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A decorative border of black floral and vine motifs surrounds the text. The motifs include swirling acanthus leaves, grapevines with clusters of grapes, and various scrollwork designs. The border is set against a white background and is contained within a dark grey rectangular frame.

PART ONE

LEO TOLSTOY

*There is a history in all men's lives,  
Figuring the nature of the times deceased;  
The which observed, a man may prophesy,  
With a near aim, of the main chance of things  
As yet not come to life, which in their seeds  
And weak beginnings lie in treasured.  
Such things become the hatch and brood of time.*

*Shakespeare*



## Chapter 3 – Marriage and Sex



Among the subjects that occupied a great deal of Tolstoy's energy and time, the sexual problem and the marital relationship claimed a prominent place. He treated these matters in his fiction with considerable detail, but the views he entertained and expressed therein varied with time and tide. The most controversial of these views, however, are contained in *The Devil* and the *Kreutzer Sonata*. *The Devil* was published posthumously and therefore did not arouse any comment during his lifetime, but the *Kreutzer Sonata* created an uproar as soon as it appeared. The fact was that it dealt with sex and marriage in such a manner as polite society simply did not wish to hear. Written when Tolstoy was already sixty, after his views on these matters had more or less solidified, he felt that he had no obligation to please the public, or be amiably disposed to keep his silence, merely because the opinions expressed therein proved offensive to polite society's sensibilities and did not coincide with their natural propensities.

The views to be found in the *Kreutzer Sonata* – expressed through Pozdnyshév, the anti-hero of the tale – depict love and happy marriage as found in polite society to be mostly an illusion. According to Pozdnyshév, human nature prefers to content itself with feeding on illusions rather than realities and quite agreed to confuse lust with love. The tale of Pozdnyshév's unfortunate marriage is related on a railway train by the anti-hero himself. Before he can launch upon his tale, however, he overhears a lady in the same carriage attest that true love exists, and this is the spark that sets him on a perverse course of contention that this true love, so called, is in reality a fake.

Pozdnyshév's view is that people in polite society are under a certain pressure to dig up all manner of excuses and subterfuges to disguise their naked animal desires under a mask of genuine affection and concern, when all that they really care about is to squeeze as much pleasure out of life as they can and satisfy their lusts. When human relationships are based primarily on a physical feast, the inevitable reaction is that infidelity in marriage becomes the order of the day. But the lady on the train spiritedly defends her stand that marriage without love is not marriage, and that love alone sanctifies it. Pozdnyshév,

however, who has killed his wife in a jealous fit, pretends not to understand. Enquires he:

*What kind of love ... is it that sanctifies marriage?*

The feminine position, expressed by the lady on the train, is that only true love makes marriage work, and that love is an exclusive preference for one person above everybody else.

But Pozdnyshev feigns ignorance and demands to know *how long* this so-called preference can last – a month, two days, or half an hour? The lady is incensed and grimly declares that they are evidently not speaking of the same thing. But Pozdnyshev insists that it is exactly the same. In fact, he is altogether unimpressed by all this talk of true love which, for him, exists only in novels and not in real life. Everyone in the railway carriage, of course, protests. But Pozdnyshev will have none of this nonsense and shouts them down: after all, he ought to know better than anyone else – it was because she was unfaithful that he killed his wife:

*Yes, I know, you are talking about what is supposed to be, but I am talking about what is. Every man experiences what you call love for every pretty woman... Even if we should grant that a man might prefer a certain woman all his life, the woman will in all probability prefer someone else. And so it always has been and still remains in the world.*

No doubt, Pozdnyshev's position only reflects his bitterness and agonized despair. It represents a cynicism all too familiar in the world, and the lady cannot but protest:

*But you are talking all the time about physical love. Don't you acknowledge the existence of love based on an identity of ideals, or spiritual affinity?*

Pozdnyshev merely emits the peculiar sound he is accustomed to when aroused, and bursts into a laugh:

*Spiritual affinity! Identity of ideals! But in that case – forgive my coarseness – why do they go to bed together? Or do people go to bed together because of the identity of their ideals?*

Having delivered which, Pozdnyshev is quite pleased with himself.

After this verbal exchange, it is some time before the poor man can find it in him to unburden himself of his tale and the circumstances that led to the killing of his wife. It is not to a woman but to a male companion on the train

that he unloads himself in fits and starts. He had lived a dissolute life before his marriage, like everyone in his class, and was of course convinced that there was nothing wrong in this because everyone in polite society did the same. He even considered himself a highly moral man and quite charming too:

*I was not a seducer, had no unnatural tastes, did not make that the chief purpose of my life as many of my associates did, but I practiced debauchery in a steady decent way for health's sake. I avoided women who might tie my hands by having a child or by attachment for me. However, there may have been children and attachments, but I acted as if there were not. And this I not only considered moral, but I was even proud of it!*

So it goes in the masculine world with much relish, as it has done of old.

Tolstoy is never shy of portraying the manner in which polite society perverts a man's mind so thoroughly as to make it acquire a completely one-sided attitude to life – an attitude that is totally selfish and mean. This kind of conditioning exalts all the worldly vices as something to be emulated and glorified, encouraging a man to take advantage of everything that drifts his way. Thus debauchery is to be practiced in a *steady* decent way for health's sake – a prescription confirmed by the high priests of medicine as a must, and which is received by the male community with a satisfied smirk. All manner of glib arguments are mustered to bolster man's sexual rights. It is a mark of distinction in fact, for him to be able to boast of his promiscuity and prowess in sex. The naked animal instincts are something of which to be righteously proud. The ability to exploit the opposite sex to advantage is the height of sexual efficiency. In that it agrees with man's propensities, everything is *decent* so long as it satisfies his lust.

How do all these views and attitudes in polite society come to proliferate? Education, of course, is to blame. This viewpoint is put into the mouth of an old tradesman on the train, whose contention is that people have become too educated and in the wrong way. He mutters that, 'foolishness comes from education!'. This sentiment elicits a protest from the lady, who contends that without education people only become the slaves of their elders – who marry their children off without their even having been first betrothed. Expostulates she:

*How is one to live with a man when there is no love?*

The old tradesman will have none of all that. Education has corrupted women so thoroughly that the fashion has spread even to the peasants, so that when a wife leaves her husband for another man, she flings his shirts and trousers at

him – saying that she is going off with Vanka because his head is curlier than her Husband's!

The lady, not to be outdone, protests that men's arguments are always prejudiced: men lock women up in a tower, but permit themselves the utmost liberty. The tradesman however contends that a woman, unlike a man, brings offspring into the home, and that a wife is a leaky vessel. Though all in the carriage are chastened and crushed by this remark, the lady refuses to bend and continues to protest:

*Yes, but I think you will agree that a woman is a human being and has feelings like a man. What's she to do then, if she does not love her husband?*

But as the old tradesman rises to leave the carriage, his judgment is final:

*Yes, the female sex must be curbed in time or else all is lost!*

Such is the uncompromising verdict of the antique school, but not necessarily Tolstoy's own.

In that both sides refuse to budge an inch, however, the battle between the sexes must continue to flourish. But the arguments that both camps recruit to their aid are too superficial to deserve any serious regard, for they neither do justice to the issue nor get to the root of the problem at all. For Tolstoy, the issue hinges not on whether there is love in marriage but simply whether the ideal of chastity – before and after marriage – is acceptable to both sides. If it is to survive, it is on this crucial point that the relationship between the sexes must be resolved.

No doubt the ideal of chastity – whether inside or outside marriage – is only held up to ridicule by the worldly wise. As long as this is so, the conflict of the sexes will continue. Until double standards are rendered single, with equal chastity on both sides, there can be no peace in the home. Of course, in sophisticated society such antiquated and tiresome ideals are not given a second thought – least of all a try – when they interfere so much with people's fun. A profligate society is unwilling to concede that chastity offers a form of satisfaction that is more fulfilling in the long run than promiscuous sex, because it enables human relationships to *endure* much longer than those peripheral inducements and stimulants which sensual pleasures provide. The fact is that people in polite society possess so few absorbing interests it makes them get bogged down in a biological function that was originally intended by nature for the reproduction of the species rather than to be the empty pastime of an idle set.

To make his point in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy goes to extremes. No doubt, he found it difficult to restrain himself on so sensitive an issue, and the urgency of the theme carried him away. The prospectus that he offered – that married couples refrain from sexual intercourse until they are prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood – obviously possessed little appeal. After he had commenced writing the story, however, Tolstoy had no set idea as to what conclusions his narrative would lead him. Only as the work progressed did he find himself gradually forced into adopting the position that obviously was not calculated to attract many devotees.

But Tolstoy was not one to cease advocating something simply because it did not find favour in others' eyes. If he let his pen run away with him when he advocated sexual abstinence for married couples it was not just a whim of the moment, he actually believed what he said – even if he could not exactly conform in practice himself. That lust was accepted only for its own selfish ends, without the accompanying responsibilities, seemed to him a moral outrage. As Pozdnyshv snarls:

*Teach abstention from childbearing so that English Lords may always gorge themselves – that is all right. Preach it for the sake of greater pleasure – that is all right. But just hint at abstention from childbearing in the name of morality – and, my goodness, what a row!*

Based on a diet of sex, it seemed unreasonable to Tolstoy to expect that the marriage relationship could endure. Sensuality without restraint only led to satiety, animosity, emotional estrangement, and in extreme cases even to bloodshed. The moment of truth in most instances, proving decisive of what is to come, is the honeymoon. The first quarrel, in fact, often begins there. At least so it did for Pozdnyshv:

*The impression of that first quarrel was dreadful. I call it a quarrel, but it was not a quarrel but only the disclosure of the abyss that really existed between us. Amorousness was exhausted by the satisfaction of sensuality, and we were left confronting each other in our true relation: that is, as two egotists quite alien to one another who wished only to get as much pleasure from sexual intercourse as we could. I call what took place between us a quarrel, but it was not a quarrel, only the consequence of the cessation of sensuality – revealing our real relations to one another. I did not understand that this cold and hostile relation was our normal state. I did not understand it because at first this hostile attitude was very soon concealed from us by a renewal of redistilled sensuality – that is, by love-making.*

And so this pattern was established from the start. Having berated each other with the most cruel words, however, the couple commenced to cast sudden silent glances at each other – followed by smiles, kisses, embraces, and sexual intercourse. In this monotonous cycle, quarrel and reconciliation dogged each other's heels.

Pozdnyshev has made his point. Marriages collapse simply because they are based on a shaky premise, for which the parties concerned have only themselves to blame, since they have gulled themselves into believing that no higher object in life exists than sex. No doubt, sex can be fun. But it ceases to be fun once satiety has set in and only the dregs are left. Once all the fun has gone out of the relationship the couple realizes only too late that they have been tricked out of their rightful dues.

The murder of his wife, with which Pozdnyshev's story concludes, was even in embryo an accomplished fact – not because he discovers her in another's arms, but because with his lecherous background he simply had no right to demand her fidelity. Equal standards, of course, are only for *others*, when it comes nearer home, a man discovers that he cannot tolerate the liberties of this much-vaunted sexual equality when a woman possesses a similar right.

At recollection of all the woes that his marriage has brought him, as the pass to which he has been reduced, Pozdnyshev begins to expostulate:

*You think I am straying from my subject? Not at all! I am telling you how I killed my wife. They asked me at the trial with what and how I killed her. Fools! They thought I killed her with a knife on the 5th October. It was not then that I killed her but much earlier. I killed her before I even met her! I killed a woman the first time I knew one without loving her, and it was already then that I killed my wife.*

A strange claim to make, no doubt, and one that can only astound his audience. For they can observe no connection at all between his premarital debauchery and the murder of his wife in a jealous fit. But Pozdnyshev understands his own tortured psychology better than anyone else. In that his finer sensibilities were debauched even before his marriage, he had in fact no right to expect his married life to be a success. Even if too late, his eyes have been opened wide, and now he can see only too clearly the causes that led to his losing control over himself.

Pozdnyshev's ire directs itself at the high priests of medicine and the irretrievable damage they have done by their sophisticated distortion of the facts, asserting that men must have sex simply for their good health. Snorts he:



*Men must! It is again those precious priests of science who have persuaded everybody of that. Imbue a man with the idea that he requires vodka, tobacco, or opium, and all these things will be indispensable to him.*

The high priests have hopelessly ruined men's sensitivities with their prescriptions of debauchery as a necessary factor for health. Once the disease of debauchery infects a man it must proliferate and involve as many others as possible in the process. Groans Pozdnyshev:

*I began to indulge in debauchery as I began to drink and to smoke. Yet in that first fall there was something special and pathetic. I remember that at once, on the spot before I left the room, I felt sad, so sad that I wanted to cry – to cry for the loss of my innocence, and for my relationship with women, now sullied forever. Yes, my natural, simple relationship with women was spoilt forever. From that time I had not had, and could not have, pure relations with women ... By the way he looks at a young woman and examines her, a libertine can always be recognized. And I had become, and I remained a libertine, and it was this that brought me to ruin.*

Pozdnyshev's belief that a man's relations with another human being is irremediably soiled once the finer sensibilities have been polluted by sex in the raw, possesses its own logic. The relationship between the sexes cannot but be infected with a cold hostility when sex, in marriage or outside it, is viewed simply as a barbecue party to be feasted on with impunity. Why should it come as a shock for couples to discover each other in their moral nakedness with the honeymoon – of having bargained for nothing better than a 'sexual barbecue' – when that is how they have been conditioned to view marriage from the start? As Pozdnyshev snorts:

*During the time of our engagement I regarded myself as the height of perfection! You know there is no rascal who cannot, if he tries, find rascals in some respects worse than himself... I was a dreadful pig, yet imagined myself to be an angel!... If love is spiritual it should express itself in words. But between my future wife and myself it was difficult to talk when we were all alone. It was the very labour of Sisyphus! There was nothing to talk about. Once the arrangements had all been settled there is nothing more to be said. And just think what a dreadful significance all those matrimonial details acquire! They show that the whole business is only a kind of sale. And the sale must be accompanied by certain formalities... And they prate about the freedom and the rights of women! It is as if cannibals fattened their captives to be devoured, and at the same time declared that they were concerned only with their prisoners'*

*rights and liberties!*

In that the status quo must be preserved at all cost, it is expedient that love and marriage continue to be preached in the same pious breath, even though it is generally recognized that a double standard glaringly exists and, as a consequence, a marriage's felicity can never be guaranteed. Even if the conventional basis of matrimony – love and premarital chastity – has collapsed, something else must be shoved in to serve as a makeshift substitute. If raw depravity proves too offensive for sophisticated society's delicate sensibilities to publicly accept, its purely naked brutality must be disguised under a veneer of erudite medical jargon cooked up by the high priests of the sex-clinic and preached from the pulpit of science. In that adultery cannot be countenanced in the interests of propriety, ways and means must be devised to satisfy it surreptitiously. Even if couples no longer believe in the ideal of fidelity, a pose of decency must be preserved to palliate the proprieties.

Pozdnyshév's is an extreme case; his whole psychology has experienced a change after having killed his wife with a knife. But murder goes on all the time without the knives. Is not the bedroom designed especially in good taste for the butcher's barbecue? It is here that each other's finer sensibilities are killed. When conflicts arise due to physical or emotional incompatibility it must be killed with the barbecue party and the dragon put to sleep for a spell. If this fails to work then it must be thrown aside and a fresh one acquired to compensate for the loss. Thus the marriage bed crumbles of itself and dies a natural death without much aid from outside.

Pozdnyshév's claim that he killed his wife even before he met her is integral to Tolstoy's theme. Obviously no good can come of a man having sexual intercourse with women whom he does not love, for by doing so he kills something within himself – destroys whatever respect and feeling he has for another human being, and by taking it for granted as the accepted mode in polite society, acquires a completely debased attitude towards the opposite sex and the value of human life.

The wizards of science are, of course, responsible for having debauched gullible minds with their erudite jargon about sex being necessary for man's health. The problem is even further complicated by the fact that when the error in this connection is recognized, it is on purpose distorted and disguised with all manner of subterfuges to glorify the fake. The glorification of wrong attitudes leads to a dead-end in human relationships, and all that is proliferated is a vicious cycle in which no lessons are ever learnt.

When men lose their sensitivity in their relations with the opposite sex it leaves nothing but a wealth of rancour and contempt in its wake. To revenge themselves – whether consciously or not – for the loss of their sensitivity both

men and women must infect as many others as they can with the same disease. There is comfort in numbers after all. In the end what polite society produces and supports is a band of sophisticated and legalized brothels and their devotees. Matrimony itself becomes little more than a legalized form of debauchery.

What then must a man do? Sleep with his wife only once in two years so as to provide offspring, and by the preservation of their chastity hope for the best that marriage may last a few years more? The sensitivity of the subject – treated by Tolstoy with his usual intensity – was bound to raise the hackles of not just a few. For he touched upon a raw spot here and his conclusions, palatable or not, could not be ignored. The force with which he delivered himself could not but raise many a sophisticated eyebrow: for the crucial question, of course, was not what the wizards of medicine had to prescribe, but what would happen to the human race if men abstained altogether from sex?

For Pozdnyshv – if not for Tolstoy – that would not be such a bad thing after all, as it might at first sight seem. What was so bad about the human race ceasing to exist?

*You ask how the human race will continue to exist? Why should it continue?... Why live? If life has no aim, if life is given us for life's sake, there is no reason for living... but if life has an aim, it is clear that it ought to come to an end when that aim is reached. And so it turns out. Just think: if the aim of humanity is goodness, righteousness, love – call it what you will – that all mankind should be united in love – what is it that hinders the attainment of this aim? The passions! And of all passions the strongest, the cruellest, and the most stubborn is the sex-passion, carnal love. If the passions, therefore, are destroyed, including the strongest of them all – carnal love – the aim of human existence will be fulfilled, and there will be nothing more for which to live!*

Obviously this curious line of reasoning was hardly calculated to excite any general appeal. In fact, it simply drove too deep into man's soul and struck a jarring discord between the way men should behave and how they really lived. If Pozdnyshv's argument appeared harsh it nevertheless possessed a certain logic, and in its own peculiar way made some sense. If life had a purpose, once that purpose had been fulfilled there was no point in fiddling on. Nothing but a terrible repetition and endless monotony would ensue if mankind degenerated into living a mere *animal* life for its own sake.

Due to the severity of his views on sex and marriage Tolstoy was accused of championing sexual abstinence because of his own impotence brought on by oncoming age; a case of sour grapes. The fact was that far from

being sour, the grapes were even sweeter than ever. Only after he reached the age of eighty could he confess with a sigh of relief that sex no longer troubled him.

Tolstoy's position on sex and marriage was the inevitable outcome of his early life. He had experienced all the pitfalls for himself. His own marriage, though it began in relative harmony, soon deteriorated, and after tottering on for some decades in the end altogether collapsed. With his active moral sense of what should be and what should not, therefore, he could not very well distort the facts simply to suit his bent. The sex question had always bothered his conscience and his flesh. Before his marriage he had wrestled with the temptation not to get involved, and once wedded he had been faithful to his wife – even if the inducement to stray from an incompatible spouse had been strong.

The severe struggles he experienced between his conscience and his flesh is portrayed in his posthumously published tale *The Devil*. As a bachelor he had already had an affair with Aksinya, the wife of a peasant on his estate. For another person of his own class such an affair with a married woman would hardly have occasioned any pricks of conscience, but would simply have been shrugged off as a casual incident common to one of the landed gentry leading an isolated bachelor existence on his country estate. In Tolstoy, however, it occasioned a tug-of-war in his mind, which finds its reflection in *The Devil*.

The hero of the tale, Eugene Irtenev, consoles himself that it is necessary for a young and robust man like himself to indulge in sexual intercourse for reasons of *health*. In fact, it had been necessary to satisfy that health with sex ever since he was sixteen:

*He was not a libertine, but neither, as he himself said, was he a monk. He only turned to this, however, insofar as was necessary for physical health and to have his mind free, as he used to say.*

If Eugene's conscience pricks him from time to time, he customarily puts it to sleep with the excuse that his sexual conduct is not for the sake of debauchery but simply for his health. But having convinced himself that this is how things really are with him, instead of laying his mind at rest it only makes him more restless than before.

After his first intercourse with Stepanida, the peasant's wife – an intercourse which he confesses was quite satisfactory for his health, even if it took merely fifteen minutes for that health to be satisfied – Eugene experiences a certain feeling of shame. But that passes off in no time: after all, everything went off rather well. Why then the recurrent pricks of conscience?

Eugene's interludes with the woman were always arranged in advance by an intermediary, and took place in the woods under trees. As for Stepanida, she delighted in deceiving her husband, and even proposed that they should dispense with the aid of an intermediary in their appointments for the sake of their mutual health. But Eugene's conscience refuses to consent to this proposal from this latter day Eve:

*He hoped that this meeting would be the last. He liked her. He thought such intercourse was necessary for him and that there was nothing bad about it. But in the depth of his soul there was a stricter judge who did not approve of it and hoped that this would be the last time, or if he did not hope that, at any rate did not wish to participate in arrangements to repeat it another time.*

Obviously Tolstoy found it extremely difficult to forget his early escapades. In a less conscientious man, the random sexual exploits of youth would have been shrugged off as merely a natural sowing of wild oats. Observing the great ravage such unrestrained conduct inflicted on people's lives, however, convinced Tolstoy that it was necessary for him to resolve the whole issue finally by some overall and conclusive pronouncement on the subject. The ultimate verdict of his mature years, therefore, was that since all men could not become monks, it was necessary for them to be as chaste as possible be it inside the marriage or outside of it.

The fact was that he even had an illegitimate child by the peasant woman and his ambivalent emotions in regard to this matter are reflected in Eugene's behaviour – when, on the eve of his marriage to a lady, he meets his old flame by chance in the village street with a baby in her arms:

*'And the child may be mine!' Flashed through his mind. 'No, what nonsense! There was her husband, she used to see him.' He did not even consider the matter further, so settled in his mind was it that it had been necessary for his health – he had paid her money, and there was no more to be said. There was, there had been, and there could be, no question of any union between them. It was not that he stifled the voice of conscience, no – his conscience simply said nothing to him. And he thought no more about her.*

Necessary for his *health!* It is a monotonous refrain which the lecher must forever salvage to quell his conscience whenever it begins to prick. It is the overall fallback position on which a troubled mind seeks rest and solace.

It is not to be wondered that in his later years Tolstoy could not but come to the conclusion that illicit sex plays the very devil with men's minds and bodies, distorting the truth so completely that even black can be made to appear

white. But no matter how many specious arguments a lecher conjures up to excuse his lecheries, he remains a lecher for all that. Tolstoy was too honest a man to preach something he did not believe, and it was his honest conclusion that lechery was hardly the answer to the health question – or any question for that matter.

Marriage contracted under the auspices of adultery proves a disaster from the start. From this form of wedlock to adultery is but a single step. This is explicitly demonstrated in the behaviour of Eugene who, after his marriage, meets his former mistress again. She has managed to wangle herself a job as a cleaning woman in his own house! This fact jolts him out of his smug marital complacency:

*‘What nonsense! It is impossible!’ he frowns and waves his hand as though to get rid of a fly, displeased at having noticed her. He was vexed that he had noticed her, and yet he could not take his eyes from her strong body, swayed by her agile strides, from her bare feet, or from her bare arms and shoulders, and the pleasing folds of her shirt and the handsome skirt tucked up high above her white calves. ‘But why am I looking?’ And he lowered his eyes so as not to see her. But he could not resist glancing round. ‘Ah, what am I doing! She may think – it is even certain that she already does think...’*

As Eugene so neatly used to put it, his addiction to the woman was simply for the sake of his health, even if his wife was pregnant at the time. In fact, his ever ready and all-purpose excuse for lechery was completely gone.

But Eugene is unable to resist thinking about his former mistress, and an inner voice even hints at the possibility of meeting her alone in the room somewhere. But another voice checks him in time, and it unnerves him to think that his wife should know of his designs:

*My God, what am I thinking of, and what am I doing! My god! If she who considers me so honourable, pure, and innocent – if she only knew!*

No doubt, it comes as a terrible surprise to Eugene to discover that he is still so vulnerable to Stepanida’s charms, and that he has not really freed himself from her spell after all. Since his marriage he had not experienced such feelings for any woman but his wife, and this unexpected recrudescence of the old emotions disturbed him deeply, especially when he flattered himself that he had finished with his mistress for good:

*He had often felt glad of this emancipation, and now suddenly a chance meeting, seemingly so unimportant, revealed to him the fact*

*that he was not free. What now tormented him was not that he was yielding to the feeling and desired her – he did not dream of so doing – but that the feeling was awake within him, and he had to be on his guard against it. He had no doubt but that he would suppress it.*

But this proves to be a forlorn hope. Despite all his good intentions, he cannot get her out of his mind:

*Yes, yes, so it seems that I cannot be rid of her!*

When Eugene spies her dancing with the other peasants, an irresistible impulse to feast his eyes and follow her into the woods overwhelms him. As though walking in a trance, he starts off in the direction he saw her go. He does not know what he is about and appears far gone indeed:

*And suddenly a terrible desire scorched him as though a hand were seizing his heart. As if by someone else's wish he looked round and went towards her.*

But a peasant interrupts him and awakens him out of his trance, and for the moment he is saved from himself.

Having come to his senses again, he feels depressed – as though he has committed some crime. He has to admit to himself that he has not finished with her yet: for her power over him is still a very real thing and he feels completely enslaved:

*Above all he felt that he was conquered, that he was not master of his own will but that there was another power moving him, that he had been saved only by good fortune, and that if not today then tomorrow or a day after, he would perish all the same.*

No doubt, in the eyes of men of his own class the poor fellow is only making a mountain of a molehill. But Eugene is made of different mettle and being a conscientious man he orders his mind not to think of Stepanida – only to find himself immediately doing just the opposite!

It occurs to him then that since he cannot get her out of his mind, the only way to avoid being unfaithful to his wife is to send the woman away. To relieve his conscience, he even makes futile attempts to do so. He consoles himself that his excitement has made him grossly exaggerate the danger of a relapse. After all, he has made no appointment with her and done nothing wrong. In fact, all that belongs to the distant past. It is pure coincidence that they have had occasion to meet again.

Once the poison has seeped into his mind, however, it cannot but continue to sink in and slowly undermine his marriage. Even after his good wife has a fall and is confined to a bed, though he feels deeply for her, the thought of the other woman gnaws at the back of his mind, and he continues to entertain a sneaking hope that he might meet her by chance in the woods alone. Each day he goes to the woods with such a sneaking hope, on the off chance that he might see her once again. Each day he tells himself that he will not go, and yet each day he goes.

Eugene tries to convince himself that it is only to *see* her, not to have sexual intercourse. No more now does he tell himself that it all for the sake of *his health*. It is no longer a physical need but has become an obsession instead, a *mental* case. It is his mental health now that must be assuaged – if not cured. The more he is frustrated of the opportunity to see her, the more attractive in his imagination she becomes:

*Never had she seemed so attractive, and never had he been so completely in her power. He felt that he had lost control of himself and had become almost insane... Every day he devised means of delivering himself from this enticement, and he made use of those means. But it was all in vain. He knew that it was only shame that restrained him. He did everything he could, and it seemed to him that he was conquering. But midday came – the hour of their former meetings, and the hour when he saw her carrying the grass – and he went to the forest.*

The expert manner in which Tolstoy develops his theme is extremely true to life. With remarkable insight into the psychology of the act, he demonstrates that a peculiar groove exists in men's minds that regulates and determines their reactions unconsciously in advance – in opposition to even the best of intentions and resolves. When, therefore, the fatal hour strikes – at which some momentous event in the past has stamped itself on the mind – a mechanism that lies beyond the superficial level of the will is set in motion that drags a man on to accomplish deeds which in his more sober moments he would not so much as dream of doing.

In opposition to the wizards of medicine claim that lechery is a necessary means of letting off steam so that desire dies a natural death, Tolstoy recognized that if lechery sates appetite at all it only does so for a while and then tightens its grip on the constitution through the obsessive force of routine. The mere sight of a pretty wench is enough to start the mind clicking in its accustomed groove.

Eugene is a case in point. He is saved from succumbing to his weakness for the opposite sex by mere chance. But he meets Stepanida again in



the rain by accident – sees her skirts tucked high to reveal her white calves, and at that instant finds himself muttering words that make an appointment with her in the shed. As he is making his way to keep the rendezvous, however, his wife sends for him. Having shaken himself free from his wife, he hastily makes his way to the shed, only to find that the woman has already left.

Eugene is terribly crushed. He muses how delightful it would have been if only she were here – alone together in the shed with the rain outside! He sits alone for a long while in the hope that she may reappear. Only after he is certain that she will not return does he leave the shed, emotionally exhausted and completely crushed.

To rid his mind of the woman and to humiliate himself in the process, Eugene confesses his secret to his uncle. On his uncle's advice he goes off to the Crimea for two months together with his wife. His child is born there. Now, in a contented frame of mind, he is pleased to think that his liaison with Stepanida is completely finished and at an end:

*Of the torments of his temptation and struggle he had forgotten even to think, and could with difficulty recall them to mind. It seemed to him something like an attack of insanity he had undergone.*

At least so he believes. For the time being things appear to have lulled him into a false sense of security and smug complacency. He has been elevated to the Zemstvo, his property is doing well, the crops are excellent, and the income good. He even meets his mistress again, and flatters himself that he experiences no response at all.

But the emotional lull is short-lived. It begins all over again, and the torments of the mind and the flesh return in all their former force. But again he is saved from going to her by a peasant interrupting him. He is stung that he has not freed himself from her spell after all. He makes repeated attempts to meet her as though by accident – at night, when all is dark and no one can see – then he will be able to touch her firm white flesh! Eugene is amazed at his own divided self:

*There now, talking of breaking off when I wish to! Yes, and that is having a clean healthy woman for one's health's sake! No, now it seems one can't play with her like that. I thought I had taken her, but it was she who took me – took me, and does not let me go. Why, I thought I was free and was deceiving myself when I married. It was all nonsense, a fraud. From the time I had her I experienced a new feeling, the real feeling of a husband. Yes, I ought to have lived with her.*

So Eugene has come to persuade himself that he has married the wrong woman after all! For so long he had been accustomed to entertain the common fallacy that men usually fool themselves with: that they are *free* and unattached, especially in matters of sex. And how delighted women are to prove them wrong upon this score.

It begins to dawn on Eugene that there are now but two options open to him: either to kill the woman or to kill his wife. He simply refused to be torn in two. Scoundrel that he is, he even plays with the idea that maybe his wife will conveniently die off by herself, and then he would be free to marry his mistress at last! He broods on the fact that this is how men come to poison or kill their mistresses or wives!

A third possibility begins to excite him: he could very well kill himself; then he would not have to kill anyone, he would be *free* from them all for good. Eugene takes the revolver-case out from the cabinet. But before he can open the case, his wife enters the room. Only after she has left the room does he shoot himself.

The doctor's verdict on the cause of death is that Eugene was mentally deranged, a psychopath. His wife and mother, however, knowing him so well, refuse to accept such an explanation. To them he was much saner than hundreds of their friends. So Tolstoy bitterly concludes his tale:

*And indeed, if Eugene Irtenev was mentally deranged, then everyone is similarly insane. The most mentally deranged people are certainly those who see in others indications of insanity they do not notice in themselves!*

But Tolstoy wrote an alternative conclusion to his tale. As so often in his fiction, it was based on an actual incident that occurred in Tula – in which the man shoots the woman rather than himself. He sees her raking corn in the barn, prancing about briskly with laughing eyes that entice. For a moment he thinks of arranging a rendezvous with her, but another instinct forces him to aim his gun and pull the trigger. He shoots her in the back, again and yet again – to free himself forever from the devil that has taken possession of him for so long. She runs a few steps, but falls lifeless on a heap of corn.

Tolstoy, to be sure, shot no one, least of all himself. But the fact that his mind was scarred deeply by his early excesses made him write about sex and passion – though decades after the event – in such a vigorous vein. For him, the terrible lesson to be learned was the amount of damage done to the mind by such specious arguments that illicit sex is necessary for men's health, and that it can be indulged in without leaving bloody tracks in its wake.

From his own experiences Tolstoy found how difficult it was to follow a straight path in the society in which he moved. It came as a shock to a sensitive soul to see that all influences pointed quite the other way. Even his pure, old maid of an aunt, whom he respected and loved, desired nothing better of him before his marriage than that he should have an affair with a married woman – for according to her maxim, nothing so formed a young man's mind as an intimacy with a woman of good breeding!

Such was the tenor of the times that educated its youth in fashions perverted and loose. The fact that Tolstoy was able to eventually wrench himself out of such a mode of living speaks much for the force of his will. For, as he comments in his *Confession*, he was young, passionate, and alone – completely alone when goodness was being sought. After his marriage he avoided illicit relationships like the very plague and, even if he was sorely tempted to at times, he never strayed.

In retrospect, however, he could not but think of those early years with horror and heartache. Yet his contemporaries considered him as a comparatively moral man. Polite society debauched its citizens, but demanded that the proprieties be upheld – ostracizing those who were brazen enough to disregard the conventional veneer. Only those who were able to bluff their way up to the top of the ladder – and ruthlessly kick off those struggling on the lower rungs – found favour in society and survived.

Nothing so formed a young man's mind as an intimacy with a woman of good breeding, indeed! In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy does his level best to prove the very opposite. Based as usual on an actual incident, he depicts the heroine's tortured sensibilities and the complicated processes that propelled the passionate woman to her death.

Anna is no common adulteress – or she would not have killed herself – but a highly sensitive soul who in the end can see no way out of her desire for legitimate love but death. Tolstoy sticks to his conviction that in sensitive people adultery leads to nothing but the most agonizing results. Once Anna surrenders to Vronsky's embraces, the initial mechanism is set in motion that relentlessly propels her to her end:

*Looking at him, she had a physical sense of her humiliation, and she could say nothing more. He felt what a murderer must feel, when he sees the body he has robbed of life. That body, robbed by him of life, was their love, the first stage of it. There was something awful and revolting in the memory of what had been bought at this fearful price of shame. Shame at their spiritual nakedness crushed her and infected him. But in spite of all the murderer's horror before the body of his victim, he must hack it to pieces, hide the body, must use*

*what he had gained by his crime. And with fury, as it were with passion, the murderer falls on the body, and drags it and hacks it. So he covered her face and shoulders with kisses.*

With relentless realism Tolstoy pursues his theme that if illicit relationships provide their thrills with a perverse relish they also hack into the lovers' lives until the liaison has no option but to collapse. If sensitive souls think they can escape the consequences of their actions then they are fooling no one but themselves. The toll must be paid somehow. Anna vaguely senses that all is up even with the first embrace. As she gazes at her lover all she can say is:

*All is over. I have nothing but you – remember that!*

She recognizes that as long as her grip on her lover lasts she may call him her own. But then such grips are extremely shaky things, and do not rest on her alone but on how long the man is prepared to remain enslaved. For the present, of course, he cannot but greedily agree:

*I can never forget what is my whole life – for one moment of this happiness!..*

His *whole* life! What will a man not say to woman on the spur of the moment right before the act, or after it! No man in his right senses believes that a woman – no matter how wonderful – can be his *whole* life, and the woman who swallows such an improbable pill is nothing but a little fool.

This Anna seems to realize in a dim and uncertain way, so that it makes her shudder with horror and loathing – a feeling that unconsciously infects her lover too, as she cries:

*Happiness! For pity's sake, not a word, not a word more.*

And with a look of chill despair she leaves the room. All of which is incomprehensible to the man, to whom pleasure is the be-all and end-all of his life.

The die having been cast, the tragedy unfolds slowly but ruthlessly of itself. Even Anna's little son is dragged into the picture through no fault of his own. The boy watches his mother's affection for her lover in bewilderment, not knowing how to take it, and broods: what does it mean? Who is this man of whom his mother is so fond?

The boy's presence irks Vronsky intolerably: for he represents their conscience, their nemesis. A strange feeling of inexplicable loathing is called up in him at the sight of the boy – a loathing not for the boy, but for everything, especially himself:

*This child's presence called up both in Vronsky and in Anna a feeling akin to the feeling of a sailor who sees by the compass that the direction in which he is swiftly moving is far from the right one, but that to arrest his motion is not in his power, that every instant is carrying him further and further away, and that to admit to himself his deviation from the right direction is the same as admitting his certain ruin. This child, with his innocent outlook upon life, was the compass that showed them the point to which they had departed from what they knew, but did not want to know.*

Of course, this is not the only element that loads the scales in their disfavour. The pressure of public opinion was already lying in wait to pounce on them the moment they made the slightest slip. Having led a blameless life before, a single slip would suffice to topple Anna from that high estate and be attacked by polite society with fang and claw:

*The great number of the young women, who envied Anna and had long been weary of hearing her called virtuous, rejoiced at the fulfilment of their predictions, and were only waiting for a decisive turn in public opinion to fall upon her with all the weight of their scorn. They were already making ready their handfuls of mud to fling at her when the right moment arrived. The greater number of the middle-aged people and certain great personages were displeased at the prospect on the impending scandal in society.*

As usual, a hypocritical society was not in the least concerned with adultery – which went on all the time, and to which it lent a completely blind eye, if it did not exactly promote it – but with the proprieties, which had to be upheld at all cost. Public opinion was not something to be scorned, and those who believe they can survive its uncompromising verdict only lull themselves into a false sense of their own immunity. Only Vronsky's mother is pleased that her son has made a connection with a married woman at last – justifying the view that nothing gives such a finishing-touch to a brilliant young man's career as a liaison with a lady of breeding from the highest society!

But the gathering storm is only the external adjunct, as it were, to the real disease, the canker that consumes from inside. Most destructive to the endurance of the liaison are the fluctuating emotions of the lovers themselves: as the affair drifts on under its various buffetings, the couple are incapable of preserving their emotions at the same high pitch with which their intimacy began. In accordance with its natural cycle, the connection faltered and waned by fits and starts, so that it could no longer be implicitly relied upon.

The sight of this gradual waning process cannot but disturb Anna deeply, and in her panic she makes frantic attempts to preserve the momentum,

if not recover the splendour of its prime. In vain, she is crushed by the realization that her lover's devotion cannot be completely recycled. Even if her husband were to grant her a divorce, and she were free to marry Vronsky, the legalization of the liaison could in no way have reversed the trend, which was a downward one from the start.

The fact was that Vronsky had other interests in life beside her love, and his early protestations that she represented the *whole* object of his existence had long been proved untrue. Except for that part reserved for her son, however, Anna's entire life had come to be centred on her lover, and in this fact all her vulnerability lay. Unable to elicit his total attention and affection to reciprocate and balance her own, the situation was a hopeless one from the start. The pathos of her condition becomes plain in her confession to her sister-in-law:

*The chief thing I shouldn't like would be for people to imagine that I want to prove anything. I don't want to prove anything. I merely want to live, to do no one harm but myself. I have the right to do that, haven't I?*

Unfortunately, those who live in polite society do not possess even that right, because being mere cogs in a machine they must conform to the dictates and duties of the collective process. Those who hope to pit themselves against the mainstream soon falter in their course and are ruthlessly crushed under the headlong weight of the merciless machine.

As the final phases of their intimacy approach, Anna's last hold on her lover remains her flesh. She has little choice, therefore, but to summon all her woman's arguments to defend her stand that she cannot bear him a second child – for not only would it disfigure her flesh, in her already compromised position it was impossible for her to bring more bastards into the world.

Tolstoy's point is that the attempt to hold a man down for good by female flesh – no matter how seductive it might be – cannot succeed when other more seductive morsels abound. Whether legalized or not, a purely sexual approach to a male-female relationship cannot prevent itself from eventual collapse. The fact that Anna's hold on Vronsky is reduced, more or less, to a matter of flesh reveals only too plainly that the relationship is already on its last legs.

Due to the existence of another factor in their lives, the lovers' liaison is a lost cause from the start. No one knew better than Tolstoy that there exists an unknown quantity, an imponderable force that determines events and people's reactions to them in spite of their personal wills in the matter. This irresistible power which Tolstoy depicts in *War and Peace* – as dividing men so that they kill

each other on a continental scale – is here again rendered explicit on the reduced scale of the bedroom.

Anna experiences the power of this evil force unmistakably in her connection with Vronsky, particularly in its final phases. When she would like to be tender and forgiving towards him, some obscene power *compels* her to be antagonistic instead. A tug-of-war wages between them both in this context, fluctuating between victory and defeat. If for the moment Anna appears to possess the upper hand, she is nevertheless aware that she is really the slave of this unknown force:

*Some strange force of evil would not let her give herself up to her feelings, as though the rules of warfare would not permit her to surrender... And she felt that beside the love that bound them together there had grown up between them some evil spirit of strife, which she could not exorcise from his, and still less from her own heart.*

Realizing the effect of this force on her will so well, Anna hovers on the brink of calamity, terrified of herself and what she may do under its spell. She strives to regain her composure whenever she loses control of herself, but is horrified to observe that her emotions are merely reeling round in circles and that it is beyond the power of her will to control her reactions when the devil gets into her... Over and over again the lust of strife wells up in her heart in spite of herself:

*The irritability that kept them apart had no external cause, and all efforts to come to an understanding merely intensified it, instead of removing it. It was an inner irritation, grounded in her mind on the conviction that his love had grown less... And being jealous of him, Anna was indignant against him and found grounds for indignation in everything. For everything that was difficult in her position she blamed him... Even the rare moments of tenderness that came from time to time did not soothe her. In his tenderness now she saw a shade of complacency, of self-confidence, which had not been of old, and which exasperated her.*

Obviously the lust of strife that tears them apart is much more complex than it at first sight seems. The tension that exists between the two is irreconcilable because each party is struggling with all its might to *conquer* the other, when what is really at stake is not the defeat of another but rather the conquest of *themselves*.

It begins to dawn on Anna's darkened mind that the only way she can conquer her lover and regain his waning love – while at the same time

punishing him for his self-confidence and complacency – is for her to die by her own hand and fix the victory forever on her side. She recalls the echo of his parting words:

*We cannot go on like this ... this is getting unbearable!*

Had she not in her rage flung back her final words at him:

*You will be sorry for this!*

So death was the only way out. Tolstoy recognized only too well that the compulsion to win is terribly deep-rooted in human nature, though it be totally senseless. Obviously there could be no victories except moral ones. By her decision to die Anna is heading only for defeat. After all, it is not her will that is here at work, but some evil force that fools her into thinking that it is her decision to seek her own doom:

*And death rose clearly and vividly before her mind as the sole means of bringing back love of her in his heart, of punishing him and of gaining the victory in that strife which the evil spirit in possession of her heart was waging with him.*

Anna's impulsive nature – demanding all or nothing – has simply cracked under the inexorable strain and pressure of that evil force by which human hearts and minds are so easily fooled. Anna's throwing of herself under the wheels of a train is hardly her own choice, but is simply forced on her by the nature of her past. That it is her unconscious at work is evidenced by the seemingly accidental manner in which it all comes about. The struggle with herself on the way to the station is unforgettably portrayed by Tolstoy, as all the bitterness at life wells up in her. Until the last moments, she does not really know what she is about to do.

But the stage had already been set from the start. A railway station was where she had first met Vronsky, and at a railway station was she fated to die. Suddenly it all clicked into place. Automatically, she headed for the station, pushed on by some irresistible force. To go on living any longer with all the ups and downs of an irreconcilable situation was simply impossible. She could not, in any case:

*...conceive of a position in which life would not be a misery, that we are all created to be miserable, and that we all know it, and all invent means of deceiving each other. And when one sees the truth, what is one to do?*



Anna has reached the very depths of disillusion and despair. Her keenness of insight at this point is terribly tragic, because it has come all too late. Here lay the tragedy: if only she had recognized all this from the start, all this would not have occurred, she would not have been reduced to her last resource, this implacable dead-end.

Human beings are merely willing pawns in a relentless endgame. Anna may believe that her final gesture of death is an act of freewill – a last wild defiance flung at the tormentor who has made her so miserable. But the tormentor is not Vronsky, and least of all not herself, but an evil force that grins unseen. If by her death she thinks she escapes everything, she is only being fooled. She escapes nothing, least of all herself, but remains the slave of that evil force.

As Anna is about to take the final plunge, she automatically makes the sign of the cross. And this familiar gesture recalls for a moment a whole series of girlish and childish memories. And life once again rose up before her for an instant with all its bright past joys!

But the wheels of fate cannot be stopped. With masterly strokes Tolstoy reveals how pathetic Anna's last moments really are. As she tenses herself before throwing her head under the train's wheels, she drops her little red bag. She makes one false start, but tries again. At the last instant a desperate panic seizes her and she struggles to extricate herself, with an inner cry of agonizing intensity:

*Where am I? What am I doing? What for ...?*

But it is all too late. Something huge and merciless strikes her on the head. And in those final moments she cannot but recall in a flash all that life and love have done to her:

*And the light by which she had read the book filled with troubles, falsehoods, sorrow, and evil, flared up more brightly than ever before, lighting up for her all that had been in darkness – flickered, began to grow dim, and was quenched forever.*

And what of Vronsky? He must be reintroduced into the picture, to tie up the loose ends. After all, nothing so forms a man as an intimacy with a married woman of good breeding!

Months later, with a throbbing ache in his teeth, he paces the station platform, like some wild beast in a cage. He is off to the Serbian war: to kill, or be killed – it is all the same to him. The last time he had seen her she laid sprawled on the cloakroom table of the railway station – a blood-stained body

so lately full of life, the head unhurt, dropping back with its weight of hair, the exquisite face with red half-opened mouth:

*And he tried to think of her as she was when he met her for the first time – at a railway station too, mysterious, exquisite, loving, seeking and giving happiness... He tried to recall his best moments with her, but those moments were poisoned forever... He lost all consciousness of toothache, and his face worked with sobs ...*

So he, too, has paid the price. Is that all that comes of having a connection with a married woman of good breeding? Surely there must be some other way whereby a man's mind can be better formed!

*The Kreutzer Sonata* ends on the same note, as Pozdnyshv concluded his tale of woe:

*Only when I saw her dead face did I understand all that I had done. I realized that I had killed her, that it was my doing that she, living, moving, warm, had now become motionless, waxen and cold, and that this could never, anywhere, or by any means, be remedied. He who has not lived through it can never understand!*

He shook with sobs and fell silent. But suddenly he broke again into speech:

*Had I then known what I now know, everything would have been different. Nothing would have induced me to marry her ... I should not have married at all! ...*

Tolstoy's subjects are no fairy-tales, for most of his stories were based on actual incidents that occurred. He even went to the station quite near his home to watch the autopsy being made on the body of the woman who threw herself under a train, after an unfortunate affair with a landlord in the district. In fact, in a remarkable association with the characters in his books, Tolstoy's own flight from his wife was on a train – the result of which was that, through cold and exposure, he breathed his last in a cabin beside a railway track.

Whether it be murder, suicide, or flight, the estrangement between the sexes exacts its own price. Those who flatter themselves on their good sense and immunity are really no better than those tragic figures driven to their doom by forces beyond their control. For no one is really immune or completely free to do as he or she may claim, and a single false step suffices to plunge people into the abyss.

Though the chief actors in Tolstoy's dramas keenly desire to free themselves from the inexorable power that impels them on, they neither possess

the will to resist nor the ability to reverse the tide. Napoleon is pushed into battle, Eugene hesitates to kill before actually doing so, Anna is terror-stricken at what she is about to do but does so nevertheless, and Pozdnyshov excitedly declares:

*I remembered that for an instant, only an instant, before the action I had a terrible consciousness that I was killing, had killed, a defenceless woman, my wife! I remember the horror of that consciousness and conclude from that, and even dimly remember, that having plunged the dagger in I pulled it out immediately, trying to remedy what had been done and to stop it!*

But as usual it is too late. The inevitability of Tolstoy's own end and that of his heroes and heroines, though differing in context, are in substance really the same. The incompatibility of the marriage relationship has driven them to seize on their various ways of escape.

Tolstoy passes no judgment on his characters or blames any of the participants in his tragedies, but only regrets the terrible toll that life exacts from human beings for their mistakes. Dostoyevski lauds Tolstoy for making quite plain that the basic conditions of the life-situation cannot be altered or changed, so long as an evil power in the universe exists:

*Tolstoy clearly considers that no abolition of poverty, no organizing of labour, will save humanity from abnormalities, and consequently from guilt and delinquency... It is made so clear and intelligible as to be obvious, that evil lies deeper in humanity than our socialist physicians imagine – that no arrangement of society will eliminate evil: that the human mind remains the same, abnormality and sin proceed from it, and that finally, the laws of the soul of man are still so unknown, so unimagined by science, so undefined, and so mysterious, that there are not as yet, and cannot be, physicians or ultimate judges.*

Utopias will be dreamt up from time to time by well-intentioned men, but the fundamental conditions of life will remain unredressed. Mankind cannot be benefited by vain ideas, on which meagre diet they cannot so much as survive or save themselves, unless they first do their own homework in private.

Tolstoy derived his anarchistic outlook on life from observing the shams of the society in which he lived. In his *Confession* he declares that in the circle of the society in which he moved, the worst things were respected and the morally good was met with contempt and ridicule. Thus, whenever he yielded to the passions he was encouraged and praised. If he hoped that his writings

would make their mark on the world, they had first to be polluted, the good concealed, and the evil displayed:

*How often in my writings did I contrive to hide under the guise of indifference, or even of banter, those strivings of mine towards goodness which gave meaning to my life. And I succeeded in this and was praised!*

But such a state of affairs – given Tolstoy's psychology – could not last for long without things coming to a head. If he was to be honest with himself he had to proclaim his real beliefs, even though they went against the current trends in society. He felt that he had to expose the terrible hypocrisies on which the social proprieties were based – not that he believed that it was in the power of any one man to change or alter hoary social attitudes – but some purpose could be served in bringing them to light.

Nowhere was this hypocrisy more in evidence than in the realm of sex and marriage, wherein the proprieties were propitiated but genuine human decency sacrificed. Tolstoy has, of course, been accused of inconsistency in his views on sex and marriage. In his early works he had championed marriage and fertility, whereas he later began to sing quite a different tune, recommending as it seemed just the reverse – prescribing, in fact, that the less one had to do with sex the better for one's peace of mind.

It was not mere perversity, however, that made him change his mind. He did not come to believe in chastity as an absolute ideal of his own accord. But in the process of writing *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as he declares, this belief was gradually forced upon his consciousness as being the only real solution to the sex problem:

*I never anticipated that the development of my thoughts would bring me to such a conclusion. I was startled at my conclusions and did not wish to believe them, but it was impossible not to do so. And however they may run counter to the whole arrangement of our lives, however they may contradict what I thought and said previously, I admit them.*

The more he mulled the matter over in his mind the more was he forced to the conclusion that the power which sex exerted over human beings did more to destroy their humanity than any other passion did. As long as the sexual passion dominated the human mind, marriage rocked upon an extremely shaky base indeed collapsing at the slightest push. And there was little point in trying to mask the facts with pious sentimentalities.

No doubt, in his attempt to expose society's shams, Tolstoy's natural intensity propelled him to extremes as he strove to attain his mark. The wizards of medicine came in for no mean share of his attack. For these high priests of science, under the guise of protecting the interests of the young, were organizing well-regulated debauchery to kill healthy human beings on the instalment plan. Once this lethal dose of ideas – that lechery is necessary for health – is injected into young minds, and syphilis is contracted as a result, it doesn't really matter because for that too the high priests have devised a cure!

As he develops his theme in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy's blood begins to boil. The more cures there are to hand the more does debauchery increase. And when the cure proves ineffective, negligence or spite enables the disease to be transferred to the innocent or to men's wives. According to Tolstoy, therefore, syphilis should not be treated – men should be left to stew in their own juice! Are not the high priests to blame for devising contraceptives and abortion techniques, so that couples can enjoy themselves without bothering to look forward or backward – free of all responsibility? A pox on them all and their scientific sham!

Tolstoy's radical change of attitude, brought on by the havoc he saw around him, earned for him nothing but the jeers and sneers of a loose society. He became the butt of scorn and ridicule. The charge directed at him was that age having exacted its toll on his virility, he was no longer able to enjoy the fruits of the bedroom – and would have others go without it too! Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Speculations such as these were exactly what the wizards of medicine were apt to advance, basing all their conclusions on purely physical factors, without any deeper comprehension of the facts.

The fact was that with his robust sexuality Tolstoy was just as virile at seventy as he was when thirty, continuing to have sexual relations with his wife well beyond his seventieth year. His critics simply could not grasp that as he matures, a change in a man's views need not necessarily stem from a deterioration of the sex glands. The gradual development of a man's moral nature has nothing to do with the metabolism of his body, but is the result of his realization that there are certain ideals he should pursue due to the beneficial effect they exercise on his mind. If Tolstoy was eventually persuaded that chastity is an ideal worth pursuing, it was because he had come to the conviction that sexuality – instead of unifying the sexes to live in mutual harmony – merely tended to divide and alienate them all the more.

Unlike his fellows, Tolstoy was not in the least embarrassed to prescribe an ideal that he himself could not as yet in practice completely fulfil. In his view, an ideal – regardless of whether it was something that human beings could entirely attain or not – would have to stand on its own merits or cease to be an ideal. In a mind as fertile as Tolstoy's, where the processes of

development were always in a constant ferment, changes of attitude were bound to occur. Why then should he fear to change his mind if the facts warranted it? Not to change it – when everything pointed to a change – but to stick stubbornly in the same old rut, would be nothing but a symptom of obstinacy and perversity, a fault so grievous as to impede all moral progress.

True enough, Tolstoy had for long extolled the joys of marriage and family life – why then this sudden change. Had he not glorified love and seen in it his only hope? In *Anna Karenina*, had he not portrayed Levin the hero as spending the night alone in the fields – his only companion the darkness and the stars – when, lo and behold, a carriage passes by at dawn, and his heart lights up with joy and hope as he recognizes a girl in it who is the main object of his lonely dreams.

*There were no other eyes like those in the world. There was only one creature in the world that could concentrate for him all the brightness and meaning of life. It was she. It was Kitty ... there only, in the carriage ... could he find the solution of the riddles of his life, which had weighed so agonizingly upon him of late.*

Obviously these emotions were not merely those of his fictional hero but his own. Why then was he now singing quite a different tune? Why all this souring of attitudes? Surely it was not because he had ceased to love his wife – for in his diary he confesses that this emotion still prevails!

Nevertheless, the sincerity of Tolstoy's anguish is quite plain – striking the reader as being wrung from the depths, rather than just a pose struck for the benefit of his literary audience. As his diary declares:

*Where is it – my old self, the self I loved and knew who still springs to the surface sometimes and pleases and frightens me? I have become petty and insignificant. And, what is worse, it has happened since my marriage to a woman I love... It is appalling, dreadful, insane, to allow one's happiness to depend upon purely material things – a wife, children, health, wealth!*

No doubt, Tolstoy's striving after spiritual values had created a vacuum in its wake. The fact was that he had expected too much of marriage and felt a little let down. Though it was not without its own brand of felicity, he had nothing to indict family life with except that it dealt a blow to his former belief that it would provide the answer to all his problems, when it had only made him petty and insignificant instead.

In fact, how could mere human loves and passions solve the riddle of life? The worst part of it was that marriage had cut short his educational

activities, and completely diverted him from the search for the general meaning of life, centring his mind merely on the family and how to increase their means of livelihood:

*My striving after self-perfection and progress was now again replaced by the effort simply to secure the best possible conditions for myself and my family.*

It seems to be Tolstoy's contention that love for a particular person or for one's family – or even for one's country – is a strictly circumscribed affair, and therefore detracts from that universality of spirit and compassion which should be every man's rightful heritage. Love on a restricted scale, for personal benefit, for a selfish happiness, is the natural enemy of such a universality of soul – especially when such love is rooted in a purely physical attraction. When Tolstoy late in life passed again the spot in the woods where as a young bachelor he had an affair with Aksinya, he could not but shudder at the recollection of this episode that left a blot on his moral nature. And to think that by this time her once strong body would be nothing but a bundle of old bones! So much for the joy of illicit sex!

From boyhood onwards Tolstoy's life had been moved by a persistent struggle to rid himself of the bestial side of sex and to attain an ideal of chaste love. Marriage appeared to him the only legitimate solution that would enable him to keep on a straight and unswerving track, even if much of his independence would have to be sacrificed by such a contract. When circumstance revealed the incompatibility of the relationship and the emotional bondage it imposed, it was only natural that he should begin to sing a different tune. His disenchantment is evidenced as early as six months after his marriage, when he makes Prince Andrew declare in *War and Peace*:

*My wife is a good little wife, a woman in whose hands her husband's honour is perfectly safe. But what would I not give at this moment, great heavens, not to be married! ... My dear fellow, do not marry till you have done everything in life that you care to do, till you have ceased to love the woman you mean to marry, and have studied her thoroughly, or else you will make a fatal and irreparable mistake ... If you marry expecting anything from yourself in the future, you will feel at every step that for you all is ended, all is closed except the drawing room, where you will be ranged side by side with a court lackey and an idiot!*

Strange words from one so given to extol wedlock and the unadulterated joys of family life! As Prince Andrew speaks, Tolstoy portrays the man's thin keen face as quivering with a feverish excitement, his eyes sparkling with bitter resentment. Count Peter, his confidant, is amazed at the

vehemence of his friend, whom he thought the most blessed of men – viewing him as representative of all that he admired, possessing force and will, qualities that he himself completely lacked. Though Peter has not even breathed a syllable in response, he is forced to hear his friend proceed:

*You do not understand! And yet it is the story of a whole life. You talk of Bonaparte and his career, but Bonaparte while he toiled was making straight for his goal, step by step. He was free, he had but one object in view, and he gained it. But once tie yourself to a woman and you are chained like a galley slave. Every impulse and inspiration, the very forces within you, only crush you and fill you with regret.*

So far the relative arguments of whether Bonaparte was really *free* or not, do not as yet enter the picture. For the moment Tolstoy is only working off his early disenchantment with marriage and getting it off his chest.

No doubt, it was unjust of Tolstoy to demand more from his mate. In all justice to his wife, she was an able helpmate, looked after the household with competence, and laboriously copied out *War and Peace* – including the offensive passages above – several times. It was hardly considerate of him, therefore, to hit out at so efficient a spouse. If his wife's concern was primarily directed to the care of the household, it only represented the normal stand which women, as mothers of the race, uphold – their first instinct being to preserve the family unit. Tolstoy, as a creative artist, represented a totally different service in the social scheme, and if he resented any restraints or encroachments on his liberty he should have known better than to bind himself down in wedlock. Under the circumstances, no woman – no matter how gifted – would have been able to satisfy his emotional or intellectual demands.

Tolstoy's argument – insofar as he makes Prince Andrew his mouthpiece – seems to be that if a marriage lacks spiritual harmony, then a man is exposed to the danger of having his sensibilities withered from within. In such a situation he should do his best to liberate himself from the chains of wedlock so far as it in him lies. It appears that by deciding in favour of marriage, Tolstoy was only trying to legitimize his sexual instincts, and that this fatal weakness only led to his eventual estrangement from his wife and all the woe it ushered in its train. Long having struggled with the sensual passions of his youth, he sought to legitimize his sex-drive by marriage and the production of a family. But when his view of life experienced a radical change, due to the religious impulses brought to bear on his consciousness, he felt that it was necessary for him to renounce whatever was selfish in his nature for the sake of a higher ideal. Tension and conflict arose in his marital relationship due not through sexual incompatibility so much as the changes in his attitude. At one



point he was prepared to even sacrifice the legitimacy of sexual relations in marriage for the higher vision of the brotherhood of mankind.

In dealing with the sex problems Tolstoy considered his personal experience as an adequate guide, and utilized it to pass judgment on an overall situation without going into specific case details. His point appears to be that if the sex instinct is a basic one and reproduces the race, nevertheless in itself it does not represent a profound ideal worthy of man's aim. A spiritual relationship plays a more integral role in human affairs than a purely sexual one, and it is rather naïve for a man, therefore, to expect that both these aspects of human life can combine without causing a jarring discord. A spiritual relationship, in fact, flourishes and endures longer when it is not encumbered or muddled by the raw demands of sex.

According to Tolstoy, the root of the problem is that the young are schooled from an early age to venerate the relationship between the sexes as the most exalted business in the world. Love and marriage as observed in polite society are only forms of deception, because love if it be true, is not something that attains its highest consummation through physical contact. Girls are trained through their education only how to trap men – some by music and curls, others by learning and political service. But the end remains the same. No matter how educated they be, the highest ideal offered to women is marriage and not virginity. As long as this is so, women will never be free but always enslaved by sex and sensuality.

The education of women will always correspond to men's opinion of them. And what is the opinion of men? To get as much pleasure from women as they can, and, unlike the animals, at all seasons. Those women who might aid the progress of mankind towards goodness and truth are invariably perverted by men's lust for pleasure. And as if that were not enough, it is incumbent on them that they coat their apish occupation with a slick term called *love* – a term that can conveniently be applied to disguise all manner of lecheries. Love, in fact, is an all-purpose term that perverts both high and low. Feminine vanity is also to blame, of course: it seems to be the purpose of women to attract as many men as she can to her roost – as a status symbol, if nothing else.

And so the circus must go on. People have for so long accustomed themselves to a life of pretence that they really begin to believe in their own morality and that they live in a moral world, when in reality the opposite is true. Although few are really fooled, the collective pretence must be upheld. But women, even when young, are no fools and know very well what men really want. As Tolstoy makes Pozdnyshev declare:

*A woman, especially if she has passed through the male school,*

*knows very well that all the talk about elevated subjects is just talk, but that what a man wants is just her body, and always presents it in the most deceptive but alluring light, and she acts accordingly. If we only throw aside our familiarity with this indecency, which has become a second nature to us, and look at the life of our upper classes as it is, in all its shamelessness – why, it is simply a brothel! You don't agree? You say that women of our society have other interests in life than prostitutes, but I say no, and will prove it. If people differ in the aims of their lives, by the inner content of their lives, this difference will necessarily be reflected in externals, and their externals will be different. But what difference do we see in prostitutes and ladies of the highest society? The same costumes, the same fashions, the same perfumes, the same exposure of arms, shoulders, and breasts!*

Tolstoy's indictment of the society in which he lived, delivered in such plain language – even if it be through the mouth of an anti-hero – is terribly severe, and was hardly calculated to endear him to the ladies. But if he hoped to expose society's hypocrisy and redirect its course towards a higher morality he was left with little choice. If he did not hesitate to take himself to task in public, why should not society be castigated merely to save its face? Double standards of values were not for the likes of him. It was a sorry situation indeed for him to observe whores for short-terms despised, but prostitution for long-terms – that is, high-class ladies – esteemed. There was no difference in class – a pox on them all!

The fact is that, according to Tolstoy, the idle-rich possess too much leisure and have too much to eat. High-class ladies and gentlemen consume more than they need, and the over-abundance of food in their systems heats the blood and stimulates sexual desire. Whereas a peasant eats simple fare and exhausts his energies in hard labour – leaving him little excess lusts for sexual promiscuity – the idle-rich stuff themselves with all manner of delicacies, while doing nothing for their living, so that an outlet must be created for excess leisure and heat. In sophisticated society this excess is transposed from its raw state through the prism of an artificial etiquette – expressing itself in so-called love and silly sentimentalities. Amidst all this sham atmosphere Pozdnyshev fell into the waiting trap:

*Everything was there to hand: raptures, tenderness, and poetry. In reality that love of mine was the result, on the one hand, of her mama's and the dressmaker's activity, and on the other hand, of the superabundance of food consumed by me while living an idle life. If my future wife had simply sat at home in a shapeless dressing gown, and I had exhausted myself in work, I should not have fallen in love*

*and nothing of all this would have occurred.*

Courtship – so delightful and exciting a game – is really an expensive trap for new designs and decors must continually be contrived to make the morsels more delectable.

Love in high society is like a sale, a big bazaar – where the men stroll around inspecting the women as they disport themselves. The women's lips do not move but their eyes speak eloquently as they compete for the men's favour. Choose *me* – not her – the eyes invite! And the men are delighted and so tickled that everything is arranged just for their good pleasure. What is so offensive to good taste is that these young bloods – all togged up and dressed to kill, but rotten underneath – move about like vultures with a charming smirk, sniffing at their female prey. Snorts Pozdnyshev:

*When we thirty-year old profligates, very carefully washed, shaved, perfumed, in clean linen and in evening dress or uniform, enter a drawing room or ballroom, we are emblems of purity – the very picture of charm!*

Of course, the young vultures believe that it is they who are taking their pick of the girls, when in reality the reverse is true – for a man's *choice* is but a formality, it is really the Woman who *decides*. Snap! Before they know it, they are caught in the snare.

If the ladies' wiles are exposed they take it as an insult. The sordid bargains of the marketplace must be masked with sophisticated sentimentalities that lull the victim into sweet ecstasies. It is the mother's task to sport their girls' wares with superb veneer, as they crow with delight:

*'Ah, the origin of the species, how interesting! Oh, Lily takes such an interest in painting! And the drives, shows, and symphonies, how remarkable! My Lily is mad about music!' But the ladies one thought is – Take me, take me! Take my Lily – or try at least.'*

In the ladies' eyes Tolstoy's treatment of the subject is simply unforgivable. But his purpose was hardly to embarrass them, only to chasten society for its shams – and there was no other effective way of doing so if it was to register and make its mark.

In any case, the ladies were bound to have their revenge. Just as the Jews are despised, observed Tolstoy, but their financial resources subjugate society, even so women turn their inferior position to good use by enslaving men with their power altogether. No wonder Pozdnyshev seizes a knife as the surest way of freeing himself from the shackles of his wife, after she had

betrayed him with another man – or so he believes. In retrospect, he is aghast at his own gullibility in having been trapped into matrimony:

*It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness! A handsome woman talks nonsense, you listen and hear not nonsense, but cleverness! She says and does horrid things, and you see only charm! And if she does not say stupid or horrid things, you at once persuade yourself that she is wonderfully clever and good!*

For the female sex to claim that they are underprivileged, therefore, is absolute nonsense, for they never had it so good! Women possess a monopoly not only over men but over the world's commodities. Nine-tenths of the goods found in the shops cater merely to the whims and fancies of the ladies.

And the production of all these goods exacts its toll of labour and expense – and men must foot the bill! Serves them jolly well right for not being able to resist the ladies' charms. Comically enough, Pozdnyshev declares that men need police protection because of women's open invitation to sensuality. In fact, in view of the danger they pose to men's minds and bodies the female sex should even be jailed!

*Ah, you are laughing! But it is not at all a joke. I am sure a time will come, and perhaps very soon, when people will understand that actions which disturb social tranquillity – as adornments evoking a sensuality are – cannot go on being allowed to parade themselves in the streets to entrap mankind!*

If the comic aspect of the situation cannot be denied that is all right. Bedroom jokes are always good for a laugh when they are at another's expense. But when human lives are at stake then it is hardly in good taste. Under the circumstances Tolstoy found it difficult to shrug off the terrible consequences of sensuality as a barroom joke.

Although the causes that make marriage totter and collapse are legion, Tolstoy faults the basic immorality upon which the whole marital contract is embarked. Unable to preserve their chastity indefinitely couples compromise by coming together in wedlock. If this compromise fails in many a case it is because insufficient justice is done to the sensitivities: for a sexual connection is sorely inadequate to base a life-relationship upon. Such a relationship cannot survive where there is no mutual devotion or respect. The spectacle of couples clawing each other to the grave may be viewed as a form of survival, but it is hardly a survival that sane human beings would wish to emulate.

If marriage is entered upon solely for the purpose of sexual gratification then the arrival of children complicates that purpose and imposes a strain on the sex relationship. As Pozdnyshev complains:

*Although men desire children their coming presents an obstacle to continuous sex enjoyment, and so a way to evade that obstacle must be devised – by making the woman barren so that the man can quietly and constantly enjoy himself. The second way of evasion is polygamy – not honourable but dishonourable polygamy with all its adulterous falsehood and hypocrisy. And the third evasion is for a man to enjoy his wife in a course fashion even when she is already pregnant... Decent men feel that the first two evasions are nasty and wish to have children, but the viewpoint remains barbarously the same and the result even worse. A woman with us must at one and the same time be pregnant and continue to be her husband's mistress. But her strength simply cannot stand it.*

Selfishness in the sex relationship automatically becomes a man's own course. A pretty woman, if only out of spite, revenges herself on her husband by flirting with any man who comes her way. And why should he complain? After all, he is only getting what he deserves. Why should he fume in silence to see some young upstart look at his wife appraisingly, in a manner as though he were examining her most private parts? How dare he look at his wife like that! But the young fellow smiles impudently back, as much as to say – What can you do about it? It is *my* turn now!

Serve them jolly well right! Once a man has led a dissolute life, retribution will some day be bound to come his way – through the body of his own wife. Even if the wife is a chatterbox a man will not be immune. According to Tolstoy, a wife before her marriage is much superior in morality to her husband, and after marriage it is even more the case. Tolstoy's view is that a woman's sphere of life – bringing up children – is much more important than a man's, even if he were to be in the senate, because a man's occupation is mainly concerned with the earning of enough cash. A woman considers her home duties much superior to a man's, but of course a man regards his job as superior. This divergence of viewpoint in couples may well lead to mutual contempt, and serve as a good reason for the marriage to crack or completely collapse.

Children too, through no fault of their own, may come to impose a strain on the marital relationship and poison its course. Anxiety about the children's well-being and health makes everything – even the parent's own lives – hang as though upon a hair. In fact, the children's demands never cease – as Pozdnyshev recollects to his dismay:

*Children are of course an important affair, but then we all have to live! In our time the grown-ups are not allowed even to live. They have no proper life – the life of the whole family hangs every second by a hair, and family life, life for the married couple, is lacking... There is no life, it is a constant peril. And doctors who charge impossible fees are called in to treat the children for every little illness that occurs. They have to be called in because the wife is sure that only the doctor can save her child... Having children, therefore, far from improving our mutual relations and uniting us only served to divide us even more.*

With all these various irritants forcing themselves upon the already badgered couple, how is the marriage able to work? Most marriages simply totter on from day to day in a daze. Though externally they pass off with a semblance of stability, all the while the relationship is being undermined from without by a dire shortage of substance and cement. Given such an intractable situation, one or both parties cannot but seek a way of escape through the nearest diversion that presents itself, and intoxicate themselves therewith.

In a setup where very little room is left for any stable human relationship to blossom or develop, hate and hostility inevitably become the order of the day. The worst part of it is that it is a hostility which the children can observe – and when they themselves become adult, pass on to their own children in a kind of hereditary chain.

Mulling this problem in his head, Tolstoy came to the conclusion that if this endemic hostility were to be expelled from people's hearts, another more stable and enduring ideal than the marital relationship had to be found, and he seized on chastity as the last resort. At the price of being a spoil-sport he had to present his argument for what it was worth, in a style and content that was in no way calculated to propitiate public appeal. He felt he had to proclaim the conclusions to which he had come, even if they proved to be in direct opposition to the commonly accepted modes of social conduct of his times.

When *The Kreutzer Sonata* first appeared, therefore, the sensitive areas upon which it touched could not but serve to excite an uproar on all sides. The author came under unanimous attack – not least for the inconsistency of his own life in not practicing what he preached. Tolstoy had his eyes well set in his head, and of all those who moved in high society he was the one who was least blind. The meagre diet he offered as an ideal may have been unpalatable to society, but that did not detract from its therapeutic value as an alternative antidote to assuage social ills.

In any case, what had it to do with him? After all, he was only presenting a story that was based on an actual life-situation – an incident of

which he had heard – and was merely stating his case as he saw fit. If men refused to face the facts – or could not accept the ideal – so much the worse for them, it was hardly his fault. He was only a scribe struggling to do his duty, by pointing out the enduring goals which the human race could take should it desire to achieve true harmony and peace.

When Tolstoy considered the terrible havoc that sex had played on his own life, it was impossible for him to take any other stand than the one he did. He had, to be sure, placed great hopes on his marriage, and when it fell short of his expectations, he felt that he was not bound by duty to shut his mouth. After all, others might derive some benefit from his case history. Like it or not, therefore, he had to leave posterity a legacy, indelibly registered in black and white.

In a society where sex is of predominant interest and masculinity synonymous with the possession of a high degree of sexuality, the penalties that this society exacts from idealistic minds – and especially the creative artist – is that they conform to this mode of behaviour and thought, a fact that reflects itself in their lives and art, which takes on a bastard form and becomes insincere through the introduction into its format of an overabundance of prurient interest, the main purpose of which is not to edify the public but merely to pervert. As an instance of this pressure brought to bear upon an artistic mind, the bawdy passages that Shakespeare produced in his plays may create the impression that he was a lecherous person and a totally bad nut, when in reality he was quite a moral man as normal standards go, who wrote in such a vein simply to gratify a public much addicted to this kind of spice. If Tolstoy refused to follow suit and bow to this perverted taste, it was because he possessed the means to live his own life without being obliged to work with his pen – something that Shakespeare was not fortunate to possess – and took much pride in his independence of thought.

Much of the bitterness to be found in *The Kreutzer Sonata* becomes explicable when its source is traced to the idealism of Tolstoy's youth and his latent ascetic instincts. The attitudes and ideas expressed in this work represent his natural reaction to the violence inflicted on his adolescent reveries concerning the opposite sex and the woman of his dreams. *The Kreutzer Sonata* is thus a form of literary revenge for Tolstoy's early innocence being shattered by the sordid contacts of casual sex relationships in later life. As Pozdnyshv declares: casual sex had utterly spoilt his natural simple relationship with women forever.

Tolstoy's complex attitude towards love and the female of the species – after manhood had taken its natural course – also stemmed from the early loss of both his parents and the filial affection that he was thus denied. This void in his life is reflected in his fiction in the person of Levin – who is portrayed as

going to Moscow with the express purpose of proposing to Kitty Shtcherbatsky, his future wife:

*Levin did not remember his own mother, and his only sister was older than he was, so that it was in the Shtcherbatsky's house that he saw for the first time that inner life of an old, noble, cultivated, and honourable family of which he had been deprived by the death of his father and mother.*

Herein lies the clue to all Tolstoy's dissatisfaction and torment concerning the opposite sex. In fact, it was his misfortune to project upon the feminine connections something which it did not, and could not in the natural course of human nature, possess. His penchant for the mysterious and poetical element in women only led him from one disillusionment to the next. As Levin so innocently expects:

*All the members of that family, especially the feminine half, were pictured by him, as it were, wrapped with a mysterious poetical veil, and he not only perceived no defects whatever in them, but under the poetical veil that shrouded them he assumed the existence of the loftiest sentiments and every possible perfection.*

It is not to be wondered, therefore, that Tolstoy after having been married for some time felt totally let down. His emotional extravagance had led him to expect simply too much from a purely mundane relationship.

Like the fictional Shtcherbatsky family, the Behrs household into which Tolstoy married had three daughters, and he is only providing a background portrait of his own emotional reactions at the age of thirty-two, when he makes Levin reflect that:

*He felt, as it were, that he had to be in love with one of the sisters, only he could not quite make out which.*

Why did he have to be in love with one of them at all? It is obvious by this confession that Tolstoy/Levin was not really in love with any of the daughters but merely moved by the urgent need to acquire a feminine object to assuage his emotional intensity. As he questions his own motives in his diary before taking the fatal step:

*I am afraid of myself. What if this be only a desire for love and not real love? I try to notice only her weak points, but yet I love.*

It was unfortunate that Tolstoy, once swayed by his emotions, was not as judicious in his decisions as he was in his doubts. Who was to blame if he



was built in such a way as to demand wonders from the female connection? As Levin expatiates:

*It seemed to him that Kitty was so perfect in every respect, that he was a creature so low and so earthly that it could not even be conceived that other people and she herself could regard him as worthy of her... After spending two months in Moscow in a state of enchantment, seeing Kitty almost every day in society, into which he went so as to meet her, he abruptly decided that it could not be, and went back to the country.*

This appears to be an accurate rendering of Tolstoy's own activities and emotions at the time. And it would have been in his own long-term interest had he stayed in the country and forgotten the whole affair. But, as usual, his intense nature got the better of him, and he returned to the city to plunge himself headlong into a renewed connection:

*After spending two months alone in the country, he was convinced that this was not one of those passions of which he had had experience in his early youth – that his feeling gave him not an instant's rest, that he could not live without deciding the question: would she or would she not be his wife, and that his despair had arisen only from his own imaginings, that he had no sort of proof that he would be rejected.*

He should not have bothered his head on this point: because if the object of his ardour had her head turned by another dashing suitor at the time, it was a match that had little possibility of materializing, and his future wife was only too glad to seize the opportunity to be married off to such a well-endowed country aristocrat as himself.

Tolstoy's loneliness had driven him to seek some object that could fill the void in his life. No doubt, it was chiefly the quality of innocence and spontaneity in the opposite sex to which Tolstoy was irresistibly attracted – as his typical heroines, Natasha and Kitty, bear witness. And this was probably the decisive factor that drew him to Sonya, his future wife, who was only eighteen – Kitty's age – when he married her.

Tolstoy's own feelings regarding his future wife are reflected in Levin's emotions as he watches Kitty skating on the ice. He is enamoured of her fresh and innocent charm – a vision that returns him in imagination to the unclouded world of his childhood dreams:

*The childishness of her expression, together with the delicate beauty of her figure, made up her special charm, and that he fully realized.*

*But what always struck him in her as something unlooked for, was the expression of her eyes, soft, serene, and truthful, and above all, her smile, which always transported Levin to an enchanted world, where he felt himself softened and tender, as he remembered himself in some days of his early childhood.*

Happy, irrecoverable days of childhood! Tolstoy's mistake, under the emotion of the moment, was to confuse his priorities: trying to shift the past into the present – something which in actual practice rarely succeeds.

Oblonsky – the man of the world and incorrigible flirt – acutely diagnoses Levin's nature as being one that can never rest content unless it achieves some ideal unity. Tolstoy's genius for self-analysis is here portrayed:

*You're very much all of a piece. That's your strong point and your weakness. You have a character that's all of a piece, and you want the whole of life to be of a piece too – but that's not how it is. You despise public official work because you want the reality to be invariably corresponding all the while with the aim – and that's not how it is. You want a man's work always to have a defined aim, and love and family life always to be undivided – and that's not how it is. All the variety, and all the charm, all the beauty of life is made up of light and shade.*

All of which exactly expresses Tolstoy's nature in all its restless ambivalence and discontent – forever seeking some ideal state that can perfectly satisfy. No one knew better than he that the beauty of life is made up of light and shade. That his fiction has become so popular testifies to his genius in capturing all the differing shades of life and presenting it in print. But coupled with this desire for beauty and variety, Tolstoy yearned for some permanent base upon which he could forever rest in peace. This conflict in his nature tossed him from one viewpoint to the next and exposed him to being accused of inconsistency in his behaviour and outlook. He was, in fact, exactly what Dryden said of Shakespeare:

*A man so various that he seemed to be  
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.*

A man of many parts has to put up with more conflicts in himself than the average man, and it is only inevitable that he must bear the brunt of being charged by unsympathetic minds as guilty of hypocrisy and deceit.

What Oblonsky says to Levin is typical man-of-the-world talk. And by the look of things Oblonsky should be a happy man. But his marriage is in shreds due to his profligate ways, and because he and his wife are no longer on

speaking terms, he complains to Levin that love is a tragedy. To which his dinner-mate simply retorts:

*In Platonic love there can be no tragedy, because in that all is clear and pure.*

Which reflects exactly Tolstoy's argument in *The Kreutzer Sonata* that the carnal connections between the sexes possesses a tendency to poison all real human relationships – or at least does nothing to foster compatibility between couples and reduce conflict.

According to Tolstoy, the carnal connection is destructive of those fresh and innocent feelings between the sexes because it is a naked desire whose basis is primarily selfish – though customarily cloaked under all manner of refined sentimentalities – and therefore in no way promotes real intimacy. Any function that has selfishness at its base is not conducive to the cementation of a real intimacy between human beings. It is not lost innocence so much as the collapse of an unspoiled intimacy between people that Tolstoy deplors.

This real intimacy is not confined to that between the sexes but includes the whole human family, and is something to be treasured wherever it is found. Thus Levin and Oblonsky, having dinner together, and apparently the best of friends, are nevertheless poles apart by virtue of their philosophy in life, and there can be no real intimacy between them at all. In fact, each one jealously guards his own way of life, and, barricaded in himself, lives in a world totally apart:

*And suddenly both of them felt that though they were friends, though they had been dining and drinking together, which should have drawn them closer, yet each was thinking only of his own affairs, and they had nothing to do with one another.*

And this is how it generally is in human relationships – in wedlock not the least. This barrier between people was what Tolstoy felt so keenly about the human situation as he observed the life around him: there were no real human relationships – in the final analysis, a man was perfectly alone.

It was a terrible fact to face, and the carnal connection – inside marriage or outside it – in no way alleviated the basic alienation and discord. On the contrary, due to the selfishness involved, it only served to aggravate it. One prominent feature of the carnal connection is its tendency to sabotage mutual respect and esteem, and when these ingredients are absent in a marriage it is bound to collapse. When a union is no longer supported by genuine regard the relationship between the sexes degenerates into merely one of naked necessity – a necessity that becomes intolerably repulsive, at least to cultured

minds. When this situation is driven to its breaking point, the last cohesive link comes unstuck, and when couples fall apart it is rarely a pretty sight.

Given the circumstances of his life, therefore, it was inevitable that Tolstoy's quest for a perfect human relationship was doomed from the start. His intellectual asceticism was acquired as a natural consequence of his realization that a sex relationship, far from creating concord, was a vulnerability that man could well do without. It was in virtue of this fact that Tolstoy, a married man with a happy family, for all his international fame and thousands of devotees, whether ensconced in his study or engaged in one of his country walks, remained like Rousseau – or Shakespeare for that matter – one of the most solitary of men.

Jotting down his reflections in a notebook or diary was Tolstoy's especial way of holding converse with himself and the world, and this fitted his spiritual isolation perfectly. If only he had heeded his own advice and remained in the country, without involving himself in marriage and a family, all would have been well. That is, he would have been much more content to observe other's happiness than greedily try to snatch it for his own. As he confides to his diary:

*A monastery of labour, that is your job, from the height of which you may calmly and gladly watch the love and happiness of others. I have dwelt in that monastery and will return to it. Yes ...*

Tolstoy, however, was more apt at giving advice than in taking it. He did not return to his intellectual monastery – at least never again completely, but married instead and raised a family, paying dearly for not heeding his own advice. His was a nature that simply demanded too much – not only of others but also of himself. Yet, in another sense, he could be content with the barest solitude of body and mind. As he notes on a certain wintry night, after his return from Moscow by railway carriage, he alights and makes his journey home by sleigh:

*When I got out of the railway carriage and entered the sledge and drove over the thick, soft snow more than a foot deep in that quiet softness, with the enchanting starry winter sky overhead and with sympathetic Misha the driver, I experienced a feeling akin to ecstasy, especially after being in the railway carriage with all its dirt and noise... After all that – Orion and Sirius rising above the Crown Woods, the powdery, silent snow, a good horse, good air, good Misha, and the good God ...*

Tolstoy's spiritual isolation, however, possessed its constructive aspects and contributed much to his capacity to evoke a setting or an emotion.

He transposes the impressions gathered from his solitary rambles into his fiction so that it becomes littered thick with vignettes that reveal his nostalgic solitude. Count Peter, for instance, having just parted from Natasha in a spirit of love and compassion, jumps into his sleigh and gazes up at the starry night:

*The night was exquisitely clear. Above the dark and dirty streets and the tangled perspective of roofs, spread the deep vault of the sky bejeweled with stars. As he contemplated those remote and mysterious spheres, which seemed to have something in common with his state of mind, he forgot the abject squalor of the world. When they came out on the Arbatskaia Square a wide horizon lay before his eyes. Just in the middle blazed a pure luminary with a glorious train, surrounded by sparkling stars that lay majestically displayed from the very margin of the earth. This was the famous comet of 1811 – the comet which everyone believed to be a warning of endless woes and of the end of the world. It caused Peter no such superstitious terrors, his still moist eyes admired it with rapture. It looked to him like a bolt of flame that had rushed with giddy swiftiness through measureless space to fall on that distant spot of earth where now it quivered and blazed into infinitude. The heavenly glory dispersed the gloom of his soul and gave him a foresight of the diviner splendors of another life.*

Here again Tolstoy's desire to sublimate the relationship between the sexes expresses itself. For passion is such a treacherous impulse that even the innocent Natasha has succumbed to its spell, and through her unstable emotions agrees to elope with the infamous Anatole Kouraguine. But the attempt having failed, Peter gazes into her eyes, overcome with love and pity at her unfortunate plight. Under the combined effect of his emotions concerning Natasha and the spectacle of the comet blazing in the sky amidst the stars, Peter only wishes to return to the solitude of his home, instead of going to the Club to meet a crowd of heartless gossips who would simply spoil the whole effect of his ecstatic mood with their obscene trash.

Hate is an emotion that leaves no one in doubt about its roots once it manifests itself. Love, however, represents an ambiguity: for it may not always be what it seems, and may really be something else in disguise. Under its all-purpose label, every trifle and trinket of human imagination may be sold, so that by the time the buyer recognizes his mistake – that it is just a fake – it is already too late. In the *Kreutzer Sonata* Tolstoy contributes his bit to making plain that the sentimental preoccupation with love – especially as dealt with in novels – barely conceals the raw physical demands that fester underneath. The perennial best-sellers are those that pass off the business of sex as romance, and as long as the market for such trash remains high, ways and means will be

devised of presenting it in a variety of hues to fool even the most astute. Sex is a game without end, and in keeping with the accepted rules of the game, men and women will continue to exploit each other in this respect to the best of their ability and with as much variety as can be devised.

Considering Tolstoy's poetic view of love and the female sex, and how these were glorified in his earlier works, it came as somewhat of a surprise to his reading public to witness him initiate a complete about-face in *The Kreutzer Sonata* and condemn such romantic fancies out of hand. People were tempted to conclude that it was just another phase of his wayward and extravagant genius – that he had said many things in his life, and that too much attention should not be paid to all that he had to say, because much of it was only the random debris thrown up by a mind in constant turmoil, and therefore to take him at his word would only be to be misled.

If there is any truth in this claim, however, the whole matter cannot be so conveniently dismissed. Tolstoy's character was straightforward yet complicated; extravagantly romantic yet antagonistic to all sham. As a consequence, the products that flowed from his pen were bound to present a conflict. Always sensitive about his own lewd past, he had no desire to glorify something that he knew very well to be false, and he was only too well aware how romantic relationships are exploited and twisted out of context by the motivations of sex in the raw. While writing *The Kreutzer Sonata*, therefore, it had become terribly repulsive to him to try and butter over the crude aspects of the carnal connection with pious sentimentalities. He had to state his case as he had come to see it, and to present the facts for what they were worth.

As a matter of fact, to testify that he was not biased on the subject, he had received corroborative evidence from women correspondents that his view was correct – one of whom had complained that:

*An innocent girl usually falls into the clutches of a beast who is ready to give everything for the gratification of his sensual pleasures, and who does not spare the health of the mother of his children. Men do not hesitate to drag a woman down from her pedestal of purity into the cesspool of immorality, and this is done to the most beautiful and healthy girls.*

If Tolstoy's conclusions on this sensitive subject appeared uncompromising and extreme, they at least were sincere. In fact, he carried this sincerity so far as to drag the clashes that occurred in his own marital life out for public inspection – a move that was the cause of the utmost embarrassment to his poor wife.

If Tolstoy's ideal of chastity appears too old a fossil to be taken seriously in a progressive age, in other areas his ideas were rather advanced for his time. Much of his arguments have been vindicated by the fact that women today are up in arms and refuse to condone the loutish attitudes of men regarding sex. The female sex is no longer willing, or able, to submit to men's nonsense lying down. The days of submissively lying down, in fact, are gone for good and the sex relationship must now be attacked on equal terms, standing up! Under the new education, a woman is no longer prepared to live merely for a man and his children, by whom she has so long been enslaved. Much of the motivation behind women's liberation movements was already anticipated by Tolstoy, when he makes Pozdnyshv declare:

*The emancipation of women lies not in universities and law courts but in the bedroom. Yes, and the struggle against prostitution lies not in the brothels but in families ... The enslavement of women lies simply in the fact that men desire, and think it good, to avail themselves of her as a tool of enjoyment. Well, and they liberate women, give her all sorts of rights equal to man, but continue to regard her as an instrument of pleasure, and so educate her in childhood and afterwards by public opinion. And there she is, still the same humiliated and depraved slave, and the man still a depraved slave-owner. They emancipate women in universities and in law courts, but continue to regard her as an object of enjoyment. Teach her, as she is taught among us, to regard herself as such, and she will always remain an inferior being.*

So far so good. Women will obviously agree with so much that has been said. But they will hardly be willing to go so far as to accept the argument that abortion is taboo, or that virginity is the highest state. For those are the guidelines along which Pozdnyshv's arguments proceed.

According to this line of reasoning, it is the collective attitude of society and the manner in which it educates its young that is responsible for the present widespread permissiveness – setting the conditions down in advance whereby marriages eventually collapse:

*Either with the help of those scoundrels the doctors she will prevent the conception of offspring – that is, will be a complete prostitute, lowering herself not to the level of an animal but to the level of a thing – or she will be what the majority of women are, mentally diseased, hysterical, unhappy, and lacking capacity for spiritual development. High schools and universities cannot alter that. It can only be changed by a change in men's outlook on women and women's way of regarding themselves. It will change only when woman regards virginity as the highest state and does not, as at*

*present, consider the highest state of a human being a shame and a disgrace.*

The terrible fact is that in society old maids unsullied by sex are held up to ridicule, and purity and chastity viewed with contempt – whereas adulterous women reap publicity and are looked upon with envy even by their peers. Such a system of values, which reverses everything and makes black appear white, is the very devil of perversity.

Since virginity as an ideal had never been in much vogue, or made much headway from of old with the human race – which ideal if adopted totally would have made the race extinct by now – concessions to human weakness must be made, and a semblance of idealism preserved. This semblance finds its niche in the marriage sacrament – a sacrament, however, which is not a Christian invention at all, for Christ never sanctioned it in the first place. Marriage takes pride of second place when complete chastity fails as an ideal. If the best is too stiff a pill to take, then second best will do – for it also ensures a seat in heaven after death, at least according to the records. As Pozdnyshv declares:

*In striving towards complete chastity man falls. He falls, and the result is a moral marriage. But if, as in our society, man aims directly at physical love, then though it may clothe itself in the pseudo-moral form of marriage, that will merely be permitted debauchery with one woman – and will nonetheless be an immoral life, such as that in which I perished and killed my wife.*

Pozdnyshv has made his point. When sex pleasure becomes the main motive for marriage it defeats itself, because the time arrives when both parties feel let down and a void appears – which must be filled by hook or by crook, for nature abhors a vacuum, to be sure.

But men are by nature much given to muster all manner of specious arguments to support their bent. Tolstoy, however, considered it more honest to admit a fact if it were genuine and proclaim it loud, even if it happened to be in direct opposition to his accustomed mode of behaviour or present way of life. The whole point of his argument in *The Kreuzer Sonata* would be lost if his readers were to understand it only in terms of his preaching chastity for its own sake. It is not the relative merits or demerits of chastity, or sexual abstention, that are at stake, but the suffering – mental and physical – which sexuality inevitably excites, that is to be deplored. The devastation which the sexual instinct leaves in its wake consigns it to a class of experience whose repercussions are such that it were best shunned if any choice in the matter exists.



It is Tolstoy's belief that sex pleasure, though one of the most powerful incitements to live, and the means whereby the race is reproduced, does not represent the most enduring of human demands or needs. How much less complicated, more pleasant and enduring, are the simple pleasures that children produce in the mind! It is no idle claim that Tolstoy made at the age of seventy-five when he declared:

*I owe the brightest time in my life not to the love of woman but to love of people – to the love of children.*

The pleasures that please men best should be the ones that endure – not those sex sensations that last for but a minute, and must frantically be recycled in a panic lest they sputter out too fast! It needs not much experience to recognize that of all pleasures the sexual one is too unreliable and shaky for man to place his ultimate hopes upon.

As he aged Tolstoy came to place even greater store on the unadulterated joys of innocent childhood, as providing pleasures more enduring than the demands of selfish lust. His first work had already been the portrayal of scenes of childhood, and he continued to insert such scenes of innocence and charm in which he excelled into his later works. Thus, in *War and Peace*, he avails himself of the opportunity to contrast the gloom of war with the brightness of peace whenever he can. Prince Andrew, as the Russian army retreats to Moscow, stops at his father's house and finds it deserted except for the presence of a caretaker. Into this melancholy and nostalgic setting a ray of sunshine is introduced in the person of two little girls who – all oblivious of the gloom of war – have been stealing fruit in the orchard, and now with aprons full of their spoil spy the Prince and hide themselves behind the trees. He makes as if he hasn't seen them, not wishing to spoil their fun, but having gone some distance turns around and watches them with great amusement, as with shrill cries and chatter they run gaily out of the woods.

If only life were but one round of such simple and carefree joys! Happy, happy irrecoverable days of childhood! Come to the sordid details of his bachelorhood, and then his conflict with his wife – and what a fall in innocence and happiness was there! It is true that he produced his best known novels during this period, but in his later years he was not given to place much importance on novels which dealt only with worldly matters that catered to nothing but popular taste. Although he would always be a writer – a solitary, on-the-quiet kind of author, as he liked to say – with the approach of age he ceased to interest himself in literature as such, for to him there was something more essential to life than just the writing of endless books to gratify a voracious public, but in which no really useful purpose was served.

Tolstoy's marital conflicts brought the point home to him with telling force that a man cannot very well serve two masters and survive in one piece. Revealingly enough, at the age of sixty-five he noted in his diary with agonizing brevity a single line:

*I remember what marriage has brought me – it is terrible!*

The fact is that if he believed that he had every right to expect wonders from marriage, he should not have been so naïve as to hope that they would for long endure. Had he only foreseen how his views on life would eventually evolve, he would surely have refrained from committing himself to a contract that bound him to a single family for good to the exclusion of all else.

But the inexorable pattern of a man's life is something that appears open to modification and change only in retrospect, when in reality very little margin of choice or modification at any moment exists. More than anyone else Tolstoy should have been aware of this. For had he not – in the *Epilogue to War and Peace* – stated in no uncertain terms why men behave as they do?

*However often reflection and experience may show a man that, given the same conditions and character, he will always at a given juncture do precisely what he did before, he will nevertheless feel assured, when for the thousandth time he engages in action, which has hitherto always ended in the same way, that he can act as he pleases.*

From this statement it may be gathered that, had Tolstoy to live his life all over again, he would in all probability have repeated his mistakes exactly as he did in the past. Though a man may seem to possess infinite scope for the implementations of his will and choice in the way he is to live and act, in reality he possesses very little autonomy over the direction and drift that his life is destined to take. The fact is that individual life – like the life of a nation – is, to a more or less degree, programmed by the karmic conditions on which its existence is antecedently based.

Any assessment of men's lives and actions, therefore, tends to be biased by conclusions that have been arrived at long after the events themselves have already passed into the domain of history. The futility of passing judgment on human lives and events – as well as nations and empires – once they have vanished into the limbo of eternity, becomes obvious to the student of history and may be condoned only as an academic pastime, for nothing of value is contributed towards redressing the lives or the events under scrutiny.

For all Tolstoy's psychological insight into the sex problem, one angle that he failed to take into consideration – due to the unavailability of the

material – was the karmic-rebirth context. If this avenue had been explored in all its complexity, it would have thrown much light not only on his own personal relations with his wife but also in a universal context – clarifying why human beings, even under the best of circumstances, are forced to behave in such a manner where sexuality is concerned. If nothing else, the added dimension of the karmic-rebirth context, once explored in depth, would have enabled Tolstoy to adopt a more flexible attitude to a matter fraught with enormous difficulties and crucial consequences for the future of the human race.

The fact cannot be denied that the modern clinical approach to sexuality, so much in vogue, does not do justice to the facts and is too superficial to divulge any solid insight, hardly resolving the problems that sex gives rise to at all. When the available information on a difficult subject like sex is merely fragmentary, all manner of one-sided interpretations and distorted conclusions are adopted that result in a loss of balance and perspective – conducing to extreme permissiveness, on the one hand, and extreme austerity of the other. Extreme permissiveness only excites its devotees to intensify the karmic consequences through their wild behaviour, while extreme austerity serves only to foster an exaggerated sense of righteousness or hysteria, or both.

It would have been informative, therefore, if Tolstoy had attempted to define why sexuality exists at all. That is, why is the human species – or any other species for that matter – divided into two, male and female? If this question had been pursued to its logical limits, it would have led into an immense perspective – in which field karmic-rebirth liabilities and assets would be revealed to be responsible not only for male and female births, but also the accompanying development of ideas and attitudes which such dual sexuality produces in the human mind and the psycho-physical evolution of the race.

According to the biological view of life, gender or sex are the basic features and mainstay of the animal species, through which each reproduces itself. So accustomed has man come to view the generation of life in this format that to advocate some other view – such as that sex is not essential to the reproduction of life, or not even germane to man's origin in the beginning of the world – would be only to excite general ridicule, for such a view in no way accords with man's experience of how things really are. Each man passes judgment on life according to his experience of it, and even attempts to go further by speculating on matters that are quite beyond that experience and of which he knows nothing at all. Of one thing, however, man is always sure: it is his firm conviction that the male-female axis has always been an inalienable fixture of life, for all experience confirms it. Even religion supports this view and, as a consequence, has seen fit to elevate a biological function to the status of a sacrament.

The only religion that begs to take exception to the rule on this crucial point is Buddhism, which declares quite the opposite – that in the beginning of things no such distinction as to male and female existed at all. According to the oldest scriptures, it is stated that when the world first arose there were only *beings* – and these beings were made up of *mind*, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, traversing the air, existing in glory for a long life span. It goes on further to state that through the gradual infiltration of greed into these early beings – or demi-gods – their natures and mental bodies experienced a change for the worse. That is, they commenced to consume coarse food because of the excellent savour thereof – a fact that eventually led by gradual degrees, over a long period of time, to the solidification of their refined forms. As a consequence of which, sex organs evolved as a necessary conduit to dispose of the waste products accumulated in their bodily systems. This transformation from the refined psychic structure to the crude organism enabled the dominant male and female characteristics to make their appearance and become established as the norm and distinctive feature of the human species. The scriptures go on to state that the contemplation too closely of each other's sexual differences served as but a step to the inflammation of passion and desire, so that the lust for sexual intercourse soon became the order of the day.

At the time of those remote beginnings in the dawn of the race, mating was a comparative novelty, and to indulge in sexual intercourse was regarded as an extremely vulgar act. So whenever mating couples fornicated in the field they were remonstrated with by others – who even threw stones, sand, or cowdung at them to drive them off. This primordial form of displaying displeasure is retained even to this day in the custom of flinging confetti and such on the newly wedded couple. Little do people realize the true origin of this act of theirs, which they believe to be an expression of the pleasure and goodwill, when in reality it is quite the reverse – a relic of the hoary and unconscious past that signifies nothing but contempt and disgust!

In the beginning, therefore, sexual intercourse, far from being viewed as necessary to the reproduction of life-forms or species, was regarded as immoral and degrading, so that those who indulged in this practice were forbidden to enter any village or town. The consequence of which was that they were driven to build huts for themselves apart from the community to conceal their concupiscence. So much do social mores change with time and place that what was once regarded with shame and obloquy, as an act of obscenity deserving ostracism, has now come to be viewed with approval as a necessary and moral act – a social obligation of which it is something to be genuinely proud.

It may be questioned, of course, how male and female characteristics appeared in the first place, since no sexual distinctions existed in the beginning

of things. The fact is that, according to Buddhism, the beginning of the world is but a relative one, and the present world-aeon is merely the renewal of a previous world. That is, after each dissolution of the world a fresh one arises – picking up the pieces, as it were, from where the old one left off. In those previous worlds the male and female sexes appeared under similar conditions, as the product of a karmic process. Those who in previous world-aeons were females naturally possess a latent femininity in their psycho-physical makeup, so that when the appropriate conditions reappear they automatically manifest again as females. And this applies with equal significance in the case of males, who due to their latent masculinity in a previous world-aeon reappear as males when the occasion for it demands. Life, in fact, is little more than an endless repeat. It is beyond the capability of man, however, to trace the ultimate origin of the sexes, for when a probe in that direction is made all that is revealed is a previous world-aeon, in which the sexes are found to exist.

What is of significance to our knowledge is the revelation that in the beginning, of the present world-aeon at least, sexlessness was the order of the day, until conditions deteriorated to a point that made the re-manifestation of sex an inevitability. The fact remains that once the sexual situation manifests itself in the world it is impossible to reverse the process and return to the good old days of sexlessness – in which beings were only recognized as beings and, no discrimination therefore existing, no sex problems were posed.

Whether the Buddhist explanation of the origin of the sexes proves acceptable to the modern intellect or not, however, proves of little consequence. If man prefers to believe that he is descended from the ape, then that is his affair. If modern science claims that man is but the recent product of just so many million years evolution, they are always free to present their claims. One thing is certain though, whatever progress technology has made need not necessarily signify that man has become better *psychologically*. On the contrary, from what may be observed today it might signify quite the reverse – namely, a distinct psychological *decline*.

Insofar as Tolstoy's psychology is concerned, it would be better understood if it were recognized that deeply embedded in his unconscious existed vestiges of primordial mores. These primordial mores conditioned him to view the world in a complex and ascetic light, complicated by a devious attraction-repulsion instinct towards sex and all its accessories. It is only natural that a man's mind reacts to life in accordance with the unconscious forces and complex elements that lie dormant in his past, since they contribute so much to the formation of the man that he at present is.

If science and psychology are to make any distinctive contributions to our understanding of the obscure origins of sex and man's psycho-physical roots, therefore, it would be germane to the success of their purpose if they were

to develop exhaustive techniques that enable them to sink deep into the unconscious, so as to excavate whatever primordial evidence that therein lies unseen. Once light is brought to bear on these obscure realms, viewpoints on the human condition that are taken for granted today may, as a consequence of this proof, have to be radically revised, if not reversed.

Tolstoy's views on sex and his tendency to branch out from the beaten track have been attributed by his detractors to mere perversity. It is true that like all complex characters he did possess a marked spirit of contradictoriness, but no one who recognizes how sincere he was in his search for truth can subscribe to such an irresponsible indictment. It would not be far off the mark to say that the views and attitudes he tosses off from time to time were the by products of a battle that continuously raged within him – between the present mode of life he witnessed around him and the ideal to which he felt he must be true. Torn between these conflicting forces, he presented the appearance of a distracted man – bound to conform to the dictates of the environment, yet eager also to heed the inner voice and make sure before he acted that the course he took was the right one.

Acutely sensitive to psychological undercurrents and impulses that popped unexpectedly from the unconscious - but which he could not actually place - Tolstoy felt compelled to often think and behave in ways quite in opposition to the accustomed mode of social mores then in vogue, as well as the normal processes through which the peripheral mind worked. For most people the unconscious lies too deeply buried under the rubbish pile of everyday routine for the peripheral brain to conveniently contact. But if the majority remain insensitive to such undercurrents and impulses that does not mean that they do not exist; for, an active unconscious is the domain of only the very few.

In Tolstoy's many-layered personality the inner and outer selves kept up a persistent tug-of-war, so that he naturally exposed himself to the charge of perversity and inconsistency in his behaviour and beliefs. Actually, however, he never ceased to try and strike a balance between the conscious and unconscious urges that struggled for supremacy in his breast, realizing that it was hardly in his best interests to totally succumb to the dictates of a fluctuating social environment and its mores, when other deeper forces and remote roots existed within that recommended him to strike out on a singular and unusual course in life. That his mind always lay open to fresh insights from outside is witnessed even on his death-bed, when puzzled as what next to do and what course to take, he sought for some external sign to ease his distress. Like Shakespeare, he was much given to take into consideration such factors as omens and premonitions, and those who have indicted his philosophy of life as being the product of his fear of death are here quite off the mark, for they have forgotten his military record and his personal bravery in battle at Sevastopol.

For a mind of Tolstoy's complexity, a deeper cause for the way he lived and thought must be sought. Through the pages of his books may be traced his acute sense of the psychological forces other than the conventionally polite which torture and control men's minds through the devious divisions that split consciousness into two, and fragment the whole personality into bits. An instance of Tolstoy's sense of the several personalities that lurk behind the normal face of things is evidenced in *Anna Karenina*, where Vronsky is puzzled by Anna's reaction to his demands that they legitimize their relationship by her getting a divorce and re-marriage. Anna's response is invariably negative, when it should have been the reverse, and this irks and perplexes him:

*It was as though there was something in this which she could not, or would not face, as though directly she began to speak of this, she, and the real Anna, retreated somehow into herself, and another strange and unaccountable woman came out, whom he did no love, and whom he feared, and who was in opposition to him.*

It is a moot point, however, who the real Anna is – the one on the surface or the one beneath? Both roles are reversible and as one advances the other may retreat. For Vronsky, of course, the one on the surface is Anna's real self, the one who had abandoned herself to his hot caresses. But what does he know of her other self? Nothing at all, as a matter of fact, and because of this he pays the price and loses her in the end. Anna's several personalities are interchangeable in an instant, and for Tolstoy she represents a more profound and complex study than her lover, the easy-going man-about-town, so that he lavishes much more detail on her portrait.

Tolstoy's observation of himself and others made it clear to him that people rarely behave or think consistently, and there must be some hidden cause that makes them feel and act so incoherently at times. Self-analysis revealed to him his own contradictory impulses and the diversity of personalities for which he at various moments stood. At the age of thirty he had already written about his several selves:

*How can all live together inside me? I do not know and could not explain it. But it is certain that dog and cat sleep together in the same hovel.*

It may easily be shrugged off that Tolstoy's psychology was just the natural product of a process in which the man, arrogant and uncertain of himself in youth, with the onset of old age develops a fear of death and therefore turns into a pseudo-humble religious phase. But this analysis does not do justice to the complexity of the overall personality, and by oversimplification obscures the true portrait rather than reveals.

Tolstoy's complex psychology, when diagnosed in depth, reveals a fundamental split in the psychic apparatus itself. Western science may not be aware of the fact, but Buddhist psychology appreciates that each individual is comprised of a split-level structure, a fourfold-complex of personalities of which the deepest layer may be termed the mainstream, or rebirth-consciousness, that does the work of impregnating the cellular tissue at conception. The other more recent layers, or levels, are the by-products of the first psychic offshoots of the present life, the effect of environmental factors in contact with the peripheral mind.

Although this basic psychic setup is common to all, it is rarely recognized as such due to the peripheral facility the surface personality possesses of presenting an overall impression of distinct unity. That this unity is not really what it appears to be, however, reveals itself when a hitch in the setup occurs, commonly recognized in clinical psychology as the schizophrenic phenomenon. But the circumscribed nature of this clinical format and the restricted methods it pursues fails to expose really revealing details as to the actual roots of such personality-splits, and as a consequence remains bogged down in the purely physical sphere.

In Tolstoy this split-level structure of the overall personality was highly pronounced: that is, his mainstream, or unconscious level, possessed an uncanny habit of thrusting itself up and forcing its way into peripheral awareness at the most awkward of times, disturbing him profoundly with insights and intimations that did not always coincide with the facile realities of everyday life. The immediate urgency of these elusive impulses, however, convinced him of the existence of a deeper reality within himself, and led him to accept them – though often in a confused and indistinct form – as being the revelations of his real self and signifying the genuine destiny he should pursue. As a consequence of Tolstoy's constant deliberations upon the life-situation, his inner impulses and outer reality invariably discovered themselves interlocked in a continual clash. The numerous jottings in his diaries and notebooks testify to the fact that these subterranean impulses from the unconscious, half-baked in youth, gained strength and became more insistent with age, until in the final stages of his life they served to occasion a complete reversal in his outlook.

If this split-level structure of the personality were recognized for what it really is, then Tolstoy's tiresome contradictions of character and attitude would not appear as puzzling or irritating as they do. Due to the fact that the majority of people are usually disposed to conform willingly to the drift or pressures of society and its collective mores, this split-level in the personality is never readily discerned and no radical outbreak from the conventional mould, as a consequence, occurs. But Tolstoy's was hardly a mind that could content itself with conformity. All in his psychic evolution and makeup demonstrated



that he was determined to understand himself, to discover his real purpose in life, gain control, and cut out a distinct course for himself. Unconscious though it might have been for the most part, Tolstoy nevertheless felt it his business to identify with the inner urge (the mainstream of personality) as his true self rather than conform to the dictates of the immediate setup (the three recent offshoots of the environmental personality) and the passions and affiliations that they inevitably stirred. After all, the peripheral influences and impositions of the immediate environment were but as icing on the cake, serving merely to conceal the real substance and inner core beneath.

For Tolstoy to have dug so deeply into life and the sexual problems in such a radical fashion, and uphold his views thereon in so tenacious a way, cannot therefore be attributed to his mere whim and perversity. For a less powerful and sincere mind this might be the natural conclusion, but given Tolstoy's enormous intellectual strength, that was able to pick to pieces in a moment all deceit and sham, this verdict is unjust. The fact is that the roots of his mature beliefs may be traced to a source which already existed deep within his unconscious, and had they not been excited into activity by the inordinate pressures of his immediate environment, they might never have even witnessed the light of day.

The problem of integrating and unifying his conscious and unconscious levels into some semblance of concord was not rendered any easier for Tolstoy by the fact that all this split-level plurality of the psychic apparatus was not *explicitly* known to him, and if he had any inklings of their obscure origins he nevertheless possessed no special technique at his command other than his intellectual strength to resolve the matter, which was hardly as effective a tool as could be wished insofar as plumbing the *irrational* was concerned. Tolstoy, as a matter of fact, possessed an overwhelming confidence in the efficacy of *reason* to resolve all his problems and difficulties, leading him to expect miracles therefrom. He had been praised even by his critics for the power of his intellectual grasp, yet it is through this extreme reliance on the intellect to clarify obscure issues and serve as an infallible guide, that many a false conclusion of his was reached, making him look more of a fool than ever for adopting such outrageous attitudes and views. Much of the rational arguments mustered by him to support his theses only served to make him appear so far gone that he was ridiculed for being unable to see through that which even the common man in the street could perceive. It should have been a good lesson to Tolstoy if he had allowed the irrational to stand on its own without the benefit of rational exegesis – for no amount of intellectual argument will render the irrational plain or acceptable to those who do not have in themselves that which it takes.

Obviously a perennial conflict raged between Tolstoy's inner urges and his intellect, with one or the other only temporarily triumphant at different times. Whenever the intellect and the deeper impulses clash a natural desire is begotten to try and reach a compromise. Erroneous conclusions, however, may arise when such attempts to compromise are made, and the claim may be put forward that a certain matter is rationally right when it may be inherently wrong. What makes it so difficult to sift out what is genuine from what is false in so much that Tolstoy has said, is due to his natural weakness for rationalizing his irrational outbursts. This brand of rationalization does nothing so much as juggles up an enormous structure of words that contributes more to obfuscate the issue than to illuminate.

When we return to Tolstoy's specific attitude towards the sex problem as presented in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, it becomes easier to comprehend when it is viewed as the expression of an unconscious urge to retire to the primordial purity of a bygone age in the beginning of the world, without all the frustrations and complications aroused by the sex relationship. After all, it was the legitimate impulse of a man who had passed through the tortured world of sexual passion and knew only too well its pitfalls, having stumbled out there from rather the worse for wear.

Tolstoy, however, may not have given enough consideration to the fact that once a situation so complex and sensitive as sexuality had reared its ubiquitous head in the world, it remains to stay and no well-intentioned attempts to dislodge it are of any avail, so that all that is left for a moral man to do is make the best of an irrevocable affair by accommodating himself to it, even if he does not desire to conform. After all, males and females will continue to be born into the world, and as long as this is so, sexuality and its problems will continue to plague the human race, and there is little that an individual can do to change the course of things except try and extricate himself as best he can from the mainstream, if he is of such a mind.

In any case, it is karmic necessity rather than any specific physical law that determines the sex of each individual birth – obliging a female to bear offspring and reproduce the race, while the male is left at liberty to sow his wildest oats all over the shop. This, of course, is not the be-all and end-all of the whole affair. For if males believe it be their inalienable right to take advantage of females, and pile up one sexual debt after another as they like, they are only fooling themselves, because the day of reckoning will soon arrive when accounts must be settled and the time come for them to be reborn as one of the opposite sex, to reap in kind what they have sown. Sexual roles are, after all, but temporary and interchangeable affairs from one existence to the next; and, females today are only repaying the debts that they have stockpiled as profligate males in many a life gone by. It is of no consequence if women rebel

at this interpretation and refuse to accept their female role as being a penalty for their sexual misdeeds in some previous life because karma is an automatic process without bias as to individual likes or dislikes. Protest as women might about their inferior roles they will have to bear their load until the day arrives when they become males again.

If sex changes from one existence to the next dispose the mind to think and act in accordance with the physical conditions in which it finds itself – that is, males look and behave like males, and females like females – this need not necessarily be so, for it is widely observed how some males behave and think like the weaker sex, whereas some women look and behave more like men rather than those of their own sex. The fact is that these effeminate men have but recently changed their sex from female to male and bear vestiges of this transformation in their psychophysical makeup. Likewise, masculine looking women and their male way of thinking and behaviour bear witness to their recent change from male to female. Of course, the behaviour and thought that accompanies each sex change like a shadow is not necessarily relative to the physical organism in which the rebirth-consciousness discovers itself, if human beings remain bisexual in their composition due to the number of existences they have passed through both as males and females. The fact that one set of sex characteristics predominates in a particular lifetime in no way neutralizes the opposite sex sensitivities, which are only held in abeyance until such time as karmic opportunities recycle it into prominence.

In view of the relativity of these male-female transformations, the inequalities of the sexual situation are too peripheral to merit serious regard for it is hardly the social environment that is responsible for the discriminations involved, but individual karma and all the shortcomings ingrained therein that determines the pattern and development of each evolving life. Apparent inequalities may fan the flames of animosity, but freedom slogans and liberation movements in no way alter the basic setup, which rightly belongs to the spheres of moral discipline and ethical conduct rather than any social or economic reform.

To attack the socio-sexual problem on the surface, therefore, without delving into the root causes of the irritation and concern, serves only to obscure the basic issue, leaving the deeper realities untouched. Schemes for social reform come to grief due to the facile manner in which the whole problem is approached. Issues that involve dimensions which as yet remain unseen cannot be tackled in such a superficial fashion and be expected to produce rewarding results, for the basic point is altogether misled. The fact is that people have come to talk of liberation today as though it were some commodity that can be lifted off the counter of a drugstore for a dime. Even if provided with all the freedom that they can want, human beings rarely know what to do with

freedom once it is theirs – and with all manner of frivolities and irrelevancies simply smash it to bits.

Even after having had the best that life and fortune have to bestow, the eternal vacuum in men's lives condemns them to endure the ultimate test, the ability to live with themselves. When the test proves a dismal failure, it is convenient for human beings to externalize their deep unease by foisting the blame onto some social scapegoat – anything but themselves. All of which only serves to demonstrate that the demands and importunities of the social scene are not really *necessities* as such but rather symptoms of a psychological disease. So long as the human mind revels in its own vacuity, forever seeking something to kick around, the vicious cycle of being kicked around must remain the destiny of man.

People, however, are more disposed to concern themselves with the storm and stress that rages on in the social scene rather than the inner struggle that ferments unseen, but may be glimpsed through the backdoor of the individual mind. When the mind finds itself unable to cope with its own inadequacies, it projects its venom on the first object that appears. It is only in human nature to seek objects on which to wreak its wrath – for to look too deeply into itself reveals a view that is too awful to be happy and proud of. The mind becomes its own victim when internal disgust serves only to breed external hate, enmeshed hopelessly in the internal-external vice.

One common reason, therefore, why marriage is plunged into by couples is due to this desperate vacuum in their lives. But this course of action instead of curing the disease and providing them with much-needed company, so often only proves counter-productive, leaving them more alone and alienated than before. The fact is that if human beings find it difficult to tolerate solitude and the company of themselves, it is hardly likely that they will be able to tolerate another's company for long. The spectacle of an estranged couple facing each other across the breakfast table without possessing anything in common is an even more depressing and pathetic sight than a solitary person who has lost his way on a deserted beach. People vaunt about their desire for freedom, yet plunge into situations where such freedom becomes automatically traumatized. Countless examples reveal the false premise embedded in human relationship – only to discover to their dismay that such relationships prove unequal to the test, upon which they immediately demand their freedom back. Even when love irradiates the relationship, the one who loves is exposed to the vulnerability of being twisted round the circle of the loved one's every whim, without much hope of escape.

The sex instinct plays a part of such magnitude in people's lives, and exercises such a complete hold on their emotions that they are so often unable to think clearly upon the subject. Only after this grip has been relaxed and no

longer holds the mind in its thrall can the whole business of sex be viewed with the necessary detachment that it needs.

Tolstoy's conclusions on the subject, therefore, utilizing his own experience as a guide but leaving out certain ingredients crucial to the comprehension of the overall picture, fails to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the whole affair. Approaching the problem only in an immediately apprehensible context, he fell into a natural pitfall and went for the simple solution to an immensely complex affair. If he was persuaded that chastity is the higher ideal for which man should strive, he was led to this conclusion through a desire to liberate himself from the domination and bondage of sex rather than through any special insight into its complexity.

The fact is that it is not merely the observable circumstances of a marriage that determine its failure or success, but the unconscious element of rebirth-karma ingrained in the psychic mechanism itself – which, more's the pity, continues to exert its influence without the participants knowledge; an imponderable pressure on the eventual outcome. For who would be so silly as to jump into a hopeless situation if he were to know the disastrous consequences in advance? However, whereas some marriages survive without any major rift or hitch – though through Tolstoy's theory they should have collapsed through lack of premarital chastity – other unions crack up at the least excuse, even when there exists the best of intentions on the part of the couples concerned to make it work.

Tolstoy's own marriage is a case in point. It can never be said that he and his wife did not do their level best to make it work, both sides were more than willing to forgive and forget their differences, but circumstances simply wouldn't permit them to do so, something always cropped up to disrupt the peace and aggravate the discord. Despite all their efforts the marriage eventually collapsed. Where undercurrents of karmic discord from some relationship in a previous life exist in the subconscious stream, it will sabotage the marriage and prevent it from proceeding smoothly on its routine course, despite the best of intentions on both sides to achieve concord. Tolstoy, of course, would never have dreamed of attributing the cause of his stormy relationship with his wife to karmic roots in some previous life, and that he was only reaping what he deserved. With his great dependence on reason as a guide he would place the responsibility for his differences with his wife completely on the present irrational conduct of his spouse and her material demands, without appreciating the spiritual change and development of his views.

It is instructive to review the circumstances that inevitably plunged Tolstoy into his marital predicament. If in theory he could have very well chosen a more compatible spouse – or refrained from marriage altogether – in reality he possessed little karmic choice. All the circumstances of the situation

that led up to his marriage conspired, as it were, to reduce his options to a very narrow field and determined the inevitable result. As a matter of fact, Tolstoy had first set his eye on his prospective wife's elder sister Liza, but the karmic connection with the younger girl Sonya was too strong to be resisted, and of course he settled for her without much ado. Or, rather, his struggles to overcome the attraction were smothered by the avalanche of passion that swamped his more sober judgment. As he commits to his diary:

*I am in love as I did not believe it possible to love – I am a madman and shall shoot myself if it goes on like this... I should have been on guard sooner. But now I cannot stop... Everyday I think that it is impossible to suffer more and be happy at the same time, and everyday I become more insane... tomorrow I will go as soon as I am up and say everything, or will shoot myself!*

The extravagance of the language – quite similar to Shakespeare's in the *Sonnets*, of which we will have occasion to refer to later, at length – in no way detracts from the subsequent impact of reality on Tolstoy's life. It depicts the inevitability of the karmic connection and its unconscious mechanisms at work. The poor fellow simply walked into the open trap.

Tolstoy says that he should have been on his guard sooner. But even if he had, it would not have changed the result. The karmic inevitability of the connection may be witnessed in the details concerning the actual proposal of the marriage itself. As a matter of fact, Tolstoy who was immensely impressionable yet cautious at the same time in his love affairs had successfully evaded proposing to several ladies in the past. This time, however, the cards were stacked against him, and the steps through which the proposal was gradually *forced* from him, as it were, made him fluctuate between depression, repentance, and delight. He had already dropped his guard in advance by declaring to himself that he *had* to fall in love with one of the sisters, no matter which.

Now having taken his pick he had to act. Tolstoy possessed a peculiar habit of deciding even crucial matters by an irrational reliance on omens and such trifles. He had carried his letter of proposal to Sonya in his pocket for days, if not weeks, but with his customary caution and reticence refrained from presenting it to the object of his passion. One day, however, while he and Sonya were playing a duet on the piano, and his future sister-in-law Tanya, the prospective model for Natasha in *War and Peace* – was singing, Tolstoy made a secret compact with himself to test his fate. He decided that if Tanya should take the final high note well at the end of the song, he would deliver the letter of proposal: if she ended badly, he would refrain. She ended well! He could no longer stop himself from carrying out what he promised to do.

Even by such trifles of chance as the throw of a dice are great undertakings decided, out of proportion to their momentous results. Tolstoy's fate had already been sealed. Though his future father-in-law tried to prevent the marriage – on the grounds that the eldest daughter should be preferred before the second – he was over-ruled and persuaded to eventually give his consent. Tormented by doubts even on his wedding day as to the wisdom of his *choice*, so called, Tolstoy desired to run off at the last moment through fear and distrust. But everything went off as planned. Decades later the impulse to decamp and take flight reappeared again, and only sputtered out when he recalled his responsibilities. When finally at the age of eighty-two he plucked up enough courage to carry it through, it was not really *choice* again so much as karmic compulsion that dictated his course. For it was a flight that was to be his last, destined as he was to die beside a railway track.

Tolstoy's case history is evidence enough to support the claim how difficult it is for people to resist at times the compulsions that propel them into taking steps against their better judgment, to the consummation of some course that is destined to have unfortunate results. Tolstoy was not blind; he had intimations of what would happen should he succumb to the emotion of the moment. Yet he succumbed, and this fatal step only came to embitter his outlook on marriage in later life, as though he had been tricked into it without the benefit of his consent. He should have known better than to have relied on such unreliable methods as omens – the high note of a girl's voice, in his case – to make up his mind; omens which when wrong usher nothing but a wealth of woe in their train. Subscribers to such random signs have only themselves to blame if they cannot make up their minds of their own accord, but require reassurance from some occult source to render the decision conclusive and confirm their best desires or worst fears.

In writing about sex and marriage, therefore, Tolstoy was inevitably biased by his own experience of the female relationship, which when young was promiscuous and after his marriage clouded over by emotional incompatibility. It is to be feared that his attraction to his wife was primarily physical, and as a consequence did not satisfy his emotional or intellectual needs. But his wife too claimed that she desired a platonic relationship, a perfect spiritual communion, and that the physical side of their union was quite abhorrent to her sensibilities. If this be true, then it only goes to show that even in the desire for platonic relationships, there exist elements that do not tally to meet the demands of both sides. When they talked about marriage being a spiritual partnership, Tolstoy and his wife were obviously speaking about different things. He desired one way of life, his wife another, and no matter how spiritual the one may have been or how practical the other, the fact is that the relationship only led to friction and confrontation. They simply got on each other's nerves.

Tolstoy, of course, could hardly know that when the karmic ingredients in a relationship are basically incompatible it is almost impossible to prevent it from heading towards a collision course. When karmic discords pre-exist in the subconscious, it requires only a minor irritation to spark them into life. External circumstances and their peripheral stimuli are only accessories to the act, as it were, not the basic agent that decides. The karmic factor is an imponderable quantity that is known only to the very few, but whether it is known or not it provides the fuel on which all relationships must feed. If no basic discords in a couple's karma exists, even if they quarrelled from time to time – since there is no such thing as a *perfect* relationship, where all is nothing but heaven and stars – the matter would not come to a head, but simply perish of itself for lack of fuel on which to feed.

From all this talk about the karmic quotient in human affairs, an overwhelming impression may be gained that all matters are fixed in a fatalistic form that does not permit of change. It is obvious, however, that any degree of fixture in the affairs of human beings is always offset by the margin of choice and freewill that the individual can exert. Straight lines are a rarity in nature, and even the basic regularity of the earth's orbit round the sun permits of a tilt that affords it leeway to produce the various seasonal changes, without which life would become a complete bore. Likewise, even if individual lives be grooved into certain karmic formats that do not admit of chance elimination, nevertheless a margin of leeway exists on both sides of the karmic life-track to which individual choice and freewill may swerve.

If only for the sake of more compatible relationships, a deeper understanding of how the karmic quotient programs individual life from the very start would be of immense benefit in human affairs. The emergence of physical life arises in conformity to a psychic pattern that is antecedently inlaid and is determined by the karmic blueprint that exists in each individual even before conception and birth. This basic substratum of karma is further complicated by the fact that its condition is not static but incorporates fresh ingredients all the while through the momentum and impact of continuous environmental contacts in the present life. What appears on the surface to be merely a simple one-level physical activity is in reality a split-level psychic complex whose invisible mechanism activates unconsciously, yet is the driving power behind the organism and makes it tick. The internal metabolism of the karmic cycle and its inter-relation with the external friction of the environment determines how events and circumstances will evolve for the duration of the individual's lifespan.

The karmic quotient inevitably decides the periods wherein certain factors will manifest themselves before the present lifespan exhausts itself. The purpose of rebirth, therefore, is twofold: to exhaust karma, on the one hand, and



to accumulate experience and knowledge, on the other – through the painstaking technique of repeated immersion in the world of spatio-temporal fact. Had Tolstoy taken into consideration all these complex factors, he would have realized that the ascetic ideal – be it chastity or liberation from sex – is not something that can be attained completely in a single lifetime, due to the subtlety of the prerequisites that it demands. The fact that males and females are forced through their karmic roots into repeated rebirth renders the ideal of chastity or liberation from sexual bondage, as an *immediate* goal something whose realization cannot but remain exceedingly remote.

Human beings disagree and marriages fall apart, therefore, not merely because of debauchery or infidelity and other such peripheral causes – whose validity is not here in question – but in a more integral sense because their karmic quotient dictates the tunes. Marriages often last a lifetime without any major mishap because the couple's karmas do not sabotage the relationship irrevocably from the very start. The participant's outlook on life may not always coincide, yet the basic compatibility of their karmas enables the marriage to survive. Tolstoy's marriage – on which his judgment of all such relationships is based – fell apart not through any basic divergence of outlook as such but because of the karmic roots that sabotaged it from the start. In human relationships discord cannot but arise, no matter how compatible the parties concerned. While peripheral differences admit of compromise, it is the major discords with their roots deep in the karmic-rebirth context that – because they do not admit of simple solutions – remain like a thorn in the side to divide the human race. Once these major karmic irritants are dislodged from the unconscious – which is hardly likely at this juncture so long as human beings remain in ignorance – even the most intractable of relationships may be resolved as a matter of course.

Insofar as the marital relationship is concerned, one way of forestalling friction and redressing the discord of karmic incompatibility would be for both parties concerned to vow earnestly that, in the event of their having any further connection in some future life, their disparate karmas be dissolved and enable them to resolve their viewpoints harmoniously into a single frame. Of course, the effectiveness of such vows will hinge upon the strength and sincerity of the parties concerned and whether their karmic possibilities permit. For there can be no guarantees in a world of constant change, where no two minds operate forever upon the same wave length, and when so many of the factors involved are basically at odds.

The failure of Tolstoy's marriage – even though he and his wife continued to live together for more than forty years until his death – demonstrated to him beyond the shadow of a doubt the basic lack of substance at the roots of the marital relationship. Chastity, therefore, became his overall

solution: for if the demand for sex did not exist, then people simply would not fling themselves willy-nilly into a relationship that exposed the parties concerned to such nerve racking consequences. But if he advocated the ideal of chastity, in marriage as well as outside it, he had with characteristic honesty to admit that he himself could not completely practice what he preached. That personal weakness and shortcoming, however, did not detract from the loftiness of the ideal. If a man could not abstain from sex relations altogether, then he should at least try to reduce his demands and keep them within the bounds of a moral marriage. In no way should an ideal be emasculated to suit personal bent, and he would be the last one to do so just because for the present it remained beyond his immediate reach. At the price of appearing to be a living contradiction, therefore, he had to be loyal to something in which he sincerely believed, and which others, if not himself, might be able to achieve.

But his wife could never understand how he could preach chastity and yet come to her bed at night! No doubt, this lack of comprehension on her part and her unsympathetic attitude towards his failings only served to estrange them even more and drive them further apart. He realized that having set his ideal so high, by his conduct he only exposed himself to the accusation of not being consistent with his ideals. To this charge, however, he was disposed to reply that it was due to the very difficulty of its attainment that the necessity for such an ideal existed: for were it attainable right here and now then it would cease to be an ideal but become an established fact of life. If a man stumbled in his attempts to reach his goal, therefore, he should be deserving of compassion rather than contempt.

Tolstoy felt his spiritual isolation keenly – particularly in his own family – and the very least he expected from those closest to him was understanding for any weakness he might display, rather than receive the derisive jeers with which they kicked him further down, with each inconsistency, into the bog. To a correspondent whom he thought would sympathize with his doctrine of non-violence – which will be dealt with at length in another chapter – he penned his defence:

*You cannot imagine how alone I am, how my true self is scorned by everyone around me... I deserve contempt because I do not practise what I preach. But I will say to you in reply, less to justify than to explain my weakness: look at my past life, and look at my present life, and you will see that I am attempting to do what must be done!... Judge me if you like, I judge myself severely enough! But do not judge the path which I have chosen. I know which is the road that leads home, and if I weave like a drunken man as I walk down the road it does not mean that the road itself is wrong... My heart breaks with despair that we have all gone astray, and when I*

*struggle with all my strength, you – at every failure, instead of pitying yourselves and me – flurry me and cry in ecstasy: See he is following us into the bog!*

Stone-throwing is a hectic pastime, from which even saints are not immune. If Tolstoy reaped a deluge of abuse for his pains, he was only receiving his dues for the diatribes he heaped upon an errant world. After all, there is always something in a person's past, the recollection of which brings a blush to its owner's cheeks. Tolstoy's nature was such, however, that he exposed his own faults even without being forced to, and most of his failings would never have met the public eye had he not chosen to publicize them himself.

It was a characteristic of the man that the older he grew the more scrupulous he became in struggling to do without those things which the average man hardly bothers to refuse himself. The fact that he was unable to be consistent in his sexual life was due in part to the ferment not only in his loins but also in his brain, so that the cerebral tension created by his strenuous mental activity demanded a physical outlet for their pains. If the degree of intensity with which his intellectual labours consumed his attention aborted his sexual demands for the duration that he was so engaged, once he lifted the lid, as it were, on the sexual centres left in neglect for so long they immediately rebelled at the repression and, demanding their fair share of the cake, simply punished him heartily for the neglect. But the outlet that sex supplies in such intellectual types is self-defeating in its pattern for to permit such an outlet for the repressed energies only establishes the conditions and sets the format whereby the mind becomes trapped in a vicious cycle of its own. Thus, bouts of intellectual activity are followed by bouts of sensuality, which while they provide relief are also accompanied by reactions of remorse. The redeeming feature in Tolstoy's case was that he had intellectual work to show for any sexual lapse, something that his detractors – no saints themselves – simply had not.

Much has been made of Tolstoy's sexual lapses, which actually is rather misleading, because they were nothing abnormal by current standards. The fact that he made no secret of his sexual activities – a sphere in which it is customary to be more discreet – inevitably exposed him to an undeserved notoriety. He wrote such a great deal about the sexual connection that it created the impression he was abnormally lecherous, especially when it was backed by his extravagant tendency to exaggerate. Although no saint, in this permissive age Tolstoy's early excesses would only make a contemporary man smile. In a society that never possessed the reputation for producing saints, such sexual exploits were regarded as so normal that if Tolstoy had not talked about his sex proclivities in his open way, no one would even have noticed, let alone jeered.

If the errors of Tolstoy's youth were a blot on his reputation, this was something that he was the first to admit and never attempted to disguise. After his marriage, however, he could be considered a conscientious husband by any standards, who never strayed into extramarital adventures or affairs. Nevertheless, a man's sex life invariably lends itself to exaggeration, not least by the man himself – for, after all, in society it is fashionable to be highly sexed, for which males and females get high marks! Tolstoy's masochistic tendencies impelled him to exhibit his vices for public castigation, so that when he struggled to overcome his sexual bent and extol chastity, his detractors were only too ready to pounce on him with the charge of being inconsistent and insincere – without being generous enough to concede that a man may change his ways for the better, and that no one's life is beyond reproach. All that Tolstoy expected of his critics was that they recognize the great advances he had made in this respect – once the abstinence of his later life was compared with the licence of his early years.

The sexual sphere was not the only area in which Tolstoy became the prisoner of his own message, since he advocated many other ideas in radical opposition to the socially accepted codes. But sex remained the realm for which he had to bear the most virulent attacks. And yet, his final views on the subject were merely the natural consequence not of any sudden distortions in his makeup, but the result of his lifelong belief that ideals are necessary as a guide to life. He has been accused of painting sex only in black and white, forgetting that there exist intermediate shades – of preaching an unattainable ideal, and not carrying his analysis any further than the advocacy of an ethic of chastity, when other more subtle distinctions exist.

If there is some truth in this, his critics miss the point by forgetting that although compromises in sexual attitudes – like other compulsory compromises – may be obligatory for the continued stability of society; nevertheless such compromises hardly endow the sex relationship with any extraordinary subtlety by trying to make a virtue out of necessity. Guidelines to virtue are already scarce enough as it is, and Tolstoy was not one to butter over people's weaknesses and vices, or his own, simply to ingratiate himself into their good graces for his own well-being and prestige.

Even if chastity as an ideal provides little general appeal – and few are disposed to recognize that it contains any merit at all – nevertheless the central issue remains: is man to possess no higher aspirations than a desire for legitimate sex relationships? Is that the ultimate aim for which life on earth is destined? To the charge that chastity is an unattainable ideal because the human race will become extinct if the procreative act is curbed, it may be countered that science boasts of having developed techniques such as artificial insemination and test-tube babies to propagate the race. The race will continue

no fear of that. Arguments to the contrary no longer hold much water. What man is by no means disposed to do without are his sensual pleasures, which must be allowed to continue at all costs. The fact that abortion and contraceptive techniques are so much in vogue demonstrates only too clearly that the aim of the sexes is not concerned with the propagation of the race at all, but to gain as much sexual pleasure for themselves as he can without any strings attached.

If liberal sex attitudes have enabled abortion and the like to be legalized and its widespread practice appeared to have laid all problems to rest so that couples may have their fun without reaping the consequences of their conduct, the fact is that although the responsibility for bringing children into the world is escaped, the karmic record remains. That is, every action registers its imprint in the unconscious, and there incubates until such time as opportunity provides the circumstances for it to re-manifest itself. Ignorance of the manner in which the karmic-rebirth process activates, and the delayed consequences that lie in abeyance, lull people's mind's into a false sense of security of having adroitly evaded the penalties of introducing unwanted children into the world – only to discover at some later date that such acts boomerang upon their defenceless heads when they are least aware. It is customary for people to often wonder why they have to suffer for wrongs in which they believe they have had no part. Karma once incurred in no way becomes neutralized or rendered extinct, but is projected into futurity either as a liability or an asset, depending on the merits or demerits of the act concerned. The penalty for those who practice abortion, and even contraception to a lesser degree, is that when their time arrives to be reborn in the womb again, the prospective parents will simply abort the foetus without much ado. Or should this obstacle be overcome, if a couple in some future life were to desire children, all attempts to conceive one will prove of no avail due to the adverse karma that has accrued. Tit for tat.

What then is to be done in a world that due to its population explosion hovers on the brink? Must the problem be left to multiply of itself until no room remains for human beings to even breathe? Tolstoy's reply would be that the safest method of limiting population growth would be to practise chastity for what it is worth. To do with less sex appears to be a highly reasonable prescription whose merits deserve to be recognized. That chastity is not so unattainable for a man of the world who has had his fill of sex – like St Augustine – to conclude that the celibate is not missing very much after all, and even take it into his head to become a celibate himself!

Tolstoy's own predicament in late life demonstrates that when it comes to an option between sex and freedom, the latter appears as the wiser choice. The tensions that arise from the desire to form a sexual relationship – whether in marriage or outside it – and the demands of individual freedom, inevitably end

in a stale mate, thus revealing that, except in rare cases, it is possible to have one cake at a time but not both at the same meal.

The fact is that, in the final analysis, man discovers that his emotional freedom is the most valuable of his possessions, and is prepared to sacrifice all else if only it leaves this freedom intact. But freedom has become such a common word on every tongue that it is rarely valued for what it really is until it is altogether lost. In the days when he was writing *War and Peace* Tolstoy realized how fundamental man's desire for freedom is in relation to his capacity to aspire:

*The reason why life would be intolerable to him is that all the aspirations of man, all his incitements to live, are so many aspirations towards an increase of freedom.*

Here lies the key to Tolstoy's own life and his failure in marriage. But in the bustle of his emotions he forgot this fundamental fact, and by not taking his own advice had to pay a heavy price.

It was Tolstoy's lot in life however, to discover everything the hard way, stamping the lessons all the more indelibly on his mind as a result. The value of a thing is reduced in proportion to the ease with which it is received, a fact that incites some minds to prefer getting their kicks the hard way rather than through the avenue of ease. Tolstoy's detractors rarely give him credit for his open-door approach to life. He was never content to sit in his armchair and stuff himself with only homemade brew, but took pains to observe and distinguish all that he could from outside himself, in the hope that something of real value might be extracted therefrom. For him, even suffering was to be courted – and he hoped that others would do the same – in that it might disgorge whatever therapeutic qualities it contained. The body's illness served to refine the spirit, and it would be better that one perish in a state of refinement than live in perfect health – but without any sense of refinement at all. For him, illness was like fire: it destroyed, but it also *warmed*. Thus, when he saw how his wife's illness changed her spirit for the better and she might not recover he felt it was best that she die in this state of refinement than be restored to health and become her old and petty bickering self once more. And to his dismay, she survived, only to confirm exactly what he had feared.

In his presentation of the sex problem and the prescription for its cure Tolstoy has been accused of being terribly biased and severe. But he was not an unreasonable man, and late in life he recognized that human beings can absorb such formulas as chastity only in small doses. As a consequence he toned his prescriptions down:

*Although only in rare cases are men able to be altogether chaste, still*

*every one should understand and remember that he can always be more chaste than he formerly was, or can return to the chastity he has lost; and that the nearer he approaches to perfect chastity according to his powers, the more true welfare will he attain, the more earthly welfare will be added to him, and the more will he contribute to the welfare of mankind.*

This sensible conclusion came to Tolstoy only after much soul-searching and travail. The trouble as he saw it was that in society inordinate sexual licence was advanced as the law of life, and in his fight to kill such perverse notions his natural intensity carried him to extremes. What he believed was that society should be more honest and admit weaknesses for what they were, and to let it pass at that, without trying to distort the facts and twist man's animal propensities into a system of morality or a divine dictate. In this context, Plato's injunction becomes extremely apt:

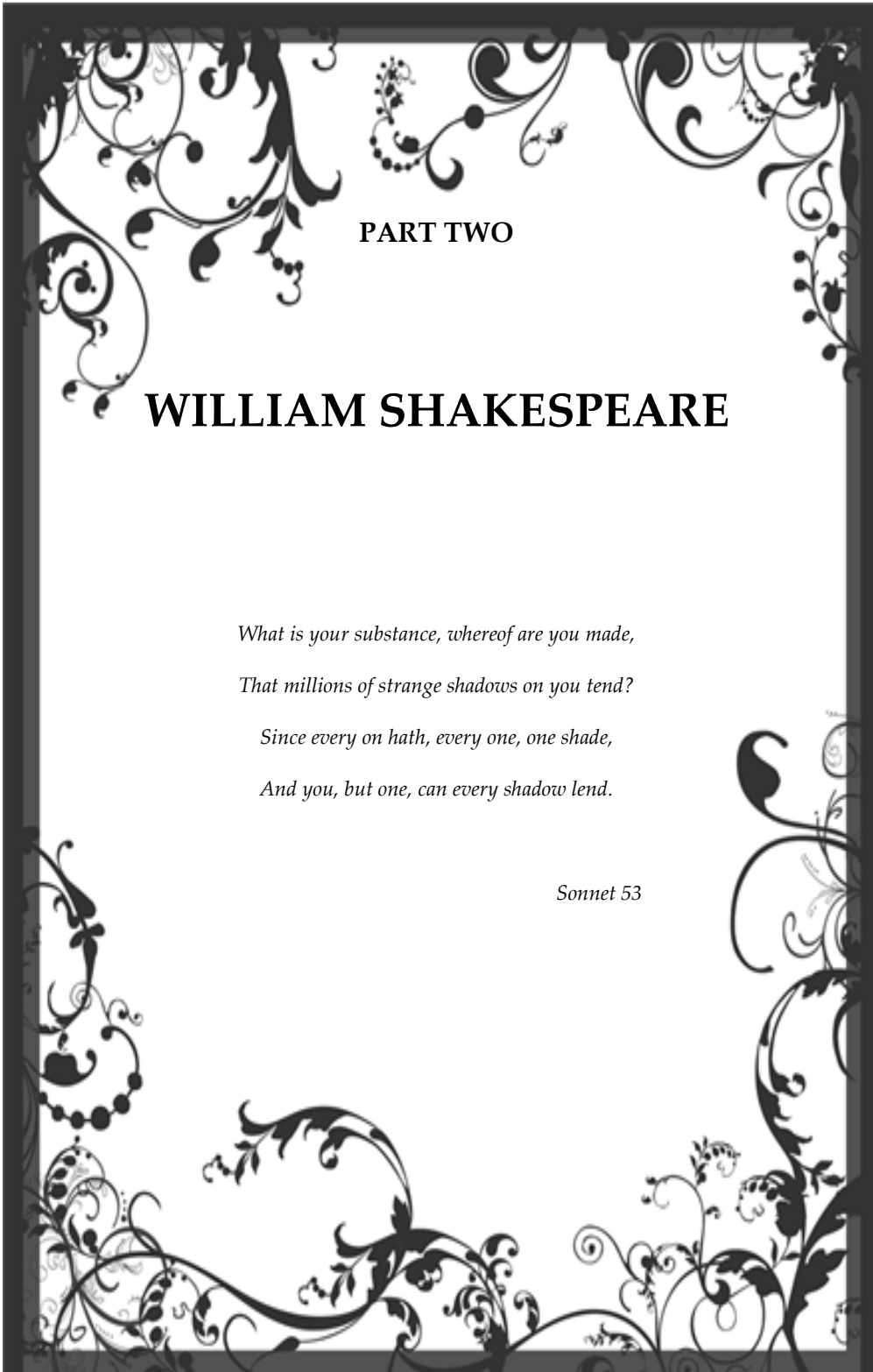
*That a system of morality based on relative emotional values is an illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception, which has nothing sound in it and nothing true, and that the true moral ideal entails a purgation of such emotions.*

In his struggle to attain ideals it is not necessary for a man to behold the fruits of his labours in one brief life, and he should not be discouraged from doing in the meantime what he can. Only in trifles is it granted that a man enjoy here in this world his due rewards. As Tolstoy consoles himself, this is only how it should be:

*It is not cruel but blessed and wise... Sow, sow! That which is God's will come up, and not you – as man – will reap, but that in you which has sown!*

Thus did Tolstoy confide to his diary, consoling no one but himself.

Battered by his lusts, his uncertainties, his conscience, and his hopes to rise above circumstances and do good – Tolstoy's complex situation continues to possess relevance and interest for our times, for it remains valid and contains the stuff of life. If others have experienced such torments just as keen and continue so to do, what renders Tolstoy's situation unique is that he possessed the ability to express it in such unforgettable terms, so that in this context at least very little is left to be said.

A decorative border of black floral and vine motifs surrounds the text. The motifs include swirling acanthus leaves, grapevines with clusters of grapes, and various scrollwork designs. The border is thicker at the corners and tapers towards the center.

PART TWO

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

*What is your substance, whereof are you made,  
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?  
Since every on hath, every one, one shade,  
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.*

*Sonnet 53*







## Chapter 7 – The Psychic Connection



It may well be questioned what accidental mixture of evolutionary forces combined to produce the myriad facets of Tolstoy's complex personality. To seek them in the everyday occurrences of his life and geographical background would provide merely a circumstantial and fragmentary portrait without revealing anything extraordinary in depth. For a more comprehensive and penetrating insight into his psychology, therefore, it would be germane to the issue to proceed beyond his immediate environment and seek for clues to his real origins in other geographical and psychic areas, long before he took rebirth in the 19th century as a Russian count.

In the Western world such a statement would, no doubt, appear to be somewhat of a presumptuous curiosity and might even serve to raise not a few sophisticated eyebrows. From the Oriental standpoint, however, where a man's origins are never viewed as being confined to but a single life, it would be the logical question to ask: for in the philosophies of the East it is widely recognized that nothing that appears in the world does so at random, but can be traced back in space-time to causes that reveal their real roots. Nature has conditioned the human mind to cognize the trunk, branches, and leaves of a tree, without endowing it with any express curiosity to probe into the inner life that produced their growth, taking it for granted that roots exist. This casual attitude towards life inevitably decrees that human beings rarely discover anything of real relevance about their inmost selves.

Had he possessed the available material Tolstoy, perennial seeker that he was, would have been extremely intrigued to discover whatever he could of his psychic roots in space and background in time. Much given to peer over his ancestral tree and trace his lineage to the Russian nobility as far back as Rurik he, however, often became quite sceptical of his aristocratic heritage at times, and would discard one layer of personality after another as though they were nothing more than wraps. Not unaware of the many-layered personalities under whose several skins he lived, his natural facility for changing from one wrapping to the next without advance notice made his character appear highly complex, completely at odds with his environment and social background at times.

It is of special relevance to our theme here to trace Tolstoy's psychic roots in a rebirth-context and from whence his life-continuum proceeds. Obviously, his literary accomplishments would disclose the area where his psychic origin should be sought in the ancestral past: for although a man so various in his interests could have derived his abilities from other original patterns and made his mark in other fields besides literature, it is in the written word that Tolstoy has left his enduring impress, to express himself in ink being to him as the breath of life. It is quite possible for men or versatility to spring from diverse psychic streams and obscure backgrounds, but amidst the welter or roots from which a mind may take its rise a certain main line of evolution can be traced by which the overall character is revealed.

The psychic roots from which Tolstoy derived his literary abilities and emotional proclivities, therefore, are not so mysterious as they might at first sight seem: for he himself provides the key, confessing to possess a marked affinity with Rousseau and the Swiss country where the 18<sup>th</sup> century writer and reformer spent much of his early years. In fact, after having read all of Rousseau's twenty volumes - including his *Dictionary of Music* - Tolstoy had this to declare:

*I was more than enthusiastic about him, I worshipped him. At the age of fifteen I wore a medallion portrait of him next to my body instead of the orthodox cross. Many of his pages are so akin to me that it seems to me that I must have written them myself.*

Indeed, the similarities in their psychological makeups are quite plain. Their likes and dislikes, the manner in which they expressed themselves, and even in the inconsistencies of their behaviour, both writers were very much of a kind. This was not the result of any deliberate imitation of his idol on Tolstoy's part but was purely an unconscious effect.

An example of their mutual predilections and the way both authors expressed themselves should suffice to demonstrate the affinity, emotional and psychological, that they shared. As Rousseau declares in his Confessions:

*The view of the Lake of Geneva and its lovely shores had always a particular attraction in my eyes, which, I cannot explain and which does not depend only on the beauty of the sight, but on something more compelling which moves and stimulates me... When a burning desire for that mild and happy existence which eludes me and for which I was born, comes to fire my imagination, it is always associated with the Canton of Vaud, with its lake shores and its lovely countryside... I have always been passionately fond of water. The sight of it throws me into a delicious dream, although often about no definite subject. On getting up I never failed, if it was fine,*

*to run out to the terrace and breathe in the fresh and healthy morning air, and to let my eyes skim along the horizon of that beautiful lake whose shores and whose skirt of mountains delighted my gaze. I can think of no more fitting homage to the Divinity than the silent wonder aroused by the contemplation of His works, which is not to be expressed by any external acts. I can understand how it is that city-dwellers who see only walls and streets, and crimes, have so little religion. But I cannot understand how those who live in the country, and the solitary especially, can be lacking in faith. In my room I pray less often and with less fervour: but at the sight of a beautiful landscape I feel moved, though I cannot say by what.*

Writing about the same lake, and others, almost a century later, Tolstoy had this to say of Rousseau country:

*I will not try to describe the beauty of this country especially at present when all is in leaf and flower. I will only say that it is literally impossible to detach oneself from this lake and from these banks, and that I spend most of my time gazing and admiring while I walk, or simply sit at the window of my room... It is wonderful, but I was at Clarens for two months, and every time - when in the morning and especially after dinner towards evening - I opened the shutters on which the shadows were already falling, and glanced at the lake and the distant blue of the mountains reflected in it, the beauty blinded me and acted on me with the force of a surprise... To be sure, I love and respect religion and I think that men cannot be either good or happy without it... But I have no religion myself and I do not believe in it. For me, religion comes from life, not life from religion. You scoff at my Nature and nightingales. But in my religion, Nature is the intermediary... What sort of God is it that can be seen clearly enough to be prayed to, entered into relationships with? A God who can be prayed to and served is a proof of our spiritual weakness.*

The apparent clash between Rousseau's claim to prayer and worship of the Divinity and Tolstoy's declaration that he cannot pray or believe in a personal God would seem to rule out any connection between their minds and outlooks, when in fact there is no clash at all. In essence, their beliefs and terminology are the same insofar as religion is concerned: for both of them the spiritual union with Nature is religion enough, and all the devotion they need.

Turgenev was perspicacious enough to note the striking resemblance between Rousseau and Tolstoy, and the natural religion that both so devoutly espoused:

*He reminds one of Rousseau, only more honest -- sternly moral and at the same time somehow unattractive.*

The fact that Tolstoy adopted so much of Rousseau's ideas and theories wholesale reveals that the psychic pattern was already in existence in his own mind and fit the earlier model from the start. In his tale *Boyhood* -- a work that has much in common with Rousseau's account of his wayward emotions in youth, as related in his *Confessions* - Tolstoy declares:

*It seems to me that the human mind in each separate individual follows in its development the same road along which it has developed during many generations, and that the thoughts which serve as basis for various philosophic theories are indivisible parts of that mind, but that each man more or less clearly realized them before he knew of the existence of the philosophic theories.*

In other words, the psychic roots that predetermine a mind's pattern of development pre-existed long before the individual made its present advent into the world.

Both Rousseau and Tolstoy sought to trace their psychic origins through a return to the memories of early childhood. However, given the lack of any psychic techniques, they were unable to delve even further back into their prenatal history. But even the manner in which they expressed themselves regarding their earliest periods bear a strong resemblance in their recall. As Tolstoy declared in *Childhood*:

*Happy, happy, irrecoverable days of childhood! How can one fail to love and cherish its memories? Those memories refresh and elevate my soul and are the source of my greatest delight... Can it be that life has left such heavy traces in my heart that those tears and that ecstasy have gone from me forever? Can it be that only the memory of them is left?*

This enthusiasm for childhood, when compared with Rousseau's expatiation on a similar theme, echoes the same happiness and regret:

*How I love from time to time, to come upon the pleasant moments of my youth! They were so sweet! They have been so brief, so rare, and I have enjoyed them at such slight cost! Ah, their mere memory still gives my heart a pure delight, which I need in order to restore my courage and to sustain the tedium of my remaining years!*

In both there always lingers this sense of nostalgia and loss for a period, real or imaginary, which has vanished from view and which they can only

vaguely attempt to attach a name. It was as though in fumbling to recover some ideal past, all they were left with in the end was a sense of something having eluded their futile grasp.

When Tolstoy in his twenties, approaching the Caucasus mountains sings his paean to youth and Nature, with his constant refrain '*and the mountains*', he is only echoing Rousseau who, also in his twenties, having come across Les Charmettes, a new abode among the Swiss hills, exclaims:

*I arose with the sun, and I was happy. I went for walks, and I was happy. I saw Mama, and I was happy. I left her, and I was happy. I strolled through the woods and over the hills, I wandered in the valleys, I read, I lazed, I worked in the garden, I picked fruit, I helped in the house, and happiness followed me everywhere. It lay in no definable object, it was entirely in me. It would not leave me for a single moment.*

It is not difficult to establish the link between the two authors, due to the relatively narrow gap of fifty years that separates Rousseau's death from Tolstoy's birth. The psychic kinship, however, will have to be identified in more of an intuitive rather than a rationally explicit style, since in such oases it is obvious that no absolute proof can be provided to substantiate the claim.

By a devious process of linkage, too, it will be necessary to proceed further back than Rousseau to get a matter grip on Tolstoy's psychological roots. It is also important to make clear what an imponderable part geography plays in determining the area or direction towards which a mind unconsciously gravitates in spite of itself. Thus, although Rousseau had scant affection for England, nevertheless he eventually found himself - after one plan or another to flee elsewhere - seeking sanctuary in this alien land from his real or imaginary enemies, and where the first six books of his Confessions were penned. Tolstoy, who loved the English even less, also experienced a similar compulsive attraction that drew him to these island shores: not only did he make a trip there in early manhood, but when, already a famous man, the Russian authorities besiege his house in the hope of discovering incriminating evidence that he was a pernicious influence on the public, the first country that Tolstoy thought of emigrating to so as to rid of his persecutors was not any European nation but England, where he hope to settle for the rest of his days. It is of some relevance, therefore, to establish the connection that explains his love-hate relationship with England and the English.

It has long since become an established fact that it is not affinity alone that reveals a linkage between people in similar walks of life, but that, by a reverse mechanism, antipathy discloses the connection just as well, and with even more justification and significance at times. It is our purpose here,

therefore, no matter how farfetched the thesis may at first sight seem, to present Tolstoy's well known antipathy to Shakespeare as demonstrating a highly subtle psychic linkage between them both. Although it may appear an incredible claim to make, the fact is that with the exception of Rousseau, Tolstoy is more akin to Shakespeare than to any other writer of similar status in the Western world insofar as literary versatility is concerned. Perhaps the main reason why a psychic connection has not been established between the English commoner and the Russian count before is because Shakespeare's real personality still remains in doubt due to the meagre information on this point, whereas no other writer has perhaps left such a comprehensive record of his character as Tolstoy, in which all his weaknesses and strengths are rendered plain.

Despite the lack of concrete evidence, however, Shakespeare's character is really no mystery, for it emerges quite clearly in his *Sonnets* and many of his plays. Although on the surface, no two characters appear more unlike than the commoner Englishman and the aristocratic Russian, a closer scrutiny serves to reveal that beneath the surface gloss a remarkable resemblance exists, and even becomes quite obvious once their outputs are examined in depth and read in between the lines.

It has been the fate of Shakespeare's and Tolstoy's characters to be twisted out of all recognition by well-meaning professionals as well as rank amateurs. Shakespeare is invariably presented as an ebullient and brilliant sensualist, whereas Tolstoy appears as a master novelist but an ascetic sportsman. This obviously does little justice to them both, for their personalities were extremely volatile and too complex to be reduced to a single simple formula. The fact is that in the rebirth-context, a particular life-continuum when it comes into contact with a certain environment produces a peculiar set of characteristics, but when transferred to another completely different locale it gives off quite a disparate variety of tendencies. In that certain environmental contacts elicit one set of characteristics and not others, and make them predominate for that lifetime - while relegating other tendencies to the background - the assumption may arise that no possible psychic connection can exist between one pattern of personality and another set.

On closer scrutiny, therefore, the antipathy which Tolstoy professed towards his illustrious predecessor does not appear quite genuine, but represents rather a symptom of resentful conceit, traceable to the fact that Tolstoy unconsciously recognized a little too much of himself in the playwright - more than he was willing to admit. The consequence of which was that he unconsciously sought to disguise the resemblance under a loud display of literary animosity. It is true, of course, that Shakespeare's apparent levity as manifested in his plays and his seemingly amoral attitude to life did indeed

repel Tolstoy in late life, after his ascetic strain had risen markedly to the fore and completely changed his views of life. The fact remains, however, that he never really bothered to examine or pursue his predecessor's true affections and character in depth, so preoccupied was he with his own. He was content to disregard, therefore, any favourable revelation about the playwright's personality which a summary probe into the matter would have produced.

Another factor that contributes to apparently defuse any connection between the two great masters of the written word is their separation by the gulf of space and time. Besides the geographical dislocation, a gap of two centuries spans the death of Shakespeare and Tolstoy's mirth, a gap that is filled only by the figure of Rousseau with all the permutations and peculiarities that the Swiss personality contributed to the psychic brew. In view of the diverse permutations that occurred as the life-continuum made its psychic transit from Shakespeare via Rousseau to himself, Tolstoy obviously found it difficult to identify with the Elizabethan Englishman in any characteristic way. Nevertheless, all it takes is a little patience and an opening of Rousseau's Confessions to discover the sensibilities of the English playwright stamped once again upon almost every other page. In that Shakespeare while living a public life amongst the great of the land was a man who, like Rousseau lived in an isolated world completely his own, the public image he presented and the private realm of his inner life were worlds that remained totally apart. The same predicament is presented in Tolstoy, who though he may have lived in the public eye and associated with the great ones of society, nevertheless remained in spirit far divorced therefrom. As a consequence, much confusion may arise as to what a famous man's personality really is, when the public image presents him as, one face and the private figure reveals a completely different portrait.

The presence of Rousseau, occupying a position between Shakespeare and Tolstoy, establishes a certain perspective and pattern that provides the link that tends to mellow any discrepancies of disposition and situation which the Englishman and the Russian might appear to exhibit. Separated by only a hundred years, there is little difference to be observed in the situations that Shakespeare and Rousseau shared insofar as their inferior social positions and private attitudes towards this are concerned. Though both moved in the aristocratic milieu of the day for a long period and received the patronage of the great, without which they probably would never have got where they did, the English playwright and the Swiss reformer nevertheless could not help but entertain mixed emotions and a certain ambivalence of attitude towards their social superiors and the life at court. This attitude may be summed up in passing by Shakespeare's making Corin the shepherd in *As You Like It* ridicule the absurdities of court life:

*Those that are good manners at the court are as ridiculous in the*



*country as the Behaviour of the country is most mockable at court.  
You told me you salute not at the court, but you kiss your hands:  
that courtesy would be uncleanly, if courtiers were shepherds!*

Shakespeare's and Rousseau's attitude towards the social scene were characterized by a marked ambivalence for the most part of their lives: for if both recognized that a few of the nobility were naturally endowed with some measure of moral substance and worth, the majority were mere nonentities insofar as their characters were concerned.

No doubt, Rousseau was more explicit in his methods and approach to social reform, something that Shakespeare never presumed to formulate or so much as openly express. It is perhaps in view of this that Shakespeare, no matter how outspoken he may have been under cover of his art, nevertheless escaped persecution during his lifetime: whereas Rousseau due to his brashness soon fell victim to much hounding, real or imagined, and like a perpetual outcast was forced to flee into hiding for a long period, wandering from place to place in search of sanctuary like a common fugitive. If Shakespeare was careful to mask his contempt for high society under the cover of his art, Rousseau was hardly as cautious, and in this Tolstoy exactly resembled him. As Rousseau in his *Confessions* declares:

*The contempt which my deep reflections had inspired in me for the customs, the principles, and the prejudices of my age made me insensible to the mockery of those who followed them, and I crushed their little witticisms with my observations as I might crush an insect between my fingers.*

Being of a naturally shy and retiring disposition (just as Shakespeare really was) Rousseau's fire immediately dissolved once the object of contempt was removed from sight:

*As soon as I left Paris the sight of that great city's vices ceased to feed the indignation it aroused in me. When men were out of my sight I ceased to despise them, when the wicked were no more to be seen I ceased to hate them. My heart, which was not made for hatred, only caused me to deplore their wretchedness, and did not single out the part their wickedness played in it.*

A sentiment that Shakespeare completely shared: for if he did fulminate at society's evils in his plays from time to time, he never harboured hate in his heart for long. And this applies with equal relevance to Tolstoy.

It is not difficult to perceive where Tolstoy derived his great social conscience: for it already had its roots in Rousseau. No doubt, the spectacle of

poverty in the slums of Moscow and also among the peasantry would have stunned any man of conscience. But the privileged class to which Tolstoy belonged was quite disposed to take all this in its stride as being in the nature of things and not something that a cultured man would waste his time about. The fact that Tolstoy was stung not only by the misery of the poor but the indifference of the privileged class to their plight, demonstrates that antagonism towards all oppression and taxation which may be traced to Rousseau, who relates how in his youth he came across a peasant in whose cottage he was apprehensively offered a humble meal. The impression made upon Rousseau by the poor man's fears of 'excisemen' would never grow dim in his mind, as he declares:

*It was the germ of that inextinguishable hatred which afterwards grew in my heart against the oppression to which the unhappy people are subject, and against their oppressors. That man, although in easy circumstances, dared not eat the bread he had earned by the sweat of his brow, and could only evade ruin by displaying the same misery which prevailed all around him.*

With Rousseau's passion for reform in mind, it is little cause for wonder that Tolstoy took Shakespeare to task for not possessing any social conscience or proclaiming same message of reform.

The fact which Tolstoy did not seem to take into consideration was that whereas Rousseau's time and place evidently demanded a reformer's voice, the social conditions of Shakespeare's day were rather premature in this respect to demand any such radical reforms. In any case, Shakespeare's methods to realize such ambitious goals involved no long or erudite social tracts, but could be expressed just as succinctly through the medium of the art he employed as in Cymbeline:

*Kneel not to me:  
The power that I have on you is to spare you:  
The malice towards you to forgive you: live  
And deal with others better.*

In Shakespeare's philosophy all schemes for reform would be rendered superfluous if only affection and forgiveness between man and man were to become the order of the day: Live, and deal with others better! And in dealing with others better, no discriminations should be made as to who is deserving and who is not, as Hamlet reproves Polonius for saying that he will use the players 'merely according to their desert':

*God's bodykins, man, much better: use every man  
after his desert, and who would 'scape whipping?*

*Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less  
they deserve the more merit is in your bounty.*

In a few unpretentious lines is expressed a whole social philosophy that strike at the very heart of the world's ills, and, it refutes Tolstoy's attack on Shakespeare that he possessed no social conscience: for the playwright's great humanity and sense of justice is here clearly on display. *Hamlet's* lines are only a restatement of that sentiment expressed earlier in the *Merchant of Venice*, and appear to be a true reflection of Shakespeare's compassionate soul:

*Therefore, Jew,  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That, in the course of justice, none of us  
Would see salvation: we do pray for mercy.*

Shakespeare could not very well believe that justice could arise in society simply if each one were allotted his just desert, since there is none so deserving who is also completely blameless and able to escape punishment if the case against him were to be really pressed. It is presumptuous to expect perfection from others when we ourselves are so imperfect. A just society, in fact, cannot be based merely on a facile assessment of who deserves and who does not but can prosper only in proportion to the elements of compassion and liberality that are injected into men's hearts. Justice in human-affairs will remain pure lip-service and quite ineffective so long as society functions under the pervasive pressure of rigid rules and unbending laws. Standards of justice cannot be measured simply by the efficiency or rigidity with which they are implemented but rest to an imponderable degree on the *humane* element involved: the quality of mercy, which is not strained but falleth like the gentle rain from heaven. After all, it is not under any human or divine law that a man is finally arraigned but by his lack of mercy that he is eventually punished.

If Shakespeare's sense of compassion and justice made him champion the underdog, nevertheless he was unable to conceal his disgust at their obstinacy and ignorance at times. He recognized only too well how fickle and unreliable the mind of the common man was, ever ready to change his tune at the least pretext and therefore difficult to trust. No where is this distrust more clearly expressed than in *Coriolanus*:

*He that trusts to you,  
Where he should find you lions, finds you hares;  
Where foxes, geese: you are no surer, no,  
Than is the coal of fire upon the ice,  
Or, hailstone in the sun...*

*Hang ye! Trust ye?  
With every minute you do change a mind,  
And call him noble that was now your hate,  
Him vile that was your garland.*

There is little doubt that Shakespeare, like Rousseau, laboured under an inferiority complex insofar as his position in the social scale was concerned. Humiliated by their low status they nevertheless considered themselves the equals, if not superiors, of any aristocrat, and this feeling was responsible for their confused ambivalence towards the whole social setup. In Shakespeare this desperate unease breaks out in verse, as he dresses down kings and princes to their real level of dunces and crooks, while in real life his lurking desire for social status and respectability forced him to wangle a miserable coat-of-arms for himself. Possessed of pronounced aristocratic tastes and a penchant for the sophisticated life, the playwright nevertheless nursed a grim contempt for all the emptiness and hypocrisy of court life, perhaps best expressed in Wolsey's famous farewell speech:

*Vain pomp and glory of the world, I hate ye!*

In Rousseau this sense of inferiority and injustice bursts out in his eloquent prose, as he changes from a shy creature into an arrogant dragon snorting fire:

*I was truly transformed. My friends and acquaintances no longer recognized me. I had ceased to be that shy creature, who was shamefaced rather than modest and who had not the courage to show himself or even to speak... Bold, proud, and fearless, I now carried with me wherever I went a self-assurance which owed its firmness to its simplicity and which dwelt in my soul rather than in my outward bearing... No state of being could be found on earth more contrary to my true nature than this one. If ever there was a moment in my life in which I became another man and ceased to be myself, it was at the time I am speaking of. But instead of lasting six days or six weeks it lasted nearly six years, and would have endured to this day but for the particular circumstances that put an end to it and restored me to Nature, out of whose realm I had been trying to soar.*

It is a moot point, however, whether Rousseau really recognized what his true nature was and what false, so interchangeable were his diverse personalities at a moment's notice.

When it comes to Tolstoy, the same ambivalence towards the arbitrary distinctions in the social scale is displayed. Shakespeare's and Rousseau's inferior social status, when it received its consummation in Tolstoy's aristocratic

birth nevertheless proved counter-productive: for once the flavour of the privileged class had been savoured to the full by Tolstoy it only served to make him desire to revert to the status of the common man, and even to dress and behave like an ordinary peasant, a circumstance quite in keeping with the humble positions lived out in previous lives.

But even if Tolstoy - like his predecessors Shakespeare and Rousseau - was democratically inclined insofar as his emotions and political sentiments were concerned, intellectually he could not but remain an aristocrat. The trio recognized only too well how easily the common man could be twisted round the little fingers of wily politicians any way they pleased -- hardly the right material on which a stable society can be based! Shakespeare did not elect the subject of Coriolanus for a play if he did not desire to express something regarding the psychology of not only the hero but the common man. A mocking tone prevails throughout the play, and the citizens are made to ridicule themselves as the many-headed multitude:

*We have been called so of many; not that our  
heads are some brown, some black, some auburn, some bald,  
but that our wits are so diversely coloured: and truly I  
think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they  
would fly east, west, north, south and their consent of  
one direct way should be at once to all points of the compass.*

Thus even if a passion for democratic reform characterizes the attitudes of Rousseau and Tolstoy, their ideas towards this end are more suited to the paper they are written on than conducive to any actual results in practice. But whereas Rousseau believed that social problems may be rectified by secular means, Tolstoy goes much further in this respect when he advocates that the situation can be resolved only through the adoption of a particular religious attitude.

No doubt, this change of viewpoint in one and the same stream-of-personalities from one rebirth situation to the next demonstrates to what extent the mind may develop and prune the evolution of its attitudes. If Tolstoy goes further than Rousseau in his social views and ideas, so Rousseau proceeds beyond Shakespeare in this respect - whose background and conditions proved inhibitive in eliciting the concrete expression of any radical measures to cure society's ills. The whole development of Tolstoy's social and religious views reveals that he had encountered situations in previous existences where his efforts to resolve social inequalities and inadequacies had been unproductive and a failure simply because they proved to be too optimistically mundane. That he was in this present life preoccupied with the religious angle rather than any secular system of reform was because he had become convinced through

trial-and-error that life could be embodied with a definite direction and purpose only when it was infused with a religious attitude, leaving little room for the vagaries of muddled thinking or social accident to interfere. If he went to extremes in pressing his cause it was purely in accordance with an unconscious trend or urge to proceed further than he had done in previous lives, wherein he had not gone deep enough into the problem to produce rewarding results.

Although great socio-political upheavals and changes ensued after Rousseau and Tolstoy's deaths, they can hardly be credited with having been the cause of the revolutions that completely changed the status quo: for no one man ever possesses through word or deed the power to precipitate or influence social events on such an enormous scale. At the most, a man's life and ideas may help to contribute to a fertilization of the cultural climate and direct men's outlooks to changes that by their place and timing were already very much in the air. In any case, Rousseau and Tolstoy would have been shocked at the indiscriminate lengths to which men's drive to realize social equality and democratic goals were pursued: for if the betterment of the underdog's position is something that is worthy of man's effort, such goals never at any time can justify violence and bloodshed.

The wholesale manner in which Tolstoy adopted Rousseau's ideas in education and related matters stresses the affinity their minds shared, as well as the inconsistencies and contradictions of character that they in common possessed. Under the influence of Rousseau, Tolstoy at the age of twenty-four fluctuated in his religious beliefs. The non-immortality of the soul - according to Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar - intrigued him and inspired him to speculate that:

*If for the idea of immortality the idea of recollection of a former existence is required, then we are not immortal. And my mind refuses to comprehend endlessness at one end. Someone has said that the sign of truth is clarity. One may dispute this, yet clarity remains the best token, and by it one must always verify one's opinions.*

If the desire for clarity is to be extolled, nevertheless for Tolstoy to conclude that just because one's memory proves to be faulty there can be no immortality, then this is no symptom of clarity but quite the reverse. If Tolstoy's chief aspiration at the time had been to attain a firm and unalterable belief in something, his restless mind vacillated constantly between belief and doubt. Moments after he has been persuaded of the non-immortality of the soul, his tortured logic returns to try and prove just the opposite:

*One cannot decline to admit the immortality of the soul, but one can decline to admit the annihilation of it. If the body separated from the*

*soul perishes, yet where is the evidence that the soul perishes? Suicide is the most striking expression and evidence of its immortality. I have seen that a body dies: so I assume that mine will do so. But nothing proves to me that the soul dies, and so I say that according to my understanding, it is immortal.*

Just as Rousseau's religious beliefs had got him into hot water with the Church, so Tolstoy's lines of reasoning were hardly calculated to win converts. If in youth he was disposed to take delight in his anarchistic attitude, in old age he was much given to forage for any titbits with which he could console himself.

*People often express regret that man's memory will not survive death. But how fortunate that it does not! What torture it would be if in a future life I remember all the bad things I have done in this life and that now torment my conscience! But if I am to remember the good I must also recall the bad... Yes, the destruction of memories is a great happiness. With memory it would be impossible to live joyfully. But with the destruction of memories we can enter into a life with clean white slates on which we can write afresh, good and bad.*

Tolstoy's intellectual bias on the matter of the after-life blatantly exposes itself: for it is but a mere convenience to huddle under the illusion that with death all memories, whether good or bad, are erased. It is hardly a symptom of clarity to accept what one likes and eagerly reject what one dreads. In no way does the failure to recollect memories erase or clean the mental slate, as Tolstoy presumes:

*How fortunate it is that memory disappears with death and only consciousness remains!*

How consciousness survives without retaining its memories is a mystery he never bothers to explain. He would have all things suit his convenience simply to lay his conscience at rest so that only the good things will be preserved, without paying the price for the bad.

It is, no doubt, in this context that his antipathy for Shakespeare poses much relevance: for he did not wish to have any association by memory with a man whose life and work suggested and condoned an explicitly amoral outlook to life. In old age Tolstoy's ascetic obsession with what is right and what is wrong inevitably stemmed from his guilty conscience and his dream of the past and the misdeeds that were there inlaid. His vain attempts to disown any connection with Shakespeare only serve to reveal the linkage even more.

The fact is that memories are taped in the mind exactly as they occur, just as both good or bad imprints when recorded on a tape inevitably reveal any defects when replayed. If it is possible to erase defective tapes, it is an impossible venture to clean the slate (as Tolstoy so dearly desired) insofar as human memory is concerned. Shakespeare knew better when he made Hamlet reflect:

*There is no shuffling, there the action lies  
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled  
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults  
To give in evidence.*

If consciousness survives death, then memories remain just as intact as they were recorded on the mind's psychic tapes when the body was alive. It is only a tortured logic that begs to retain the one without acknowledging the other.

Shakespeare was just as preoccupied with the afterlife as Tolstoy, with varying conclusions as befitted his immediate conditions and background. An obvious trait that Shakespeare, Rousseau, and Tolstoy shared in common was the peculiar fascination they possessed with the past. The major burden of Shakespeare's output was taken wholesale from historical chronicles and refurbished to suit his own rhetoric, Rousseau's Confessions display how greatly enamoured he was of a vanished scene than of the immediate life, and Tolstoy's War and Peace - not to mention his recollections of the past - reveal how much a bygone age intrigued. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that this trio of writers not only set their major productions in the context of a bygone age, but actually harked back in spirit to the past for fulfilment rather than the present in which they found themselves. No doubt, a bygone state of affairs is apt to prove more alluring in retrospect, and at a remove than it really was in fact.

This predilection for scenes removed in space and time represents not simply an identification with the happier moments of untroubled youth, but demonstrates that their imagination found more room to roam in the past than in immediate reality. The routine drift of the daily grind proves so mechanical and ephemeral that it cannot compete with the ever-living quality which the dream-like realm of the past inexhaustibly provides. As usual, the realm of the ideal is to be found in the past rather than the present, and memory and imagination provide the necessary compensations that enable sensitive minds to retreat from the harsh realities of an uncongenial world. The fact is also that as the trio of writers under consideration possessed no really intimate friends of a kind, they were as a consequence forced to retire into their own private worlds for inspiration, communion, and solace.



The Shakespeare of the Sonnets (his version of a diary), the Rousseau of the *Confessions*, and the Tolstoy of the Diaries, all contribute to set the seal on the psychic linkage they shared, dyed as all these differing works are with the same extravagant outbursts and emotional intensity. The same turbulent stream of consciousness may be observed in the trio: the fertile imagination straining at the leash, the great difficulty in coping with the rush of ideas due to the plethora of options that springs to the surface from the great unconscious reservoir. The same sensuality, the poetic meanderings, the flight of fancy, the great literary eloquence, the passionate rhetoric bursting forth in the different languages they found themselves saddled with, all testify to an identical and solitary genius not to be found elsewhere. This overall similarity was the product not of any special education or environment, but was the natural outcome of an innate strain fashioned and nourished over a long succession of rebirths. Men of the highest literary excellence, in fact rarely possess much of a formal education to boast of. Even Tolstoy failed to make it through the university, and justified his failure thus:

*Men of genius are incapable of studying when they are young, because they unconsciously feel that they must learn everything differently from the mass.*

Had the trio been indoctrinated with a formal education it is hardly likely that the world would have come to benefit from the distinct individuality and originality of their literary outputs.

The emotional impetuosity which the trio shared in common, leading them to make rash decisions in their love-lives, which were far from serene, is quite plain. Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway, a woman eight years his senior when merely a raw youth of eighteen was hardly calculated to assuage his thirst for affection, and only served to make it inevitable that he should make a complete fool of himself over Mary Fitton, the Queen's maid-of-honor, once he found himself in London. Rousseau's humdrum relationship with Therese le Vasseur is only a repeat of Shakespeare's dry and uneventful marriage to Anne, setting the stage for Rousseau's hopeless infatuation with the Countess Sophie de Houdetot in late life, and thus repeating all over again Shakespeare's futile passion for his not-so-Dark Lady. No doubt, Shakespeare's and Rousseau's wives possessed hardly anything in common with their husbands except the beds they sometimes shared (second-best bed in Shakespeare's case), with no comprehension of their art at all.

Although Tolstoy dallied until the age of thirty-four before taking the irrevocable step, that did not prevent him falling a prey to the same fate of incompatibility and disenchantment in wedlock. His long struggles as to the advisability of taking such a step reveal his unconscious dread of repeating the same mistakes he had incurred in previous lives. Pestered by misgivings and

doubts, it is only natural that he should confide to his diary before the die was cast:

*Do not think of marriage. Your calling is of another kind, and for that much has been given you.*

As though, the karmic compulsions of the past can be reversed simply by the present promptings of anxiety and fear! The karmic wheels grind slowly but they grind exceedingly well.

Shakespeare left Stratford for London at the age of twenty-two, the very age that Tolstoy left his Yasnaya estate for the Caucasus to begin a new life as a military cadet. Obviously, Shakespeare was quite dissatisfied with his marriage, or he would not have seized on the first opportunity that appeared to run off to London to live his own life, to return to Stratford for good only when his career was at an end. If Tolstoy after his marriage tried many a time to escape, he didn't go very far before his conscience began to prick and he returned home a penitent man. Even if he did leave home for good in the end, it was only to perish a short distance away.

In their late thirties Shakespeare and Tolstoy both produced their major work. It is of some significance to observe in passing the darker themes that intrigued both at the same age. War and Peace is just another Macbeth and makes its point just as well, for Napoleon had to be shown up for what he really was like another Macbeth, both of whom possessed:

*No spur  
To prick the sides of my intent but only  
Vaulting ambition, which overleaps itself  
And falls on the other.*

*Othello* and the *Kreutzer Sonata* operate on the same wave-length and vibrate with the same fire: sex jealousy generates as destructive a force as any that political ambition can, with or without valid cause. *Cleopatra* and *Anna Karenina* harp on a familiar theme: that is, there is no illusion so devastating as that which passes off under the all-encompassing label of love. These parallel themes must have fascinated both authors otherwise they would not have seized upon them as vehicles of expression to liberate themselves from unconscious forces whirling up to the peripheral mind.

Before he had reached fifty Shakespeare, however, had finished with his work and retired to Stratford. At the same age Tolstoy, having completed *Anna Karenina*, experienced a terrible vacuum in his life and, arriving at his spiritual crisis, all his literary labours came to a sudden stop. When some years later he resumed his activities in this respect, he produced works in quite a

different vein, as though his former self had been pushed into a backseat, as it were, to be replaced by a totally renewed personality.

The spiritual isolation with which Tolstoy felt himself besieged was nothing new, however, for it already derived its roots from Shakespeare and Rousseau, who were nothing if not solitary souls. The fact is clear that for all their contacts with the high and low of the land, the trio were never really able to establish any enduring rapport with anyone all their lives. And it is this void in their emotional recesses that, for all their world-wide acclaim, stamps them as being the most aloof and solitary of men.

Shakespeare's latent isolation surfaced from the year 1600 onwards and finds unmistakable expression in his tragedies of that period:

*The single and peculiar life is bound,  
With all the strength and armour of the mind,  
To keep itself from noyance.*

Here he was not speaking of the King in *Hamlet* but referring rather to himself. There is little doubt that if Shakespeare possessed the reputation for having a free and open disposition, he was nevertheless much concerned about the privacy of his own mind, and did not relish any intrusion into his solitary preserves. The exuberance and boisterousness reflected in the early plays does not serve as a reliable guide to the mind of the matured playwright, and should not mislead us (as it seemed to mislead Tolstoy into assuming that he had no hard realities to face). The banter to be found in the plays conceals so much in Shakespeare that was isolated and aloof which the tragedies eventually exposed the brooding chains of thought and endless soliloquies throwing much light on the real state of affairs fermenting within him, surcease from which was indeed something devoutly to be wished.

That success did not come as easily as it may seem to Shakespeare in the early London years is clear, for he had to start from the lowest rungs: first taking charge of the horses before the playhouse, and then laboriously working his way up onto the stage in minor roles. Even after his plays had earned some measure of recognition he nevertheless never forgot his origins or lowly place: for unlike his fellow playwrights, who had the best of educations, he was just a country bumpkin and remained very much a social outcast - a fact that prompted him to voice his deep resentment in many a verse:

*When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,  
I all alone beweepe my outcast state.  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries  
And look upon myself and curse my fate.*

Allowing for a certain maudlin sense of exaggeration and poetic extravagance - a trait from which Rousseau and Tolstoy were also never free - there is little doubt that this was indeed the natural condition of affairs for one of his obscure social background. It is obvious that Shakespeare viewed his play writing merely as a commercial enterprise to earn his bread, for the early plays possess little quality, except that they often served as a vehicle for throwing off asides, when the opportunity presented itself, of getting something off his chest. The stage, in fact, became his only real outlet on the world. So much so, that a great deal of his verbiage appears quite out of place at times - simply because he would have his say, come what may.

It is a well known fact that even after having won for himself a modest measure of success, far from leading a rollicking existence as one might surmise, Shakespeare kept his own company and would not be debauched: giving as his excuse, when invited to such pastimes, that he was merely indisposed. Obviously he, like Rousseau and Tolstoy, did not find it easy to forge a really intimate relationship with any man or woman in his circle of life. Having spent his boyhood in the solitude of the country, just as Rousseau and Tolstoy were to do, he had little company but his own early dreams of love, happiness, and fame to provide him with solace. No doubt, he must have taken great delight in wandering the countryside in the environs of Stratford, just as Rousseau, and Tolstoy found much solace in their solitary rambles. As Rousseau dilates:

*Never did I think so much, exist so vividly, and experience so much, never have I been so much myself - if I may use that expression - as in the journeys I have taken alone and on foot. There is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts... The sight of the countryside, the succession of pleasant views, the open air, all these serve to free my spirit, to lend a greater boldness to my thinking, to throw me, so to speak, into the vastness of things!*

Obviously Shakespeare's own insights into things derived just as much inspiration and impetus from his solitary rambles in the country than when he found himself ensconced within the four walls of his London room.

When compared with Rousseau and Tolstoy, however, Shakespeare's environment was the most restricted of the lot insofar as broadening his outlook by travel was concerned: for he never so much as moved abroad all his life, commuting merely between London and Stratford. It is true that Rousseau and Tolstoy did travel a great deal at certain periods of their life, but at other times their movements were confined to merely commuting from the city to the home. This restriction of their physical freedom left them more room, it seems, for their minds to roam in imagination where it pleased. Even Rousseau, who led the most vagrant life of the lot when young, often preferred to idle away his day in sequestered solitude, producing his most prolific work in the country - the

outcome of the mind's midnight promenades.

If the trio failed to forge a really intimate relationship with anyone in their lifetimes, however, in a sense it was to the world's gain: for being forced to turn in on themselves by necessity, their energies were able to focus their attention to the production of their greatest art. Although *As You Like It* is far from being Shakespeare's greatest work, it does provide much insight into his character, his likes and dislikes. In this unassuming but delightful play much of his social and emotional situation at the time is brought to light. For one who was already disposed by nature towards the solitary life, the subject he selected for a play was ideal and much to his taste, as he could give free rein to the melancholy that plagued him at the time, and might:

*Under the shade of melancholy boughs  
Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.*

The fact that Rosalind in the play is made to poke fun at Jaques (Shakespeare's alter ego) attests to the playwright's great distaste whenever circumstance makes him a motley to the view:

*Rosalind: They say you are a melancholy fellow.*

*Jaques: I am so. I do love it better than laughing... But it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and indeed the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often rumination wraps me in a most humorous sadness.*

*Rosalind: A traveller! By my faith you have great reason to be sad: I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's; then, to have seen much and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.*

*Jaques: Yes, I have gained my experience.*

*Rosalind: And your experience makes you sad: I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad; and to travel for it too!*

This banter reveals more about himself than Shakespeare would care to admit, for in Rosalind his Dark Lady of the Sonnets, so called, reveals herself. It throws much light on his hopeless passion for Mary Fitton, the Queen's maid-of-honour, and how her shallow wit both attracted him as well as repelled. As Shakespeare propels his audience through the woods and scenes of this most unpretentious of his plays, they also provide a clue to the transports he

experienced at this time, even though Mary finally proved herself unworthy of his devotion and regard. As Orlando (another of Shakespeare's alter egos) moons:

*Hang thee, my verse, in witness of my love...  
O Rosalind! these trees shall be my books,  
And in their barks my thoughts I'll character;  
That every eye which in this forest looks  
Shall see thy virtue witnessed everywhere.  
Run, run, Orlando; carve on every tree  
The fair, the chaste and unexpressive she!*

Even if Shakespeare was not exactly blind to Mary's shallow soul at this juncture - one year before his disenchantment and the writing of *Hamlet* - it appears that he intended to convey through the person of Jaques that he belonged to an altogether different breed of man than that which the maid-of-honour was accustomed to hobnob with. Although he was in love as never before, he was realistic enough not to be fooled by all the fantasies that passed under that name, and the banter between Rosalind and Orlando says as much. For he makes Rosalind declare that there was not any man who has died in a love cause, and all the tragic love-deaths of history are mere lies: men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love. Like Jaques, he had gained his experience the hard way:

*Rosalind: Now tell me how long you would have her after you have possessed her?*

*Orlando: For ever and a day.*

*Rosalind: Say a 'day', without the 'ever'. No, no, Orlando; men are April when they woo, December when they wed: maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives.*

*Orlando: A man that had a wife with such a wit, he might say 'Wit, wither wilt?'*

*Rosalind: Nay, you might keep that check for it till you met your wife's wit going to your neighbour's bed... O, that woman that cannot make her fault her husband's occasion, let her never nurse her child herself, for she will breed it like a fool.*

Little did Shakespeare realize that just under a year his Rosalind would indeed be found in his neighbour's bed to his agonized dismay. The banter

between the two in the play, when laid beside the exchange in Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata, takes on an ominous ring. In fact, that which men call love is little more than lust, and if lucky lasts indeed for but a day. Thus Pozdnyshhev refutes the lady's assertion made on the railway carriage that love is an exclusive preference for one person above everybody else:

*Pozdnyshhev: Preference for how long? A month, two days, or half an hour?*

*The Lady: Excuse me, we are evidently not speaking of the same thing.*

*Pozdnyshhev: Oh, yes. Exactly the same. I mean exactly the same thing: a preference for one person over everybody else, but I am only asking: a preference for how long?*

*The Lady: For how long? For a long time, for life sometimes.*

*Pozdnyshhev: Oh, but that happens only in novels and never in real life!*

Variations on a theme of how long! No doubt, the subject fascinated both Shakespeare and Tolstoy, or else they would not have bothered to treat it, at such length. In fact, the periods during which Shakespeare and Tolstoy experienced their emotional turmoils coincide: for the playwright's passion for Mary Fitton reached its peak in his middle thirties, the age at which the Russian was madly wooing the woman who was to become his wife, a circumstance which he appears to have regretted in later life when he makes Pozdnyshhev declare in rather an ungallant way:

*Well, you see, I was caught that way. I was what is called in love. I not only imagined her to be the height of perfection, but during the time of our engagement I regarded myself also as the height of perfection!*

Tolstoy, of course, was a rich and eligible aristocrat whom any girl would have been eager to have made her spouse whereas Shakespeare was hardly in the same class as the maid he had pretensions to woo. If the playwright hoped to endear himself to the ladies and to while away the boredom of the court with his banter, he was hardly fool enough to entertain any illusions that the lady of his dreams would give a damn about him as a man. Orlando's stylish sentiments, in fact, serve only to mask the truth of his own pathetic fix, and reveal Shakespeare's inferiority complex:

*I shall do my friends no wrong, for I have none to lament me; the*

*world no injury, for in it I have nothing; only in the world I fill up a place, which may be better supplied when I have made it empty.*

Needless to say, the playwright – a country lout at the court of the great – was here speaking not merely with his mouth but from the heart. If anything in his life ever contributed to make his eloquence bloom it was love above all else.

Only a year separates the delightful nonsense of *As You Like It* from the snarling anguish of *Hamlet*, but it shows how much such a short interval can teach a man and change his whole outlook and mood. Love is merely a madness, he makes Rosalind say. In *Hamlet* it drowns itself not only in madness but in bloodshed. What madness was it that persuaded a poor playwright to dote upon a lady of the court, from whom he could expect no real return? Obviously the attraction was completely a one-sided affair, the unfortunate effusion of a poet's impossible dream-world. In fact, the connection between 'the pale complexion of true love' on his part and the 'red glow of scorn and proud disdain' on his dark lady's, was an unequal one from the start. Obviously, Shakespeare's poor social standing undermined any prospects he may have entertained in the romantic field, and served only to augment his already strong resentment at his inferior birth. Evidently this sense of social inferiority was one of the chief motivations for his struggle to make good in the great world, so much so as to wangle for himself a miserable coat of arms! So much for the man and his inferiority complexes.

In his love affairs Shakespeare, however, is more akin to Rousseau than to Tolstoy, since their social positions were no different and just as poignant. The erotic outpourings in Shakespeare's plays, not to mention his *Sonnets*, can hardly disguise his own emotional involvement at the time of their writing and need only be compared with Rousseau's ecstatic expressions of his infatuation with the Countess de Houdetot to denote the similarity of their psychic makeups. Not only in the *Confessions* but in the last book of *Emile*, Rousseau provides us with a true portrait of the intensity of his erotic life. In describing his imaginary *Emile* it is obvious that he is only speaking of himself and the solitary ecstasies in which he perennially indulged:

*You see the young man is very far from spending his days with Sophy, and seeing as much of her as he wants. One or two visits a week are all that is permitted, and these visits are often only for the afternoon and are rarely extended to the next day. He spends much more of his time in longing to see her, or in rejoicing that he has seen her, than he actually spends in her presence. Even when he goes to see her, more time is spent in going and returning than by her side. His pleasures, genuine, pure, delicious, but more imaginary than real, serve to kindle his love but not to make him effeminate.*



How true this is of Shakespeare's psychology also, his *Sonnets* bear witness! It is obvious that his passion for Mary Fitton, or his so-called Dark Lady, belongs to the same order of eroticism and was more imaginary than real. With a nature as passionate as Shakespeare's it is only understandable that for want of an immediate object, he should focus all his emotional drive upon the first maiden who presented herself to his fevered mind, in just the same manner as Rousseau did. Just as Orlando runs about hanging his verses on trees, Rousseau in his *Confessions* makes it quite clear how a passionate heart, finding the years drift emptily by, slowly initiates the process of entangling itself in highly erotic dreams rather than reality:

*I believed that I was approaching the end of my days almost without having tasted to the full any of the pleasures for which my heart thirsted, without having given vent to the strong emotions which I felt it had in reserve, without having even tasted that intoxicating passion, the power of which I felt in my soul - a passion which, through lack of an object, was always suppressed and could express itself in no other way but, through my sighs.*

And indeed, all this is hardly different from Orlando's imaginary wanderings through the woods in search of his Rosalind, carving her name on the barks of trees and sighing like a furnace. Those who desire to arrive at a true picture of the erotic Shakespeare have only to take another look at Rousseau to get to the heart of his mystery, of which *Hamlet* was so resentful a guardian. As Rousseau expatiates:

*How could it be that, with a naturally expansive nature for which to live was to love, I had not hitherto found a friend entirely my own, a true friend - I who felt so truly formed to be a friend? How could it be that with such inflammable feelings, with a heart entirely moulded for love, I had not at least once burned with love for a definite object? Devoured by a need to love that I had never been able to satisfy, I saw myself coming to the gates of old age, and dying without having lived.*

The introspective pattern of their intensely erotic natures had no recourse but to drive both men back upon their own psychic resources and feed upon themselves. As Rousseau eloquently continues:

*These melancholy but moving reflections drove me back upon myself with a regret that was not without its own pleasure. It seemed to me that fate owed me something she had given me. To what purpose had she sent me into the world with delicate faculties, if they were to remain to the end unused? This consciousness of my internal worth gave me a feeling of injustice, which afforded me some form of*

*compensation and caused me to weep tears that pleased me as they flowed.*

Shades of the discontented Dane! who does nothing if not mourn in the same resentful strain:

*Surely he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To fust in us unused!*

It was only to be expected that Rousseau, like his predecessor, should react in kind when the desired female object presented herself on the scene, and that as a consequence, the inflammable and suppressed nature of the erotic syndrome should flare up in a rash fierce blaze of riot.

At the time of writing *As You Like It*, it is obvious that Shakespeare was as love-sick as his successor was, and ruminating in Rousseau's words:

*In the finest season of the year, in the month of June, beneath cool groves, to the song of the nightingale and the murmuring of the streams. Everything combined to plunge me once more into that too seductive indolence to which I was naturally inclined... My blood caught fire, my head turned despite its grey hairs, and there was the grave citizen of Geneva, the austere Jean-Jacques at almost forty-five, suddenly become the love-sick swain.*

It was as if a melancholy Jaques were turned overnight into a bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked Orlando. If Shakespeare foisted upon Jaques and Orlando much of his pent-up emotions, it is not to be wondered that Rousseau inherited willy-nilly a great deal of the emotional residues that Shakespeare left over from his bouts of unrequited passion for a lady of the court, suffering all over again similar '*excitements of his reason and his blood*':

*I loved Ophelia! forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum!*

And, for his part in the ensuing scenario, Rousseau goes on to make explicit in similar vein:

*As I have already said, this time it was love, love with all its strength and all its violence. I will not describe the agitation, the tremblings, the palpitations, the convulsive movements, or the faintings of the heart which I continually experienced: the effect her*

*image had on my heart is sufficient evidence... There was on the road, within sight of Eaubonne, a pleasant terrace called Mount Olympus, to which she would sometimes come to meet me. I would arrive first and had to wait for her. But how painful that waiting was! As a distraction I tried to write with a pencil notes which should have been written with the finest drops of my blood. But I never succeeded in finishing one that was legible. When she discovered one in the niche which we had agreed upon, all that she learned from it was the pitiable state of mind in which it had been written.*

No doubt, the plays which Shakespeare penned during his love-sick days were also a means to distract his mind from a reality which had become too painful to contemplate without venting itself in some outlet of dramatic verse. It is to the playwright's credit, however, that despite the turbulent state of his emotions he was able to finish his plays, and not only make them legible but prune them into an artistic success.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare paid dearly for his passion, and so much of the venom that found its way into the tragedies is only a reflection of the emotional turmoil and the turgid depths of hate to which he so often sunk in his despair, so much so that it casts a blot on the plays as works of art. As for Rousseau he paid for his erotic experience in his own unique way:

*This state, and what was worse, its continuance over three months of ceaseless stimulation and privation threw me into an exhaustion from which I did not recover for several years, and finally brought on a rupture that I shall carry with me to my grave. Such was the sole amorous gratification of a man whose temperament was at the same time the most inflammable and the most timid that Nature can ever have created. Such were the last happy days that were dealt out to me upon earth, and now begin the long tissue of my life's misfortunes.*

Rousseau's pages depicting his one-sided passion for the Countess Sophie are extremely beautiful ones and not easily surpassed in annals of this kind. As for Shakespeare, that which later generations have come to lap up thoughtlessly as delightful art, its author had to pay dearly for with excitements of his reason and his blood. What are the tragedies but reflections of his inner torment, relics of dejection and despair? The routine adulation of his would-be admirers provides no discernment of the author's real feelings to be able to understand his inner life in any fundamental way, and demonstrates how much can be said by a writer and yet left unsaid.

It is not customary, of course, to view Shakespeare as a tortured

personality: for the plastic surgery his image has undergone down the centuries has turned him into a mere plaster effigy, a shell with no inner life, and quite unrecognizable as a man. No amount of cosmetic paste, however, can completely conceal from a discerning eye the fact that beneath all the jesting and the variety of masks under which he masquerades a tormented personality heaves. All the glittering rhetoric cannot butter over the sense of inferiority that stemmed from his common birth, and his struggle to make his way up in the world at the expense of his moral integrity. Allusions to 'the fatness of these pury times only serve to reveal his bitterness at having to crook the knee like any knave just to earn his daily bread. No doubt, even his unrequited passion for his Dark Lady was due in large measure to his low station in the social scale. Had he been of noble birth the outcome would doubtless have been otherwise.

Shakespeare's association with the stage was a liability rather than an asset insofar as respectability was concerned, since even in his own village an actor's profession was hardly regarded as one deserving of respect. The fact that Shakespeare is recognized today as the foremost dramatist of all time and the greatest master of word, in no way implies that in his lifetime he earned anything but the barest of social dues. Towards the end of his career he even lost the favours of his rich patrons in the privileged class - failure to possess which favour was tantamount to benign neglect and even social disgrace. Obviously Shakespeare's struggle to make his way in the world overwhelmed him with a sense of dereliction that could not but be extremely acute at times.

Any deeper study of the playwright's personality must reveal the same hectic turbulence of soul that plagued Tolstoy and Rousseau, except that in Shakespeare it is disguised under a sophisticated mask of polish and by the very medium he employs. No writer, in any case, can portray the heavier emotions of the heart with any degree of conviction or force unless he has experienced them for himself at firsthand. It does not require a large stretch of the imagination therefore, to recognize the connection between the playwright's inner life and the main creations in his plays. *Hamlet's*, *Othello's*, *Timon's*, and even *Lear's* fulminations may with little difficulty be traced to their real source - to the strained emotions that besieged their creator at the time, as he struggled to exorcize his distemper in black verse. The fact that he seized upon such dark subjects on which to vent his spleen demonstrates that he would not have chosen them at all unless something was weighing on his mind bursting to release itself.

Not that any art or verse could completely purge the distemper of a restless mind: art was after all merely an appendage to actual life, a very dispensable part. What Shakespeare sought with all his heart was some kind of divine repose, which hopelessly eluded his frantic grasp. As *Hamlet* is made to confess:

*In my heart there was a kind of fighting,  
That would not let me sleep.*

Here it is obviously the playwright rather than the prince that speaks. Repose from all the fever and the fret of life was, in fact, a welcome relief to escape the intense pressure of his beating mind, a consummation devoutly to be wished. No one who has read his rhapsodies on the theme of sleep in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and elsewhere can be left with little doubt upon this point. It is quite plain that during the writing of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare needed all the sedation that he could get: to sleep, no more! Unfortunately, he was condemned to be a poor sleeper right down to the grave. Tolstoy's refusal to waken his servants when they slept also demonstrates how much store he placed on the therapeutic value of this commodity: for, in his opinion, when human beings are asleep at least they were not up to any mischief. With their highly-strung natures, it is clear that the mind's repose embodied life's greatest boon.

But as time and tide mellowed Shakespeare's mind he became reconciled to his slot in life, a fact that enabled him to produce plays of forgiveness and reunion such as *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale*. He, who in the beginning had been fired with an ambition to make a name for himself in the world of bright lights, finally came to realize the petty insignificance of all worldly things. In his last years, as he wandered by the banks of the Avon, he found himself pushed even deeper into himself and his own private world, and it was only natural therefore that his ultimate verdict on the life-situation should creep into the script of his final play, as he makes Cardinal Wolsey exclaim:

*Vain pomp and glory of the world, I hate ye:  
I feel my heart new opened...  
I know myself now; and I feel within me  
A peace above all earthly dignities,  
A still and quiet conscience.*

If these lines reflect a tinge of bitterness, they also represent a simple statement of fact: an acceptance of things as they really are. It is no slight on human nature if people through birth and circumstance, are apt to forget that those who hang upon a prince's favours are only looking for a terrible letdown, and that life is so fickle it leaves a man like a flat tyre once the tide has turned. What fools men make of themselves in their struggle to survive, fabricating all manner of illusions to escape the terrible vacuity of their lives! They sacrifice their innocence and sincerity for mere egg-shells, without recognizing that it is not superficial success but only humble acceptance of life's transience that in the end illuminates, when all else is gone. Shakespeare wisely retired from the stage and the fickle favours of the great while he could, before they left him completely in the lurch.

One cannot but derive the impression from studying Shakespeare's plays that his purpose is to demonstrate that it is not the small man but monarchs and their train who are the world's greatest victims. His portrayal of the high and mighty is nothing less than a parade of murderers and crooks: in the face of which fact the small man should shed the last shreds of any illusions regarding them that he may have entertained. For the small man to court the favour of the great in the hope of advancement, therefore, is merely to take a stupid step in reverse, since to latch onto their coat-tails is only a shortcut to the grave, but without its peace. If it is true that men possess little option but to twist and turn with the tide simply to survive, this turning and twisting is not without its price and an expensive one. The bane of opportunists like Wolsey is the huge drop that they must bear once the wind is taken out of their sails.

Having reflected deeply on life's dilemmas, it is clear that Shakespeare came to prize personal integrity above all else, and snatched at every opportunity to drive his point home:

*This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

A few telling lines, and not endless tomes, suffice to convey the moral of Polonius' advice to his son. It also reveals Shakespeare's weakness, like Tolstoy's, for delivering sermons, albeit in humorous vein, and the great difficulty he experienced in restraining himself from saying too much once he had begun.

When Shakespeare found it difficult to voice his more serious views without appearing a bore, he seized on clowns as his mouthpiece. If the public is to be in any way edified, he realized only too well that they must first be entertained. A fool is allowed the liberty of his foolery so long as he can make his audience laugh. It is a moot point, however, who had the last laugh: Shakespeare or his audience. Clowning was an indispensable ingredient of his art, under guise of which he could express sentiments which if presented in a weightier vein would only have appeared presumptuous and detracted from the desired effect. The witticisms of clowns are a convenient medium for any man with a message, which even monarchs might tolerate. As Jaques make this point quite clear:

*I must have liberty  
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,  
To blow on whom I please; for so fools have;  
And they that are most galled with my folly,  
They most must laugh...*

*give me leave*  
*To speak my mind, and I will through and through*  
*Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,*  
*If they will patiently receive my medicine.*

Obviously Shakespeare is here taking advantage of saying exactly what he wants and meaning exactly what he says: arrogating a liberty of speech for himself which Rousseau and Tolstoy were likewise to adopt with great force, though in a completely different style. Tolstoy, in fact, frowned on Shakespeare's clowning through his fools, and after his religious conversion took exception not only to Shakespeare but to Rousseau, whom he accused of lack of self-respect, firmness, and judgement, even if he did acknowledge his obligation to him in many a respect and the man's high talent and culture.

As usual, Tolstoy failed to take into consideration the inferior social status of Shakespeare and Rousseau, which inevitably conditioned their attitude as they were forced to lead their lives in contact with the high and mighty of the land, who were hardly likely to tolerate any impertinence from the mouths of men of such a common breed. Their situations were such as Tolstoy with his birth and breeding fortunately escaped, and was therefore hardly in a position to condemn. No man is so above reproach, in any case, that he can arrogate the right to upbraid his fellows for their faults with impunity, a fact that Tolstoy himself eventually discovered to his dismay.

Shakespeare was probably the last person in the world to try and shove his sense of righteousness down others' throats, recognizing his own shortcomings in many a respect. So Jaques is chided by the Duke in turn:

*Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin:*  
*For thou thyself hast been a libertine,*  
*As sensual as the brutish sting itself.*

In no wise discomposd Jaques ratifies the jibe, acknowledging indeed that no one is perfect:

*Why, who cries out on pride,*  
*That can therein tax any private party?*  
*Doth it not flow as hugely as the sea,*  
*Till that the weary very means do ebb?*

If Shakespeare's witticisms often stray out of bounds at times, they were nevertheless a necessary element of his art for one in his lowly walk of life, if he was not to appear presumptuous or a bore, something which he took great pains to avoid, if not always with sustained success. Due to this lack of sanctimoniousness on his part – a fault from which Tolstoy was not free – his

output still proves acceptable today, where so much else (like Tolstoy's) only serves to irritate and cause offense, so that it is shunted out of hand with no regrets. In Shakespeare's hands, even the ponderous message of life's inanity is presented in such a witty vein that it fails to give offense:

*from hour to hour we ripe and ripe  
And then from hour to hour, we rot and rot;  
And thereby hangs a tale.*

A good laugh for Shakespeare was more effective than a prate: for if men are already condemned by fate to life's gallows, they should at least be treated to a good laugh now and then so that they can die in peace. Tolstoy was himself such a lover of good fun in his early years, until his ascetic zeal blinded him to the lighter vein towards the end, forcing him into a position so rigid that he forgot how to laugh.

No doubt, this fact serves to underwrite the extent to which environmental conditions contribute their load to determining a man's mood and outlook. For all its shortcomings, Shakespeare's times were unclouded with the threat of any serious national disaster, and the man was therefore free to turn his attention to matters in a less ponderous vein. Tolstoy's environment and times, however, were towards the end of his long life beset with much unrest, and displayed unmistakable symptoms of tottering on the brink of total collapse. It was only natural, therefore, that he found it impossible to deal with the life situation in a light vein when he himself possessed no peace of mind. In that he failed to take into consideration the difference in time and place between his illustrious predecessor and himself, the old Russian reformer found his pen turning the battery of its withering scorn upon the innocent English playwright, whose harmless witticisms Tolstoy, intentionally or unintentionally, so deeply misunderstood.

If Shakespeare when in good spirits was much given to clowning, nevertheless the distinct tug he felt between opposites was a very real emotional experience. That he was not devoid of a sombre and religious streak beneath all his banter is evidenced ever and anon in his work. The unpretentious *As You Like It* concludes on just such a sober note: for on learning that the usurper Duke has had a change of heart, neglected the pompous court and taken on the religious life, Jaques expresses a desire to pay him a call:

*To him will I: out of these convertites  
There is much matter to be heard and learned...  
I am for other than for dancing measures.*

Had Shakespeare lived to Tolstoy's ripe old age, it is more than feasible that the religious streak might have claimed him altogether and propel him, like



the Russian, to adopt just as ascetic ideas and attitudes. Intentionally or not, Tolstoy refused to acknowledge the religious element in his predecessor's work, although it is extremely clear. Adam, for instance, in referring to his old age as 'unregarded and in corners thrown', expresses a distinctly religious sentiment which his creator must have sincerely shared:

*And He that doth the ravens feed,  
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,  
Be comfort to my age!*

This Adam is, in fact, the brand of faithful servant that Shakespeare himself must have greatly esteemed, as he makes Orlando laud:

*O good old man, how well in thee appears  
The constant service of the antique world,  
When service sweat for duty, not for meed!  
Thou art not for the fashion of these times,  
Where none will sweat but for promotion,  
And having that, do choke their service up  
Even with the having.*

If nothing else, these lines demonstrate how much Shakespeare cherished the values of the antique world, so well tried and tested by time and tide. Of Shakespeare himself it might as well be said, that he was not for the fashion of his times, and because of this timelessness and universality of goodwill, he still survives today.

Shakespeare, however, appears to have enjoyed playing off one side of his many-sided nature against the other, simply to display different points of view. His - as well as Rousseau's and Tolstoy's - ambivalence is easily observed in their attitudes to almost everything. Their innate dualism placed them in the peculiar position of standing on both sides of the fence at the same time. No doubt, this was due in part to their having just too many alternatives from which to choose: for when the mind has an ample store of possibilities before it to select, it cannot but become indecisive (as in Hamlet), for the choice may not always be the best and might even turn out to be the worst. The wisdom of keeping one's options open and not shoving all one's eggs into a single basket appears quite plain.

The drawback of having too many baskets to shove their eggs in, however, resulted in the trio's inability to make up their minds, a weakness from which not only their art suffers but their lives. Pros and cons can be summoned up with a wealth of detail to support or demolish either side; and, this universalist way of looking at things plunged the trio into the uncomfortable position of not being able to take up a fixed stand on anything

for long. If versatility possesses its constructive side, it also exposes its possessors to the charge of inconsistency and unreliability. For all its apparent inconsistencies, however, this many-sided viewing of things is a faculty to be developed rather than deplored: for only by viewing all sides of a situation can a real solution to the world's ills and conflicts be resolved and reconciled. Of all the lessons that Shakespeare has left to posterity it is his humane attitude of live and let live that survives, demonstrating that the promotion of goodwill amongst men still pays over the long haul.

Shakespeare's - as well as Rousseau's and Tolstoy's - dualism is much in evidence in their natural affection for the simple joys of the countryside on the one hand, and their attraction for the brilliance of city life, on the other, best expressed perhaps in Touchstone's clownish retorts to Corin the shepherd:

*Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught. In respect that it is solitary, I like it very well; but in respect that it is private, it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields, it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court, it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no plenty in it, it goes against my stomach.*

Touchstone declares that the person who has never been at court is like an ill-roasted egg - all on one side. A country fellow, in fact, knows nothing about good manners because he has never been at court, and his soul is thus in a parlous state. This reveals how much the commoner playwright was impressed by the sophistication of the privileged class, though his infernal ambivalence also imbued him with a deep contempt for all its insincerity and inanity. Thus with no affectation Corin is made to defend the simple country life, just as Tolstoy defended it, despite all the dirt and smells that stuck to him because of it, which so often offended the sensibilities of his wife:

*Sir, I am a true labourer: I earn that I eat, get what I wear, owe no man hate, envy no man's happiness, glad of other men's good, content with my harm, and the greatest of my pride is to see my ewes graze and my lambs suck.*

The dualism and ambivalence of Shakespeare's psychic make up can only be comprehended after his life and work have been examined in depth, so as to reveal the heart of his mystery, without being misled by the cosmetics that his fame has foisted him with.

It is a moot point, however, who was the more fortunate: Shakespeare rejected in his affections for a lady of the court, or Tolstoy successful in courtship but in marriage with hell to pay. Whatever their differences in this respect,

there is little doubt that both produced some of their most enduring work as a result of their turbulent emotional experiences in the erotic field. Shakespeare's passion for his ladylove exerted a radical effect on his life and work, completely changing its drift: for when the ingredient of rejection in love was added to his already brooding sensitivity regarding his social inferiority, their collective weight was bound to have repercussions in his art. Had it not been for this emotional impact on his life, Hamlet and the other tragedies would never have seen the light of day. If the erotic experiences of Shakespeare and Tolstoy - not to mention Rousseau, whose infatuation with Sophie de Houdetot was just as hopeless and acute - were not exactly heaven, nevertheless their several ordeals through this emotional hell immortalized itself in their art and became posterity's gain.