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Tolstoy's View of Free Will Through Natasha Rostova and Anna Karenina

By

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Introduction

Tolstoy, in the eighteenth hundred, analyzed human beings as part of a simple psychology, he believed human beings to be made up of “four parts: ‘the body’, ‘feeling’, ‘mind’, and ‘will’” (Tussing 33). He understood that the man’s true goal is freedom, and his basis is the “unlimited will” that is free. (Tussing 33). Everything else does not matter to the man, that was the basis of his writings. In his masterpiece, *War and Peace*, Tolstoy used his surroundings to test his theories about humans and free will and their ability to choose for themselves or go along with what society instructs one to do. His other novel, *Anna Karenina*, also battles with the same issues. The two heroines in their own way found a way to rebel against their societies, families, friends, and lovers.

In his novel *War and Peace*, he used Natasha to express his view of freedom and one’s desire to have that freedom. In Natasha’s case she tried to gain freedom by running away from her family, but ultimately, she was controlled by the people surrounding her. Tolstoy intentionally placed his characters in situations where what really happened was replaced by the characters own betraying minds. They created an illusion that individuals can control and understand the course of events with the use of resources available to them. However, those who believed this were mistaken, which is the reason why Tolstoy’s characters constantly dealt with difficult situations and their decisions lead to more harm than good.

The situation is very similar in Tolstoy’s later novel *Anna Karenina*. He allowed his main character, a woman, to have the strength to have her own opinions, mind, and ability to make decisions. However, this character’s fate came to a more gruesome end. Was it free will that led

her there or was she predestined for this path? It seems that Tolstoy specifically focused on the importance of free will and one's ability to make your own decisions. Is it rebellion against fate?

The goal of the two novels is to discover how much freedom can one have, according to Tolstoy. He used unlikely characters to rebel against what is believed to be the appropriate behavior. The result of these rebellions was very different and show the reader two different paths, which lets the reader find out the truth about free will for himself. Natasha took the path of minor rebellion which allowed her to gain understanding about herself and her true desires and lead her to find happiness, romance, and family she was always seeking. Natasha throughout the novel chose to make her own decisions and achieved maturity she always wanted. She became an adult by learning from her own mistakes and making changes to her perception of the world. Her path ended up teaching her what every adult must learn about life. On the other hand, Anna Karenina made many dangerous and rebellious decisions which led to her unhappiness and sadly untimely death. Her path showed the dangers of romanticized thinking and constant living in the dream world. Throughout the novel, Anna gave in to every desire she had and her acceptance of the events that followed was her own choice.

The Rebellion of Natasha Rostova

In Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace*, Tolstoy believed that “‘free will’ ... ‘is nothing other than the true, eternal divine life which we receive, with which we can commune in this life... It is God within us, working through us. I am free when I merge with God, and I merge with God when I suppress in myself everything that hinders love and when I yield to love’. Tolstoy finds his ultimate self when he loses himself and becomes ‘merged with God,’ in communion with divine life, a part of the ‘divine endless stream of love’ where he freely and truly belongs” (Gustafson 10). With this belief he wrote his character Natasha Rostova. Natasha Rostova grew up without having any concerns about free will or the makings of important decisions. She was a child who had the ability to enjoy life and do whatever she desired, since she was admired by everyone and could easily get away with some of her innocent but questionable behavior. Natasha had no need to make any choices until she was manipulated by Anatole Kuragin into an emotional affair while being engaged to Andrei Bolkonsky. When it came to her affairs with Anatole, Natasha began to decide for herself what she wanted to do without being aware of the consequences of her actions. Tolstoy gave Natasha an ability to make a choice and to see whether she would make the correct choice or not. Due to the naiveness of her character, Natasha made a wrong choice, but one that was her own. Her choice led to her moral fall and the loss of herself. Additionally, she did not understand the seriousness of her situation until people who care about her intervened in the situation. Although Natasha had a choice to participate in the emotional affair with Anatole and the making of her escape plan, her choice to carry through with the plan was taken away from her. Tolstoy gave Natasha limited free will, which saved her. The intervention by Natasha's cousin Sonya and Natasha's mother, saved Natasha from her

demise and the grave consequences that would have followed her choice to run away with Anatole and rebel everyone that surrounded her, and the societal rules.

Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is generally known to be one of the most important works in literature across the world filled with lovers, families, drama, and rebellion. Natasha Rostova is an ideal character, an antithesis of Helena Kuragina, that showed the strength of an individual who was able to experience free will but also allowed herself to rely on others. She is a child born into a noble family, a sister to eleven siblings, and a lover to several male characters in the novel. She also represents a dream to those who are around her, she served as a source of lightness, happiness, and admiration to those around her. In *War and Peace* Natasha experienced a moral set back after being manipulated by Anatole, and she transformed herself into a young woman ready to bear the responsibilities of love and family.

Due to the minor setback Natasha experienced it made her a relatable character to readers because they are experiencing all her firsts with her. Natasha is first introduced as a lively and happy thirteen-year-old running into the room with a doll in her hands full of laughter:

“This black-eyed, wide-mouthed girl, not pretty but full of life... ran to hide her flushed face in the lace of her mother's mantilla-not paying the least attention to her severe remark-and began to laugh. She laughed, and in fragmentary sentences tried to explain about a doll which she produced from the folds of her frock.” (Tolstoy 33).

Since that first introduction Natasha continued to be a young girl admired by others because of her charm, directness, and ability to make adults laugh. Throughout the novel, the people's admiration for her does not stop even after her minor rebellion. Besides Natasha's charming personality that is admired by everyone, she also has other talents that adults around her respect and accept from a young lady of high society. She was very musical, could perfectly sing and

dance, and when she was admired by those around her during these actions, they were all impressed with her skills but also the Russianness of her soul, it delighted her aunts, uncles, siblings, and lovers. Natasha was the character in the novel that was close to the people, known or unknown to her and was able to make them feel better in difficult situations:

“‘And what is she so pleased about?’ thought Nicholas, looking at his sister. ‘Why isn’t she dull and ashamed?’ ... Natasha, that winter, had for the first time begun to sing seriously... ‘What is this?’ thought Nicholas, listening to her with widely opened eyes ‘What has happened to her? How is she singing today?’ And suddenly the whole world centered for him on anticipation of the next phrase... ‘All this misery, and money, and Dolokhov, and anger, and honor- it’s all nonsense... but this is real... Now then, Natasha, now then, dearest! Now then, darling! How will she take that si? She’s taken it! Thank God! And without noticing he was singing, to strengthen the si he sung a second, a third below the high note!’” (Tolstoy 786)

Natasha was able to move Denisov with her singing and make him feel warm and happy, as well as her own brother who was struggling with gambling debts. Without even knowing, Natasha made someone feel better by being her own self. However, Natasha is not concerned with moral reflections, deep thoughts, or meaning of life, she felt people instead of understanding them.

When Natasha first met Andrei, she was a young naïve girl who lived in her own world. She enjoyed mostly everything that surrounded her and lived in her own dream world. On the other hand, Andrei Bolkonsky was aware of the world, its greatness and its dangers. Throughout the novel, he used his title, battles, and career to discover perfection and acceptance of his father. With the discovery of perfection, Andrei wanted to overcome the cold approach and disinterest he had for life. When he discovered a flaw in his path, he escaped and moved on to another

quest. The two characters from the very beginning were unlikely to end up in a happy marriage, but they both needed each other's presence in their lives to reach the goals they were trying to reach. Natasha was too young and too inexperienced in life to be able to make Andrei happy. He has already lived and had the love that Natasha's young soul was looking for. It would have been unlikely that Andrei would also be able to provide Natasha with the love that she wanted. She was a simpler and kinder soul than he was. He was capable of harsh and evil actions that Natasha was not even aware were possible for an individual to make. Their first meeting began a transition for both characters onto a path of transformation that they both needed. When Andrei met Natasha his spirit reawakened, and Natasha was immediately entranced by their love at first sight. From their first glance, they had a unity, and they were able to understand each other's feelings for each other. Andrei felt at ease with Natasha, and he liked the kindness of her soul. Natasha enjoyed the feelings of love and the romanticism of their feelings for each other. She was in love with him, but her love was very pure and innocent. She had no experience of the feelings that Andrei and their engagement meant for her. She had no understanding of the seriousness behind an engagement and her commitment to Andrei for the rest of her life. For Natasha their engagement was a fairytale that she always wanted, but for Andrei their engagement meant a beginning of a new life, where he is saved from himself and his view of life. Their engagement could possibly have been saved if Andrei's father, Nikolai Bolkonsky did not intervene in their plans. Andrei's father understood the suddenness of his son's decision to get married, and he also understood that his grandson needed a mother. Natasha was inexperienced and lived in the moment. Her view of the world did not include the future. She did what she wanted and what made her happy. Andrei father's deal to postpone the marriage for a year, is the main reason the two characters did not have a happy ending. Natasha was not the character to be

able to have a year-long engagement and to be separated from her beloved. His presence next to her is what she desired the most and his absence is what made her more susceptible to Anatole's manipulations. Due to her ability to only live in the moment, Anatole gave her what she wanted. She wanted to be happy with someone who was there and who could give her romance. Natasha still felt love for Andrei and still felt happy, but it was no longer the same. Their separation led to Natasha's questioning their love and her emotional affair with Anatole.

She was a young naïve girl seduced by a playboy that was able to learn from this event and transform herself into a courageous young woman who was willing to give her heart to love and pay the price for it. Natasha's moral fall begins with an image of unity with her identity, she was happy with the path she was on. Natasha was not concerned with the events of the outside world or anything that she could not have, she did not want to change anything about her life. She was happy and able to enjoy her time with her family and people that surrounded her. After her meeting Anatole there is a sudden transformation into a state of conflict and unwholeness, she must learn again how to be satisfied with what is in her life and the path that she is on, instead of wondering of everything else life has to offer. Natasha had a long and difficult journey that ended with her reinvention into a solid and secure whole at the end. (Olsen 524)

Natasha is a self-conscious character who is aware of her actions, but her unconscious desire to please and be liked by others control those actions. It was clear from the beginning that Natasha's moral fall could have been avoided, and what happens to her was not because she was a "bad" or an "evil" person, but because she was a young, inexperienced girl full of life. Tolstoy similarly described Anna Karenina during her first meeting with Vronsky,

“[Vronsky] felt he must glance at her once more; not that she was very beautiful, not on account of the elegance and modest grace which were apparent in her whole figure, but

because in the expression of her charming face, as she passed close by him, there was something peculiarly caressing and soft. As he looked round, she too turned her head. Her shining gray eyes, that looked dark from the thick lashes, rested with friendly attention on his face, as though she were recognizing him, and then promptly turned away to the passing crowd, as though seeking someone. In that brief look Vronsky had time to notice the suppressed eagerness which played over her face and flitted between the brilliant eyes and the faint smile that curved her red lips. It was as though her nature were so brimming over with something that against her will it showed itself now in the flash of her eyes, and now in her smile. Deliberately she shrouded the light in her eyes, but it shone against her will in the faintly perceptible smile” (Tolstoy 68).

He used two characters that were full of life. Anna Karenina wanted to experience happiness and romantic love; those desires were visible on her face although she was trying so hard to hide it, since society did not allow for these types of revelations of one’s feelings. Natasha Rostova was not aware that there is even a need to hide that side of her. Even as she was experiencing her moral fall, she was unaware of the grave consequences to her running away with Anatole. Natasha had always seen the world through pink-colored glasses, and it was obvious and made her an easy target for Anatole. After their encounter Natasha had to recognize her naïve nature and learn to find a balance between enjoying life and being cautious, she now must have moral development and commitment, needs to be careful and observe the intentions of others. Tolstoy uses the character of Natasha to show one’s ability to crack the central idea of the meaning of life, be victorious over war and hatred, division and discord, and to show triumph of peace. Throughout the entire novel, Natasha experiences the reversal of and a return to her blessed state of love. During and after her encounter with Anatole, Natasha becomes a stranger to herself.

(Gustafson 40) Her betrayal of love leads her into a depressed state, she loses her ability to find joy or happiness in life. His deception of her destroys her perception of reality and of her own feelings. She lost sight of herself and of what the meaning of life was for her. The depressed state that Natasha was in isolated her from everyone, including her family. To move past this “stranger” feeling Natasha had to feel unity withing her own self and once again find her meaning of life. As the news of Napoleon approaching Moscow kept spreading, Natasha began to allow herself to listen to others. On her trip to church, she heard the deacon say:

“‘In peace let us pray unto the Lord’ ‘As one community, without distinction of class, without enmity, united by brotherly love- let us pray!’ thought Natasha. ‘For the peace that is from above, and for salvation of our souls.’ ‘For the world of angels and all the spirits who dwell above us,’ prayed Natasha. When they prayed... she remembered Prince Andrew, prayed for him, and asked God to forgive her all the wrongs she had done him. When they prayed for those who love us, she prayed for the members of her own family, her father and mother and Sonya, realizing for the first time how wrongly she had acted toward them, ... Only at prayer did she feel able to think clearly and calmly of Prince Andrew and Anatole, as men for whom her feelings were as nothing compared with her awe and devotion to God... ‘Let us commit ourselves and our whole lives to Christ the Lord!’ ‘Commit ourselves to God,’ Natasha inwardly repeated. ‘Lord God, I submit myself to thy will! ... I want nothing, wish for nothing; teach me what to do and how to use my will! Take me, take me’” (Tolstoy 1551-53)

During the prayer, Natasha feels connected with what she hears. Her ability to finally separate herself from her feelings about Andrei and Anatole, allowed herself to see the reality of her situation. No longer is she blaming those around her for what happened, but instead she feels

ashamed of her actions towards them. She realizes how they saved her from her own demise and feels responsible for her actions. Instead of dwelling in her situation she now gives her own decision to God and tells him to lead her down the right path. Natasha finds the central meaning of life; to allow others to help and rely on stronger forces than yourself. Her trip to church and this realization allowed her to return to unity within herself. She becomes a resident in her own state of mind.

During her encounter with Anatole, she was not able to see his playboy nature or recognize that he was hunting her as if she was his prey. Anatole was able to exert feelings of love and admiration for Natasha, which she was clearly able to feel. His ability to make her feel wanted made her desire him. She was initially able to determine the evil nature of Dolokhov when Nikolai brought him home, and initially she was able to see the warm and kind nature of Pierre's which was not obvious to many characters in *War and Peace*. Natasha personifies the nature and love, and she recognizes how important one's feelings are, how it is the main thing in a person's nature. All the mistakes Natasha had to make as a young individual began with the importance of feelings and love. It all began with Anatole Kuragin and ended with him too. The love Natasha felt for Anatole was very naïve and inexperienced, since Natasha has only had one important experience with a male character, Andrei. At the beginning of the opera, the first encounter between Natasha and Anatole, is when Natasha's conflict between pleasure and confusion about Anatole's advances begins. (Warner 1017) She sees the world from a fresh and unconventional point of view, which Tolstoy uses to show the fakeness of the images she is seeing since she is the only character who has retained an innocent perspective. She is the only one that notices the "trees" on the stage are just cardboard, and the "girl" that is singing is just a fat woman, and the "lover" waits for the right moment during the music to make a love

declaration. Natasha's view of the opera was somewhat disappointing, since she saw the reality of the production and saw the fakeness of it all. Her ability to be ashamed for the falseness of what she is viewing and the ability to admire it, shows the strength of her character and the strength of her morals. However, by the end of the opera Natasha joins in with the rest of the group and sees the opera from their point of view, she begins to be more associated with the society and their high status than she was before her meeting with Anatole. (Olsen 524) Her encounter with Anatole opened the door into the adult world filled with deception and romance, the world that she was not acquainted with before. Because she allowed herself to feel things for Anatole she gave "evil" an entry into her world and mind, his deception of her changed her view of the world forever, from the view of a young girl into the view of a young growing woman. Once she accepted the evil, the hypocrisy, and the rebellion of the society Natasha was unable to make clear decisions when it came to her affair with Anatole. After seeing the hypocrisy of the outside world and the opera she accepts, "I suppose it has to be like this!" (Tolstoy 653).

The meeting between the two caused her a lot of confusion and a moral fall. Natasha still maintains her morals because she initially feels uneasy about her dealings with Anatole, which comes from her the guidance of her family. However, she tried to engage in an unacceptable activity with Anatole and tried to manipulate the limits society put on sexual activity in order to get what she wanted. Her moral fall comes from her confusion with what is right and what is wrong, she loses her moral compass. As a result of these observations Natasha lost some of her innocence that so many admired which also did not allow her to make mistakes up to this point of her life. With the loss of her innocence and some of her morals she was unable to see or judge Anatole's true intentions to just have her as a woman. (Olsen 526) As Natasha begins to lose more and more of her innocence as her affair with Anatole continues, Tolstoy begins to write

about her from a more of an adult point of view. Even though Natasha is not able to see her fall, the reader gets insight into the high society that Natasha loses. The reader is drawn along with Natasha to her fall and can see the glimpses of the truth about society that Natasha is blinded to. Tolstoy uses Natasha's moral fall to allow the reader to see the falseness and the wrongs of the adult society in *War and Peace* and to lead Natasha onto a path of becoming an adult.

Natasha is a perfect character subject to internal reincarnation as if she has experienced death during her moral fall and rebirth as a result of that unfortunate moral fall. She reemerges as a fertile female which is the most acceptable role for a woman, motherhood. Tolstoy uses Natasha's moral fall to destroy her own dangerous tendencies as a child to not be able to tell the difference between good and evil. With her fall and interactions with Anatole, from the opera to running away, Natasha learned to identify one's evil intentions and see evil tendencies in her own personality and to be able to leave them behind. Although it was difficult for her to see the reality of Anatole's intentions and his character, she recognized the "evil" that lives in some people and how easily she could be fooled. Natasha made a couple of wrong decisions following her encounter with Anatole, such as taking poison and isolating herself from those who care about her, but as the time went on, she gained strength to recognize her own wrongdoings and accepted help from her family. Natasha learned from her experience, once she recognized it was her own fault in this situation and it was up to her to make matters better. Now that she recognizes the powers that are available to her, with her now experiencing good and evil, she uses her powers for nurturing. Natasha had tendencies for fun and flirtation and pleasing others, but once she has experienced the fall after Anatole and saw the consequences of her actions, Natasha was not worried about her own happiness, she began to be concerned with those around her. Her motherly instincts began to wake up as the war progressed. The unusual event that

began to show the changes in Natasha was when she suddenly offered shelter to Russian soldiers and allowed the families rich and high-end house to be used during the evacuation of Moscow. Natasha continued her support of others even after leaving Moscow. On her escape from the city, she ended up by chance meeting Andrei as he is wounded and dying. Natasha is not concerned about her embarrassment of seeing him after her betrayal, she is not selfish and rushes to help Andrei. Until the very end she stays by his side and makes him feel as comfortable as he can be during his final moments. Additionally, she forgave Andrei for his pride and his mistakes during their brief engagement. After he found out about Natasha's mistake and choice to participate in an emotional affair with Anatole, he treated her as though she did not exist. He showed his true harsh side that has been seen by so many but not by Natasha. As Natasha was realizing her own mistakes, Andrei refused to see her side of things or listen to her apology. He was only able to see his own fault in their split as he was dying. His death completes Natasha's transformation into an adult. As she loses someone important to her, she loses any bit of childhood she had left. This event still shows the unpredictability and innocence of some of her actions, but it also shows her stepping away from the evil of selfishness and your own desires. From making her own choices and seeing that no matter what the consequences are not in her control, she decided to use whatever free will she has for good and demonstrate a greater involvement in the good and history that was being made around her. (Warner 1017) Throughout the novel Natasha changes emotionally and physically which is important to see the reality of one's life and the progression of it. Tolstoy uses reality for the endings of these characters which makes the reader relate more to Natasha and her path.

At the end of the novel, we see Natasha as a plump woman, playing sloppy, nourishing the mother figure to Pierre and her children with him. Even at the end as she completely

transforms physically, her realism and personality traits from her childhood are still present. She, as an adult woman, shows once again realistic traits such as jealousy, her desire to please and dominate Pierre, and inner strength. Also, the changes that she has made allowed her to be a “good” wife in their society. Natasha’s transformation into a purely good inner self that is aware of the evil that surrounds her, allowed Pierre total satisfaction at the cost of his freedom as a rich and powerful man. Natasha and Pierre were able to gain a happy family, because even though their match was for some economic reasons, it was also a marriage where the two characters chose each other for their own personal fulfillment reasons, and they devote themselves to raising their children. Natasha breastfed her children, which was incredibly unusual in Russia at the time, since other women gave their kids to strangers, tutors, governesses, and serfs. Their family goes against the societal rules, where she secured for herself a tight family nest, where each person’s self is defined by their relations to her, the heart of their home and the fulfiller of their desires. Natasha mediates the conflicts in her nest and does not allow the chaos and the evil from her childhood to be present in her own family life. Not only is the family protected from each other, they are protected from the influences of the outside world as well. They may seem like a free family, but they are not. Their family is still led by the father and the mother is still the one to take care of the children. However, Natasha’s family was able to attain happiness and fulfillment for themselves through privacy from the outside culture. (Olsen 529)

Natasha Rostova was a young naïve girl who had no concerns in life. She was a happy child surrounded with love and admiration. Until she met Anatole, she had no issues or concerns in life, which is why she was so easily fooled by him. In my opinion, Natasha was a victim to Anatole and his hunter nature. She was innocent in her actions, since she was manipulated by some of the “evil” people surrounding her, Helene and Anatole. Even though she made a

mistake, not by her own choice, she was able to mature and recognize her own faults. She is a character that is easily liked because she makes mistakes and learns from them despite the unhappiness she endured during those moments. She is the one-character worth learning from. During her journey it is seen that she is not a perfect character but one that can be a role-model.

The Rebellion of Anna Karenina

A decade after *War and Peace*, Tolstoy writes a novel called *Anna Karenina* which is an incredible masterpiece about another young woman's self-destruction as she pursues an affair with a man and goes against every societal norm in Russia. Similar to Natasha Rostova in

Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Anna represents an individual in rebellion against her own situation, the reality, her collision with it, her hatred of lies and her own use of lies to further her own agenda, and her destruction by her own choices. (Call 96) However, her story revolves around a theme of one's internal conflict that leads to your own imminent destruction. Unlike Natasha, Anna was not manipulated by other people, she made her own choices. Tolstoy uses Anna to describe one's fight against fate and one's desire to gain freedom. There is a clear narrative of Anna's problem with free will and the experiences of freedoms she does have are always vividly described, which shows the importance of those moments. Tolstoy focuses on the characters free will through their consciousness and the events surrounding them. Tolstoy also makes point to focus on the characters connection between their impulses and their needs to see which they would prioritize. Natasha Rostova's psychological state and knowledge of self-depended on her knowledge of her emotions and what her life meaning is, which were directly related to her life goals. Similarly, in *Anna Karenina*, the characters psychological state is directly connected to their actions, desires, dreams, and failures. Tolstoy uses this novel and the character of Anna Karenina to show that Anna is slave to her needs and desires, but her actions are free in nature. Tolstoy describes free will as a necessity to live, a person's ability to act freely is what fills with meaning and satisfies their life:

“I do not know why a certain event occurs, I think that I cannot know it; so, I do not try to know it and I talk about chance... As the sun and each atom of ether is a sphere complete in itself, and yet at the same time only a part of a whole too immense for man to comprehend, so each individual has within himself his own aims and yet has them to serve a general purpose comprehensible to man” (Tolstoy 1274).

Throughout the novel Tolstoy wants his readers to be aware that there is a choice. He describes, “each individual has within himself his own aims, and yet has them to serve a general purpose incomprehensible to man” (Call 95). Same in the novel *Anna Karenina* had aims and choice within herself. She chose to follow her dreams and desires instead of conforming to societal rules. Anna starts out as the molder of her own actions and situations, but she quickly turns into a victim because of the unforeseen by her consequences. In Natasha Rostova’s case in *War and Peace*, her past, her surroundings, and the people in her life saved her. But in Anna’s case, she can’t escape her own history which has shaped her life; her past continuously affects her future events. For most of her life Anna followed what society made her believe was acceptable, she was known as a respected woman from an esteemed family. Although it seemed as if the main heroine had everything, she was constantly dissatisfied with her husband’s sheer presence. She did not consider that she had love, because her husband did not love her the way Anna wanted and needed, the deep intense and romantic desire for each other. (Tolstoy 346) As it is described in the first line of the novel, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy 1) and Anna’s family was no different. Although Anna was not alone and she had people around her, they all belonged to the world she so desired to escape and each was surrounded by members of the high society who always circled themselves around the most esteemed members. Even her own son’s love was not enough for her to conform to the societal rules and stay for his benefit. Nothing could replace the romantic and physical love she so deeply desired. Anna no longer had any strength to fight against her own desires and decided to allow her decisions to be blamed on God:

“Haven’t I striven, striven with all my strength, to find something to give meaning to my life? Haven’t I struggled to love him, to love my son when I could not love my husband?”

But the time came when I knew that I couldn't cheat myself any longer, that I was alive, that I was not to blame, that God has made me so that I must love and live" (Tolstoy 346)

Anna explains that she has done everything else to feel the love she so deeply desired but was not able to find it. Ultimately to be able to survive and to be fulfilled she needs that love.

Although once choosing this path she followed her own desires, Tolstoy makes sure to point out that she could act by her own will, but she was unable to control the situation, because the consequences of someone's actions are not in their control. In Anna's situation she chose to use God as an excuse for her actions, unlike Natasha who uses God to find a way back to her own self and her correct path.

Similar to Natasha Rostova, there were possibilities for Anna to avoid the destruction with the choices she had: she could have complied with the societal rules, continued to fight for a divorce and marry Vronsky, or focused on her needs and desires despite the consequences. Anna's possibilities and conflict with her decisions is a clear example of Tolstoy's idea that an individual can act with free will but not to determine the outcome of those actions. (Call 100) First option to comply with the societal rules was not even a possibility in Anna's mind, this choice was worse than death in her own mind. Second option to fight for divorce and marry Vronsky was possible and would have made her a respectable member of the society, instead of a woman in an unfaithful and unhappy marriage who is a topic of societies gossip. However, Anna was no longer able to comply with the life she was willing or be under husband's rules any longer. Her life with Karenin and Seryozha were not enough for her. In view of Anna's conflict, she had many choices, but no possible choice in the outcome. Anna went with the third option and no longer wondered about what was acceptable or what people thought about her choices. The outcome of this choice was Anna's obsession with life possessed by love for Vronsky and

society. Tolstoy gave Anna the freedom of choice and the final choice was executed by uncontrollable and irrational forces of her emotions. She was no longer in control of her thoughts or feelings. However, the succession of events seemed to have a logical path of consequences going towards an unknown for the reader goal.

Anna's major part of identity was being a mother to Seryozha and there are several sentimental scenes between Anna and her son. She is a mother who is torn between freedom and love for her son. This made issues much harder for Anna once she decided to fight for her freedom and allow herself the love, she always desired with Vronsky and abandoned Seryozha. She also gained freedom from the societal rules a mother should follow. Anna is a contrast not only to Natasha Rostova as a mother, but also to other mothers in the novel such as Dolly and Kitty who accepted their roles as mothers and motherhood gave them their life meaning. These two characters exert a positive mother image, Kitty was able to transform from a young bride and adapt to becoming a mother with new responsibilities and Dolly focused on her children and gained happiness through them in her loveless marriage. (Alhassani 9) However, for Anna the relationship with her son for her is secondary to her desires and she allowed herself freedom to spend time away from her son and be selfish. Even though Anna does love her son and thinks of him often, she defied the accepted gender roles of a devoted mother and had no interest in fulfilling this image. Anna had the strength to choose herself and she left her son, but that was also chaotic for her, and she often regretted it. Not only she began to be viewed by the society as a fallen woman for her affair with Vronsky, but she was also considered an unfit and selfish mother. Her past as a mother to Seryozha followed her throughout her decisions and played a role in the consequences of the events that took place. If Anna did not have her son, it was going to create chaos in her relationship with Vronsky and the society. On Dolly's visit to see Anna,

she noticed Anna's absence from her other child, a daughter with Vronsky, and the ignorance towards her, "Dolly wanders that Anna does not know how many teeth her baby has" (Tolstoy 46). The unhappiness was obvious to Dolly, and she saw the fakeness of Anna and Vronsky's love and family life. She found out that Anna was using birth control and the reality of her not wanting to have any more children, meant unhappiness for Dolly. She began to see motherhood in a different light herself. Dolly was able to find true meaning in life and enjoy the everyday, ordinary moments. Dolly saw Anna's unhappiness in the way she spent her time mostly alone without even paying much attention to her daughter. (Minion 15) Natasha Rostova in *War and Peace* also used family and motherhood as a meaning and purpose of life. It was one of the qualities that made Natasha into a complete self by the end of the novel. Anna could have focused on similar goals to escape her demise, but she was unable to think clearly about the path she was on.

Family plays a big role in Anna's life and consequences of her actions. There are many distinct families who have their own journeys filled with unhappiness and chaos, there are also families who were able to attain happiness despite the hardships in their relationships. The Levins family, throughout the novel moved towards happiness rather than stay amid unhappiness like other families. Levin had the perfect example of a happy family in the Lvovs, and the way Lvov treated his wife and his children, the dedication he had to them. Levin also saw the family dynamic and learned from the small interactions he witnessed between the family while visiting them. Later when Levin and Kitty have their own family, their dynamic was like the Lvovs, they had their secret language that allowed for a deeper level of connection and trust. Additionally, Levin attained faith after advice given by Lvov, "No father could bring children up relying on his own strength alone without that help [of God and religion]" (Tolstoy 772). Levin gained

meaning of life in those words and it was the final element that allowed Levin and Kitty to have a happy family, since it bound them together towards a common goal: the happiness of their children. (*Family in Anna Karenina*, 2019) The unhappy families were unable to obtain the unity that is needed for the happiness in their marriages. Dolly and Steva had no communication or love between them. Dolly had the same issues Anna did, her husband did not give her the love she needed. The only concern of Dolly's became her children and raising them with good habits so that they grow up to lead good lives. Dolly's dedication to motherhood is truly meaningful compared to the emptiness and fakeness of Anna's identity as a mother. Similarly, Anna and Vronsky were unable to gain happiness due to the miscommunication in their relationship. Anna had no issues expressing herself to Vronsky and tell him about her feelings, however for Vronsky the constant and intense communication was too much and began to overwhelm him. He often needed to escape from Anna and gain access to his old life surrounded with his old friends. As he was growing up, he experienced unhappy life and he had no intention to get married or start a family, since he has not seen the value of marriage and thinks of husbands as people to laugh at while their wives sleep around. Despite his realization of what he has done to Anna once he slept with her, he continued to have no interest in family life. Instead, he felt bound to Anna and felt resentful towards her. Additionally, he has no interaction with his young daughter. It is unknown what Vronsky thinks of his daughter, and he ends up giving little Anna away after Anna's death.

Anna's turn of events was accidental, unlike Natasha Rostova's who had other character manipulate her and the situation behind the scenes. Similarly, to Natasha, she had no control of the events that were about to happen. Anna began to have control once she met Vronsky, not beforehand. The initial encounter that set off the entire chain of events and Anna's rebellion may

seem accidental, they all occurred at the same time when Anna was not mentally prepared pay them any attention. When we first meet Anna, she accidentally ends up taking the same train as Vronsky's mother and they accidentally end up having a conversation about their situations. To follow it was by accident that Vronsky picked up his mother from the train station and then by chance ran into Anna coming out of the train carriage and they exchanged a prolonged glance. Tolstoy showed a way that chance and fate play together. Anna's ability to pay attention to Vronsky and show him attention was her first act of free will and rebellion. She noticed his "shining gray eyes, that looked dark from the thick lashes, [and] rested with friendly attention" (Tolstoy 73). As a respectable woman of society, she is not supposed to pay close attention to other men. She is married and has a child, and this type of behavior is considered disgraceful and shameful. Anna herself understood the dangerous path she was suddenly steering towards and initially fought her every impulse. Although this was an accidental and a harmful initial meeting, it influenced Anna's entire life and brought her the freedom she desired but also which led her to destruction. Her final decision to free herself from the chains the society put on her were also influenced by Vronsky's accident during the horse race, clearly controlled by nature and not anyone's actions. Anna exclaimed to her husband, "I am thinking of him. I love him, I am his mistress; I can't bear you" (Tolstoy 253). This was her way of finally setting herself free and showing the society a different 'unacceptable' way to lead a life. With this final phrase Anna became her own person. (Call 98)

As the society realized the seriousness of Anna's choice to follow Vronsky and abandon her family, she was quickly isolated. People could not believe her ability to proclaim the seriousness of her love and the confidence to stand up for her own decisions. Even though many in the society were disloyal, same as Anna, they kept their imperfections personal and kept

complying with the societal rules, so they were not punished for their behaviors. From the very beginning, Anna declined help from others, and she followed her own desires without concerns about consequences. She was not protected from the society and from her own mistakes the way Natasha was. Natasha was protected in every way from the harm of the society and from the harm of her own mistakes. Anna was unable to listen to advice or make any rational decisions which lead to her being isolated for everyone. This is another reason Anna Karenina ended up the way she did, dead. Anna made a different decision and was severely punished for it unlike the other women. Despite the consequences of her actions and the hatred of the society, Anna became more of herself and became to feel truly alive. Now her life and her thoughts were separated between her lover Vronsky and her son and motherly instincts. Those are the two only other characters Anna herself felt that she has ever loved, but sadly she cannot have what she truly desires; to have the two together as a family. Even though she wanted to have her son in her life, her desire for romantic love and her life with Vronsky was more important. She ignored her motherly duties and chose herself over her son and her responsibilities. If she would have chosen son, Anna knew that her life would not have changed, and she still would be unhappy. She made a choice that she would be best for her and no one else. She chose herself. She became uninterested in everything else, saying she no longer cares about anything else, and her mind and desire became to control her. (Tolstoy 749) Anna's son was a constant reminder of her past and in no way was it possible to have her own free will if her past is keeping her behind. The agony Anna felt was also annoying and not understandable to Vronsky, since he recognized the past's control over Anna. The past also had control over her when continuously discussing the two lovers and attacking them verbally during public events, however this intensified Anna's actions and her feelings for Vronsky. Her free life began to break when Vronsky did not reciprocate the

intense feelings Anna was experiencing and he was no longer able to understand and share her deep passion for this affair, which also brought suffering to Anna:

“‘My love keeps growing more passionate and egoistic, while his is waning and waning, and that’s why we’re drifting apart.’... ‘And there’s no help for it. He is everything for me, and I want him more and more to give himself up to me entirely. And he wants more and more to get away from me. We walked to meet each other up to the time of our love, and then we have been irresistibly drifting in different directions. And there’s not altering that. He tells me I’m insanely jealous, and I have been told myself that I am insanely jealous; but it’s not true. I’m not jealous, but I’m unsatisfied.’” (Tolstoy 453).

Despite her feelings and suffering she continued to love Vronsky and kept defying the society and their rules, she also continued to strongly demand for his love. (Call 100) She continued to demand from Vronsky what he was unable to provide. He was incapable to feel the intensity that Anna felt, but he felt love for her in his own way and he in his own way jeopardized his status, future, and relationships to provide her the comfort she is used to.

Anna’s continuous conflict destroyed not only her relationship with the society but also with her own self. She began to be often frustrated and unable to hide her feelings, which provoked public emotional outbursts. The consequences of all her actions began to destroy Anna and the happy life she was trying to build. Even her excited moments such as public affection are filled with exaggerated emotions. Once Anna and Vronsky decided to return to Moscow, Anna’s honeymoon period was over. She was happy with the thoughts of seeing her soon and the success of her plan afterwards, but that happiness for her was not enough. That happiness did not last long and once she saw a picture of Vronsky she remembered her misery and the reason for it. Anna began to find reasons to be unhappy and later that night she creates a scene at dinner by

flirting with men and later at an opera by being offended by other people's comments. Anna is unable to stay happy and she lets Vronsky know of her unhappiness, he is also unable to comfort her until she hears about his intense feelings for her. As soon as her affiliations and feelings for Vronsky began, Anna's isolation started to unravel. Additionally, her looks began to fade as the stress of the alienation and the self-conflict began to Affect Anna. Vronsky noticed:

She had broadened out all over, and in her face at the time when she was speaking of the actress there was an evil expression of hatred that distorted it. He looked at her as a man looks at a faded flower he has gathered, with difficulty recognizing in it the beauty for which he picked and ruined it. (Tolstoy 424).

With these observations, his strong love for her also began to fade and her constant outbursts did not help the situation. Anna was a flower that Vronsky destroyed. Anna allowed herself to be destroyed and fell into every trap fate had set up for her. By making the choices that she made, she went down a very wrong path that was soon unable to be changed. Natasha Rostova was saved by God and the people around her; she was unable to make every choice that she wanted. Anna had many things going against her, unlike Natasha who had everything going for her.

Everything while Anna was making her own choices conspired against her: society, law, free will, and love. There were multiple factors contributing to Anna's destruction: she refused to sacrifice her individuality to preserve her family, was unable to not surrender to Vronsky, and she rebelled against her situation. Even though Anna had no control over the consequences of her actions, she did have a choice of the actions themselves. Due to her ability to control the actions she was persecuted for them since she knew that the societal rules are not to be violated. The responsibility for the actions falls on the person committing those actions, so Anna paid for her behavior.

From my own assessment, Anna felt victim to her own desires and to her own free will. She had the ability to avoid her demise by fighting for her son and for divorce, even though it was not going to be an easy road she could have had it all that she wants at the end. However, Anna was not able to think clearly about the choices she was making, and she was weak when it came to her sexual desires and romantic love. I find that she was a very strong woman who defied men's rules and listened to what she herself wanted, but she was unable to strategize or control her emotions when it mattered not only for her but also for her son. She was the maker of her own fall due to her inability to control emotions and her desire to control others. In my opinion, Anna was at fault for what happened to her. She never made a plan or what she wanted the end result to be of her actions. She followed Vronsky blindly and allowed herself to go crazy.

Conclusion

In one decade, Tolstoy wrote two incredible masterpieces exploring free will and one's ability to handle the making of their own decisions. With his two main heroines Natasha Rostova and Anna Karenina, he showed the reader the consequences of exercising free will and a person's necessity to have free will in order to be happy. Natasha was a young naïve heroine who

made a small mistake but did not let that mistake ruin her life. She was a beautiful girl who was loved and admired by everyone, which made her crave that acceptance and the attention from others. Once she got the attention from Anatole that she was not receiving from Andrei, it was easier for her to make a decision to involve herself in the emotional affair rather than be smart and think of the future. She had no concerns about where this decision could lead her. She was saved by her family and her exercise of free will was not able to harm her. Anna Karenina was also a young woman who desired more than she had, and that desire overpowered her ability to make smart decisions. Instead of being aware of the consequences of her actions or worrying about her own or her son's future, she made a selfish decision to get what she desires despite the consequences. Her choices led to her demise and to her kids not having a mother. She was not saved by anyone, instead she was pushed more into the rebellious world that she was already living in, once she was 'exiled' by her own society.

Natasha was a young girl, which meant she had no control over many of her decisions, which meant that she had a safety net of people to turn to when she got into trouble, as well as a safety net of people that would save her from herself. She lived in the moment but once she had a moral fall and accepted that some of her decisions were wrong, she was able to see the meaning of life. Natasha was saved because she did not have full control over her decisions. Her decisions were determined by the people and events surrounding her, which were usually in control of Count and Countess Rostova. Due to Natasha's family not turning away from her despite her actions and their desire to save her from her own actions led her on the right path. Once she admitted her own faults and gave God control over her actions, she understood her purpose and she created a goal for her life which she kept going towards. Natasha grew up and changed herself, which Anna was unable to do even though she can be considered to be a smart woman.

In my opinion, through Tolstoy's novels, the reader needs to understand the dangers of free will and how to handle one having the ability to make their own choices. From my understanding, one needs strength of character, support of others, and God in your life in order to be able to exercise free will and at the same time be smart about your decisions. Without the interruption of her own family, Natasha would have been lost the same way Anna was. For one to be able to exercise free will, one must think of consequences and the future and not only live in the moment. Without considering the consequences of one's decisions and how one's decision is going to affect other people, that individual is unable to exercise free will. A person must understand the meaning of life and have faith in God, since that wisdom takes away one's 'evil' desire and selfishness. With that understanding, an individual must think of others and the future in order to be able to exercise free will; one must understand that every action has a reaction.

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