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“Everyone Learns, Nobody Changes”: Images and the Ideal in *Anna Karenina* and *Closer*

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Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy, published in 1877 in Russia, and *Closer* by Patrick Marber, first performed in London in 1997, are concerned with similar topics such as relationships, adultery, social situations, and (important for this paper) art and the pursuit of the ideal. "Art" in this paper refers not only to the physical works of art in the characters' lives—such as paintings, photographs, and books—but also to intangible images that surround the characters. "Images" refers both to how a character wants to be seen by others and to how a character chooses to see others; they are the physical and non-physical representations of the ideals that the characters pursue in their lives. The characters create these images by focusing on and manipulating their material selves while hiding and separating from their more spiritual, inner selves. Using the framework of Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* and his definitions of true and counterfeit art to analyze the images in these works reveals that the images the characters use are counterfeit because they do not represent the spiritual inner selves of the characters. Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* also provides a framework for analyzing how these characters interact in society and with each other, as Tolstoy evaluates the relationship between art, society, and the pursuit of the ideal. The eight main characters of *Anna Karenina* and *Closer* manipulate their counterfeit images to pursue their own ideals, which are often focused on material or sensual satisfaction and are therefore disconnected from the need of the spiritual self to authentically connect with another.

Because the counterfeit images of the self and others in the characters' lives are often created by or for a self-centered pursuit of their ideals, these images create tension and division among the characters. Even as the characters experience the consequences of their actions, they continue to sacrifice the possibility of authentic connection with each other in pursuit of their ideals. This repeated choice in both works reflects and is affected by Tolstoy's identification in

What Is Art? of how society, though progressing outwardly, fails to achieve the ideal of unity among mankind. In the book and play, those characters that are able to change their actions do so as a result of close encounters with suffering and death, which tear down their counterfeit images and allow the characters to pursue more authentic connection with others.

Images and the Pursuit of the Ideal

What is Art?, though completed twenty years after *Anna Karenina* when Tolstoy's philosophy on art had become more dogmatic, is a helpful tool for understanding the images that the characters in both *Anna Karenina* and *Closer* use to present themselves and see others. Tolstoy's main point is that "The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in their being united together, and to set up, in place of the existing reign of force, the kingdom of God—that is, of Love—which we all recognize to be the highest aim of human life" (*What is Art?* 288). In Tolstoy's eyes, the purpose of art is to enable the development of human nature towards an ideal of unity, communion, and brotherly love. Art, defined by its transmission of a feeling from one man to another and *not* by beauty or the pleasure it gives, is meant to further this ideal by transmitting the benevolent feelings meant to flow out of Christianity. Tolstoy aligns himself with Christianity to define goodness in the context of good art, but not with the church; his concept of morality is not dependent on an institution but rather on the ideal of humanity becoming more and more united in love. Art that still enables the transmission of a feeling but does not promote this unity is, in Tolstoy's definition, bad art (*What Is Art?* 111-34, 227-50 263-67). While some characters in *Anna Karenina* and *Closer* do manipulate the images around them from an outflow of true or authentic feeling, this feeling does not promote a communal ideal of love but rather a more individual, self-centered ideal, leading those images to be bad art.

Tolstoy also defines four types of counterfeit art, or, art that does not transmit a feeling at all and still leads to division. “Borrowing” technique, subject, or overall feeling from other works of art is regarded as poetic romanticization of what people think art should be. This is therefore present when characters choose to romanticize what they want to see in other characters rather than see others for who they truly are. “Imitation” of real life is considered counterfeit art because it gives all the details of what life is without any of the true feeling behind it. This occurs when characters act in accordance with what is expected of them from society, which simultaneously serves to hide their true feelings in the moment. “Striking” counterfeit art strives to have a great effect on the senses of the receivers, and this occurs specifically when characters are sexually explicit and honest in order to avoid true vulnerability. “Interesting” counterfeit art is meant to engage the mind in guessing its meaning, and is present when characters focus solely on intellectual issues rather than the authentic selves of others. These four types of counterfeit art, like Tolstoy’s definition of bad art, lead individuals and society in general into division and numbness of feeling rather than promoting a unity and communion with others (*What Is Art?* 181-92, 239). All four of these types of counterfeit art are found in *Anna Karenina* and *Closer*, both in the physical works of art and the immaterial images of the self and others created by the characters. Most of the main characters present themselves in a certain way or choose to see others in a certain way not because of any true feeling for the other, but as a way to perpetuate their own, often self-centered, ideal lifestyle. While this ideal may arise from the true self of the character, it is not aligned with Tolstoy’s more communal ideal of unity in love and therefore ultimately leads to the hiding or sacrificing of the true self with the creation of counterfeit images.

Beyond Tolstoy's theories, art has long been associated with the pursuit of the ideal, though often that ideal is in terms of beauty. While Tolstoy writes that art should push humanity to a more transcendent reality of unity and love, more generally, humanity has often used art to supply or pursue what it is lacking—perfection, beauty, their own individual ideals. This is what F. Wellington Ruckstuhl, writing in 1917, has identified as "the restless and instinctive search by man for the good, and for the better so long as an ever-better can be found" (254). However, there is another strain of art that, rather than idealizing aspects of humanity, exaggerates its shortcomings in a grotesque image of violence, pain, and suffering. Ruckstuhl names this tendency "modernistic idealism" and defines it as "not exclud[ing] the representation of the bizarre, the mystic, the ugly or the horrible…[but] rather lean[ing] towards them" (255). Charles Baudelaire, a poet and critic with whom Tolstoy disagreed (*What Is Art* 156-80), is a quintessential example of this modernistic ideal. In *A History of Modern Criticism*, written in 1965, René Wellek discusses Baudelaire's theories concerning art (443):

> Art is not "idealization" because nature, while evil, must not be "purified" by abstraction or sentimentalization: rather, nature is taken up into the permanence of art, metamorphosed, symbolized, but not evaporated. This is, at least, the novelty of Baudelaire's poetic sensibility: his power over the ugly and the evil. "The horrible, artistically expressed, becomes beauty, and pain, rhythmic and cadenced, fills the mind with calm joy." At times this power is conceived of as a momentary escape or mere illusion. "The intoxication of art hides the terrors of the abyss: for genius can play comedy on the edge of the tomb." …Thus irony is another fundamental requirement of art, next to supernaturalism.

Tolstoy and Baudelaire fundamentally disagree, as Tolstoy defines art in terms of progressing towards an ideal and Baudelaire defines it in terms of making the real world, with all of the pain and ugliness included, beautiful. However, both connect the purpose of art with the desire for making real life something more than it is.

These ideas contextualize the eight main characters' reliance on art (their images created for themselves and others) in their pursuit of their individual ideals. Characters use these images to pursue that "ever-better" thing they believe is available or, failing a belief that there is something better, use the irony that Baudelaire believed fundamental to art to embrace their current brokenness as their ideal. Rather than progressing towards Tolstoy's ideals of love and unity, the ideals of the characters are self-serving, and thus lead to division and numbness of feeling between characters. This is because the images the characters use are counterfeit—in Tolstoy's language, they lack true feeling; they are not authentic to the characters' true selves. This is at times a form of protection; rather than risk the vulnerability and potential pain that pursuing something better and more authentic would bring, the characters sacrifice or hide their spiritual selves in favour of focusing on and manipulating their material selves. This applies to how some characters choose to view each other as well.

Anna Karenina

Anna Karenina is centered on the love stories of four main characters. Konstantin Levin, an upper-class farmer, is in love with and hopes to marry Kitty Scherbatsky, daughter of the Prince and Princess Scherbatsky, who lives in Moscow. Kitty is at first in love with Count Vronsky, an officer in the army, but Vronsky then meets Anna Karenina, a beautiful woman in upper-class society, falls in love with her, and follows her to Petersburg. Anna is likewise in love with Vronsky, but she is married to Karenin, an official in the Russian government, and has a

child with him. Through the events of the book, Kitty and Levin eventually marry and have a child, and Anna starts an affair with Vronsky. This affair continues after she leaves her husband until she commits suicide in the penultimate section of the book. All four characters use counterfeit images in some way to preserve or pursue their own ideals, often centered around the love they wish to gain from others.

Kitty Scherbatsky's first ideal is to be the wife of Vronsky—a handsome, fashionable young man who is beloved in the eyes of society and pays Kitty encouraging attentions. In hopes of Vronsky proposing, Kitty refuses Levin's hand in marriage, though she has known him longer and her father wishes her to accept. This refusal can be seen as the result of a counterfeit image on Kitty's part. After interacting with Vronsky one evening, she reflects, "It was as if there were some falseness—not in [Vronsky], he was very simple and nice—but in herself, while with Levin she felt completely simple and clear" (7). Even before Vronsky leaves her, Kitty recognizes that her interactions with him are not true to herself; rather they are a counterfeit image, one that imitates real life as her actions can be seen as what society expects of her. Kitty's friend, Countess Nordston, for example, wishes "to get Kitty married according to her own ideal of happiness, and therefore she wished her to marry Vronsky" (49). Kitty's actions in pursuit of this ideal that is influenced by others in society only lead eventually to her heartbreak and depression when Vronsky leaves her.

Kitty's travels to Germany with her family in hopes of recovering from this heartbreak lead to her pursuing another ideal. Kitty meets Madame Stahl, a pietist who, in Kitty's eyes, lives perfectly. The pietist movement could be categorized as one of the spiritual fads of the 19th century—a way that people tried to achieve a spiritual ideal through, as translators Volokhonsky and Pevear explain, "favouring inner peace and prayer over external ritual, with more than a

touch of smug sanctimoniousness" (825n34). Kitty certainly sees Madame Stahl's actions and beliefs as ideal, and tries to emulate them to the best of her ability. However, Madame Stahl's actions are not based on or inspired by any inner, transcendent feeling. They are not truly a part of a search for deeper spirituality; rather, as Kitty's father reveals to her, Madame Stahl is a bitter old woman who acts from piety only for appearances. Kitty then sees her own image as counterfeit: "she understood that she had deceived herself in thinking that she could be what she wished to be" (236). She romanticizes pious actions in imitation of someone who is herself pretending, thus essentially displaying the "borrowing" type of counterfeit art. It is an image that Kitty adds to her true self in pursuit of this pious ideal, but in the end it only leads to division, as counterfeit images do in Tolstoy's estimation. In her resolve to care for the sick around her, Kitty helps a married artist, but by her presence it is evident that she drives a wedge between this artist and his wife. As she says herself, "I caused a quarrel and… I did what nobody asked me to do. Because it was all pretense!" (235). Kitty's actions were "not from the heart" (235): they were not inspired by true feeling (a desire for unity and brotherly love) like good art is; rather Kitty's ideals were ultimately self-serving as they revolved around how she wanted to be seen. The fallen human element within herself had not changed, just as Madame Stahl had not changed from being a bitter old woman. Therefore, her actions done in pretense only lead to division.

Levin, Kitty's eventual husband, is a man full of ideals, and he often finds himself frustrated with society as a whole and with himself for not living up to them. The most prominent example of this is, perhaps, found in his time in the city while Kitty is pregnant and preparing to give birth. While there, Levin is obligated to imitate, using Tolstoy's language, a real life role that is expected of him but that is not consistent with his character. These expectations or ideals of city society essentially boil down to calling on others, spending money

on needless things, and doing nothing useful, helpful, or scholarly. Levin does not respond well to these ideals; as Kitty notices, he is not himself in the city: “She loved his calm, gentle, and hospitable tone in the country. But in the city he was constantly anxious and wary, as if fearing someone might offend him and, above all, her” (671). However, over time, Levin becomes more accustomed to the ways of society and “those unproductive but inevitable expenses” (677) necessary to be a part of it. Levin, surrounded by society’s ideals that he would shrink to call his own, eventually and inevitably adopts them, and this leads to discord between himself and Kitty. After going to the club with his friend Oblonsky and drinking quite a bit, he leaves with Oblonsky to visit Oblonsky’s sister, Anna Karenina, at that point deep in her affair and living with Vronsky. Though perhaps a more sober self would have seen how his actions would hurt Kitty, the whole influence of society and Levin’s eventual conformity to it leads him to visit Anna regardless. As he says himself, “living so long in Moscow, just talking, eating, and drinking, he had got befuddled” (703). The counterfeit image of imitation that Levin steps into leads to both a numbness towards what he knew and felt was right, similar to the numbness of excessive alcohol, and a division between himself and Kitty that takes time to reconcile.

While in this case Levin adopts society’s ideals as his own and lives with the consequences of the resulting counterfeit image, he also uses images to preserve his own idea of the ideal. Throughout much of the book, Levin views Kitty through a lens that is inauthentic to her real self. His view of her as ideal is portrayed as a product of his love for her: “Levin was in love, and therefore it seemed to him that Kitty was so perfect in all respects, a being so far above everything earthly, while he was such a base earthly being, that it was unthinkable for others or for Kitty herself to acknowledge him as worthy of her” (22). His view of Kitty as perfection contrasts with his view of his own imperfection, especially in the realm of sexual purity. As

such, he believes himself unworthy of her and is constantly insecure about her love for him. Levin's image of Kitty is inspired by his true inner feeling, but it also divides him from Kitty at times because it inspires jealousy and discord, thus falling under Tolstoy's definition of bad art. A prominent example of this occurs when a man called Veslovsky begins to flirt with Kitty and Levin assumes Kitty to be cheating on him because of his own view of his unworthiness. His counterfeit image of her perfection only heightened his jealousy and suspicion as Kitty's own actions threatened to break his view of her. This leads to division between him and Kitty, and Levin's suspicions of Kitty's infidelity are only put to rest by her repeated affirmation of her strong love for him. While Levin's actions often originate from a place of wanting everything to be ideal, those ideals are still primarily self-serving; it is not for Kitty that he believes her to be perfect, but for himself. Thus, when he believes his image of her to be threatened, it causes disruption and division.

Using images to preserve an ideal is also present in Anna Karenina and Vronsky's relationship. To love and be loved by Vronsky becomes Anna's ideal when she meets him, and her actions continually protect and pursue that ideal. Throughout the book, these actions and interactions rely on her projection of an image to others that is not consistent with her true feelings. This is at its most evident when, at a time of severe emotional tribulation, she continues to act as the hostess to one of Vronsky's friends, not even knowing herself why she does so: "Why, when there was a storm in her soul and she felt she was standing at a turning point in her life that might have terrible consequences, why at such a moment she should have to pretend in front of a stranger…she did not know" (749). At that moment, Anna is doubtful of Vronsky's love for her, and yet she continues to imitate the role of a loving wife (though she is his lover) that acts as hostess to her husband's friends. However, the disconnect between Anna's inner

feelings and outer images in many of her interactions is characterized more by her words than by her actions. D. S. Merezhovsky points out that "It is easier to lie with words than with body gestures and facial expressions" (771), and it is true that Anna often expresses her true feelings through her physical expressions while deceiving others with her words. This is especially evident through her interactions with her husband when he comes to visit their country house before he knows for certain that she is having an affair. Though Anna's words welcome him in, her body "shuddered with revulsion" (206) after he left. Regardless, Anna's actions and words are imitations of the roles she has in society (of a hostess or dutiful wife), and are therefore counterfeit images. She uses these imitations to preserve her ideal—she must hide her love for Vronsky from her husband in order to have it, and she feels she must be the best possible hostess in order to keep hold of Vronsky's then-fading love for her.

Both Anna and Vronsky, throughout their relationship, struggle to preserve the ideal that they hold of each other and of their love. From early on, Anna, "at every meeting…was bringing together her imaginary idea of him (an incomparably better one, impossible in reality) with him as he was" (357). Evidently, she is viewing Vronsky through an ideal lens of poetic romanticization, essentially "borrowing" beauty and romance in order to see what she wishes to see, much like how Levin views Kitty. Vronsky does this as well, particularly through a portrait that he paints of Anna while they are in Italy. While there, Vronsky paints as an amateur who imitates other great works, specifically medieval paintings, which also falls under Tolstoy's definition of "borrowing" art in order to produce counterfeit art. Eduard Babaev likewise identifies this, and notices that Vronsky's imitation extends to how he sees Anna: "He wanted to see Anna changed, also" (828). This is a significant contrast to the master artist that captures Anna's essence in his portrait so perfectly that Vronsky sees it and thinks that he should be the

only one to see that deeply into Anna. However, Vronsky is not able to see or capture that depth of Anna's person, and, as Babaev comments, "Nothing reveals so clearly the true relationship of Vronsky to Anna as his portrait…. Vronsky's medieval enthusiasms reveal the 'abyss' which was to swallow up both Anna's life and her brief happiness" (830-31). The lack of true feeling in Vronsky's medieval portrayal of Anna shows the inability of the two to actually be happy with each other as the images that both use are simply imitations of being happy, beautiful, and ideal.

After their time in Italy, Anna and Vronsky move back to the countryside in Russia, where they continue trying to preserve their ideal love through counterfeit images that imitate what their roles in society would be as a true husband and wife. Dolly Oblonsky, Anna's sister-in-law, notices this when she goes to visit them. In Dolly's eyes, the interactions between Anna, Vronsky, and their guests all appear to be a part of a play: "All that day [Dolly] had had the feeling that she was playing in the theatre with actors better than herself and that her poor playing spoiled the whole thing" (634). Though Dolly has been received kindly by the hostess, she sees Anna's life for what it is: a counterfeit portrayal of life that is not based on the sort of true feeling that imbues meaning into art. This portrayal hides, as Dolly learns from private conversations with both Vronsky and Anna, the true difficulties of their situation. Both individuals are sensible of how living alone in the country is only a temporary solution, yet neither can discuss it with the other for fear of how they will react, a reaction which could disrupt their ideal counterfeit images of each other.

This reliance on counterfeit images and moving from place to place to try to make their love ideal and happy again only results in Anna and Vronsky becoming more and more numb to true, selfless love. This is evident in the way that Anna's and Vronsky's views of each other change. Anna's suspicion of Vronsky and Vronsky's subsequent boredom and decreasing love

for her begins early on in their relationship, but it comes to a head near the end of the book. Anna begins to imagine Vronsky as worse than he actually is instead of idealizing him: “All the cruelest words a coarse man could say, he said to her in her imagination, and she could not forgive him for them, as if he actually said them to her” (751). Anna continually suspects Vronsky wants to leave her for another woman and is hiding letters and actions from her. Her view of him is still a counterfeit image, but now it is one that she built up because he is not fulfilling her need for love. Rather than increasing his good qualities, she exaggerates his faults, and thereby increases the division between them. Vronsky also changes his view of Anna. In contrast to his idealization of her in the portrait, he thinks to himself, “He liked [Anna’s appearance], but he had already liked it so many times!” (667). In his analysis of physical expressions in Anna Karenina, Merezhovsky notices that Anna and Vronsky interact most often through actions and expressions rather than substantive words. Eyes, lips, hands, gestures—all communicate the love between them. This suddenly changes, however, when Anna perceives that Vronsky “was disgusted by her hand, and her gesture, and the sound her lips made” (748). Vronsky, by the end of their relationship, becomes dissatisfied with Anna’s looks, her image, and rather than elevating her to his own ideal (as in the portrait), he lowers her to the point of being disgusted with her.

For both Anna and Vronsky, the way they view each other is not reflective of true feeling—it is first fabricated based on what they wish or imagine their partner to be and later exaggerates the negative qualities that they see in each other. As Anna realizes near her death, their first liaison is also what drives them apart. This is because of the selfishness of their pursuits; their need for love is for themselves, not for each other. Each implores the other to think of them, and each assumes that the other will know what they need and are upset when it is

not provided. Their focus on the material, sensual aspects of their partners, rather than on a true emotional connection, becomes the basis of their images of each other. These counterfeit images, instead of preserving their ideal love, only separate them more.

Closer

Closer, a play by Patrick Marber, is, similarly to *Anna Karenina*, concerned with the romantic and sexual relationships among four individuals. The play begins with Alice and Dan having a conversation in a hospital after Alice has been hit by a car. They are strangers, but soon Dan leaves his girlfriend, Ruth, to be with Alice. Through the events of the play, Dan accidentally sets up Larry and Anna, but then Anna and Dan have an affair. After they split up with Larry and Alice, Larry meets Alice at the strip club where she works and they start a casual relationship. Eventually Dan goes back to be with Alice, but when he presses her for details on her relationship with Larry, Alice leaves him. The final scene occurs with the three remaining characters reuniting after finding out about Alice's death by being hit by another car.

Larry, Anna, Dan, and Alice, like the characters in *Anna Karenina*, are all pursuing in some way an ideal or happy life. Marber states this in an interview by saying that the play "[is] about the pursuit of happiness…. And that pursuit can be a brutal business" (interview by Riedel and Haskins). In this way, the ideal that the characters of *Closer* are pursuing is more similar to the "modernist ideal" that Ruckstuhl describes. This is the idea of emphasizing and exaggerating the pain of the material world (Ruckstuhl 255) rather than pursuing Tolstoy's more spiritual ideal. Indeed, the characters seem to believe that the fulfillment or pursuit of their material and sensual desires is not worth sacrificing for any deeper, genuine connection with another individual. The ideals of the characters, therefore, like in *Anna Karenina*, are mostly self-centered. Marber even notes in an interview that he wanted the play to be about how love can

bring about the worst in people rather than the best and that “love sometimes makes us selfish” (interview by Riedel and Haskins).

The characters seem to be aware of the possibility of more authentic relationships with others, something that transcends only the material world, but ultimately they decide it is not attainable. This is evident throughout the script through various beats and pauses in the stage directions. A scene that exemplifies this occurs when Larry is at the strip club with Alice. After a conversation about truth and intimacy, Larry asks Alice to strip for him again, and she asks, “That’s what you want?” after which there is a “beat” in the script, as if Larry is considering what he truly wants, and if there is something more to want. By saying “What else could I want?” (73), he shows that he chooses to believe there is nothing more than material satisfaction to want, and he certainly isn’t going to risk losing what he has for any deeper vulnerability. These sorts of interactions happen throughout the play; instead of risking being vulnerable and living in authentic communion with one another, the characters try to preserve their ideal, though broken, reality through the images they use. The counterfeit images of how the characters present themselves and choose to see others relate again to Tolstoy’s categories of borrowing, imitation, and striking types of counterfeit art. Thus, as it is in *Anna Karenina*, the counterfeit images the characters use lead to division and numbness of feeling.

Alice’s actions are a prominent example of projecting, in Tolstoy’s language, a striking counterfeit image of herself rather than reality. She works as a stripper, and the audience encounters her in this way when Larry pays to have a private room with her. Her role as a stripper is to continually shape her actions and her self to fulfill men’s sensual desires. She is good at this because she knows what men want from her, which she tells to Dan in the very first scene, and it is also evident when she says, “I’m telling you the truth… Because it’s what you

want" (64) to Larry. What she provides as a stripper is stimulation for the material senses, not any true or deeper intimacy. It is important to note, however, that Alice does not view her performance of a self shaped to men's desires as a bad thing. As she says herself, "Lying is the most fun a girl can have without taking her clothes off. But it's better if you do" (73). Alice willingly participates in these lies, and she is an example of not wanting to risk vulnerability (particularly emotional vulnerability) because she sees the world as full of lies. This sensual counterfeit image that she portrays of herself at the strip club is contrasted by the fact that the strip club is actually a place where Alice feels she can be honest. She shows her entire sensual and material self and even uses her real name, Jane Jones, because the strip club is also a space where she is protected—there are security cameras and two-way mirrors and guards. This honesty should not be confused with vulnerability—her willingness to be truthful about her physical identity only highlights her decision to protect her emotional, spiritual self.

This is Alice's ideal—to have that inner self protected and hidden. She seeks and finds this protection for a while in her relationship with Dan. In a confession to Anna about why she wants to be with Dan, she says, "You wouldn't understand; he…buries me. He makes me invisible" (91). When asked what she is hiding from, she says, "Everything. Everything's a lie, nothing matters" (91). Alice considers herself able to discern the truth—that everything is a lie and that everyone lies, and therefore she also lies and wants to protect her true inner self, which can be hidden in her relationship with Dan. Here she does the opposite from what she does at the strip club—she lies about her identity and yet wants to give and receive true love. However, her ability to love and be loved is inhibited by her separation of the inner and outer, the spiritual and material of herself, or in other words, a presentation of counterfeit images. Because of these images Alice projects, the people around her are not able to truly know and love her authentic,

inner self. For example, when Dan wants to uncover the truth and repeatedly asks her about if she slept with Larry, Alice feels she can no longer hide with him, no longer loves him, and leaves him. In fact, by this second time that she is in a relationship with Dan (after she leaves him because of his affair with Anna), it resembles an imitation of her relationship with him before; it is an ideal counterfeit image. Dan, by his insistence to know the truth, shatters this imitation and therefore her ability to hide in her relationships with him—so she says, "Now go or I'll call… security" and Dan replies, "You're not in a strip club. There is no security" (110). By threatening security she shows her desire for that other place where her vulnerable inner self is protected through counterfeit images—the strip club. To Alice, vulnerability and authenticity is a risk she is unwilling to take in a world of lies, but her choice to protect herself with counterfeit, material images only leads to a loss of any true connection in her relationship with Dan.

Dan is continually searching for the next person who will make him happier, and then he chooses to see his own ideal in that person. This is a form of the "borrowing" type of counterfeit art because Dan is romanticizing a real person to fit what he wishes them to be. Dan first does this with Alice, for whom he leaves Ruth, when he writes a book about Alice's life. When Larry asks Alice if the book is about her, she says, "Some of me" to which he responds, "Oh? What did he leave out?" to which Alice says, "The truth" (38). It is evident here that Dan's "portrait" of Alice in his book, the way that he sees her, is false in comparison to the actual Alice. In fact, Alice has to continually draw Dan back to her true self from the counterfeit images of herself portrayed throughout the play. At the exhibition where Anna's photo of Alice is featured, she has to say "I'm here" (34), and when Dan is reminiscing about how perfect Alice was when he first met her, Alice has to remind him, "I still am" (106). Rather than seeing Alice for who she is, Dan romanticizes her beauty and her life for his own self-centered ideal.

Dan then leaves Alice for Anna saying, “I think I’ll be happier with her” (54), but in reality Dan also sees his relationship with Anna through a counterfeit image of his own ideal. When Anna shatters his view of her by saying she slept with Larry to get the divorce papers signed, he says, “It’s gone…we’re not innocent anymore” (81). This is ironic as the two of them were never innocent in their affair, but it shows that the ideal way Dan had viewed their relationship was shattered by the real-life actions of Anna. In reaction to this, he asks, “What’s so great about the truth? Try lying for a change—it’s the currency of the world” (79). Dan would have preferred to preserve his own happiness and the ideal love that he had—even though it was counterfeit—but that image was destroyed by Anna confessing the truth. Natasha Richardson, who played Anna in the stage production, recognizes that the play intentionally brings up this question: “is it morally right to tell the truth always, or should you lie to save things?” (interview by Rose). While the question is not necessarily answered, with Anna, Dan certainly wants to preserve the lies through counterfeit images in order to have what he wants. In the end this only divides him from Anna. With both Anna and Alice, he does not take into account their flawed, inner, human selves, thus showing that any real feeling he had for them was only inspired by the ideal, but counterfeit, images that he perceived.

Anna does see the reality of the brokenness of the world and humans in it that Dan wants to ignore, but she uses what Tolstoy would likely classify as bad art to assuage her own guilt, therefore still leading to separation from others. Anna is a photographer, and she takes a picture of Alice crying just after Alice inferred that Dan and Anna had kissed. This picture is displayed at Anna’s exhibition, and Alice calls all of Anna’s pictures at the exhibition comforting lies because “they make the world seem beautiful” when truly all of the people photographed were “sad and alone” (37). While Anna’s picture of Alice captures her true and inner feeling at that

moment, Anna uses that picture to comfort and deceive herself. In Anna's mind, though she has hurt this woman by being with Dan, she can photograph her beautifully rather than do anything tangible to fix the situation. This tendency is later emphasized when Anna states that she is photographing "Derelict buildings" and Alice replies with, "How nice: the beauty of ugliness" (89). Anna's habit of taking beautiful photos of painful situations is reflective of Baudelaire's theories of art, but as that process does not lead her to any actions that promote unity with the people around her, her use of images falls under Tolstoy's definition of bad art.

Anna's artistic choices are reflected in her own life and actions. Instead of pursuing true happiness in authentic relationships with others, she emphasizes the pain of her life, especially in her own guilt. Larry understands this part of Anna; when he talks to Dan about why Anna agreed to sleep with him he says, "she's a Catholic—she loves a guilty fuck" (95). While partly joking, this does ring true for Anna's character as she is the one who most often dwells on her own guilt. She later admits to Alice that she simply acted for her own means, "I had a choice and I chose to be selfish. I'm sorry" (91), but she does not actually act on her guilt to try to make things better. Anna's dwelling on guilt may be a reaction against those who do not recognize their guilt at all, similar to how the photographs she takes highlight brokenness in the world. However, just as the photos are, in Alice's estimation, only comforting lies and do not bring about any action in pursuit of unity, so Anna's dwelling on guilt functions as a way to comfort herself that she is doing enough rather than as an instigator to repair the broken relationships around her. Indeed, her refusal to care for Alice's pain leads her to Dan and in separation from Larry, and her dwelling on guilt leads to sleeping with Larry and telling Dan. These images that Anna surrounds herself with, both physical and in the ways she emphasizes her own guilt and pain, fall under Tolstoy's definition of bad art because they separate her from those she attempts to love.

Instead of projecting his own counterfeit images, Larry often sees through and takes advantage of the images of others. He often does so especially for his own gain, as he, like all the characters in the play, is motivated by selfishness, specifically a self-centered pursuit of material satisfaction. This is evident in almost all of his interactions with Alice—though he sees that she just wants to be loved, he is really only using her role as a stripper to get over Anna. As Alice says to Anna, "He spends hours staring up my arsehole like there's going to be some answer there [about why Anna left]" (89). Though Larry may want true intimacy with the person he is with, he thinks it is impossible to attain. This leads him to seek out a strip club, where he finds Alice and uses the striking counterfeit image she presents there to try and satisfy his material desires instead.

Larry also understands the way that Dan and Anna see the world, and he uses that to manipulate them. He knows that Anna will sleep with him in order to obtain the divorce papers, and he knows that it will ruin Dan's perception of her. As he says to Dan, "I fucked her to fuck you up" (95). He also tells Dan about sleeping with Alice, knowing that it will also mess up their relationship because, as Larry says, "I'm just… not… big enough to forgive you" (101). Larry manipulates and attacks the lenses through which Dan and Anna see the world—Dan through his poetic counterfeit images, and Anna through her dwelling on guilt and pain. This manipulation reveals a desire for revenge on Dan and Anna, and it does not restore any authentic relationship he might have had with Anna. Rather, he settles for material satisfaction and for knowing that he has also ruined Dan's relationships with both Anna and Alice. Larry takes the preservation of his ideal of material satisfaction a step further by also using the counterfeit images surrounding the other three characters to ensure that they will also lose any chance they had at authentic relationships with each other.

Society's Influence on Images and the Ideal

Tolstoy's theories in *What Is Art?* extend to how he sees art in relation to the development of society. In Tolstoy's eyes, the four types of counterfeit art as well as bad art are produced in order to perpetuate the lifestyle of the upper-class (mostly defined in idleness, excess, and pride) and divide them from the lower class (*What Is Art?* 134-55, 251-67). Tolstoy comes to the conclusion that society is not progressing towards his ideal of unity and love, but that does not mean that society is not progressing towards any ideal. Rather, Ruckstuhl posits that there is a "blind, instinctive pursuit of perfection [that] is the root and law of all progressive evolution, and even of decay" (255). In this, Tolstoy would probably agree, as he defines art as an organ of social progress but also identifies how the upper-class pursuit of an excess of beauty (perfection) is actually decaying the development of society. Tolstoy even contrasts the ways that society, in the eyes of the upper-class, has progressed in science, technology, and ideas with his belief that humans have not developed in their nature towards an actual unity of mankind (*What Is Art?* 251-52, 264-65). This relates to what Dostoevsky identifies in Tolstoy's work: in his "approach to culpability and human delinquency it is clearly revealed that…no elimination of poverty, no organization of labor will save mankind from abnormality, and therefore,—from guilt and criminality" (760). While society may develop outwardly, it does not follow that human nature will develop towards Tolstoy's ideal.

The contrast between the outward progress of society and the inward stagnancy of human nature is evident in both *Anna Karenina* and *Closer*. Just as Tolstoy's evaluation of his society led him to see that the presence of counterfeit and bad art was leading the development of human nature in the opposite direction of the ideal, so the counterfeit images that the characters use in both works lead them into more division, separation, hurt, and brokenness. While outward

developments of society are present in both the book and the play—through technology, political change, and new social customs—the characters are like the upper-class depicted in *What Is Art?* because they use images to preserve their ideal and self-centered lifestyle; a lifestyle that is devoid of that true feeling that allows them to connect authentically with other people.

Anna Karenina

Levin's frustrations with himself and with the society around him in his pursuit of the ideal reflect Tolstoy's perspective on the decay rather than progress of the upper-class. Levin is constantly searching throughout the book for some sort of deeper, more transcendent ideal. Because of this, he often views any social progress as shallow and irrelevant as it does not truly help the humans it is meant to help. From Levin's first appearance in the book, everyone assumes that he is still involved in the zemstvo, a relatively new form of provincial government. He replies, however, by saying it is a "plaything" (18) and that nothing they do has any real value. Any progress made in philosophical scholarship is also frustrating to Levin; when he interacts with his half-brother and other thinkers of the day, they never discuss, in his opinion, "the most important thing," something connected with "inner, spiritual questions" (24). And again, in a conversation with other farmers, he notices inconsistencies between what his one friend, Sviyazhsky, thinks and reasons and the actual principles by which he lives and governs his farm. There is a disconnect between Sviyazhsky's inner and outer lives; reason alone cannot change his actions because it is not connected in any way to what he actually feels. This perhaps encapsulates Levin's frustrations with his current society—in it, there is a continual refusal to actually connect the spiritual and material, to live outwardly in such a way that makes true change towards an ideal. Levin notices the counterfeit images of the people around him: the way they try to be interesting (to use another of Tolstoy's four types) and intellectually engaging

without engaging true feeling, or the way that they imitate roles in society without any connection to the inner self. These images, especially those related to government and farming, are simply ways to perpetuate the separation between the upper- and lower-classes. The people in charge may discuss and reason that a change needs to be made, but in their true selves they are not willing to do so. Being surrounded by these images in society also leads to engaging in them himself, as previously shown to happen during the time that Levin and Kitty move to the city.

Tolstoy also shows the lack of development in society towards his ideal in its attitude towards adultery in contrast to Anna Karenina's depth of feeling. Stiva Oblonsky, like his sister Anna, has an affair, and yet his affair does not destroy his entire life as it does with Anna. This is because his affair is motivated by sensation and physical satisfaction in contrast to the deeper emotion of Anna and Vronsky. Donna Tussing Orwin identifies this in Oblonsky's moral outlook: "Since nothing but matter exists and everything happens according to predetermined physical laws, the life of the body, which Stiva lives to the fullest, is the only life possible" (853). Oblonsky does not feel guilty or upset over his actions and how they hurt other people, as long as outward peace is restored, because he is solely motivated by his material sensations. This nonchalance of adulterers towards infidelity is prevalent throughout society; there are several people identified as having an affair, and yet none of them is affected by it in the way that Anna is. In fact, one of her friends, Betsy, tells Anna that she is perhaps "inclined to look at things too tragically" (298), showing that Anna's feelings of guilt and turmoil over her affair is an anomaly. Boris Eikhenbaum comments on this guilt by saying that "Anna and Vronsky became subject to moral judgment ("eternal justice") only because, in the grip of genuine passion, they rose above this world of utter hypocrisy, lying, and emptiness, and entered into the world of human

feelings" (788). Anna believes that, with Vronsky, she has arrived at a truer version of herself and that she has experienced deeper emotion with him than ever before.

This is evident in the contrast between how she views Vronsky and her husband. With her husband she feels that she is in a "state of pretense" (104), but Vronsky says to her what her "soul desired" (103). Again, when Anna and Vronsky meet later on, she is described as having a "new, spiritual beauty" (139), and this description reflects the deep nature of her feelings for him. However, Anna's need to hide her love for Vronsky is in conflict with her normally genuine and honest nature. She says herself that she "can't bear lying" (207), and that she is not at peace with the love that she has for Vronsky. This is portrayed in contrast to the other society women and men who also commit adultery, but do so in accordance with their rather shallow nature that seeks to be fulfilled by sensations. How ironic it is, then, that it is this society that would still outwardly condemn Anna's actions if she were to be open about them. Thus, Anna and Vronsky feel the need to preserve and protect their lifestyle through the images they use both in how they show themselves to the world and to each other.

Anna and Vronsky endeavor to escape this society by moving to Italy after Anna nearly dies giving birth to their daughter. However, instead of being a place where Anna and Vronsky can live authentically without the counterfeit images they used in Russian society, their time in Italy serves as a counterfeit aesthetic that mirrors and perpetuates their inability to be truly happy. In this setting, Vronsky pursues what is fashionable, specifically medieval art, made famous by the Pre-Raphaelites. There was a societal craze at that moment of amateur painters imitating great works of art (Babaev 828). While all of the painters, including Vronsky, are making an effort to pursue something beautiful and ideal, their works fall flat because they have borrowed inspiration—it has not come out of any deeper inner feeling. This is something that

begins to define Anna and Vronsky's relationship as well, symbolized through the portrait Vronsky paints—they continue to pursue their ideal love, but it ends up being an imitation, a counterfeit image, as they cannot truly love each other and exist without reproach in society.

This is continued when Anna and Vronsky move back to the city in another effort to preserve their ideal by obtaining a divorce from Karenin. In the city, Anna realizes the impossibility of her station in society in contrast to Vronsky's freedom to act normally. Her friends cannot visit her as she is a fallen woman, and when she goes out she knows this is how she will be perceived. Anna is constrained in her life and pursues escape through books and morphine, as well as in her work as a benefactress to a poor English girl. Vronsky calls her care for this girl "unnatural," and this comment "destroyed the world she had so laboriously built up for herself in order to endure her difficult life" because it implied to Anna that "it's unnatural for me to love someone else's child when I don't love my own daughter" (741). Anna, at this point, has two children—a son with Karenin and a daughter with Vronsky—but it is clear in the book that Anna has given all of her love and motherly instinct only to her son whom she is now separated from because of her affair. Thus, Vronsky calling her care for the English girl "unnatural," though indeed cruel, hits on the point that Anna has built up this counterfeit image of motherhood to replace the true motherhood that she experienced with her son. Society's hypocrisy and alienation of Anna push her into using a reflection of society's counterfeit images herself in order to imitate what she wishes her life to be. Vronsky and Anna's refusal to discard the counterfeit images that they have built up in pursuit of their ideal of love only drives them apart. While society has progressed outwardly, counterfeit images and hypocrisy are still prevalent, and this inhibits those functioning in society like Anna, Vronsky, and even Levin as

they try to pursue authentic connection. Inevitably, these characters end up adopting reflections of the counterfeit images used in society, leading them to the same ends of division.

Closer

Closer also pairs the progress of society with the stunted development of human nature towards the spiritual ideal of unity and love that Tolstoy presents in *What Is Art?*. Marber mentions that he "set out to write an honest portrayal of love in the '90s" (interview by Rose), meaning that he intentionally paired modernity with the timeless themes of love and betrayal. These themes are relevant beyond the '90s as well, as Michael Billington notes in his review of a 2015 production of the play: "Marber's portrait of the failure of men and women to achieve spiritual as well as sexual intimacy seems as powerful and pertinent as ever" (n.p.). This failure is in spite of the outward, technological progress that society has made, as "all four characters still have a bottomless capacity for suffering and…the new freedoms—and the play embraces laptop sex and lapdance clubs—have done nothing to resolve the pain and anxiety of intimate relationship" (Billington). While society has progressed in the '90s with new technology, *Closer* makes it clear that humans themselves still suffer, are still selfish, and still often fail at achieving anything more than material satisfaction.

This idea, that societal development does not equal human development towards the unity of mankind, is reflected in the sexually explicit nature of the play as a whole. Marber comments that "It goes into territory of really examining how sexual jealousy feels, the madness of it and the savagery of it, in a way that perhaps hasn't quite been done on stage on that level before" (interview by Rose). Though the play is not necessarily revolutionary in this respect, it is modern in the sense that it takes this examination further. The whole play is very forthright and honest in the material sense—often the characters reveal every detail of their sexual exploits or

every part of themselves—but in the end, this honesty only drives the characters further apart. This new level of including sexual content in plays in the '90s only reveals the fact that it doesn't lead to any true intimacy between the characters. This is most plainly observed in Larry. He is the one who seeks out the internet chatroom and has a version of internet sex with Dan pretending to be Anna, and he is the one who seeks out a strip club after being left by Anna. By doing this, Larry pursues what Tolstoy identifies as counterfeit art, art that just strikes the senses and, in Tolstoy's estimation, numbs true and deeper feeling. The ironic nature of seeking intimacy in the most forthright but least intimate places is central to the play. Susannah Clapp, writing a review of *Closer* for *The Guardian*, describes this irony specifically in reference to the internet sex scene: "Yet it is still a stirring and more than ingenious scene: A graphic demonstration of an idea about human exchanges. The more frank the proclamation, the bigger the lie. *Closer* is about growing further apart" (n.p.). In this scene, as in the whole play, sexual forthrightness does not equal intimacy because the characters are only using it for material satisfaction, making it a counterfeit image.

Larry's use of the internet chatroom and the strip club embodies the idea of using new technology, which represents the development of society, to fulfill the same basic sensual human desires, thereby showing the unchanging nature of humanity. When Larry, in a later conversation with Anna, realizes he has been duped by Dan pretending to be Anna on the internet, she says, "Wonderful thing, the Internet… The possibility of genuine global communication, the last great democratic medium," to which Larry says, "Absolutely, it's the future," and Anna responds quite jokingly, "Two boys tossing in cyberspace" (32). This exchange emphasizes how, whatever the progress in society, people will use the new technology to do the same things. This is also shown in the renovation of the strip club in which Larry finds Alice. When Larry first went to that strip

club years before it was very different, but he muses on it now, saying, “Everything is a Version of Something Else” (63). However new the strip club appears, its purpose is the same because people continue to want the same satisfaction of the senses. The images that Larry pursues here, and the counterfeit nature of these images as they are not inspired by feeling from the inner self, lead Larry into a numbness that renders him incapable of maintaining a fulfilling relationship. Like Tolstoy’s evaluation of upper-class society, outward progress here does not reflect any change in human nature, and in fact it only continues numbness and division as a result of counterfeit images.

Larry’s actions are representative of what each character in *Closer* and *Anna Karenina* is trying to do with their counterfeit images: preserve their ideals. Larry, Alice, Dan, Anna, and the characters in *Anna Karenina* all, in their own way, hold onto the material images they have of themselves or other people in fear of what they may lose in pursuing a deeper vulnerability and connection. This is similar to how Tolstoy identifies that the upper-class society uses counterfeit images to preserve and protect their lifestyle. However, without a dismantling of these images, the characters in both *Closer* and *Anna Karenina*, along with the societies they function in, will not be able to change in pursuit of a better ideal that allows them authentic connection and unity with one another, even in light of the brokenness of human nature.

Death and Suffering as an Avenue for Authenticity

The reality of death in both *Anna Karenina* and *Closer* forces many characters to reckon with the counterfeit images that are present in their lives. Nadezhda Kasavina, analyzing the theme of death in other works of Tolstoy, comments that, “In existential philosophy, the significance of a boundary situation [in this case, death] consists in its breakthrough to authentic existence” (230). In other words, death, through its inherent suffering, can dismantle the images

or “screens” (Kasavina 231) that characters use to protect themselves from the reality of life and the possibility of pain. Death, both throughout *Anna Karenina* and *Closer* and as an end for characters’ stories, either highlights the division of the characters or brings them together through a shared suffering, as the removal of images can finally allow characters to truly connect with each other. Some characters do not actually change in their lifestyle or actions after their encounter with death; rather they remain divided from others and numb to true feeling. However, for others, such as Kitty and Levin, death leads to a life that is not surrounded by counterfeit images where they can more authentically pursue love and unity with each other.

In *Anna Karenina,* Anna’s supposedly imminent death near the middle of the book affects for a short time herself, her husband Karenin, and Vronsky. After giving birth to Vronsky’s daughter in her husband’s house, most believe Anna to be lying on her deathbed. At her bedside, Karenin, who in Anna’s mind is emotionless, weeps for her death—a genuine expression of true emotion. Karenin recognizes this in himself, that he had “given himself for the first time in his life to that feeling of tender compassion which other people’s suffering evoked in him, and which he had previously been ashamed of as a bad weakness” (418). He describes, here, a sense of “spiritual joy” (419) which came from his forgiveness of Anna. Death disrupts Karenin’s focus on perceived material strength and allows his true emotions to no longer be numb. Anna, on her deathbed, also achieves a resolution of her identity and breaks down her counterfeit images. She describes another self inside of her, a self that loved Vronsky and wanted to hate Karenin, but she says as she is dying, “Now I am real, I’m whole” (412). Vronsky also achieves a deeper, more spiritual state of emotion as Anna is dying. The rules and images through which he had seen the world, and specifically Karenin, “the deceived husband” (415), had been rendered “false and inapplicable” (415) when he realized that Karenin was also capable

of real feeling and forgiveness. He understands this at the same time that he realizes his love for Anna has become deeper during her illness; he "had come to know her soul" (415), making his love more transcendent. The material lens through which Vronsky had viewed the world—the rules he had set up and his cooling love for Anna—was torn down by Anna's imminent death. Because of this, Vronsky feels a mix of shame and unhappiness so strong that he attempts suicide.

Though all three of these characters experience some deeper, more spiritual emotion separately from each other, there is also one moment where they are united in their suffering through being at Anna's deathbed. Karenin and Vronsky are both with her in her room, and she implores Karenin, "Give him your hand. Forgive him" (413). At that moment, the three characters are united both physically and spiritually, through the clasping of hands and through Karenin's forgiveness. Anna's suffering and the subsequent breaking down of counterfeit images brought these three characters closer to Tolstoy's ideal of unity among human beings. That one moment, however, does not last. Vronsky is ashamed and tries to kill himself, and after both he and Anna recover, they leave for Italy and continue on their search for an ideal love that is still riddled with counterfeit images. Likewise, Karenin's one moment of deep spiritual forgiveness only leads him to pursue an excess of surface level spirituality after Anna leaves. The situation of these three is certainly influenced by the expectations society has for them—Karenin, especially, notices a "crude force which was to guide his life in the eyes of the world and which prevented him from giving himself to his feeling of love and forgiveness" (423). Society as a whole has not developed into the unity that the three characters had for a moment, so though they may have made some change within themselves, it was not strong enough to last in the pressures and reality of a society that, in fact, drives them apart.

While Anna's deathbed does not actually contain any resolution for the characters, Kitty encounters death in such a way that counteracts the counterfeit images she was presenting early on in the book. When Levin's brother is on his deathbed, Kitty insists on visiting him with Levin. Levin does not want her to come because of the low social standing of his brother's mistress, but Kitty insists because she knows that going with Levin is a way to truly care for him as a wife. As she says, "I feel it's my duty to be with my husband when my husband is in distress" (488). When Levin allows her to come with him and she encounters the dying man, "pity in her woman's soul produced…a need to act, to find out all the details of his condition and help with them" (493). Kitty's actions and care for the dying man are inspired by true, inner feeling, which is a contrast to her time in Germany with Madame Stahl. Rather than acting with pretense and perpetuating counterfeit images, she cares for the sick with attention because she really does care. Her actions, and the love that propels them, also prompt a unity between herself and her husband. Though they are suffering, they are suffering together, and Levin's discomfort in the face of death "now, thanks to his wife's nearness…did not drive him to despair: in spite of death, he felt the necessity to live and to love" (505). Death brings, in this situation, a resolution of Kitty's counterfeit images and a continued desire to live in pursuit of Tolstoy's ideal.

This situation is contrasted in the play when Alice asks Dan why he will not allow her to go with him to his father's funeral. In a way, Alice is trying to fulfill the same duties as Kitty; she wants to be a loving partner for Dan and be there for him as he mourns. When she says, "I love you, why won't you let me?" he responds with, "It's only a weekend," but then she clarifies, saying, "Why won't you let me *love* you?" (35). Alice going with Dan would have been a manifestation of her love for him, a way for them to authentically love each other, but Dan not allowing her to come shows both how he will not let Alice love him and how he does not truly

love her. In the play as a whole, neither of them are willing to take the risk of having authentic intimacy, as is shown by the counterfeit images through which they present themselves and see each other. The reality of death, however, shows how Dan is particularly unwilling to share the deeper spiritual parts of himself with Alice. Death, as it does with Kitty and Levin, can bring people together because of its inherent suffering. However, Dan does not allow death to break down their counterfeit images, and he continues to close himself off to any vulnerability. Instead, Dan asks Anna to come with him for the weekend, and in this way his experience with death is only a way for him to continue pursuing his self-centered ideal rather than being a dismantling of the images surrounding him.

Encounters with death also end most of the characters' stories. For Anna and Vronsky, Anna's suicide brings an end to their relationship, which becomes more and more strained after Anna's anticipated death, even as both try to see the other as their ideal. Anna concludes near her death that "we're all created in order to suffer, and…we all know it and keep thinking up ways of deceiving ourselves" (766). Here, Anna sums up the main purpose of her and Vronsky's counterfeit images—a deception to hide from their actual difficulties and suffering in life. Anna and Vronsky self-centeredly pursue their ideal love, and in doing so suffer separately and divided rather than being drawn together through the authenticity that suffering can bring about. This is especially evident in how Anna views Vronsky's freedom in society while she has no ability to re-enter society normally or to care for her son. She becomes jealous and assumes that Vronsky does not love her anymore, and her jealousy and the counterfeit images she creates with it only push Vronsky further away. To Anna, the only solution to this division is death. As she is contemplating her suicide, she thinks of it "as the only way to restore the love for her in [Vronsky's] heart, to punish him and to be victorious in the struggle that the evil spirit lodged in

her heart was waging with him" (751). Anna's suicide is her final effort to fulfill her self-centered ideal—to win back the love of Vronsky for herself that she has held onto for so long. In the end, she dies by throwing herself under a train, a striking parallel to the first scene where she meets Vronsky and a worker is run over by a train. This moment contrasts the progress of society, in its use of trains and technology, with the lack of development in Anna's human nature. Anna's final effort to make Vronsky love her reveals how far Anna has strayed from Tolstoy's ideal as it is an act inspired by the thought that all is "Filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief and evil" (768) rather than by a pursuit of authentic connection and unity with others.

Levin, though living an outwardly fulfilled life, feels similarly to Anna in the final section of the book. He recognizes the presence of evil and feels that he cannot get around it in order to live a happy life. In his mind, "It was necessary to stop this dependence on evil. And there was one means—death" (789). He sees the counterfeit images that he is surrounded with and the ways that they lead to division and destruction rather than to a happy life. Levin tries to resolve his discordant self through reason—he tries to find an explanation of "what he was and what he lived for" (789)—and yet none of the new philosophers or books answer that question for him; they only convince him that his life has no meaning. It is only when he encounters a peasant in the country who describes a man as "liv[ing] for the soul" (794) that Levin begins to understand the purpose of his life. He concludes that, when he does not think about it too much, he understands naturally that he would live in pursuit of goodness. This, however, could not be found out through reason: "Reason could not discover love for the other because it's unreasonable" (797). Levin's revelation is inherently spiritual; it comes from encountering the deepest parts of his soul and not through any counterfeit image crafted by his reason. Levin becomes discouraged when this inner change does not "instantly change him in his contacts with

reality" (801), as he continues to become angry or annoyed with his half-brother and his wife. However, he also realizes that the change in his soul imbues his life with "the unquestionable meaning of good which it is in my power to put into it!" (817). These words end the book, and it is aligned with Tolstoy's ideal pursuit of goodness and unity even with the imperfections of human life. It is important to note, as well, that this realization "entered into [Levin]... imperceptibly through suffering" (817). Levin's suffering, even unto considering taking his own life, took down his images and brought him to this development in his human nature, which contrasts greatly with Anna's final moments.

Death also brings the characters together at the end of *Closer*. When Alice leaves Dan, she goes to New York where she dies from being hit by a car, a striking parallel to how she meets Dan at the beginning of the play. Though this car technology is not necessarily new, the cause of Alice's death is still similar to the cause of Anna Karenina's death in that the development of society through technology only shows the lack of development in human nature. Alice's death brings together the other three characters in the last scene, but more than that, it reveals that Alice Ayres is a fake identity for Jane Jones and that none of the characters had any true or lasting connection. Though throughout the play there is sexual forthrightness and even honesty, this language of the material does not lead to any deeper spiritual connection. They all, in Patrick Marber's words, end the play as strangers (interview by Riedel and Haskins). Anna and Larry, though briefly together again, are split up and Larry is seeing another, younger woman. This is still in pursuit of material rather than spiritual satisfaction, as, when Anna asks if she is "the one" (112), he admits that he knows she is not. Anna takes in a dog and plans to go out to the country to take a break from work, to which Larry says, "Don't become…a sad person" (113), implying that Anna is continuing to dwell on her own sadness in life. Dan, rather

than becoming a writer as he dreamed and tried to be, becomes the editor of the obituary column that he has written for since the beginning of the play. These characters, unlike some outward forms of society, do not change in their lifestyle. This is emphasized when Larry, the character who most exemplifies this theme, says, "Everyone learns, nobody changes" (112). If these three characters have learned something from the destruction in their relationships, they certainly have not acted on it by the end of the play. This is the case with Larry in particular, as Anna replies to him, "*You* don't change" (112), but all of the characters show they might know what led to their division and still do not do anything about it. Death, in this case, shows how the characters' use of counterfeit and bad images did nothing to unite them but only led to inauthenticity, numbness, and division. It does not, as with Kitty and Levin, bring about a change in lifestyle towards pursuing love and unity.

In the play, there is only a small hint that life could be more like Tolstoy's ideal—that characters could be more unified—and that is Dan's reference to his ex, Ruth, in the last scene. Ruth is happily married, with a child and another baby on the way, in contrast to Dan, who left her for Alice and then lost both Alice and Anna. Ending the play with this one beautiful note of a happy family implies that there is hope, but not for the characters who never change. Rather, the four characters of the play are stuck in their images; they refuse to let go of the material and sensual, but unfulfilling, aspects of their lives in pursuit of anything that is more transcendent and authentic. Anna Karenina is like this as well. While she wants to pursue something deeper, something that flows from the spiritual part of herself, she is stuck in the material and sensual images that she crafts with Vronsky. Her unwillingness to change and develop towards Tolstoy's ideal of unity works with the forces of society that also emphasize counterfeit images, eventually leading her down the path to suicide.

Levin and Kitty, however, present a contrast to all of these characters. Levin, in particular, understands in the end that even as he pursues the ideal, he himself will fall short, leading to his own frustrations. Donna Tussing Orwin, in an essay on morality in *Anna Karenina*, identifies that Levin finally understands and accepts his own human weakness, allowing for compassion for himself and others in his life. He also understands that "Acceptance of the body is a good and necessary thing, then, but living simply for the body is not" (854). This is something that many of the other characters miss. Rather than take the risk of accepting their whole, united selves with its weaknesses and still pursuing authentic connection with others, they fully embrace only their material and sensual selves and try to preserve the life that that gives them. Levin, on the other hand, resolves to continue to pursue authentic connection and love in his life and actions, presenting a unification of his spiritual and material selves, despite his knowledge that he will fall short in his interactions with others.

Levin understands the idea that suffering can be done with others and therefore be made more bearable, something that Kitty had already grasped during his brother's death. This is also an idea that, while not presented on stage, can come out of the viewing of *Closer*. Natasha Richardson speaks of resonating with the play while still being disturbed by it (interview by Rose), and this echoes the reaction of many critics and reviews towards the play. As a whole, it can be disturbing, as Marber isolates the selfishness brought out by love and exaggerates the role that it plays in the characters' interactions with each other. However, in Marber's words, watching the play can be cathartic because it leads the audience to think, "that was bad, but we all experience the same things" (interview by Rose). It is almost an assuaging experience as it leads the audience to see they are not alone in this struggle through life. This presentation of suffering in art relates to Baudelaire's philosophy, which sees the beautification of suffering and

the subsequent irony as essential to art (Wellek 443). This irony is present in the works as a whole as the suffering of the characters is certainly portrayed masterfully. However, the acknowledgement that something is wrong in the characters' lives does not make it better, even if it is made beautiful. This is shown throughout the book and the play as most of the characters know that something is wrong in their lives and that their actions continually separate them, but they do not, or cannot, do anything about it. This is particularly evident in *Closer* with Anna's beautification of sorrow and guilt and Larry's recognition of his own weaknesses. While there is a unifying aspect in realizing there are others, even characters in literature, struggling in their counterfeit images and failures as well, this unity is short-lived if it does not inspire change, as it does in Levin's attitude towards his life.

Conclusion

Tolstoy states that the purpose of good art is to bring society closer together in unity and love, and that true art will transmit benevolent feelings in pursuit of that unified ideal. The characters in *Anna Karenina* and *Closer* fall short of this ideal (and I have certainly highlighted their deficiencies in this regard for the purposes of this paper), but perhaps that is to be expected. The human condition is known to be imperfect and often self-centered, and, while society continues to develop outwardly, it certainly does not follow that the individuals in society have themselves developed to become more selfless and authentic. Rather, we do, like the characters in these works, tend to protect ourselves or pursue our ideal through how we present ourselves to the world or how we see each other. But these counterfeit images are solely material—not physical, per se, but disconnected from spiritual, inner, authentic parts of ourselves that we reveal to each other in order to be vulnerable. This vulnerability can be brought about by a unified experience of suffering. While suffering is not necessary to be vulnerable, it can reveal

the authentic, transcendent parts of humanity that we try to hide in our fear of being hurt. The beauty of these works is that they help us make sense of our own suffering, whether it is as extreme as death or not. Suffering in literature, because it is such a universal experience, can act as a unifier, a way to understand the need for empathy and love for others. Like Levin, we have the opportunity to see this suffering and respond to it, to live in such a way that connects our spiritual selves to our outward actions, even with the possibility of failure.

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