

Representations of Self-Actualizing Women in Haruki Murakami and Leo Tolstoy

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Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Leo Tolstoy,
Anna Karenina

“That’s how stories happen—with a turning point, an unexpected twist. There’s only one kind of happiness, but misfortune comes in all shapes and sizes. It’s like Tolstoy said. Happiness is an allegory, unhappiness a story.” Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

Synopsis

*The paper analyses two modernist and inter-textual representations of young women in Japanese and Russian fiction where the female protagonists embark on a tortuous path of self-actualization in a patriarchal society and a malignant universe leading to disastrous consequences. The strategy of embedding an older text into a newer one often transposes the social ethos and intellectual temper of two cultures forcing the discerning global reader to create new connections. Intertextuality in literature both enriches and complicates a literary work forcing the reader to understand one text against the other in a global context. Haruki Murakami’s short story “Sleep” refers to Leo Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* where the Japanese heroine gets infatuated with Anna’s lover Vronsky to the detriment of her health and family life.*

Rebelling against her staid middle-class life, the Japanese heroine seeks solace in literary and emotional escapades during the night. Her modernist adventures coupled with alcoholism and insomnia results in panic attacks, hallucinations and impeding tragedy. Though both writers talk about love theirs is not a love story. Also there is no logic to why individuals find unhappiness in life. Both writers reveal the incompatibility of self-actualization with the demands of family life. Though the genre of the novel and short story are different, Tolstoy uses the tragic consequences of romantic love, education and self-actualization of women in tsarist Russia as themes while Murakami employs it as strategy to bring about a subtle denouement in postmodern Japan. However the idea of one text inserted in another and intertextual mimesis seem to work effectively for both Murakami and his audience.

The self-awakening of two beautiful and enigmatic heroines in Haruki Murakami and Leo Tolstoy, set apart by over a century and yet connected by inter-textual references, question the models of romantic love, seduction, marriage and self-actualization of women in an elitist society and a vindictive world. Murakami's text published in 1993 introduces Tolstoy's Anna Karenina's struggles for self-fulfillment both as literary theme and social reality in his short story "Sleep" published in the short story collection called *The Elephant Vanishes* (74-109). The seventeen stories in the collection unhinge reality by presenting implausible situations often verging on hyper and magic realism. In the fifth story "Sleep" the anxieties of a thirty-year old Japanese woman attempting to break free from a boring married life are represented through the first person narration, the logic of her arguments, the ethicality of her judgment and the self-assessment of her character. Tolstoy's heroine ends her life in a morphine-induced hypnotic moment by jumping between train carriages, while Murakami's heroine is paralyzed by fear at the hallucinatory apparition of two shadowy male figures in a parking lot. The strong references to *Anna Karenina* (1878) in Murakami's story forces the discerning reader to see obvious connection with the Russian text. The failure of both the heroines to

find happiness in a world which is at times malevolent and at others male-centered is an indictment of both the literary universe and the morality of the text in which the female protagonists are placed.

The Readership of Literary Texts

The meaning of a literary text does not arise only through the linguistic codes in it but are also provided by the reader. And there are different kinds of readers. Umberto Eco points out there are two kinds of readers—the semantic reader and the aesthetic reader. The semantic reader reads to anticipate the end of the story while the aesthetic reader locates meaning in the process—how “intertextual irony” takes place and “how what happens has been narrated” (Eco 221-23). But today in the age of digital technology there is a third kind of reader whom we could call the global literary reader. Such a reader not only incorporates the roles of a semantic and aesthetic reader but goes beyond them to imagine the text in a global context. He finds transcultural connections that the embedded text may not refer to. Linguistic and literary suggestions are always racing through his mind. A postmodernist writer conscious of such a reader will introduce suggestions in his text for multiple interpretations. The textuality or inter-textuality is a timeless phenomenon cutting across centuries providing new meanings beyond the vision of the literary text. The postmodern writer unhinges reality risking clarity on the one hand and on the other opening multiple possibilities for the imagination to range in. Such writers leave the moral world located in specific cultural norms and concentrate more on the actions of characters which have a more universal appeal. Murakami is conscious of the global reader and aware of the trans-linguistic and trans-cultural text that he is creating.

Modernity and Post-modernity

The technique of inter-textuality and symbolic representation in modern writer Tolstoy and postmodern writer Murakami endorse the hypothesis that modernity and post-modernity are not hermetically sealed categories but affect and influence each other. The

methods of presenting a self-actualizing heroine within the confines of marriage and the disastrous consequences of her endeavors prefigure both modernity and post-modernity in Japanese and Russian novels. The self-actualizing representation of modernity, commonly available to a European writer, transforms itself into self-control when it enters the modern Japanese novel. Most protagonists in the modern Japanese novels are not trying to rebel against but conform to social traditions and institutions; tragedy occurs when they are unable to do so. The tragic life of protagonists within European modernity or Japanese modernity possesses a singular uniqueness not replicated by the representations of a happy life, so succinctly enunciated by Tolstoy. However the novelists' methods of representing the tragic story of individuals are often connected to each other through inter-textual references, allegorical implications and mimetic denouement.

Whether a writer passes judgment on the actions of fictional characters or withholds it, the novel continues to remain an impure art form. It is riddled with moral implications and inter-textual references of major texts written in the past. Literary history not only impacts the language a writer employs but the society and characters he creates. If we extend this assumption then most representations of heroines in literature are mistakenly seen as representations of women in actual society. Marcel Proust once said that the novel was more real than abstract theory.

The arrival of the western novel in Russia and Japan in the nineteenth century was a modernist moment that imitated fiction in real society and often shaped the response of educated elite class towards traditional social institutions and morality. The independent literary heroines often turned role models in shaping the identity of the new woman battling with traditional roles. To see inter-textual references in nineteenth and twentieth century literature is perhaps an important way to understand the reception of modernity in traditional societies and the underlying themes of romantic love, seduction and marriage.

Murakami escapes the traditional framework of the modernist Japanese writer and is more inclined towards the European literary concept of self-actualization. His short story “Sleep” is built around the extramarital relationship of Anna in Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina* where his heroine seeks happiness in literary fantasy. In both Murakami and Tolstoy the desire of the female protagonist struggling to actualize herself are thwarted by an unresponsive husband and the constricting norms of society leading to insomnia, depression and suicidal tendencies. The desire to self-actualize and the failure to do so are the twin themes that are pursued by Murakami in his short story.

Intertextuality has larger global implications as the writer engages with trans-cultural, transnational and trans-historical texts. The modernist idea of the alienated and isolated writer “imprisoned by language” is a myth (Brodkey 54-55). Literary scholars take the help of Jacques Derrida’s phrase *il’ny a pas de hors texte* or there is no outside-text to underscore the inescapable centrality of the text. Derrida means something else(158). His popular phrase does not deny the importance of the text but underscores its context. Writers are conscious of the social and literary context of their work more so when they embed an older text or replicate some of its incidents. For such writers not only the text explicates meaning of their central vision but the inter-text enriches it. The writer delves into his literary past to extricate literary readings of earlier texts and then presents them to his readers for an enriching experience. Therefore inter-textuality often refers to the craft of fiction itself as the writer does not find himself alone with his writing but engages himself with language, society and translated literary texts from other languages. It also refers to the changing audience, linguistic groups, literary taste, translating communities, reading practices and a global reading public. But some of these issues are beyond the scope of this paper.

Two Epigraphs at the Beginning of the Essay

In the two epigraphs placed at the beginning of the essay, one from Tolstoy and the other

from Murakami, the central theme is the representation of unhappiness in fiction. Tolstoy sees no singularity in the lives of happy families as they are “all alike” and therefore offer no new material for the writer to build his story upon. Murakami accepts Tolstoy but goes further to see the theme of unhappiness as a “turning point” and a “twist in the tale.” A turning point could be a character flaw, dissatisfaction, yearning, desire, emotion or a dream which leads to a predicament, problem or an “unexpected twist” in the story. Murakami fails to answer the rhetorical question that if happiness is “allegory” can unhappiness be also transformed into an allegory by the writer as Gabriel Marquez, Thomas Pynchon or Dimitris Lyacos have shown. However both Tolstoy and Murakami are comfortable to work with the raw material of domestic unhappiness transforming the individual into a self-actualizing agent in a society yet not completely modernized. Both the writers choose unique trajectories of individual misfortune in an unforgiving moral universe. Tolstoy’s representation of unhappiness is located within the framework of a conventional social order endorsing its institutions. Any confrontation with the status quo, any infringement of the moral norms must bring punishment or damnation. If social confrontation brings individual happiness the result may unhinge the social system and moral order.

The mimesis in Murakami is based on the life of Anna Karenina and it functions on two levels—first on the level of representing reality and second on the level of imitative behavior. Murakami’s heroine negates the reality of Tolstoy’s heroine by pursuing a more hallucinatory world born out of insomnia, alcoholism and romantic idealism. She further snatches Vronsky as her romantic hero in her literary fantasy escaping the hard choice of Anna to either have her lover and son or have nothing at all. For Murakami’s heroine the institution of marriage functions more as a constraint rather than a choice. Murakami’s heroine does not confront the moral world of Anna in all its full-blooded implications. This interpretation could endorse Michael Riffaterre’s assumption that an intertextual mimesis could also involve a text which “represents reality by negating an intertext

compatible with that reality” (143). Obviously intertextuality as understood by Bakhtin, or trans-textuality as Gerard Genette calls it, refers to language in a dialogic relationship within the mind of the writer (Bakhtin 127; Genette 83-84). Murakami is more interested in the way Tolstoy controls the destinies of his characters and less with the theme of emancipation central to Tolstoy’s thinking. It is rather difficult to imagine that *Anna Karenina* is a love story. Tolstoy loads the dice against his characters. The novel is more the story of “fate” or “judgement” (Rothman 1). Anna realizes this truth rather late. Towards the end she gets convinced that the world was created “in order to suffer” and if we think otherwise we are “deceiving ourselves”. However this comment ends on an apathetic note. She concludes that “But if you see the truth, what can you do?” (766). There is no escape for Tolstoy’s characters. The atonement for perceived sins is either death or near-death experience. But this is atonement without redemption. When Vronsky fails to commit suicide he realizes that his act was “too stupid;” however he comes out of it “washed” of the “shame and humiliation” he has felt before (432-33). Tolstoy controls events and passion in the novel with relentless force. He does not present the world as backdrop to the story but as a callous entity that distributes happiness and unhappiness without reason. The metaphor of unhappiness mentioned at the beginning of the novel is more for the elites, the Oblonskys, who have all the comforts of life but not the happiness of conformity.

Obviously Murakami is in a dialogic relationship with the text as we can see through the behavior of his heroine. Like his heroine Murakami is mesmerized by Tolstoy’s manipulation of character but rejects this manipulation in favor of an escape, some kind of salvation. In the end of the short story two male figures shake her automobile from both sides but there is still hope for her to find salvation. In the case of Anna there is no turning back, there is no redemption. In Murakami the story is open-ended forcing the reader to close the book with some relief. Tolstoy’s end for Anna is final, there is no turning back. Tolstoy’s should have ended with Anna’s suicide but the story meanders

endlessly into agricultural history and conflict between Slavs and Turks for the reader to forget and forgive. Tolstoy makes great effort to create “unquestionable meaning” after Anna’s death. But there is no forgiveness and no forgetting.

The European novel is a moral artifact arising from values of moral conformity or non-conformity and therefore allegorical in nature. At the same time the novel encapsulates the modernizing elements of individual agency, reason and choice. Writers find it more gratifying to portray conflict between a modernizing individual force and a conformist social power. The resultant outcome is often tragic for the individual. The therapeutic aspects of tragedy in the Aristotelian sense create a catharsis in the reader.

Finding inter-textuality in literary texts is often the favorite past time of literary scholars but often writers themselves insert references to popular literary texts in their fiction to force the reader to see the connection with the story or character. In an artwork where human beings perform specific functions the reader and the writer must understand that the “pure form,” of a literary text cannot be easily separated from the “human meanings” and “moral judgments” that are imposed by the writer and the reader (Booth 397). The highly controversial moral judgments by Tolstoy in the novel force Ayn Rand to consider *Anna Karenina* as the “most evil novel in world literature” in terms of both “theme” and “essence.” According to Rand, Tolstoy believes that it is “futile to be motivated by happiness” (103). Some might feel that this is an exceedingly feminist indictment of a male writer.

The moral world of the novels comes into conflict with the hidden desire of the heroines that ultimately lead them to disastrous consequences. By association Murakami introduces the strictly moral world of Tolstoy where happiness outside social norms is impossible. The frigid heroine of Murakami finds sex within marriage less enjoyable than the chocolate-whiskey-laden literary fantasies she indulges in. She keeps awake at night

to grapple with her fantasies and desires about Vronsky the lover of Anna Karenina. She even fakes a headache to deny sex to her husband as she wishes to return to her fictitious hero Vronsky. She justifies this escape by claiming to be impeccable in her behavior and assiduous in her performance of family duties. Within her own world of fantasies she seeks her self-fulfillment. In a self-righteous tone she lets the reader know that she is a good mother, wife and cook. Though she does not commit suicide like the morphine addicted insomniac Anna she finds herself enacting the psychosomatic scene of being rocked in her parked car late night by two shadowy figures in a Yokohama parking lot. In terror she fumbles for her car key to start the engine but it does not start and the key falls under the steering wheel. The two shadowy male figures could personify her husband and her son who represent the arrogant patriarchy that she hates.

Seeking love and protection over duty and bondage both the heroines reject sex within marriage. Sexual fantasies are more satisfying to the heroines than actual sex which to them is invariably connected to duty or guilt. The overpowering world of social norms and their own inhibitions destroy their natural impulses and leave them frigid and disinterested in physical relations with men. Undeniably the novel is a product of the “sentimentalizing taste” of the eighteenth century and within it love — “seduction and marriage” — the subject “par excellence” (Fiedler, 2003 25). The female search for sentimentality and seduction often became the mimesis of textuality, the *raison d'être* of tragedy.

Sex, Narcissism and Fantasy

Murakami believes that a satisfying sex refurbishes the body and soul and electrifies the imagination. Sex is not seen by the heroines as a self-actualizing act but as fulfilling an erotic fantasy to escape the confines of social duties and responsibilities. Though Murakami believes that “good” sex can become a “soul-commitment” that reinvigorates the imagination, heals the body and takes us to a “better place” his heroine finds it hard

to realize the ideal (Wray, 2004 4). Tolstoy's heroine Anna values love more than duty but she is placed within a moral world where the destructive power of passion is more obvious than its therapeutic effect.

Murakami highlights the sexless and unhappy life of his heroine who is beautiful and narcissistic. Though she is married she is less interested in her staid husband than in admiring her body. At the age of thirty she narcissistically studies her naked body in the mirror for half an hour and finds herself pretty as a girl of 24. She denies sex to her boyfriend after he becomes sexually excited during a session of heavy petting in the car and feigns headache with her husband when he wants to have sex with her (97). During all this time she is thinking of Vronsky. She confesses,

It was only after my husband stood up and drew me toward the bedroom that I realized what he had in mind. I wasn't in the mood for it at all. I didn't understand why I should have sex then. All I wanted was to get back to my book. I wanted to stretch out alone on the sofa and munch on chocolate while I turned the pages of 'Anna Karenina.' All the time I had been washing the dishes, my only thoughts had been of Vronsky and of how an author like Tolstoy managed to control his characters so skillfully. He described them with such wonderful precision. But that very precision somehow denied them a kind of salvation. (92).

She identifies herself with both the fictional Anna and the author Tolstoy. She imagines sexual escapades with fictional character than actual people. True to her literary fantasies she reads difficult writers. She admires the authorial 'control' of Tolstoy over his characters and his ability to describe them with 'precision'; but she also realizes that control and precision denies them 'salvation.' Tolstoy is the omniscient voice, the one who passes "unchallenged judgment" on the actions of his characters (Meek 4). Since she is controlled by powerful social institutions she realizes that she cannot achieve

salvation. Whether it is the red bag in Tolstoy or the car key in Murakami the world of exciting possibilities do not open for these women. Both the key and the bag promise the realization of fantasies but the key is lost and the red bag does not reveal its contents. Since both the heroines are caught in a web of duties and controlled by social sanctions, they are unable to realize their aspirations. Both writers concentrate on the inner struggles of self-actualizing heroines caught in the intensity of their own passions and their sexual escapades than the actual trauma of suicide by train or automobile imprisonment.

Male-dominated Social Order

The struggles of the heroines in Tolstoy and Murakami gain tragic significance in a world dominated by strong moral values attributed to the roles of mother and wife. The conformist ideas of home builders work against modernist ideas of romantic love, individualism and self-actualization. The heroines lose their confidence in their husbands as they realize that for men, duty is more important than love or concern for women. Anna finds her dutiful husband too involved with his work than with her. It prepares the ground for her romantic escapade with Vronsky. Murakami's heroine too loses confidence in her husband after the naming of their son. Instead of being her protector he pacifies both his mother and wife when they quarrel over the naming of their son (103). In the end of the story as she hallucinates about the two dark figures of men shaking her car she realizes that she "can't go anywhere;" they will rock the car and "turn it over" (109). In an attempt to write against the family-dominated fiction of Russia and Japan both writers present heroines who wish to escape the constraining atmosphere of social institutions by forging an independent self through literary readings and ruminating at night.

Female Insomnia and Reading

Both insomnia and literary readings become a rejuvenating and destructive force. Insomnia is used to create a private space of self-reflection away from the hustle and

bustle of life, while readings to resurrect fantasies which have languished since childbirth and subordinated to wifely duties. The theme of female sleeplessness or insomnia opens a modern moment of individual freedom in the novel for male writers to imagine the emotional and intellectual space their heroines inhabit. The heroines are incorrigible insomniacs and voracious readers of romantic fiction seeking a private place to reflect and encompass “an entire universe” (101). Insomnia becomes their model of seeking an escape in a world which prevents them from realizing their happiness both emotionally and symbolically (106). Though their insomnia might be anxiety-based they feel that by “abandoning sleep” they had “expanded” themselves (100). They discover that the “power to concentrate was the most important thing” (101). They are willing to die young as they have expanded their lives.

Murakami admits that the family has played an important role in traditional Japanese literature, in his fiction characters are presented as “independent, absolute individuals” (Wray 4). Murakami’s heroine is a modern woman like Anna burdened by the weight of her social responsibilities. She yearns to escape into the literary world of European novel eschewing her Japaneseness. Though her husband is handsome by conventional standards and her son obedient, she finds the former “ugly” and an “Absolute fool a blob” and the latter possessing a close similarity with his father and mother-in-law (103). She finds them all “self-satisfied and arrogant” (104). She feels that since her husband and son cannot understand her soon she would “despise” her son too (104). Obviously she does not feel satisfied with her lot. After the old man nightmare she cannot sleep but her husband sleeps like a turtle buried in mud (92). She is so taken in by reading that she does not wish to have sex, get involved with anyone or waste time in idle gossip but go home and read the novel. She confesses:

I went through the motions—shopping, cooking, playing with my son, having sex with my husband. It was easy once I got the hang of it. All I had to do was break the

connection between my mind and my body(95-96).

Her inability to find significance in daily chores forces her to delink her “mind” from her “body.”

The tendency to feel dissatisfied with her lot and yearning for some imaginary fulfillment destroys her mental equilibrium. Somewhere at this point her reading turns psychological as she begins to realize that most “people live in the prison cells of their own tendencies” (97). As she reads the novel *Anna Karenina* three times she confesses that the “old me” understood the novel little but the “new me” understands everything (100-1). Often this fervent reading makes her too excited. In order to cool down she goes out for a drive, does calisthenics or just walks around the room (101).

Apprehending the Passage of Time

For Murakami’s heroine time passes at varying speeds. At times it passes slowly and at others it speeds up. It all depends on her emotional state of mind. At times she feels trapped in the web of time and at others she feels the world is changing very quickly. The apprehension of life is directly connected to her enchantment or disenchantment with the world. She feels that events sweep past her like a “silent breeze” (97). At times she realizes that the unchanging world was after all changing. She often come back to her husband and son after her nightly sojourns and see them sleeping as if they believed in an unchanging world. But according to her the world was changing:

They believed that the world was as it had always been, unchanging. But they were wrong. It was changing in ways they could never guess. Changing a lot. Changing fast. It would never be the same again (102).

In the beginning she feels trapped in the web of time, unable to scream when an old man in her dreams pours water on her feet. Her husband oblivious of her predicament sleeps

through the night acting as her foil to her quest for identity. Towards the end of the story she tries to “look like a boy” but ends up feeling “trapped” as if locked in her car.

Social Demands and Individual Freedom

The demands of life are hard to endure for Murakami’s heroine who is never named. Women are seen in Murakami as “mediums—harbingers of the coming world” (Wray 1). The word *nemuri* in Japanese means both sleep and sleeping and it is here the protagonist attempts to sort out her life as a woman, a wife and a mother. It is a sad irony that reality does not allow her to understand the world she inhabits. It is in the darkness of night, when people are sound asleep, she must keep awake. She is not an insomniac as she can sleep when she wants to. But only in the silence of the night she can escape her responsibilities and acquire the freedom to understand herself and “extend [her] life”. She feels that the need to be beautiful, to have sex with her husband, to love her son, to cook for the family are all duties that she must fulfill in the day. Only at night when everyone is sleeping she must keep awake to understand herself. In this unconventional way she accepts and rediscovers herself.

Murakami’s heroine though “good looking” is somewhat unconventional. She has married a “strange looking” dentist who is neither handsome nor ugly. They have a loan to pay back for the clinic they had opened five years ago. When she tries to draw his face she is surprised to find out that she does not remember it at all — “How can you live with a man so long and not be able to bring his face to mind?” (77). Though he instills confidence in others, smiles like a child and has good teeth, she does not like him (77). They have no common interests. He loves listening to Haydn and Mozart but she does not understand music. She often wonders while looking at her beautiful body why did she marry him amongst the many handsome boyfriends she had had. She does her home duties meticulously, goes to the gym to keep fit, swims and loves to look at her naked body. There is a repetitious monotony to her life’ she feels like an “unfeeling machine”

repeating a cycle as if she was “going nowhere” (99). When her aspirations clash with her monotonous life she finds it hard to sleep.

The Meaning of the Nightmare

When we meet her in the beginning of the story she has not slept for seventeen days (74). Perhaps recurring insomnia triggers a nightmare. She has a “repulsive dream” one night where she sees an old man with “huge” “piercing” eyes in “a skintight black shirt” holding a white pitcher and pouring water from it over her feet. She wants to move and scream but feels paralyzed. Suddenly she feels that her feet would “rot” and “melt” in the water, so she screams but the scream never materializes (83). Then she gets up and drinks Remy Martin brandy to calm her ravaged nerves. Her consumption of alcohol, caffeine and sugar begin a bedtime ritual of wakefulness. She starts reading *Anna Karenina* which she once read in school remembering the first line of the novel and the heroine’s suicide. Tolstoy’s heroine, Anna, also has a nightmare of a dirty old peasant muttering ‘It must be beaten, the iron, pounded, kneaded” (1-11). Anna’s nightmare symbolizes Vronsky and the fear of her death. She wants motherly love and romantic love which are together hard to get but the unfeeling universe gives her nothing:

‘I love only these two beings and the one excludes the other. I can’t unite them, yet I need only that. And since I can’t have that, I don’t care about the rest. I don’t care about anything, anything. And if there isn’t that, the rest makes no difference. It all makes no difference. And it will end somehow, and so I can’t, I don’t like talking about it. Don’t reproach me, then; don’t judge me for anything. You with your purity can’t understand all that I suffer over.’ (640).

This argument is the crux of the matter. She wants both Vronsky and Seryozha. Anna realizes that romantic love “excludes” motherly love and therefore she rejects both. She knows her life will end in misery but she does not blame herself for the impending

tragedy. She believes that those with “purity” — the pretentious Russian elites — cannot understand her suffering. Therefore she does not wish to talk about it. Murakami’s heroine also believes that the doctors will not understand her predicament and therefore she does not wish to talk to them.

Reading Habits of the Heroines

Anna is fond of reading and dressing well. She reads English novels and writes children’s books and can be the center of attention. The heroine of Murakami also loves reading. Reading has been the center of her life since school though this habit has decreased due to family chores and domestic worries (87). Since at college Murakami’s heroine studied English literature and wrote her graduation thesis on the British writer Katherine Mansfield she would be familiar with the influence of Anton Chekov on “The Doll’s House” and the heartless world of class snobbery that working class children inhabited. Her family did not have enough money to send her to graduate school. With two more sisters to take care there was not enough money (87). She starts reading *Anna Karenina* again after her old man nightmare sitting up with the book until 3 in the morning. Though she finds the story “odd” she cannot stop reading. She argues with herself that she could afford sleepless nights when she was a student but now she was a “mother” and “wife” and she has “responsibilities” (88). After her husband and son leave in their Sentra she continues to read the novel and gets highly excited by the fall of Vronsky from a horse. Finding crumbs of chocolate from her high school days in the book she restarts the habit of eating chocolate while reading. As she reads she wonders how the author can control his characters so “skillfully” and deny them “salvation” (92).

Moral Universe of Tolstoy and Murakami

Both the Russian society of late nineteenth century and the Japanese society of twentieth century created role models for women in the concept of good wives and wise mothers. The Japanese phrase for following a domestic ideal is *ryosai kenbo* while the Russian

word is *Domostroi*. (Davies and Ikeno 179). The first was coined by Nakamura Masanao and expressed the ideal of womanhood while *Domostroi* meant domestic order based on a set of household rules. The Confucian-based Japanese society emphasized family values for women rather than individual freedom. The samurai code further emphasized the duty of wives to take care of their husbands. From the earliest literary writing of the eleventh century Heian such as Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* women were seen as "fundamentally evil" as they were subject to jealousy. In fact a literary representation of women became the general though inexact standard to understand women of the nineteenth century. Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi point out that nineteenth century Russian women were often seen as "literary incarnations" of Tolstoy's heroines represented in *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* (250).

Both Tolstoy and Murakami drew their inspirations from the changing roles of women in urban society. Barbara Engel believes that the "positive impact" of Russian urban life on women was an enhancement of "personal freedom" and strength to "shape their own lives." (84). Though she points out that those women who received higher education were able to access the "greater freedom" to participate in "public life" (107) Since Russian urban culture was a byproduct of noble elite culture, women of noble elites began to enjoy a relative amount of this new freedom. And as the nineteenth century ended women to find new opportunities "to earn their own living, to interact with others of their sex on the shop floor, in the classroom and in the dormitory and through charitable works, to contribute to the common good, had drawn a far more numerous and socially diverse range of Russia's women from their home" (Rosslyn and Tosi 23).

Tolstoy placed the actions of his characters within a strong moral universe, preaching the grace of unselfish goodness and the damnation of self-assertion. Within the paradigm of his moral world he therefore damns Anna's self-assertion and individuality. The process of western modernity in Russia began with the intelligentsia around the 1840s and with

the decline of traditional Russian society towards the end of the nineteenth century began to influence women's emancipation, family life and sexual relations. Anna Karenina is symptomatic of female rebellion as it emerged in the west against Tsarist sexual mores. She craves for social freedom and sexual liberation as her counterparts in the west did in modern Russia. The Tsarist state imagined the woman's question of sex and gender within pure symbols of wife and mother and brought sexual emancipation within state and ecclesiastical control to counterbalance rampant corruption in political and social sphere dominated by men. The state began to influence and control domestic life in Russia. As women sought higher education to escape the stranglehold of a male-dominated society they left their families which further reinforced the negative impact of modernist ideas on traditional way of life. The sexual liberty preached by the heroines of the French author George Sands in the 1840s appalled Russian conservatives but appealed to Russian women. Nikolai Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel *What Is to Be Done?* campaigned for an urban educated utopia based on self-love through its heroine Vera Pavlovna. Vera manages to escape parental control and the constraints of an arranged marriage into a world of economic freedom.

Murakami's heroine also escapes economic want by marrying a dentist but she discovers that the boredom of married life and the tyranny of a meddling mother-in-law would force her college-day-insomnia to return. Though she writes the events of her life in a diary, she stops writing when she stops sleeping. When the story begins she has not slept for seventeen days but does not want to seek medical help. Possessing a stubborn streak of self-reliance she depends more on her "woman's intuition" than on "doctor's advice" (74). After keeping awake the whole night she begins to drift to sleep early morning but it is not sleep but "incomplete drowsiness" with an alert mind — "My fingertips were just barely brushing against the outermost edge of sleep. And all the while my mind was wide-awake." In the beginning she wishes away her sleeplessness as a temporary ailment, a conflict between "body and mind." As she grapples with it her dependence on alcohol,

sleeping pills, night drives and reading classics increases. Slowly she begins to feel like a “drowned corpse” (75). By rejecting the reality of sleep she seeks her independence. There are obvious comparisons with Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* which the protagonist has been reading. The shadow of the moral universe of Tolstoy takes its toll and leaves her terrified by a strange reality dominated by men.

The World of Anna Karenina

Murakami’s heroine is not happy the way Tolstoy “control[s] his characters so skillfully” and denies them “salvation.” She wants salvation for Vronsky by inducing Tolstoy to give him Anna without the adjudicating criticism of his actions and by default give her right to transgress and be free of a constraining marriage. Just like Murakami’s heroine Anna too wants to realize herself and suffers from the boredom of a married life with Karenina.

She felt herself so criminal and guilty that the only thing left for her was to humble herself and beg forgiveness; but as she had no one else in her life now except him, it was also to him that she addressed her plea for forgiveness. Looking at him, she physically felt her humiliation and could say nothing more. And he felt what a murderer must feel when he looks at the body he has deprived of life. This body deprived of life was their love, their first period of their love (2.11.149)

Anna is also forced by the strain of emotions to take morphine to sleep and then commits suicide by jumping in front of a passing train. The story *Nemuri* ends with the feeling of the protagonist being imprisoned in her “little box” of a car and not able to find the key to start the engine. Anna too commits suicide in a daze after morphine induced despair. Tolstoy works on the symbolic level as well. He wants the reader to believe that the first meeting of Anna and Vronsky prefigures her end. Here is the ending of Part 7 chapter 31:

And suddenly, remembering the man who was run over the day she first met

Vronsky, she realized what she must do. With a quick, light step she went down the stairs that led from the water pump to the rails and stopped close to the passing train. She looked at the bottoms of the carriages, at the bolts and chains and big cast-iron wheels of the first carriage slowly rolling by, and tried to estimate by eye the midpoint between the front and back wheels and the moment when the middle would be in front of her.

‘There!’ she said to herself, staring into the shadow of the carriage as the sand mixed with coal poured between the sleepers, ‘there, right in the middle, and I’ll punish him and be rid of everybody and of myself.’

She wanted to fall under the first carriage, the midpoint of which had drawn even with her. But the red bag, which she had started taking off her arm, delayed her, and it was too late: the midpoint went by. She had to wait for the next carriage. A feeling seized her, similar to what she experienced when preparing to go into the water for a swim, and she crossed herself. The habitual gesture of making the sign of the cross called up in her soul a whole series of memories from childhood and girlhood, and suddenly the darkness that covered everything for her broke and life rose up before her momentarily with all its bright joys. Yet she did not take her eyes from the wheels of the approaching second carriage. And just at the moment when the midpoint between the two wheels came even with her, she threw her red bag aside and, drawing her head down between her shoulders, fell onto her hands under the carriage, and with a light movement, as if preparing to get up again at once, sank lower to her knees. And in that same instant she was horrified at what she was doing. ‘Where am I? What am I doing? Why?’ She wanted to rise, to throw herself back, but something huge and implacable pushed her head and dragged over her. ‘Lord, forgive me for everything!’ she said, feeling the impossibility of any struggle. A little muzhik, muttering to himself, was working on some iron. And the candle by the light of which

she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief and evil, flared up even brighter than ever, lit up for her all that had once been in darkness, sputtered, grew dim, and went out forever” (768).

She has three reasons aims to commit suicide — “I’ll punish him and be rid of everybody and of myself”. She takes off her red hand bag, crosses herself with the sign of the cross to remember a “series of memories from childhood and girlhood”. As she remembers the darkness recedes from her soul and her “life rose up before her momentarily with all its bright joys”. At the last moment she questions why she is doing this but it is too late — “What am I doing? Why?’ She wanted to rise, to throw herself back, but something huge and implacable pushed her head and dragged over her.” The candle of her life sputters and goes out “forever.”

Conclusion

Just like the individualistic western novel of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth, the self-realizing women in fiction represent a modernist moment of inter-connected human passions, a break from tradition and morality, where women do not succeed in a male-centered universe. Some believe that the inability of these women to find happiness in a male-centered world makes Tolstoy’s novel evil. If women are the “mediums — harbingers of the coming world” as Murakami claimed in his interview then this is a rather dismal picture of society that does not grant happiness upon moral infringement (“Interviews” 98). The inter-textual references to Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* in Murakami’s short story show the impact of 28-year old Anna’s life on the conventional life of a 30-year old Japanese heroine and her unsuccessful attempts to free herself. Intertextuality in fiction has been successfully employed by Murakami to show how “every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

The implausibility of an independent action by the heroines of Tolstoy and Murakami that

can lead to their happiness within the strict moral universe of the literary texts cannot be imagined. The modernist elements in both the texts yearn for fulfillment but are prevented by a malicious universe and a paternalistic moral order. The tragic mood of the western novel that Murakami's short story partakes of makes happiness almost impossible for the heroine. In this sense Murakami replicates the world of Tolstoy in his short story and moves between the concepts of modernity and post-modernity in his fictional world.

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