The Woman in the Window
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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Valentino, Russell Scott.
The Woman in the Window: Commerce, Consensual Fantasy, and the Quest for Masculine Virtue in the Russian Novel.
The Ohio State University Press, 2014.
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The question I am following is how the advent of the virtual man inflects the notion of the virtuous one. Positing this as a question might seem merely clever. Portraying it as a quest might seem anachronistic. But with consensual fantasy as a middle term, especially as it developed with the rise and spread of symbolic value and modes of commercial consciousness through commercial development, the two other terms take on a different kind of weight, and the virtuous man, the man whose propertied corporeality was once thought to substantiate the health and rationality of a polity, that man’s character is called into question. The quest, then, conflates with the question: What sort of character steps forward when the virtuous man has passed out of sight? This chapter explores two responses.

**Divided Man**

To draw interest to itself, science must speak primarily about the questions that have most importance for the country. If ‘The Economic Indicator’ follows this rule, it will bring great benefit to its activity—the activity of spreading economic concepts among us.

—Nikolai Chernyshevskii, *The Economic Indicator*
Symbolic value and its effect on the depiction of the modern masculine character pervade Dostoevsky’s first post-exile novel. Amid the consensually fantastical world of his surroundings, Raskolnikov struggles to come to terms with a stable image of personhood and personal action. Indeed, the first concrete emotional assessment of the hero conveyed in the novel, the “somewhat sickly and cowardly sensation” we are told he feels in passing his landlady’s door, is explained as the simple result of debt: “[Raskolnikov] was in debt up to his ears to his landlady and was afraid of meeting her.”

Raskolnikov is himself struck by “the fear of meeting his creditor” (6) and of all the “trifles” (pustiaki, 7) associated with her, especially when compared with the “thing” (delo, 7) he has been considering. How can he be afraid of her and what she represents and still be capable of that? The idea of the murder is thus introduced by its combination in Raskolnikov’s mind with the fear, cowardice, and simultaneous shame of debt, a lack of credit: “I want to attempt such a business and at the same time fear such trifles!” “Why,” he asks himself, concluding the same paragraph, “am I going [there]? Am I really capable of that? Is that really serious? Not serious at all. So it’s just out of fantasy that I’m amusing myself; games!” (igrushki, 6). Raskolnikov dismisses his own resolve as pure fantasy; he lacks trust, faith, credit—the tendency to treat these equivalently is suggested by his equation of fear before meeting his creditor and anxiety before his planned action. The “fantasy” to which he attributes his fear and anxiety applies equally to each: they are both imaginary, both promises about the future, real only to the extent that the imagining agent can be trusted to carry them out.

Raskolnikov’s desire for a kind of integration, his “thirst for people” (11), is contrasted to the malignancy of his alienation. He is divorced from family, friends, and the society around him, alone, a free-floating agent in the urban Petersburg sea. He has “sunk into himself and distanced himself from everyone else” (5). On the street he lapses into a kind of forgetfulness, “not noticing his surroundings and not wanting to notice” (6). The most dramatic and poignant moment of such alienation comes just after the murder, when, having wandered onto Nikolaevsky Bridge, he is mistaken for a beggar, beaten with a whip by a coachman, laughed at, and given alms. At that moment he looks across the Neva to St. Isaac’s Cathedral and finds his previous ideas and interests unthinkable.

All that recent past seemed to him covered over somehow, down below, somewhere barely visible beneath his feet, the ideas of before, the tasks of before, the themes, the impressions, all that panorama [around him], and he himself, and everything, everything . . . He seemed to have flown
away somewhere above and everything had disappeared from his view. At an involuntary motion of his hand he suddenly felt the two-griven coin clutched in his fist. He opened his hand wide, looked intently at the coin, and threw it in a wide arc into the water; then he turned and went home. It seemed to him he had cut himself off from everyone and everything at that moment as with a pair of scissors. (90)

The symbolism of the passage is carefully controlled. The value of coin—conventional, changeable, consensually fantastical—has served as the pretext for Raskolnikov’s departure from the earth, the ostensible motivation for murder. He looks down, senses the earth’s solid presence somewhere below the bridge, the water, and the consensually fantastical world in which he has immersed himself, but he cannot connect to it; indeed, in the elation of uprooting, he no longer wants to connect. Like the dream he has realized in his actions, he has entered the realm of human-made consensual value completely. But in doing so alone, he no longer has any use for the supposed value that initially invited him in; the consensual fantasy of valued coin means nothing to the man who has opted out of the consensual.

The degree to which such alienation can be understood as a correlate of commercial endeavor is underlined by Raskolnikov’s premurder ruminations on the crime he is about to commit, that which will supposedly propel him into the midst of civic activity and a life of virtuous (dobrodetel’nyi) devotion to society, the “service to all human kind and to the common cause” (54) that the old lady’s money will make possible. For the fact that Raskolnikov uses the word delo, which may equally well signify a thing as a business deal, is no mere fluke of language. Indeed, he appears to think of the projected murder and theft as a kind of entrepreneurial venture.

He had already begun to look [at it] differently, and despite all the teasing monologues concerning his own powerlessness and indecision, he had somehow even against his will got used to considering the “hideous” (bezobraznaia) dream as an enterprise (predpriiatie), even though he didn’t believe himself yet. He was even going right then to make a test of his enterprise (predpriiatie), and with each step his anxiety grew stronger and stronger. (7)

The translation of the unreal dream or fantasy into a real event is accomplished through the vehicle of the enterprise, endeavor, undertaking, venture, or predpriiatie, a concept laden with modern commercial overtones. Moreover, Dostoevsky’s qualification of the dream as “hideous,” “ugly,” or bezobraznaia, emphasizes both its present formlessness (bez means “without,”
obraz means “shape” or “form”) and its juxtaposition to the divine or heavenly, where the notion of the icon, divine form, or obraz is latent.3

Just as in Gogol’s usage, and Pushkin’s before him, here the medium of commercial enterprise, the subjection of questions of social and ethical good to consensually fantastical human agreements, coalesces in a single monumental business deal—the result of the hero’s long speculations on an “unreal” dream of future value. Furthermore, the hero’s dream is linked, as in Gogol’s and Pushkin’s earlier depictions, to the Napoleonic, though this time Napoleon’s image contains another dimension: his exemplary role as an upstart and grandiose manipulator is less important than his place on Raskolnikov’s list of “extraordinary individuals” who have transgressed moral boundaries to give their “new word” to the world.4

Here again, as with Hermann and Chichikov, the most elementary explanation of the hero’s behavior begins with a desire to gain riches and thereby raise himself from his current circumstances. On the surface, Raskolnikov’s motivation appears to be calculated rational self-interest, the most straightforward, albeit rather simplistic, argument for which is furnished by Luzhin.

One might prefer to dismiss this theory of econo-ethical activity, especially as it comes from the supercilious and repugnant Luzhin. And Luzhin is, in fact, criticized by the good Razumikhin in the same scene for cynically appropriating and distorting these ideas merely to justify his own exploitative actions. It should be recalled that Raskolnikov draws the conclusion that one may murder from this theory: “Take what you were just saying to its logical consequences, and it follows that people’s throats can be cut” (118). There is no explicit response to the “logical consequence” of self-interest offered in the novel. Raskolnikov’s remark is greeted by his interlocutors with indignation and Luzhin’s response, “There’s a limit [mera, which is also “measure” or “balance”] to everything,” and the subject is dropped.

The seemingly unconnected transition, in Raskolnikov’s subsequent question, to the subject of Luzhin’s apparent approval of Dunya’s poverty, is of course not unconnected in the mind of the male protagonist, nor, as we shall
see below, in the novel’s moral schematic. Luzhin’s planned financial subjugation of Raskolnikov’s sister is part of the same problem that generates the permissibility of murder.7 Having entered the system of consensually fantastical value, humans determine the measure (mera) themselves. The organic connection to Raskolnikov’s theory of the great individual should be evident: symbolic value depends on human agreements, which are all “formless” and contingent, only as real as any plan or promise can be acted upon. As part of the same system, any limit someone might choose to apply to them would require an external standard.

Luzhin, Svidrigailov, and Raskolnikov all attempt to instrumentalize people in the realization of their particular dreams, and in this they resemble Pushkin’s Hermann, Gogol’s Chichikov, and Dostoevsky’s Golyadkin Senior. The secret of the cards sought by Hermann functions equivalently to the ruse Chichikov attempts to pull off and the social gambit employed by Golyadkin Senior, all of which turn back on them as they lose control of the forces they have set in motion. These treatments make it very clear that such forces issue from people themselves. Moreover, the “magic” that the hero counts on to advance his interests actually serves to undermine them. The same is true of the relation between Raskolnikov’s dream and the medium by which it comes to be “real.” For the event that sets in motion Raskolnikov’s downfall and his eventual confession is, as noted previously, the calling in of a loan, a failed promise.

Just as, at an earlier point in the book, Raskolnikov mentally connects his debt to the murder he is about to commit, so, immediately after the murder, is the same connection made via the story’s narrative pattern. The same shameful debt from the novel’s opening pages, for which he has apparently given his landlady an IOU (77), serves as the pretext for getting him to the police station, where he is undone. All he can think of is the murder during his time there, so that when he discovers that he is not a suspect, he is filled with “a minute of complete, unmediated, purely animal joy” (78). His relationship to the police officers, his conception of self in relation to others, shifts momentarily from murderer to merely debtor, and, contrary to his previous debtor’s sensation, he reexperiences the postmurder elation of leaving behind all worldly attachments. And he faints.

The journey to the police station is what brings him to the attention of the authorities and, more importantly, transforms him in his mind back to being a suspect in theirs. Following his fainting spell, and the apparently greater attention the officers pay to his whereabouts of the previous evening as a result of it, his final thought on leaving the station is, “They suspect!” In much the same manner that the hero’s magic doubles back on him in Push-
kin's, Gogol's, and Dostoevsky's previous treatments of commercial, entrepreneurial, “Napoleonic” enterprise, so Raskolnikov’s promise to pay serves as the pretext for introducing the idea of his guilt in the minds of the authorities, an idea on which the novel’s entire subsequent development pivots.

Afloat in the sea of consensually fantastical valuations, modern man needs an anchor or a raft, and Raskolnikov’s various theories and rational attempts to explain his actions and the motivations for them are chock-full of holes. Even after his confession, trial, and internment in a Siberian prison, he suffers from the same absence, the same dull grasping at rational understanding. In the end, the support he finds is mediated, like his transformation as a whole, by Sonya Marmeladov. And Dostoevsky, never one to shy away from a literary allusion, constructs the crucial scene on the shoulders of his predecessors, even perhaps on those of his own previous self:

It was the second week after Holy Week; warm, clear, spring days had arrived; the windows had been opened in the prisoners' ward (barred windows beneath which a guard patrolled). Sonya had only been to see him in the ward twice during the course of his illness; she’d had to acquire permission each time, and that was difficult. But she had often come into the hospital courtyard, beneath the windows, especially toward evening, sometimes just in order to stand for a minute in the courtyard and look from a distance at the windows of the ward. Once, toward evening, Raskolnikov, then almost fully recovered, fell asleep; when he awoke, he happened to go up to the window and suddenly saw Sonya in the distance, at the hospital gates. She stood there and seemed to be waiting for something. Something seemed to pierce his heart just then; he started and drew back from the window. (420)

The craftsmanship of Dostoevsky’s final sentences here is apparent: the “something” (chego-to) that Sonya is “somehow” (kak by) waiting for appears to be the same “something” (chtoto-to) that “somehow” (kak by) pierces Raskolnikov’s heart in the next sentence. Nor can there be much doubt that she sees him framed by the window and understands, as does he, that “something” transformative has taken place between them. But why invoke the well-worn trope and why reverse the usual roles for the man and the woman in it? Why put Raskolnikov in the place of the maiden in the tower and Sonya in the place of her devoted knight?

An easy answer would see a transcendent ideal replacing an earthly one, where Raskolnikov’s resurrection, an embodiment of Christ’s suffering and rebirth, comes to occupy the center of meaning for a loving believer in him.
and what he stands for. Such an interpretation finds ample support on the page following that just quoted: “But he was risen [voskres], and he knew it, felt it fully in all his renewed being, while she—she lived only through his life alone!” (421). And so, in the traditional woman-in-the-window trope, a man would look up to her casement and find all the meaning of his life there. The confinement suggested by the added parenthetical details of the bars across the windows and the guard patrolling below them in Dostoevsky’s scenic depiction accord perfectly with the trope’s historical use—she is in a convent or her parents’ house or a castle keep, thus unattainable, inspirational, and anchoring. The gender reversal is necessary, in this interpretation, for readers might otherwise mistake the inspiration for a purely Romantic one (like that for an inspired poet) or a purely romantic one (like that for a lover). These would be wrong, for he is up there because of his greater sin, his greater suffering, and she is down here looking up because he more closely embodies an ideal of Savior. This treatment of the trope could be understood with or without irony. He is a murderer, after all.

There is more, however, to the gender switch than a simple replacement of a figurative representation by a sacramental one, important as this may be. Previous instances of the trope in Dostoevsky’s works suggest that the question of masculine character, particularly the degree of the hero’s heroism, is integral to the author’s use of it. Makar Devushkin, who repeatedly looks up to the heroine’s window from the opening scene of Poor Folk onward, is shown as emasculated by a variety of means, from the potency of his rival to his family name (devushka means “young woman”). And, as shown previously, Golyadkin Senior’s climactic downfall is mediated by his loss of control over the trope’s suggestive power, as it is wrested away from him by a more powerful public gaze. Moreover, the German Romantic origins of the reinvented trope, of which Dostoevsky appears to have been aware, place it in the discursive domain of Schiller’s beautiful soul and the republicanism of the early nineteenth century. Such talk permeates Crime and Punishment, making a hero of the lover of life, the lover of humanity with his rational, civic vision, a vision that Dostoevsky’s novel questions from start to finish.

That he was not alone in employing the trope to explore the zeal of republican-inspired enthusiasts can be deduced by comparison with Dickens’s use of it in the climactic scene of his 1859 A Tale of Two Cities.

“Remember these words to-morrow: change the course, or delay in it—for any reason—and no life can possibly be saved, and many lives must inevitably be sacrificed.”

“I will remember them. I hope to do my part faithfully.”
“And I hope to do mine. Now, good-bye!”

Though he said it with a grave smile of earnestness, and though he even put the old man’s hand to his lips, he did not part from him then. He helped him so far to arouse the rocking figure before the dying embers, as to get a cloak and hat put upon it, and to tempt it forth to find where the bench and work were hidden that it still moaningly besought to have. He walked on the other side of it and protected it to the court-yard of the house where the afflicted heart—so happy in the memorable time when he had revealed his own desolate heart to it—outwatched the awful night. He entered the court-yard and remained there for a few moments alone, looking up at the light in the window of her room. Before he went away, he breathed a blessing towards it, and a Farewell.9

Sydney Carton here has just prepared the ground for his swindle of the French republican government by impersonating the imprisoned Darnay and going to the guillotine in his place. As a dead ringer for Darnay, he doubles him; the con of the French authorities, and the devoted glance upward to Lucie Manette’s window (Darnay’s wife and the love of Carton’s life), complete the character trio—double, con-man, and woman in window—whose union serves to deepen Dickens’s already profound tone and increase the sense of closure in the scene, a group photo as it were, with familiars who, we realize only in the end, have been in this story all along.

The invocation of a precommercial heroic ideal, inspired by the inaccessible, inspirational woman, contrasts the republican ethic of the revolution, especially in its formless, “hideous” early excess. The contrast also anachronistically deploys a Romantic devotion to an idealized feminine form. But where Dickens’s depiction sticks to a rather conventional usage of the woman-in-the-window trope, Dostoevsky’s strikes out in a radically different direction, in effect standing the precommercial heroic image on its head by advancing an alternative notion of heroic masculine character. This is not the championing of trade noted by de Tocqueville, who “[could] not express [his] thoughts better than by saying that the Americans put something heroic into their way of trading.” Nor is it the absorption and transformation of virtue by the bourgeois ethic suggested by Dierdre McCloskey in *The Bourgeois Virtues.*11

That it is an alternative to both the heroic and the commercial masculine character becomes evident when one considers the role of the double, Svidrigailov, in this work, particularly the manner in which his life comes to an end. Svidrigailov’s suicide in a dirty side street is witnessed by an “official” of the state, a Jewish fireman, which impressively combines heroic and commercial ethics in one and the same image.
A milky thick fog lay upon the city. Svidrigailov walked along the slippery, dirty, wooden sidewalk in the direction of the Little Neva. [. . .] Then the wooden sidewalk came to an end. He was in front of a big stone building. A dirty, shivering mutt, its tail between its legs, cut across his path. Someone dead drunk, in an overcoat, was lying face down on the sidewalk. He glanced at him and kept going. A tall watchtower off to the left caught his eye. “Hah!” he thought, “this is the place. Why go to Petrovsky? At least in front of an official witness . . . ” He almost smirked at his new thought and turned down N— Street. [. . .] By the big locked gates of the building, leaning with his shoulder against them, stood a little man wrapped in a gray soldier’s coat and wearing a brass Achilles helmet. With drowsy eyes, he cast a cold sideways glance at the approaching Svidrigailov. His face bore that eternal, grumbling sorrow that is so sourly imprinted upon all faces of the Jewish tribe without exception. The two of them, Svidrigailov and Achilles, studied each other for a while in silence. Achilles finally thought it out of order that the man was not drunk but was standing there three steps in front of him, staring at him point-blank and saying nothing. (394)

There follows an oft-quoted conversation between Svidrigailov and the Jewish fireman, which caps both their encounter and Svidrigailov’s existence, and which seems to have baffled several generations of critics. Achilles maintains his prominent metonymic presence throughout, reappearing in mock-heroic phrases such as “Achilles raised his brows” (Akhilles pripodnial brovi, 394) and “Achilles roused himself” (vstrepanulsia Akhilles, 395). The effect is darkly comedic, as others have pointed out, but it is far from uncanny or inexplicable.

The figurative invocation of the heroic ethos combines here with the tacit association of the Jew to the trading, commercial world, the world of everyday commerce. Dostoevsky’s emphasis on the cosmic dimensions of this particular Jew, the “eternal (vekovechnaia) grumbling sorrow” in his face, and the reference to the Jewish tribe (evreskoe plemia), appear to serve the same purpose as the metonymic reference to the fireman through his helmet: they raise the representational stakes, as it were, and make the contrast between lowly “Hebrew” and heroic Greek that much more palpable. Dostoevsky has managed the combination with such efficiency that, without unraveling the expressive resources tapped in its construction, the image has tended to strike some readers as mere comic relief and others as a clear indication of the author’s anti-Semitism. Both these readings fall short.

The notion of a Jewish Achilles contains within it a stark contrast, one that was widely accepted in Dostoevsky’s time and has seen various versions
both before and after. Matthew Arnold’s variation, which he termed Hebra-ism versus Hellenism, emphasized Hellenic honest realism as opposed to the proper conduct of the Hebraic. “The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are,” he wrote; “the uppermost idea with Hebraism is conduct and obedience,” a distinction that applied to the interconnected history of Renaissance humanism and medieval Christianity. In the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt characterized the Greeks as preoccupied with greatness and contrasted this with the Hebrew appreciation of human life in all its aspects, not just the heroic ones. One might cast a glance further back to Heinrich Heine or again forward from Dostoevsky to Nietzsche, Heidegger, or Harold Bloom, but the details of these or other takes on the Greek versus Hebrew models of character and the representation thereof are not the point: the point is that the two categories Dostoevsky has crystallized in his Jewish Achilles—or, translated more correctly given this analysis, his Hebraic Achilles—combine aspects of European thought of his day that are far more profound than anyone has seemed to notice. Their combination may have very little to do with any sort of personal anti-Semitism on Dostoevsky’s part. The effect of the mixture is something like Chichikov wearing armor (dospekhi), or the rise of Chichikovian self-interest in a heroic Rus’ being abandoned by its heroes.

Alternative modes of masculine character—the commercial and the heroic—are thus set to one side in a rather humorous if not offensive gesture, like the portraits in Sobakevich’s drawing room watching the purchase go down, and the dual modes of libertine and ascetic are highlighted for a brief moment before the aesthete blows his brains out, leaving just one masculine character standing in the end. As Raskolnikov’s double, Svidrigailov in death implicitly contrasts Raskolnikov in rebirth, and the mediation of Svidrigailov’s death by means of a Hebraic Achilles can be seen in its proper perspective, namely, by contrast to the new image of masculine heroism that Raskolnikov’s placement in the window has foregrounded. Rather than simply rehashing the woman-in-the-window trope and offering it up to his lost hero as an anchor or a raft, Dostoevsky creates a new vehicle altogether, a new image of novelistic heroism, self-made in a sense and thus “American” in its spirit.

Raskolnikov rushes away from the debt that had hounded him toward a variety of liberatory modes—the confident, the criminal, the entrepreneurial, the Napoleonic—but in apparently raising himself ever upward, his crime sinks him further into a primordial indebtedness that he struggles to explain. While the aesthete aristocrat Svidrigailov thus heads off to America with his ironic announcement to an impotent Hebraic Achilles, Raskolnikov sets off
for a different New World, accompanied by Sonya, through a recognition of his own sin and suffering, and the recognition by another of his sin and suffering as great and all too human.

**Whole Man**

For men are bad in countless ways but good in only one.

—Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*

When, in the midst of a discussion with his brother, Konstantin Levin claims that the motor (dvigatel') of all our actions is self-interest (lichnyi interes) and that no activity can be lasting unless it is based on such interest, Kozny- shev offers the following response: “The main task of philosophy through the ages has been comprised of finding that necessary connection between self-interest and public interest.” Thus does Tolstoy explicitly take up the theme addressed in these pages.

The form in which the brothers have expressed their idea points to a more specific episode in the history of Western social thought than Koznyshchev’s response might suggest. While questions of the public and private good may be found in the history of ideas from the Ancient Greeks onward, the contrast of self-interest to public or social interest grew into the form in which we recognize it today only with the early moderns, and in fact, as explored in chapter 2, it is there that one finds the term interest coming into use in much the way it would continue to be used to our own day. Self-interest was considered as a “motor” for social benefit in the writings of Montesquieu, James Stewart, Adam Smith, and a host of others. Aspects of commercial endeavor, especially in the realm of credit and national debt, the stock and bond market, were debated in the publications of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele and Daniel Defoe and discussed widely by such figures as the Earl of Shaftsbury and David Hume. In Russia the views of Niko- lai Novikov, Mikhail Speransky, Nikolai Mordvinov, the Decembrists Pyotr Pestel’, Nikolai Turgenev, and Mikhail Orlov, as well as Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev, show an implicit familiarity with the ideas of their West European contemporaries.

One of the most powerful opposing standpoints, later to be upheld variously by Thomas Carlyle, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill, pointed to the detrimental effects of such cultural commoditization and contrasted commercial self-interest to an agrarian ideal, especially that of an idealized
landed citizen, often a Roman one. In the writings of the eighteenth century, one finds two extremes of conceptualizing postfeudal propertied individualism, one agrarian and the other commercial. In opposition to the commercial, writes Pocock, there is “a conception of property which stresses possession and civic virtue.” According to this view, “moral personality is possible only upon a foundation of real property, since the possession of land brings with it unspecialised leisure and the opportunity of virtue.”

Such a conceptual history of apologies for self-interest makes it at least counterintuitive if not deeply ironic that Konstantin Levin should uphold it as the foundation for human well-being, the motor for social progress. Given his staunch defense of aristocratic values and heritage, one would expect him to be at least skeptical of the theory that once functioned as the main rationale for the expansion of commercial enterprise throughout Europe. Even more striking in this context is the fact that the very same notion of self-interest has in the course of the century’s development now passed into the arguments of a new set of progressives, Nikolai Chernyshevsky and his followers, all while continuing to be used by the emerging bourgeoisie. The question is, why would Levin, or Tolstoy for that matter, wish to promote the notion of self-interest as the motor and foundation of human well-being when, with its close associations to both commercial ideology and left radical politics, its usage contradicts the gentry agrarian principles for which he stands?

On the one hand, this may be deliberate Tolstoyan iconoclasm, a desire to debunk or contradict established ideas simply because they are established. The contradictory character created by such a means would be no less engaging, and indeed, there is some evidence for seeing Levin’s portrayal as deliberately complex in such a manner. He shows a consistent willingness to allow inconsistencies to enter his arguments, a trait that drives his brother batty. One might also look to the specific circumstances in which the idea is expressed: perhaps Levin is merely trying it on for size, perhaps he is simply appeasing his vacationing brother, or perhaps he is trying to end an argument that he has little taste for. He is impatient about getting back to the mowing, after all.

Here I explore a third explanation, one that resonates more fully through the work and its larger literary-historical context, namely, that Tolstoy, through his somewhat contradictory character, and in a somewhat iconoclastic manner, has offered up the concept of self-interest for scrutiny, especially in the face of the other usages just noted, that of capitalist apologists and the new radical ethics. This is where the concept of virtue in its historical context becomes important. The principle of self-interest espoused by Levin...
dovetails with certain other of his traits and ideas in the virtuous ideal dismissed by Gogol some thirty years before, the landowning nobleman whose unspecialized leisure enables him to cultivate virtue in his person, his family, and his political life. That Tolstoy does not present these traits in an immediately recognizable form has partly to do with the cultural history of the concept of virtue in Russia.

As noted earlier, the semantic whole once contained within *virtus*, especially in its civic humanist sense—as obedience to a moral standard, devotion to the public good, the establishment of conditions of equity between the governed and the governing, and the active civic life of the citizen—was only poorly if at all rendered by the Russian word *dobrodetel*, which increasingly in the nineteenth century intimated a precious gentry etiquette that was less and less in step with contemporary society: it grew archaic and womanish at one and the same time. In contrast, the Roman and later Renaissance concept of *virtus*, like several of its senses in the English word *virtue*, emphasized the aspect of steadfastness, moral and physical, that could combat the world's changeability.

The *baraka*, *mana*, or *charisma* (to use terms from other cultures) of the successful actor... consisted both in the quality of personality that commanded good fortune and in the quality that dealt effectively and nobly with whatever fortune might send; and the Roman term for this complex characteristic was *virtus*. Virtue and fortune—to Anglicize them—were regularly paired as opposites, and the heroic fortitude that withstood ill fortune passed into the active capacity that remolded circumstances to the actor's advantage and thence into the charismatic *felicitas* that mysteriously commanded good fortune. This opposition was frequently expressed in the image of a sexual relation: a masculine active intelligence was seeking to dominate a feminine passive unpredictability which would submissively reward him for his strength or vindictively betray him for his weakness. *Virtus* could therefore carry many of the connotations of virility, with which it is etymologically linked; *vir* means man.

Precisely these “connotations of virility” are lacking in the Russian *dobrodetel*, which, ironically, in its overt associations with the erudition and gentility of aristocratic culture, came over time to suggest effeminacy. By contrast, the virtuous man is, like the Hercules of the Renaissance, an exemplum of moral fortitude and soulful steadfastness in the face of *fortuna*.

Tolstoy's usage in *Anna Karenina* is consistent with this historical picture. *Dobrodetel*, even when it is not explicitly associated with women (the
majority of cases), connotes superficial gentility, absence of “heart,” and lack of authenticity, as in Lydia Ivanovna’s and Madame Stahl’s philanthropic activities. Moreover, the process of learning to be virtuous in this self-conscious and, for Tolstoy, inauthentic manner begins early: when little Tanya Oblonskaya gives up her dessert for Grisha, “the consciousness of her virtuous [dobrodetel’nyi] act” brings tears to her eyes (310). Here as elsewhere in Tolstoy’s oeuvre, self-consciousness suggests falseness, even and perhaps especially in children as they are learning to act in social settings, as they come to terms with the routine phenomena of everyday life.

Kitty’s association with Madame Stahl and Varenka introduces an extended treatment linking the questions of life’s worth and worthiness that permeate the novel. What Kitty hopes to find in Varenka are the “interests of life, the dignity of life” (interesov zhizni, dostoinstva zhizni, 254). If the commercial overtones of such words seem dubious, Tolstoy’s elaboration brings them into focus: Kitty wants those interests and values that are “outside of the social relations of men and women, which now seemed disgusting to [her], a shameful display of goods before a buyer” (254; emphasis added). The opposition is clear: Kitty’s fascination with the authentically virtuous Varenka is motivated by a desire for independence from the exchange relations that have come to dominate social interaction, particularly in the commoditization of women.

The more Kitty observes her, the more convinced she is that Varenka is “that most whole being” (samoe sovershennoe sushchestvo, 254) she seems to be. Kitty wants to know where such “independent calm” (260) comes from and is especially impressed that Varenka was “utterly indifferent to praise” (260). The reduction of an individual to a commodity with a price, as Kitty perceives the relations of men and women, is placed in direct opposition to the completed, integral, and independent being she sees in Varenka. The whole person is thus removed from an exchange relation represented as part of the new social environment; she is spared the subjection of humans to commodity speculation, to their treatment as acquisitions for the satisfaction of self-interested ambitions.

The opposition of completeness or wholeness (sovershenstvo) to a commercial partiality and dependency is not limited to the novel’s treatment of the “woman question.” It is interwoven, often metaphorically, with fundamental aspects of human worth amid changing social mores. With all of his morally fragmented nature, Oblonsky is perhaps the most astute judge of Levin’s character in this regard: “You are yourself an integral character (tsel’nyi kharakter) and you want all of life to be composed of integral phenomena, but it isn’t” (55). Just such integration lies at the heart of the virtuous ideal, which
is ultimately a Socratic notion of living fullness, commitment, and purity—but also, and perhaps most importantly—independence, particularly from the growing norm of salaried bureaucratic functionalism.

The opposition of such living excellence to the moral corrosiveness that results from the application of exchange relations to human relations is clear in a number of the novel’s key scenes. For instance, the crucial opening conversation between Oblonsky and Vronsky on the station platform puts men and women into commercial intercourse in none too subtle a sense. With the frame of the train’s approach, the two men discuss Levin’s supposed proposal to Kitty of the evening before, and Vronsky, his chest swelling from the knowledge that she has turned Levin down on his account, shifts the conversation in a telling direction, translating the entire affair into a hypothetical encounter with a prostitute:

I think she can count on a better match [rasschityvat’ na luchshiu partiiu] . . . Yes, it’s a difficult position. Instead of that sort of thing most prefer women of the demi-monde [znat’sia s Klarami]. Failure there simply means one doesn’t have enough money, but here—one’s dignity is on the line [dostoinstvo na vesakh]. But here’s the train. (75)

Vronsky’s sense of personal self-worth shines through here by means of a contrast to the buying and selling of sex. Moreover, he does not limit calculation, which amounts to a cost-benefit analysis, to himself and Levin; Kitty does likewise, he intimates, when she “counts on” a better match. The crudeness of the exchange—replete with risk, gain, and worthiness (dignity, dostoinstvo) being weighed on a scale—comes across when one considers that an alternative to the kind of human interaction that Vronsky believes he, Levin, and Kitty have just been a party to would be sex for money.

This suggestion of marriage, or at least the relations of men and women in preparation for marriage, as a form of legalized buying and selling of sex, is an early form of the radical stance Tolstoy would take in the 1880s and of a later narrative treatment like that of “Kreutzer Sonata.” In Anna Karenina, however, there still appears a contrast to be drawn between inauthentic interaction as a form of exchange relations, on the one hand, and non-exchange-oriented intimacy, authentic feeling, “the real thing,” on the other. Thus we find the crude equivalence of marriage and a commoditized relationship suggested in the letter Karenin sends to Anna demanding her return to their St. Petersburg home after she has confessed her love of Vronsky. In effect, the letter’s contents demonstrate the falseness of the Karenins’ intimacy by highlighting its basis in exchange relations.
The letter arrives in the hands of a courier as the household is in a flummox over preparations for a sudden departure for Moscow, announced by Anna that morning to her servants. “Very well,” she said, and as soon as the man went out, she tore open the letter with trembling fingers. *A wad of unfolded bank notes in a sealed wrapper fell out of it* (343; emphasis added). This is the fourth time to which this particular money “for her expenses” has been referred, and the second time Tolstoy has managed to arrange for Karenin to humiliate Anna by rubbing her nose in it. It is on the day of the races (the fifteenth of the month) and in Karenin’s thoughts that it makes its first appearance, an apparent excuse amid Karenin’s apparent clarity of mind (239). Next he announces to Anna, in Betsy’s presence, “I also came to bring you money, since nightingales aren’t fed on fables. . . . You need it, I suppose.” She initially says no, but then acknowledges that in fact she does, “blushing to the roots of her hair” (243). Then comes Karenin’s point of pride, the strategically nonchalant postscript to his letter: “Enclosed is the money you may need for your expenses” (334)—the same money nearly eighty pages after its previous appearance, which finally falls from the letter she reads as a crass wad of unfolded notes another half dozen pages later. In between, she blushes once again in reflecting on her position, and “a hot flush of shame [pours] over her face,” while it occurs to her that “the accountant would now come to turn her out of the house” (338), the accountant being apparently the lowliest individual she can imagine who might be entrusted with such a duty.

An equally if not more striking dramatization of intimacy as mediated by exchange relations is enacted by Anna and Vronsky, in their immediately postclimactic encounter, the notorious lover-as-murderer simile.

*There was something horrible and repulsive in the memory of what had been paid for with this terrible price of shame [za chto bylo zaplacheno etoiu strashnoiu tsenoi styda]. Shame in the face of her spiritual nakedness pressed down on her and communicated itself to him. But, despite all of the murderer’s horror before the body of his victim, he must cut it into pieces, hide it, use that which he has gained by murdering.*

*And with bitterness, as if in a passion, he throws himself on the body, drags it, and hacks it; so Vronsky covered her face and shoulders with kisses. She held his hand and didn’t move. Yes, those kisses—that was what had been purchased with shame. (to, chto kupleno etim stydom, 178; emphasis added)*

Here Tolstoy has framed the more striking comparison within one that may seem unconscious or accidental by contrast, especially to modern readers.
We are so used to living in a world so thoroughly permeated by commercial concepts that it is easy to dismiss such language. Given the degree to which issues of modernization function thematically in Tolstoy’s book, this would be a shallow reading.

The most important statement of the fortune theme, however, its linkage to the fate of the country and global notions of value and change, is contained in the railroad. The symbolic, consensually fantastical values of the commercial world are preparing, largely with the promises of foreign finance capital, to lay tracks at Levin’s doorstep, suggesting that his desire for “integral phenomena,” as Oblonsky terms it, springs ultimately from the same source as Kitty’s for “completeness.” The specific forms of Levin’s search are, however, quite different. Two stand out.

First is Levin’s proposed study of the agricultural laborer, whose character, he claims, should be “taken as an absolute given, like climate and soil,” so that to climate and soil data would be added the “certain, unchanging character (известный неизменный характер) of the laborer” (181). The notion of a worker’s character as an absolute given, like climate or soil, contrasts the fluidity of contemporary bureaucratic, financial, social, and moral affairs as depicted up to this point in the book—for instance, in Stiva’s paper officialdom at the office, Stiva and Dolly’s marital life, the choosing of a suitor for Kitty, the uncertainties of medicine and doctors, and the depiction of Karenin’s and Anna’s loss of footing in the immediately preceding scenes. Levin, of course, does not have in mind a particular laborer but an abstraction. Such is the only manner—without the kind of ignorant simplification of the peasantry for which Kozynshev is implicitly criticized—by which one might arrive at the notion of the laborer’s character as certain and unchanging. The supposition of the worker’s unchanging nature, moreover, in a society rapidly transforming, largely under the influence of Western-oriented modernizing trends, is in no way a given aspect of 1870s Russia, a fact that Tolstoy’s treatment makes evident elsewhere, particularly through Anna and Vronsky’s dream of the French-speaking peasant. This, then, I would suggest, is yet another of the many “linkages” that Tolstoy suggested run throughout his text: the notion of changing social mores—from Princess Shcherbatsky’s troubles in negotiating the newfangled practice of nonarranged marriages to the use of birth control techniques and the railroad-facilitated uprooting and dislocation of the peasantry—is associated with the growing role of fortune, especially with its large-scale commercial associations, in the contemporary world.

The second occurs in the course of the same conversation between Levin and Kozynshev with which I began. The ability to act in the service of the public good, Levin thinks, “may not be a quality but actually a lack of some-
thing—not of good, honest, noble desires and tastes—but of force of life [sila zhizni], that which they call heart, the yearning [stremlenie] that makes a man choose one road out of all the possible ones and desire only that” (282). Somewhat like his notion of the unchanging character of the laborer, though in a more heroic manner, Levin appears to have in mind a kind of constancy and purity of action, perhaps under difficult conditions in the face of the world’s changing circumstances. He appears to associate it with personal over public interest, and he suggests that its connection to elemental force, power, and desire for life make it a positive character trait. This has all the markings of the Ancient Greek concept of thumos, or “spiritedness,” and Levin’s attempt to zero in on a character trait whose absence might account for a tendency toward devoting oneself to the service of others suggests, on the one hand, a remarkable psychological self-characterization, but also, on the other, a response to the question of how self-interest might be considered in a positive light.

In terms of the representation of the character’s thoughts and emotional life, his suggestion is consistent with a tendency to see himself as slightly unworthy, yet to be overly sensitive about this at the same time. Overbalanced toward emotion rather than intellect or erotic love, Levin appears to be identifying his own tendency toward thumotic anger and physicality as a positive trait, especially compared to his brother’s logocentrism and Stiva Oblonsky’s eroticism. On the social side, a self-interested, thumotic impulse is suggested here as that thing which centers a man and gives him purpose. To revert to a previous formulation, it tosses him an anchor or a raft amid the sea of life. To make it the sea of modern life, we need our woman in her window once more.

He came out of the meadow and headed down the main road toward the village. A slight breeze rose up, and it became gray, cloudy. There was a gloomy moment, the kind that usually precedes the dawn, the victory of light over darkness.

Hunching up from the cold, Levin walked quickly, his eyes on the ground. “What’s that? Someone’s coming,” he thought, at the sound of bells, and raised his head. Forty paces away, headed toward him on the same wide, grassy road down which he was walking came a carriage-and-four with leather trunks on top. The shaft horses were pressing away from the ruts, toward the shafts, but the skillful coachman, sitting crossways on the box, guided the shafts along the ruts so the wheels would run on the flat ground.

Levin noticed only that much and, without wondering who might be traveling, glanced absentmindedly inside the carriage.
An old woman dozed in the corner, and, at the window, apparently just having woken up, sat a young woman, the ribbons of her white bonnet gripped with both hands. Bright and thoughtful, filled completely with a delicate and complex inner life to which Levin was a stranger, she looked past him toward the glowing sunrise.

At the very moment when that vision was about to disappear, the honest eyes glanced at him. She recognized him, and her face lit up with joyful surprise.

He could not have been mistaken. Those were the only eyes in the world like that. That was the only being in the world capable of concentrating for him all the light and meaning of life. It was she. It was Kitty. He realized she was on her way to Yergushovo from the train station. And all that had been troubling Levin during that sleepless night, all the decisions he had made, all that was suddenly gone. He recalled with disgust his dreams of marrying a peasant woman. Only there, in that carriage moving quickly away and crossing to the other side of the road, only there was the possibility of resolving the riddles of his life that had so painfully afflicted him of late.

She did not look out again. The sound of the springs could no longer be heard, the bells grew nearly inaudible. The barking of dogs indicated that the carriage had passed off through the village—and all around there remained the empty fields, the village ahead, and he himself, alone and distant from it all, making his way alone down the wide, deserted road.

The passage has a lyrical arc with a marked orchestral punctuation at the dual phrases, “It was she. It was Kitty.” The scene resonates, moreover, with the earlier-invoked man-on-his-road passage from Gogol’s Dead Souls, where a man’s vision (the same word, videnie) of a woman appears suddenly and just as suddenly vanishes, leaving the hero stunned amid the empty fields. In Gogol’s work it is the narrator who takes the next step to wonder about the vision’s meaning; in Tolstoy’s the experience is filtered through the hero’s point of view. In either case, the vision serves as an impetus to a certain kind of action and is channeled into the hero’s “force of life.”

In Tolstoy’s works, however, getting the girl is never an appropriate end for such a driving impulse. Levin continues to struggle with the proper end of his own life energy even—and perhaps especially—after his marriage and the apparent filling out of his domestic life. This problem, faced at a later stage in life by Levin, is faced at an earlier one by Andrey Bolkonsky in
In Search of the Virtuous Man

War and Peace, who appears in the early pages of the novel bored out of his wits by domesticity and primed for a leap into a life of heroic, Napoleonic, warrior-based glory. Levin, as Bolkonsky before him, is in effect faced with the problem of bourgeois happiness, which of course is only a problem when the driving impulse of the male protagonist is essentially heroic in nature. Such a character is faced with the question, “Is this all that I am good for?” We in turn can understand this clearly now as, “Is this all that the virtuous, manly ideal amounts to?” The domestic sphere casts its dark shadow over the hero, who is threatened with the mundane details of an essentially procreative and therefore “un-heroic” household.

Levin and Vronsky are threatened with the power of the domestic sphere both at once, and their responses, as the diagram below demonstrates, are systematically contrasted. Tolstoy’s treatment of the problem follows historical precedent, as the depiction of the dual male protagonists, Vronsky and Levin, suggests a turn to either politics or sports as a way of exercising the heroic ethos that the domestic sphere would turn to flab. And, as in the case of the inauthentic in love, a healthy marriage remains distinctly possible at this point in Tolstoy’s imaginative life: it is indicated through the appropriate reactions of Kitty to her husband’s absence, by contrast to the imbalanced and manipulative behavior of Anna. Squarely between the two, indeed, the medium that connects them in this part of the novel, if not the work as a whole, is Dolly Oblonsky and her household, arguably the center of unheroic, mundane, procreative family existence. The ideal of Dolly—for she is idealized, by Levin, and by Tolstoy as well—is remarkable for its dependency. By contrast to what Kitty admires in Varenka, Dolly’s way of life, perhaps because it is that of her sister, appears all too familiar. It can certainly function as a truth hidden “in plain view,” as Gary Saul Morson has argued, but it does not turn out to be productive for any character in the novel other than Kitty. Anna has seen that life, lived it to some extent, but left it behind. Levin sees it only from the outside and can never truly adopt it. He is a manly man.

Tolstoy’s woman-in-the-window scene is thus developed for his main male character: it can motivate him, give meaning to his existence, at least for the moment, and direct his “force of life.” Its framing, moreover, suggests a deeper interrogation of the trope than this single instance might otherwise suggest. Having made his decision to marry a peasant woman and start a new life, Levin looks up to the sky and finds his thoughts reflected in a beautiful mother-of-pearl cloud formation that has appeared when he was not looking; just after his vision of Kitty, he looks again to the sky and finds that the shell that seemed to agree with him is gone.
Figure 5. Sports versus Politics.
Veslovsky is completely accepted; begins flirtation with Anna

Absence of jealousy on V’s part.

Vronsky departs for elections

The reported stinginess of Vronsky in feeding Levin’s horses before Dolly’s return

Vronsky’s departure marked by Anna’s obvious wish for him not to leave and by clear conflict between them.

Vronsky finds himself perfectly at ease and is skilled at them.
There, in the unattainable height, a mysterious change had taken place. No trace of the shell was left, but spread over half the sky was an even carpet of fleecy clouds growing smaller and smaller. The sky turned blue and shining, and with the same tenderness, yet also with the same unattainability, it returned his questioning look.

“No,” he said to himself, “no matter how good that simple life of labor may be, I can’t go back to it. I love her.” (326)

Careful readers of Tolstoy’s fiction will recall an equally magical and dubious encounter between one of his main heroic exemplars and the natural world—Prince Andrey and the oak in *War and Peace.* A detailed comparison is not necessary. I merely wish to point out the similarity of pattern, where the hero’s encounter with the woman in the window is framed by an attempt by him to find corroboration for the general course of his life in some aspect of nature, which is obviously in flux. In both cases, the initial appearance of corroboration and the resulting certainty yields to a sense of dubious excitement about the potential ahead, and in both cases the core of the shift in the character’s thinking is found in the trope in question. The only sure thing for him is her image.

The invocation of the woman in the window at this moment of *Anna Karenina*—a mere twenty pages after Levin’s conversation with Koznyshhev regarding self-interest as the basis for human well-being—makes clear the suggestion of masculine centering and the redirection of the masculine heroic tradition to which the trope is connected. Viewed from a different perspective, the scene provides an answer to Kitty’s search for a nonexchange relationship, one based on something other than the “newfangled” wares-on-sale approach to fostering intimacy among marriage-aged young people that she and her family have found so difficult to adopt.

Tolstoy’s novel resists schematic summaries, especially through the depth and richness of its characters. But the opposition of a thumos-inspired virtue to the contemporary world’s fickleness brings many of its stark dichotomies into focus. On one side lies a wholeness of character that renders one independent, capable of coping with the world’s uncertainties. On the other lies changeability as such and the various dependencies on which people build facades of security to support themselves until “real life” causes a collapse. The shift from landed (virtuous) to symbolic (virtual) conceptions of property afforded a wealth of such flimsy certainties to Tolstoy’s readers. It would continue to do so for several generations to come.