THE OVER-EXAMINED LIFE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON TOLSTOY
Harvard University, April 19 – 20, 2002
Sponsored by the Davis Center for Russian Studies

Friday, April 19

1:00 – 2:50 PM
Panel One: RETURNING TO *ANNA KARENINA*

John Kopper, Dartmouth College
"The Zemstvo Elections: Tolstoy and the Tedium of History"

Like *Anna Karenina* itself, Levin's presence at the Kashin Province elections—as opposed to the elections themselves—tests the conditions under which meaning can be established, perceived, and "used." In these scenes Tolstoy exploits the principle of redundancy, the balancing point through which the meaningful and the meaningless transit. Levin's bafflement, and the cause of estrangement, is the complete lack of redundancy in conversation. Everything he hears is contextless, discrete information. If redundancy helps situate meaning, then liberalism and novelty (everything from English plows to universal suffrage) by definition live under the threat of the meaningless. Simultaneously a literary device and a socio-political virtue, redundant conduct joins the semantic to the moral. Complete redundancy, conversely, is pernicious at all levels: informational, narrative, and ethical. The "bad infinity" of redundant names in Anna's life—daughter Anna, servant girl Annushka, and ward Hannah—exhibits a parthenogenesis of self that signals Anna's narrative and moral end: the destruction of a temporal vector and a context for meaning. *War and Peace* moves against a theory of historical redundancy, where context can in principle always be derived, and behavior thus made understandable and automatic. Foresworn in *WP*, this possibility of extrapolation, leading to the prediction of the course of all future narratives, is entertained by *AK* and embraced by its ending.

Tim Langen, University of Missouri, Columbia
"*Anna Karenina* and the Poetics of Listening"

The theme of listening is pervasive in *Anna Karenina*. It is a fundamental index of a character's morality. Inattentive listening, or the outright refusal to listen, drives much of the novel's tragedy. Listening is not straightforward, but rather a mystery. It is also a good model for the broader problem of interpretation. For Tolstoy, true listening is a leap from verbal surfaces to depths of meaning. Statements may be termed "listenable" or "unlistenable," depending on their relation to meaning. Grammatical paradigms, academic philosophy, and society gossip are generally depicted as "unlistenable" verbal surfaces that inhibit the pursuit of deep meanings (which they typically lack, or even avoid). Listenable statements invite a leap to a meaning that is not exhausted by the words themselves. True listening thus requires not only concentration and logic, but also

imagination. The proper function of words is to enable, and, to some extent, to guide, these imaginative leaps. Tolstoy's hermeneutical model necessarily includes imagination. Yet the importance of imagination does not imply relativism: there are many *wrong* ways to listen in Tolstoy's world, some of which are imaginative. Neither reason nor imagination is a self-sufficient principle; rather, they should both be subordinated to the search for the "meaning of goodness" which occupies Levin at the end of the novel, and which is the ultimate object of Tolstoyan listening.

Julie Buckler, Harvard University
"*Anna Karenina*, Matinee Idolatry, and the Silent Treatment"

My talk does not trace the progress of a literary work to film, but rather attempts the reverse interpretive trajectory, treating Tolstoy's novel in terms of an obscure Hollywood film adaptation—the 1927 American silent film "Love," a free retelling of *Anna Karenina* starring a young Greta Garbo and her real-life love John Gilbert. In its aesthetic remove from Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, "Love" throws an unexpectedly illuminating beam back upon the novel, raising provocative questions about the story's relationship to its historical context. "Love" demonstrates the novel's elasticity, although, it is true, sometimes stretching a Tolstoy-scholar's open-mindedness to the breaking point. "Love" also suggests the influence of Tolstoy's novel on the film's surrounding context – the mythology of Garbo, in its early stages in 1927, when "Love" was released. In my reading, cinema provocatively updates literature, and literature reaches across a span of decades to shape the culture of cinema celebrity. Thus the two forms do not destroy one another, but instead, each artistically renews the other. Tolstoy would certainly have hated "Love," but he might well have relished the productive union of literature and film.

Discussant: Stephanie Sandler, Harvard University

To borrow the terms introduced in Tim Langen's paper, these three papers are eminently "listenable." What makes listening possible, as he has shown us, is not just a listener's capacity for attention and creativity, but also the depth and engagement that a speaker has to offer. We are lucky indeed to begin our two days of talking about Tolstoy with three papers so rich in these qualities. Tim emphasizes the active power of listening, so in order to save time for your own active participation in our discussion, let me be very brief.

John Kopper's paper suggests that Tolstoy is especially difficult and fruitful when he is most self-conscious, and uses the elections scene to study what he calls "the conditions under which meaning can be established, perceived, and 'used.'" The chief condition is redundancy, but we learn most about characters when there is a mismatch, a lack of redundancy, as when characters don't understand rules, when "they sense they don't fit." Where meaning is the hardest to make, where there is the least redundancy, there Tolstoy finds moral virtue; the opposite is true as well, as the example of Anna's "narcissistic

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reproduction of self" is meant to show. Marriage is held out as potentially virtuous – it is compared here to tilling the soil, to ritual repetitiveness – yet its positive example, Kitty and Levin, may seem workable precisely because the marriage is fresh, thus still filled with unexpected, non-redundant elements. If, as John memorably puts it, "Tolstoy's plots are filled with stories he runs from," I suspect that he is partly responding to "the problem of repetition in human experience," partly realizing that he has the capacity to create plots whose endings he cannot entirely face. We as readers, however, benefit from this paradox of redundancy as both attractive and repellant, we are freed to interpret both repetition and difference as meaningful.

In Tim Langen's account, redundancy is replaced by the idea of depth: what is important in listening isn't the accumulation of facts, but a capacity to fill in another's words, as in Plato's *Symposium*. Real listening requires imagination and thus remains slightly mysterious, and it is no coincidence that listening is sometimes most successful when heavily mixed with love. One recalls the great moment in the epilogue of *War and Peace* where Natasha listens so generously, so successfully to Pierre, catching the winged word in flight, Tolstoy tells us. The metaphors are less liberatory in *Anna Karenina*, more a divination of hidden rules, as in the proposal scene between Levin and Kitty. It is a novel more inclined to grimness, and so its failures of listening are more interesting: Grisha's Latin lesson, society gossip, philosophical speculation (wonderfully described by Tim as "gossip about God"). Some of these forms of speech flirt with the production of meaning, others cannot even flirt, as in Koznyshev's book that no one reads, or Tolstoy's fantasy of a critic who does not listen, of words debased by being separated into solitude, bereft of context. Halfway between failure and success, we find a space for a sympathetic reading of Anna herself, characterized as "the book's most varied, interesting, ambitious listener"; her tragedy is not the narcissism John Kopper emphasizes but rather the fact that she cannot hear what matters most. She, like the novel's readers, is caught between two metaphors: surface/depth as a contrast works as fine field for testing sight, but listening cannot so actively probe behind hidden layers. We can, though, listen for more than one thing at a time, we can comprehend both A and not-A simultaneously, as Tim shows Levin trying to do. We can hear them as point and counter-point, as two motifs in a larger fugue; if music replaces painting as our metaphor, then listening seems more possible, the creation of art more optimistic.

In Julie Buckler's paper we return to visual metaphors, most gratifyingly in her discussion of cinematic illumination in the creation of Greta Garbo's screen image. Anna again inevitably emerges as a positive figure, dying not because she deserves punishment but because the world has failed her. The active, resisting presence of Greta Garbo on screen presses us to reconsider these character traits in Anna herself, to understand the assault of social conventions on her passionate being as comparable to that onrushing train, so terrifyingly evoked in the Lumière film clip. Julie's paper also suggests that the act of aesthetic creation has the potential violence and crashing force of that train: the railroad as "*protocinematic* phenomenon," in Lynne Kirby's terms, also becomes a novelistic phenomenon, an intensely forward-moving progression that sweeps bits of narrative along toward their inevitable ending which, as John Kopper told us, is always death. The first of several splendid quotations from Virginia Woolf narrows this

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association of violence with artistic creation by insisting that only cinema acts so rapaciously, but even Woolf ends up fantasizing about "what the cinema might do if left to its own devices." Her dream of liberating film is also a dream about transcending redundancy, but if we keep in mind the way in which redundancy facilitates the making of meaning, we cannot but be grateful for the reciprocal relationship between film and fiction so well explored here. To return to *Anna Karenina*, then, is to return to its enduring capacity to make new meanings, even as it probes experiences that defy the comprehension of character and reader alike; these three papers capture that paradox well.

3:00 – 5:15 PM
Panel Two: TEXTUAL AND CULTURAL SPACE IN TOLSTOY

Andreas Schonle, University of Michigan
"Tolstoy's Paradoxical Myth of the Russian Estate: Space and the Practice of Self-Estrangement"

In analyzing Tolstoy's myth of the country estate, the paper revisits the relationship between Tolstoy's life and fiction and analyzes the displacements the author undertook in transposing events or elements of his life into the world of fiction. From the diaries one can reconstruct the tensions, subtleties, and paradoxes of Tolstoy's embrace of the estate, the erotic temptations and political ambivalence he confronts as he settles into the role of the landowner. *War and Peace* presents two distinct, even opposed incarnations of estate life, both drastically different from Tolstoy's life on the estate, and both profoundly attractive, yet ultimately wanting. The paper speculates about the psychological and moral underpinnings of this binary opposition between two styles of estate life that seem to obfuscate Tolstoy's own experience. Both estates are the targets of his identification, but in a cathartic move this identification serves the purpose of self-distancing, as if the estates embodied something Tolstoy desired but wanted to dismiss. Instead, Tolstoy affirms the honesty and inevitability of a confrontation with the triviality of estate life and the need to make small-scale decisions day by day, turning the estate into the playground of what has been called "prosaics."

Robert Croskey, Muhlenberg College
"Saving Yasnaya Polyana"

Yasnaya Polyana, Tolstoy's family estate, was a destination of pilgrimage for his followers during his lifetime. After his death, several proposals were made by his family to memorialize him there, but nothing was realized before the Revolution. Yasnaya Polyana was threatened with destruction during the Revolution and Civil War, but his family and his followers, the Tolstoyans, managed to save the estate. This paper examines what these efforts to save Yasnaya Polyana reveal about the way Tolstoy was understood by his followers, his family, and the various governments.

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Brett Cooke, Texas A&M University
"Tolstoy's Over Self-Examined Life and the Drafts for *War and Peace*"

The drafts of *War and Peace* are essential reading for the true devotee of Tolstoy's masterpiece. Not only does one get to read yet more of a favorite novel, but earlier versions of published scenes and scenes which were not included in print seem to shed new light on relationships in the book. Scholars have long since noted how brother-sister incest amongst the Kuragins was more explicit in the drafts, but they appear to have missed more subtle entanglements such as (old) Nicholas Bolkonsky's sexual dalliance with his peasants or Kiril Bezukhov's sexual abuse of his female cousins, such as would seem to explain some of the tensions expressed in published editions.

These possibly illuminating drafts probably stayed in the minds of the novel's first and, in all likelihood, primary readers, the author and those members of his family who helped him write it. But can we properly use these versions to explicate the published editions? Some are muted, others wholly ignored, and a number are directly refuted by the printed text, as in the case of the dying Andrew's decision to "give" Natasha to Pierre.

Tolstoy's relatedness, per tenets of evolutionary psychology, appears to have influenced his editorial decisions as we can see by comparing the published drafts with final versions of the novel. Furthermore, Tolstoy seems to have investigated troubling parts of his family history in the drafts, then excising or "improving" them for publication.

Nina Gourianova, Harvard University
"Aesthetics and Anti-Aesthetics: Tolstoy, The World of Art, and Russian Futurism"

Discussant: Robin Miller, Brandeis University

Our first three papers reflect on aspects of space in Tolstoy—whether on the distance or lack of it between fictional estates and characters and their prototypes, or upon the physical space of Yasnaya Polyana and the often contradictory attempts to graft on to it the ideas of Tolstoy, his descendants, his followers, and the government. Two of our papers ponder texts and look back at biography and hypertext, one of them deciphers the estate as a kind of text, whose meaning is debated among three sets of "readers"—family, followers, and government.

Each paper, along the way, formulates the kind of rich question which is transferable from one occasion to another, and since I have had the pleasure of being able to absorb each of these papers at my leisure (so to speak), I would like to try to get our discussion going this afternoon by attempting to highlight what these questions are.

Andreas Schonle returns to the question of the author and makes use of Stephen Greenblatt's notion of Shakespeare as a "conjuror, someone who instigates contact with things, bodies and spirits that are absent." And, following Hans Robert Jauss, Andreas

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points out that it is finely calibrated distance, rather than similitude or separation, which is the modus operandi of aesthetic identification. Distance, as you define it, partakes—if I understand you correctly—of a finely balanced mix of both similitude and separation. You then go on to assert, and I think this is both an original but also a debatable moment in your paper, that "it is surely in this deviation from the prototype that Tolstoy's creative impulse and the meaning thereof should be situated." It seems to me that there may be a minute fault line in your argument here and that, by the use of the term "deviation," you end by privileging (excuse this trendy word) separation over similitude. Am I wrong?

You then, in a fascinating way, go on to focus on the gap between the representation of the country estate in *War and Peace* and Tolstoy's actual experience of it during the same period. You propose several other evocative binary spatial oppositions—between the Bolkonskii estate and the Rostov esate, between Tolstoy's own political and private engagement with his own estate , and finally, (excuse the rough summary) between Prince Andrei and Tolstoy and their respective fictional and actual experiences with their own estates. You conclude that "the distance between Andrei and Tolstoy is more significant than the similitude."

My question, however, returns to this binary structure that you have identified. Could one not argue that the structure is more like a triptych with all the accompanying and mysterious accoutrements of the number three? That is, what about Pierre and his estate and the other set of binary oppositions lurking there both between Pierre and Tolstoy and between Andrei and Pierre which we see (as you point out) through Pierre's eyes in the novel (throughout Book V)? These two sets of binary oppositions having to do with Pierre begin to migrate into a triangle, in which, to extend upon your interesting framework, it would tell us more about meaning and creative process to scrutinize the distance between Tolstoy and each of his heroes, though the separation in one case might constitute similitude in another.

I would like to return to your invocation of Tolstoy as a conjurer (though he might have hated the term). We are more accustomed to thinking of writers like Nabokov as conjurers (witness Michael Wood's recent book)—Tolstoy doesn't make statements like the following: "as a child I loved doing simple tricks—turning water into wine, that kind of thing," or "I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another." (Wood, *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction,* p. 83) Yet a magician or a conjurer is also a master of the delicate balance, of the maintenance of the perfect distance, of the sleight of hand, of misdirecting our gaze, of the manipulation of similarity and difference.

I am turning to Brett Cooke's paper next because, like Andreas, he focuses on literary prototypes, the drafts of *War and Peace,* and the boundary between these prototypes and drafts and the novel itself. I share Brett's fantastical wish that there were some way to experience the complete hypertext of *War and Peace*. Indeed I recently learned from a colleague of mine in Computer Science that something called an "UNDO" button is being developed. If a writer worked on a single computer to create his work, this undo button could peel back each layer, each fragment of the text and its drafts in the order that

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they were composed. Brett's provocative starting point is the assertion that "the novel does seem short in some respects." I think you are right, but what does such shortness mean? Does it mean elliptical, shorthand, or too short? Furthermore, is it not such economy that is precisely the goal of the artist? Two of the shortest poems I know (each has four lines) are also among the most fully suggestive, the most open-ended, yet the most complete. ("Oh Western Wind, when wilt thou blow? The small rain down can rain. Christ, if my love were in my arms, and I in my bed again" [Anonymous]. And "Whence did all that fury come? From empty tomb or virgin womb? Saint Joseph thought the world would melt, But liked the way his finger smelt" [W. B. Yeats].)

Brett demonstrates eloquently how the excised scenes help us understand the motivations of particular characters and, as you put it "often illumine tensions insufficiently sketched in the final text." You show us how "the actions of such characters are sometimes explained by passages left out of the published versions." You give rich examples of the kind of pruning Tolstoy engaged in as he moved from the drafts (which constitute a useful biographical source) to the final text which "introduces the author's fancy." We are back in the realm of distance, similitude, and separation delineated by Andreas, yet for Brett it is the similarity that intrigues, that matters. You write, "Although he never yielded his authorial license and one should never claim there is a one to one relationship between any character and a real prototype, it is difficult to believe that Tolstoy ever lost sight of where characters like the Rostovs and the Bolkonskys really came from." Thus, you assert "to understand the novel better, we need to look for that larger whole."

For Brett then, it seems, the keenest understanding of the novel's meaning comes from scrutinizing similarities, not differences, and from bridging that very distance which Andreas would have us maintain. Or, put differently, which path leads us most directly to the heart of the work? Is our goal to understand Tolstoy as author or *War and Peace* as a novel?

I am reminded of my favorite part of Saul Morson's *Hidden in Plain View.* He cites the charming passage in the novel when a young officer, a distant Rostov relative, arrives at their house in Moscow after the evacuation. Three pages later the young man vanishes; we never hear of him again. Saul writes, "And yet, the presence of these incidents has an important effect on the experience of reading *War and Peace*. For the very fact that some incidents lead nowhere makes impossible the assumption that each new incident we read about will lead somewhere . . . As a result, the scenes in *War and Peace* that are conventionally and novelistically plotted carry augmented power—which is one reason why Tolstoy can get away with, indeed be especially effective with, novelistic clichés when he wants to . . . .The structure of *War and Peace*, then, is emblematic of the historical process as Tolstoy conceived it and as he depicted it in his work. Seemingly insignificant events may or may not turn out to be the most important. Apparently significant ones may not be." (149-150). Here the novel's shortness, to use Brett's term—the way it comes up short and lets this attractive, promising young Rostov disappear from view—is the crux of the matter; the omitted details constitute a compelling similitude with unmediated life itself.

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Bob Croskey has offered us a wealth of historical information about what happened to Yasnaya Polyana during the years of the revolution and in the period following it. A quick question: you mention that he owned several other properties as well. Do any of them figure as estates in his novels in an interesting way? As early as 1858, while working on a sketch entitled "Summer in the Country," Tolstoy wrote a brief passage which I think eloquently encapsulates his own complex relationship to this dear space, "Without my Yasnaya Polyana I can hardly imagine Russia or my relationship to her. Without Yasnaya I could perhaps see more clearly the general laws necessary for my country, but I could not love my country so passionately" (Kathryn B. Feuer, *Tolstoy and the Genesis of* War and Peace, 142). For Tolstoy, then, his estate embodied his relationship to Russia and continuously clouded his ability to theorize about life.

As you show us, the subsequent groups who struggled for control over the estate experienced no such paradoxical stance toward it. For Tolstoy the estate was a text, for the generations that followed, a textbook. You illustrate for us eloquently how, as you write, "in the fifteen years following Tolstoy's death, we see considerable contention for his moral legacy in the controversy over the fate of Yasnaya Polyana."

Running along side of this issue of moral legacy is a heady current of a kind of false piety, a spatial poshlust, that can quickly adhere to the physical traces, the debris, left behind by any great figure. Janet Malcolm wrote recently about this phenomenon with regard to Chekhov but it seems relevant here in thinking about the groups struggling to craft Tolstoy's legacy through his estate: "In Russia, no less than in our country, possibly even more than in our country, Chekhov attracts a kind of sickening piety. You utter the name "Chekhov" and people arrange their features as if a baby deer had come into the room. "Ah, Chekhov!" my guide in Moscow—a plump, blond . . . had exclaimed. "He is not a Russian writer. He is a writer for all humanity!" (Malcolm, *Reading Chekhov: A Critical Journey*, 22).

The task for all of us is somehow to find a way to skirt that deadly quicksand, that dangerous space. All our panelists have done so.

5:30 PM
KEYNOTE SPEECH: CARYL EMERSON, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
"Revisiting Bakhtin on Tolstoy, 2002"

The paper surveys shifting critical opinion on Bakhtin's famous "anti-Tolstoyan" position, raising the following questions: Is Bakhtin basically a philosopher or a literary critic (that is, should we read him for his own theories, or for the insights into literary worlds that his theories afford us)? In what ways is the image of a "monologic Tolstoy" inaccurate or unpersuasive, when one gets down to actual feel of the literary worlds created? Why nevertheless did Bakhtin persist in it? (Appreciative use is made here of David Sloane's excellent piece in *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 2001: "Rehabilitating Bakhtin's Tolstoy: The Politics of the Utterance.") And finally, is there evidence that Bakhtin, at some point in his writerly career, had a more open-minded attitude toward

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Tolstoy, classifying him other than merely an “anti-Dostoevsky” in the world of the word? There is: the recently published full text of notes to Bakhtin’s “home-course” lectures on Tolstoy, delivered in Vitebsk in 1924. In these lectures, Bakhtin examines Tolstoy’s writings not in terms of dialogue versus monologue—categories he had not yet devised—but in terms of his earlier, phenomenological rubrics of “I-for-the-self” and “I-for-the-other.” Tolstoy is still subjected to a harsh reading (that is, Bakhtin does not approve of Tolstoy’s solipsistic individualism and considers it an ethical dead end), but Bakhtin’s judgments are cast in terms that Tolstoy himself would find compatible and valid: Tolstoy is not merely the losing side of a dichotomy designed to serve another type (Dostoevsky’s type) of author.

Saturday, April 20

8:30 – 10:20 AM
Panel Three: TOLSTOY AS PHILOSOPHER

Michael Denner, Stetson University
“Looking the World Inside Out: The Ethics of Examining”

My paper offers an elaboration of Tolstoy’s theory of how things experienced become things understood, how the things from the “outside world” take their place in an individual’s consciousness. In Tolstoy’s epistemological model, observation (and, by extension, knowing itself) is seen to be a participant in what is known, which is to say that objects respond to our observation. As any reader of War and Peace knows, Tolstoy is interested in the way that such minute acts and events coalesce to shape history, in the widest sense of the word as the totality of events in the world. Tolstoy, from his earliest works, refigures looking as an act, and therefore as something that can either interfere or cooperate with the pre-existing natural harmony. He believed that our aggregate immoral “look acts” were, in part, the source of the illusion that pervades the world and renders the average person incapable of moral reform.

Jeff Love, Clemson University
“The Restlessness of Desire in *War and Peace*”

Tying Prince Andrei’s contrast of Napoleon and infinite sky at Austerlitz to the relation between reason and consciousness set out by the narrator in chapter 10 of the Epilogue’s second part, this paper contends that a complex striving for mastery is the novel’s fundamental structure, its dynamic center. This striving reflects the restless desire to capture the infinite whole in the finite nets of reason. The inevitable failure of such striving, revealing the conflict between infinite desire and finite capacity, is expressed in the complex web of circular patterns of struggle, of hopeful attempts and tragic failures to obtain a synoptic understanding of the whole, that are such a distinctive feature of the narrative forms employed in the novel. The essence of these forms is to move beyond the confines of Aristotelian poetics by employing a mathematical model for narrative, a

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"calculus of history," as a more powerful means to describe the whole. In so doing, they constitute a fascinating, if ultimately perilous, attempt to depict the life of immutable laws in ever mutable time, thereby mastering history by turning becoming into being, the time-bound discourse of narrative into an ostensibly timeless discourse of conceptual linkage. Major characters trace out analogous patterns of striving to master becoming and of resignation about the possibility of doing so. Both Prince Andrei and Pierre enact this struggle in the twists and turns of their fictional lives. Prince Andrei is a tragic figure in so far as the impossibility of mastery is a deadly burden for him, whereas Pierre is comic in the grand sense since such impossibility opens up ever new possibilities. These two characters show contrasting temporalities, one tragic and closed, the other comic and open, which compete throughout the entire novel in differing degrees and contexts.

James P. Scanlan, Ohio State University
"Tolstoy as Analytic Thinker: His Philosophical Defense of Non-Violence"

By way of countering Tolstoy's reputation as an alogical and inept philosophical thinker, this paper explores the tension between maximalism and reasonableness in his defense of the ethics of nonviolence. Tolstoy's writings of the last decades of his life show that he was perfectly capable of making appropriate conceptual distinctions, recognizing legitimate objections to his position, and responding rationally to them; in so doing, he made valuable points about the unpredictability of human actions, the futility of using violence to combat violence, the equal worth of all human lives, and the immorality of revenge. Yet his conception of the moral ideal, together with his missionary zeal, led him to exaggerate the absoluteness of his moral message, pushing him relentlessly to predict the unpredictable and demand the impossible of human beings.

Discussant: Donna Orwin, University of Toronto

10:30 AM – 12:45 PM
Panel Four: RECONSIDERING TOLSTOY'S LIFE AND LEGACY

Firouzeh Mostashari, Regis College
"Leo Tolstoy and the Dukhobors of the Caucasus"

This paper discussed the significance of Tolstoy as a political activist and polemecist in his post-conversion years. The paper focused on Tolstoy's aid to the Doukhobor emigration after 1895, when they came into direct conflict with the authorities and were subjected to persecution. Tolstoy and the Tolstoyans were instrumental in bringing the plight of the sectarian Doukhobors to international attention and raising funds for the transporting of the Douhkobors to Canadian territory. Tolstoy's literary and political activities were closely linked. A number of short stories, as well as Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* were completed and sold in order to finance the Doukhobor passage. In defense of the Russian sectarians, Tolstoy also boldly wrote to Nicholas II, predicting the impossibility of upholding a regime based on coercion. Tolstoy's involvement in the

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cause of the Doukhobors demonstrated his increasing politicization during his last decades.

Inessa Medzhibovskaya, Princeton University
"Tolstoy's Conversion: Reexamination and Definitions"

The paper takes as its topic Tolstoy's conversion, one of the least understood periods in Tolstoy's life, routinely prefaced with a qualification: the "so-called conversion." The paper analyzes sources of this distrust and locates them in the starting point of Tolstoy's change. His thoughts of death and immortality ("a fear of dying") are taken by many to be an inauthentic source of conversion. The next problematic point occurs around the course and results of Tolstoy's process of change. It is too long, laden with suffering as far as we know, punctuated by painful setbacks, with none of those serene illuminations that we expect in a conversion. (Tolstoy's conversion, after all, is not just *any* conversion; we presume that it is justified only if it exerts an epoch-making authority on the world).

I argue that the pattern of conversion that Tolstoy demonstrates to the post-Realist age was, in his opinion, the *only* authentic conversion, and far more difficult than the world hopes for. For this reason, the third point of distrust coalesces around how Tolstoy tells us the story of his conversional experiences. Too many of his powerful critics grant no credence to the doubts that Tolstoy brings forward, together with his claim that he wills himself to believe and this is how people believe *if they truly do*. This latter suspicion extends also onto Tolstoy's seeking to satisfy the spirit by bending the letter, to him no more than a site of cowardice for those not capable of creative faith.

The source of all these dissatisfactions, I argue, should be sought in the following striking characteristic overlooked in Tolstoy's conversion: that this experience was a gigantic philosophical and religious project, the search for a new outlook, rather than a crisis-begotten, inherently tragic trajectory. A critical formulation of the terms and definitions on which Tolstoy's project of conversion relies corroborates such a thesis. The paper follows Tolstoy's careful application of Kant's teleology of judgment to forms of positive knowledge supplied by the natural sciences, by pragmatist religious solutions, by theories of social progress and evolution, by historical school of Christianity and other influential schools of thought available at his time. I further show how Tolstoy reworks fundamental concepts of neo-idealism concerning space, time and the role of the metaphysical subject in the acquisition of immaterial, eternal knowledge. Tolstoy's progress of faith (or better, his progress *into* faith) was, I argue, unsuccessful until he elaborated an individual form of communication with God—explaining how and why he chose to bypass the benefits of revelation and neo-Platonic havens of secret knowledge.

I finally show how the same principles of harmonized philosophy and religion are transferred onto, and enjoined with, Tolstoy's new Christian art—naturally, with all the consistency of his new inspired faith, and therefore happily, a-dogmatically. By offering a strict intellectual and spiritual chronology of the decade in which the later Tolstoy was

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shaped, the paper critically reexamines some longstanding contentions about Tolstoy's conversion: e.g., that it was a mid-life crisis caused by a fear of dying; that it was a family crisis or a crisis caused by tensions in the family (or a combination thereof); that it was *not a crisis* but the whim of Tolstoy's insatiable haughty pride; that it was *not a crisis* but a bout of plain but powerful depression, and even an exhaustion of the great talent which had to resort to didacticism to keep itself active.

The paper, thus, provides a significantly modified view of Tolstoy's conversion, beginning with its unusually protracted decade-long chronology (1875-1885) and continuing, more significantly, with its reworking of major terms and concepts generally included in the analysis of conversional experiences: self analysis, repentance, the will to change, resistance to temptations, as well as firmness of foundation and the creative resources of a *new faith*. That an artist of Tolstoy's magnitude would reshape conversional terms and concepts and make them compatible with aesthetic tasks should not surprise us. If it does, it is indication of the gigantic scope of the changes required, if Tolstoy was to continue to live inspired, to create and to inspire others. As such, Tolstoy's conversion represents an entire cultural and religious epoch, whose relevance for the world is only beginning to unfold.

Alexandra Popoff, University of Saskatchewan
"Sophia Tolstaya's 'Who is to Blame?' as Counter-Story to 'The Kreutzer Sonata'"

Criticism directed at Sophia Tolstaya's novella "Who Is to Blame?" is scarce and tends to oversimplify its plot, characters, and ideas. It is assumed that Tolstaya wrote her novella to prove that "it's all her husband's fault." Unpublished for over a century, for fear of causing a scandal, her novella is still considered merely a "domestic" reply. Tolstaya who knew her husband's fictional works in all their variations wanted to show the difference between male and female attitudes to sexual love. However, she did not introduce an alternative sexual morality into her "woman's novella." In her references in the margins she quoted those passages of Tolstoy's work that were critical of male sexuality and coincided with the ideas she wanted to convey. Textual analysis reveals that Tolstaya's ideas on physical and spiritual love and celibacy in marriage were in accord with Tolstoy's, as presented in the final variant of his provocative work. The ideological similarities between the two works reveal the feminist qualities of Tolstoy's text.

Kathleen Parthé, University of Rochester
"Does Tolstoy Still Live in Russia?"

The people and places in Tolstoy's fiction remain constituent elements on the cognitive map of Russian identity, and the vision of a great Russia in *War and Peace* fits the contemporary nationalist mood. Tolstoy's works are still a source of cultural capital, as reflected in opera, stage and film adaptations, as well as in popular sequels, condensed versions, and even comic books. But the later Tolstoy - peasant and seer, shaker of nations, renouncer of earthly pleasures and leveler of class distinctions - has retreated into

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the background as the rich, talented, and worldly Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy emerges. Tolstoy's provincial estate is promoted to the Russian public as an example of good taste in home decor and in the entire construction of a genteel and dignified way of life. Every age finds the Tolstoy it needs, and it remains for a future generation to mount a Tolstoyan rebellion against the master of Yasnaya Polyana.

Discussant: Gary Jahn, University of Minnesota

Our topic here invites us to reconsider Tolstoy's life and legacy as an instance of a general re-examination of a man known more for his persuasively palpable fictions than for his life. And yet our panelists have, in the main, construed Tolstoy's "life" as those later years during which he was known to all the world as a profound thinker and an acerbic and radical commentator on the life and society around him, not only in Russia but in the western world generally. He was, in fact, much better known as such, as the "sage of Yasnaya Polyana," than as the author of those great works of literature on which his enduring fame rests. And it was at this time, the middle 1870s until his death in 1910, that he seems himself to have been most perplexed about the meaning of life and most doggedly persistent in his efforts to comprehend and expound a cogent and satisfying explanation of his life and its significance.

When we, then, set ourselves the task of dealing with Tolstoy's "over-examined" life and finding "new perspectives" from which to regard it, we follow in Tolstoy's own footsteps, and our efforts are fully consonant, at least in principle, with the concerns and intentions of our subject. So, in "Confession," Tolstoy tells of his various attempts to find a suitable viewpoint from which he might see his life as meaningful, sensible, and significant. He, too, needed, by his own account ***desperately***, to find a "new perspective."

To speak of "perspective" is to speak in visual terms and suggests an effort to understand something by deciding whether it looks right. This, too, is familiar from Tolstoy himself. There is a passage in which he comments on the effect that his new understanding of life had upon him by comparing himself to a person out for a walk. As he walks along he sees the various objects that he passes, some on his right, others on his left. Having gotten as far as he wished to go, he turns back and it comes to him then that he is passing once again all the very same objects as before but that now everything is quite different. What was on the right is now on the left, and vice versa, and though everything is in one sense the same there is another, and much more important, sense in which everything is different because it is seen now from a different perspective.

There is, then, an interesting question about whether and when Tolstoy's life looked right to him. Were there long periods or only brief moments when he felt that everything seemed to be in its proper place? He gives many of his fictional characters such moments. We think of Olenin's perfect contentment in the lair of the deer, or the perfection of Natasha's first ball, or Levin's final moment in "Anna Karenina," wherein even his shortcomings seem to have their proper place. In the case of Tolstoy's

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characters these moments are of short duration and last only until they are overwhelmed by the need to deal with the ceaseless flow of life itself, so that it is ***life*** which makes it impossible for life to "look right" for more than a very little while at a time. It is this apparent perversity in life that drives Tolstoy in the end to the radical dualism to which he resorts in the essay "On Life."

It is clear that he felt internally divided throughout his life, torn especially by the difficulty of making the moments of clarity and contentment last, seeking the comfort of the one illuminated, changeless instant but always beset by the consequent perception of something other, continuous, ubiquitous, and ineluctable. Perhaps this is the root of the intensely binary quality that is so often evident in the structure of his thought and the construction of his writings. He seeks a way to still the disharmony, to cause the competing forces or principles to coalesce. He desires completion and combination, but he settles for division. In his dualism he tries, as it were, to undivide by dividing, to separate a higher life from a lower life and then to discount the importance of the lower.

But the consciousness of the true life and its superiority to what he calls the "animal life of man" must itself be succeeded by the labor—the intensely rational labor—of construing the significance of the illumination for the life of every day. In "Confession" Tolstoy speaks of those dozens and hundreds of dyings and awakenings occasioned by his disbelief in God being succeeded by the powerful but evanescent conviction of the presence and power of the divine. He remembered all those many dyings and quickenings . . . [remembered] that he needed only disbelieve in God and he died and only believe in Him to live. "For what else should I look further then," he exclaims. "God is that without which it is impossible to live—God is life!" What else, indeed, could there be to look for? And yet Tolstoy never thereafter ceased looking, never ceased his effort to understand and expound the implications of that glimpse of the power of God.

Was this final perspective any more successful than any of its predecessors in his fiction or his life? Was it any more resistant to the ceaseless flow of life itself? Did it give Tolstoy a life that "looked right"? Inna Medzhibovskaya goes into such questions in some detail as she describes a Tolstoy consciously concerned with himself as if he were the subject of a portrait. She describes a Tolstoy whose conversion is in significant part grist not only for the thinker's mill, but for that of the artist and aesthetician as well. Prof. Mostashari's paper examines the private stresses within the public posture of the Tolstoyans in their efforts to assist the persecuted Dukhobors. This was an important element of what Tolstoy looked like to the rest of the world, and we learn of the difficulty of maintaining harmony between private convictions and a public persona. Prof. Popoff is concerned with the differing perspectives of Lev Nikolaevich and Sofya Andreevna on the significance of the events depicted in "The Kreutzer Sonata." She develops the argument that there is after all more harmony than disharmony in this aspect of their troubled relationship. Prof. Parthé draws upon her close acquaintance with the recent past and current state of Russia to consider what Tolstoy looks like in his homeland now and whether and how Tolstoy's new perspective, or, indeed, any of his former perspectives have persisted.

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Examination and re-examination is a constant theme throughout Tolstoy's life (and his works), and it would seem that there is a sense in which that life ***cannot*** be over-examined, as the title of our conference seems to worry. Still, the draconian nature of Tolstoy's final solution—that what is commonly thought of as life is life only in a very inferior sense—should make us mindful of the possibility that our conclusions might well be criticized from a radically Tolstoyan point of view as not pertaining to Tolstoy's ***real*** life at all.

That real life is shown only in hints and allusions. It is difficult to say whether it looks right, since we are rarely afforded more than a glimpse of it. We do know, based on such experiences as those of the eponymous hero of "The Death of Ivan Ilich" and of the master Brekhunov in "Master and Man," that there seems to be some basic incompatibility between the living of life in the sublunary realm and the manifestation of the true life that was so important to Tolstoy. Even the workman Nikita from "Master and Man" had to live on for another twenty years before he could be "sincerely glad . . . that now he was really passing from this life of which he was weary into that other life which every year and every hour grew clearer and more desirable to him." We also know that the release from this life, "most simple and ordinary, and most terrible," was longed for and welcomed by Tolstoy himself with such regularity as might well raise the suspicions of even the most devoted of his followers. Several of his essays end with a passage that echoes this one, from "I Cannot Be Silent":

"It is impossible to live so! I, at any rate, cannot and will not live so.
That is why I write this and will circulate it by all means in my power both in Russia and abroad—that one of two things may happen: either that these inhuman deeds may be stopped, or that my connection with them may be snapped and I put in prison, where I may be clearly conscious that these horrors are not committed on my behalf; or still better (so good that I dare not even dream of such happiness) that they may put on me, as on those twelve or twenty peasants, a shroud and a cap and may push me also off a bench, so that by my own weight I may tighten the well-soaped noose round my old throat."

1:45 – 4:00 PM
Panel Five: NARRATIVE AND TOLSTOY

Joe Andrew, Keele University
"'There's No Place Like Home': Narrative, Space and Gender in 'Family Happiness'"

"Family Happiness," perhaps the most important precursor of *Anna Karenina*, has received surprisingly little critical attention. This paper sought to offer a re-appraisal of this important and somewhat neglected early work, especially around the three concepts of the title, narrative, space and gender. The central premise was derived from Bakhtin and his claim that chronotopes 'are the organizational centers of the basic plot events of the novel. The knots of the plot are tied and untied in the chronotope. We may say

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without reservation that they have a basic plot-forming significance.' It is in the chronotope that the plot is developed and advanced.

The paper considers a number of key chronotopes and related features in the work, namely, the house, nature and the seasons, the threshold, St Petersburg, the Spa Town, before returning to the dominant chronotope, the house, to which Masha returns at the end of the work to regain her true identity. The paper also examined plot movement, basing the argumentation on Lotman's typology for plot: 'The elementary sequence of events in myth can be reduced to a chain: entry into closed space - emergence from it'. This 'chain' may be reinterpreted as 'death - sexual relations - rebirth'. It is precisely this 'death leading to rebirth/resurrection' plot that Masha embarks upon, and thereby, in this sense, she acts more like the *hero* of myth than the passive, immobile heroine, and therein lies at least part of her problem, in the sense that she strives throughout the story to be its hero, to be morphologically male. In discussing the plot movement, and the interplay between the chronotopes, the following conclusion is reached. Returning to Lotman's plot typologies, we may synthesise his ideas as follows: 'The hero is male, and mobile; he leaves home, crosses the boundary/threshold and enters enclosed space. This space can be thought of as 'death/the grave/descent into the underworld/the devil's kingdom/the house of the dead'; here [s]he encounters/overcomes/slays immobile obstacles/antagonists and/or engages in sexual relations. These encounters lead to emergence from this space/return home, to rebirth/resurrection, in the form of a new identity or the renewal/confirmation of the old identity.'

Masha, in entering enclosed space, in leaving home, in (almost) engaging in (inappropriate) sexual relations, had usurped the morphological male role, which she also does in other ways. In returning to her own home, Pokrovskoe, she both recreates and reconfirms, paradoxically, her earlier Virginal identity, but also establishes, or rather accepts, her new identity as wife and mother, which are here encoded as asexual. Equally, Sergei is now for her 'not a lover, but an old friend.' Family happiness is thus achieved, but it promises to be a rather sexless affair.

Justin Weir, Harvard University
"Desire and (Anti-)Narrative in Tolstoy's 'After the Ball'"

This paper argues that in "After the Ball" Tolstoy attempts to redefine the role of realistic detail in narrative. The hero's attention to fetishistic detail in his own interpolated narrative seems to overburden the communicative capacity of language; it thus interferes with the typically productive junction between sexual desire and narrative, which Tolstoy repeatedly examined in his late fiction. "After the Ball," is also, the paper reminds Tolstoy's readers, "after" the major realist fiction, a kind of metafictional commentary on its goals and methods. All of those characteristically Tolstoyan details from the major fiction—the downy lip, the heavy tread, the porcelain bust, the wild lock of hair—no longer drive the narrative forward in a flurry of realistic description that integrates the environment metonymically. On the contrary, in "After the Ball," detail as fetish,

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weighed down with unsustainable meaning, seemingly unimportant or antagonistic to character development, suggests an aesthetics of anti-narrative.

Gary Saul Morson, Northwestern University
"Narrativeness"

This paper introduces the concept of Narrativeness, which indicates whether narrative is essential for explaining a certain set of events. In many kinds of thinking, laws are themselves sufficient, and a story is a mere illustration; and there are many other ways to diminish (or increase) the need for narrative. The dominant trend of thinking about society since the seventeenth century—the aspiration to create a social science in the hard sense—involves eliminating the need for narrative. Tolstoy regarded that whole aspiration as absurd, and dedicated "War and Peace" to pointing out the fallacies necessarily involved in any purported social science. Narrative is essential and ineliminable. "War and Peace" also exemplifies a whole type of literature that is designed to maximize narrativeness,—the literature of process. The poetics of this form would distinguish it from traditional narrative genres and would be of immense interesting its own right.

Discussant: Bill Todd, Harvard University

In the past thirty years of academic life, certain terms have in turn overwhelmed us with their users' imperial aspirations—"everything is political, cultural, social" we heard during the '60s. "Everything human is semiotic"—during the 1970s and 1980s. "Everything is narrative," or at least subject to narrative analysis—during the past quarter century. I have sometimes found myself asking "what is ***not*** narrative," and we have some good answers and examples in today's papers: the static ending of FAMILY HAPPINESS for Joe, description and metaphor for Justin, the Leibnitzean for Saul, a perfectly harmonious world in which everything is interdependent on everything else and on the whole. "Narrative" has been variously defined as an "account of an event or series of events" (Websters) or as "someone telling someone else that something happened" (B.H.Smith)—both of these point not only to eventfulness, but also to the act or agency of narrating and to the reception of narrative. Our papers attend to these aspects of narrative in varying degree—all to the events of their narratives, Joe and Justin to particular aspects of telling, Saul to the difference between reading and rereading. Narrative has been distinguished from other text types, such as "argument" or "description." The problem with such distinctions is that they break down and functionally comingle when we come to specific texts. Narrative quickly becomes, in Wittgenstein's terms, a "concept with blurred edges," and we can see how this happens in our three papers, as Joe concerns himself with his story's description of space, Justin touches upon descriptions which break loose from narrative enchainment, and Saul looks forward to a time when we will have scholarly arguments shaped—or unshaped—by narrativeness. A further boundary crossing concerns the methods with which our panelists, in 2002, study narrative. None stays on one side of that line Saul drew

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between structuralist and non-structuralist reading. Joe's elegant structuralist analysis draws, as did Lotman, on Bakhtin, and to good advantage Joe draws on the earlier version of the ideas Saul articulated today in *The Shadows of Time*. Justin's more phenomenological reading nevertheless finds help in Eikhenbaum's study of Tolstoyan narrative and in Saul's notion of narrative potentials. Saul's treatment of events as acts which happened but did not have to, as surprises, would have been no surprise to the Lotman who wrote a chapter on the concept of event.

The complexity of our panelists' methods is a fitting response to narrative, which is notoriously slippery stuff. Louis Mink, who celebrated narrative as our primary cognitive instrument for studying careers through time, also articulated its pitfalls: problems with putting narratives together, or enchaining them, problems with determining what is an event, since events are dependent on context and point of view; problems with determining which narratives—*as narratives*—are true and which are false. A narrative may report events which can be proven to have taken place, but is the narrative as a whole, as a narrative, true? Narrative is more than a set of events, as Saul notes; narrative involves sequencing and spinning; it is processed in terms of pragmatic assumptions—which writers such as Sterne and Pushkin turn against their readers. I know of no more stirring articulation of this problem than Dmitri Karamazov's, when he cries out against his father's narration of the beating of Snegyrev: "On the surface it's true, but inwardly it's a lie!" —"Snaruzhi pravda, a vnutri lozh'"! No writers were more aware of these problems than Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Saul cites Tolstoy's preface to *War and Peace*, in which Tolstoy asserts the independence of his parts and the unfolding of his narrative, narrative interminable. His later pronouncements are less celebratory, and, in his practice he edged toward description and argument, types of writing in which the author is more likely to control the reception of his work than in narrative. His famous statements about Anna Karenina give a more static, holistic sense of the text, writing as they do about its architecture, its internal connections, its "linkings". These linkings—in turn—encompass not only actions, but images, situations, characters. In Joe's paper we see such linkings—especially ones involving setting—deftly traced, as do we in Justin's paper, with its attention to recurring imagery and to the contrast between the body of Varen'ka and the body of the beaten and flayed soldier.

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