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## Latent Love or Lust?

Liberating Female Sexuality in Joe Wright's 2012 filmic adaptation of *Anna Karenina*

### **Introduction**

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way,” opens Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina*. Although this novel focuses on the dysfunction, consequences, and repercussions of family, I will turn my focus onto how women are represented in this novel, and more importantly in the 2012 Joe Wright film adaptation of *Anna Karenina*. I’ll be examining mis-en-scene, which is “what the viewers notice most of all film techniques” (Bordwell & Thompson, 112), and this category often encompasses setting, costuming, makeup, staging, and for my purposes, score. Within my interpretation of the film, the mis-en-scene switches the spotlight from families, onto the female characters. Within this classic novel, Anna Karenina, the married “belle of St. Petersburg society” (film), has a passionate affair with a young Cavalry officer, Count Vronsky. The two other main female protagonists are: Kitty, a young girl just beginning her coming out into society at a grand ball, and Dolly, her sister, who is married with ten children to Anna’s brother, Oblonsky. Levin, Oblonsky’s friend, falls in love with Kitty and proposes, keeping in mind that he must compete with Count Vronsky for Kitty’s affections. Meanwhile, Levin and Kitty, follow the traditional love story, and Oblonsky and Dolly struggle through issues created by his affair.

It is an understatement to say that both the film and novel focus on families, but I’d like to center around the female protagonists: Anna, Dolly and Kitty. Joe Wright makes a unique choice with mis-en-scene where the staging and the theatricality create a spectacle, placing three women

center stage. The costuming, makeup and stage design (mis-en-scene) as well as the score elevate and highlight the treatment and transformation of women. As I examine this film as a literary adaptation visually, verbally and musically, I will also be addressing those aspects of the novel that the film captures, and those that it does not. As I analyze both texts, I will be asking, how is this representation of women transformed when the novel is adapted to film by Joe Wright? How do changes in the treatment of women across these two texts tell us about changing ideas about and attitudes towards women's sexuality and "freedom"? Finally, how does mis-en-scene contribute to the changes in representation of women and their sexuality? How does the score contribute? My paper brings in film, adaptation, and literary criticism about *Anna Karenina*, to maintain a contemporary conversation.

Although Anna Karenina is the main female protagonist, I will examine Dolly and Kitty as well. Anna is the Russian diplomat, Alexei Alexandrovich Karenin's wife, but decides to have a passionate affair with a young cavalry officer, Count Alexei Vronsky. Dolly is the wife of Prince Stiva Oblonsky, Anna's sister, and he has an affair with their family governess, and other women. Kitty, Dolly's sister, falls in love with Count Vronsky, but after being humiliated by him at her cotillion ball, grows up, and grows to love Constantine Demitrich Levin, and marries him. All three women occupy the center stage at different points in the film, and some occupy spaces outside the stage, or behind the stage. Within these spaces, there is mis-en-scene, which I would like to analyze in relation to the sexual liberation of these three women. Through makeup, costuming, stage design, and even the score, all of these elements contribute to the development of each female protagonists' journey to love, and documents each of their either rewarded, or fatal, choices. These elements of mis-en-scene also point to aspects of these three women's femininity, how the men in their lives treat them, and what their role in the society they live in

truly is. All three women face different outcomes and choices by the end of the story, but all have to do with love, passion, and marriage, and like each journey, each individual woman is completely different.

### **Opening Scenes**

To begin my discussion, I'll start with the opening scenes of the film and how each woman is introduced. First, I'd like to start my discussion by explaining a few definitions. I will be defining a wide shot as a shot which depicts the person on screen as well as the setting, with the person in the center of the shot, a medium close-up shot as a shot of a whole person's body, a close-up as a person from the shoulders up, and an extreme close up such as on an eye, or a body part. Bird's eye view will be defining shots that are looking down from a high place, and a dolly shot is a shot, which moves the camera to the right or left on a cart. The first introduction the audience receives of Anna, the main female protagonist, is a medium-close up shot of Anna reading a letter, and being dressed for the day by her lady's maid.

Throughout these opening scenes cutting between Oblonsky and Dolly, as well as Anna, we also see that she is reading a letter from her brother, Oblonsky. At the beginning of the film, Anna wears darker colors such as blues, purples, and black, signifying her marital status, and her domestic role as wife and mother. Especially in these opening scenes, we see Anna as a family supporter, right in the thick of the business with Oblonsky and Dolly, reading the letter, and going to Moscow to convince Dolly to forgive Oblonsky for his affair with the children's governess.

In contrast to the film, within the novel, Anna is introduced for the first time at the train station, and the focus is already on foreshadowing and metaphors to come. Tolstoy begins his journey with Anna from Vronsky's eyes:

“Vronsky followed the guard to the carriage and had to stop at the entrance of the compartment to let a lady pass out. The trained insight of a Society man enabled Vronsky with a single glance to decide that she belonged to the best Society...he felt compelled to have another look at her, not because she was very beautiful nor because of the elegance and modest grace of her whole figure, but because he saw in her sweet face as she passed him something specially tender and kind.” (Tolstoy, 72)

The description goes on to portray Anna’s physical appearance, but it is an interesting choice that Tolstoy chose for Anna to be introduced through the eyes of her future lover, in contrast to the film, where Anna is first introduced as being dressed by her lady’s maid, alone, and a sort of Savior to her brother’s marriage, and as a smooth, beautiful member of Society. The similarities lay in the portrayal of Anna’s beauty, grace, and in her high society, but the differences are of an angelic being viewed by a man, or a beautiful woman being viewed by the audience as the lady’s maid is dressing her. These differences portray the differences between the film’s ability to begin the film with Anna’s beauty and grace, transition into the growth of this in her affair, and more importantly, show the contrast when she eventually degrades and destroys herself.

On the subject of Dolly, the first scenes we see her, are with her ten children, as she says good morning to each of them individually. After this, we see her on the stage, crying, after receiving a note that was meant for the governess, from her husband, Oblonsky. In these shots of Dolly and the children, and then Dolly and Oblonsky, we see her as the beacon for the “cult of domesticity” during this time period: the perfect mother of 10, another one on the way, and attentive to her family.

Dolly is the ideal Victorian “angel of the house”, keeping the family safe and protected, while her husband goes out and has affairs with whomever and whenever he chooses. Dolly’s darker

clothing choices also go with the above statement I made about domesticity and marital status, indicating that neither Anna or Dolly prioritize their sensuality or sexuality by wearing bright colors, but instead hide their beauty through darker clothing, or behind veils.

Within the novel, Dolly is introduced in a more insecure way, and in a negative situation, rather than at first as a mother, but first as a worried wife. Tolstoy begins his description as “Darya Alexandrovna was there in a dressing-jacket, with her large frightened eyes, made more prominent by the emaciation of her face, and her knot of thin plates of once luxurious and beautiful hair. The room was covered with scattered articles, and she was standing among them before an open wardrobe, where she was engaged in selecting something. Hearing her husband’s step she stopped and looked at the door, vainly trying to assume a severe and contemptuous expression. She felt that she was afraid of him and afraid of the impending interview...” (11) This first introduction is different from the idealized, endearing mother of 10 within the film, instead, Tolstoy begins her story with anxiety and sets her up as an uneasy person with many difficulties in her home and family ahead. This contrast is interesting due to the idealization and perfectionism of her character in the film, compared to the realism of her life in the novel.

In contrast, Dolly’s sister Kitty is introduced in a very grandeur way, at the top of the stage, as Levin looks up and sees her dancing above him, asking him to come up to meet her. We as an audience see her dancing and her ribbons in her hair flying. As the youngest of the three female protagonists I will be examining, I noticed her youthfulness and girlishness first. The choice of light pink compares to her princess status, but the ribbons imply that she is like a little girl. Her dancer-like quality also draws attention to her right away, as she becomes in the third screenshot of her in front of the pink set. Unlike Dolly and Anna, she is center stage, enjoying it, and plays it up for Levin. Kitty is young, and foolish, and her costuming displays this, but more than

anything these opening shots show us that this girl is young still, and yet to know what true love is. These characteristics provide a useful comparative foundation for later in the film when her character goes through some significant changes through the rejection of Vronsky, growing up, watching her sister Dolly's marriage, and finally falling in love with Levin.

Kitty's introduction in the novel is almost identical to the film, which is interesting; considering the significant differences between Dolly and Anna's introductions. Tolstoy introduces her:

"Princess Kitty Scherbatskaya was eighteen, and this was her first season. Her success in Society was great than that of her two elder sisters, and greater even than her mother had expected. Not only were nearly all the youths that danced at the Moscow balls in love with Kitty, but two serious suitors presented themselves for her that very first winter: Levin, and immediately after his departure, Count Vronsky." (50). This introduction mirrors the filmic one, right down to the romantic rivals, and her youth. Even her relationship with Levin, and the relationships there are an accurate portrayal. Within this quote, Tolstoy also emphasizes her success in society, which takes center stage in both her coming out in society, and her humiliation at the ball. When Anna steals her place in the spotlight in both the book and the film, Kitty is devastated, and her youth and hopefulness turns to wisdom, determination, and growth as a young woman. Arguably, her sexual liberation comes in her choice of pure love and giving a marriage proposal a second chance, growing to love Levin.

Overall, these introductions to the three main female protagonists both mirror as well as contrast the filmic stylistic choices to introduce Anna, Dolly and Kitty. For my purposes, I would argue that each of these introductions within the film point to foreshadowing each woman's choices within sexual freedom, whether that be: having an affair outside of marriage, choosing to

respond passively and predictably to her husband's affair with the governess, or eventually accept a marriage proposal she first denied. Each woman is introduced differently as unique individuals, but from the costuming to how each woman is positioned within the theatrical stage, their journeys towards sexual liberation begin.

### **Men and Marriage**

After these introductions of our three female protagonists, I wanted to briefly discuss one scene that includes all three women in this discussion, and frames our discussion of treatment of women within the 19<sup>th</sup> century man's view of women, marriage and love, brought to you by Levin and Oblonsky. Levin, Oblonsky's oldest and dearest friend, comes back to Moscow to propose to Oblonsky's sister-in-law, Kitty, and asks Oblonsky for advice when they have dinner together. Instead of advice, their conversation turns into one of love, marriage, and treatment of women. Oblonsky begins their conversation by asserting,

“It's so unfair. You marry for love; you're a good husband. Children arrive. Years depart, and all of a sudden, your wife grows old, and tired, and her hair is thin, and her body...while you yourself, you still have your vigor...and you find yourself a martyr to distraction by so many women.” (Oblonsky, *Anna Karenina*)

Levin laughs, responding that, “Forgive me, but I find that incomprehensible...as though I'd leave this restaurant and steal a roll from a baker's shop.” (Levin, *Anna Karenina*). Levin asserts that Oblonsky is talking about his appetite, while he is talking about love. They discuss Levin's competition in Count Vronsky, which later includes Anna into the conversation.

As they discuss Dolly and Oblonsky's marriage, and Levin's potential marriage with Kitty, all three women are entrenched in this discussion, and Oblonsky gives a pin-point answer to how men viewed women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and how that triggered affairs outside of marriage.

When Levin talks about Kitty, he describes her as “of the heavens, an angel,” (Levin, *Anna Karenina*), to which later, after prompted that Dolly is a gem, Oblonsky talks of his love for her by remembering, “I loved her to distraction.” (Oblonsky, *Anna Karenina*) After this conversation, although these two men view women differently, Oblonsky potentially takes Tolstoy’s voice here by displaying that men marry women for beauty and for love, but as they age, and children arrive, men need to satisfy their sexual urges somewhere else, by stealing bread rolls, as it were.

The conversations between Levin and Oblonsky in the novel are similar, with more emphasis on Levin’s accusatory tone of Oblonsky’s actions regarding the affair and otherwise, under the guise of criticizing his business. Levin says, “I don’t understand it at all! I don’t understand what you’re doing. How can you do it seriously?” (23), which references his affair with the governess, but of course Oblonsky takes it to mean his business. Joe Wright’s depiction of the two friends is pretty accurate in comparison to the novel.

Before and after this conversation, Anna, as she travels to Moscow, has three separate conversations, all of which also paint a very accurate portrait of the plight of women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First, Anna has a conversation with Countess Vronskire, who later we learn, is Count Vronsky’s mother. They discuss their sons, and the joys and pains of motherhood on the train ride to Moscow. Anna recognizes her because of her scandalous affairs, but keeps it to herself, only asking her, “Was it love?” (Anna, *Anna Karenina*) to which she responds, “Always. My sons are ashamed of me, but I’d much rather end up wishing I hadn’t then wishing I had. Wouldn’t you?” (Countess Vronskire, *Anna Karenina*). Anna responds that she doesn’t know, but this sets up the conversation on adultery, and the humiliation for women in society after having an affair. Interestingly enough, this conversation is excluded from the novel, except for a

goodbye and Vronsky's voyeurism of Anna while she and his mother talk. This scene is significant to my argument because it provides sufficient foreshadowing to Anna's own affair, and connects directly to the acceptance and conversation of men's affairs and the normalcy of them compared to the horrors and scandal of a woman's potential affair.

Anna has the pivotal conversation about forgiveness with Dolly. Discussing Stiva's affair, Anna assures Dolly that it is "the animal in man, not the soul. You and the children are everything to him." (Anna, *Anna Karenina*), to which Dolly responds, "Are we? But there is room for a governess." (Dolly, *Anna Karenina*) Their conversation rapidly switches from talking about the "disgracefulness" of Oblonsky's choice, to how Dolly's choice to not forgive him will impact her life forever. Anna worriedly asks Dolly, "My poor lamb, then you would rather accept your fate?" (Anna, *Anna Karenina*) when Dolly tells Anna that when she thinks of her husband and the governess together she could not forgive him. Even though Dolly hasn't done anything, if she chose not to forgive him, she would assuredly be out on the street, leaving Oblonsky with the children, because his wife decided to get a divorce, or not perform her wifely duties. Overall, this conversation represents that women are always at fault in these affairs, regardless of whether it was the woman or the man who was unfaithful.

Their conversation in the novel is remarkably similar, but with more precise description of Dolly and many other women of the time's situations:

"But how can I forgive him, how can I be a wife to him after her?...Life with him now will be a torture for me, just because I love my old love for him...You know she is young, she is pretty. You see, Anna my youth and my good looks have been sacrificed and to whom? For him and his children. I have served his purpose and lost all I had in the service, and of course a fresh, good-looking creature now pleases him better." (81) The discussion in the novel provides a deeper

look at Dolly, and by extension other women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century through Dolly and her domestic role, as well as her frustrations as a discarded wife.

Finally, Anna's conversation with Kitty does a remarkable job at foreshadowing Anna and Vronsky's affair, but sets up Kitty's humiliation at the ball. Anna and Kitty discuss the ball, and how she is "very sure it is going to be her night" (Anna, *Anna Karenina*) because it is her very first ball as a young woman, eligible to dance with young men, a sort of cotillion. Anna sets up the alphabet blocks on the table, spelling out Vronsky's name, saying, "I know everything...oh, to be your age again. I was 18 too when I got married." (Anna, *Anna Karenina*) By sharing this, she confides in Kitty and in the audience this sense of longing to be young again, and to be in love, not married to someone nearly twice her age, and a mother. This conversation also puts the center stage on Kitty and Vronsky based on the expectations of a romantic rendezvous for the pair at the ball, which sets Kitty up for miraculous disappointment, and Anna, for an unexpected love affair she couldn't have ever dreamed of. Interestingly enough, this conversation was added to the film, but is absent from the novel. The fact that this is excluded from the novel, points to Joe Wright's choice to set up the love triangle more between Anna, Vronsky and Kitty, and stage the theatrical and dramatics of the spectacle that will come with the Dance Scene.

### **Relationships Between Men and Women within Opening of Film**

Before elaborating on said Dance Scene, I'd like to analyze further the relationships between men and women that the film starts out with. The three main relationships at the beginning of the film are between husbands and wives, Anna/Karenin, and Oblonsky/Dolly, as well as the scandalous relationship of Oblonsky/governess, and the blossoming relationships of Levin/Kitty or Vronsky/Kitty. The end of the film can display the relationships between Anna/Karenin/Vronsky, and Dolly/Oblonsky/anonymous women, and certainly Kitty/Levin, but

I'm going to begin by discussing the original relationships: starting with Dolly and Oblonsky. We see very few conversations between Dolly and Oblonsky, except the shots at the beginning when Oblonsky sees that Dolly found the note meant for the governess, and indirect conversation between the children, Oblonsky and Dolly. However, we do receive quite a bit of screen time with Anna and Karenin throughout the film, but particularly in the beginning and end. At the beginning, Karenin jokes with Anna saying, "I am to be deprived of my wife so that an adulterer can be forgiven?" (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*), and later to tell Anna lightheartedly, "Sin has a price. You'll be sure of that." (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*) unknowingly foreshadowing his wife's horrible downfall.

As far as Kitty and Levin, Levin proposes, and Kitty rejects him. Our story begins with two hopeless love stories, one flirtation, and one somewhat loveless, but amicable marriage. All of this changes at the Dance Scene, when all the couples' lives are forever changed, and the promotion of sexual liberation for women begins through staging, costuming, makeup, and most importantly in this scene, the score.

### **Kitty's Ball and Dance Scenes**

The Dance Scene within the first hour of the film exposes all of the affairs and relationships that will come in the rest of the duration of the film. Anna goes only as a favor to her brother and to Kitty, Kitty is there as the center-stage star at her sort of cotillion hoping for Vronsky's undivided attention, Oblonsky is only there because it is his wife's family event, and Vronsky is there to seek out and find Anna, intrigued and attracted to her from the train station. As far as costuming, Kitty begins our scene wearing a debutante kind of dress that is white with a pink bow, demonstrating her youthfulness, innocence, as well as beauty. Kitty is even so generous as

to offer a young 12-year-old boy her third dance, because she is certain every other dance will be spent with eligible young men, and especially Count Vronsky.

Anna and Oblonsky enter in a medium close up shot, Anna on his arm, wearing a black lacy gown, once again demonstrating her closed marital status, and wears a veil over her face. Count Vronsky enters the scene in his white military duds, and Oblonsky in a suit. At the beginning of the scene, Kitty dances with the first stranger who swoops her up, and lifts her above his head, and then dances with Vronsky, only to be bitterly humiliated and disappointed, when he tells her, “You look beautiful as ever, Princess Kitty,” (Vronsky, *Anna Karenina*) and then dismisses her for the duration of the evening to go and find Anna. Anna and Oblonsky dance together, and in between dances, Vronsky comes up from behind Anna, and simply states, “Dance with me.” (Vronsky, *Anna Karenina*) Anna responds, “I’m not used to being talked to like that by a man I met once at a railway station.” (Anna, *Anna Karenina*) Vronsky’s definitiveness in asking Anna to dance, after rejecting Kitty, begins their bold relationship by demonstrating his passion for her. Anna responds in the same boldness, beginning making her choices towards sexual liberation outside of marriage, with Vronsky. Deciding that for Kitty’s sake, they will dance, they dance several dances together, so much so, that everyone in the ballroom is staring at them, and Kitty is humiliated. Joe Wright staged this scene so brilliantly in a way that when Vronsky and Anna first begin to dance, every couple freezes when they dance beside them, and at one point, it is as if there is no one in the room but them dancing, similar to work Joe Wright did in *Pride & Prejudice* when Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth danced at Netherfield Ball.

As far as score choices, the song, *Kitty’s Big Debut* which is how the ball starts, is both merry, and hauntingly joyful, like the theme of the whole score, but keeps it light as the couples dance. When *Dance With Me* starts after Vronsky says this, the score elevates to a darker tone,

and sets the stage for the sexual tension to begin building between Vronsky and Anna as they dance together. As the song progresses, and Anna and Vronsky continue to dance together, and as people start to look, and Kitty is more humiliated, the song goes into a more minor key, and escalates into higher notes quickly, and then when Kitty faces Anna with the spotlight on her, the music darkens into a menacing tone. This is when Anna makes the choice to push Kitty out to dance with Vronsky. As Kitty and Vronsky begin to dance, there is a critical foreshadowing moment for Anna when she realizes the brevity of the choices she made in the ballroom, and looks into the mirror, and begins to see a train coming fast towards her reflection. This is the first time, besides at the train station seeing a man dead under the tracks, that Anna's fate starts to rapidly progress towards her. From this moment in the film on, Anna begins constantly looking for mirrors, trying to reconcile that she was, to who she has become in this affair with Vronsky, and ultimately what her fate will be, when she kills herself. Overall, this dance scene: sets up the affair between Vronsky and Anna with the building sexual tension, humiliates Kitty and sends her into a process of growing up, and begins the start of a downward spiral for Anna through the gossip of others, and by giving her the beginnings of the means to destroy herself if she makes the choices with Vronsky.

Anna and Kitty are represented here in different ways: Anna as the anti-heroine, and Kitty as the forgotten, and humiliated heroine. Kitty, in her purity and innocence in her white gown, makes all the right choices, but still ends humiliated, and not at the center stage. Anna, however, in her black lacy gown, and the lack of guilt in dancing with Vronsky multiple times indicates her selfishness and fulfilled desire in not only being the center of attention, but the center of Vronsky's attention. Kitty expects one thing, and leaves the Ball broken and disappointed about her lack of attention, lack of Vronsky's love, and regrets now turning down Levin's proposal.

Anna, however, leaves the Ball with choices to make about her relationship with Vronsky, and with the beginnings of people looking at her and Vronsky as the center of attention. Not only is Kitty humiliated, but Anna and Vronsky also enter the conversation and center stage.

### **Protagonists and Families**

After this dance scene, Anna returns to St. Petersburg to her family, Karenin and her son. With this transition, I will discuss Joe Wright's depiction of families within these three women's lives. Starting with Anna and Karenin, Joe Wright sets up an amicable, yet loveless marriage between these two individuals, with a large age difference in between. When Anna returns from the dance and helping her brother, we see the bedroom and domestic routine of Anna and Karenin, when Karenin declares that it's "Time for bed," (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*), to which Anna goes to bed, and Karenin discusses his successes as one of the prime ministers of Russia, as he pulls out the 19<sup>th</sup> century contraceptive device, intending to have sex with his wife. Wright demonstrates that there is little love there, certainly no passion, and only business, much like his meetings as prime minister. Anna is merely a wife, mother, and a sexual object, not an individual person with thoughts and feelings that are outside her domestic duties as a wife and mother.

Another aspect of family life that Wright shows us is a scene with Anna and her son, Serojza. Before she left for Moscow, her son begs her to stay, and Anna discusses how this was the first time leaving her little boy during her conversation with Countess Vronskire on the train. When Anna returns, Wright shows us an extreme close up shot of Anna's fingers caressing Serojza's skin, and hugging him in his sleep, to demonstrate her return home. Serojza says, "Thank you for my present", and smiles contentedly at the idea of his mother being home. Wright sets up right away with Anna's priorities being in saving her family, and being with and near her son.

Dolly and Kitty's circumstances intertwine in the domestic spheres, as we look at the scene of Dolly and her new little baby boy, as Kitty holds him. Dolly asks, "Doesn't he make you feel ashamed of dwelling on your troubles?" (Dolly, *Anna Karenina*). Dolly and Kitty discuss love and marriage, and how much Kitty hates Anna for how much she humiliated her in regards to Vronsky. So frustrated to the point of exhaustion and anger, Kitty says, "I will never marry. The whole business of it has become disgusting to me. And look what it's done for you! Why do they call it love?" (Kitty, *Anna Karenina*), to which Dolly responds, looking adoringly at her baby, "Because it's love." (Dolly, *Anna Karenina*). Kitty's use of the word business here implies her disgust and horror at the consequences and plight for women within marriage, while men do as they please. These scenes with Dolly and Kitty demonstrate Kitty's growth as an individual woman recognizing the plight of women in these domestic spaces, and Dolly accepting it, and loving the parts of it that she can appreciate as a loving mother, meanwhile, excusing her husband's horrible behavior.

### **Betsy's Party Scene**

Meanwhile, while these ideal portraits of domesticity span across the screen, the director shows the obsession and persistence of Count Vronsky in pursuing Anna to have an affair. The score song choice *Unavoidable* describes these scenes perfectly; Anna never seeming to be able to escape Vronsky's presence and questioning looks. Another scene, almost as critical as the Dance Scene, which concludes this sort of stalking of Anna and voyeurism on Vronsky's part, is Betsy's party scene. This scene is staged in a way that everyone is moving in slow motion, the costuming is emphasized, and the women gossiping provides a strong framework for the potential scandal that could occur as a result of Anna and Vronsky. To set the scene, all of Betsy's friends are seated on a couch; all wearing different colored pastel dresses, fanning

themselves synchronized, and mimicking each other's movements with each conversational line. *I Don't Want You To Go* begins to play. One of the princesses argues for Anna's impropriety, and another argues that she thinks, "Karenin is a fool. Anna is the best of us." and thus begins the contradictory views of Madame Anna Karenina at the party. The score builds slowly, starting on low, menacing notes, and then rising with the gossip, later Anna and Vronsky's tense conversation, and ending with Anna's choice to stay at the party and ultimately ask Vronsky to stay. Anna enters the room in a wine red dress with ruffles, and most importantly, bare shoulders, with one sleeve falling off. She also wears a wine red hairpiece that is falling off her head, indicating that even her costuming is falling apart at the thought of an affair. As Vronsky indicates to Princess Betsy, "I'm losing hope." (Vronsky, *Anna Karenina*) and she responds, "Hope of what? Persuading a virtuous woman to break her marriage vows?" (Betsy, *Anna Karenina*). This hope that Vronsky displays indicates that he doesn't expect Anna to come, but then Anna practically runs into the party in her bold, red dress, which communicates her openness, and her sexuality with her bare shoulders, as well as the color choices. Earlier in the film, she had worn darker colors, which symbolized her marital status, domesticity, and duty, but now in wine red, she takes the leap into her affair with Vronsky, making her first real public appearance with him since the dance.

When Anna enters the party, Vronsky has already left, and all the men in the room escort her in as the royalty she is, until Betsy says, "He's gone, but you're just in time for the surprise." (Betsy, *Anna Karenina*) This "surprise" is a fireworks show above the stage, and everyone in the room bends backwards in a sort of choreographed move, looking up at the show. This spectacle just foreshadows the sort of show that Anna and Vronsky will create when others see them. Different than the others, though, when Anna bends backward and looks up, she closes her eyes,

we see her in a medium close-up shot here, and almost seems to resign her marital duties, mentally deciding to let go and have the affair with Vronsky. Vronsky, seeing the firework show, and almost sensing Anna's resignation, turns his carriage around, and comes back to the party. From this moment on, the scene is dictated by the staging of their conversation, and their decision to be together. From bringing her an ice, to offering her a cigarette, to leaning in closely to talk with her, Anna and Vronsky begin to, as Karenin puts it, "attract attention." (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*). Anna tells Vronsky "You behaved badly, very badly." (Vronsky, *Anna Karenina*), but at the same time, the staging of the scene moves them closer together with each shot. Their conversation tenses, to the point where Anna says, "If you ever cared for me, you will give me back my peace." (Anna) and Vronsky responds, "There can be no peace for us. Only misery. Or the greatest happiness." (Vronsky) After Vronsky says this, Karenin complicates the scene by entering, almost as a prop that doesn't belong on their set or stage of their relationship, a complication.

Between the staging of Anna and Vronsky as center stage participants to Anna's bold costume choice, to the dramatic score, this scene paints the pair as the only occupants, and therefore shifts the spotlight and the drama of the story to Anna's choice in whether to have an affair with him or not. The spectacle and voyeurism of the other party members in watching them increases the suspense and drama, and even more so when Anna's husband arrives on the scene.

Once Karenin enters, this not only complicates the scenario, but forces Anna to make two decisions: 1) to stay at the party and finish her conversation with Vronsky, and 2) decide whether or not to have the affair or not, regardless of her husband. Anna insists that Karenin send the carriage back for her, and then Vronsky eventually escorts her out, giving her an ultimatum of whether he will leave St. Petersburg or not, basically asking her if she will move forward with

their relationship or not. The score changes to *I Don't Want You To Go*, as soon as Anna exclaims “No!” to Vronsky saying he will leave, and she declares, “I don't want you to go.” This puts the seal of approval on the beginning of their romantic relationship.

Returning to the costuming discussion, once Anna returns home, and realizes that Karenin had waited up for her, she begins to remove her clothing on her own, since her lady's maid is absent. Karenin tells her “You and Count Vronsky attracted attention tonight.” (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*) and warns her that “We are bonded together by God, and this can only be broken by a crime against God...you may by indiscretion, give the world occasion to talk about you.” This quote sets the stage for Karenin's warning, and his curiosity at the relationship between Vronsky and his wife. His duty to his country, wife, and honor, all overwhelm any other feelings of jealousy, and he only seeks to cover up a potential scandal. His quotation perfectly describes the theatricity of the party scene, since the whole room is talking about Vronsky and Anna, and their behaviors, choreographed movements, Anna's clothing choices, and the score, all point to the fact that a scandal is beginning.

### **The Affair Begins: Anna and Vronsky Sex Scenes**

This relationship finally begins when Anna utters, “Too Late” to her husband saying that it was too late to talk about her and Vronsky, and asks him to leave her alone to undress, but really, ends up saying, “Too Late” to give her marriage another try and give up Vronsky. The song *Too Late* begins playing, and the stage turns into Karenin and Anna's bed, which Anna is levitated off the bed as a sort of puppet, and transitions into a sex scene between Vronsky and Anna. Each of Anna and Vronsky's movements are more like a choreographed dance of intertwining, caresses, love and ecstasy. The score increases the drama of the sex scene, and the cutting between the bedroom, and shots of Anna and Vronsky sneaking around, and Vronsky leading

Anna to dark places to go and have their affair. Anna's costuming, and lack of clothing in these scenes is incredibly significant. During the cuts in which Anna and Vronsky sneak around, she wears black, and a veil to hide behind, but they touch as much bare skin on each others' hands as possible in between escapades. Of course, during the sex scenes, neither of them is wearing any clothes, which demonstrates Anna's complete sexual liberation in her relationship with Vronsky. In the one sex scene we saw with Karenin and Anna, they are both wearing clothes, the lighting goes dim, and all is implied, rather than shown on the screen, making it almost business-like, rather than romantic and loving relationship between a husband and wife in the bedroom.

Anna and Vronsky's relationship however continues to be tense and conflicted, even during these sex scenes. After these choreographed movements, towards the end of the scene, Anna declares to Vronsky that "You're all I have in this world, you know that." to which Vronsky replies, "You are my happiness.", and Anna replies, "You murdered my happiness...Murderer, murderer....", and from there we get an extreme-close up shot on her lips as she says this. Both this, and a later sex scene between Anna and Vronsky, are both where they are naked, and the lighting is on them as if they are on a stage, and their dialogue is tense, and the score elevates the drama of their sexual interactions and loving moments. More importantly, while Anna is having this affair, she seems stronger, happier and more confident in her existence as an individual, independent woman, once again advocating sexual liberation.

### **Vronsky's Races and Confessions**

After these sex scenes, the next critical scene that puts Anna's sexual liberation on stage is Vronsky's Horse Race scene. In this scene, Anna is wearing a light blue dress with a pink garden hat, and she has binoculars to look at the race from way up in one of the top boxes in the theater. This time, Karenin is behind Anna, observing her movements, which are again choreographed,

and mimicking what is going on with Vronsky in the race. When Anna is unsure of Vronsky's fate, she crushes her fan, and fans herself even further. Karenin stands behind her with his own binoculars watching Anna's reactions. The most difficult part of this scene and this scene in the novel is Anna's terrified and horrified reaction when Vronsky falls off his horse. Anna screams out, "ALEXEI!", to which Karenin runs behind her, holding her, saying that he was right there, knowing perfectly well, like the entire theater, that she had cried out for Alexei Vronsky, and not her husband. After this scene, we cut to Karenin and Anna in their carriage, where the affair is finally exposed. Karenin declares that the manly sport of horseracing, and "the cruel spectacle" of it all was unbearable, and questions her regarding her "behaving inappropriately". As a result of these comments, Anna comes clean, declaring, "You are not mistaken. I am his mistress. I love him." In the carriage, one of Anna's sleeves hangs off her shoulder, and her skin is exposed again in this dress choice, and this hat does not have a veil, like previous hats. In this way, she is conflicted and torn between the black, muted domestic color of her dress, and the light pink, frivolous hat. In a way, in the public eye, she is trying to still look the part of a married woman, but the light pink hat is her salute to her affair with Vronsky, and who she has become in that affair, more feminine, strong, and happier.

In two scenes prior to this one, Anna had come clean to Vronsky about being pregnant. In this scene, Anna is wearing all white, with a parasol in the country field. Vronsky declares that he and Anna could finally be together, and they could run away, and Anna sets up their situation with Karenin, by joking, "You think my husband will make you a present of me?" This sort of purity displayed in her dress, and confession to Vronsky, transition strangely into the Races scenes, which make a "cruel spectacle" of their affair, much like at the Dance, and at Besty's party.

### Pregnancy and the beginning of Anna's downfall

After these scenes, there is a rapid change in character, and costuming, as well as staging for Anna's character, as a result of her sexual liberation. Anna is now pregnant, and dresses in darker clothes once again, attempting to exhibit her domesticity despite the affair and the scandal. However, different from the beginning, when Anna exuberates with confidence and ease, she now waits hour after hour for Vronsky to show up at her house, and navigates Karenin and Vronsky's visits around each other. Her pregnancy almost serves as a part of her costuming, and changes who she is. Now no longer an independent woman sneaking around, the pregnancy is a living example of her sin, and of her affair with Vronsky. This is visible to all, and her pregnancy is her emblem of the sexual choices she has made, good and bad. The staging of the Karenin household conveys the entrapment of the three of them in the mess of their own making. From this moment on, Anna's costuming choices change dramatically, and the staging of her character also changes significantly.

After the birth of her daughter, we see Anna "dying" in her bedroom, with her head laying back on her bed, and a medium close-up shot on her face with her hair spread out like Medusa on her pillow. Within this set of scenes, Vronsky and Karenin come together for Anna's sake, even grasping hands, and Karenin comforting Vronsky. This scene concludes with Karenin telling Vronsky, "I forgive you. I forgive Anna. My soul is filled with joy. I will remain with her and look after her forever." (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*). Anna's costuming becomes less and less, and changes rapidly with every scene, as her degradation begins. In these bedroom scenes, she is wearing a white nightgown with her shoulders bare and exposed. She also chooses to cut her hair off after the birth of her daughter, and when she asks Vronsky to go. This costuming choice seems to be a physical change Anna wanted to make after the product of her affair was born, and

she was a new woman, source of scandal, but still a wife, and mother, and lover of Vronsky. This haircut attempts to portray all these roles, and more importantly, her hopelessness as a character, since she cannot repay Karenin's forgiveness, and she can't be happy without Vronsky.

Before Anna gives birth to her daughter, Karenin tells Anna that she is "depraved, a woman without honor. I thank God the curse of love has lifted from me." (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*) With this comment, Karenin decides to tell Anna's brother that he will be divorcing her. Karenin visits Oblonsky and Dolly, and Oblonsky invites him to dinner, declaring "Alexei, divorce is one thing, but dinner is quite another." (Oblonsky, *Anna Karenina*) The conversation at dinner turns to an issue of adultery with another couple, and makes the situation even worse, which leads Dolly to beg Karenin to forgive Anna, much like Anna did with Oblonsky at the beginning of the film.

"But she will be nobody's wife, she'll be ruined." (Dolly)

"I tried to save her. She chose ruin." (Karenin)

"Alexei Alexandrovich—look at me. You will have no peace of mind until you forgive her. It was Anna who taught me that." (Dolly)

"I do not wish to forgive. I am not a cruel man. I have never hated anyone. But I hate her with all my soul for all the wrong she has done me." (Karenin)

Dolly continues to wear darker domestic colors, and still manages to promote the domestic sphere, even though Anna had ruined herself. Dolly remains a beacon of the family as the film progresses, and doesn't change, which leads to a scene with Kitty and Levin, where Kitty has made significant changes in her costuming, demeanor, and in her heart. Levin returned after seeing Kitty in a carriage over the summer, when she had extended her head out the window with her eyes closed, and the ribbons blowing in the air. Levin remembered this, and loved her

anyway, coming back to propose again, despite his humiliation. Levin tells Kitty “You are just the same.” to which Kitty responds, “I certainly hope not.” Kitty wears light pink again, much like at the beginning of the film, but this time, her hair is pinned back like her sister’s, and her demeanor has changed. She is no longer longing for the center of attention, but instead fades into the background, and waits patiently to talk to Levin, grateful for any conversation with him. Kitty almost mimics her sister’s demeanor and characteristics, mirroring herself as a more mature woman, prepared for another potential marriage proposal, and this time, acceptance. During the scene with the blocks, Kitty and Levin agree to forgive and forget, move on, and realize that they have loved each other all along. Kitty’s choices of changing herself lead to her marriage with Levin, and a happy life, unlike Dolly or Anna. Dolly remains unchanged, much like her husband, and Anna, as Karenin puts it, “chose ruin”, and her degradation and destruction of herself begins from the birth of her daughter onward.

From when Anna cuts her hair, and makes Vronsky go away, Karenin tries to return to the status quo of his dutiful marriage to Anna, taking Vronsky’s daughter as his own. Anna declares that since “I sent him away and it’s as though I shot myself through the heart!” (Anna, *Anna Karenina*), to which Karenin responds, trying to save her again, “Is there anything I can do for you?” (Karenin, *Anna Karenina*). Anna cries, “I’m a bad woman. But I can’t breathe. Your kindness, which I can’t repay, and your forgiveness...I have to live with it! If only you would have gone on hating me.” (Anna, *Anna Karenina*). Karenin informs Anna, “You would be lost. Irretrievably lost. You would have no position. And worse if we divorce. You would be the guilty party. That mean you cannot legally remarry. Your union with Count Vronsky would be illegitimate, and so would your daughter who now has the protection of my name. And that is what you want! It would be a sin to help you destroy yourself.” (Karenin,

*Anna Karenina*). In this scene, Anna's sexual liberation, which up until this point, the film has promoted, is turned on its head, because of her pregnancy, and the consequences of her affair. Here, we see the plight of women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the lack of options for women in these situations. In this way, Joe Wright's stylistic choices of Anna's character degradation from novel adaptation portray Anna as a gradually more-so anti-heroine, steering away from the happiness, strength and confidence she had felt earlier.

### **Anna and Vronsky "Husband and wife"**

Anna reminds him, "You forget something. Count Vronsky and I love each other.", to which Karenin responds, "And this love sanctifies a criminal folly?". From this scene onward, Anna wears thin, white clothing, from her nightgown, to dresses that look similar to wedding dresses, to her final red dress. Anna's choice of white clothing not only attempts to cover up her scandalous affair and sin, but also attempts to show the world that she is a "New bride", and that Vronsky is her new husband. After Karenin releases Anna, and Anna and Vronsky leave the country, they are traveling as if they are married. Within these scenes, Anna either wears nothing, or wears light colors, and lots of whites, and wears her hair up in messy bun, or down and untamed. From these scenes, we see Anna and Vronsky enjoy their love for a while, until Anna begins to feel discontented with Vronsky, and is paranoid that he doesn't love her anymore, they fight over a potential divorce, and over Karenin, and Serozsha. When Anna and Vronsky return, Anna attempts to go and see her son on his birthday, since Karenin has not allowed it. In this scene, however, Anna wears all black, as if she is mourning, and wears a veil over her face, so that the servants at the Karenin household almost don't recognize her.

When Anna finds Serozsha, she asks him to love Karenin, but Serozsha responds, "I don't want papa. I want you. No one in the world is better than you." (Serozsha, *Anna Karenina*). This

is where Anna realizes now her role as a wife and mother is gone, and the black signifies her grieving that she no longer fits in both worlds. However, she tries to come out in society as a “bride” at the Opera with Vronsky. Vronsky suggests that she stay home, but instead, she puts on a frivolous, wedding like white gown with a huge fur, and goes to the opera alone, for everyone to gawk at the scandal. Despite Vronsky’s pleas, she declares, “I’m not ashamed of who I am or what I’ve done; are you ashamed for me? Why do you keep a room at the hotel? Aren’t we together? Have you changed towards me?” (Anna, *Anna Karenina*). Anna sits in the opera box with a friend, until everyone starts staring at her, and making a scene.

### **The Opera Scene**

There is a medium shot, where everyone in the audience at the Theater is staring, and using their binoculars to look at Anna after a scene that a woman made at her expense, screaming, “Let them look! She has a lot of nerve, parading herself in society like a slut.” (Woman, *Anna Karenina*), and Vronsky stands, attempting to go save her, and Betsy says, “Yes, why don’t you? Rescue her and put your seal on the fiasco...you see why she must divorce. Marriage will solve everything.” (Betsy, *Anna Karenina*). This scene is a perfect combination of the Dance Scene, and Betsy’s party, but this time, there are immediate consequences. Anna is staged at the center of the theater even in the audience, and this time, Vronsky is off to the side, away from the scandal, protected. Anna’s consequences are there for everyone to see, and gawk at, unlike the previous two scenes. Although Anna is wearing a beautiful gown and jewelry, these accessories don’t succeed at hiding the scandal, or everyone’s shame, voyeurism, and gossiping.

Similar to this scene, Anna goes to have tea at a restaurant where all women are there, all wearing white. They all glare at her, seeming to accuse her for wearing white, or simply, for being out in society in the first place. Dolly surprises Anna and joins her at her table, asking how

she is and how little Annie is doing. Anna catches up on Levin and Kitty's story, and asks Dolly, "Aren't you ashamed of me for what I've done?" (Anna, *Anna Karenina*), to which Dolly responds, "No. I wish I would have done the same. I wasn't brave enough... Stiva doesn't change. Like all men I suppose.", while they finish their conversation about love. Both women are wearing white, and in a similar advice giving scenario as the beginning of the film, this time Dolly the wiser one, and Anna the ruined woman, both talking about the consequences and benefits of love.

### **Anna's Downfall and Suicide**

After this, Vronsky and Anna quarrel over inconsequential things, since Anna claims that there is no love left, and she sees that she can no longer fit in either world. Anna fears Vronsky leaving her for a younger woman, due to his mother's request, and begins dressing down further every day, wearing less and less, drinking morphine, and demonstrating her degradation. On the night of the opera, Anna tells Vronsky that she can't sleep, and Vronsky gives her morphine, which begins the onset of her hallucinations, and eventually her depression and suicide. These last ten minutes of the film, Anna wears her hoop skirt, and a nightgown, and nothing else, with her hair down and untamed, worrying about Vronsky leaving her for a younger princess or a widow. Anna keeps looking for herself and mirrors, and although Vronsky loves her and tries to save her, she can't see that, and ultimately, destroys herself. When Vronsky leaves, she has her lady's maid dress her for the last time, like at the beginning of the film. This time, she is stoic, and staring into space, while she dresses her in a similar wine red dress from the night she chose to have the affair with Vronsky. Once dressed, she begins to walk to the railway station, seeing both real people and hallucinations, and once on the train, she has nightmares of Vronsky and the girl having sex. *Anna's Last Train* plays in the background, adding to the drama of her last

scenes. Much like how the score played a crucial role in the Dance Scene, Betsy's Party, and the sex scenes, Anna's last moments are documented with the same, if not more melancholy and theatrical score, to bring her sexual journey and consequences full circle. Eventually, Anna is staged on the train, and in the railway station, until she walks off the train and stands at the side of the tracks, and looks at the train, and then throws herself in front of the tracks, screaming, "FORGIVE ME!" (Anna, *Anna Karenina*)

The ending scenes are of Karenin, raising Anna's two children, both in white, as is Karenin, demonstrating the purity and duties of their family still being fulfilled in Anna's absence. Dolly's family continues on, and her role continues as before, this time, with Oblonsky on the outside of the house, smoking, apart from the family. Levin and Kitty live a happily married life, Kitty now a mother, wearing white as well, and content with her situation.

### **Film Criticism:**

In a different way, there is little film criticism about this specific film so far, so I am contributing to a relatively new conversation about the 2012 filmic adaptation. However, a brief discussion of feminist film aspects is necessary to round out my argument that the film promotes sexual liberation for women, to put the icing on the cake of my argument, and also connect to the brief conversation there has been about this specific film before my Thesis. A great deal of my initial thoughts on the spectacle and the theatrical examining staging within mis-en-scene in the film come from reading Daria Chernysheva's Thesis "Intermedial Performance: Staging Anna Karenina in Tolstoy's Novel and Wright's Film". So many things that could be discussed from this Thesis, but what stood out to me about this 84 page Thesis, and the only one I found on the 2012 film, is that she believed that "this film became an inspiration for a reinvestigation of Anna's character, and the world she lives in, in the intermedial perspective." (Chernysheva, 7) In

contrast, I used three film criticism texts as a foundation, much like the Bordwell and Thompson, to frame my analyses, assumptions, and opinions about mis-en-scene and visualization of women on the screen in general. In a modern perspective within J.L. Godard's "Images of Women and Sexuality" within Laura Mulvey's reader *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Godard argues that "the female body has become industrialised; a woman must buy the means to paint on (make-up) and sculpt (Underwear/clothes) a look of femininity, a look which is the guarantee of visibility in sexist society for each individual woman." (Mulvey, 54) This assumption and many others within this reader, provide a helpful foundation for my discussion of the visualization of Anna, Dolly and Kitty within the film.

Constance Penley's reader *Feminism and Film Theory* also provided the introduction of the concept of the analysis of textual systems, "the complementary areas into which the semiotics of cinema is divided" (Penley, 161) on a most basic level, in addition to several other feminist discussions that are implicitly included in my analyses of costuming especially. Finally, I used helpful theory and strategy from Humm's *Feminism and Film* reader specifically from the articles, "Feminist Theory, Aesthetics and Film Theory", "Author/auteur: Feminist Literary Theory and Feminist Film" and "Cronenberg's Films and Feminist Theories of Mothering" as background texts from which several of my minor conclusions about staging and costuming of women are based.

### **Anna Karenina literary criticism**

Having finished my discussion of the film scenes, I can't forget to mention that there has been a great deal of literary criticism in the over 100 years since Leo Tolstoy first published *Anna Karenina*. This novel has gathered a great deal of controversy, as well as popularity, as it is a beloved classic. Therefore, for a film adaptation, there is a lot of expectation behind a recent

adaptation of a timeless classic. As I'll discuss later, there was a lot of backlash over the most recent adaptation, especially in relation to Keira Knightley's portrayal of Anna, and the fantastical elements of the staging, costuming, and other elements of the film. For this reason, I'm going to examine some literary criticism that addresses Anna, female protagonists, and female sexuality. One of the common arguments about Anna within Tolstoy criticism is the fact that she is an anti-heroine. Within the book, *Framing Anna Karenina*, Mandelker argues "Anna's claim to heroinism is denied because of her gender and the nature of the escape open to her in her attempt to 'rise above her condition.' Even if she is forgiven her sexual transgression, she is never excused for abandoning her son and ignoring her daughter..." (Mandelker, 50) Thus begins the common conversation about Anna as an anti-heroine, and her punishment for her behaviors. I'm going to start with these common scholarly threads within *Anna Karenina* criticism in order to refute them. I'm arguing that the film promotes female sexuality, although displaying the contradictory views of the consequences for Anna, making her character unlikeable, but definitely not as sympathetic as her character in the novel. This argument is complex, since I believe the film argues for female sexuality, but degrades the character of Anna by the end of the film, and that's where a lot of the negative criticism about the film comes from.

This book also displays the realism of Dolly's situation, which is both matched in the film and in the novel, as I'll discuss later. Mandelker argues that:

"While Dolly is unquestionably one of the positive characters of the novel, one could certainly argue against Evans that she does not succeed in creating a desirable moral atmosphere for her children. They will grow up in a home that is based on a hypocritical, fictitious marriage, and as they mature, they will increasingly recognize that their mother is passively enslaved to a patriarchal society and an abusive husband. In fact, it is very difficult to read Dolly as a sister of

the exalted Angels in the House of Victorian fiction. Compared to those warm, rotund, matronly queens, surrounded by a bevy of adoring children who lovingly clasp their mother's neck and thick curls with chubby fingers, Dolly is strikingly emaciated and worn, a hack dray horse among sleek thoroughbreds; she is surrounded not by plump cherubs, but by dirty, misbehaving urchins." (53)

This sets up a common conversation about Dolly, which I agree with slightly, but would like to amend when discussing the film. I believe that Dolly is depicted as an Angel of the house in the film, but in the novel, her situation is more realist, and her struggles are portrayed as raw and authentic, whereas in the film, Dolly is practically perfect, and a beacon of light for domesticity. Dolly is also usually depicted as the hero of *Anna Karenina*, which I disagree with, given that Dolly is passive at best, and isn't brave enough to change her circumstances, but suffers in silence, and lives a fake life with her husband and family.

In contrast, Kitty's journey and character is questionable within criticism, often viewed at the marriage and relationship that is successful in the novel, but as Mandelker reveals, "Although Lyovin and Kitty's marriage is usually seen as successful, some critics suggest that theirs is a relationship of increasing estrangement, that by the end of the novel 'lack of communication has become a way of life for Kitty and her husband.'" (56) Unlike these common criticisms, I'd like to argue that Kitty makes a journey of character, and changes dramatically, which impacts her choice to marry Levin for love, which is her kind of sexual liberation, in her ability to chose despite the humiliation she caused for him, and the humiliation she suffered at the hand of Count Vronsky as well.

Due to Tolstoy's focus that is often focused on families in criticism, I was surprised by the chapter "The Family Idea" within the book, *Architecture of Anna Karenina*, since it argues the

complexity of Tolstoy's "family novel", as I begin my paper talking about. To Steinbock-Fermor, "To Tolstoy, at that period of his life, marriage was not just the cultivation of sexual, spiritual and romantic attraction, though they all were necessary for a man of a certain educational level; neither was it only aim the creation of a couple, with or without children, united by love and understanding—it was the formation of a social unit which could, by its very existence, be a moral and material influence in the country's historical development." (Steinbock-Fermor, 79) In my opinion, both *Anna Karenina* the novel, and the film, focuses on families, but that the true focus is on the complexities, passion, and bitterness of love, in all forms. Therefore, as the film argues for sexual liberation for female protagonists, the novel, I believe, argues for advocacy for the power of love in all forms, even forms that didn't exist appropriately during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for women. Tolstoy's novel begins an early feminist discussion about women's freedom in sexuality, marriage, motherhood and relationships, and was ahead of its time, while at the same time, showing the consequences and repercussions of going against the grid.

Within this discussion of passion, there is great deal of criticism on *Anna Karenina* the novel. Within Judith Armstrong's, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, she has an entire chapter on "The Roots of Passion" which I would like to use as my final foundation for my literary and filmic discussion of *Anna Karenina* and its 2012 adaptation. Armstrong puts it well by displaying that "What comes between Anna's meeting with Vronsky and her final act is an interlude of passion, followed by the visible transformation of that passion into something so neurotic, obsessional and destructive that we are uncertain whether it can still be called the same name. The relation between passion and self-destruction must therefore be examined in the light of concepts which go well beyond the usual limits of literary criticism." (Armstrong, 71) These moments in

between, are what the film focuses on, especially the neurotic degradation of Anna, and the sexual passion between Anna and Vronsky.

Armstrong also chooses a discussion of literary criticism that I take up as well, which is a little uncommon, taking on a discussion of the ball scenes directly, which I will do later in the film and novel. Armstrong argues “The direct opposite of this binding, life-enhancing effect is described only a week later at the ball where Kitty notices the elation at play in the interaction that has suddenly sprung up between Anna and Vronsky. She is of course more sensitive to it than anyone else in the room. But what is curious is the language that is used to describe this mutual excitation. What Kitty sees in Vronsky’s face she also seems distinctly in ‘the mirror’ of Anna’s. When Anna smiles, the smile passes on to Vronsky. When she falls into thought, he too becomes pensive.” (82) These perceptive observations of Anna and Vronsky’s relationship within the ballroom scenes are just the kinds of details that I examined as I incorporated the filmic aspects such as the shots, staging, score, and costuming, in addition the character chemistry and development.

Armstrong also makes a perceptive observation that “Anna’s story...is thickly scattered with metaphors, similes, and symbols, many of which have been dissected so often by critics eager to retrieve their meaning that I prefer to give just a few examples, and go on to discuss not what they stand for (their signified) but what they signify in the ordinary sense of that word.” (85), and this is one of the pieces of literary criticism that I’d like to use as one of my foundations for my argument towards sexual liberation for female protagonists, and to set up my brief conversation about certain symbols and metaphors that frame my discussion of the film. The metaphors of mirrors, voyeurism and binoculars, trains, the theater, stage, and many others, are just a few of the detailed aspects of this film adaptation that I examined.

Within Gary Adelman's *Anna Karenina: The Bitterness of Ecstasy*, very similar to my analysis of the film and novel opening scenes, he writes a whole chapter on "Exits and Entrances: the Laws of the Novel", which specifically paints Anna's entrance in a similar way of foreshadowing and promoting sexual liberation. Adelman offers the reader the idea that "Despite Tolstoy's disapproval of illicit love, Anna and Vronsky's encounter at the station is passionate and compelling...But Tolstoy is already preparing Anna's tragic end." (Adelman, 54) In a similar way to a quote I will share from Joe Wright, Adelman also argues that "Tolstoy cannot plead a case against Anna, and the reason for this is simple, "The best books, the most full of infectious feeling, are those in which the author's intention is lost sight of, or even contradicted by, the close attention or 'love' which he devotes to his characters..." (58) This close attention of love, I argue, is lost towards the end of the film, which is the one criticism that I agree with against the film, which I briefly discussed in my introduction, and will briefly touch on again in my conclusion.

However, within Alexandrovic's *Limits to Interpretation in Anna Karenina*, he specifically breaks down the "relativity: characters as arbiters of meaning and value" in a whole chapter, which argues for the lovability of Anna and Vronsky within the novel, which I concur doesn't translate during the entirety of the film. He concludes that "it is paradoxical that once Anna's affair with Vronsky actually begins and she is drawn, or rushes, progressively deeper into it, descriptions of her private perceptions and of her differences and distance from Vronsky occupy more of the narrator's attention, and consequently, more textual space than do portrayals of the lovers' physical or emotional closeness." (Alexandrovic, 179) In contrast, the film spends a great deal of time, almost the whole time, on their physical relationship and the attraction, desire and passion there, and leaves little room for the emotional relationship.

With this adaptation in mind, there are a lot of things that could be left out, forgotten, or deliberately excluded from the novel, but included in a film. Cahir argues in the reader, *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*, that every adaptation of a film is a translation, and that “every act of translation is simultaneously an act of interpretation” (Cahir, 14), and that “film translators of literature face the same challenges, dilemmas, interpretative choices, latitudes and responsibilities that any translator must face” (14). Based on the above thoughts on what is chosen to include and exclude from the novel and the film, this statement encompasses any counterpoints that I include about *Anna Karenina*, as a 2012 filmic adaptation.

Overall, there has been a lot of *Anna Karenina*/Tolstoy criticism, and I’ll be using what is already out there as a framework, and building on this, and adding to the academic conversation about the novel, and contributing to the relatively contemporary and new academic conversation about the 2012 Joe Wright film. Joe Wright himself advocates for Anna’s character, much like, Benson does within *Women in Tolstoy: The Ideal and the Erotic* when she talks about Anna as she “finally emerged as not only a sympathetic character, but a captivating one as well. Her beauty and elegance, her vitality, her instinctive tact, her warmth...which readily engages the moral and aesthetic affection of the reader.” (Benson, 78)

### **Conclusion:**

Joe Wright says that “What people have done in past is make Anna this great martyr to love. For me, that isn’t the book that I read. The book I read is a portrait of a lady who was difficult, compromised, obsessive, and in the end, brought down by herself.” Agreeing with the director of the film, after studying this film, and novel for a long time, I believe that Anna’s character is not only misunderstood, but that she is a beacon of light for liberating female sexuality during the 19<sup>th</sup> century period, and this film promotes this. The film also gives us portraits of Dolly and

Kitty, who fit the political mold of domesticity for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but each have their own unique characteristics that make them lovable characters, and promotes freedom for them as well, but they instead, choose marriage, instead of ruin or passionate, forbidden love. Overall, these portraits of Anna, Dolly and Kitty all point to the fact that the novel gives us more time with each of these protagonists but displays the stereotypical roles that each woman plays and would have played during the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the anti-heroine, the Angel of the House, and the perfect young woman. These molds are a perfect place for criticism because of the arguments about Tolstoy's classic being a feminist novel, and the many controversial discussions about Anna's character and whether or not she is a heroine or a villain. One of the features I loved about the film was that it left me with more thought provoking questions than the novel. I thoroughly enjoyed the novel, and of course, it speaks to many life experiences, and the many complex scenarios of love, and of the human condition, in a way that no film could ever convey.

However, the film promotes female sexuality in this 19<sup>th</sup> century classic through staging, costuming, and score, and most importantly through the director and actors' choice of the portraits of the characters themselves. In the novel, all three women are portrayed in a slightly different light. As far as the novel depictions go: Anna is a sympathetic, beautiful, and psychotic anti-heroine, with whom the readers cannot decide how they feel about, but in turn, love her all the same. Dolly is the stereotypical "angel of the house" but with many complicated marital problems and a certain negligence in parenting by pretending that everything is fine in her marriage and in her own heart, when the two don't reconcile. Kitty is a young, beautiful woman, who marries the man she loves, but even then, has a great deal of marital problems, health struggles, and conflicts with Levin. In the film, however, Anna becomes a sort of demonic villain by the end, where although her sexuality and her choices are understandable, it still leaves the

audience wishing for the proper punishment and repercussions for her, and almost sighs in relief after the 20 minutes leading up to Anna's suicide. Dolly still remains the angel of the house, but is portrayed as a perfect woman, if not naïve, who if only she had been brave enough to love someone else, would have had a much better life, and is content with her family and children, ignoring her husband and his affairs. Kitty is portrayed very much the same, but with the absence of marital problems, and the presence of a Florence Nightingale kind of characteristic and unselfishness.

The 2012 *Anna Karenina* adaptation uses staging, costuming and score to portray its cheers towards female sexuality, but at the same time, leaves me with questions regarding Anna's character, and the choices made by Keira Knightley to make Anna a more psychotic character that is hateable at the end. There are also some indiscretions of adaptation that I thought could have been helpful, but in any film adaptation of a classic novel, there are always things missing that could have been there. The choices the director made in which scenes to include or not, are really the only problem I have with the film. However, Joe Wright's stylistic choices of staging, costuming, shots, and score cancel out the issues of adaptation, and make a truly beautiful film that depicts the complexity and power of love driven home in the film, maintains the integrity of Tolstoy's work, and at the same time, starts a new conversation of promotion of female sexuality of these protagonists, beginning a new academic, contemporary look at film, feminism, and a new twist on a classic. *Anna Karenina* is a masterpiece of film, a well-done adaptation, and an intriguing first look at the scholarly conversation to come about sexuality, women, and treatment of women and relationships in 19<sup>th</sup> century classics.



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