

READING ANDRE GIDE'S THE IMMORALIST AND LEO TOLSTOY'S ANNA KARENINA THROUGH FEMINIST CRITICISM

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The growing interest in gender issues, relationship, family construct etc can be seen in academic writing or elsewhere. Gender stereotypes obviously have created some impacts on individual behaviors. Such stereotypes consolidate gender behavior practised in society. Mental and physical health are also affected by these stereotypes. Moreover, gender stereotypes affect male and female relationships.

Anna Karenina and *The Immoralist* were written at different times and places, 1866 and 1902, both of these Novels written by men with their perspective.. The female character in these two novels portray different stereotypes. Female characters lack authenticity if they are not portrayed as the complex and unique individuals. Too often women are merely stereotypes that allow the male protagonist to define his own role and fulfill his own selfhood. In response to this misrepresentation of women in literature, feminist criticism has necessarily often become a negative one, resisting stereotyped images of women.

The Immoralist is narrated by Michel, a young man who describes his marriage to Marceline, a woman he hardly knew, and lays bare the developments of his inner life during the first few years of their marriage. While on an extended honeymoon in North Africa, Michel finds himself attracted to young Arab boys. This experience inspires him to embark on a journey of self-discovery through which he eventually finds himself leading a double life: he presents a false facade to his wife, while going out on his own to follow his natural inclinations and experience his true inner being. Back home in France, Marceline announces that she is pregnant. Meanwhile, Michel finds himself increasingly drawn to healthy and attractive young men. Becoming ill from tuberculosis, Marceline suffers a miscarriage. Michel, motivated by a strong desire to return to North Africa, pushes her to travel with him, despite her deteriorating health. After she dies, Michel is left to grapple with the meaning of his own life, and to come to terms with his homosexual tendencies

Anna Karenina is one of Leo Tolstoy's masterpiece of fiction during his life. Tolstoy's directness on women became a Tolstoy trademark. In the very beginning of his writing, he created female characters who easily change emotions affected by love. Furthermore, he has a conservative view on women. Among the many roles a man plays, women have only three duties: to bear, feed, and raise as many children as possible. If she denies two of these three, she is negative. He wants model wives and mothers. He tends to give a negative characterization of women as morally inferior to men as represented in "Women", his famous series in Cycle of Reading (Cruise 192). In his early works, sex is highly pure. The relations between men and women are childlike. However, there are some changes in Tolstoy. Sex appears to be more threatening, beginning with *Anna Karenina* and is clearly seen as such in *Resurrection*. It is to say that all his women are pure in the early period and all of them are dirty in later works.

The power of literary texts, plays, films, and dramas in the formation and perception women's image is overwhelming. The "images of women" method, or as Elaine Showalter terms it "feminist critique," which was a popular form of feminist criticism in the 1970's and 80's, provided a means for discussing women in texts written by men. This method involved analyzing the women characters in novels to identify the authors' stereotyped presentations. Two of the feminist critics who brought about this evolution were Elaine Showalter and Josephine Donovan.

In "*Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism*," Donovan provides a diagram useful for understanding the stereotypic female characters in male-authored novels and presents an important critique of the "images of women" approach. Donovan claims that male-authored texts can be dangerous for feminist readers unless women consciously "read with perspective that recognizes the sexism inherent in [the texts'] moral vision" (214). Donovan would also state, "sexist ideology necessarily promotes the concept of woman-as-object or woman-as-other because 'sexist ideology controls the text'" (236). There is no doubt that Tolstoy and Gide use "sexist ideology" to describe Marceline, Anna and the other women in the text, but are their description of Marceline and Anna, a negative personification of a "woman-as-object" or "woman-as-other?" Could their describing the strengths of a woman instead of her weaknesses?

In "*Towards a Feminist Poetics*," Showalter adds to this argument: "One of the problems of the feminist critique [or "images of women" method] is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women [...] we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be" (216). Showalter adds to this argument: "One of the problems of the feminist critique [or "images of women" method] is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women [...] we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be" (216). Josephine Donovan in the essay 'Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as a Moral Criticism' admits "much of our literature in fact depends upon a series of fixed images of women, stereotypes..."

If we take Marceline and Anna's characteristics and apply Josephine Donovan theory, from her essay, she would more than likely describe Marceline and Anna as an "Other," i.e., a woman who "serve or detract from the goals of the male protagonist," in this case Michel and Karenin .

Throughout *The Immoralist*, Marceline displays a self-sacrifice and denial of her own desires, during Michel's illness, Marceline selflessly cares for him and makes his improvement her primary concern. In doing this, she is sacrificing her own needs and desires. As Marceline grows more and more ill, Michel continually abandons her on his quest to fulfill his own desires. When he spends the night with Menalcas, Marceline miscarries their child. When he is dragging her around all of Europe and Northern Africa, she is growing sicker and sicker. When he is spending time with Moktir and sleeping with his mistress, Marceline is finally dying. After Michel has finally returned to her, he says, "Her hand grasped me in desperation, holding me back. Oh! Did she think I wanted to leave her?" (Gide 97). Michel did not have the faith and loyalty that Marceline had shown him in his illness, and his lack eventually leads to her death. When Michel is put in the same situation, he struggles greatly with his own desires. Marceline literally saves Michel by caring for him throughout his illness, and she also offers him salvation from his discovery of and near-total submission to his subconscious desires. In many ways, Michel wants Marceline and the life she has to offer. He does express a love for her, but it is a conscious love that cannot overcome

the other loves he is discovering for physical sensation, rebellion, and time spent with young men. She offers him an escape route from his journey of discovery, but he refuses it and, as is the case with the underground man and Liza, that refusal of her ultimately leads to her destruction.

Marceline is initially pictured as the stronger of the two and that Michel is seen as weakened because of his bout with tuberculosis. This is clear in the novel when Michel describes Marceline as “quite strong; that she was stronger than I we were soon to learn” (Cohn 423, quoting Gide). Marceline is not the only strong female character in the text, though she is certainly the most well-developed. Michel's mother is also a strong female force in Michel's life; as Keith Cohen points out, “the irritation that Michel feels might arise from the recognition that he has not been able to avoid the strong Huguenot upbringing he received from his mother” (71). Her influence over Michel's life, primarily in the form of religion, is a subdued but ever-present force in the novel. The presence of these strong women, particularly in the beginning of the narrative, upsets the expected male-female. To some readers, this act would be considered a “self-determined action” in other words, Marceline is a “moral agent” and is a “character that has a reflective, critical consciousness” thus being an “authentic character” because she was able to save Michel's life with her own way (215).

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy presents Russian society in the nineteenth century in which the role of men and women are not equal. It is the male dominant society. There are many disadvantages for women in many aspects. Anna is obviously a conventional woman at the beginning of the story. She conforms her role to that of the patriarchy standard until she meets Vronsky. Women have many limitations paid by society. It is a fate for women. As Freud, the psychologist in the nineteenth century, believed that it is an inevitable part of the fate of being a woman the limitation of outlook and life of the Victorian era (Friedan 106). Those limitations become mainstream value for women to conform themselves physically and mentally. One of the most important things for women is their physical appearance. As it is said by the theorists of femininity that anatomy is woman's destiny, the identity of women is determined by her biology (Friedan 71). Women have to be beautiful in public in order to be attractive, and so is Anna. Anna is charming and fascinating as clearly seen at the first time she meets with Vronsky: The major inspiration for most women to keep their body beautiful is to get a man for marriage. It is the goal for unmarried women. As Joan N. Burstyn pointed out in *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* that the task of unmarried women is to find a husband. Marriage is the only way to upper her status. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage. Marriage is the only means of integration in the community and if they remain unwanted, they are, socially viewed so much wastage (Beauvoir 449). After marriage, women belong to their husbands. As Friedan said, she was so completely defined as object by man, never herself as subject (74).

In the Western tradition these stereotypes tend to fall into two categories reflecting endemic Manicheistic dualism in the Western worldview...The following diagram shows how this dualism is conceived:

spiritual	material
spirit/so	body
virginal ideal	sex object

Mary	Eve
inspiration	seductress
good	evil

(218)

Tolstoy shows the different values between men and women. Women like Anna are viewed as evil to have a husband and a lover. While men gain prestige especially on seducing married women like Anna. Thus, women are men's victim. It's different with Marceline. Gide shows Marceline find strength in religious beliefs while Michel finds strength in his rejection of it. Marceline's strength throughout life lay in her faith, viewed as angel or good person.

My question is this: aren't men portrayed in this same way as well? Aren't male characters in literature for the most part either good or evil? It kind of goes back to the idea that all stories have already been told and today we are just telling variants of this same story. If this is the case, then all characters must be archetypal to some degree. How can we completely escape this idea with males or females. Inauthentic female characters are designed to provide this affirming experience for male readers. They become aesthetic objects of male pleasure. Even artistic works which seem to encourage sympathy for female figures may actually pander to this male aesthetic pleasure. I remembered with one song Sabda Alam. The famous composer Ismail Marzuki composed song entitled Sabda Alam (The Commands of Nature).

This song was very popular in its era and is still sung today. The lyrics of the song are as follows : nature had created man and woman/ two creatures in the God's embrace/ it was written that man be powerful/while woman be gentle and loving/women have always been under man's domination/ been made the jewel in a golden cage/ but there are times men are made to feel helpless/ surrendering under the gaze of women's eyes.

The contrast in the lyric sabda alam, comparing men's victory and their surrender is actually not a contrast but rather signals the male domination , the women's victory is declared not by women but by men. Although this song seems to elevate women by saying about man's surrender in the end of the song but still the lyric of this song as something that disgraces women. . Men have power over women and treat them as their properties (it shows men's perspective towards women). Once again, women become aesthetic object, properties, of male.

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