

moral manifesto in regards to sexuality, which runs through the novel sanctioning and damning the sexual endeavours of his characters. As Jeff Love states that “few could be said to have sought authority more passionately, more violently, and more immoderately”⁵ than Tolstoy, so it is disputable that the moral manifesto he creates for the characters in *War and Peace*, is as much a manifesto or code of conduct for himself, as much as it is for his fictional creations. However, despite his precautions, what emerges from his depiction of sex and sexuality is more than fear of moral chaos. Tolstoy’s depiction reveals a fraught and conflicted mentality, one that secretly desires the transgressions it damns as much as it seeks to stifle them.

Laura Jespen comments on the characterization of Prince Andrei Bolkonsky as a “transitional figure” who reveals “the author’s concept of heroism, exemplifying first Homeric, then Christian ideals”⁶. Through this depiction of Andrei as the epitome of heroism, it is arguable that Tolstoy also discloses his vision of the ideal man, or at least, of the man who strives for the ideal. In terms of sexuality then, it is interesting to note that the character who most seeks to achieve perfection is also the character who shows the least interest in sex and whose sexuality is never explored.

When Nikolai Rostov encounters his idol, the emperor Alexander, he develops an ambiguous infatuation, which, according to Tolstoy, was not uncommon amongst the Russian soldiers: “he was not the only man to experience that feeling”⁷. Indeed, verging into the realm of the homoerotic, Rostov’s rapture at the sight of the emperor is due to what he represents, “the glory of the Russian arms and the hope for future triumph”⁸, but it is also due to what Rostov describes as Alexander’s “beautiful” physicality, which suggested “the liveliness of a fourteen-year-old boy”⁹:

Alexander’s face was even more beautiful than it had been... the Emperor’s eyes met

Rostov’s... whether or no the emperor understood what was going on in Rostov’s soul (it

⁵ Justin Weir, *Leo Tolstoy and the Alibi of Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 16.

⁶ Laura Jepsen, "Prince Andrey as Epic Hero in Tolstoy's 'War and Peace'" *South Atlantic Bulletin* 34, no. 4 (November 1969): 5, accessed October 22, 2012, JSTOR.

⁷ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (Cambridge World Classics), Kindle, 23%.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The first illustration of this malpractice is seen with the marriage between Helene Kuragina and Pierre Bezukov. When Helene first smiles at Pierre at Anna Pavlovna's party, Pierre takes no notice of it:

Helene turned to Pierre with the beautiful bright smile that she gave to everyone. Pierre was so used to that smile, and it had so little meaning for him, that he paid no attention to it.²⁷

This sense that Helene's charms are both specifically aimed at Pierre but also made available to everyone, is enforced later in the passage:

"So you have never noticed before how beautiful I am?" Helene seemed to say. "You had not noticed that I am a woman? Yes, I am a woman who may belong to anyone-to you too," said her glance.²⁸

The contingency of her 'belonging' expressed in Pierre's impression of Helene, implies not only that Pierre believes that he could quite easily 'have' Helene, but also that "anyone" else could just as easily do the same. Thus, the fortuitousness that Pierre associates with the possibility of possessing Helene denotes an underlying feeling of un-belonging, a feeling that because she could just as easily be somebody else's, she should not really belong to him. This feeling is confirmed on the night of his proposal: "he felt that he was occupying someone else's place here beside Helene"²⁹. It follows that what is lacking in their union is an abstract feeling of connection and exclusivity necessary for the mystical covenant of marriage. In the place of such a mystical connection are lust and sexual desire, these are uniquely what draws Pierre to Helene:

²⁷ Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (Cambridge World Classics), Kindle, 19%.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, 20%.