

***Kreutzer Sonata's* Rousseauian Gospel: Leo Tolstoy's Artistic Asceticism**

In Leo Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), Pozdnyshev murdered his wife whom he believes has committed adultery with the unmarried violinist Troukhatchevsky who visited his home to play music with her. Overwhelmed by guilt, Pozdnyshev puts himself on trial in a train compartment. He seeks forgiveness from his fellow passengers in confession; but he also rages over the seductive force of music. His wife, Pozdnyshev laments, was not so much drawn to Troukhatchevsky in the beginning, but the music they made together had aroused her lascivious impulse and subjugated her to total lust:

... I was tormented by jealousy all the evening. From the first moment his eyes met my wife's I saw that the animal in each of them, regardless of all conditions of their position and of society, asked, »May I?« and answered, »Oh, yes, certainly.« ...he had no doubt whatever that she was *willing*....this man—by his external refinement and novelty and still more by his undoubtedly great talent for music, by the nearness that comes of playing together, and by the influence music, especially the violin exercises on impressiona-

Keri Hui

University of Hong Kong
Pok Fu Lam
HONG KONG
Email: yuet_ka.hui@kcl.ac.uk

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Abstract - Résumé

Often remembered as one of the greatest novelists in history, Leo Tolstoy had since a young age shown an ascetic temperament that emphasized sexual discipline. As a teenager, Tolstoy logged down his »every little sin« including his violation of the Seventh Commandment »Thou shalt not commit adultery«; at the age of sixty-one, he penned the novel *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) to proselytize an even more radical measure that advocated abstinence from not only sex but also marriage. In *Kreutzer Sonata*, however, Tolstoy also censures the *presto* of Beethoven's »Kreutzer Sonata« No. 9, Op. 47, claiming it has the power to arouse immoral sexual desire. Tolstoy expands on this argument in *What is Art?* (1897) where he establishes music as primarily »a means of union among men.« In the treatise, he criticizes many musical works for being »false« and »exclusive,« but he also paradoxically arrives at a narrow musical preference that divided him and his contemporaries: in his view, folk tunes and music with melodic simplicity are the only true musical art worthy of devotion, for not only do they not incite sexual passion, but they also unify mankind by heightening the consciousness of universal brotherhood. This article examines Tolstoy's musical orientation in light of his reading of the Gospels and Rousseau, which engendered in him a yearning to return to a primitive state of nature that aligned with his vision of the Kingdom of God. In this Rousseauian gospel, musical simplicity as a form of artistic asceticism became the means of salvation that could deliver men from the curse of civilization.

Keywords: Leo Tolstoy • *What is Art?* • folk tunes • folk music • religious perception • Jean-Jacques Rousseau • back to nature • *Kreutzer Sonata* • asceticism

ble natures—was sure not only to please but certainly and without the least hesitation to conquer, crush, bind her, twist her round his little finger and do whatever he liked with her. I could not help seeing this and I suffered terribly.¹

Pozdnyshev proceeds to lay charges against music, arguing his wife was not the only one who, deceived by its luring appearance, was provoked to infidelity: »...everybody knows, that it is by means of those very pursuits, especially of music, that the greater part of the adulteries in our society occur.«²

But Pozdnyshev specifically condemns Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* No. 9, Op. 47. For his wife and Troukhatchevsky, performing this piece was a harmless and innocent act; but for Pozdnyshev, Troukhatchevsky through the sonata had tantalized his wife into tickling the piano keys like sensual ivories that titillated her body. His abhorrence for the *Kreutzer Sonata* intensified as he recognized it was also this music that had irritated him into stabbing his wife:

Music carries me immediately and directly into the mental condition in which the man was who composed it. My soul merges with his and together with him I pass from one condition into another, but why this happens I don't know... You see, he who wrote, let us say, the *Kreutzer Sonata*—Beethoven—knew of course why he was in that condition... but for me—none at all. That's why music only agitates and doesn't lead to a conclusion... That is why music sometimes has such a terrible, horrible effect.... It is a terrifying instrument in the hands of any chance user!³

Yet Pozdnyshev disdains not the whole sonata but only its *presto*: »Take that *Kreutzer Sonata* for instance, how can that first *presto* be played in a drawing-room among ladies in low-necked dresses?«⁴ This particular concern for the *presto* of *Kreutzer Sonata* parallels Tolstoy's musical liking as remembered by his daughter Alexandra. In Alexandra's recollection, Tolstoy would often turn »cold and sad« whenever he listened to Beethoven's sonatas with the exceptions of the piano sonatas »Pathétique« in C minor op. 13 and »Moonlight« in C-sharp minor op. 27 no. 2, as well as »the first part«—namely the *Adagio sostenuto* and not the *presto*—of the *Kreutzer Sonata*.⁵ Tolstoy was also known to have criticized Beethoven when he critiqued Rachmaninoff's song »Fate« op. 20 no. 2, which is based on the opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. After admonishing the young Rachmaninoff to compose only when he had »real feelings to express,«

¹ Leo TOLSTOY, *The Kreutzer Sonata and Other Stories*, Richard F. Gustafson (ed.), trans. Louise Maude, A. Maude, and J.D. Duff, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 137.

² *Ibid.*, 139.

³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵ Alexandra TOLSTOY, Tolstoy and Music, *The Russian Review*, 17/4 (1958), 260.

Tolstoy in a gloomy manner proclaimed, »I have to tell you how I dislike it all... Beethoven is nonsense, Pushkin and Lermontoff also.«⁶

Tolstoy was nevertheless devoted to music; he not only taught music but also helped establish the Moscow Musical Society which later evolved into the Moscow Conservatoire.⁷ He enjoyed Chopin, Mozart, Haydn, J. S. Bach, and Schubert, but besides disliking Beethoven, he also considered the music of Mussorgsky and Wagner »false« and Brahms, R. Strauss, and Scriabin incomprehensible.⁸ »To compose four bars of clear and simple melody, without any accompaniment« according to Tolstoy is a much more difficult and yet profound venture than »to compose a symphony in the manner of Brahms or Richard Strauss, or an opera like Wagner's.«⁹ Tolstoy also loved folk tunes precisely for their melodic simplicity; in Moscow, the Tolstoy family would visit the Maiden Lane Fair just to hear the playing of some peasant pipers from a northern province of Russia. He heard »a depth of feeling« in the peasants' songs despite their lack of musical training.¹⁰

Tolstoy's peculiar musical preference, however, did not originate from nothing. In 1905, near the end of his life, Tolstoy summarized the two forces that moulded his philosophy the most:

Rousseau has been my master since I was fifteen. Rousseau and the Gospels have been the two great and beneficent influences of my life. Rousseau does not age. Quite recently I had the occasion to reread some of his works and I felt the same spiritual elevation and admiration that I experienced when I read him in my first youth.¹¹

Tolstoy's musical orientation similarly cannot be considered apart from his reading of the Gospels and Rousseau, which engendered in him a yearning to return to a primitive state of nature that aligned with his vision of the Kingdom of God. In this Rousseauian gospel, musical simplicity became the means of an artistic, ascetic, and yet not aesthetic salvation that could deliver men from the curse of civilization.

⁶ See Katherine SWAN and A. J. SWAN, Personal Reminiscences—Part II, *The Musical Quarterly*, 30/2 (1944), 185.

⁷ Aylmer MAUDE, *The Life of Tolstoy: First Fifty Years*, 5th ed., New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911, 174–75, 271.

⁸ A. TOLSTOY, Tolstoy and Music, 258–60.

⁹ Leo TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, trans. A. Maude, New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1904, 198.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261–62.

¹¹ Originally from L. TOLSTOY, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (PSS), 90 vols (Moscow, 1928–58), 20:577. Quoted and translated also in Priscilla MEYER, *How the Russians Read the French: Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008, 155; Hugh McLEAN, *In Quest of Tolstoy*, Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2008, 143–44; and Donna TUSSING ORWIN, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, 36. For a chapter on how Tolstoy integrated French works including Rousseau's as well as biblical texts into *Anna Karenina*, see »Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*,« in P. MEYER, *How the Russians Read the French*, 152–209.

What is Art?, Religious Perception, and »True Christianity«

In *What is Art?* (1897), Tolstoy defines the purpose of art, including music. Art, he states, is not »the manifestation of some mysterious Idea of beauty, or God,« »a game in which man lets off his excess of stored-up energy,« »the expression of man's emotions by external signs,« or »the production of pleasing objects.« Above all, »it is not pleasure.« Instead, it is »a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity.«¹² For Tolstoy, the ultimate function of music is thus to serve the unification of mankind; true music reinforces our »religious perception« which he describes as »the consciousness that our well-being... lies in the growth of brotherhood among all men in their loving harmony with one another.«¹³ In the conclusion of his treatise, he emphasizes again that »the common religious perception of men is the consciousness of the brotherhood of men.«¹⁴

Still, Tolstoy attaches the idea of universal brotherhood to the name of Christianity by claiming religious perception belongs to »true Christianity.«¹⁵ Elsewhere in the text, he equates the term directly to »Christianity.«¹⁶ In connecting religious perception with Christianity, Tolstoy is also redefining the conventional meaning of the term. He distinguishes what he calls »true Christianity« from institutional Christianity; »Church Christianity,« he laments, has failed to »acknowledge the fundamental and essential positions of true Christianity, – the immediate relationship of each man to the Father, the consequent brotherhood and equality of all men, and the substitution of humility and love in place of every kind of violence.«¹⁷ Tolstoy's goal in resurrecting a »true Christianity,« as Hugh McLean puts it, »was to renovate Christianity, to purge it, to restore a pure 'Jesus' Christianity, freed from all the lies and priestly encrustations of the ages, beginning with those imposed by that great traducer and distorter of the message of Jesus, St. Paul.«¹⁸ This interpretation of Christianity is an anthropological one centering on the humanity of Jesus and rooted in Tolstoy's immersion in the Gospels, although Tolstoy's interest in the Gospel accounts was selective. Like Rousseau, he found the violations of natural order troubling and therefore dismissed stories such as the miraculous healings and the resurrections of Lazarus and Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount remained the foundational text of Tolstoy's

¹² L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 50.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁸ H. McLEAN, *In Quest of Tolstoy*, 150.

faith, as his writing in *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1894) testifies.¹⁹ Tolstoy concludes in *Kingdom of God* that »the sole meaning of life is to serve humanity by contributing to the establishment of the kingdom of God«—and to serve the kingdom of God, he elaborates, is »to contribute to the establishment of the greatest possible union between all living beings—a union possible only in the truth.«²⁰ The final words of *What is Art?*, which proclaim »the task for Christian art is to establish brotherly union among men,«²¹ reveal Tolstoy's conviction that true art should serve the very fundamental purpose of life he outlines in *Kingdom of God*.

If true Christian art contributes to union among men, then true art unites rather than divides. Tolstoy thus declares Roman Catholic and patriotic arts are not »Christian art,« for they consistently stir up hostility between religions and nations.²² Good Christian art in his view belongs to every person regardless of one's class, nationality, and religion, for it can »transmit feelings accessible to everyone,« whether they be »an aristocrat, or a merchant, or ...a Russian, or a native of Japan, or a Roman Catholic, or a Buddhist.« It is thus this kind of Christian art that proves »catholic« in its original meaning, that is, »universal.« This universal nature of true Christian art, according to Tolstoy, allows all to experience their »sonship to God and of the brotherhood« and »the simple feelings of common life, accessible to everyone without exception such as the feeling of merriment, of pity, of cheerfulness, of tranquility, etc.«²³ In longing for a universal brotherhood that transcends all religious labels, Tolstoy shows a universalist position similar to Rousseau's.²⁴

Tolstoy's terminologies may come off as somewhat obscure as he further divides »good Christian art« into two types: »religious art« and »universal art.« »Religious art« refers to »art transmitting feelings flowing from a religious perception of man's position in the world in relation to God and to his neighbor;« »universal art« denotes »art transmitting the simplest feelings of common life, but such, always, as are accessible to all men in the whole world, the art of common life—the art of a people.« The former in his theory manifests mostly in words and, sometimes, paintings and sculptures; the latter is found primarily in music.²⁵ In defining »universal art« as art that conveys simple feelings accessible to every person, however, Tolstoy still then considers religious perception the mark of universal art, for only art flowing from religious perception can bring forth feelings comprehensible to everyone:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 149–50.

²⁰ L. TOLSTOY, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, trans. Constance Garnett, 2 vols., London: William Heinemann, 1894, 2: 265.

²¹ L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 212.

²² *Ibid.*, 163.

²³ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁴ H. McLEAN, *In Quest of Tolstoy*, 150.

²⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 166.

People talk about incomprehensibility; but if art is the transmission of feelings flowing from man's religious perception, how can a feeling be incomprehensible which is founded on religion, i.e. on man's relation to God? Such art should be, and has actually always been, comprehensible to everybody, because every man's relation to God is one and the same.²⁶

The notion of comprehensibility for Tolstoy is inseparable from the idea of sincerity, which he categorizes as a quality of the artist. For Tolstoy who views art as primarily communicative or, in his term, »infective,«²⁷ there are three primary factors that determine the level of the music's infectiousness of which »sincerity of the artist« is the third:

On the greater or lesser individuality of the feeling transmitted; (2) on the greater or lesser clearness with which the feeling is transmitted; (3) on the sincerity of the artist, i.e. on the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself feels the emotion he transmits. The more individual the feeling transmitted the more strongly does it act on the receiver; the more individual the state of soul into which he is transferred the more pleasure does the receiver obtain, and therefore the more readily and strongly does he join in it.²⁸

The sincerity of a composer or a performer is often difficult to discern. But in regarding art as an expression of the artist's sincerity as well as an activity in which the artist »by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them,«²⁹ Tolstoy is thus suggesting sincerity can be conveyed by a configuration of external signs—and for Tolstoy, musical brevity and melodic simplicity are such signs that attest to the artist's sincerity. As Aylmer Maude notes, Tolstoy locates this sincerity in the form of brevity and simplicity mostly in folk music:

His work among peasant children has convinced him that the normal human being possesses capacities for the enjoyment of art; and that in most unexpected places the capacity to produce admirable art is now lying latent. That is why he sets up Brevity, Simplicity, and Sincerity as the criterions of art, and why he believes that folk-tales and folk-songs and folk-dances... are infinitely more important to the life and the well-being of humanity than *King Lear* or [Beethoven's] *Ninth Symphony*.³⁰

For Tolstoy, as Alexandra recalls, the music of the »illiterate, but talented peasant musicians« are »real art« that display such sincerity.³¹ Meanwhile,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 153–54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁰ A. MAUDE, *Life of Tolstoy*, 378.

³¹ A. TOLSTOY, *Tolstoy and Music*, 262.

Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, like Pushkin's poem *I Remember the Marvelous Moment*, only attracts to those corrupted by false learning. If humanity finds Pushkin and Beethoven pleasing, Tolstoy mourns, it is not because they are beautiful but »because we are as spoiled as they, and because they flatter our abnormal irritability and weakness.« After commending *Willy the Steward* and the melody of *Floating down the River, Mother Volga* as more profound in being »absolutely and universally good,« Tolstoy complains,

How common it is to hear the empty and stale paradox, that to understand the beautiful, a preparation is necessary! Who said so? Why? What proves it? It is only a shift, a loophole, to escape from the hopeless position to which the false direction of our art, produced for one class alone, has led us. Why are the beauty of the sun and of the human face, and the beauty of the sounds of a folk-song, and of deeds of love and self-sacrifice, accessible to everyone, and why do *they* demand no preparation?³²

Tolstoy often contrasts folk songs with Beethoven's music to accentuate the importance of melodic simplicity. In *What is Art?*, he reminisces about hearing the singing of several peasant women which lifted him out of his depressed mood as he was walking home: »In this singing, with its cries and clanging of scythes, such a definite feeling of joy, cheerfulness, and energy was expressed, that, without noticing how it infected me, I continued my way towards the house in a better mood, and reached home smiling and quite in good spirits.« In the same evening, however, when a famous pianist visited his house and played Beethoven's Sonata in A major op. 101, his joy was depleted. »The song of the peasant women was real art, transmitting a definite and strong feeling,« he states, but Beethoven's op. 101 »was only an unsuccessful attempt at art, containing no definite feeling and therefore not infectious.« Although the rest of the audience applauded the performance of Beethoven's op. 101 and perceived Tolstoy's dismissive remarks as strange, Tolstoy insists the audience's praises were pretentious. To defend his understanding of op. 101, Tolstoy writes at great length:

For the benefit of those who might otherwise attribute my judgment of that sonata of Beethoven to non-comprehension of it, I should mention that whatever other people understand of that sonata and of other productions of Beethoven's later period, I, being very susceptible to music, equally understood. For a long time I used to attune myself so as to delight in those shapeless improvisations which form the subject-matter of the works of Beethoven's later period, but I had only to consider the question of art seriously, and to compare the impression I received from Beethoven's later works with those pleasant, clear, and strong musical impressions which are transmitted, for instance, by the melodies of Bach (his arias), Haydn, Mozart, Chopin (when his melodies are not overloaded with complications and ornamentation), and of Beethoven

³² A. MAUDE, *Life of Tolstoy*, 276.

himself in his earlier period, and above all, with the impressions produced by folk-songs, Italian, Norwegian, or Russian, by the Hungarian tzardas, and other such simple, clear, and powerful music, and the obscure, almost unhealthy excitement from Beethoven's later pieces that I had artificially evoked in myself was immediately destroyed.³³

By comparing Beethoven's late works with the simplistic melodies of not only folk songs but also Bach's arias, Haydn, Mozart, and the Chopin when »not overloaded with complications and ornamentation,« Tolstoy once again makes known his prioritization of melodic accessibility.

Tolstoy had always held melodic simplicity in high regard before he wrote *What is Art?* In December 1876, Tolstoy became acquainted with Tchaikovsky, then an admirer of Tolstoy. After weeping over a quartet performance of Tchaikovsky's »Andante in D Major« arranged personally for him by the composer, Tolstoy sent a collection of folk songs to Tchaikovsky stating, »...for God's sake use them in a Mozart-Haydn style, and not in a Beethoven-Schumann-Berlioz, artificial way, seeking the unexpected.« For Tolstoy, the »Mozart-Haydn style« is typified by a melodic simplicity that is absent in the »Beethoven-Schumann-Berlioz, artificial way« characterized by harmonic complexity. But Tchaikovsky not only denied Tolstoy's request but also commented that the tunes »have been taken down by an unskillful hand,« »bear only traces of their pristine beauty,« and »have been artificially squeezed and forced into a regular, measured form.«³⁴ Tchaikovsky's refusal to adopt Tolstoy's beloved folk tunes disappointed Tolstoy, who eventually broke off their correspondence. In a letter to two of his children written in March 1894, Tolstoy pronounced after hearing a performance of Tchaikovsky's string quartet: »What an obvious artistic falsehood Tchaikovsky is!«³⁵

For Tolstoy, falsehood is revealed in a willful rejection of the simplicity embodied in folk tunes. His change in his perception of Scriabin's music suggests the same. In 1895, Tolstoy heard an early Scriabin prelude and told his private secretary Valentin Bulgakov: »How sincere it is, and sincerity above all is truly precious. From this single piece you can tell he is a great artist...«³⁶ Yet in the end, Tolstoy, as his daughter reports, deemed Scriabin incomprehensible. Tolstoy was not the only one who demonstrated this shift of view in his days; Scriabin's teacher Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev, also a friend of Tolstoy, once applauded Scriabin's

³³ *Ibid.*, 146–48.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 375–77.

³⁵ Zoya Gavrilovna PALYUKH and Anna Vladimirovna PROKHOROVA, *Лев Толстой и музыка. Хроника, нотография, библиография* [*Lev Tolstoy and Music. Chronicle, Notography, Bibliography*], Moscow: Советский композитор, 1977, 149. Quoted in http://en.tchaikovsky-research.net/pages/Lev_Tolstoy.

³⁶ Faubion BOWERS, *Scriabin, a Biography*, 2nd rev. ed., 2 vols, Mineola, New York: Dover, 1996, 1: 197.

Prelude op. 11 no. 24 in D minor (1895), but at a performance of Scriabin's last symphonic piece, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* op. 60 (1910), he scoffed after the final chord of this piece: »Now the music will begin.«³⁷ The increasingly negative reception of Scriabin was tied to the evolving musical style of the composer, whose works conceived roughly between the 1880s and 1903 were initially noted for their resemblance to Chopin's music. Scriabin published many pieces with Chopinesque titles during this period including mazurkas, impromptus, waltzes, nocturnes, polonaises, and many preludes and études; his 24 Preludes op. 11 was modelled after Chopin's 24 Preludes op. 28 which covers all the major and minor keys. Scriabin was not always happy with the comparison and once allegedly blurted out with tears: »What if my music does sound like Chopin?! It's not stolen.«³⁸

Tolstoy admired Chopin's music, but only »when his melodies are not overloaded with complications and ornamentation;«³⁹ for him, »Bach's famous violin aria, Chopin's nocturne in E flat major, and perhaps a dozen bits (not whole pieces, but parts) selected from the works of Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, and Chopin« are musical examples outside the folk genre that exhibit melodic simplicity.⁴⁰ In showing melodic simplicity, music like Chopin's nocturnes drew him into a union with Chopin himself: »When I listened I became as one with Chopin; I felt as if I had composed the piece myself.«⁴¹ But the late Scriabin broke away from the somewhat Chopinesque fashion and conventional harmonic function. As Richard Taruskin remarks, Scriabin often eliminated tonal and cadential resolution, leaving listeners in a state of ambiguity or a sense of »transporting burst«; his occult revelation translated into »rapid ascents and a predilection for high registers« which were first heard in Piano Sonata No. 5, a companion piece to *The Poem of Ecstasy* op. 54 (1908).⁴² While Tolstoy would not know whether Scriabin committed this defilement of traditional order with a sincere disposition, he undoubtedly interpreted Scriabin's compositional change as a loss of sincerity, as his contemporaries also continued to accuse Scriabin of »melodic poverty.«⁴³

But the abandonment of melodic simplicity and tonal resolution was not the only reason that rendered Scriabin false and incomprehensible to Tolstoy. Sonata No. 5 and *Ecstasy* were exemplars of Scriabin's devotion to theosophical mysticism, which violated Tolstoy's ideal of religious perception. An entry in Scriabin's

³⁷ Sergei TOLSTOY, *Tolstoy Remembered by His Son*, New York: Atheneum, 1962, 187.

³⁸ F. BOWERS, *Scriabin*, 134.

³⁹ See fn. 33 again.

⁴⁰ L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 169–70.

⁴¹ George MAREK and Maria GORDON-SMITH, *Chopin*, New York: Harper and Row, 1978, 246.

⁴² Richard TARUSKIN, *Defining Russia Musically*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 346.

⁴³ Cecil GRAY, *A Survey of Contemporary Music*, 2nd ed., London: Oxford University Press, 1927, 156–57.

notebook dated 1905, the year he started composing *Ecstasy*, reveals his mystical vision that shaped his late works including *Ecstasy*:

I am a moment in shimmering eternity.
I am freedom's play, I am life's play,
I am the playing streams of unknown feelings...
I am God!
I am nothing, I am play, I am freedom, I am life.
I am the boundary, I am the peak.
I am God!
*I am the blossoming, I the bliss,
I am all-consuming passion,
All engulfing,
I am fire enveloping the universe,
Reducing it to chaos.
I am the blind play of powers released.
I am creation dormant, Intellect quenched...*⁴⁴

According to *What is Art?*, Scriabin, like many in the »pseudo-cultured circles,« was practicing what Tolstoy considered »the conception of a religious cult« which stood at odds with religious perception:

People who do not acknowledge Christianity in its true meaning ...invent all kinds of philosophic and aesthetic theories to hide from themselves the meaninglessness and wrongness of their lives.... These people intentionally, or sometimes unintentionally, confusing the conception of a religious cult with the conception of religious perception, think that by denying the cult they get rid of religious perception...⁴⁵

Scriabin, in perceiving himself as God and associating with the Theosophical Society, had become an adulterer who deserted humanity's universal nature in Tolstoy's courtroom — and his unfaithfulness to the ideal of musical comprehensibility became the most compelling evidence.

Rousseau and the Return to Nature

Tolstoy assembled his religious thoughts on the Gospels, but the Gospels did not teach that melodic simplicity triumphed over other musical characteristics. Tolstoy's favor for melodic simplicity pointed to another source of his spiritual inspiration: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As V. V. Zenkovsky puts it, »The seeds sown

⁴⁴ F. BOWERS, *Scriabin*, 61.

⁴⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 158.

by Rousseau bore abundant fruit in Tolstoy. There would be a certain justice in expounding all of Tolstoy's views as variations on his—so deeply did this Rousseauism influence him of his life.«⁴⁶ After his stay in Paris in 1857, Tolstoy even made a pilgrimage to Clarens, remembering it was »the same village where Rousseau's Julie lived.«⁴⁷

When Tolstoy narrates his indebtedness to Rousseau, he highlights specifically Rousseau's *A Dictionary of Music* (1768). Rousseau was the god whom the young Tolstoy felt a natural affinity with:

I have read the whole of Rousseau—all his twenty volumes, including his *Dictionary of Music*. I was more than enthusiastic about him, I worshipped him. At the age of fifteen I wore a medallion portrait of him next to my body instead of the Orthodox cross. Many of his pages are so akin to me that it seems to me that I must have written them myself.⁴⁸

In *Dictionary of Music*, Rousseau concludes a tuneful melody alone moves the human heart. Music that is not melodious remains powerless in delighting the listener regardless of its harmony:

If music paints only by melody, and receives from thence its whole force, it follows, that every music, which does not sing, however harmonious it may be, is not an imitative music; and not being able either to touch or paint with its beautiful concords, soon fatigues the ear, and always leaves the heart in a state of coldness.

Rousseau's belief in the supremacy of melodic simplicity further spurs him into concluding that »as soon as two melodies are heard at the same time, they efface each other, and are of no effect, however beautiful each of them may be separately.«⁴⁹ The idea that melody reigns supreme over harmony permeates other works of Rousseau such as *Examination of Two Principles Advanced of M. Rameau*, which he originally planned to publish as a preface to *Dictionary of Music*. Initially written in 1755, *Examination* had its final form completed about a decade later and was published posthumously. It critiques the two principles promoted by Rameau—that harmony serves as the foundation of music or the basis of melody, and that accompaniment epitomizes the natural sounding body.⁵⁰ Rousseau establishes harmony as inferior to melody in *Examination*:

⁴⁶ Vasily V. ZENKOVSKY, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George Louis Kline, vol. 1, New York: Columbia University Press, 1953, 391.

⁴⁷ A. MAUDE, *Life of Tolstoy*, fn 36.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 46–47.

⁴⁹ Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU, *A Dictionary of Music*, trans. William Waring, London: J. French, 1779, 228.

⁵⁰ See also John T. SCOTT, *The Harmony Between Rousseau's Musical Theory and His Philosophy*, in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 4, ed. John T. Scott, 57–77; London: Routledge, 2006, 63.

Harmony is a purely physical cause; the impression it produces remains of the same order; chords can only impart to the nerves a passing and sterile disturbance; they would produce vapors rather than passions... The most beautiful chords, like the most beautiful colors, can convey to the sense a pleasant sensation and nothing more. But the accents of the voice pass all the way to the soul; for they are the natural expression of the passions, and by depicting them they arouse them. It is by means of them that music becomes oratorical, eloquent, imitative, they form its language; it is by means of them that it depicts objects to the imagination, that it conveys feeling to the heart. Melody is in music what design in Painting, harmony produces merely the effect of colours... In a word, the physical part alone of the art is reduced to very little and harmony does not pass beyond that.

For Rousseau, harmony can still please, but only a melody appeals to the soul. In likening harmony as »military instruments« that arouse »the ardor of soldiers« and describing it as a great noise that transmits »a certain agitation« from the ear to the brain,⁵¹ Rousseau maintains that harmony, being subservient to melody, can agitate nerves but not touch the sensible heart.

In *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (1781), Rousseau composes a history for melody to stress its authority. He asserts melody »speaks« by expressing passions and imitating the accents of language. Despite being inarticulate, melody as a language of nature still has »a hundred times more energy than speech itself: «It is from whence the strength of musical imitations arises; here is from whence the dominion of song over sensitive hearts arises.«⁵² A critique of harmony as a possible hinderance to melody's purpose reappears:

Harmony may, in certain systems, cooperate with this by linking the succession of sounds through certain laws of modulation... But by thus shackling melody, it deprives it of energy and expression, it eliminates passionate accent in order to substitute the harmonic interval for it...⁵³

Rousseau thus denounces those who have devoted themselves to harmony rather than melody:

Melody being forgotten and the attention of the musician having been turned entirely toward harmony, everything was gradually directed toward this new object; the genera, the modes, the scale, everything took on a new appearance; it was harmonic successions that regulated the progression of the parts. Once this progression had usurped the name of melody, it was indeed impossible to mistake its mother's features in this new melody, and as our musical system gradually became purely har-

⁵¹ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*, trans. and ed. John T. Scott, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998, 279.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 322.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

monic, it is not surprising that oral accent suffered for it, and that our music lost almost all its energy for us.⁵⁴

Tolstoy, despite being a man of another age, expressed views strikingly similar to those of Rousseau. He argues in *What is Art?* that while melodic simplicity makes music accessible to every person, complex harmonies and complicated textures accomplish the opposite:

Melody—every melody—is free, and may be understood of all men; but as soon as it is bound up with a particular harmony, it ceases to be accessible except to people trained to such harmony, and it becomes strange, not only to common men of another nationality, but to all who do not belong to the circle whose members have accustomed themselves to certain forms of harmonization. So that music, like poetry, travels in a vicious circle. Trivial and exclusive melodies, in order to make them attractive, are laden with harmonic, rhythmic, and orchestral complications, and thus become yet more exclusive, and far from being universal are not even national, i.e. they are not comprehensible to the whole people but only to some people.⁵⁵

Like Rousseau, he takes issues with his contemporaries' preoccupation with harmony and attacks the Rameaus of his time:

In consequence of the poorness of the feeling they contain, the melodies of the modern composers are amazingly empty and insignificant. And to strengthen the impression produced by these empty melodies, the new musicians pile complex modulations on to each trivial melody, not only in their own national manner, but also in the way characteristic of their own exclusive circle and particular musical school.⁵⁶

Composers such as Wagner, Liszt, Berlioz, Brahms, and Richard Strauss particularly annoyed Tolstoy with their convoluted harmonies. He despised »the Wagners, Liszts, Berliozes, Brahmses, and Richard Strausses« and the »immense mass of good-for-nothing imitators of these imitators« of his time.⁵⁷

Tolstoy's Rousseauian preference for melodic simplicity, professed in the name of sincerity, still reveals a deeper layer of thought. Sincerity denotes the absence of falsehood and deceit, but to label something as false and deceiving is to then presume there exists something originally true, pure, and natural. Tolstoy's idealized »sincerity« therefore suggests yet another idea—again a Rousseauian one—that recast his vision of true art as melodic simplicity: »back to nature.« As Donna Tussing Orwin points out, while Tolstoy was heavily impacted by Rousseau's musical philosophy, Tolstoy's views on topics such as childhood,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁵⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 169–70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

education, maternal breastfeeding, language, and Jesus also attest to his firm adherence to Rousseau's critique of civilization.⁵⁸ Rousseau formed his faith in melody precisely from his idealization of »nature« and a negative attitude towards civilization. In »The Origin of Music and Its Relations« from *Origin of Languages*, he argues melodies gave humanity their first utterance:

Thus verse, singing, and speech have a common origin...the first discourses were the first songs...The periodic recurrences and measures of rhythm, the melodious modulations of accent, gave birth and music along with language. Or, rather that was the only language in those happy climes and happy times, when the only pressing needs that required the agreement of others were those to which the heart gave birth...At first, there was no music but melody and no other melody than the varied sounds of speech... Considering the way in which the earliest societies were bound together, is it surprising that the first stories were in verse and the first laws were sung? A tongue which has only articulations and words has only half its riches...for the expression of feelings and images it still needs rhythm and sounds, which is to say melody, something the Greek tongue has and our lacks.⁵⁹

As John H. Moran puts it, Rousseau was concerned about »the transition from a state of nature through institutional forms to civil society«; the theme of »secular version of the Fall« dominates his work.⁶⁰ In this narrative, civilization is humanity's self-wrought curse rather than a divine blessing; and the devaluation of melody, which encapsulates humanity's first purity, reflects the deterioration of society due to civilization. Tolstoy wrote from a similar perspective: the »good, great, universal, religious art« marked by melodic simplicity is accessible to »any large number of plain men,« but »a small circle of spoilt people« corrupted by depraved learning cannot understand it; the »simple, unperverted peasant laborers« sympathize with the highest sentiments rooted in religious perception, but »erudite, perverted people destitute of religion« cannot. Progress and development have become an impediment preventing people from returning to their original nature: »The hindrance to understanding the best and highest feelings (as is said in the gospel) does not at all lie in deficiency of development or learning, but, on the contrary, in false development and false learning.«⁶¹

For Rousseau, however, »nature« refers to not only a distant or mythical-historical past lodged in Eden but also a shared state all humans once experi-

⁵⁸ See D. TUSSING ORWIN *Tolstoy's Art and Thought*, 36–49.

⁵⁹ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *On the Origin of Language*, 50–51.

⁶⁰ See John H. MORAN's 'Afterword' in J.-J. ROUSSEAU and Johann Gottfried HERDER, *Two Essays On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986, 75.

⁶¹ L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 103.

enced. In *Émile* (1762), Rousseau explains »nature« with reference to both the »natural man« and the child uncorrupted by social institutions:

The natural man lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like. The citizen is but the numerator of a fraction...good social institutions are those best fitted to make a man unnatural...⁶²

Thus, »nature« designates both the primitive man and the childlike state. »The further we are from a state of nature,« Rousseau argues, »the more we lose our natural tastes; or, rather, habit becomes to us a second nature, and so completely replaces our real nature, that we have lost all knowledge of it.«⁶³ To preserve this first nature of mankind, he goes as far as to suggest preserving a child's original nature: »What must be done to train this exceptional man! We can do much, but the chief thing is to prevent anything being done.«⁶⁴ To prevent anything being done is to avoid the forming of habits: »The only habit the child should be allowed to contract is that of having no habits.«⁶⁵

If mankind were to preserve or return to this first primitive and childly nature, and if, in the beginning, there was no music but melody as speech, then to preserve or return to the simplicity of melody is to preserve and return to the initial state of nature. To revive melody's simplicity and superiority for Tolstoy is to resuscitate disappearing folk tunes—and embodied in folk tunes is often an idealized pastoral mode that suggests an uncorrupted and even utopian state. »Back to nature,« Leonard Ratner argues, is exactly what the pastoral evokes.⁶⁶ In the words of Raymond Monelle, the pastoral signifies »a return to the state of nature,« a state of »innocence in the sense of an absence of tumult and strife and a freedom from passion.«⁶⁷ Tolstoy's preference for melodic simplicity and folk tunes might also explain his fondness for Haydn, who is noted for his adoption and 'invention' of folk tunes and often associated with, in his reception history, the idea of naivety.⁶⁸ Tolstoy's praise of Haydn reveals his perception of Haydn as

⁶² J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Emile*, trans. B. Foxley, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1921, 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶⁶ Leonard RATNER, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, Style*, New York: Schirmer Books, 1980, 390.

⁶⁷ Raymond MONELLE, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 195.

⁶⁸ As Charles Rosen remarks, »The use of folk music or the invention of folk-like material becomes increasingly important in Haydn's works from 1785 on: there had always been some allusions to popular tunes, hunting-calls, yodels, and dance-rhythms.« See Charles ROSEN, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, London: Faber and Faber, 1971, 329. For a detailed account of the changing attitudes and understanding towards the aesthetic category of naivety in connection with Haydn's reception history in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Jacob FRIEDMAN, Haydn and the Aesthetics of Naivety, *Music & Letters*, 102/4, (2021), 687–718.

a composer that cherished melodic accessibility: »I like Haydn's style. Such simplicity and clarity! Everything is so simple and clear – and completely without artificiality.«⁶⁹ He hears in Haydn – who himself also believed his task as a composer was to »touch the heart« by writing »a charming and rhythmically right melody«⁷⁰ – a »pre-fall« and childlike simplicity resembling what E.T.A. Hoffman perceived:

Haydn's compositions are dominated by a feeling of childlike optimism...A world of love, of bliss, of eternal youth, as through before the Fall; no suffering, no pain; only sweet, melancholy longing for the beloved vision floating far off in the red flowing of evening, neither approaching nor receding; and as long as it is there the night will not draw on, for the vision is the evening glow itself illuminating hill and glade.

This tone of simplicity evoking the childlike worldview and a natural landscape, according to Hoffman, renders Haydn »more congenial, more comprehensible to the majority«: a claim that Tolstoy would have agreed given his confidence in the ability of musical comprehensibility to unite common humanity.⁷¹

The return to nature for Tolstoy is not just a dream but a longing that can be realized. Art offers a means of this return—and the musical means is comprehensibility in the manner of melodic simplicity. Tolstoy lambasts his contemporaries who think it is impossible to »return to a primitive state«; he mourns their refusal to write »such stories as that of Joseph or the Odyssey...or ... such music as the folk-songs.« He envisions a future where every art will be liberated from »all the perversion of technical improvements hiding the absence of subject-matter,« where the artist, »not being a professional artist and receiving no payment for his activity, will only produce art when he feels impelled to do so by an irresistible inner impulse.«⁷² Since Tolstoy considers writing with melodic simplicity to be the artist's sincere answer to his inner call as part of the universal brotherhood, as a form of true art it also transcends time and expresses »the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago.«⁷³ Flowing from religious perception, it produces a communion that reaches »beyond the grave« and »unites us with all men of the

⁶⁹ Valentin F. BULGAKOV, *The Last Year of Leo Tolstoy*, New York: Dial Press, 1971, 107.

⁷⁰ Vernon GOTWALS, *Joseph Haydn: Eighteenth-Century Gentleman and Genius*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963, 124–25.

⁷¹ E.T.A. HOFFMANN, *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana; The Poet and the Composer; Music Criticism*, David Charlton (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 237–38. Charles Rosen likewise argues Haydn's simplicity, conveyed through folk and pastoral music, is often heard as a pointer to a long-lost rural past that makes the civilized sentimental: »... it is this simplicity which is most moving, the country simplicity that speaks with a sharp nostalgia to the urban reader ... the apparent naïveté is at the heart of Haydn's manner. His melodies, like the shepherds of the classical pastoral, seem detached from all that they portend, unaware of how much they signify.« See Ch. ROSEN, *Classical Style*, 162.

⁷² L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 198.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 50.

past who have been moved by the same feelings, and with all men of the future who will yet be touched by them.«⁷⁴ Melodic simplicity thus becomes the absolute truth, freeing oneself from the constraint of time and space as well as all social and linguistic constructs. For Tolstoy, it was not Jesus but humanity's universal consciousness that has to be resurrected from the dead.

Artistic Asceticism

How, still, did Tolstoy's critique of his contemporaries' dethronement of melodic accessibility make its way into a novel named after Beethoven's sonata? In the epilogue of *Kreutzer Sonata*, Tolstoy explains the meaning of the story: »We must stop thinking that carnal love is something especially elevated.«⁷⁵ He further condemns the idea of marriage, arguing that it is an excuse invented by the Church for carnal men to legalize sexual desire: »Church teachings, calling themselves, establish marriage as a Christian institution; that is, they set external conditions under which carnal love can be enjoyed without sin by the Christian, and can be completely lawful.« In true Christian teaching, he avers, there is no foundation for the institution of marriage; the account of Adam and Eve being one flesh before the Fall remains a fanciful notion in his philosophy.⁷⁶ For Tolstoy, the highest form of love for both God and men requires not just an asceticism that abstains from all types of sexual relationship but also one that avoids marriage:

The ideal of the Christian is love toward God and one's neighbor. This constitutes renunciation of self and service for God and one's neighbor. Carnal love and marriage are forms of service to oneself, and that is why in every case these are a hindrance to the service of God and to people; this is why, from the Christian point of view, carnal love and marriage are a degradation and a sin.⁷⁷

This self-formulated commandment that forbids the sin of marriage eventually led Tolstoy to also shun music like Beethoven's *presto* in the *Kreutzer Sonata*, for to flee sexual temptation is to flee musical agents that excite one's passion:

What should the pure young man or woman do? They should keep themselves free of temptations, and in order to be in the position of rendering all their strength to the service of God and people, they should strive towards an even greater chastity of thought and desires.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 164–65.

⁷⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *Kreutzer Sonata*, 167.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

Tolstoy's personal life had always manifested a strong ascetic temperament that was sensitive to sexual desire. Since an early age, Tolstoy had kept a confessional diary of »every little sin« he had committed, especially those related to the Seventh Commandment, »Thou shalt not commit adultery.« But while Tolstoy's statements against sex and marriage in both *Kreutzer Sonata* and *What is Art?* reveal his seriousness about sexual abstinence, he also disciplined himself with strict demands concerning other areas of his life. When Tolstoy started studying at Kazan University in 1844, a student named Dyakof—the Nehludof of *Boyhood* (1854)—encouraged Tolstoy to pursue »an ecstatic worship of the ideal of virtue« to perfect himself by the effort of will. To obtain virtues and demolish all vices, Tolstoy assigned himself many rules such as

1. To fulfil what I set myself, despite all obstacles.
2. To fulfil well what I do undertake.
3. Never to refer to a book for what I have forgotten, but always to try to recall it to mind myself.
4. Always to make my mind work with its utmost power.
5. Always to read and think aloud.
6. Not to be ashamed of telling people who interrupt me, that they are hindering me: letting them first feel it, but (if they do not understand) telling them, with an apology.⁷⁹

Tolstoy's acute self-consciousness heightened his awareness of not only his moral imperfection but also his flawed aesthetic appearance. His private diary is plagued by a sense of shame that accuses him day and night:

I am ugly, awkward, uncleanly, and lack society education. I am irritable, a bore to others, not modest, intolerant, and as shame-faced as a child. I am almost an ignorant...I am incontinent, undecided, inconstant and stupidly vain and vehement, like all characterless people. I am not brave. I am not methodical in life, and am so lazy that idleness has become an almost unconquerable habit of mine. I am clever, but my cleverness has as yet not been thoroughly tested on anything; I have neither practical nor social nor business ability. I am honest, that is to say, I love goodness...but there is a thing I love more than goodness, and that is fame. I am so ambitious, and so little has this feeling been gratified, that should I have to choose between fame and goodness, I fear I may often choose the former. Yes, I am not modest, and therefore I am proud at heart, though shame-faced and shy in society.⁸⁰

When Tolstoy left the university during the middle of studies and returned to Yasnaya Polyana temporarily, he again compiled an extensive list of goals that

⁷⁹ A. MAUDE, *Life of Tolstoy*, 38–39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 128–29.

he wished to achieve by determination—»to reach the highest perfection I can in music and painting,« »to write down rules (for my conduct),« and »to write essays on all the subjects I study« are just some examples.⁸¹

Tolstoy's interpretation of faith was also fundamentally ascetic. Although Tolstoy began to study philosophy from the age of fifteen and stopped attending church service at sixteen, he in those days still clung to a form of faith—one that, as his anecdote in *A Confession* (1882) reveals, was ascetic and aimed only at one goal: to perfect the self.

...My only real faith, that which apart from my animal instincts gave impulse to my life—was a belief in perfecting oneself... I tried to perfect myself mentally—I studied everything I could: anything life threw in my way; I tried to perfect my will, I drew up rules which I tried to follow; I perfected myself physically, cultivating my strength and agility by all sorts of exercises and accustoming myself to endurance and patience by all kinds of privations. And all this I considered to be perfecting myself. The beginning of it all was, of course, moral perfecting; but that was soon replaced by perfecting in general: by the desire to be better, not in one's own eyes or those of God, but in the eyes of other people.⁸²

Tolstoy read the New Testament through an ascetic lens that stressed self-renunciation. Self-denial was what he considered alongside love, humility, and the duty of repaying good for evil the four distinct teachings of the Scripture. As he confesses in *My Religion* (1885):

From my childhood, from the time I began to read the New Testament, I was touched and stirred most of all by that portion of the doctrine of Christ which inculcates love, humility, self-denial, and the duty of returning good for evil. This, to me, has always been the substance of Christianity; it was what I loved in it with all my heart, it was that in the name of which, after despair and disbelief, caused me to accept as true the meaning found in the Christian life.⁸³

Tolstoy expressed his discontent with theologians who denied self-perfectibility in their reading of the Gospels; whereas theologians believed Christ as the God-Man (*Bogochelovek*) reveals that man can only become perfect by participating in Christ's divine nature,⁸⁴ Tolstoy contended humans can fulfil the perfect ideals delineated in the Sermon on the Mount by self-willed law-keeping:

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

⁸² L. TOLSTOY, *A Confession*, trans. A. Maude, Mineola, New York: Dover, 2005, 4–5.

⁸³ L. TOLSTOY, *My Religion*, trans. Huntington Smith, New York: Thomas Crowell and Co., 1885, 2. See the emphasis on self-denial also on 3, 22, viii.

⁸⁴ In Russian religious literature, the term *Bogochelovek*, that is, God-Man, refers to Christ incarnate. See »'Only the word order has changed': *Bogochelovek* and *chelovekobog*,« in Nel GRILLAERT, *What the God-seekers Found in Nietzsche*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, 107–37.

I read not only the Sermon on the Mount; I read all the Gospels, and all the theological commentaries on them. I was not satisfied with the declarations of the theologians that the Sermon on the Mount was only an indication of the degree of perfection to which man should aspire; but that fallen man, weighed down by sin, could not reach such an ideal; and that the salvation of humanity was in faith and prayer and grace.⁸⁵

Rousseau's writing also strengthened Tolstoy's faith in human perfectibility; as Julia Simon points out, »Although Rousseau often stresses human limitations, and perhaps nowhere as much as in the *Social Contract*—where he fears conspiracies, private interests, and all human vices that interfere with ideal forms of governance—he nonetheless expresses faith in human potential.« Humanity's faculty for perfectibility in this view »posits the possibility for democratic and virtuous self-governance in concert.«⁸⁶ But Tolstoy's ascetic manner concerning sex, marriage, and even music might have also been reinforced by his later reading of Søren Kierkegaard, who did not consider the Christian experience an ascetic one.⁸⁷ Russia was one of the first countries where Kierkegaard's works were translated and as Hilary Fink notes, Tolstoy began to work on *Kreutzer Sonata* soon after becoming familiar with Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's essays in *Either/Or* such as »On the Immediate Erotic Stages, or the Musical Erotic« and »Balance between the Aesthetic and the Ethical« explore—as Tolstoy does in *Kreutzer Sonata*—»the corruption of the aesthetic« marked by »dark passions« in contrast to the ethical and the religious.⁸⁸ Although Tolstoy did not mention *Either/Or* in his work, Fink argues that a connection seems compelling: »The Kierkegaardian conception of the demonic musical-erotic and the abyss which lurks beneath the strains of the violin parallels Tolstoy's depiction of Beethoven's Sonata and its effect on Pozdnyshev.«⁸⁹ In practicing asceticism, Tolstoy constantly demanded of himself to turn inward to the phenomenon of the consciousness of the self—a »willing, living, loving striving toward the other whose term is God« as Richard F. Gustafson put it⁹⁰—and it somewhat evokes what Kierkegaard suggests under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus in *Practice in Christianity* (1850) about »the earnestness of life.« This religious earnestness Kierkegaard describes is »to will to be, to will to express the perfection (ideality) in dailyness of actuality«; »to live is to be examined«—and this way of life resists the »pressure of finitude and busyness with livelihood, job, office, and procreation.«⁹¹

⁸⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *My Religion*, 6.

⁸⁶ Julia SIMON, *Rousseau Among the Moderns: Music, Aesthetics, Politics*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 2013, 69.

⁸⁷ See Antony AUMANN, Kierkegaard and Asceticism, *Existenz*, 13/1 (2018), 39–43.

⁸⁸ Hilary FINK, Tolstoy's The Kreuzer Sonata and the Kierkegaardian Either/Or, *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 36 (2002), 10–11.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁰ Richard F. GUSTAFSON, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014, 265.

⁹¹ Søren KIERKEGAARD, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, 189–90.

For Tolstoy, since an ascetic lifestyle encompasses every dimension of life, a glorification of sexual abstinence then ought by law result in an asceticism that addresses not only the sexual but also the musical. To resist music like the *presto* of *Kreutzer Sonata* is to resist immoral temptations and the arousal of erotic desire. But this »artistic asceticism« in Tolstoy's philosophy cannot be described as an aesthetic one, for beauty in Tolstoy's eyes is not what defines art of which the goal, according to him, is to serve the union of mankind by purging perverted thoughts. »What then is this conception of beauty,« Tolstoy complains, »so stubbornly held to by people of our circle and day as furnishing a definition of art?« Tolstoy bemoans the common view that considers beauty subjective. Beauty in the subjective sense is tied to pleasure, he notes; but in the objective sense, beauty denotes absolute perfection—and perfection for Tolstoy concerns morals and not pleasure. He thus criticizes philosophers' attempts to define beauty in terms of imitation of nature, symmetry, harmony, and unity in variety among others. He specifically detests Francis Hutcheson, Voltaire, and Denis Diderot for turning the quest for beauty into a matter of taste which he considers futile. In arraignment of these Enlightenment philosophers, Tolstoy not only discloses his familiarity with eighteenth-century philosophical discourse but also once again evinces his special reverence for Rousseau, even though Rousseau had also written on taste.⁹²

Like Pozdnyshev who grieves over the prevalence of sexual immorality stimulated by arts, Tolstoy abhors witnessing sexual desire being promoted through the artworks of his time: »It is not only in Church matters and patriotic matters that art depraves, it is art in our time that serves as the chief cause of the perversion of people in the most important question of social life—in their sexual relations.« He describes his contemporary culture as one submerged in the »same sexual dissoluteness«; most art is »devoted to describing, depicting, and inflaming sexual love in every shape and form.« Among the works he deems most depraved are »novels and their lust-kindling descriptions of love, from the most refined to the grossest, with which the literature of our society overflows,« »pictures and statues representing women's naked bodies, and all sorts of abominations which are reproduced in illustrations and advertisements,« and »all the filthy operas and operettas, songs and romances with which our world teems, involuntarily it seems as if existing art had but one definite aim,—to disseminate vice as widely as possible.«⁹³ It does not matter for Pozdnyshev—and for Tolstoy—that there was no evidence to prove Pozdnyshev's wife adulterous, for he has been taught that even to lust after a man or a woman by looking is itself an act of adultery.⁹⁴

⁹² L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 40–41. Rousseau distinguishes taste from sensibility: »Taste however is by no means sensibility... it seems that taste is more particularly connected with the smaller expressions, and sensibility to the greater.« See J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *A Dictionary of Music*, 429–30.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 184–85.

⁹⁴ Matthew 5:28, quoted in L. TOLSTOY, *Kreutzer Sonata*, 172.

If the meaning of both life and music is to unite mankind into a state of nature, then the »labor of humanity,« Tolstoy contends, must consist in »the destruction of physical and moral obstacles to the union of men« and in »establishing the principles common to all men.«⁹⁵ Abstaining from complex music and turning to simple folkish tunes achieve both for Tolstoy, for while melody is moral, harmony often remains an obstacle to moral living and listening. Tolstoy did not just follow Rousseau in exalting melody and putting down harmony; he also inherited Rousseau's view that melody alone gives »moral effects.« Rousseau argues that »it is by means of the song, not by means of the chords, that sounds have expression, fire, life; it is the song along that gives them the moral effects that produce all of Music's energy.«⁹⁶ By relinquishing melodic simplicity, »music found itself deprived of the moral effects that it used to produce when it was doubly the voice of nature.«⁹⁷ Melody for Rousseau thus also moves listeners into moral sympathy: »The sounds of a melody do not act on us solely as sounds, but as signs of our affections, of our feelings; it is in this way that they excite in us the emotions they express and the image of which we recognize in them. Something of this moral effect is perceived even in animals.«⁹⁸ As Simon puts it, for Rousseau, »the moral feeling elicited through song is excited in the listener in much the same way that the perception of suffering causes humans to feel pity: both evoke an awareness of another sentient being«—and this moral feeling provides the basis for social life, »establishing the primary bond between individuals that will extend to create the bonds of community.«⁹⁹ This bond between individuals, in Tolstoy's vocabulary, is the union among men; and if music is »a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings,«¹⁰⁰ then true music is essentially simple and accessible melodies that knit mankind into oneness.

Still, Tolstoy took the idea further. Rousseau's analysis of music relies on a distinction between »physical« and »moral« passions; even when harmony produces a pleasant sensation, it remains, as *Examination* says, »purely physical.«¹⁰¹ For Tolstoy's ascetic ears, however, harmony is more than just physical—it is carnal, fleshly, and perhaps even immoral depending on its usage. He considered the desire of his contemporaries who sought to develop involuted harmonies unrighteous; their intent was not to move the heart and unify mankind but to excite nerves for temporary thrills: »Instead of transmitting by means of a melody the feelings he has experienced, a composer of the new school accumulates and

⁹⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *Kreutzer Sonata*, 159.

⁹⁶ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, 279.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 331.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁹⁹ J. SIMON, *Rousseau among the Moderns*, 69–70.

¹⁰⁰ See fn. 12.

¹⁰¹ See J.T. SCOTT, *Rousseau's Musical Theory*, 71. See also fn. 51.

complicates sounds, and by now strengthening, now weakening them, he produces on the audience a physiological effect of a kind that can be measured by an apparatus invented for the purpose.¹⁰² In Tolstoy's hands, the *presto* of *Kreutzer Sonata* becomes an epitome of insincere and immoral music that stirs lustful desire. Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, too, becomes an archetype of false art especially since Wagner, whom Tolstoy despised, perceived it as »the mystical lodestar of all my fantastic musical thoughts and aspirations.« Wagner praised this symphony for its incomprehensibility, unrestrained passion, ability to arouse strange desires, and even the engendered »demoniac phenomenon« that compelled him to screech as if he had been seized by a ghost—and such effects were enough for Tolstoy to declare the symphony vile.¹⁰³ Filled with sexual impulses, Scriabin's symphonic *Ecstasy*, accompanied by a poetry Scriabin wrote originally entitled *Poème Orgiaque* (Orgiastic Poem), also proved degraded according to Tolstoy's religious perception; his sentiments were shared by Shostakovich who remarked, »We regard Scriabin as our bitterest musical enemy. Why? Because Scriabin's music tends to an unhealthy eroticism. Also to mysticism and passivity and escape from the realities of life.«¹⁰⁴

Abstinence From Tears

Tolstoy's artistic asceticism still was not the most extreme form of self-denial. He espoused a form of sexual abstinence critical of marriage and a musical abstinence that despised harmonic complexity; but he also strived for an abstinence from tears—in, paradoxically, tearfulness. During his early days, Tolstoy despite his frequent criticism of Beethoven still once admitted that »I play Beethoven [on the piano] and shed tears of tenderness.«¹⁰⁵ He later nonetheless chose to disown his tears as if his instinctive emotional responses to music were nothing but self-deception. In Maude's account, when Alexander Goldenweiser and Wanda Landowska visited Tolstoy to play for him in 1907, Tolstoy's face would still »soften« whenever a melody pleased him. Seated in the old Voltaire armchair with his eyes closed, he would sigh and even weep when he was moved—there was even something »immaterial and seraphic« in his look under the light of his paper lampshade. Yet as soon as »the spell was broken,« Tolstoy would shun the composer and performers, growling: »My tears mean nothing.« He reduced music to a mere stimulant and mocked his tears as sheer—and even shameful—neuro-

¹⁰² L. TOLSTOY, *What is Art?*, 113.

¹⁰³ Richard WAGNER, *My Life*, ed. Mary Whittall, trans. Andrew Gray, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in F. BOWERS, *Scriabin*, 2 vols, Palo Alto: Kodansha International, 1969, 1:86.

¹⁰⁵ Henri TROYAT, *Tolstoy*, trans. N. Amphoux, New York: Double Day, 1967, 179.

physiological products: »So what? There is some music I cannot listen to without weeping, that's all, just as my daughter Sasha cannot eat strawberries without getting hives! Anyway, sometimes I weep when I laugh too. It's nerves, nothing but nerves.«¹⁰⁶

Tolstoy's ridicule of his tears as purely nervous responses reveals a reluctance to treat the music that touched him as true music, especially since Rousseau has taught that chords alone only impart to nerves disturbance and produce vapors,¹⁰⁷ and that true music that moves the heart cannot be considered merely in terms of the nervous reactions it excites.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, in minimizing his tears as mere nervous responses, Tolstoy finally showed one deviation from Rousseau and the humanity of Jesus; whereas Tolstoy diminished the sincerity and significance of tears, Jesus in the Gospel wept and Rousseau, like other leading figures in the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility, considered tears the most visible sign of one's true and tender sensibility. Unlike Tolstoy's *Confession* that foregrounds self-renunciation, Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) celebrates tears as expressions of sympathy. For Tolstoy, tears ought to be repudiated as false and unvirtuous, but for Rousseau, to weep is to act according to one's genuine moral sensibility: »Dear and precious tears! They were felt and ran all to my inward soul; they washed from it every trace of base and dishonest sentiments; none ever entered there since that time.«¹⁰⁹ Tears, he professes, were like »my food and medicine.«¹¹⁰

Tolstoy strove to resist music's charm, but sounds, like other temptations in life, remained too much of a burden to bear. Like a true *Rousseauian*, he left his home in 1910 in search of a quiet dwelling place. On October 10, at five in the morning, he departed, leaving a note for his wife:¹¹¹

Do not seek me. I feel that I must retire from the trouble of life. Perpetual guests, perpetual visits and visitors, perpetual cinematograph operators, beset me at Yasnaya Polyana, and poison my life. I want to recover from the trouble of the world. It is necessary for my soul and my body which have lived 82 years upon this earth.¹¹²

Contending he would not return even if he were found, Tolstoy, like the weary Pozdnyshchev, closed his short letter pleading for his wife's forgiveness after their forty-eight years of marriage.¹¹³ In longing for a state of nature that unites

¹⁰⁶ A. MAUDE, *Life of Tolstoy*, 606.

¹⁰⁷ See fn. 51.

¹⁰⁸ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, 323.

¹⁰⁹ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *The Confessions*, 2 vols, London: J. Bew, 1783, 2: 45.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 68.

¹¹¹ See: Tolstoy Quits Home; His Refuge Unknown, *New York Times*, 12 November 1910.

¹¹² Tolstoy in Covent; a Typist is With Him, *New York Times*, 14 November 1910.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

mankind, Tolstoy exiled himself from his wife, his family, and even the world. Despite its claim of a universal simplicity that brings forth unity, Tolstoy's artistic asceticism—which metamorphosed into a narrow preference for folk tunes and fragmented pieces that exhibit melodic simplicity—ended in exclusion and division which he had always wanted to avoid by proclaiming his musical gospel. Rimsky-Korsakov was irritated by Tolstoy's dismissal of the idea of beauty after reading *What is Art?*;¹¹⁴ and Tchaikovsky found himself ostracized from Tolstoy, whose writing he once admired as »the deepest of heart-seers«: »He did not at all regard me as a subject for his observation, but simply wanted to chat about music ...He took a pleasure in denying Beethoven, and plainly expressed doubts of his genius. This was a trait not at all worthy of a great man.«¹¹⁵ G. K. Chesterton enunciated his rejection of Tolstoy's ascetic kerygma in 1908 in an issue of *Illustrated London News* after Tolstoy's eightieth birthday:

Tolstoy is not content with pitying humanity for its pains...He also pities humanity for its pleasures, such as music...He weeps at the thought of hatred; but in *The Kreutzer Sonata* he weeps almost as much at the thought of love. What you [Tolstoy] dislike is being a man...you pity humanity because it is human.¹¹⁶

Tolstoy's ideal of the universal began with a Rousseauian seed and concluded with a Rousseauian fate. In the name of nature, Rousseau, as Moran remarks, judged his subjective universal as a »universal universal«:

Undoubtedly cosmopolitan in spirit, Rousseau at his best objected to particular, fragmentary »universals« in the name of a universal universal, that is, nature... The notion of nature thus functions of Rousseau as a critical foil against authoritarianism and all forms of externalism, and as the key concept in his advocacy of interiority or liberty, which he conceived as a strict obedience to self-imposed law.¹¹⁷

Tolstoy's assertion of universality shows a similar pattern; as Taruskin observes, his claim, in lumping the subjective with the objective and the relativistic with the absolute, lends itself too easily to free forms of adaptations and even adoptions:

Everywhere Tolstoy treats vague and relativistic formulations as if they were both specific and absolute, which is the perpetual fallacy—one is tempted to say the prero-

¹¹⁴ See Leon BOTSTEIN, *In Search of Beauty: Autocracy, Music, and Painting in Rimsky-Korsakov's Russia*, in *Rimsky-Korsakov and His World*, ed. Marina Frolova-Walker, 301–54, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

¹¹⁵ A. MAUDE, *Life of Tolstoy*, 377.

¹¹⁶ G.K. CHESTERTON, *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. xxviii [The *Illustrated London News*, 1908-1910], Lawrence J. Clipper (ed.), San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, 190–91.

¹¹⁷ J. H. MORAN, *Afterword*, 77.

gative—of the believer. But all believers share the prerogative, and its very slackness made Tolstoy's esthetics endlessly adaptable, or should I say adoptable...¹¹⁸

Tolstoy's idea of a »universal language« also raises a question similar to one probed previously in relation to Haydn, whose melodies delighted Tolstoy. Tolstoy considered folk tunes a universal language in music even if they were sung in Russian and received by people who do not speak Russian; and this idea of a universal language was once claimed by Haydn who told Mozart that »my language is understood all over the world.«¹¹⁹ Peter Kivy has taken issues with Haydn's remarks; for Kivy, while music is language-like in some respects, it is not language or part of a language. Haydn's claim is thus true only in that his music constituted his language; but the world of Haydn, Kivy argues, primarily consisted of Austria, Germany, Bohemia, France, Italy, and England. Contemporary listeners of other nations might enjoy Haydn's music, but Haydn's music was still culturally conditioned and thereby remained abstractly, but not literally, a language of emotions.¹²⁰

Besides the notion of universality, the idea of sincerity, which Tolstoy categorizes as a quality of the artist, also elicits doubt. As suggested earlier, if art, as he states, is »the expression of man's emotions by external signs,«¹²¹ then any person who perform external signs that correspond to his ideal of melodic simplicity may be deemed sincere even if they were not performing out of sincerity. Tolstoy's sincerity ultimately indicates not so much a person's genuineness and honesty which are often hard to tell; rather, it denotes one's truthfulness to his first inner nature of common humanity, as confirmed by simple melodic signs.

It is easy to judge Tolstoy a fanatic with his zealous and problematic claims, but every ideology considered extreme often begins as a reaction to its contemporary milieu and struggles; like Rousseau who associated the political decline in his age with a decline in the expressive power of music, Tolstoy was troubled by moral decline and sought deliverance in music. Like a Rousseau outsider of his age, Tolstoy in his last years, as Leon Botstein puts it, rose as »an inspiring symbol of a fundamental critique of values and mores associated with ideas of progress and modernity, including property and war.«¹²² In his critique of corrupted national and religious regimes, his ideas, despite being inspired by the Gospels, still impacted many thinkers in different circles; even Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ* as Walter Kaufmann has pointed out, »shows the influence of both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.«¹²³

¹¹⁸ R. TARUSKIN, *On Russian Music*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, 367.

¹¹⁹ Vernon GOTWALS, *Joseph Haydn*, 120.

¹²⁰ See: Music, Language, and Cognition: Which Doesn't Belong, in Peter KIVY, *Music, Language, and Cognition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 214–32.

¹²¹ See fn. 12 and fn. 29.

¹²² L. BOTSTEIN, *In Search of Beauty*, 302.

¹²³ Walter KAUFMANN, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, rev. and expanded, New York: Meridian Books, 1956, 16.

Tolstoy's interpretations of the Gospels nevertheless cost him an excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901, but for Tolstoy, he was looking for a truth that the priests did not recognize. He saw them as part of the »misguided and as pitiful creatures«:

You who may die any instant, you sign sentences of death, you declare war, you take part in it, you judge, you punish, you plunder the working people, you live luxuriously in the midst of the poor, and teach weak men who have confidence in you... yet it may happen at the moment when you are acting thus that a bacterium or a bull may attack you and you will fall and die, losing forever the chance of repairing the harm you have done to others, and above all to yourself, in uselessly wasting a life which has been given you only once in eternity, without having accomplished the only thing you ought to have done.¹²⁴

In submitting themselves to deceit and hypocrisy, the violent men in Tolstoy's view have forsaken »the rational conscience« that would have enabled them to serve both humanity and the kingdom of God. These many acts of violence, Tolstoy writes to them, »obviously opposed to your reason and your heart, to base your existence on the misfortunes of others.«¹²⁵ Tolstoy's emphasis on the conscience is another strong mark of his assimilation of Christianity and Rousseau, who himself also often borrowed biblical imageries. Rousseau describes conscience in *Emile* (1755) as »the Divine instinct, immortal voice from heaven; sure guide for a creature ignorant and finite indeed, yet intelligent and free; infallible judge of good and evil, making man like to God«;¹²⁶ this definition of the conscience alludes to the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3 where God reckoned Adam had, as a result of eating the fruit of the tree, »become like one of us, knowing good and evil« (Gen 3:22). Published also in the same year, Rousseau's *Second Discourse, Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755) reveals a similar sentiment; as Heinrich Meier notes, although Rousseau in the *Second Discourse* and *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782) did not refer to the tree of knowledge of good and evil by name, the *Second Discourse* interprets the prohibition against eating from the tree as »the intention of giving from the beginning a morality to human actions, which they would not have acquired for a long time.«¹²⁷ The ultimate point remains that humanity should strive to return to a »pre-fall« state, a state of innocence before eating from the tree; the *First Discourse, Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750) also suggests, as Joshua Mitchell puts it, that »humans should not have tasted of the tree of knowledge if they had wanted

¹²⁴ L. TOLSTOY, *Kingdom of God*, 264.

¹²⁵ L. TOLSTOY, *Kingdom of God*, 264-65.

¹²⁶ J.-J. ROUSSEAU, *Emile*, 254.

¹²⁷ Heinrich MEIER, *On the Happiness of the Philosophic Life: Reflections on Rousseau's Rêveries*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, 83.

to retain the natural goodness attendant to their original condition... before the fall, so to speak, consciousness of death was almost nonexistent.«¹²⁸ In *War and Peace* (1867), Tolstoy shows a similar view by opining the fruit of the tree has only begotten a consciousness that afflicts the self:

In historical events we see more plainly than ever the law that forbids us to taste of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It is only unself-conscious activity that bears fruit, and the man who plays a part in an historical drama never understands its significance. If he strives to comprehend it, he is stricken with barrenness.¹²⁹

It is in this yearning to taste the fruit of unconsciousness that readers hear one more echo between Pozdnyshev and Tolstoy. Not only did Tolstoy share in Pozdnyshev's revulsion at the *presto* of *Kreutzer Sonata*, but Pozdnyshev's frustration with music's hypnotizing power was also Tolstoy's. As Henri Troyat recounts, music often thrust Tolstoy into an unfamiliar realm where he would lose self-control:

Tolstoy had always been sensitive to music. It acted on him like a drug. It unstrung his nerves and made him lose control of his reactions. Sometimes he even grew angry with the artist for destroying his peace of mind. Stepan Behrs observed that when his brother-in-law was listening to his favorite melodies, he would suddenly turn »very pale,« and »he winced, almost imperceptibly, in a way that seemed to express fear.«¹³⁰

Like Tolstoy, Pozdnyshev realizes that music often tyrannized him: »Music is a terrifying thing!... Music makes me forget myself, my real position; it transports me to some other position not my own. Under the influence of music it seems to me that I feel what I do not really feel, that I understand what I do not understand, that I can do what I cannot do.« These words of Pozdnyshev—of Tolstoy—some-what show subtle conscious or unconscious absorptions of Pauline biblical texts;¹³¹

¹²⁸ Joshua MITCHELL, *Not by Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 220, fn 69.

¹²⁹ L. TOLSTOY, *War and Peace*, trans. Constance Garnett, New York: Random House, 2012, 1072.

¹³⁰ H. TROYAT, *Tolstoy*, 385.

¹³¹ The Apostle Paul writes, »I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do... it is no longer I myself who do it...I know that good itself does not dwell in me...For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it« (Rom 7:15-20). Paul speaks of this experience as one unique to his »old« identity as »a wretched man« under the law of sin (see Rom. 7:24) in contrast to his »new« identity as one living in the Spirit (Rom. 8); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel called this perception of »wretchedness« as an »unhappy consciousness« and, as Peter Singer suggests, Romans 7:19 (»For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing«) is an example that exemplifies Hegel's »unhappy consciousness.« See Peter SINGER, *Hegel: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 84.

like the Apostle Paul, Pozdnyshev experienced a state of not being himself and of not having power over himself, but as one who averred Paul had led many astray from Jesus' teaching,¹³² Tolstoy did not see sin but Beethoven's music as that evil which imprisoned him in a wretched consciousness. Whereas for Paul, it was sin as a cosmic power that had ruled over him, for Tolstoy, it was music as a diabolic force that had lorded over him. Thus, for Tolstoy, true liberation is to be found in freedom from degenerate music, attained by the power of self-imposed laws.

To return to the first Edenic realm of nature, Rousseau in the words of Daniel Chua conceived a »sentimental aesthetic« in which

...vocal music becomes the pure transmission of sentiment from soul to soul, linking the composer to the performer and ultimately to the listener. The authenticity of the experience lies in the recovery of an innate morality of feeling that is the ontological ground for human communication. In this sense, the voice is a remnant of an Eden, a moral purity that society has obscured through the artificiality of its signs.¹³³

While Tolstoy insisted that art is not an aesthetic matter, he still envisioned an idealized universal sound of melodic simplicity that resembled Rousseau's sentimental aesthetics. For he who scorned the idea of aesthetic, however, sentimental aesthetics then functioned as a sentimental ascetic that served a similar musical return to nature—a childlike, »pre-fall« state that has no need of development. But Irenaeus, whose Byzantine Christian view of sexual intercourse had been compared to Tolstoy's,¹³⁴ offers another possibility: the »pre-fall« Adam and Eve, being »children, innocent and guileless,«¹³⁵ are designed to mature and be perfected through initial failure and suffering.¹³⁶ For Rousseau and Tolstoy, progress, even in the arts, is to be eschewed; for the latter, perfection is furthered by imposing more laws upon oneself. But if a child in the alternative view is to proceed in maturity and not return to a state of primitive unconsciousness or ignorance, then humanity, as it presses on, cannot just rest on simple melodies; the Edenic aesthetics is simply not enough to capture the particularity of each human being, the peculiarity of each local culture, and the complexity of humanity's overarching history. Childlikeness still nonetheless can denote something that would welcome the late Beethoven, the late Scriabin, or other musical beings;

¹³² See L. TOLSTOY, Church and State, in *Church and State and Other Essays*, Boston: B.R. Tucker, 1981, 5–32.

¹³³ Daniel CHUA, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 103.

¹³⁴ See Stephen G. POST, Love, Religion, and Sexual Revolution, *The Journal of Religion*, 72/3 (1992), 413–14.

¹³⁵ IRENAEUS, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching (Ancient Christians Writers No. 16)*, Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (eds.), Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1952, 17.

¹³⁶ IRENAEUS, *Against Heresies* 4.38.1, in *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (trans and ed.), 10 vols, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, 1: 522.

the title of Tolstoy's *Kingdom of God* is derived from Luke 17:21, but one reads in Luke 18:16 a saying of Jesus Christ: »Let the little children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.« If Tolstoy's musical vision for the kingdom is one that adopts this childlike mind, then a childlike approach to music perhaps is not one legally bound to a sole devotion to simplistic melodies; rather, it acquires an attitude of innocence that denotes not ignorance but a posture that is playful, guileless, peaceable, open, and curious—and against this spirit there is no law that restricts the diversification of music. Unassuming and unsuspecting, the innocent does not presume melody clean and harmony unclean.

Tolstoy's *Kingdom of God*, as its subtitle states, speaks of »true Christianity« as a »new theory of life« and not a »mystical religion.« It is an anthropological and lived experience: »The Christian religion is not a legal system which, being imposed by violence, may transform men's lives. Christianity is a new and higher conception of life. A new conception of life cannot be imposed on men; it can only be freely assimilated.«¹³⁷ While asserting this new life cannot be imposed as a legal system but received as grace, Tolstoy paradoxically contends perfection for a new way of life can only be achieved by rigorous self-regulations comprising innumerable musical laws that forbid the hearing of many composers and compositions. In attempting to emancipate himself from suffering, he also unceasingly directs his gaze upon himself and thereby allows his self-consciousness to torment him. Despite his sharp critique of the organized use of music as social disciplinary forces that advance religious and nationalistic ideologies, Tolstoy himself had turned music into an ideological means of discipline—one that realized his Rousseauian ideology via the means of self-discipline. Yet, in the end, Tolstoy was earnest—and earnestness, if we go back to the Kierkegaard that Tolstoy read, »is to will to be, to will to express the perfection (ideality) in dailiness of actuality.«¹³⁸ In seeking universal salvation through a return to a »pre-fall« state of nature, Tolstoy was earnest in expressing his ideal of religious perception in actual music; his self-imposed law puts its faith in the art of melodic simplicity. What prompted him to earnestly desire a kingdom formed by the will was the insensibility of his days; seeing many self-appointed elites in his age in his own land offering themselves to the god of violence, Tolstoy bewails that »men of the present day have come into such an extraordinary condition, their hearts are so hardened, that seeing they see not, hearing they do not hear, and understand not.«¹³⁹ In not only desiring but also contriving his idealized kingdom, then, Tolstoy's denial of most music and his tears ironically came from a heart that was not hardened but prone to weeping. In his artistic asceticism, he showed, in his stubborn way, both sincerity and sensibility.

¹³⁷ L. TOLSTOY, *The Kingdom of God*, 2–3.

¹³⁸ See fn. 91.

¹³⁹ L. TOLSTOY, *The Kingdom of God*, 237.

Sažetak

**Rousseauovsko evanđelje *Kreutzerove sonate*:
umjetnički asketizam Lava Tolstoja**

Često smatran za jednog od najvećih romanopisaca u povijesti, Lav Tolstoj je od rane dobi pokazivao asketski temperament koji je zahtijevao spolnu disciplinu. Kao adolescent Tolstoj je prijavljivao svoj 'svaki maleni grijeh' uključujući i sedmu zapovijed Božju – »ne sagriješi bludno«. U dobi od 61 godine napisao je novelu *Kreutzerova sonata* (1889.) kako bi prozelitizirao jednu još radikalniju mjeru koja je zagovarala ne samo apstinenciju od seksa nego i od braka. Međutim, u *Kreutzerovoj sonati* Tolstoj je također osudio stavak *presto* iz Beethovenove *Kreutzerove sonate* br. 9 op. 47, tvrdeći da ima moć izazvati nemorralnu spolnu želju. Tolstoj je proširio ovaj svoj argument u spisu *Što je umjetnost?* (1897.), gdje proglašava glazbu kao primarno »sredstvo jedinstva među ljudima«. U toj raspravi on kritizira mnoga glazbena djela da su 'lažna' i 'isključiva', ali, paradoksalno, dolazi i do uske glazbene preferencije koja ga izdvaja od njegovih suvremenika: prema njegovu shvaćanju, narodni napjevi i glazba melodijske jednostavnosti jedina su istinska umjetnička djela vrijedna priklanjanja, jer ne samo da ne pobuđuje spolne strasti, nego i ujedinjuju čovječanstvo uzvisujući svijest o univerzalnom bratstvu.

U ovom se članku istražuje Tolstojeva glazbena orijentacija u svjetlu njegova tumačenja Evandjelja i Rousseaua, što je u njemu izazvalo čežnju za povratkom u primitivno prirodno stanje što izjednačava sa svojom vizijom kraljevstva Božjeg. U ovom rusooovskom evanđelju glazbena jednostavnost kao oblik umjetničkog asketizma postala je sredstvo spasa koje čovjeka može odvratiti od prokletstva civilizacije.