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**French Framing of *Anna Karenina*:
Confused Identities in Russian Aristocratic
Culture**

**Research Honors
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April 16, 2007**

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Introduction

Anna Karenina uses Russian identities and Russian language in opposition to European culture and French language to highlight the superficiality of the Russian aristocracy in the nineteenth century. In the context of the novel, honesty to oneself is the highest expression of being; unless one lives in truth, one cannot lay claim to a genuine existence. Culture and, more importantly, cultural identity provide this appraisal and affirmation of our own self-worth, as well as a framework in which to approach life. When confronted with two cultural identities, one innate and the other imposed, imitated, or “borrowed”, one’s true identity is muddled in a labyrinth of languages, customs, and traditions. This creates a disjointed relationship with both cultures and a “clash of cultures”. The dual identity of the Russian aristocracy in the nineteenth century is a classic example of a culture’s struggle to find the “right” path independent of any imitation, equated with superficiality and insincerity. Throughout its history, Russia has been associated with backwardness and primitivism. France, on the other hand, was a model to be revered not only for its fashion and cultural cues, but also for its status as a refined modern and technologically superior country.

Acquiring an inferiority complex because of its lack of membership among “modern” nations, in the seventeenth century Peter the Great rushed Russia into modernity, using St. Petersburg as Russia’s point of entry to the world. However, he and subsequent rulers accomplished this by borrowing and imitating European identities, superficially embracing a

European identity as if preparing for a theatrical performance. Thus, the Russian aristocracy did not come to truly adopt this new identity, and many used it as psychological escape from daily life. Using this European identity to separate itself from peasants, Russian aristocratic society dictated a standard of “role-playing” to appear equal to their European counterparts.

In his portraiture of Russian aristocratic society in his novel *Anna Karenina* (1877), Leo Tolstoy illustrates this world of two cultures, Russian and French and the dual identity of being Russian in the nineteenth century, particularly in representing the sincerity of his characters. In the novel, French-speaking and generally “Westernized” Russian characters such as Madame Stahl and Countess Lydia Ivanova are viewed as morally inept and superficial, deviating from their “Russian identity”. Those whose behavior does not rest on imitation but rather on truth are framed in the context of the “Russian soul”, or being innately Russian, such as characters like Konstantin Levin or the Scherbatskys. Using language as a measurement of verisimilitude, Tolstoy creates two verbal entities in the text: while Russian remains the language of intimacy and emotions, French represents the ritualized life of ignorance and falsehood. This linguistic anomaly differentiated the aristocrats from the peasants (the “Russians”), and presented a dual cultural identity for Russians of the upper crust. Culture is a ubiquitous term; hence, there are many components and variables to its definition. In this paper, the exploration of culture will be limited to its visible, material, and linguistic expressions. Indeed, “...the Russian conception of culture remains more limited than the all-encompassing model proposed by cultural studies” (Holmgren x). In *Anna Karenina*, the French and Russian culture are juxtaposed visibly in the architecture, materially in fashion, and linguistically in the contrast between French and Russian language usage.

I. On the Quest for Cultural Identity

In order to create a common bond with others like ourselves, we must look back to history, for “a culture is made up not simply of works of art, or literary discourse, but of unwritten codes, signs and symbols, rituals and gestures, and common attitudes that fix the public meaning of these works and organize the inner life of a society” (Figs xxxiii). These images and behaviors form a distinct cultural identity which lends itself to the formation of a communal identity, developed and refined over time. Essentially, this cultural and communal identity comes to a climax in our understanding and meaning of human existence. Benedict Anderson’s idea of “imagined communities” complements this idea of creating a culture and a sense of unity based upon (often historical) commonalities, real or imagined, to form a group identity, and ultimately a nation. However, an imagined community does not mean that these communities are merely a figment of the imagination, because they are rooted in historical images and definitions (Suny 11).

If a culture’s values are designed to be conducive to cultural harmony and the wellbeing of the community, then it is easy, even in contemporary times, to see the effects of a “clash of cultures”, where traditional meets modern, or East meets West. Caught between these two value-providing identities, Russia has struggled and continues to struggle to define itself as unique, having traits of both sides. Geographically, it is mostly on the Asian continent, and many cultural symbols such as the Balalaika and traditional Russian clothing are quite similar to those of Asian folk culture (Figs xxix). Religiously though, it links itself to the Christian Byzantine Empire, traditionally associated with the West.

A. Creating Russian Identity “Borders”

In 988 A.D., Prince Vladimir of Kiev, the first “Russian” state, converted to Eastern Orthodox Christianity and aligned the Kievan State with the Byzantine Empire. Simultaneously, he declared all people residing on his territory to be Christians; thus Russian identity came to be associated with Christianity. Overrun by the Tartars, the Kievan State broke apart and the Grand Duchy of Moscow, or Muscovy, became its most powerful remnant because of its remoteness and alliance with the Tartars. Retaining relative autonomy, Muscovy developed into the Moscow state, using Russian Orthodoxy to establish identity, for “to say ‘Russian’ was to say ‘Orthodox’” (Figs 301). This made Moscow an island in the Tartar territory and the center of Russian culture, and created an image of the exotic, barbaric Russians far removed from European sensibilities. As a religious society, Muscovy perpetuated and maintained their Russian existence with what remnants of the Russian Orthodox Church had survived the Tartar occupation; however, it was not exposed to the influences of the Renaissance or Reformation in Europe, and thus lacked this vital modernization link with the Western world.

Starting in 1230 and cut off from Europe for over three hundred years, “the cultural advancement of the *Boyars* (old Muscovite nobility) was well behind that of the European nobility in the seventeenth century... (and were) considered among the barbarians...The country which emerged from the Mongol period was far more inward-looking” (Figs 16). When Peter the Great ascended to the throne in 1682, he focused on modernizing Russian culture in order to bring it closer to what he saw as the ideal modern culture, that of Europe. Indeed, in the seventeenth century, Russia was still quite medieval, and was self-conscious

that in the eyes of Europe they were seen as uncivilized, ignorant, and backward. To Peter, westernization meant modernization, a concept which, if realized, would result in Russia's recognition as a world power. The goal of this project was to reshape Russian culture and "was a vast, almost utopian, project of cultural engineering to reconstruct the Russian as a European...to leave behind the 'dark' and 'backward' customs of the Russian past in Moscow, and to enter, as a European Russian, the modern Western world of progress and enlightenment" (Figs 10). Peter the Great's emphasis on Prussian discipline and emulation of the West thrust Russia into the abyss of modernity, making St. Petersburg the symbol of "New Russia", the Russia of the enlightened aristocracy, and calling himself "Emperor" (Billington 191). He sent noble boys to be educated abroad (particularly to Germany and France) not only for academic reasons, but also to learn the ways of European society. This had the effect of creating a deeper gap between the elites and masses (Riasanovsky 107). Thus, Peter the Great's understanding of the self in the context of modernization focused on borrowing an identity from Europe and incorporating it to form a concept of *European Russia*.

This cultural imposition split and confused the cultural identity of the Russian nobility. The emphasis on Western customs as superior to Russian traditions was met with some protest, and many argue that the population's "Russianness" never quite went away. This identity dilemma presented an existentialist identity crisis within Russian society. Due to all the Western reforms, Russians had lost their Russian existence in the face of a European existence. However, they still retained their Russian essence, which manifested itself in many works of art during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Plate 1a). This is a problem, for if existence precedes essence and the Russians had a European existence, how is it possible

that they had a Russian essence? This philosophical dilemma can be observed in Russia's search for validation and approval in the eyes of their superiors, Europe: if they were granted a European essence, then their existence would be legitimized. I would like to propose that this is reminiscent of Nietzsche's "Master-Slave Dichotomy", where the goal of the slave (Russia) is to become the master (Europe).

While imitation is a natural human behavior and, indeed, the manner in which people learn, it also comes with costs. The problem with Russia reshaping its culture to fit European cultural norms was that there was no process of formation and no inner reflection; the emphasis of fitting the European mold was not on "being" but rather on "becoming". More often than not, this Russian with a European façade presented himself in the form of an actor, appearing and acting like a European. Over time though, as French became the first language of many aristocrats, this "becoming" or having a European identity was achieved and some Russians lost touch with their Russian identity. However, because of the aforementioned "Russian Essence", it was impossible to be completely European. Russian authors of the time reflected this sentiment of split identity in their writings; Gogol wrote that "Petersburg is an accurate, punctual type of person, a perfect German, and he looks at everything in a calculated way. Before he gives a party, he will look into his accounts. Moscow is a Russian gentleman, and if he's going to have a good time, he'll go all the way until he drops, and he won't worry about how much he's got in his pockets. Moscow does not like half way measures...Petersburg likes to tease Moscow for his awkwardness and lack of taste. Moscow reproaches Petersburg because he does not know how to speak Russian...Russia needs Moscow, Petersburg need Russia" (Figs 157). He suggests that, because Europeanization has become part of this dual identity of nineteenth century Russians, unity is needed to bring

the two together into a truthful existence. One cannot faithfully represent two cultures simultaneously; one is truthful to neither culture and has a split and confused identity.

B. Expanding Russian Identity Borders

In the nineteenth century, the idea of Moscow as a Russian city comes from the contrasting symbol of Peter the Great's showcase of European identity in St. Petersburg as a foreign (and artificial) civilization (Figs 157). Visitors to St. Petersburg, such as Madame de Stael, remarked that 'everything has been created for visual perception'...the city was assembled as a giant *mise-en scène*- its buildings and its people serving as no more than theatrical props (Figs 8). Aspiring to emulate the grandeur of Louis XIV's court in France, Peter the Great continued with shaping St. Petersburg as a Western city. He built Peterhoff, designed to emulate Versailles, home of the French royalty (Billington 192). (Plate 1.b) His other palaces such as Monplaisir and the interiors of his other projects also followed the French style. With names like Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, Domenico Trezzini, Jean-Baptiste LeBlond, and Charles Cameron, the architects were all imported from Europe, making St. Petersburg a stylistically diverse amalgamation of European architecture (Figs 8). These borrowed architectural styles reflect the borrowed European identity of the aristocracy in St. Petersburg who act out this role as if on stage. Scenes in *Anna Karenina* depicting the aristocracy, their language, and their superficial way of life are set in St. Petersburg and symbolize their artificiality and dubious morals. It was in St. Petersburg where life became ritualized, where French became the *lingua franca*, and where the modern, Western Russian society took on the semblance of European values. Carefree Stepan Arkadyich (Stiva) is always anxious to get away from Moscow, where he

...reached the point of worrying about his wife's bad moods and reproaches, his children's health and education, the petty concerns of his service...he needed only to go and stay awhile in Petersburg, in the circle to which he belonged...and immediately all these thoughts vanished and melted away...In Moscow, he went so much to seed that, in fact, if he lived there long enough he would...reach the point of saving his soul; in Petersburg he felt himself a decent human being again (Tolstoy 729).

Stiva does not live in truth but, at the same time, he does not want to live in truth; then he would be confronted with duties of prosaic life. He is mesmerized by the grandeur and show of St. Petersburg, which stands in stark contrast with the mundane concerns of everyday living associated with Moscow. This illustrates the attitude of many aristocrats in preferring to escape everyday responsibilities which were connected to their true identities. Thus, in *Anna Karenina*, moral behavior is geographically represented by the juxtaposition of Moscow and St. Petersburg with St. Petersburg being a playground and an escape when life got too real. On the other hand, Levin feels awkward in the city and finds bliss in the countryside working alongside the peasants, making the case that, as a true Russian, he understands that the superficiality and pretentiousness of the cities is contrary to the traditional, simple Russian way of life. This preference and glorification of the peasants is central to the Slavophiles' quest to return to the roots of Russian culture, and ultimately to a more truthful existence.

Before Peter the Great's changes to Russian society, noble and peasant styles of living in Muscovy were often indistinguishable and reflected a more tribal way of living. As part of his "revolution from above", Peter the Great changed the image of the elites, imposing a European dress code which required men to shave their beards, traditionally a sign of holiness. Only the clergy and the peasants were exempt from this decree (Engel 11). This visible marginality and separation of classes in Russian culture later led the Slavophiles to use the image of the peasants and Russian Orthodoxy as the essence of "Russianness". With their

former Russian identity gone, *Boyars* became “rootless” and were forced to outwardly and superficially display a new identity that many of them did not fully embody; they used French as a common language and to form a common identity (Billington 219). Later, many scholars would argue that it was at this moment that the superficiality and dual identity of the nobility began. Like actors on a stage, the Russian aristocracy tried to imitate their European counterparts, borrowing their European identities. Consciously or subconsciously, aristocrats were aware of this split identity, and their role as Russians role-playing Europeans:

The Russian nobleman was not born a ‘European’ and European manners were not natural to him. He had to learn such manners, as he learned a foreign language, in a ritualized form by conscious imitation of the West...The point was not to become a European, but rather to act as one... On one level he was conscious of action out his life according to prescribed European conventions; yet on another plane his inner life was swayed by Russian customs and sensibilities (Figs 44).

II. Sophistication of the New Russian Self-hood

Looking West for guidance, Russia sought specifically to emulate France, which was seen at the time as the height of cultural sophistication and refinement. Russia’s obsession with France began in 1756 with an alliance with France and lasted until 1855 with the military defeat in the Crimea and the reign of Alexander II. Intriguingly, James Billington in The Axe and the Icon calls this period the “Century of distinctive, if disturbed” aristocratic culture (202). Under the reign of Elizabeth I (1741-1762), the incorporation of French ideas and language became a mark of the “brilliant and self-confident culture of the aristocracy” (205). The alliance with France helped to bring Russian nobles into the mainstream of European culture, while at the same time further isolating them from their countrymen, instilling (mandating) French language and customs into the aristocracy (Billington 210). Like much of

Europe at the time, disjunct nobles found a sense of identity through French language and culture. It became their common and preferred language, as many Russian aristocrats, along with their servants were not even of Russian origin.

The Russian Enlightenment during the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796), “the Enlightened Despot”, had perhaps the greatest influence in the Francization of the Russian court (Billington 208). Her influential reign was marked with an “intellectual Westernization”, changing Russian thought by linking it closer with France, with the aristocracy looking to French culture for philosophical guidance (Billington 218). Very conscious of her image abroad, she wished to be recognized by Western Europe as a civilized and “enlightened sovereign”, even though she played the role of the tyrant more often than not, particularly in perpetuating and entrenching serfdom. Indeed, “from Catherine, aristocratic thinkers received only their inclination to look Westward for answers”, moving Russian culture further away from its old Orthodox roots of Moscow (Billington 224). Emphasizing women’s education, Catherine founded the Smolny Institute for Noble Maidens for girls to learn the ways of high society, which was a softer yet more effective medium for transforming and Europeanizing Russian civil society. This transformation took the form of improving “Russian family, social, and civic life”, in which women were the key to the “civilizing mission of Peter the Great” (Engel 16).

A. Russian Women, Men and Westernization

While Peter the Great and Paul I emphasized Prussian discipline as the model for Russia, it was the female rulers, Elizabeth and Catherine the Great, that embodied and transmitted the romantic, elegant, and, hence, French influences into the aristocracy, preferring to showcase

their power in elegance. This symbolized the final departure of Russian aristocratic society from a Russian identity in their effort to integrate into mainstream European society.

Historically hidden behind closed doors and layers of heavy clothing, women were brought out of the back rooms and told to dress in revealing Western dresses. (Plate 2.a) They were expected to play a new role in society, responsible for the Westernization (read Francization) and guidance of the future generation of servants to the state (Engel 13). In addition, to be regarded as proper mothers and consorts for the “new Russian man”, they began to be educated, especially in the “European tradition” (Engel 13).

These women presided over “salons” and helped foster the development and growth of an enlightened intelligentsia tradition, often seen as the “Feminization” of Russian society, if indeed “Francization” and “Civilization” are analogous to “Feminization”. Conducted primarily in French, these famous salons were places of literary and societal banter and discussion that were springing up around Europe. Moreover, “in their civilizing role, such women exerted influence over the development of Russian culture... (and) became arbiters of taste” (Engel 19). In the novel, salons such as Princess Betsy’s in St. Petersburg are examples of this social and intellectual construction, providing gossip as well as philosophical debates. Women also played symbolic roles in manifestations of Russian culture. In the patriotic renewal of Russian nationalism after Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812, ladies would come dressed in “Russian costumes” at theme balls to show their solidarity with Russia. They also began to wear peasant shawls, though likely a European trend of similar-looking Persian shawls initiated this fashion trend (Figs 108). For men, “the Petersburg dandy, with his fashionable clothes, his ostentatious manners, and effeminate French speech, had become an anti-model of the ‘Russian man’...the decadent and artificial manners of the fop were

contrasted with the simple, natural virtues of the peasantry; the material seductions of the European city with the spiritual values of the Russian country” (Figs 52).

Concurrent with the Romantic period in much of Europe where “such strange problems as the true nature of nations and the character of their missions in history came to the fore”, the Slavophile movement was the highest expression of Romantic intellectual thought in Russia at the time (Riansanovsky 150). This development placed Russia’s cultural identity as a civilization based in the “superior nature and supreme historical mission of Orthodoxy and of Russia” (Riansanovsky 152). Through mythic images of Slavic communal life, particularly through the glorification of the family, these idealistic aristocrats deemed this Pre-Petrine ideal to be the future of Russia. The West was portrayed as decrepit and in need of salvation from old Holy Russia, who through their “conscious unity” of all peoples would spread its messianic message throughout the world.

The image of the patriot serf soldiers in the war of 1812 remained a symbol of Russian nationalism, and inspired feelings of patriotism and Russian nationalism in disillusioned aristocrats. Some of these became Slavophiles, many of who went to live among the peasants. They “Russified” their dress by wearing “traditional kaftans, eating peasant food, and grew beards that were formally against the dress code” (Figs 76). Looking to the country, Slavophiles “idealized that the common folk (*narod*) was the true bearer of national character (*narodnost*)...As devout upholders of the Orthodox ideal, they maintained that the Russian was defined by Christian sacrifice and humility. This was the foundation of the spiritual community” (Figs 133). Ironically, peasants often took these “Russified” men for Persians on account of their appearance. (Plate 3).

Understanding their borrowed identities, Slavophiles looked inward and sought to emulate the peasants, thinking that they were “untainted” by modern civilization. They romanticized this space as uncorrupted by Europeanization, making Moscow the center of old Russia. Many Slavophiles saw this as a return to their Russian roots, which they believed to be the solution to Russian aristocracy’s “identity crisis”. Being raised as Europeanized aristocrats, most of them did not share the faith or the work, a distinction which alienated aristocratic Slavophiles from this group they so idolized. Constructed through idealized images, their idea of the Russian identity was thus confused and misguided, but well-intentioned.

When a foreign prince comes to St. Petersburg, Vronsky is charged with organizing a showcase of “Russian pleasures” characteristic of the “Russian spirit”. Interestingly, “of all Russian pleasures, the prince liked French actresses, a certain ballet dancer and champagne with the white seal best of all”(Tolstoy 354). Completely opposite to the traditional Russian peasant cultural image, this foreigner identifies the “Russian spirit” with the decadence of the aristocracy. The prince is quite similar to Vronsky, being “very stupid, very self-confident, very healthy and very cleanly man, nothing more”, and was in fact an “unpleasant mirror” (Tolstoy 355). For the first time, Vronsky is confronted with his true character in the mirror and does not like what he sees. The insincerity and imitation of his character is reflected in this foreigner, and for the first time, Vronsky is aware at least on a subconscious level of his empty existence. It is simple to judge an outsider’s moral behavior and to find it distasteful and unpleasant but, when it is similar to your own, this reflection of yourself strikes to the core of your identity. In Vronsky’s case, this refers to the ritualized code of conduct and Europeanization inscribed into his being, making him pretentious and damaging the sincerity

and profoundness of his existence; he is all for show and has no depth, contrary to the Russian identity ideal.

In contrast to Vronsky's character, Konstantin Levin, an aristocrat who longs to lead a life of truth, which he sees in the life of the peasant, spiritually embodies the Russian spirit. However, because of his social status, he has the characteristically meticulous French-tailored clothing, which distances him from the peasantry, the "true Russians" (Tolstoy 19). Most importantly though, because he seeks a life of truth and honesty, he is uncomfortable and awkward in his clothes, preferring the simple and more "Russian" style of the peasants in his estate. He prefers his country estate to the city, feeling more at home with the simple rhythmic life of peasants.

Whenever the clothing of the two female main characters, Anna Karenina and Kitty Scherbatsky Levin, is mentioned, a point is made to indicate that it is from Paris. Indeed, the fact that Kitty's wedding dress is from Paris is significant, as it shows that even for a sacred event such as a wedding, society dictated that the dress be French (Tolstoy 450). Furthermore, fashion was different between the two main cities, St. Petersburg and Moscow. Figs states that "Petersburg's style was dictated by the court and by European fashion; Moscow's was set more by the Russian provinces" (Figs 154). With Moscow regarded as the more traditional and hence more "Russian" geographical indicator of Russian cultural identity, this reinforces the idea of the peasants embodying the Russian identity.

B. European "Islands" and Russian "Seas" in the New Westernized Culture

Under Peter the Great, all noble men were required to serve the state, a policy which prevented the European tradition of the cultivation of one's estates and the creation of landed

gentry. It was only after 1762 when Peter III lifted this obligation that the nobility had more time to devote to cultivating their estate, a “tiny island of European culture in a vast Russian peasant sea” (Figs 45). These noble estates reflected the split identity of the Russian noble, something Figs calls “emotional geography”. Within the estates, the divide was evident in the layout of the palace. “The grand reception rooms, always cold and draughty, where formal European manners were the norm; and then there were the private rooms, the bedrooms and boudoirs, the study and the parlour, the chapel and icon room, and the corridors that ran through to the servants’ quarters, where a more informal, ‘Russian’ way of life was to be found” (45). While hunting, Levin feels quite at home sleeping in hay like a peasant, for he feels that this is living in truth. The peasant cottage, while crowded and untidy, feels more like home to him.

The aristocratic families of Anna, Dolly, and Levin all have country estates. These estates all differ in their purposes and appearances, reflecting the moral fiber and cultural affinity of their perspective owners. Levin’s estate is modest, efficiently run, and he is on good terms with the peasants who run the farm. Dolly’s ancestral country estate, splendid in her childhood, is rundown because her husband Stiva does not take an active interest in it, being preoccupied with earthly pleasures. However, she makes ends meet because she is the epitome of the “perfect mother”, devoting herself completely to her children. Anna and Vronsky’s estate has “*chambers garnis*” (garnished rooms) complete with French wallpaper, and a feeling of unequaled grandeur in the eyes of Dolly. Increasingly frustrated and a prisoner of her situation, Anna grows to hate these rooms, seeing that “they have no face to them, no soul” (Tolstoy 746). Like her affair with Vronsky, a thin glaze of opulence cannot cleanse the dishonest and empty core. Similarly, regardless of the opulence, Dolly feels

awkward and uncomfortable amidst the grandeur, for the superficiality of the estate is overwhelming. Indeed, while playing lawn tennis there, she finds it very unnatural that adults play children's games.

III. Language and the Identity Formation in Russia

As the most sacred part of human identity, language embodies all cultural implications of communication that are necessary for existence. With language come cues that communicate not only one's surroundings, but also the cultural context of the observation to endow it with meaning and definition. While many advantages come from knowing another language, this often results in a manipulation of the language and culture to allow an individual to invest meaning or triviality in his or her actions. Like culture, language is a learned behavior dependent on a community. Concurrent with Peter the Great's transformations of Russian society, the nobles were obligated to speak in French, the epitome of refinement and culture. As the Tsar was traditionally a paternal figure symbolic of "Russianness", noblemen had to write to him in Russian; however, because of the European nature of the Imperial Court, they always spoke to him in French. Women always had to write in French so as not to be "indecent" in the eyes of society (Figes 103). Reduced to a peasant language, Russian and its usage were scorned, for it was a sign of a lack of education, rank, and manners (Billington 256). Figes relates "French was the language of high society, and in high-born families the language of all personal relationships as well...It was a common paradox that the most refined and cultured Russians could speak only the peasant form of Russian which they had learnt from the servants as children" (56).

Thus, the French and Russian languages functioned as a dual identity, a symbol of two worlds, one of intimacy and the other of society. As children grew up, speaking Russian became taboo, and even progressed to the point that many Russians only spoke a peasant dialect of Russian and had become totally disconnected with their cultural identity and heritage. Children were raised speaking French, but learned Russian from their nurses, who were often closer to them than their own mother due to the characteristic aristocratic distance. Busy with her social life or with other children, the nineteenth century Russian aristocratic mother was unusually distant compared to her European contemporaries (Figs 121). When Anna shows Dolly to the nursery to see her daughter Annie, Anna tries to give her daughter a toy, but cannot find it. Even though Anna is not portrayed as a “perfect mother” in comparison to Dolly, her distance from Annie is not abnormal, given her aristocratic standing.

Like many European nobles, Russians also believed “that the milk of a peasant girl can give lifelong health and moral purity to the noble child” (Figs 125). Agafya Mikhailovna, Levin’s former peasant nurse whom he credits his “blood-love of the muzhiks” occupies a subtle but important link in his morality (Tolstoy 237). Even though (or perhaps because) she doesn’t speak French, she is favorably portrayed as a beloved mother figure to Levin. Her favorite subject of conversation is philosophy, which is surprising because of her origins. As a former serf, and almost certainly uneducated, her talking about philosophy is important in that it shows the “natural” logic and reasoning of the peasants, showing their wisdom of life and of its deepest questions of human existence (Tolstoy 152). Indeed, peasant nurses often were a mother figure closer than the biological mothers. All this contributed to the favorable and romantic view of the peasantry, for many of the nobles’ happy childhood memories stemmed from contact with the peasantry. Later, many nobles became Slavophiles

who constructed the Slavophile movement out of these same memories, the “lost idyll of ‘a Russian childhood’...out of a deep need to retrieve...if not reinvent it” (Figs 126, 129). Despite all the Westernizations that took place, artwork of the nineteenth century reflects this feeling of being caught between two cultures. In the paintings, we see a typical, upper-class living space with the family relaxing. The family is typically Europeanized, but we know the family is Russian because of the peasant nurse in the background. Based upon previous discussion on the importance of peasant nurses, the replacement of the mother by the nurse is especially important. In the next scene, we see a typical European garden complete with fashionably dressed aristocrats and the Russian nurses with the children. (Plates 3.a, 3.b)

A. French and the linguistics of Anti-family

As a Slavophile, Tolstoy uses French language and culture to show the juxtaposition between true family life and the false ideal many had in copying from their Western counterparts. The classic “search for identity” is evident in this book, as Russians were searching for an identity in the face of incorporation into the global arena and a desire to be accepted as a modern world power. However, as James Billington affirms, “Francomania had an artificial and programmatic quality that did much to determine the character-or lack thereof- of aristocratic culture...viewed as a single, finished product to be rejected or accepted en bloc” (218). Thus, while it changed the appearance of the Russian aristocracy, European culture was unable to penetrate the inner sensibilities, the soul, of the Russian people. Shedding her aristocratic European identity to talk with peasant women about mundane subjects of women and children, Dolly is surprised at how naturally she converses with the women and how for the first time the subjects of the conversation is central to her interests. This demonstrates the

“inner Russian sensibility” that unites all Russians, regardless of social class, and a common “Russian” identity. This harmony among all Russian people demonstrates what Tolstoy defines as a Russian national consciousness.

While their outward appearance in society was altered, inside Russians stayed the same. The Slavophile movement in the nineteenth century was founded upon the ideals that Russia was unique and had a legitimate culture independent of European influences. As a result, Russia saw a resurgence of Slavic tutors, such as Seryozha’s Russian tutor, and of the culture of the peasants, for it was believed by Slavophile nobles that they were the bearers of the true “Russian Essence”. This also reflected the increasing resentment of foreign influences in Russian society. Later, there would be a relapse against French language, and many sought to bring back Russian language, which existed mainly in archaic Old Slavonic of the fifteenth century and in the peasant’s dialects. Many lamented the fact that literature, much less words, did not exist in Russian, and were thus forced to continue to use borrowed French words in everyday life. Indeed, when French is used to communicate in *Anna Karenina*, it is usually in the sense of superficiality, i.e. society or other formal and outrageous occurrences such as the French Clairvoyant episode.

Historically conveying a sense of unity, religion (Russian Orthodoxy) is one of the largest mediums of truth in Russian society. Spirituality occupies a special and intrinsic place in Russian identity, and its commercialization devalues it, as seen by the modern Western “spirituality” of the French clairvoyant. Landau or Count Bezzubov, as he was named by one of his patrons whom he had “cured”, personifies the anti-French sentiment and negative portrayal of French culture in *Anna Karenina* by his aura of faddish and commercialized spirituality. Significantly, the entire episode with Landau, Karenin, and Countess Lydia with

Stiva is conducted almost entirely in French. Landau is comically described as “a short, lean man with womanish hips and knock-kneed knees, very pale, handsome, with beautiful shining eyes and long hair falling over the color of his frock coat” (Tolstoy 732). His feminine description is Tolstoy’s mockery of France, presenting his opinion in the form of a weak and “sly” Frenchman.

Landau gives advice or “words of wisdom” that come to him from “voices” he hears in his sleep. Countess Lydia Ivanova’s fanatical religious fervor and her success at converting Karenin show the unnaturalness of religion. This episode points to the aristocracy’s regard and practice of spirituality, which like everything else for them is a fad, and not sincere in practicing or believing. Stiva, upon his entry into the room, is suspicious of this feminine man whose words make up the mind of Karenin. This comes to a climax when Landau falls asleep, whether real or feigned, and orders Stiva to leave the room. One could conclude that it is Stiva who, despite all his imperfections and dubious morals, is a true Russian man and sees through the charade of this French “spiritual” guide. Subconsciously, he is not as gullible, owing to his “Russian soul”. This is a clear mockery of French culture, which is portrayed as superficial, hysterical, and above all, untruthful. In his sleep, Landau gives advice, and thus decides Anna’s fate by advising against the divorce. The Petersburg aristocracy’s delight in faddish spirituality such as clairvoyants and Ouija boards are humorous yet telling examples and commentary of the falseness of society.

This subtle yet telling observation not only indicates the superficial spirituality, but it also demeans the participants and alienates them from Russian identity. Russian Orthodoxy was synonymous with Russian identity, and certainly a unifying point for all Russians. “Living in Truth”, as Slavophiles idealized the life of the peasants, included sincerity in

religion. It is worth remarking though that if Tolstoy is against the ritualization of the orthodox religion, then why is it part of the true Russian soul? As Orlando Figes suggests, the “very meaning of ‘Orthodox is rooted in the ideas of the ‘correct rituals’” (Figes 323).

Moreover, Prince Lvov, who speaks Russian with a French accent, embodies the Russian essence with his return back to a Russian identity. Married to Kitty’s older sister, he is also a part of the aristocracy and of Levin’s family, and is first presented in the text while reading the St. Petersburg newspaper in French. Having received an aristocratic education in French in preparation for the Diplomatic Service, he now helps his children with Russian grammar, relearning it himself along the way. He asks Levin to explain a grammatical concept but “Levin tried to explain to him that one cannot understand it but must simply learn it; but Lvov did not agree with him” (Tolstoy 682). The Russian essence is not something that can be studied scientifically, for facts do not apply in this area; one must accept the rules of language, just as one must accept an essence and not try to compartmentalize it.

Indeed, Russian is the language of truth and of sincerity, signified by its usage. The French “Framing” in the book portrays French as anti-family, against natural order, culminating in an overall theme of the fight to live in truth when society accepts falseness. Levin sees the peasants as naturally living in truth as “true” Russians and disdains much of the aristocracy which he deems superficial and corrupt. Thus French is only used in high society, when one must distance oneself from “true” emotions to avoid involving and investing themselves emotionally in a given situation. Anna personifies this cultural escapism, leaving Russia for Italy when living truthfully in Russia becomes unbearable and impossible. When Stiva goes to see Karenin and Seryozha, Seryozha addresses his uncle Stiva in French as to remove himself emotionally from the situation, caught between his love

for his mother and his father's concern with decorum. By removing himself emotionally from the situation, he maintains his composure.

Dolly realizes that her insistence upon the French language is unnatural, and has struggled with the idea of the superficiality of making her children speak French. Levin finds this quite disagreeable, thinking "How unnatural and false it is! And the children can feel it. Teaching French and unteaching sincerity" (Tolstoy 271). Because French has become a ritualized behavior, Dolly resigns herself to society's falseness in order to incorporate her children into a society where French is the main language of communication. She sees maintaining class distinction for her children the key to forming an identity. Vronsky, whose mother praised him in the beginning for his affair with Anna, usually addresses his mother in French, thus giving readers the suggestion that their relationship is not one of truth and sincerity. Before she realizes how serious the relationship is, she encourages her son's behavior, condoning it as an excellent career move and opportunity for social ascension.

Transcending cultural identities results in an unnatural personification of both cultures, Anna and Vronsky's dream of a muzhik muttering in "incomprehensible" French, which is unnatural given his social status and likely education level. This irregularity reflects the juxtaposition of a Russian identity with an "unnatural" French identity, Anna's unnatural death, Vronsky's existence in society, and also of the inability of aristocratic society to live in truth. Over time, the novelty and excitement of the relationship took on a more mundane character, causing conflicts between the society and intimacy of the home.

Vasenska Vesovsky, an ungainly and completely Europeanized nobleman, serves to illustrate the shallowness and irresponsibility of the French language. He cannot understand the peasants, flirts mercilessly with Kitty, and speaks almost exclusively in French.

Ironically, before he flirted with his wife, Levin liked him because of his upbringing and because he spoke French. Levin, angry with Kitty for permitting his flirtation, admonishes her in French. Vronsky speaks to Anna in French seeking to avoid the “impossible coldness of formal Russian and the dangers of the informal” (Tolstoy 187). When they argue, Anna argues in Russian, Vronsky in French. Thus French is a safer language to use, with none of the intimate connotations that Russian possesses. This shows us the true nature of Anna and Vronsky’s relationship: while Anna is emotionally invested in Vronsky, he does not wish to give her keys to his soul.

Similarly, when Karenin writes to Anna, he uses the formal French language, “which does not have that character of coldness which it has in Russian” (Tolstoy 283). While not as cold as the formal Russian, the use of French nevertheless signifies a certain distance between them and a disassociation from the situation; French is the public, societal manner of speaking, and Russian the language of intimacy. The unhappy couple Anna met on the train shortly before her suicide jabber in French, indulging in a self-flattering, fake, and above all, empty existence. The situations in which French is used compared to when Russian is used often add or subtract meanings to the words used, and communicate to the reader elements of cultural contexts used as a moral compass for the characters’ behaviors.

It is interesting that while Stiva himself does not act in a traditionally moral sense, he does not like to “lie and pretend, which was so contrary to his nature” (Tolstoy 7). Even though he deceives his wife, his frankness, simplicity, and overall “Russianness” excuse him from the artificialness of society. He takes part in the rituals of society, but at the same time clings to his Russian soul. This is evidenced by his insistence on calling food, a sacred and

vital part of existence, by its Russian names, not French ones as does the Tartar waiter. Stiva asks Levin what he wants to eat:

‘It makes no difference to me. I like shchi and Kasha best, but they won’t have that here’.

‘...Well, then, my good man, bring us two, - no make it three dozen oysters, vegetable soup...’

‘*Printanière*,’ the Tartar picked up. But Stepan Arkadyich evidently did not want to give him the pleasure of naming the dishes in French.

‘Vegetable soup, you know? Then turbot with thick sauce, then...roast beef....and why not capon- well, and some stewed fruit.’

The Tartar, remembering Stepan Arkadyich’s manner of not naming dishes from the French menu, did not repeat after him, but gave himself the pleasure of repeating the entire order from the menu: “*Soupe printanière,, turbot sauce Beaumarchais, poularde à l’estragon, macédonie de fruit..*” (Tolstoy 34).

Even though Stiva does typify “Russianness”, he still maintains the socially constructed cultural distance between classes. By naming all the dishes in Russian after the Tartar waiter names them in French, he shows his position in society by his refusal to stoop to the level of the pretentious waiter who tries to ascend to Stiva’s level. Likewise, when speaking to Stiva in front of Ryabinin the merchant, Levin speaks French to maintain this distance. On first glance, this episode is curious, for it shows that maintaining class distinctions was quite important for Levin, who feels unity with the peasant outside of his social class.

Traditionally, the Russian merchant class resisted the modernizations of Peter the Great and was idealized by Slavophiles as living a “pure” Russian life. Symbolizing old Russia with their long beards and dressed in kaftans, many merchants had risen from the peasantry and were fiercely opposed to Western liberalization, fearing competition in Russian markets. In *Anna Karenina*, the portrait of the merchant Ryabinin is painted in such a way as to

accentuate his greediness and dishonesty, the merchant's stereotype in the nineteenth century (Figes 193). (Plate 5). He buys Stiva's woods for much less than it is worth, and Stiva, who as an aristocrat must go through with the deal to retain his honor, allows himself to be cheated. When Levin speaks French, he does so to restore truth and fairness to Stiva's situation. The merchant tries to pay less than the price that was agreed upon, and it is only through Levin's exasperated intervention that he pays up and leaves. He is of a different class than Levin and Stiva, but he has lost the connection of the peasant tradition such as searching for an icon upon entering a room. Specifically marking his social class, "...Ryabinin looked around by habit, as if searching for an icon, but when he found one, he did not cross himself" (Tolstoy 168). This demonstrates the extent to which Western customs have infiltrated the lifestyles not only of the upper class, but also of the "middle class".

Indeed, the Russian tradition of an icon in every room is curiously presented in this juxtaposition of classes: "enlightened Russians" such as Stiva and Levin have lost the habit of searching for the icon and crossing themselves, a Russian Orthodoxy custom upon entering a room; however, the icon is still present in Levin's room. Nevertheless, while his class is guilty of embracing a foreign identity, Levin still clings to the "Russian" tradition of the icon and to truth. Closer to the peasant's class and thus to what Tolstoy sees as the true Russian culture, deceptive and greedy Ryabinin finds the icon upon entering, and yet does not cross himself. While it is arguable as to who is more "Russian", in the issue of morality, Ryabinin is constructed in such a way as to behave dishonestly, shown by the fact that he sees the icon but does not acknowledge his true identity; he has lost his spiritual connection. Like the Tartar waiter, he desires to transcend his social class, and does not acknowledge the icon traditionally associated with the peasantry. Living in truth, Levin may not acknowledge the

icon on a daily basis, but subconsciously, it is present, just as the Russian soul is present under the façade of Europeanization. Not being true to oneself and to one's origins is central in the debate over the true cultural identity of Russia.

Confronted with her own situation of the banalization of spirituality, Kitty starts to notice some troublesome traits of Mme Stahl's (a satire of Madame de Staël) such as "...when the Catholic priest was with her, Mme Stahl carefully kept her face in the shadow of a lampshade and smiled peculiarly" (Tolstoy 224). Upon reflection, Kitty considers this smile "unchristian" and begins to doubt the sincerity of a woman she once held in high esteem. Madame Stahl is something of an aristocratic legend, but her false spirituality damages Kitty's impression of her. These impressions are further shattered when her father, through his "Russian" sensibilities, tells Kitty that Mme Stahl stays in a wheelchair simply because she has a bad figure.

Kitty's father Prince Scherbatsky is portrayed as a "true" Russian, who purposely tries to be less European than he is; however, he is betrayed by addressing Mme Stahl "in that excellent French which so few speak nowadays" (Tolstoy 231). Kitty's parents represent two sides of Russian society- a Russian imitating Europeans and a Russian formed as a European trying to maintain a Russian identity, betrayed by linguistics. "The prince and the princess held completely opposite view of life abroad. The princess found everything wonderful, and despite her firm position in Russian society, made effort abroad to resemble a European lady- which she was not, being a typical Russian lady- and therefore had to pretend, which was somewhat awkward for her. The prince, on the contrary, found everything abroad vile and European life as burden, kept to his Russian habits and deliberately tried to show himself as less of a European than he really was"(Tolstoy 227).

B. The French Women in Russian Society

French women in *Anna Karenina* are portrayed as being sensual, coquettish, and mischievous. Stiva's affair with the French governess is particularly significant because of the image conveyed in her description. Stiva remembers his *amante* as a stereotypical sensual Frenchwoman, reminiscing about her "dark, roguish eyes and her smile" (Tolstoy 4). Stiva's affair with this Frenchwoman can be compared to Russian aristocratic society's "affair" with French culture. At first all was new and exciting, but when the prosaics of life set in (Stiva's wife Dolly, and Napoleon's invasion of Russia), the relationship ended, and life returned to its "natural state". However, if one is prone to such behaviors, or imitations, then it is not the last time that it will occur.

On the other hand, Levin's contact with French women is limited to prostitutes, which he looks at with disgust as "painted ladies" with false teeth, and thus unnatural. This disgust prevents him from drinking vodka, traditional Russian drink, distracted by "...the painted Frenchwoman in ribbons, lace and ringlets...Levin did not drink, if only because this Frenchwoman, who seemed to consist entirely of other peoples hairs, *poudre de riz* and *vinaigre de toilette* was offensive to him"(Tolstoy 33). He equates them with fallen women, a vision which stems from a religious (Russian?) moral code, even though he professes to be an atheist at the beginning of the novel. The women with the soldiers are almost certainly prostitutes, and indeed it is mentioned that men often have affairs with French women. This view of the French is not limited just to women, but expresses the view of French people as a whole. Varenka, Mme Stahl's devoted assistant, tells Koznishev that what are considered old men in Russia are young men, in the prime of their life in France. As an old and hot-blooded

aristocrat, Pyotr Oblonsky says that life begins in Paris, referring to the indulgence of life's material and certainly non-spiritual pleasures. He acknowledges his duty to his family to return to Russia, but says that he becomes an old man very quickly if he stays too long. According to the stereotype at the time of Paris as the zenith of decadence, all enjoyment is against the natural order of the family, for it is all a show fueled by sin.

C. "What is Art"? or What is Russian Art?

Tolstoy's definition of art stresses its communication of real life and real feelings to others. In his descriptions of Anna's portraits, he contrasts Vronsky's efforts at imitation with Russian artist Mikhailov's strikingly realistic rendition of Anna. Educated to appreciate art, Vronsky tries his hand at painting in the French style. It is pure imitation and has no true artistic value; there are no feelings reflected. He is a victim of the society, a cliché with no true basis in reality, which is why he cannot succeed in producing anything of value. Mikhailov's portrait of Anna is, on the other hand, a work of art, one that seems to be of a singular beauty and one that can only come from a true Russian artist who scorns superficiality and values veracity by having lived and understood beauty. As Levin says, "it was not a painting, but a lovely living woman with dark, curly hair...looking at him triumphantly and tenderly with troubling eyes. Only, because she was not alive, she was more beautiful than a living woman can be" (Tolstoy 696). In contrast to the imitation French style of Vronsky's work, the Russian artist had looked into the soul of Anna, seeing her beauty and at the same time her "troubling eyes", an indication that all was not what it seemed to be. Life is more beautiful than its imitation. Indeed, in his essay "What is Art?" Tolstoy says of art

If men did not have the ability of receive all the thoughts which are communicated in words and which have been thought out by men who lived before him, and communicate to others his ideas to others, they would be like animals...If there did not exist man's other ability, to be infected by art, men would be almost more savage still, and, above all else, disunited and hostile (184).

These feelings invoke a "religious consciousness of men", which Tolstoy defines as "art in the fullest sense" (185). True art must communicate an awareness of life, not its imitation. When Levin visits Anna, a conversation strikes up about the realism a French artist used in illustrating the new Bible. One of the guests, Vorkuev, says that the use is vulgar, fitting only for commoners. However, Levin says that "the French employed conventions in art as no one else did, and therefore they saw a particular merit in the return to realism. They saw poetry in the fact that they were no longer lying" (Tolstoy 698). Because he values sincerity, and realism depicts life as it is, this cessation of lying by the French is seen by Levin as a positive step.

Anna replies, "...people first build their conceptions out of invented, conventionalized figures, but then- once all the combinations are finished- the invented figures become boring, and they begin to devise more natural and correct figures" (Tolstoy 698). Anna's idea of her relationship with Vronsky follows this pattern of thought, for it was constructed that "at every meeting, she was bringing together her imaginary idea of him (an incomparable better one, impossible in reality) with him as he was" (Tolstoy 357).

Conclusion

The definition of a “Russian” identity has occupied the minds of Russian tsars and rulers, searching to bring unity to the vast geographical expanse that at one time was the largest continual colonial territory in the world. Using religion as a common identity, Tsars tried to unify the peoples under Russian Orthodoxy, traditionally a value- provided cultural identity. According to Ronald Grigor Suny, since the Russian empire included many different ethnic groups and nationalities, conversion to the Russian Orthodox Church was often all that one need do to be considered “Russian” (Suny 25). A key component of a culture, the Russian language was used to mainstream communications and to unite different peoples together, if only superficially. Thus Russian language was used to form a Russian identity, to distinguish Russians from the “others”, the inferior peoples. The Russian Imperial Court’s Gallomania (love of anything French) spurred generations of French cultural osmosis in the aristocracy and provided them with a modern, superficial, and sophisticated cultural identity. Disenchanted with France after the French Revolution in 1789, the nobility became Francophobes, marking a return to Russian-style behavior (Figes 67). They did not want to be “copies of the French”, and looked inward and around them to search for a new cultural identity. Through a historical, sociological, and in some cases a romantic reconstruction, their idea of Russian identity was based upon mythic images of an idealized past.

Comprising almost 80% of the population, the peasants were idealized and were considered to be the “true” Russians by the Slavophiles of the nineteenth century, because they were not corrupted by the Western influences like the aristocracy. Living in truth included returning to Russian roots, for in “nationalistic mythology the ‘Russian soul’ was

awarded a higher moral value than the material achievements of the West. It had a Christian mission to save the world” (Figs 66).

Through the text of *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy expresses many of these ideas. The dual identities of the Russian aristocracy are portrayed as a classic example of a “clash of cultures”, and of the struggle to find the “right” path independent of any imitation, equated with superficiality and insincerity. The inability of a European identity to magically solve Russia’s “identity” issues later led many Slavophiles to look back to Russia’s past- to Moscow and the peasants, for a “Russian” solution to “Russian” problems, of which the most notable problem was a defined national identity. As a reaction to centuries of borrowing European identities, Slavophiles identified falsehood as a sickness of the Russian state and highlighted the importance of living in truth as the solution (Figs 141). Their attempt to bring Russian culture back to the Kievan Rus State was constructed through history and “mythic images” of this precursor to Russian culture. This emphasizes the need Russians felt for verisimilitude in the formation of one’s identity. Billington explains that this phenomenon is nothing new: “Repeatedly, Russians have sought to acquire the end products of other civilizations without the intervention process of slow growth and inner understanding. Russia took Byzantine heritage en bloc without absorbing its traditions of orderly philosophical discourse. The aristocracy adopted the language and style of French culture without its critical spirit, and variously sought to find solidarity with idealized sectarian or peasant communities without ever sharing in either the work or the faith of these non-aristocratic elements” (595).

Thus, an existentialist problem of identity is depicted by characters in *Anna Karenina*. They suffer from confused cultural identities, which stem from the fact that an identity cannot

just be imposed; it must be acquired. Furthermore, many characters seem to have ceased existing in their own world. Their Russian existence had been replaced by a European/French substance, which led to a confused Russian essence and identity. This removes the characters from the real world and places them in a surreal world where charade, insincerity, and falseness are perfectly acceptable and consequently shape the society. This novel presents readers with a strong critique on French society and Russian Francophone society in which Tolstoy frames his novel.

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Plate 1a:

A.I. Belsky, "Ne byd ne kogda
prazdna" (Ne soyes jamais oisive)
1769



Plate 15:

— Peterhof, st. Petersburg —

Clothing



Plate 2: a) Vivien Leigh and Ralph Richardson
— Anna Karenina, 1948.

Typical upper-class dress in second-half
of 19th century Russia.



b) Celebration of a Marriage Agreement
— detail, Grigory Shibanov, 1777.

Traditional Russian clothing, pre-Petrine

Peasantry

N.A. Koshchelev. Ofenya-Korobeynik. 1865



V.E. Makovsky. Igra u Babki
1870



A.G. Venetianov.
Zhnetsee. end of 1820s.



Plate 3.a.

Letney saad, unknown artist.
c.1800



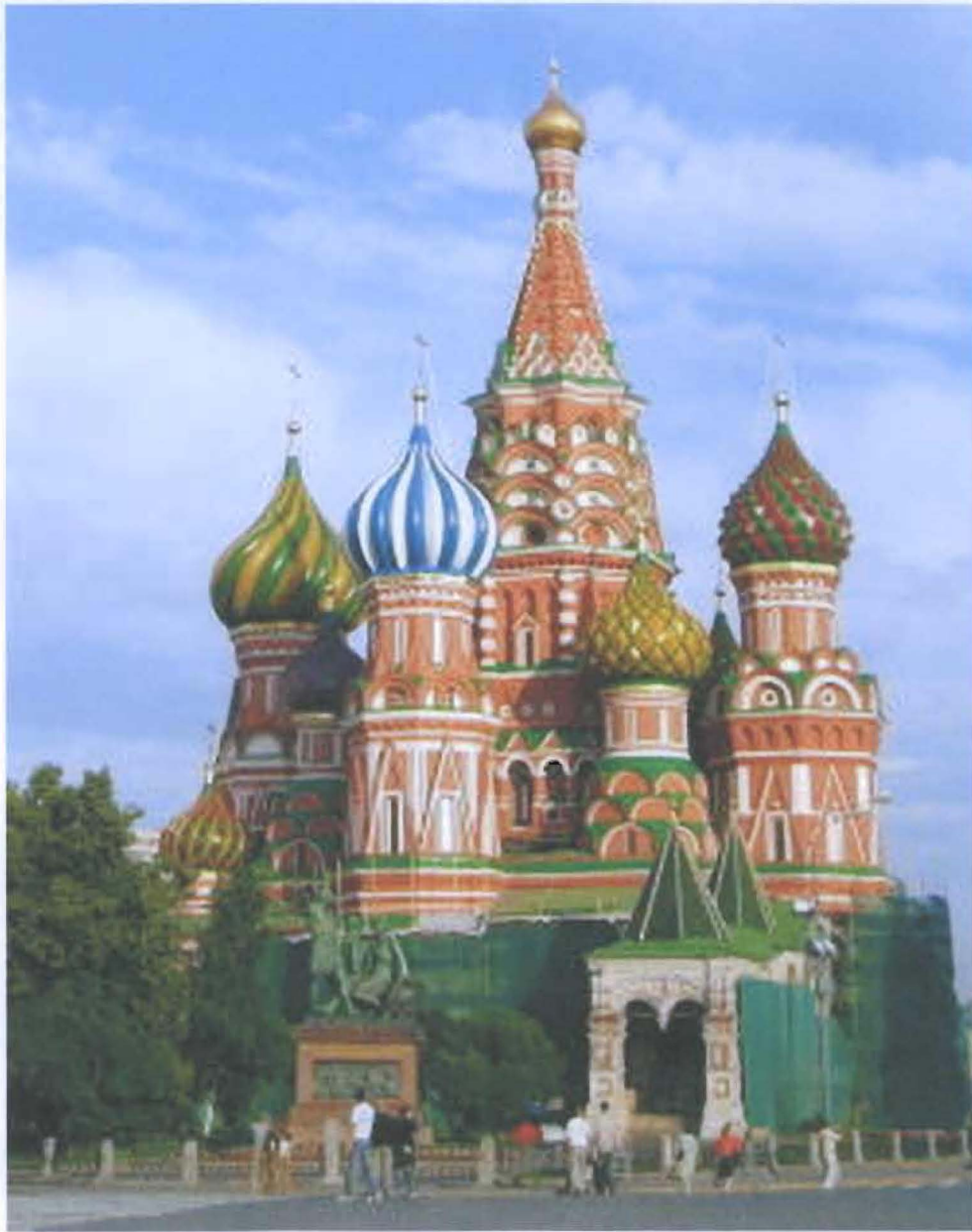
Plate 3. b.

N. G. Podkluchnikov. Gostinista
v dome Hashovkina. 1840.



Plate 5:

A merchant Family in the XVII century.
1890. oil on canvas. Andrei Ryaboshchikov.
The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia



St. Basil's cathedral
Moscow



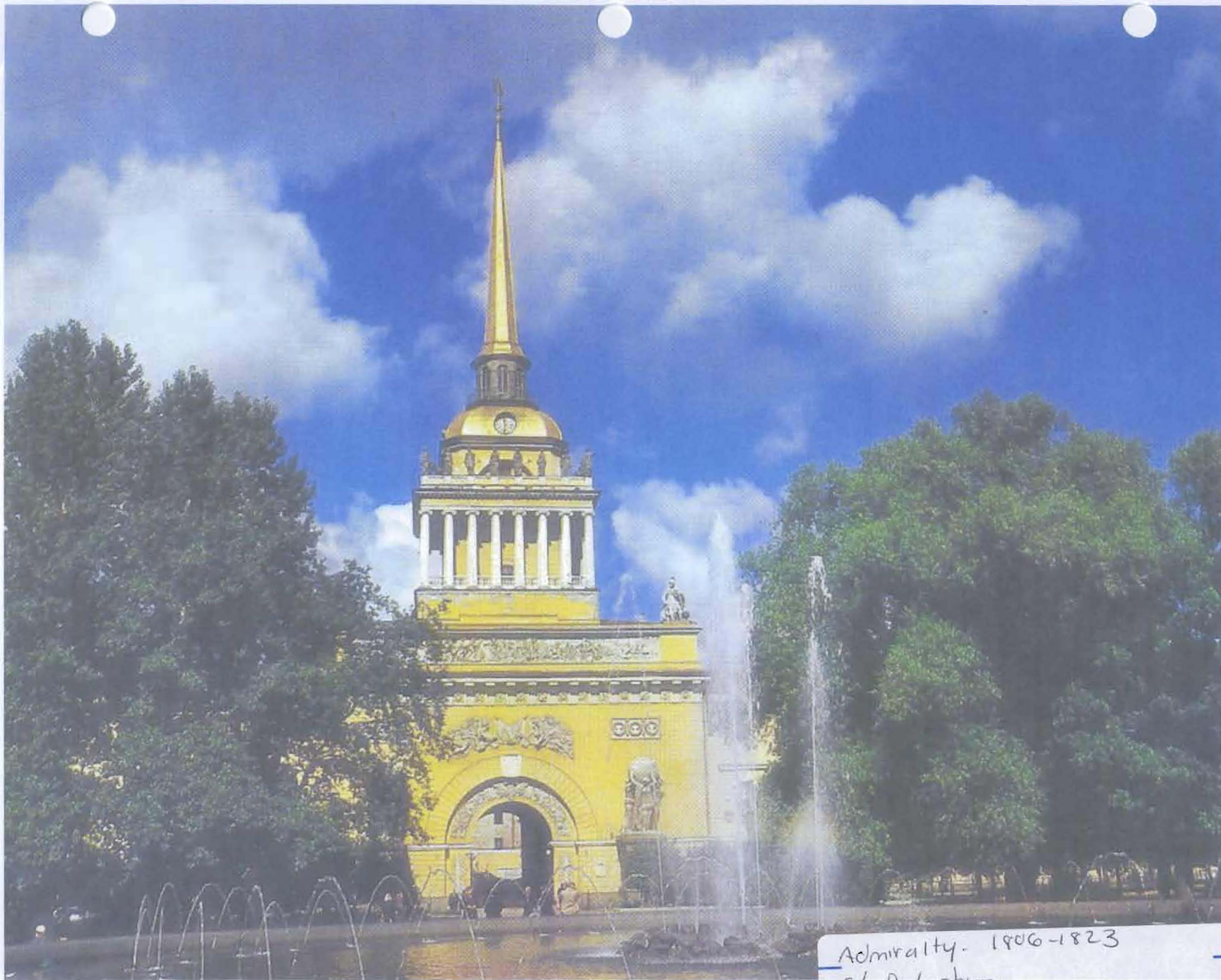
Cathedral of our lady of Kazan
St. Petersburg. 1801-1811



Peter and Paul cathedral.
St. Petersburg. 1712-33



Peter and Paul Fortress, 1703.
First structure built in St. Petersburg



Admiralty. 1806-1823
St. Petersburg



Arts square. statue of Pushkin.
St. Petersburg.



St. Petersburg