Abstract

In this thesis I explore the ways in which men’s fictions envision and interact with the structures of patriarchy. Using pornography, specifically the obscene joke as described by Sigmund Freud, I analyze the paradigmatic structures that interlink author, text, and audience. The use of two mechanisms, fetishism and voyeurism, characterize the male participants in the obscene joke. In fact, the possibility of meshing both fetishism and voyeurism is one of the principal attractions of pornography and other forms of representation.

I then turn to two texts, Leo Tolstoy’s novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Vertigo*, which seem to expose and critique these structures. Tolstoy’s protagonist, Pozdnyyshev, delivers an impassioned polemic indicting the social structures whereby men subjugate women. His own story of how he murdered his wife provides a compelling example of the disastrous consequences of these structures. In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock lures the audience into participating in a voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze. He then makes that gaze increasingly uncomfortable, finally holding it squarely responsible for the film’s tragic conclusion.

Yet even as these two authors establish a compelling critique of patriarchy, they reaffirm it by recapitulating many of the mechanisms they decry. Though the two works foster an understanding of patriarchy, they can envision no alternatives. Male privilege operates in a number of powerful ways to hinder men’s search for alternative modes of perception. Nevertheless, the kernel of resistance to which Tolstoy and Hitchcock point has the potential to flower, despite these obstacles.
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I would like to thank Ruth Perry, for her suggestion that I examine *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Barbara Schulman, for her assistance with the section on pornography, and most of all, my advisor, Edith Waldstein.
Pornographic fictions are quintessentially men's fictions. Pornographic works, including books, magazines, movies, and so on, are created predominantly by men and are read or viewed by a large (the pornography industry in this country makes an estimated $8 billion a year),¹ and largely male, audience. Texts consumed by men in such quantities, and so centrally concerned with issues of sexuality, gender, and power, undoubtedly contain much that is relevant to the way men envision their positioning in a patriarchal social order.

At this point I should make clear that when I use the word "pornography," I will generally mean explicit representations of sexual material depicting women and aimed at a male audience. This will help to limit my discussion by excluding several kinds of representations that are often included under the category of pornography. It excludes, for example, sexually explicit representations that are intended for a female audience, or those representing gay men. Despite its limitations in scope, this working definition of what might be called "mainstream pornography" still includes the preponderance of what is conventionally included under the term pornography.

I want to respond to the spirit of B. Ruby Rich's charge to "the legions of feminist men" by beginning "the analysis that can tell us why men like porn."² To gain some insight to this question, I turn to that canny observer of male psychology, Sigmund Freud, whose analysis of obscene jokes in Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious bears clear and


important parallels to an analysis of pornography. From Freud's analysis I will elaborate somewhat on the psychological functions pornography serves for men and why its structure and function distinguish it to a certain extent from other forms of representation directed at a male audience.

1.1 The Pleasure of Obscene Jokes

Freud's analysis of obscene or "smutty" jokes is relevant to an analysis of pornography. In a sense, of course, "smut," defined by Freud as "the intentional bringing into prominence of sexual facts and relations by speech,"[^3] is a sort of verbal pornography. The analogy must not be pressed too far, for the physical presence of the "author" of an obscene joke distinguishes it from most cases of pornographic books, pictures, or films, where the author is absent. In general, though, Freud's crucial points apply to both "smut" and pornography.

Freud sees the origin of obscene jokes in women's resistance to men's pleasure. The sequence that initiates such a joke is as follows: First, the man sees a woman and wishes to see her expose herself further. This scopophilic desire must then shift into words, firstly, to announce itself to her, and secondly, because if the idea is aroused by speech it may induce a corresponding excitement in the woman herself and may awaken an inclination in her to passive exhibitionism. A wooing speech like this is not yet smut, but it passes over into it. If the woman's readiness emerges quickly the obscene speech has a short life; it yields at once to a sexual action. It is otherwise if quick readiness on the woman's part is not to be counted on, and if in place of it defensive reactions appear. In that case the sexually exciting speech becomes an aim in itself in the shape of smut (99).

There are a number of important points in this sequence. Though Freud has his doubts about the sincerity of the woman's resistance--"to be sure, it seems merely to imply a postponement and does not indicate that further efforts will be in vain" (99)--it is

[^3]: Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), in *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works*, Volume VIII, Trans. and Ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960), 97. Freud appends to this definition what should be a caution to all participants in the debates about pornography: "This definition, however, is no more valid than other definitions." Subsequent references to this work will be noted parenthetically in the text.
nonetheless the proximate cause of the man's smut. Second, the smut is an end in itself which replaces the desire for actual sexual activity. Freud further states explicitly that the aggression implicit in the "wooing speech" in the smut "becomes positively hostile and cruel, and it thus summons to its help against the obstacle the sadistic components of the sexual instinct" (99).

I should stress at this point that men's viewing pornography is not, or is not simply, a substitute for a frustrated desire for actual sex. Pornography, from "pome," for prostitute, and "graphein," writing, does not reduce to "pome," tout court, and it would appear that the contemporary pornography industry is not moving towards producing actual sex. But this distinction does not contradict Freud's analysis, for it is based on a faulty analogy. It is the author, not the reader, of pornography, who is in a position analogous to that of the man who tells the obscene joke. Freud next articulates the role of this second man, the spectator or reader of the obscene joke.

This second man, who was not necessarily initially attracted to the woman, soon acquires enormous importance in the satisfaction of the desires that spurred the first man to make the obscene joke. "To begin with," Freud notes, "the presence of the woman is not to be overlooked," but by the end of the paragraph, he has decided that her presence is no longer important. "From this point onwards our attention will be drawn to two factors: the part played by the third person, the listener, and the conditions governing the subject-matter of the smut itself" (99). To begin with in, say, the making of a pornographic film, the presence of the woman is not to be overlooked; once the film is made, our attention is drawn to the film and its viewer. Analogously, in the law, a snuff film may be illegal to make, for, to begin with, the presence of the woman is not to be overlooked; but it is legal to show, for, from that point onwards, the law's attention is drawn to the film and the age of its viewer.

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The description of the dynamics of this joker-woman-listener triangle is concise: "Through the first person's smutty speech the woman is exposed before the third, who, as listener, has now been bribed by the effortless satisfaction of his own libido" (100). Both men's libidos have been satisfied; the woman's presumably has not been, though this was never a matter of concern in Freud's rendition. The manner of access to pleasure is somewhat different for the two men. The author of the joke satisfies his libido primarily through his sadistic impulses, for he exposes the woman before the second man; merely exposing her in his own mind is not enough. The second man, on the other hand, apparently has no sadistic designs, and it is merely the sight of exposure, as provided vicariously through the joke, that gives him pleasure.

This scenario can be easily transposed into the classificatory scheme developed by Laura Mulvey in her influential analysis of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Mulvey notes that while the woman on display for the male audience is a source of pleasure, the female figure is also threatening, for it establishes sexual difference and thus raises the threat of castration. There are two modes of viewing available to the male spectator which allow him to allay this anxiety. The first is fetishism, disavowing castration by turning what is seen into a reassuring fetish; the second is a sadistic voyeurism, which asserts control by actively investigating or punishing the woman. Using a somewhat expanded notion of "fetishism" and "voyeurism," these two avenues of male pleasure can be divided between the two male roles in Freud's scenario of the obscene joke. The teller of the joke, the first man, can be seen as a voyeur, actively controlling the image of the woman through his own storytelling. He expresses his sadism, "becomes positively hostile or cruel." The second man, deriving pleasure from perceiving the display of the woman effected by the first, can be seen to participate in fetishism. An "inactive listener" who has been "bribed" by the "effortless satisfaction" of his pleasure, he watches the image of the woman, rendered

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nonthreatening by the joke. "A person who laughs at smut that he hears is laughing as
though he were the spectator of an act of sexual aggression" (97). A man who gains
pleasure in telling smut is participating in a verbal act of sexual aggression; one who listens
gains pleasure by observing a scene whose threatening aspect has been defused by the
first's aggressive action.

The line between being a spectator of an act of sexual aggression and being an
aggressor oneself is a thin one, however, as the phenomenon of gang rapes suggests. The
clear-cut role division between the author and audience just delineated may in this light
seem too simplistic. Freud's final paragraph of the section lends strength to this conjecture:

Thus what we suspected to begin with seems to be confirmed; namely that tendentious
jokes have sources of pleasure at their disposal besides those open to innocent jokes, in
which all the pleasure is in some way linked to their technique. And we may also once
more repeat that with tendentious jokes we are not in a position to distinguish by our
feeling what part of the pleasure arises from the sources of their technique and what part
from those of their purpose. Thus, strictly speaking, we do not know what we are
laughing at. With all obscene jokes we are subject to glaring errors of judgement about
the 'goodness' of jokes so far as this depends on formal determinants; the technique of
such jokes is often quite wretched, but they have immense success in provoking laughter
(102).

If I am listening to an obscene joke, I do not know what part of my pleasure arises from its
technique and what from its purpose. That is to say, my pleasure is not solely fetishistic,
not solely arising from the contemplation of the image evoked by the joke (its "purpose").
It also slips into voyeurism, giving vicarious pleasure in the act of controlling through my
identification with the author and my appreciation of his "technique." This cross-
identification of author and audience also works in reverse; through identification with his
audience, the author of a joke can experience pleasure in passively observing the spectacle
of (his own) joke. A joker requires an audience, and once he has one, he can laugh at his
own joke.

There is a second reading of Freud's concluding paragraph which is in the spirit of
the one just outlined, but distinct from it. Not only are the joker and the audience bound to
each other by bonds of identification, but the technique and the content of obscene jokes are
also intertwined. We are, Freud says, subject to glaring errors of judgment; we do not
know whether we are laughing at the joke's technique or at its content. The two are
indissolubly wedded. For the joke itself is an act of sexual aggression, and this aggression
inherent in the technique of the joke is necessary to negate the threat called up by the
content of the joke, so that the listener can take pleasure in it. The structure and the content
of the obscene joke reinforce, and resonate with, each other.

1.2 Pornography and Repression

Let me now return to the question that I asked in prefacing the previous section,
namely, "Why do men like pornography?" If one takes Freud's account seriously, and
accepts his "smut" as essentially similar to pornography, then the answer would seem to be
that men enjoy pornography because of the pleasure they take in the view of the exposed
woman. This seems obvious enough; the real question is, why do men find this exposure
pleasurable? The answer to this amended question, I believe, lies in the ways that
patriarchy structures men's relations to women, particularly as objects of erotic attraction.

Mulvey's categories of fetishism and voyeurism will serve as useful guideposts in the
investigation of this structure. Importantly, both tactics hinge on contradictions. In
fetishism this structure is more or less explicit. The knowledge of woman's lack of a penis
and the denial of this lack through the fetish as substitute persist simultaneously. "The
structure of the disavowal is this: 'I know (woman has no penis), nevertheless (she has
through this fetish)." An analogous pattern of denial is implicit in the structure of
voyeurism. In this case, the denial centers around the issue of woman's subjectivity, in the
sense of interiority or autonomy. The structure is clearly revealed in the description of the
initiation of the obscene joke. The man knows that women are subjects, for the one he was

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attracted to has just expressed her will through her resistance to his wishes. However, by
telling the joke, he in effect denies her subjectivity. The substitute woman he has created in
the telling of the joke has no autonomy because she resides in the man’s story. In this case,
the structure of the disavowal is: I know (woman has subjectivity), nevertheless (she lacks
it, through my representation of her).

Both of these structures circle around the same center, the issue of female
subjectivity. Voyeurism clearly does; fetishism does too, if one treats the issue of woman’s
"lack" metaphorically, as a lack of the socially recognized authority that is given to men in
a patriarchal society. Yet, when viewed this way, the two contradictory formations start
with opposite premises: voyeurism is premised on women’s subjectivity and goes on to
undermine it, fetishism is premised on women’s lack of subjectivity and goes on to
recuperate it. To make matters even worse, both mechanisms can be operating at once, as
demonstrated by the analysis of the dynamics of the obscene joke.

Both of these dynamics respond to a threat posed by an underlying contradiction in
the male infant’s experience of women’s subjectivity. On the one hand, the boy personally
experiences a woman, his mother, as a powerful and autonomous subject not bound by his
will. On the other hand, he lives in a society that does not acknowledge female
subjectivity and thus denies this authority to his mother. This threatens the infant, for
whatever power has been able to suppress his mother’s subjectivity is liable to remove his
own. This construction by the infant of a "lost subjectivity" in the mother becomes
mythologized, in Freud’s theories, into a tale of female castration which is so ludicrous
when read literally. There are two ways for the infant to cope with this threat to his own

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7Elizabeth Janeway, "On 'Female Sexuality,'" in Women and Analysis, Ed. Jean Strouse (Boston:

8Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender

9Janeway, 65.
subjectivity, which Freud anatomizes into castration anxiety. One is to deny that the woman has lost her subjectivity; this falls into the fetishistic schema. The second is to deny that she ever was a subject, or that if she lost her subjectivity, it was because she deserved to.

The interlinking of the two structures may be sketched as follows:

Figure 1-1: Interlinking of fetishism, voyeurism, and patriarchy

The underlying event is the social denial of subjectivity to women, which causes the threat and sets in motion the two defense mechanisms. Voyeurism echoes and justifies the patriarchal denial of subjectivity. As in Freud’s joke scenario, voyeurism must establish an objectified woman (the joke is told) before the fetishistic regime can operate (the listener enjoys the joke). Once the woman-as-object is produced, by another person like the joker or author or by the man’s own mind, a problem arises. A woman without subjectivity is not acceptable as an erotic object, because she brings the specter of castration too close again. Therefore, a way must be found to revive her subjectivity; fetishism provides this way.¹⁰ Importantly, female subjectivity is never truly resurrected in the male mind. Instead, a sort of ersatz subjectivity is substituted for the original experience, which would recall the threat patriarchy posed to the boy’s subjectivity.

The exact parallel of these psychosexual mechanisms with Mulvey’s textual

mechanisms returns one to the issue of representation, and more specifically, pornography. 

To the extent that a representation reproduces and naturalizes these structures that deny women's subjectivity, that representation anchors patriarchy. It is my claim that men's representations in general reproduce and naturalize fetishism and voyeurism, and that pornography does so to an extreme degree. For if Freud is right in suggesting that the pleasure men feel in smut comes indistinguishably from the technique and the object of the obscene joke, this can only be because the structures of smut, or pornography, mesh the technique of producing the object, associated with voyeurism, and its contemplation, associated with fetishism, into a seamless whole.

Pornography is voyeuristic, and is by no means unique in this respect. Mulvey's remarks were formulated with regards to mainstream cinema, and Judith Mayne has noted that the claim that cinema is a voyeuristic medium is "a virtually undisputed observation in film theory, feminist or otherwise." Indeed, most forms of art are to some extent voyeuristic, in that they have been created by an artist or artists to control the viewer's perceptions, guiding them to look upon a place they might otherwise not dwell. Nevertheless, the genitals and sexual acts specifically are very private in this society. Insofar as the pornographic gaze penetrates these veils of privacy, it is voyeuristic to an extreme degree.

Fetishism is more subtly located in textual mechanisms. Voyeurism is easily detected in pornography or in other forms of representation through their establishment of difference, and distance, between the viewer/subject and the picture/object. How can fetishism, which seems to be aimed at eliminating difference and distance, be consistent with the voyeuristic mechanisms of representation? This is an even more glaring issue in pornography, where the woman's body is put forth in a way that directly establishes sexual difference. The answer lies in the observation that fetishism only seems to be eliminating

difference. The fetishist is not interested in giving the woman a real penis, making her into a real man, which would negate his heterosexual desire. Instead, he wants to see the woman as a mirror of his own desire. Thus, he projects a copy of the phallus, in reality his, onto the body of the woman. This projection of men's own desire onto women can be read in many texts created by men, for it is natural that, like Freud's joker who wants to laugh at his own joke, a text's author wants to read his own text. In some sense, this is implicit in the structure of representation, for the depicted woman has a sort of pseudo-subjectivity which actually reflects and is controlled by the desires of the male author. But it again reaches an extreme in pornography, where the gaze is explicitly sexual rather than implicitly so.

How are the two competing structures of voyeurism and fetishism, starting from opposite premises and contradictory within themselves, propped up by pornography? The pornographic apparatus, and again, to a lesser extent, any representational apparatus, produces a hermetically sealed cycle in which voyeurism leads to fetishism which in turn cycles back and validates voyeurism. The exemplar of this situation is the pornographic scenario of the "willing victim" of rape. In this fiction, the violent act of male control (the rape) is portrayed as producing a positive subjective reaction of the woman (her pleasure). This circles back and justifies the initial controlling act—if the woman wanted to be raped, then the rape itself was desirable, perhaps even natural.

Not all pornography explicitly depicts such willing victims. The pornographic apparatus, however, replicates this structure. The author, and, indirectly, the reader, who both identifies with the author and chooses what, how, and when to read, control the content of the representation. That this control can become coercive is acutely apparent in pornographic materials that require actual models. Since sex is not ordinarily public, coercion of some sort in the production of this type of pornography is implicit if not actual. This controlling act produces the text, and in the text the (image of the) woman appears to
lead an autonomous existence. In the same way that the fiction of the woman's pleasure justified the rape, the fiction of the represented woman's subjectivity justifies the act that led to the creation of that image of woman. Thus the cycle is complete, and any flaws are masked: the male spectator's voyeurism has created a fetishistic female subjectivity, and the successful creation of this subjectivity ratifies the initial voyeurism. The creaky edifice of the male psyche under patriarchy has been caulked and sealed, and presents a watertight face to the rest of the world.

1.3 A Progressive Pornography?

The mechanisms I have been describing do not seem to be necessary for every imaginable example of pornography. While it is surely true that "the common nature of much pornographic representation" is one "in which pomographers impose meaning on women's bodies by displaying them in ways that disregard women's subjectivity," it is certainly possible to imagine a more "progressive" pornography that would take the codes above and deliberately disrupt them. Such a pornography might have sexually explicit images of women which would exhibit a true subjectivity, perhaps, or would be positioned in such a way as not to allow the reader to confuse the image of women with real women, or would interfere with the placement of the male reader in the position of sexual subject to the sexualized female object.

It is, as I said, possible to imagine such a progressive pornography that would help to unsettle rather than anchor the codes of patriarchy in the minds of its male viewers. Nevertheless, such an imagined pornography is, I think, very problematic. To better show some of the problems that I think are implicit in such an idea, I will analyze John Ellis'

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12 Nancy W. Waring, "Coming to Terms with Pornography: Toward a Feminist Perspective on Sex, Censorship, and Hysteria," manuscript, to be published in Vol. 8 of Research in Law, Deviance, and Social Control, Ed. Steven Spitzer and Andrew Scull (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press Inc.).
article "Photography/Pornography/Art/Pornography," which contains one male theorist's hopes for establishing such a pornography.\textsuperscript{13}

After a lengthy summary of three positions which seek to define and limit pornography (the Festival of Light, a semi-religious right-wing lobby; anti-pornography feminists; and the Williams Report, which urges liberalization of British anti-pornography laws), Ellis enters into his main argument. "The next step for this analysis is to find a way of characterizing the representations designated as 'pornography' so that they can be seen as contradictory and open to change, even as undergoing change at the moment" (97). For Ellis, what must change is the analysis; pornography is already contradictory and open to change, if one could only find the proper way of seeing it. For an axis along which to reveal these contradictions and fluxes, Ellis proposes investigating the "startling appearance of female genitals" in widely disseminated photographs and films.

The appearance of female genitals is "startling," and useful in "reveal[ing] 'pornography' as a contradictory area of signification" (97), because of its apparent clash with the denial of sexual difference that lies at the heart of fetishism, in Mulvey's framework of voyeurism and fetishism. (Interestingly, Ellis basically ignores voyeurism, which would seem at first glance to be the hallmark of pornography.) The apparent contradiction is that while the style of visual pornography "maintains the kind of textual structure that Mulvey associates with fetishism" (99), the content displays the female genitals and thus affirms sexual difference.

The resolution of this paradox, according to Ellis, has been the fetishization of woman's sexual pleasure. After many years of repression, female sexual pleasure has finally been allowed to appear in pornography. This is "unquestionably an advance upon previous modes of representation of women in association with sexuality" at least partly because of the "directly educative effect" of "the availability of vaginal imagery" (104).

\textsuperscript{13}Subsequent references to this article will be include parenthetically in the text.
This novel vaginal education is a mixed blessing, Ellis acknowledges, for a certain control is maintained of female sexuality. Pleasure is envisaged as dependent on the phallus, which is given to woman by men, ultimately by the male audience. Despite this major caveat, the "advance" is still seen as significant by Ellis because "this regime of representation is profoundly unstable. It has asked the question ‘what is female pleasure?’, a question that *cannot find its answer in representations* [emphasis mine]" (105). Furthermore, even in not asking the question of male pleasure, in order to maintain the "security" of the male viewer, the question, paradoxically, gets asked anyway: "Yet in the very perfunctory treatment that it receives, the question begins to haunt the representation: a disparity between the pressure of desire and the inadequacy of its satisfaction begins to open the complementary question, ‘what is male pleasure?’" (106)

The fact that the question of sexual pleasure seems to arise whether pornography stresses the issue or ignores it should suggest that these questions are of interest more to Ellis than to pornography. This becomes clearer if we stop regarding questions as posing themselves in the abstract and consider them instead as posed by specific human beings to other human beings, in this case by men to other men through the medium of certain pornographic texts. "In cinematic representations," Ellis writes, "there appears most acutely the instability of the current regime of pornographic representation oriented around the question of female pleasure, initially posed as a fetish" (106). A *question* posed as a *fetish*? But a fetish is a mechanism to reassure the man frightened by woman’s lack of the phallus, precisely to deflect questioning. If anything, a fetish is an answer, a false answer insisting that woman really does have the phallus, which precludes further questioning. And a fetish as a question of *female* pleasure? But fetishism is entirely centered around male pleasure. Its mechanism is premised on the rewriting of the female body to better reflect male desire, precisely on editing out female desire.

Ellis concludes with an admirable vision of what pornography could become:

The instability of the current fetishistic regime based on the question of female pleasure
which is only partially answerable by the 'gift' of the phallus, provides opportunities for
film-making practice. This would aim at a displacement of existing representations
through foregrounding the aspects of the question which trouble the regime of
representation that asks it. The institution of pornography would then begin to ask the
questions whose space it occupies without being aware of it: 'What is sexuality? What is
desire?' (107)

As if in acknowledgment of the difficulties in the analysis just put forth, the argument has
slipped from the confident present tense of the initial statement of purpose to a conditional
future tense ("this would aim"). While I agree in general with Ellis' political agenda of
"attempting to change representations, their uses and their potential in our society" (107), I
feel that he has himself in some sense foreclosed pornographic representation as an
effective arena in which to address the questions he raises of sexuality and desire. As he
notes, pleasure is a question whose answer cannot be contained within representation:
where the partial answer supplied by the 'gift' of the phallus leaves off is precisely where
representation can no longer go. The "institution of pornography" has been asking, and
answering, the questions "What is (male) sexuality? What is (men's) desire?" for years, but
it has asked the question of women's desire only to fetishize it, to preclude its being
answered. And if representation cannot find the "answer" to the "enigma" of women's
pleasure, it is equally unreasonable to want men to. Not the "institution" of pornography,
but female subjects, individually and collectively, must ask the questions, "What is female
sexuality? What is women's desire?"

There are indeed contradictions in current pornography. But the presence of a
contradiction need not be an impetus to change. As Ellis notes, "Freud presents his clinical
fetishists as in no real way discommoded: 'usually they are quite satisfied with it, or even
praise the way in which it eases their erotic life.'" (101, n. 11). And as I have suggested
above, one can address contradictions only to cover them up. Ellis notes the importance of
various mechanisms for ensuring the "security" of the male viewer of pornography.
Addressing the contradictions circling around men's sexuality in such a way as to be
reassuring will surely not involve highlighting the contradictions, but will minimize them.
None of this rules out the possibility of sexually explicit representations of women that would challenge and disrupt these psychological patterns in their male viewers. Indeed, one might argue that because men’s psychic processes are so directly paralleled in the content of pornography, changes in the structure of such representations could be an especially powerful impetus to changes in men’s psyches. Perhaps this is true, but I am wary of it. Though there may only be a difference of degree between pornography and other forms of patriarchal representation, a difference in degree is no small matter. A sexually explicit image of a woman produced for my benefit as a reader taps into the circuitous undercurrents of my mind far too directly for me to feel much hope of being able to divert them from their paths, and I am leery lest the increase in flow wear the ruts yet deeper. "In a less sexist society," writes Ann Snitow, "there might be a pornography that is exciting, expressive, interesting, even, perhaps, significant as a form of social rebellion, all traits that, in a sexist society, are obscured by pornography’s present role as escape valve for hostility toward women, or as metaphor for fiercely guarded power hierarchies."  

Possibly, but the crucial phrase is, "in a less sexist society;" it seems a difficult task to set pornography to change that society. Even if, as Snitow writes, pornography for women is different, I very much fear that any pornography for men would remain the same.

If, as I have suggested, pornography is simply an extreme of men’s representations, then what hope for change do more mainstream representations offer? I will argue in the next two chapters that two such fictions, Leo Tolstoy’s novella The Kreutzer Sonata and Alfred Hitchcock’s film Vertigo, do indeed start to undermine men’s acceptance of patriarchy. If a "progressive pornography" runs aground hard and fast on its path to dismantling the patriarchal unconscious, then it is just barely possible that other works, less deeply enmeshed with these unconscious mechanisms, might have enough time to steer clear of the rocks.

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Chapter 2

Polemic and Practice: Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*

Thus far, I have considered every male reader to be analogous to the spectator in Freud’s scenario of the obscene joke, a man who laughs at another man’s smutty jokes. But what about a man who does not find these jokes so amusing? In the first chapter of Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the unnamed narrator listens to an aged tradesman describe to a clerk his role in some orgies at the Kunavin fair. The story apparently becomes risqué enough to force the older man to tell it in a whisper. While the “clerk’s roar of laughter filled the whole carriage,” and “the old man laughed also, exposing two yellow teeth,” the narrator is unimpressed. “Not expecting to hear anything interesting,” he gets up and goes outside to the railway platform.15 Here, then, is a fourth person who does not fit so neatly into Freud’s scheme. In addition to the tradesman who tells the joke, the clerk who laughs at it, and the (absent) woman who is the butt of the joke, there is a new role, played by the narrator, of a listener who is not interested in this kind of joke. Perhaps the story that follows, recounted by a man apparently outside of the voyeuristic-fetishistic cameraderie of the tradesman and the clerk, may start to unhinge this unfortunate social dynamic.

A second joke follows the tradesman’s joke. It is told by a lawyer to a lady about a wife who would no longer live with her husband. This joke’s punchline is also effaced, here by the noise of the train. Framed by these two jokes, whose endings are withheld from the reader, the characters’ discussion enters into a debate over the issue of marital fidelity. On the one side, the tradesman argues that coercion must exist in the relation between husband and wife: “Let her fear her husband!” (161). On the other, the lady asserts the

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importance of love: "‘‘They make people who don’t love one another marry, and then wonder that they live in discord’’ (160).

Tolstoy presents in this argument the two poles of voyeurism and fetishism, albeit in somewhat camouflaged form. If one understands marriage to be the successful integration of women into patriarchal society, then the tradesman’s solution to this admittedly difficult project is the voyeuristic one: simply force her to. Conversely, the woman—who appropriately enough wears a "mannish coat and cap" and smokes (157)—advocates an approach to marriage which can be seen as fetishistic. She wants love to appear between men and women, which garners the woman’s consent to her marriage, and thus establishes her subjectivity in a manner acceptable to male desire. She rather circularly argues ‘‘that marriage without love is not marriage; that love alone sanctifies marriage, and that real marriage is only such as is sanctified by love’’ (163).

This debate, and the points of view espoused by both participants, are clearly held in low esteem by Tolstoy. Neither participant really responds to the other, the woman "answering not what her interlocutor had said but what she thought he would say," and the man "looking contemptuously at the lady and leaving her question unanswered" (160). Since the debaters do not speak to each other, there can be no winner of the argument. Though at one point the tradesman’s "tone was so impressive that it evidently vanquished his hearers, and even the lady felt crushed but still did not give in," (161) the pomposity of the man undermines him in the narrator’s and readers’ eyes, just as the ineffectuality of the woman in opposing the man’s weak arguments undermines her position. The farcical quality of the entire discussion is further enhanced by the presence of the fawning clerk, who listens smilingly to all points of view and hastens to agree with whatever view he senses is likely to emerge victorious.

One critic has suggested that "one feels at this moment of the story that the lady and her friend are on firmer ground in the argument than the old man, even though they have
not won by any means. In this argument, Tolstoy merely sets the scene and introduces the issues.\(^\text{16}\) While it is certainly true that this discussion sets the scene for what is to follow, it does so almost in a negative sense, emphasizing how infirm the ground is that both sides are standing on. Two characters, who are interested in the debate but do not really participate in it, point out the crucial flaws in both sides of the argument. The first is the narrator, who chides the tradesman with the double standard of marital fidelity that he is espousing, saying, "'Yes, but you yourself just now were speaking about the way married men amuse themselves at the Kunavin Fair'" (162). This is the strongest statement the narrator makes in the entire story. To his objection the tradesman can only make the patently inadequate reply, "'That's a different matter'" (163). The second is Pozdnyshev, who, after the tradesman leaves the train, poses the question, "'What kind of love ... love ... is it that sanctifies marriage?'" (163, ellipses in original) This is enough to completely baffle the lady and the lawyer. In the jokes that frame the discussion, the endings are literally obscured; in the arguments, they are unconvincing.

What Tolstoy has set the scene for is moving beyond the fruitless "argument" between voyeurism and fetishism. With both fetishistic and voyeuristic attempts to recuperate marriage made to seem ridiculous, a new element can be introduced into the discussion. This element is Pozdnyshev’s critique of patriarchy.

2.1 Pozdnyshev’s Anti-Patriarchal Polemic

"They do all that, but their outlook on her remains the same. She is a means of enjoyment. Her body is a means of enjoyment. And she knows this. It is just as it is with slavery. Slavery, you know, is nothing else than the exploitation by some of the unwilling labour of many. ... So it is with the emancipation of woman: the enslavement of woman lies simply in the fact that people desire, and think it good, to avail themselves of her as a tool of enjoyment. Well, and they liberate woman, give her all sorts of rights equal to man, but continue to regard her as an instrument of enjoyment, and so educate her in

childhood and afterwards by public opinion. And there she is, still the same depraved slave, and the man still a depraved slave-owner" (Pozdnyshev, 191-192).

"They" do all that, but who are the "they" to whom Pozdnyshev refers? Though never explicitly stated, it becomes clear that they are the men of his society. It is thus men's views of women, and their power to enforce them, that cause the "abyss of error in which we live regarding women and our relations with them" (168). Male-dominated society encourages women to become sexual objects for men's pleasure, and encourages men to treat them as such. All other problems Pozdnyshev sees as stemming from this asymmetry in sexuality. "Woman's lack of rights arises not from the fact that she must not vote or be a judge--to be occupied with such affairs is no privilege--but from the fact that she is not man's equal in sexual intercourse and has not the right to use a man or abstain from him as she likes--is not allowed to choose a man at her pleasure instead of being chosen by him" (178). Pozdnyshev (and through him Tolstoy) further heightens the delineation of patriarchy by drawing the analogy between the sexual division of society and slavery.

Pozdnyshev elaborates on some of the consequences of this social construction of women as sexual objects. For example, at the beginning of the novella he shocks the lady, lawyer, narrator, and even the clerk with his assessment of the impersonality of love: "Every man experiences what you call love for every pretty woman" (165). He later reiterates this view in the description of his own life trajectory, describing how by the time he was thirteen, "woman, not some particular woman but woman as something to be desired, woman, woman's nudity, tormented me" (169). He castigates the marriage market, observes with distaste the universality of women's playing to male desire, and deplores the "experts" who create men's "need" for sexual intercourse.

This view of sexuality and society, espoused with such intensity, is sufficiently radical to have provoked a variety of critical avoidances of Pozdnyshev's message. Many, like R. F. Christian, simply reject Pozdnyshev's diatribes: "few other novelists could have
made compelling reading out of sentiments and arguments which are irritating and manifestly unjust."\(^{17}\) Others, like Elizabeth Hardwick, seem almost to repress them:

The actions the nineteenth century gathered together under the name of "debauchery" are never, in fiction, made entirely clear, but it seems very likely that many of them are understood in our time as healthy exertions of vital being. Debauchery, of course, still exists in our minds as a designation of brutal excess and deviation, even if it cannot stand as the name of the experiences of the man in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. "I did not understand," he says, "that debauchery does not consist simply in physical acts . . . real debauchery consists in freedom from the moral bonds toward a woman with whom one enters into carnal relations. . . ." [ellipses in original]\(^{18}\)

Hardwick seems to ignore the point made by the very passage she quotes. What determines whether something is debauchery, says Pozdnyshev, and I would argue Tolstoy as well, is not *actions* but the pattern of *attitudes* involved in sexual behavior. What the experts of "our time" have informed us are "healthy exertions of vital being," seem "very likely" to be just what the experts of Tolstoy's time assure Pozdnyshev is "'a most legitimate function good for one's health'" (170). Tolstoy's view is radical in that he insists that if a man uses a woman as a sexual object, rather than relating to her as another human being, then "healthy exertions" are just as debauched as "brutal excess and deviation."

This argument should by now not seem all that radical; feminists have been making it for years, for example in trying to distinguish between "pornography" and "erotica." What is somewhat surprising is that Leo Tolstoy, notorious misogynist, should be making the argument. Even Ruth Crego Benson, who recognizes the radical drift of *The Kreutzer Sonata*, notes with some surprise that "[i]ronically, he writes like a radical feminist."\(^{19}\) It is possible that Tolstoy is only having Pozdnyshev make his long-winded argument for the express purpose of making it look ridiculous. As Pozdnyshev himself says, "'You know I am a sort of lunatic'" (195). Why should one take Pozdnyshev's argument any more seriously than the initial arguments of the pompous tradesman and the ineffectual lady?


\(^{19}\)Benson, 135.
There are two reasons to take him seriously. The first is a structural one. An enormous amount of space is devoted to the development and elaboration of Pozdnyshev's societal critique. The first two disputants on the issue of men, women, and marriage can be summarily dismissed because they are summarily dispatched from the narrative. The old tradesman leaves the train at the end of the first chapter, and the lady and lawyer leave the car by the end of the second. Pozdnyshev then has at least twelve chapters in which to expound his theories before even approaching the events that lie at the heart of his own story. Beyond sheer physical space, the structure in which Pozdnyshev presents his views compels the reader to listen to him. The lady and the tradesman were involved in what was structurally, if not actually, a dialogue. One could pay attention to either side, for both sides presented comparably convincing (or unconvincing) arguments. Pozdnyshev speaks in essentially a monologue. The narrator is practically always listening. When he occasionally poses a question, he is generally interrupted by Pozdnyshev's rushing to answer his objection. If Pozdnyshev is identified with Tolstoy's voice, then the narrator is closely identified with the reader's ears. Like the readers, he listens to the story, and like any audience to a story, he can at most participate by asking questions. Thus Pozdnyshev's overwhelming response to the narrator's questions, because they are in some way surrogates for the reader's questions, greatly accentuate the impact of Pozdnyshev's argument.

That the narrator takes Pozdnyshev seriously is the second reason to for the reader to take him seriously. Insofar as the narrator stands in for the readers, it is difficult to resist his judgment. His sympathy for Pozdnyshev is established quite early; even before he knows his name, he says "[i]t seemed to me that his loneliness depressed him, and I made several attempts to converse with him" (158). Of course, more than sympathy for a lonely man with a tragic history is needed to make his extreme argument credible.

The best evidence that the narrator takes Pozdnyshev seriously comes from his
descriptions of his direct sensory impressions on hearing Pozdnyshev speak. Near the beginning of Pozdnyshev’s tale, the narrator notes that "[i]t was too dark to see his face, but, above the jolting of the train, I could hear his impressive and pleasant voice" (169). Of the two senses, sight and sound, the former is muted and the latter is dominant. Furthermore, the voice is "impressive and pleasant" both in itself and because it masks the unpleasant "jolting" of the train. The description of Pozdnyshev’s voice is made more striking by its contrast with the hesitancy of his first question and the frenetic quality of his exposition. It would seem that something within Pozdnyshev--his voice--has managed to overcome an irritating feature of the external world--the noises of the train. This sense of his internal impressiveness contrasting with external "jolting" is even more central to this later passage:

It [the tea] was fearfully strong and there was no water with which to dilute it. I felt that I was much excited by the two glasses I had drunk. Probably the tea affected him too, for he became more and more excited. His voice grew increasingly mellow and expressive. He continually changed his position, now taking off his cap and now putting it on again, and his face changed strangely in the semi-darkness in which we were sitting. (172)

The whole paragraph vacillates. Though Pozdnyshev grows more excited, his voice gets mellower. Though the railroad car is in semi-darkness, the narrator sees the details of his strange facial transformations. In the midst of this vacillation, though, is an important tilt in Pozdnyshev’s favor. What is seen as strange or disconcerting, like his face or his manner, is covered over (as by the semi-darkness) or ascribed to external effects (as the tea, which has also affected the narrator). What is positive, the mellow and expressive voice, is associated with Pozdnyshev’s intrinsic features. The reader is invited to ignore his misleading outer features to try to listen to his disturbing, but ultimately worthwhile, inner self.

Despite what might be called Pozdnyshev’s feminist critique of his patriarchal surroundings, he displays a distinct strand of gynephobia. Prototypical of this unsettling coexistence is chapter nine. Though he begins by placing the blame for the world’s ills on society’s unequal assignment of sexual roles, he ends by calling dressed-up women
"dangerous objects" and wishing policemen would take them away. Pozdnyshev repeatedly insists that women are victims, but this intellectual reaction has little effect on his gut reaction to them, which is essentially one of revulsion. Benson states that "he [Tolstoy] finds himself and all men guilty in their premarital and family relations, and for the first time [in his later stories] he describes this guilt. Nonetheless, within this new view, he sees women as willing accomplices, as accessories before, during, and after the fact." Pozdnyshev's attitude is somewhat more subtle than this, for he states clearly that women are not "willing" accomplices. "'Of course the fault was not hers,'" he says at one point, speaking of his wife. "'She had been brought up as the position of women in our society requires, and as therefore all women of the leisured classes without exception are brought up and cannot help being brought up. . . . The education of women will always correspond to men's opinion about them'" (190-191). This intellectual exculpation coexists with a visceral condemnation that surfaces in the tone of his diatribe. There is something especially repellent about women for Pozdnyshev: "'I had formerly quarrelled with my brother, my friends, and my father, but there had never, I remember, been the special venomous malice which there was here [with his wife]'" (186). His gynephobia appears even more clearly in his description of how he murdered his wife.

2.2 Pozdnyshev's Woman-Killing Practice

It is crucial to keep in mind what question Pozdnyshev's story is answering. It is not whether he kills his wife; that is revealed as soon as he gives his name. Nor, on further consideration, is it why he kills his wife. His analysis of marital relations, as detailed in the first half of the novella, forces the conclusion that such a resolution is almost inevitable. Only sexual attraction, according to Pozdnyshev, binds men and women together, and such

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20Benson, 135.
attraction is bound to be fickle. How he kills his wife is the real question, dealt with by the intense ending of the story. Tolstoy even considered subtitling the novella *How a Husband Killed His Wife.*

One should not be too literal in investigating this how, though; as Pozdnyshev emphatically tells the narrator in his discussion of the evils of "love," "'You think I am straying from my subject? Not at all! I am telling you how I killed my wife. They asked me at the trial with what and how I killed her. Fools! They thought I killed her with a knife, on the 5th of October. It was not then that I killed her, but much earlier. Just as they are all now killing, all, all . . . '" (188, ellipsis in original) "'But with what?'" asks the bewildered narrator, to which Pozdnyshev answers, in essence, with sex. Tolstoy gives us a (fictional) case study with which to compare Pozdnyshev's general theories, namely Pozdnyshev's own history.

A first impulse would be to class Pozdnyshev's story with the timeworn tale of the wronged husband. A man is suspicious about the dalliances of his wife, catches her *in flagrante delicto,* and kills her in a fit of righteous anger. This is the surface formula of Pozdnyshev's actions, and it is why he was acquitted by the jury. But Pozdnyshev accuses the jury of being fools, and it is indeed foolish to read the novella as simply another instance of the tale of a man's revenge for his wife's infidelity. If anything, it is a parody of that cliche, for Tolstoy undercuts essentially every element of the formula.

Pozdnyshev's jealousy and his suspicion, for example, are almost caricatured. Both are undercut by his own constant ambivalence about them. He comes to his conclusions based on the slimmest of evidence: looks exchanged between Trukhachevski and his wife; the sound of arpeggios coming from a closed dancing room, "'purposely made to drown the sound of their voices, their kisses . . . perhaps'" (213, ellipsis in original); her coming to talk to him in his study. And with his "'perhaps," with his "'thoughts go[ing] round and round in a circle of insoluble contradictions,'" (223) he sows even more doubt in the reader's mind through his own doubt of his interpretations.

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21David Magarshack, *Afterword,* *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories,* 301.
Furthermore, his jealousy, supposedly a passion, is always mingled with self-consciousness and deliberation. Shortly before his wife plays the Kreutzer Sonata with Trukhachevski, he goads her into hysterics. Though there is a real core to the rage, it is under considerable control:

"As I jumped up I remember becoming conscious of my rage and asking myself: 'Is it right to give way to this feeling?' and at once I answered that it was right, that it would frighten her, and instead of restraining my fury I immediately began inflaming it still further, and was glad it burnt yet more fiercely within me. . . . Having given relins to my rage, I revelled in it and wished to do something still more unusual to show the extreme degree of my anger. I felt a terrible desire to beat her, to kill her, but knew that this would not do, and so to give vent to my fury I seized a paper-weight from my table, again shouting 'Go!' and hurled it to the floor near her. I aimed it very exactly past her. Then she left the room, but stopped at the doorway, and immediately, while she saw it (I did it so that she might see), I began snatching things from the table—candlesticks and ink-stand—and hurling them on the floor still shouting 'Go! Get out! I don't answer for myself!' She went away—and I immediately stopped" (216-217).

Pozdniyev becomes more extreme in his actions just as his feelings have become less extreme, insofar as he now controls them. It is a fit of jealous rage, perhaps, but a very self-conscious one.

His jealousy and suspicion thus come not so much from any external source as from within his own psyche. What are their motivations there? Here Pozdniyev is quite clear—he is afraid that his wife's sexuality may escape his control. His fear consists of two parts. The first is that he may lose ownership of his wife. Echoing the tradesman's platitude, "'Don't trust your horse in the field, or your wife in the house'" (162), Pozdniyev compares his wife to a "well-fed, harnessed horse" with "no bridle," and concluded "'I felt this—and was frightened'" (203). Added to the danger that his wife's unbridled sexuality might run away with her is the threat posed by his belief that it would take her into someone else's power. He feels that Trukhachevski, for example, "'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 territ. '" (212). Losing his control of her is bad, but losing it to another man is particularly galling to Pozdniyev.
This structure of jealousy is obviously dehumanizing to his wife. One does not own another person, only objects, or animals, like the horse to which he compares her. Worse, Pozdnyshev thinks her will insignificant, with Trukhachevski "sure" to conquer her while she exerts no apparent effect on him. The violinist's opinion is also more substantial in Pozdnyshev's eyes than his wife's. Pozdnyshev invites his rival back to play over the voiced objections of his wife lest Trukhachevski suppose that he is afraid of him. And while the loathsome Trukhachevski at least is named, Pozdnyshev never deigns to supply the name of his wife.

All of this--the artificiality of Pozdnyshev's jealousy, his fear of losing control of his wife's sexuality, and his fear of appearing weak in the eyes of the world--reach a peak in the discovery scene. He discovers the two, not in bed together, but sharing dinner, hardly grounds for postulating adultery. It is not even enough evidence for Pozdnyshev, but for him the annoyance he reads in his wife's eyes, just momentarily, is enough, and he moves to attack her. When the violinist prevents him and he attacks him instead, only to be faced with his escape, he returns to attacking his wife, for he "remembered that it is ridiculous to run after one's wife's lover in one's socks; and I did not wish to be ridiculous, but terrible. In spite of the fearful frenzy I was in, I was all the time aware of the impression I might produce on others, and was even partly guided by that impression" (233).

And then, the lethal climax of his story, the killing of his wife. Grotesquely, Pozdnyshev is proven almost literally right in his declaration that men are killing their wives with sex. There is no question that the murder is described as erotic. As Pozdnyshev describes trying to throttle her, he exclaims "'What a firm neck it was...!'" (233, ellipsis in original) And in the act of murder itself, he tells the narrator, "'I felt, and remember, the momentary resistance of her corset and of something else, and then the plunging of the dagger into something soft'" (234). Even more eerily, the scene is played out as a defloration for both of the participants. Pozdnyshev emphasizes that he uses a dagger "'that
had never been used and was very sharp" (231) and the rush of blood from under the
wife's corset mimics the bleeding after the rupture of the hymen. As if to recoup his
feelings of inadequacy in the face of Trukhachevski's triumph, Pozdnyshev has raised the
stakes, making intercourse a lethal event that each will participate in only once.
Remembering "the resistance of the corset and the plunging in of the dagger" a few hours
later, "a cold shiver ran down my back" (235). This is a terrifyingly ambiguous reaction
to his parody of intromission, a shiver both of remembered sensuality and of horror at what
he has done.

This collapsing of "love" and murder is hardly surprising. It is the logical end to the
description of patriarchal relations between men and women that Pozdnyshev had produced
in the first part of the story. Nor is it surprising given the intimate connections between
violence and male sexuality in Western society. And it is not a surprise to see it in a work
of literature. But as John Bayley observes, Tolstoy's description shares certain similarities,
as well as certain crucial differences, with other contemporary renditions of analogous
crimes:

We have something of the same feeling of horror in Dickens's description of the murder
of Nancy in Oliver Twist, and Dostoevsky's of Nastasya Philippovna in The Idiot; but
Dickens is fascinated rather than appalled--it was his favorite scene for recitation and used
to excite him to the point of frenzy--while Dostoevsky's imagination is always on equitable
terms with every kind of violence. In all three we are aware of the pressure of a
preoccupation--not uncommon in nineteenth-century fiction--with murder as a sexual act,
but only Tolstoy seems to become fully aware as he describes it of the contrast between
the insulated fantasy of the murderer and the outraged otherness of his victim. Pozdnyshev's
wife is not, as Nancy and Nastasya are, a natural murderee who appears to
acquiesce in the atmosphere which the murderer and his creator have generated. It is
significant that Norman Mailer's revival of the imagined murder as a sexual act, in his
novel An American Dream, follows the Dickens-Dostoevsky pattern, not Tolstoy's.22

2.3 Voyeurism/Fetishism Revisited

While the envisioning of murder as sexual comes as no surprise, the psychic outcome of it in *The Kreutzer Sonata* does, as Bayley intimates. At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that the narrator's refreshing attitude toward obscene jokes boded well for the enunciation of an enlivening approach to the twin golems of voyeurism and fetishism. The sexualized murder of Pozdnyshev's wife, its causes and effects, allow me to venture as an answer to that initial promise a cautious yes—and no. The yes I assert by reading *The Kreutzer Sonata* as a cautionary tale about the dangers of the voyeuristic/fetishistic construction of women. The discussion of the no I defer until the last chapter.

Tolstoy's novella reveals only what Pozdnyshev wants to reveal about his wife. To a certain extent, this is an obvious feature, necessitated by the fact that the narrator can know only what Pozdnyshev tells him about his wife. This structure heightens a salient feature of Pozdnyshev's tale, which is his consistent elimination of his wife from the story. One knows so little of her that the misogyny of the text is almost blunted by it; how can one blame a woman who is a mere shadow on a screen filled with an image from Pozdnyshev's imagination? In describing the fateful train ride that took him from the Zemstvo meetings back home to find Trukhachevski with his wife, he confesses as much: "She? But who is she? She was, and still is, a mystery. I don't know her. I only know her as an animal" (222-223).

Indeed his memories of the train ride back reveal the crux of the issues, just as the agitation of the train ride on which he accompanies the narrator spurs his recounting of his life story. And for him the crucial issue is this: "What was terrible, you know, was that I considered myself to have a complete right to her body as if it were my own, and yet at the same time I felt I could not control that body, that it was not mine and she could dispose of it as she pleased, and that she wanted to dispose of it not as I wished her to" (227). Here is a restatement of the dilemma I formulated in the first chapter. Patriarchy denies women's
autonomy, therefore Pozdnyshev has a "right" to her body. Yet he experiences her as a frustratingly autonomous person, as the infant experiences the mother.

Bayley's analysis of similar scenes by other authors suggests that other authors (Dickens, Dostoevsky, Mailer) repress this dilemma by exerting their authorial power to create women characters who "acquiesce" in their environment and become "natural murderees," in other words willing victims. In my first chapter I argued that this repression of the patriarchal dilemma at the authorial level is prototypical of pornography. Tolstoy refuses to solve the problem by authorial fiat; he refuses to make the woman involved acquiesce. Instead he gives her what Bayley calls a sense of "outraged otherness." Thus the dilemma, instead of lurking buried in what might be called the subconscious of the text, is raised to the conscious level, where the character Pozdnyshev must deal with it, and where the reader can see how he deals with it and what the effects of his mechanisms are.

Here, then, is the sequence of Pozdnyshev's reaction mechanisms, from when he gets on the train to the end of his story. As soon as he gets on the train to Moscow, his efforts at tranquility end and he conjures up images of his wife being unfaithful to him. They begin to take on reality during his train ride--""[t]he more I gazed at those imaginary pictures the stronger grew my belief in their reality. The vividness with which they presented themselves to me seemed to serve as proof that what I imagined was real"" (225). This reality is confirmed in Pozdnyshev's mind by the circumstantial evidence of Trukhachevski's presence. Convinced of her unfaithfulness, Pozdnyshev wants to punish her. ""[A] strange sense of joy arose in me, that my torture would now be over, that now I could punish her, could get rid of her, and could vent my anger"" (229). He feels that she is no longer human: """"No, she is not a human being. She is a bitch, an abominable bitch"""" (230). Finally, he kills her in the eroticized manner I described earlier.

Analysis of this sequence reveals a series of three cycles of voyeurism/fetishism, with voyeurism leading to fetishism leading to another level of voyeurism, and so on. In the first
cycle, analogous to the pattern discussed for obscene jokes, Pozdnyshev voyeuristically
denies his wife's subjectivity by creating fantasies of her. Her subjectivity reasserts itself,
though, when these fantasies of her with Trukhachevski begin to seem real to Pozdnyshev.
This might be called "inverted" fetishism, for it aims to produce his wife as an acceptable
erotic object not for himself, but for Trukhachevski. Still, this is very much like the
jokester who produces an acceptable erotic image for his audience, and this view is
strengthened by the identification, albeit weak, between Pozdnyshev and his rival. They are
both men and further identified by means of their very rivalry. In the sentence, "'in spite
of that she is not bad looking, and above all she is at any rate not dangerous to his precious
health'" (231), Pozdnyshev seems to let slip a hint of identification with Trukhachevski--
she is not bad looking to him, or to me--which he quickly disavows in the last half of the
sentence--his precious health.

The second level of voyeurism then begins with his desire to punish her. The desire
to punish is characteristic of the voyeuristic gaze, and lethal attack would seem to establish
an extreme distance between attacker and victim. At the same time it involves an extreme
of physical closeness, an abolition of distance associated classically with fetishism. The
erotic aspect of the killing involves the sensation of the deed, the sensing of her as another
person with whom he is interacting. For Pozdnyshev, the "'more frenzied I became the
more brightly the light of consciousness burnt in me, so that I could not help knowing
everything I did. . . . I realized the action with extraordinary clearness. I felt, and
remember'" still, the act of penetration/murder (234). That feeling, memory of contact,
mark the effect of fetishism.

I distinguish a third cycle of voyeurism and fetishism related to but distinct from the

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23Ellis, 99.

24For a similar discussion of the dynamics of eroticized murder in literature, though not using the
voyeurism/fetishism categorization, see the discussion of Freikorps novels in Klaus Theweleit, Male
cycle involved in the act of attacking her. This last cycle is not so much connected to the action of killing her, that is the attack, but the effect of killing her, that is, rendering her dead. Cries Pozdnyshev, "it was my doing that she, living, moving, warm, had now become motionless, waxen, and cold" (238). In killing her he is literally reducing her to an object, a corpse. Paradoxically, it is in this transformation that his wife's subjectivity asserts itself in his mind the most strikingly. When he describes seeing his dying wife, Pozdnyshev says that "for the first time I forgot myself, my rights, my pride, and for the first time saw a human being in her" (237). And when the transformation is complete, so is his understanding. "Only when I saw her dead face did I understand all that I had done" (238).

Beyond the general insanity of the patriarchal mechanisms of repression, there is something particularly nightmarish in this progression. Running parallel with the sequence of voyeurism/fetishism cycles is a descending sequence of objectifications of Pozdnyshev's wife. Framed by the general objectification of woman as sex object that Pozdnyshev makes clear in his prelude, she is taken successively as object of Pozdnyshev's fantasy, as object of Pozdnyshev's punishment, and finally as an object tout court, an inert body. The aim of the voyeurism/fetishism cycle for the man, however, is to turn the woman into an acceptable erotic object, and Pozdnyshev's accelerating voyeurism takes him farther and farther from this aim. By the end of the first cycle she is attractive, albeit to another man, the end of the second cycle allows desire, but only for a moment, and the last cycle leaves her dead.

The paradigm does not work because the "fetishism" that follows Pozdnyshev's voyeurism is never entirely successful. It cannot be, because at each stage his wife's will further thwarts Pozdnyshev's desire, instead of recapitulating it. Just as in the mechanisms outlined in the first chapter, Pozdnyshev aims at each stage to remove his wife's autonomous subjectivity and replace it with one that is more congenial to his desires, one
that would acquiesce with his sense of entitlement to control her body "as if it were his own." Each tactic he tries is frustrated, which forces him to escalate to a more severe tactic, which prompts an even more absolute denial. Thus, when he imagines his wife betraying him with Trukhachevski, he invokes a kind of negative magic, which is rebuffed by the evidence of Trukhachevski’s presence. ""Yes, so it is not as I thought: I used to expect a misfortune but things used to turn out all right and in the usual way. Now it is not as usual, but is all as I pictured to myself. I thought it was only fancy, but here it is, all real”" (229).

From this follows his attack on her. But after the attack, she continues to resist his will. ""Of what to me was the most important matter, her guilt, her faithlessness, she seemed to consider it beneath her to speak"" (237). She even upsets his plans for forgiveness; where he initially intended to generously give her his forgiveness for her transgression, he eventually asks her forgiveness for his lethal attack, which she refuses to give him.

The refusal to have Pozdnyshev’s wife acknowledge his desire, to "acquiesce" in her own progressive destruction, is Tolstoy’s stance in relation to the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism. By not allowing, as an author, the fetishistic resolution that Pozdnyshev seeks as a character, Tolstoy demonstrates that the "happy ending" of the obscene joke is only an illusion. Furthermore, Tolstoy has traced out the trajectory that leads to Pozdnyshev’s murder of his wife in a way that draws the reader’s attention to this sequence as an inevitable outcome of patriarchy. Starting with the axiom of Pozdnyshev’s expectation to control his wife’s body "as if it were his own" the novella proceeds irresistibly, like a train on its tracks, through greater and greater attempts at control faced with greater and greater evidence of autonomy that Tolstoy suggests must end with ""that terrible hell which makes people take to drink, shoot themselves, and kill and poison themselves or one another"" (166). The long discussion of the evils of society is explicitly framed in terms of its relevance to the actual murder. Pozdnyshev asks the narrator before beginning, "‘would you like me to tell you how that love led to what happened to me?’"
I name "the evils of society" patriarchy; a contemporary of Tolstoy would surely not have done so. In any case, the novel is set up to give a social framework to an individual action, to show that society is killing women, and that imagined "solutions," which I have designated voyeurism and fetishism, only serve to hasten that death.
Chapter 3

A Representational Vortex: Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*

The structure of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* is essentially that of a dialogue. While one may certainly listen to Pozdnyshev's harrowing tale with considerable empathy, there is always a certain distance created between the reader and the erratic protagonist. Like the narrator, we listen, and even if we observe and condemn the dynamics of patriarchal perception that Pozdnyshev analyzes and describes, we do so at a safe distance. At the end of the story, the narrator can leave the train, despite his emotion; despite our emotion, we can similarly end the story.

Alfred Hitchcock's film *Vertigo*, on the other hand, allows no such easy distancing for its spectator. Instead of merely allowing the viewer to observe the mechanisms that ensnare its characters, *Vertigo* sucks the viewer into participating in them. Deeper and deeper we are whirled, until we are brought face to face with the disastrous effects not only of the characters' flaws, but of our own. Our own complicity in the story, and in patriarchy, is not so easily denied in Hitchcock's film as in Tolstoy's novella.

Part of this difference, at least, stems from the difference in mediation between reader and subject in the two works. *The Kreutzer Sonata* is highly mediated by its narration, with Tolstoy introducing a fictional narrator to relay Pozdnyshev's story instead of having it told directly in first person or through an omniscient third person narrator. *Vertigo*, on the other hand, directly presents visual and auditory scenes, and the many subjective shots reinforce the illusion that the spectator is there, looking with the characters. This is particularly significant in a film like *Vertigo*, where images, and the act of looking, are central to the film's story.
3.1 The Framing of the Gaze

Looks, and what the protagonist sees and what he does not, structure both the plot and the images of the film. A few examples illustrate this point. In his first interview with Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart) is initially reluctant to trail Elster's wife Madeleine (Kim Novak). Elster entices Scottie by suggesting that Scottie should come observe his wife at Ernie's Restaurant ("You can see her there," he says), and the bargain is apparently sealed by Scottie's look at Madeleine that evening. Appropriately, Scottie's job is to watch Madeleine, which he does in a number of long sequences without dialogue, where his watching is emphasized by intercutting shots of him watching with shots of what he sees.

Furthermore, the theme of vertigo is organized in terms of looks. In the scene where Scottie hangs from the rooftop, or in the scenes where he climbs the spiral staircase at San Juan Bautista, Scottie's vertigo is marked by a famous trick shot involving a simultaneous forward zoom and reverse tracking shot. Paralleling this simultaneous approach and avoidance of the camera is the way that Scottie looks down in each case. He looks down almost reluctantly, then practically has to tear himself away from the view. Robin Wood notes that the "sensation [of vertigo] has been explained, I believe, by psychologists as arising from the tension between the desire to fall and the dread of falling--an idea it is worth bearing in mind in relation to the whole film." In *Vertigo*, I would argue that the sensation of vertigo is linked to vision as well: the tension between the desire to look and the fear of what one sees. As if to emphasize this linkage between vertigo and vision, the title "Vertigo" emerges from an eye in the title sequence.

What "one" sees is generally women. One of the central categories to emerge in

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recent feminist film theory has been the recognition that mainstream Hollywood cinema generally assigns man as the bearer of the look and woman as its object. 27 This division is strikingly evident in Vertigo. The "one" who looks is Scottie Ferguson, with only a few brief, though significant, exceptions. The spectator's look is coincident with his, identifying the spectator's gaze as male. Women, on the other hand, are typically assigned the role of receiving the man's look. The paintings or drawings, from Midge's (Barbara Bel Geddes') drawing of brassieres to the portrait of Carlotta, place women in the position of being looked at. Madeleine, whose very ability to get Scottie to look at her is the bait in Gavin Elster's trap, is in this position. So is Judy, who must change her appearance until it suits the detailed specifications of Scottie's obsession. In the scene at Ransohoff's, the fashionable store where Scottie takes Judy to fit her in Madeleine's clothes, a woman who works there remarks, "The gentleman certainly does know what he wants." Judy knows what he wants, too, and she tries to refuse it, turning away from Scottie. But she turns only to find a mirror, to confront not only her image, which Scottie threatens to reduce her to, but Scottie's reflected gaze, inescapable.

That man is the bearer of the look within the film extends to the spectator of the film as well. Vertigo, like many Hollywood films, seems to code for a male spectator. 28 This is not to say that women cannot or do not watch these movies, for of course they can and do, and the nature of female spectatorship of films that construct a male audience is an important topic in contemporary feminist film theory. 29 Nevertheless, in keeping with my primary focus on the communication or disruption of patriarchal modes of perception between male authors and male readers, I will concentrate on the male spectators of this

27 Mayne, 15.


29 For an excellent analysis of Vertigo from the perspective of the female spectator, for example, see Tania Modleski, The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory (New York: Methuen, 1988).
film. Therefore, the "we" that I use will refer specifically to the body of male spectators, though my observations may apply to many women as well.

In addition to dividing the gaze between men as looking and women as being looked at, the structure of the gaze in Vertigo conforms to the models proposed by feminist film theorists in two further important ways. First, it presents modes of male looking that conform well to Laura Mulvey’s categories of voyeuristic and fetishistic scopophilia that I described earlier. The film presents voyeurism and fetishism in forms blatant enough to be practically clinical; it is so paradigmatic and this respect that Mulvey used it as an illustration in her original article. As Mulvey notes, Scottie’s voyeurism is obvious: he becomes attracted to Madeleine by following her around and spying on her. His fetishism is only slightly less obvious. Madeleine becomes his fetish object, thus he must make up Judy to look exactly like her before he can fully experience sexual desire for her.

Second, in Vertigo, as in other mainstream films, "men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession that is lacking in the female gaze." The coercive aspect of Scottie’s gaze is painfully evident in the scene at Ransohoff’s described above. Its ability to allow Scottie to take possession is doubly manifest in the scene where he rescues Madeleine from the bay, carrying her up the stairs out of the water in a posture reminiscent of a husband carrying his bride over the threshold. Not only can he take her out of the water because he has been watching her, but we learn later that she jumps into the water because he has been watching her. Conversely, when women try to look, their investigations are impotent. Scottie questions Madeleine insistently at every possible opportunity, but when Midge tries to question Scottie, he can evade her. Frusttrated, she concludes, "Naturally, we won’t talk about anything you don’t want to talk about."

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30Mulvey, 16.

Toward what does this coercive male gaze work? Earlier I noted the parallel between vertigo, involving simultaneous longing for and dread of falling, and *Vertigo*, involving simultaneous longing for and dread of looking. Dread of falling makes sense, for falling from great heights is often lethal, but why would one long to fall? Conversely, pleasure in looking makes sense, Freud even took scopophilia as a basic instinct of the infant, but why would one dread looking? Each question answers the other. Falling can be associated with erotic love. Each involves letting go, losing control. The linkage is often suggested by our language: the Biblical fall, "falling" in love. The dread in looking is the same as the dread of falling: each evokes death. When a man looks at a woman, as is the case in *Vertigo*, then that look can be interpreted psychoanalytically as evoking the threat of castration. I would interpret this metaphorically, as I did earlier, and suggest that what is being evoked is the social denial of female subjectivity, a kind of death in life. Furthermore, associating death with looking at women is reinforced by the theme of possession in *Vertigo*. Madeleine Elster seems to be possessed by the dead Carlotta Valdes; Judy Barton becomes possessed by the dead Madeleine Elster. Looking at the portrait of Carlotta Valdes, or Madeleine "possessed" by Valdes, or Judy remade as Madeleine, is to look at the possibility of death.

To answer the question I posed at the beginning of the previous paragraph, then, the male gaze works toward the woman's death. This is clearest in the second half of the film. Scottie forces Judy to change her appearance to mimic that of the dead Madeleine. But as her image merges with that of Madeleine, the identity seems to gather an energy of its own to make itself more total, and to totally mimic Madeleine, Judy must also be dead. For no apparent reason, Judy puts on Carlotta's necklace; for no apparent reason, she goes off the tower, her death completing her fusion with Madeleine.

The question then is whether the death of the woman is necessarily a bad thing, within the logic of the narrative. If women are most satisfactory erotically when they are
objects, then what is wrong with necrophilia? Hitchcock is almost titillated by this angle on his film, telling Truffaut, "I was intrigued by the hero's attempts to re-create the image of a dead woman through another one who's alive. . . . To put it plainly, the man wants to go to bed with a woman who's dead; he is indulging in a form of necrophilia." To render a woman dead is manifestly the motivation of Elster's actions, for they are all part of his plot to murder his wife. This necrophiliac desire can be read in Pozdnyshev's killing of his wife in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, as well.

However, in none of these cases is necrophilia an adequate explanation for the men's actions. One reason is that necrophilia does not offer an acceptable resolution within the voyeuristic/fetishistic perceptual system that operates in each of the two works. If only voyeurism were important, then the woman's death would favorably resolve the man's tensions. The woman would be punished for her lack of subjectivity, and would be radically distanced from the man. Fetishism, on the other hand, is totally frustrated by this outcome. Where voyeurism attempts to eradicate the woman's volition, fetishism wishes to have a congenial will appear, and death prevents this utterly.

3.2 The Naming of Patriarchy

As in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the outcome of the events described in *Vertigo* is the death of women directly or indirectly at the hands of men. In Tolstoy's novella, Pozdnyshev's polemic on society establishes a conceptual structure that indicts patriarchy as a causal agent of the death of Pozdnyshev's wife. In *Vertigo*, patriarchy is also implicated in the deaths of the three women (Carlotta Valde, Madeleine Elster, and Judy Barton), though in a more subtle and far less polemic way than in the novella. I will examine four sequences that I see as structuring both the film's view of patriarchy and the

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32 Truffaut, 184, 186.
positioning of the four main characters within it. These are the curious case of Midge Wood, the tragic case of Judy Barton, the theme of "power and freedom," and the images of towers and vertigo.

Midge is introduced in the second scene of the film, right after the scene in which Scottie watches a fellow policeman plummet to his death. From the beginning, Midge's relationship to Scottie is ambiguous. This unclear connection of a woman to a man is unsettling to the patriarchal framework, which demands that women be defined by their relationships with men. Is she Scottie's sister? No, clearly not. His wife or fiancée? Not that either, though we learn from their conversation that they were engaged for three weeks during college. Nor is she his mother, though this seems the best fit of the three roles. Her supervision of his attempts to overcome his vertigo, fetching him a stepladder, catching and comforting him when he falls, strike a motherly resonance. So does the fact that while she tells Scottie, "You know there's only one man for me, Johnny-O," he reminds her that it was she who broke off their engagement. Remaining exclusively attached to a man to whom she is not married suggests motherhood. Nevertheless, she is not his mother, and her leanings in this direction are a source of tension, prompting Scottie to admonish her, "don't be so motherly." Not fitting into any of the prescribed female roles, the viewer uneasily designates her a "good friend" of Scottie's.

There are other subtle hints in this scene that confirm the viewer's unease. For example, he is at her apartment, upsetting notions of patrilocality. While he will be in her apartment three times in the film, she will never be seen inside his house. There are also a number of symbolic gender reversals implicit in the scene. He wears a corset, and the feminization of his position is emphasized by his asking Midge, "do you suppose many men wear corsets?" Midge, on the other hand, draws a woman wearing a brassiere, placing her in the historically male role of depicting women in art. In a similar vein, the scene ends with one of the few shots we have where Scottie is not looking. He has had a dizzy spell
and is unconscious, and Midge is the character who articulates the audience's gaze. Finally, Scottie is unemployed and intends to stay that way, an idle bachelor housewife of sorts. Midge is working throughout the scene, and refuses a dinner invitation from Scottie because she has to work. None of these role reversals weighs heavily on the viewer at the time, but they do register subliminally to reinforce our unease at the structure of the relations between Midge and Scottie.

Midge's trajectory for the rest of the film will consist of her unsuccessful attempts to resolve her ambiguous position. She first tries to establish herself more firmly as Scottie's lover. Observing Scottie's increasing preoccupation with Madeleine Elster, Midge tries to refocus his erotic attentions on herself. She sends him a note, in which Scottie reads an "undercurrent of desperation." Her desperation is confirmed by the unveiling of her self-portrait, which places herself in the same pose as the portrait of Carlotta Valdes. Her stratagem fails, and Scottie leaves her apartment, to which he never returns. Realizing that she has overstepped the bounds of light banter that has previously characterized their relationship, she chastises herself with a quadruple self-mutilation: she tears at her hair, calls herself "stupid, stupid, stupid!" defaces her self-portrait, and flings the paintbrush at the window, which reflects her image.

The final time Midge appears in the film, she is visiting Scottie after his breakdown. Unable to have become his lover, she now tries to fit herself more securely into the role of mother, playing music for him, trying to get him to return to sanity. She even embraces him and tries to reassure him, "You're not lost, Mother's here." Her attempt to place herself in the role of Scottie's mother is as unsuccessful as her prior attempt to become his lover. Scottie remains entirely catatonic, and Midge leaves his room after concluding sadly, "You don't even know I'm here." Unable to stay Scottie's friend, unable to become his lover or his mother, Midge is in the final analysis unable to be integrated into the film. She walks slowly to the end of a hallway, and fades out into darkness, never to reappear. She is
portrayed as a woman outside of the bounds patriarchy has set for women. She straddles that boundary, and tries to become acceptable, but ultimately she cannot.

Madeleine Elster, by contrast, is the epitome of patriarchal womanhood. She is the image of Woman in our culture: beautiful, mysterious, idle, needing protection. Ultimately, and ironically, she is exactly an image, a role played by Judy to assist Elster in his plot to kill his wife. "Madeleine," that is the Madeleine-image that we see, has only a tentative relationship to any of the "real" women in the film. She has little to do with the real Madeleine Elster, whom we see only as a dead body; or with the real Carlotta Valdes, for Judy says that the story was "part real, part invented;" or with Judy, who merely plays the role of Madeleine.

But the role of Madeleine takes on obvious importance for the character of Judy. When Scottie finds Judy and follows her to her room, she goes to great lengths to convince her that she's "just a girl," producing her name, address, and driver's license number. She reiterates time and time again that she wants Scottie to love her "as I am for myself, and so forget the other and forget the past," as she writes in the note she never gives him. In the scene after their first date, this point is made quite poignantly as Judy asks Scottie if he wants to keep seeing her "Because I remind you of her?". When Scottie assents, she tells him "That's not very complimentary." She then asks, "And nothing else?" Scottie says not, and she replies, "That's not very complimentary either." During this scene she sits by the window, and is seen in profile and in silhouette. The pose recalls Madeleine, who was often shot in profile, and who described in one of her trances sitting alone by a window. The memory of Madeleine threatens to obliterate Judy's individuality, leaving her own face literally obscured.

Judy's ambivalence toward the Madeleine image is very deep. In this scene, the "her" of whom she reminds Scottie is a Her, a male-created fantasy-woman whose image/memory eclipses her real existence, just as the role of Madeleine masked Judy's
existence in the first half of the film. Yet she allows herself to be remade twice as Madeleine because she, like Midge, is desperate for men's love, and the only way she can get that love is to dress herself up, to sell herself as Woman, that is, as men's construction of femininity. Unlike Midge, Judy is able to fit herself convincingly into that role. Midge declines dining with Scottie to do her work; Judy gives up her work to be with Scottie. Midge looks comic and pathetic with her bespectacled face looking out from her portrait à la Carlotta Valdes; Judy is convincing and attractive as the remade Madeleine Elster. Judy is able to fit fully within the limits of patriarchy, but this position exacts a lethal toll.

Judy's position is mirrored by her two "ancestresses," the real Madeleine Elster and Carlotta Valdes. Each of these women is associated with a man who exerted substantial power over her: Scottie Ferguson, Gavin Elster, and an unnamed "rich man, a powerful man," respectively. The continuity between these three men is marked by the threefold repetition of the phrase "power and freedom." Elster says that he would have liked to have lived in the old days of San Francisco, when men had that power and freedom. Pop Liebl of the Argosy Bookstore, in discussing Carlotta Valdes's nameless patron, remarks that "men could do that in those days. They had the power, and the freedom." And at the top of the tower, Scottie uses the phrase in his description of Gavin Elster.

"Power and freedom" is Vertigo's signature for patriarchal power. It is specifically male. This is most clearly enunciated in the story of Carlotta Valdes. A rich, powerful man in the "golden" days of San Francisco found Carlotta, bought her, used her for a time, and then, "he threw her away," taking her child and leaving her to go mad and finally die. That this story is general, that it applies to Everyman, is reinforced by the fact that the man who tells the story is called "Pop," a sort of generic father figure, and that the name of Carlotta's patron is not distinctive enough for Liebl to remember. That the story is general only for men is suggested both by the repetition of the word "man" ("a rich man, a powerful man," "men could do that in those days"), and by what this man's power is used for (disposing of
a woman and taking her child). Many years later, Gavin Elster uses his wife, and when he no longer wants her, he literally "throws her away" off the top of the tower at San Juan Bautista. Scottie's relationship with Judy follows a similar pattern of buying, using, and discarding a woman. Hitchcock here makes an argument for the historical persistence of patriarchal power. Elster and Liebl speak of power and freedom as if they were merely things of the past, but Scottie's remark at the end of the film demonstrates that they are not. Elster still has exactly that same power and freedom.

Patriarchal "freedom" is thus premised on the control of women; patriarchal "power" is premised on the victimization of women. The three men are linked by the phrase, Elster and Scottie speaking it and Pop Liebl standing in for the nameless man from the past. But in another sense, each of the instances of the "power and freedom" motif refers in some way to Gavin Elster. Elster reminisces over the first instance, is linked by his marriage to Carlotta Valdes' great-granddaughter to the second, and is the subject of the third. This is fitting, for Elster is the prototypical patriarch of the film. He is the man with power enough to control women (Judy, his wife) and other men. He ascends to the upper level of his split-level office, for instance, to be able to stand over Scottie and impose his story on him. In fact, his ability to predict Scottie's responses so well, his ability to plan and carry out the "perfect crime," stretch his power into an omnipotence that strains the imagination.

Three of the four main characters fit neatly into positions relative to patriarchal society. Scottie's position is the most intriguing. A number of images mark him as a man who has in some way been emasculated or who is impotent. The first scene in Midge's apartment opens on Scottie balancing his cane upright on his finger. Characteristically, he can hold the cane erect for only a few seconds, and it finally falls. He cannot manage to climb to heights, as a result of his acrophobia. He falls from the stepladder in this scene, and later can not climb to the top of the tower and so watches Madeleine fall to her death.

Wood, Films, 83.
His inability to reach and stay at a height is a token of his loss of masculinity. This point is reinforced by the coroner's vicious attacks at the inquest. The coroner, representative of law and authority, blasts Scottie for his "weakness" and his resulting inability to "protect" Madeleine.

Where Elster is the model of manhood under patriarchy (he is fully exonerated at the inquest), Scottie is the failed man. His failure causes his breakdown, and his efforts to recoup his masculinity cause his obsessive interest in recreating Madeleine. Finally, he does take Judy all the way up the tower, erasing his vertigo and his symbolic impotence. Subconsciously, just as Judy has been drawn to emulate the "ideal" woman, Madeleine, so Scottie has been drawn to emulate Elster, the "ideal" man. He establishes this connection at the tower: "He made you over didn't he? He made you over just like I made you over."

Scottie achieves what is expected of men in patriarchy; he makes it to the top of the phallic tower. His "triumph," though, is immediately linked to a tragedy which totally undermines it: Judy's death. All of the characters except Elster, in fact, suffer unhappy fates as a result of their scripted roles in patriarchy. There is one last man who must be integrated into patriarchy, and led to regret it. That last man is the one in the audience.

3.3 Gazing at the Male Gaze

Alfred Hitchcock's ability to manipulate his spectators' identifications has been duly noted by a number of critics, and Vertigo is no exception in its attention to the process of identification. I divide the film into three main phases in its approach to identification. In the first phase, which begins when Scottie meets Madeleine and extends to her suicide, the spectator is drawn into forming a strong identification with Scottie Ferguson. In the second phase, from Madeleine's suicide to Scottie's discovery of the necklace which incriminates Judy, Hitchcock sows doubts about this identification, and in the third and final phase, Hitchcock decisively exposes the very conditions for this identification as responsible for tragedy.
Both narrative and camerawork in the first part of the film establish audience identification with Scottie. What we see moves with his motion, and subjective shots from his point of view are the rule. Through the agency of the camera, the spectator's view is coaxed into parallel with his. As Tania Modleski notes in her analysis of the scene in which Madeleine first appears, "the camera itself takes over the enunciation [of desire]: in Ernie's Restaurant it first shows Scottie sitting at a bar and then detaches itself from his searching gaze to conduct its own search for the woman through the restaurant."34 Something rather subtle is going on here, for the camera is not simply endorsing Scottie's perspective. The shot does echo his point of view, but it also "detaches" itself from it. We are not only looking at Scottie, or looking with Scottie, though we do both. We also look on our own at what he sees, investigating side by side with him.

What is being elicited is not only an identification with the male protagonist, but an endorsement of the process of identification as well. This is most clearly revealed by the spectator's relationship to Madeleine. It is difficult to identify with Madeleine: she is presented as a distant, mysterious figure, almost a work of art, as suggested by shots such as the one where she stands like a statue in Carlotta's graveyard. However, we identify very strongly with Scottie's identifying with Madeleine. In the scene where Madeleine goes into the flower shop, there is a shot of Scottie spying on her from behind a door, which turns out to have a mirror on the other side. Thus, we see Scottie's eye in the crack in the door, with Madeleine's mirror image projected on it. In a sense, we see Madeleine's image almost literally reflected in Scottie's gaze; in another sense, since her image appears in the same place Scottie's body is, we see the two as superimposed, as one. Indeed, one might say that Madeleine is a figure of identification,35 a node in an intricate network of identities and "possessions." She is allegedly "possessed" by Carlotta Valdes, and she is literally

34Modleski, 91.

35Modleski, 92-93.
The film equates these two types of possession, as fusion and as ownership, most clearly in Scottie's multiply ironic reassurance to Madeleine. "No one possesses you," he tells her, as the two embrace in the livery stable just before her death. This is belied first by his embrace of her, and second by her continued possession by Carlotta Valdes.

In fact, it is only the first part of the film that enunciates the type of gaze that has been considered canonical in mainstream Hollywood films: controlling, possessive, and male. And the first part of the film works to lure the spectator into approving this possessive gaze. By involving his own gaze side by side with Scottie's, the film makes the spectator mirror Scottie's own aggressive investigations. We feel his gaze is beneficial; after all, he watches Madeleine in order to save her life, and does so on one occasion. Our attachment to Scottie's growing attachment to Madeleine leads us to accept the story she is acting out as plausible. And if we resent and resist Carlotta's possession of Madeleine, it is only because we wish to see Scottie (vicariously us) possessing her.

The gaze that the first part of the film bolsters, the second part undermines. Of course, the seeds of doubt had already been sown. For example, Midge's inability to get Scottie to reveal what he has been doing suggests that Scottie's analogous attempts to demystify Madeleine might also be largely illusory. With Madeleine's fall from the tower, the inefficacy of Scottie's watchful eye is demonstrated. The coroner taxes him with precisely this failure of protection. Now, the coroner is vilified, and we feel that his attacks are unjustified; as Gavin Elster says, "He had no right to speak to you like that." Elster's support, though, undermines our sentiment as much as it bolsters it, for we already resent him (note that Scottie does not take his hand when he offers it) for manipulating Scottie to
be unable to prevent Madeleine's death. Our reactions are thoroughly contradictory at this point, for we both resent these accusations of Scottie and yet feel them to contain a kernel of truth.

Our faith in Scottie's ability to enunciate our gaze is now badly shaken. Hitherto, he has seemed totally trustworthy and reliable; as Elster tells him, "You're good at your job." Now, however, his subjectivity is assailed. He loses the ability to speak, saying nothing from the time when Madeleine falls to when he leaves the hospital. Significantly, particularly in retrospect, the one time he seems about to speak, Elster stops him: "No, there's nothing you have to say to me." The forces of patriarchy have stolen his voice. Finally, after the nightmare sequence he wakes, staring into nothingness. The fact that he has lost his ability to look is confirmed by his catatonia in the next scene. Blind and mute, the support given by this character on whom the spectator was previously leaning is now utterly crushed.

Scottie is eventually "cured," but we experience his return with trepidation as well as relief. We have been misled once, and are wary of its happening again. Indeed, our distrust only increases when Scottie, in a series of attempts to recreate the lost woman, leads us disappointingly to the wrong one at Madeleine's car, at Ernie's, and at the portrait gallery. "Importantly, the film at this point emphatically discredits his vision--and by extension, our vision--on several occasions. On each of these occasions it sets us up for one of the point of view shots Hitchcock has employed throughout the first part of the film to draw us into Scottie's subjectivity, and then it reveals the sight to have been deceptive."37 When he

36 To be sure, we do not know at this point that Elster actually killed Madeleine, but he was certainly responsible for Scottie's being the one to watch over her. And Robin Wood has suggested that we already suspect him subconsciously: "The image [in Scottie's dream of Elster standing with Carlotta Valdes at the inquest] also intensifies the sense of the possibility of fraud, because of its incongruity: Gavin Elster and the supernatural simply do not belong in the same world (or in the same shot), and the image tells us--retrospectively at least--that we should never have trusted his story." Wood, Films, 89.

37 Modleski, 96.
finally lights upon Judy, the spectator is prepared for her to be yet another stranger upon whom Scottie’s obsessive desires to see Madeleine have fastened.

The fact that she really is Madeleine, and that that fact is revealed in a long sequence from her perspective just after Scottie arranges to have dinner with her, sets up a crucial balance of identification for the second part of the film. Judy’s flashback begins as a faithful repetition of what we had seen through Scottie—and then continues on, revealing Elster’s murder of his wife, which Scottie could not see. In parallel, our identification, which had hitherto been almost exclusively with Scottie, is extended to include Judy. At the moment when our insecurity about our reliance on the male protagonist’s accuracy of vision is greatest, her revelation provides us with a person with a more accurate vision to which to attach our gaze.

This surprise twist, revealing the punch-line, as it were, halfway through the joke, has been commented upon extensively. Hitchcock remarked that "[e]veryone around me was against this change" from the original Boileau-Narcejac novel;38 Wood calls it "one of the cinema’s most daring ‘alienation effects.’"39 Indeed, it certainly alienates the viewer from his notions of the story that preceded it, but in another sense it actually restores our ability to accept Scottie’s gaze. If we had continued to believe that Judy was just a woman picked at random from the streets of San Francisco, we would have continued to doubt Scottie’s sanity. His ability to miraculously produce the true Madeleine out of what seemed to be a city full of impostors restores part of our trust in him. In a sense, though Judy’s vision is more complete, Scottie’s too has been vindicated.

The spectator’s view has thus been split between the male and the female protagonists. The importance of what Modleski calls the "‘painful split’ in identification
between Judy and Scottie" 

is difficult to overemphasize. Before, we may have felt slightly uncomfortable with the relentlessness of Scottie's questioning of Madeleine, as in the redwood scene where she finally cries out, "Please don't ask me, please don't ask me!" Then, however, acquiescence in Scottie's voyeurism and his curiosity, as the terms of identification with Madeleine, led us to overlook our discomfort. With Judy, it is far more difficult to avoid the unease we feel at Scottie's behavior towards her, because we experience it, in part, from her perspective. Scottie's compulsive "making over" of Judy becomes extremely coercive, and we condemn it and sympathize with Judy.

Yet at the same time, we accept it from Scottie's vantage point. This coexistence of sympathies is the most disturbing element of the second part of the film, for it begins to make the spectator conscious of his own complicity in a gaze that he also experiences as coercive. The Pygmalionesque remaking of Judy is a perfect incarnation of the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism to which I keep returning. On the one hand, Scottie's powerful, controlling gaze is a strong manifestation of his voyeurism. Hitchcock, in his interview with Truffaut, notes the irony that "[c]inematically, all of Stewart's efforts to re-create the dead woman are shown in such a way that he seems to be trying to undress her, instead of the other way around." 

At the same time, he is trying to make her into a fetish object (Madeleine) that will mirror his own desire. Through our identification with Scottie, we are drawn into participating in this dynamic.

But Hitchcock is able to give a dimension to this dynamic that Tolstoy, for example, cannot. In Tolstoy, the woman who is the victim of these machinations is merely a shadowy presence haunting the margins of the story; it is essentially impossible to identify

40Modleski, 99.

41Truffaut, 186.

42The Pygmalion myth in its original form presents the voyeurism/fetishism cycle in an even starker form. The misogynist male sculptor creates the perfect woman-image (voyeurism), then animates that image, gives it subjectivity, through the force of his own desire (fetishism).
with her. In Vertigo, on the contrary, our direct identification with Judy opens up the possibility that the spectator can experience the violence of Scottie’s behavior more personally. In my schema of the etiology of voyeurism and fetishism, a necessary step for the initiation of the voyeurism/fetishism cycle is a declaration of the infant’s distance from his mother. In essence, Hitchcock prevents this initial declaration by fastening audience identification on both man and woman (and earlier by identifying Scottie with Madeleine). Without this distance, we are immersed in the cycle on both sides.

Judy resists both stages of the cycle, and we with her. She resists leaving her job, she objects to Scottie’s buying clothes for her, she resists having her hair redone. And importantly, in a point that is too often overlooked, she objects to the false/fetishistic identity that she is being made to assume. It is popular to note that she opposes Scottie’s attempts to transform her into Madeleine because she fears that he will discover the hoax. While this is true, it shows a failure to listen to the reason that she explicitly gives for her resistance. She wants to be loved for herself, not, as she says to Scottie, “because I remind you of [Her].” She wants to be loved as a woman, not as Woman, and ironically, it is because she already loves Scottie that she acquiesces in donning a fetishized appearance.

We thus suffer a divided conscience about Judy’s transformation. With Scottie, we experience relief at it; he seems normal for the first time as he relaxes in Judy’s apartment after her transformation is complete. With Judy, we distrust it, because it has meant suppressing our identity. With these doubts about Scottie’s gaze and our own, Vertigo enters its third and final phase.

This last part begins with a shot, in profile, of Scottie finally seeing Judy wearing Carlotta’s necklace. In this scene, the act of looking is brought to the foreground. The line that precedes it is Judy’s responding to Scottie’s query about how to work the necklace by asking him, “Can’t you see?” Finally, he does see, and there is a shot of him looking in the mirror, followed by a cut to what he sees (the necklace), then a cut to the portrait of
Carlotta, who is wearing the necklace, with the camera tracking back to show Madeleine gazing at the painting. The camera finally fades to the image of Scottie's face, still looking in the mirror. The necklace that he has seen reveals to him that Judy really was Madeleine, but it is a subtle irony that Scottie had never seen Madeleine wearing the necklace. Judy is now Madeleine, and Judy is also now Carlotta, a single fused image of ideal womanhood.

With Scottie's knowledge restored, Judy is in a precarious position, as later developments will confirm. As Mulvey glosses the ending, Scottie's sadism and curiosity finally win through and punish the woman now revealed as guilty. Scottie's sadism, in his dragging Judy to the top of the tower, verbally and physically manhandling her as he confronts her and reviles her with her guilt, is undeniable. And it is through this access of sadism that he is able to climb the tower and overcome his vertigo. In the first scene in Midge's apartment, Scottie vowed that he would "lick" his vertigo. In this scene, by finally climbing to the top of the phallus, he banishes the specter of his impotence that has haunted him in this film since his corset prevented him from balancing his cane upright in the second scene. "I made it," he tells Judy. "I made it!"

Ironically, his return to potency coincides with his admission that he has been bettered by another man, Gavin Elster. "He made you over, didn't he? He made you over just like I made you over. Only better. Not only the clothes and the hair, but the looks and the manner and the words," Scottie says in bitter anguish. Modleski notes about this scene that "Scottie must now confront the fact that, like a woman, he was manipulated and used by Gavin Elster, that his plot too had been scripted for him." Having been mastered by another man, Scottie exerts his control on a convenient woman, and in this way maintains his masculinity in the face of its being undermined.

To paraphrase Mulvey, his sadism wins through and his masculinity is restored. But

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43 Mulvey, 16.
44 Modleski, 98.
to see only his sadism is to miss a crucial part of the ending. Significantly, his shift away from sadism is marked by a loss of verbal mastery when his trail of logic leads him to Judy’s love for him. "Carlotta’s necklace. There was where you made your mistake, Judy. You shouldn’t keep souvenirs of a killing. You shouldn’t have been . . . you shouldn’t have been so sentimental." His voice breaks, though, after he says "you shouldn’t have been . . .", for he realizes that it was for his sake that she was so sentimental. "I loved you so, Madeleine," he mourns.

Clearly, Scottie’s journey to the top of the tower had been a cathartic rite for him, what he calls his "second chance." As he tells Judy in the drive to San Juan Bautista, there’s "one final thing I have to do, and then I’ll be free of the past." Even the texture of the dialogue, filled with repeated lines ("You were a very apt pupil, too, weren’t you? You were a very apt pupil! But why did you pick on me? Why me?"), reinforces the idea of the scene as therapeutic repetition of a trauma. The coercion of our alter ego as she is forced up the stairs is disturbing, but allowable—for a time.

Judy responds to Scottie’s "I loved you so, Madeleine:"
Scottie? I was safe when you found me. There was nothing that you could prove. When I saw you again, I, I couldn’t run away, I loved you so. I walked into danger, let you change me because I loved you, and I wanted you. Oh, Scottie, please. You love me now, will you keep me safe?

"It’s too late, it’s too late, there’s no bringing her back," Scottie laments. But to belie his words, they kiss, and the triumphant music starts in the background. Everything will be all right.

Indeed: for this one moment, against all odds, everything seems to be possible again. The power of this moment lies in the fact that in it Hitchcock has healed our "painful split" in identity. The perspectives of Scottie and Judy, hitherto out of kilter with one another, appear to fuse, to look together towards a possible future. They both love each other so; finally, alone at the top of the tower, it should come out right this time, unlike the first time. Then, Scottie said, "it had to happen, we’re in love, that’s all that counts;" now, it may come true.
But of course it cannot come true. Judy looks away during their embrace, at the nun who is revealed in the next shot. When two characters kiss, one expects their eyes to be closed, or for them to be looking at each other. In two previous scenes, looking away while kissing marked profound disjunctions in apparent unions. Scottie kissed the remade Judy, and looked away to find himself back at the livery stable. And at the original livery stable, Judy/Madeleine looked away from Scottie’s embrace towards the tower. Relayed by a series of looks backwards in the film’s time, Judy ends up looking at her own position. The nun is cast backwards in time, too, by Madeleine/Carlotta’s recollection of how the nuns would prevent her from playing in the livery stable.

What does Judy see that ruptures the possibility of her union with Scottie and that necessitates her death? As relayed by the other looks, she sees the tower, phallic emblem of patriarchy. And of course, she sees the nun, who has been interpreted in many ways. As a figure for the ghost of Madeleine, for example, she renders ironic Scottie’s statement that "it’s too late, there’s no bringing her back,” for bringing her back is what makes it too late. I read the nun as a universal Mother who is surrounded by, but in many ways exists apart from, patriarchy. In this way, she is a reminder of the "primal" mother who exists before the male child distorts her through voyeurism and fetishism.

In the time when Scottie’s (and our) gaze is distracted by the apparition of the mother, who recalls the simultaneous tenacity and vulnerability of the woman who lives on within Woman, Judy dies. Although both Scottie and Judy "loved so," they did not love each other so. Tragically parodying Freud’s dictum that "a man’s love and a woman’s are a phase apart psychologically," Judy loves Scottie, but Scottie loves Madeleine. Too late, too late, we whirl to see Judy, but she is gone.

45Raymond Durgnat, The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock, or the Plain Man’s Hitchcock (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1974), 288.

Crucially, and unlike the previous death at the tower, we neither see Judy falling, nor do we see her body. Hitchcock denies the access to the necrophilia he would later claim to be so central to Scottie’s desires. Teresa de Lauretis, in an otherwise excellent analysis of *Vertigo*, argues that this access is preserved:

> Actually, we do not see Judy’s body on the rooftop, but rather we imagine it, seeing Scottie’s look. More precisely, the film imagines it for us by calling up the visual memory of Madeleine’s body on the rooftop in an earlier shot from the same camera position now occupied by Scottie. . . . While Scottie is the image we spectators look at, and Judy is not in the image at all, what we see (envision and understand) is the object of the look: what we are seeing is not the woman but her narrative image. Scottie is the figure of narrative movement, his look and his desire define what is visible or can be seen; Judy/Madeleine is the figure of narrative closure, on whom look and desire and meaning converge and come to rest.47

Hitchcock has in many ways in fact obscured the visual recall of the previous death. The earlier camera position is not the same as the one now occupied by Scottie; in the earlier death, both Scottie and the camera looked down from a lower window rather than from the top of the tower. And there are several visual differences; Judy/Madeleine wears gray in the first death, while she wears black in the second. It is daytime for the first death, evening for the second. Both of these alterations hint that the second time is more somber; this time, the stakes are more real. When Judy dies, all is lost for Scottie. He gazes not so much at Judy’s dead body as at nothing, as he did during his illness. Then, he was “cured,” but this is the bitter result of that cure. For the spectator, Hitchcock has here, as earlier in the necklace scene, lifted the gaze into the forefront of the film. We are left gazing at the gaze, realizing the emptiness of its claims to control and to create, as Scottie lingers helplessly between the wind and the tolling bells.

*Vertigo* presents the male spectators with an intense series of frustrated desires. We are drawn into living with, loving with, and looking with the male gaze. Each time we are drawn in, we are whirled around and made to suffer. The experience of vertigo, the realization that some of our desires must not be met regardless of how much we long for

them, may very well be necessary for men's growth toward a nonpatriarchal society. But is it sufficient?
Chapter 4
Intertwined Ambivalences: Patriarchy and Men’s Fictions

In the previous two chapters, I have read two texts by men, Leo Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, as critiques of patriarchy. Each work presents a vision of patriarchy, and proceeds to follow its logic to the bitter end, revealing its disastrous consequences for both women and men. Where does this analysis lead, in terms of possibilities for personal and social change?

Let me frame this question in a slightly different manner. In *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Pozdnyshev explains to the narrator his state upon hearing Trukhachevski and his wife play the first movement of the Beethoven sonata from which the novella draws its name:

"Such things should only be played on certain important significant occasions, and then only when certain actions answering to such music are wanted; play it then and do what the music has moved you to. Otherwise an awakening of energy and feeling unsuited both to the time and the place, to which no outlet is given, cannot but act harmfully. At any rate that piece had a terrible effect on me: it was as if quite new feelings, new possibilities, of which I had till then been unaware, had been revealed to me. 'That's how it is: not at all as I used to think and live, but that way,' something seemed to say within me. What this new thing was that had been revealed to me I could not explain to myself, but the consciousness of this new condition was very joyous. All those same people, including my wife and him, appeared in a new light" (220).

This, then, is the "terrible effect" of music: it opens up "quite new feelings, new possibilities, of which I had till then been unaware." There is, however, a difficulty. The revelation is still unfortunately inchoate, "what this new thing was that had been revealed to me I could not explain to myself."

This episode is in many ways a microcosm of the novel as a whole. Certainly the novella and the sonata are linked by their common name, and by the fact that both are works of art. 48  Furthermore, the effect of Beethoven’s music on Pozdnyshev is linked

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textually to the transformation that Pozdnyshev has undergone as a result of coming to terms with his killing of his wife. "'We all, and you too unless you are a rare exception, hold those same views, just as I used to... since that 'episode' occurred my eyes have been opened and I have seen everything in quite a different light. Everything reversed, everything reversed!'" (168)

Thus linked to the novel itself and to Pozdnyshev's own transformation, I am led to link the sonata to the transformation the narrator undergoes as a result of hearing Pozdnyshev's story--"[Pozdnyshev] gave me his [hand] and smiled slightly, but so piteously that I felt ready to weep" (239). And, finally, I link the sonata to the changes the novel has effected in me. I too, held these same views, views of how I used to think and live. Listening to and taking seriously Pozdnyshev's story, or Scottie Ferguson's, has led me to experience new feelings, new possibilities, some sense of what patriarchy is and what society ought to be. But that sense remains vague. Pozdnyshev says that music without an immediate object "'is only agitating, and what ought to be done in that agitation is lacking'" (220). This, then, is the first difficulty these two men's texts present to me if I want to change. They are agitating aplenty; what ought to be done in that agitation is lacking.

This disturbance is not the only meaning that Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata has for Pozdnyshev. Later, while he is away at meetings, his suspicions of his wife's unfaithfulness are reawakened by a letter from her. He then thinks back to the music. "'Was it not clear that everything had happened between them that evening? Was it not evident already then that there was not only no barrier between them, but that they both, and she chiefly, felt a certain measure of shame after what had happened?'" (223) For Pozdnyshev, the music, "'that most exquisite voluptuousness of the senses'" (222), comes to represent the adulterous sexual union he imagines between Trukhachevski and his wife. What had earlier been linked to the possibility of seeing beyond what is to what ought to be now fuels Pozdnyshev's jealousy that ultimately leads him to kill his wife.
This is the second difficulty the two texts present me. Even the deepest expressions of criticism of patriarchy or of any kind of vision beyond it seem always to circle back to reassert, often virulently, the patterns of patriarchy. Pozdnyshev’s “new light” becomes his desire to murder a woman. Tania Modleski, speaking of Hitchcock’s films, suggests that “the misogyny and the sympathy [with women] actually entail one another.” In a similar vein, I would say that these male authors’ deepest expressions of resistance to patriarchy evoke their strongest commitments to it. These kinds of intertwined ambivalences, to an even greater degree than the lack of a vision of the future, haunt the potential for progress suggested by the works.

4.1 Empathy’s Potential and Problems

In the conclusion of my chapter on *The Kreutzer Sonata*, I answered the question of whether the novel led beyond the sterile repetition of fetishism and voyeurism with both a yes and a no. The yes, as I described earlier, indicates how Tolstoy points out the irresistible lethality of these cycles. This is an analytic sort of progress that shows how patriarchal perception is damaging to all concerned. It can at best be only a partial answer, for to move beyond voyeurism and fetishism requires synthetic thought. It requires a vision of another way of perceiving, of another kind of male sexuality.

Pozdnyshev himself represents only a limited possibility for development. He has changed in some ways, but those alterations took place before the time of the story. Pozdnyshev begins the novel on the train and ends it on the train, on a journey which is paradoxically static. Furthermore, the train ride of the story is linked to the train ride in his past, when he is on his way to kill his wife. This suggests that he is stuck in his past, doomed to relive and repeat it. Indeed, that is his role in the novel: he literally repeats to

49Modleski, 5.
the narrator the story of his past, and as he tells it, re-experiences the strong emotions that stem from his experience.

The narrator seems to be the most hopeful figure for progress. He changes during the course of the novel through the contact he establishes with Pozdnyshev. From the beginning, the narrator is portrayed as having empathy for him, which is reinforced throughout the story by Pozdnyshev’s occasional expressions of thanks to him for being such a good listener. Unlike Pozdnyshev, he is able eventually to get up and leave the train, just as I am able to put down the book at the end. If I, too, empathize with Pozdnyshev, perhaps I will be able to change by incorporating what he has learned through his bitter experience.

It is worth noting that the kind of male bonding achieved between the narrator and Pozdnyshev can be achieved only because the narrator is, to a certain extent, feminized. That the narrator has a feminine side is suggested early by his tacit criticism of the sexual double standard and later by Pozdnyshev’s asking him for forgiveness just as he had earlier asked his wife. More subtly, where the other characters are immediately and unambiguously assigned their genders when they are first introduced, the narrator’s sex remains unspecified for a substantial period. In fact, his sex is never established by direct reference. That he is male is, however, made clear in the way Pozdnyshev includes him in certain generalizations. Indeed, given Pozdnyshev’s residual revulsion toward women, his connection to the narrator would seem to depend on the fact that he is a man. But without the narrator’s sensitivity and submissiveness, for example, the conversation would not have been able to take place either.

That the narrator is not in a thoroughly masculine position is in itself no reason to be

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50 This is partly an artifact of the English translation. In the Russian, his gender is revealed by agreement of one of the past participles early in the first chapter, but even in Russian it remains ambiguous until after the sexes of all the other original passengers have been established. (My thanks to Professor Catherine Chvany for her assistance with the Russian.)
pessimistic about his hopefulness as a figure of change. It is plausible to imagine that a man who represents change for men in patriarchy would incorporate some traits that our culture has labeled feminine. What is disturbing is the way in which women are used in order to make possible the connection between the two men. When the narrator initially tries to converse with Pozdnyshev, the latter remains aloof, turning away from him to read or look out the window. Only after Pozdnyshev reveals the fact that he has killed his wife can the narrator engage him in conversation. The recounting of the story of how he murdered his wife serves two purposes in the narrative. First, it creates a bond between the two men, and second, it is presumably what allows the narrator to change his conception of patriarchy just as Pozdnyshev's own conception had changed. But this particular story as mediating between the two men poses some serious problems. How is one to move beyond fetishism, if the figure of the dead and narrativised body of Woman is necessary as the precondition for bonding? How is one to move beyond voyeurism, if watching a man sadistically murder his wife is the only way one can change? While the content of Pozdnyshev's tale decries the evil that patterns of patriarchal perception wreak on women and on men, the form of Tolstoy's tale mirrors those patterns of perception. In so doing, they catch me in a web of hypocrisy, for the only way I can condemn voyeurism and fetishism is through indulging in them myself.

This argument could be circumvented if one believed that a recapitulation of patriarchal patterns were a necessary beginning to extirpating them. At some level, this does seem true. Trapped, as we all are, in patriarchal society, our cultural legacy is initially all that is available to us. To move beyond this, one must work through that heritage, understand it, and use that knowledge to change those structures. There are even some hints that something of this ilk is happening in The Kreutzer Sonata. When Pozdnyshev is about to embark on his story, the narrator asks him if it is painful to talk about it. Pozdnyshev replies that in fact "it is painful for me to be silent" (167), suggesting that in reliving his trauma he hopes to be better able to live with it.
The similarity of this kind of "cure" to the kind Scottie Ferguson attempts in *Vertigo* makes me leery of it. Both "cures" that Scottie tries to effect by reliving the past end disastrously. Before he takes Madeleine to San Juan Bautista, he tells her that "I'm going to take you down there to that mission this afternoon, and when you see it, you'll remember when you saw it before and it'll finish your dream, it'll destroy it, I promise you." Instead, it destroys her. Similarly, Scottie's final return to the tower, which he hopes will set him "free of the past," has almost the opposite effect. He recreates the original trauma only too well, down to the last detail of the woman's death. That he has not been cured is indicated by his final blank stare, reminiscent of his earlier catatonia.

Thus, the empathy between men that is enacted in *The Kreutzer Sonata* recreates men's fetishistic/voyeuristic victimization of women, and it seems unlikely that the catharsis provided by this re-creation will produce any change. What of men's empathy for women? In the abstract, the possibility of this seems hopeful for undermining the objectifying processes of fetishism and voyeurism. Empathy, involving both the understanding of another person as similar to one's self and allowing enough space for her autonomy, would seem to preclude both the extreme swings of distance and of sameness that are involved in men's construction of women.

*Vertigo* suggests that one should be no more optimistic about the ameliorative effects of male-female empathy than one was about male-male empathy. There are two relevant instances of men trying to understand women that illustrate accompanying dangers. The first is Scottie's pursuit of Madeleine in the first half of the film. Here, his identification with, and concern for, her is undermined by the issue of possession. Scottie tries to understand Madeleine because he wants to possess her.

The second, more subtle, instance of this empathy is the male spectator's empathy for Judy in the second half of the film, which I described in some detail in the previous chapter. Evidently, this empathy is futile, too, in that it is unable to prevent Judy's death. Ironically,
one finds that the male spectator’s attachment to her is rendered impotent by the very return to potency of the male protagonist. Scottie’s need to recuperate his wounded pride puts Judy at risk. However, Scottie’s climb to the top of the tower, while intense, is alienating. What reunites the spectator with the characters is the moment of the kiss, where what proves to be impossible seems, for one brief instant, possible. In looking for the opportunity to change, this is certainly a pivotal moment. Why must the opportunities hinted at by the kiss be so brusquely foreclosed, and what does this closing off of opportunities mean?

At the literal level of the film, the kiss, and with it the hope for life, ends because Judy looks away and sees the nun. In a sense, the intervention of the nun works against patriarchy. The kiss signals the possibility of a seamless union of voyeurism and fetishism. Judy loves Scottie, despite the sadistic control he has exerted over her. In fact, in some way the control has been possible because of her love—"I walked into danger, let you change me because I loved you," cries Judy.

In another sense, though, the nun works for patriarchy. For example, she can be seen as doing Elster’s work for him. One critic has noted that at the end of the movie, the chance of Scottie’s bringing Elster to justice is slim, because Judy’s death removes his only witness!51 In a more serious vein, it is important that Judy’s desires as well as Scottie’s are frustrated by the nun’s appearance. Judy had turned the tables on Scottie’s earlier "possession" of Madeleine by her expression of her desire to own him. "I do have you now, don’t I?" she asks, just before they leave her hotel room for the mission. And if the alternative of Judy and Scottie living happily ever after serves the ends of patriarchy, it is clearly less gynephobic than that of Judy’s death.

The nun is an appropriate figure for both antipatriarchy and gynephobia because she is in an ambiguous position herself in relation to patriarchy. In some ways, she exists

51Durgnat, 288.
outside it, literally separated in a convent, and in resistance to its ways, refusing to take part in patriarchal heterosexuality. In others, she exists very much within it, governed by the laws of her male-dominated church and of God the Father. Like Beethoven’s music in *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the arrival of the nun in *Vertigo* is inextricably linked both to opposition of patriarchy, and to its support.

4.2 Male Privilege and Men’s Commitment to Patriarchal Perception

Both *Vertigo* and *The Kreutzer Sonata* are built upon contradictions of this sort. Both are at the same time feminist and gynephobic, antipatriarchal and propatriarchal. On closer inspection, however, these “contradictions” begin to seem less like contradictions than limitations in the extent to which the two works are capable of criticizing patriarchy. Both works reach a place where they bog down, a point away from which their analyses cannot progress. Furthermore, though each work takes a different route to this place, and enjoys different degrees of success in the process, I feel that the point at which each gets stuck is essentially the same.

Let me be more precise. Each of the two texts I have analyzed delineates a view of society which provides a rather clear indication that the society portrayed is patriarchal. Each demonstrates the mechanisms that constitute patriarchal perception, and does so relatively self-consciously. To differing extents (*Vertigo* far more than *The Kreutzer Sonata*), both works prod the male reader into considering his own complicity in the processes in which the protagonists are ensnared. And both texts are fairly clear in their understanding, and condemnation of, the results of patriarchy: dead women and anguished men.

In short, both works are excellent in analyzing the dynamics of men’s involvement in patriarchy and of its effects; both works powerfully develop knowledge and self-knowledge. But, as I asked at the conclusion of the previous chapter, is knowledge and
understanding sufficient to initiate change? Vertigo should puncture any sanguine views one might have about the power of understanding, for it contains a devastating critique of the efficacy, and even the possibility, of knowledge. These criticisms are expressed in a particularly effective way in the incident at the McKittrick Hotel. In many ways the incident seems a fluke, only tangentially related to anything that happens before or after. In it we are faced with an unsettling dilemma: though the spectator and Scottie have just seen Madeleine go into the house and open the shades on the second floor, the woman at the desk denies that she was ever in the house. Several pieces of evidence support her view: the key is on the hook, by the time the camera moves (with Scottie) upstairs, there is no sign that Madeleine was ever there, and her car is gone. The only point of the scene seems to be to sow doubts in Scottie's and our minds about whether we really have been watching a ghost; the relief Scottie and we feel when he drives back and sees the flowers on Madeleine's dashboard is palpable. The flowers seem to indicate that it was, in fact, all real. Nevertheless, the memory of this disturbing incident, which is never explained during the course of the film, should render suspicious Scottie's hopeful assertion when he is with Madeleine in the livery stable that "there's an answer to everything." There is not an answer to everything, as the McKittrick Hotel incident demonstrates. Besides, whether the "answer" that Scottie supplies is correct or not, the use to which he puts his knowledge goes awry. He twice tries to recreate the past, with Madeleine based on the false premise that she had previously been to the mission, and later with Judy based on the same premise which is now correct. In both cases, the woman, rather than the problem, is "destroyed" by Scottie's tactics. This belies the psychoanalytic notion that a deep understanding of the problem leads to its solution; even when knowledge is possible, it does not lead to improvement.

And this is precisely the nature of the dilemma that I have been trying to describe: the texts provide eloquent, even passionate, expressions of comprehension, but nothing
more. This is manifested in a simple way in that both texts are powerfully analytic, but neither one has any kind of synthetic thought, no vision of a way out. It is also demonstrated by the continual recapitulation of patriarchy that seems to live symbiotically with the authors' societal critique. With nothing beyond knowledge at hand, the two authors cannot move outside of patriarchy in any way, even in their criticism of it.

If there is this limitation in men's stance against patriarchy, then why is it there? It is reasonable, if not self-evident, to state that the persistence of men's commitment to patriarchy stems from men's privilege in patriarchy. Few would dispute that men are privileged in patriarchal society by virtue of their gender; many would take it as axiomatic, as a definition of what patriarchy means. In The Kreutzer Sonata, this privilege is exemplified by the right that Pozdnyshev feels he has to possess women, his right to control his wife's body "as if it were his own." In Vertigo, too, patriarchal privilege centers around ownership of women, for the "power and freedom" that Scottie seeks is, as Pop Liebl's story suggests, based on men's power to dispose of women as they will. Such power is realized concretely in the persona of Gavin Elster, who is above the law and who seems to have an almost unlimited ability to predict and manipulate the course of events.

Though the two texts I have discussed do not deny the fact that men are privileged in patriarchy, they certainly do call into question whether this privilege is something that men should desire. Is not the ultimate point of The Kreutzer Sonata that Pozdnyshev's desire to own his wife brings nothing but anguish? Is not the ultimate point of Vertigo that Scottie's desire to be like Elster destroys his only chance of happiness? Both works acknowledge that the harms patriarchal privilege inflicts on women are much more grievous than those it inflicts on men, for the women are killed, whereas the men are merely traumatized. Even so, "privilege" is envisioned as harmful to men, too.

Both fictions condemn patriarchal privilege, yet remain haunted by it, unable to shake its specter. Though there are numerous, crucial, and tenacious material aspects of male
privilege, the emphasis in my examination of men’s fictions has been on the hold patriarchy has exerted on the mechanisms of representation. One consequence of men’s privilege in patriarchy is that the perceptual apparatus operates in such a way as to anchor men’s commitment to that apparatus.

The perceptual mechanisms fostered by patriarchy are like a mirror that society holds up to events. To stop using this mirror, a man must first confront it. But a man who looks directly into that mirror sees his own likeness. As Scottie Ferguson climbs the tower for the last time, he is enraged because he has realized that he had been duped by Gavin Elster’s plan to murder his wife. His rage, then, should logically be directed at the absent perpetrator of the plot rather than at Judy, who was merely a "tool," as she puts it in her letter. Yet Scottie never condemns Elster directly, and all of his anger is directed at Judy. By this point, Scottie has realized that he has done exactly what Elster had done before him: "He made you over just like I made you over." To condemn Elster is to condemn himself.

To use the metaphor of the mirror, what Scottie sees when he confronts patriarchy’s mirror is himself, and the fascination of his own image makes breaking off his gaze difficult.

But, quite literally, Scottie sees more than himself when he looks in that mirror, for it has, in Virginia Woolf’s famous phrase, "the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size."52 As Scottie recognizes the essential similarity between himself and Elster, he maintains their distinction as well. Elster did what Scottie did, "Only better." Thus, Scottie sees reflected back to him not only a recognizable self-image, but an amplified one, a man with more power and more freedom than he has. This makes the fascination of the gaze even more difficult to break, as indicated by the strength of Scottie’s compulsion to emulate Elster. Even after Scottie has conquered his vertigo, he must still climb higher, to put himself literally in the same space Elster occupied as he threw his wife off the top of the tower.

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The pattern, when a man uses the mirror of patriarchal perception to look at women, is much the same, with one major caveat. When man looks at himself, he sees an essentially faithful image. Scottie and Elster are both, after all, rich, free, and powerful men. But that which is reflected when a woman stands in front of this mirror is not her likeness, but a generic cultural image, what I have been calling Woman. In the scene in Vertigo where Scottie realizes that Judy had originally played Madeleine in Elster's plot, Judy emerges from a bathroom, now completely made up as Madeleine. Scottie invites her to embrace him, but she refuses, turning to the mirror and declaring, "Too late, I've got my face on." What she sees in the mirror is not revealed directly by the camera, whose gaze is aligned with Scottie's, but from her words, it is likely that what she sees is not herself but her "face." In fact, Judy looking into the mirror would see Madeleine, not herself.

This is precisely what Scottie also sees. In the necklace sequence that I analyzed earlier, his surface action is to look at Judy in the mirror. But the chain of associations delineated by the camera demonstrates that what Scottie sees is not Judy, but rather a fusion of Judy, Madeleine, and Carlotta. He sees not a specific woman, but a composite ideal, "part real, part invented."

Both Judy and Scottie look in the mirror and see not a woman but Woman, but there is one crucial difference. Judy can tell which is the reflection and which is the person, as indicated by her "face" remark; Scottie cannot make this distinction. From Madeleine's first appearance at Ernie's where she walks past a full-length mirror, to the shot of her in the flower store where all that is shown is her mirror image, to the scene at Ransohoff's where Judy is cornered by a mirror, Hitchcock has played with images that suggest that men cannot tell the difference between a woman and her reflection. This notion is borne out in the necklace scene, where what Scottie sees in the mirror prompts him to collapse the distinction between Judy and Madeleine. Judy's chiding "Can't you see?" reveals a deep flaw in Scottie's perception. Without the mirror, Scottie cannot see at all, and therefore he
is prone to blur the distinction between the woman (Judy) and her male-constructed image (Madeleine).

But if the distinction between image and reality is often blurred, if figments of men's imaginations can often seem deceptively real, the line between the two is never entirely erased. Scottie can tell the difference between Judy and Madeleine. Indeed, as Robin Wood has suggested, in some ways Judy's "unforgivable crime" is that "she isn't really Madeleine."53 His distinction again serves merely to reinforce the fascination the mirror exerts upon the male gaze. Scottie desperately wants Judy to be Madeleine; he would rather see with the help of the mirror than with his own eyes. Just as a man is attracted to the image of himself as the free and powerful Gavin Elster, so too is he attracted to the image of a Madeleine Elster, constructed to be possessed by him.

4.3 The Attraction of Authorship

The apparatus behind this mirror of patriarchal perception consists in part of the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism that have been at issue throughout my discussion. In the second and third chapters, I described the critiques of these mechanisms that are developed in Tolstoy's novella and Hitchcock's film. What I have argued in this final chapter is that the attraction of the mirror for men is also very strong. Thus, the authors participate in voyeurism and fetishism at the same time as they demonstrate its harmful effects.

This continued commitment to patriarchy is illustrated well by the two authors' lives. Both The Kreutzer Sonata and Vertigo have striking autobiographical parallels. Tolstoy's obsession with the "problem" of sensual love is well-known, and there are extensive parallels between Pozdnyshev's description of his troubles with his wife and Tolstoy's

feelings about his marriage to his own wife, Sofia. Furthermore, several years after he had written *The Kreutzer Sonata*, Sofia Tolstoy became close friends with a pianist, Sergey Ivanovich Taneyev. Tolstoy’s thoughts on this friendship had much in common with those his character Pozdnyshev had described toward his wife’s supposed adultery. Tolstoy was alternately suspicious of his wife and convinced of her loyalty.

Hitchcock’s case is even more striking. The director describes in his interviews with Truffaut how “Miss Novak arrived on the set with all sorts of preconceived notions that I couldn’t possibly go along with.” This interaction gives one more layer to the Carlotta-Madeleine-Judy sequence, for underneath Judy is yet another woman, Kim Novak, who is made up against her will into a figure established by yet another powerful man, Alfred Hitchcock. The drama of *Vertigo* indeed can be seen as a drama that Hitchcock enacted with many of his lead actresses, and particularly painfully years later with Tippi Hedren, who starred in *The Birds* and *Marnie*. He told her what to wear, what to eat, and even had some crew members follow her for a while. “It was really very clear, wasn’t it?” Samuel Taylor remarked years later. “He was doing *Vertigo* with Tippi Hedren.”

One need not look to autobiographical details to find signs of the authors’ ambivalence about the opposition to patriarchy inscribed in their texts. In each case, the stance that the author takes in relation to his text indicates a partial disavowal of the subversive nature of what it exposes. Tolstoy’s distancing of himself from his text is twofold. First, he inserts an additional layer of narration to mask his identification with the radical ideas Pozdnyshev espouses. Second, he makes Pozdnyshev a fairly erratic, almost

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56Truffaut, 188.

insane, character. One critic writes that where the narrator observes that Pozdnyshev prizes certain ideas highly, "[s]o in a sense did Tolstoy, but he bestows the overt absurdity of priding himself on such a conviction upon the unfortunate Pozdnyshev." In a sense, Tolstoy believes what Pozdnyshev says, but it is as if he cannot quite believe that he believes it. He thus puts his words in the mouth of a character whom the reader must take seriously yet who is unorthodox enough to be held at a distance.

Hitchcock's positioning of himself is somewhat more subtle. To understand it, one must first look at the Gavin Elster character. Elster is the all-powerful author figure of the film. He writes the script that governs the others' actions, and as Judy puts it, "he made no mistakes." Perfection, of course, need not be attractive, and Elster is hardly presented as a sympathetic character. Thus, since the spectator dislikes Elster, he may disapprove of Scottie's persistence in imitating Elster, whether in his remaking of Judy as Madeleine or in his ruthless climb to the top of the tower.

But lest the spectator too easily condemn Scottie's authorial ambitions from the safe vantage point of his seat, Hitchcock dangles one last piece of bait in front of his eyes. Scottie and Judy kiss, and we too are caught, wishing that Judy remain in Scottie's possession. This moment of complicit vicarious authorship is ruptured by the emergence of the real author, for Judy's apparently unmotivated death is one of Hitchcock's most heavy-handed moments as a director. On his way up the tower, Scottie had grappled with the galling admission that Elster was able to make Judy into Madeleine far better than he was, in short that Elster was a more effective author than he. In the final moments of the film, Hitchcock reenacts this comparison directly between the real viewers (us) and the real author (him). When he shatters the momentary illusion of our ability to fit reality to desire, he pushes us into renouncing our claims to a controlling authorship. The spectator is aligned with Scottie, staring brokenly into nothingness. But paradoxically, Hitchcock's role in this comparison firmly aligns himself with Elster, the patriarchal author.

58 Bayley, 284.
In the final analysis, then, both authors firmly accept the need to kill women in order to tell a story. That we should come back full circle to this simple statement of misogyny is not too surprising. In the first chapter I suggested that authorship offers the lure of being able to mesh fetishism and voyeurism. Since both voyeurism and fetishism carry many rewards for men, this lure carries enormous weight. In addition to the attraction that male privilege gives patriarchal perception, there is an additional difficulty confronting any attempts to break away from its hegemony. Like Scottie, male authors have trouble seeing without the aid of patriarchy’s mirror, and to find, or create, a new perceptual scheme is by no means easy.

With little reason to make a difficult change, and much reason not to, it is small wonder that Leo Tolstoy and Alfred Hitchcock become enmeshed in ambivalent, contradictory tangles in their relation to the web of the representational apparatus. Indeed, the attraction of the male gaze seems to present such great obstacles to any kind of progress that one may wonder if progress in men’s fictions is worth working for at all. Men’s fictions are not, after all, the only writings available to us. If one believes that the commitment to patriarchy exhibited by men’s fictions stems from male privilege, then it is reasonable to look to women’s fictions for non-patriarchal modes of perception.

Women’s writings, fictional and nonfictional, have in fact offered deep insights into patriarchy, gender, and their impact on women and men, and will doubtless continue to do so. Yet this does not resolve the issue of men’s fictions. Representational practices exist in a dialectical relation to other social practices; they are both shaped by these practices and in turn help to shape them. If one uses men’s fictions as a barometer of men’s psyches, then to say that men’s fictions can never alter the extent of their commitment to patriarchy is to say that men can never alter their commitment to patriarchy. Speaking as a man, I find that prognosis too pessimistic for me to accept. Conversely, if one considers fictions as agents of change, then as long as men and women continue to read them, to say that they cannot
progress is to say that they will continue to anchor, or at least not unsettle, patriarchy in the minds of their readers. And while I am pessimistic enough to believe that prognosis, it is still a state of affairs one would wish to better.

While the quagmires that ensnare men’s fictions in their escape from patriarchal representational practices are undeniably tenacious, I nonetheless believe men can eventually disentangle themselves from them. Even if Hitchcock’s and Tolstoy’s excursions do eventually circle back to gynephobia, it is wrong to neglect the path that they take to get there. And it is not that the two texts have gone nowhere in their journeys. Like Pozdnyashkev and his train ride, which repeats itself yet moves in the process, there is both motion and continuity in the two works. True to the visual metaphor of Vertigo, the texts describe not a circle but a spiral. It is perhaps the greatest testament to the entrenchment of patriarchal modes of perception that The Kreutzer Sonata and Vertigo, despite their separation in time and culture, take their readers through the same turn of the spiral. Both works expose the mechanisms of patriarchal perception to critical scrutiny, both clearly demonstrate the disastrous ends to which voyeurism and fetishism inevitably proceed, yet both remain fascinated by these mechanisms, unable to abjure them. Both works move their readers, but they move their readers to the same place, where men still stand today, transfixed. The forces that anchor men to patriarchy are formidable, but the nucleus of discontent that Tolstoy and Hitchcock leave behind them is a potentially powerful sign of hope. With time men may begin to take up this legacy and move themselves with it, through the next turn of the spiral.
Bibliography


