

Presenter: Tatiana Kuzmic

Title: Reading *Anna Karenina* with Social Psychologists (A Case for Moving Away from Freud)

Abstract:

This paper grows out of a Tolstoy faculty book club I lead for two years at the University of Texas at Austin and an undergraduate course that resulted from it. The book club consisted primarily of social psychologists, one of which co-taught a course on Psychology and the Russian Novel with me for two semesters. These psychologists' great admiration for Tolstoy – how does he describe [such and such] a phenomenon so well?! – provided me with new insights into his novels and I will extrapolate on those here. It is unfortunate that the disciplines of Literature and Psychology have interacted almost exclusively through the figure of Freud, who enjoys no respect in today's Psychology departments, when contemporary research provides far less reductive means of approaching fiction.

The paper will not merely assign contemporary scientific terms to universal human experiences described in *Anna Karenina*, but will engage in close readings to demonstrate how Tolstoy's prose, in turn, fleshes out those phenomena. Anna's first meeting with Vronsky will be analyzed for the attention Tolstoy pays to their facial features, especially their smiles, from the perspective of Paul Ekman's research on microfacial muscles; Levin's mowing with the peasants, which results in his feeling of oneness with the universe, will be analyzed from the perspective of Mihály Csikszentmihály's concept of "flow;" Vronsky's disappointing experience with Anna in Italy will be analyzed from the perspective of research on "affective forecasting," that is, how people typically overestimate both the intensity and the duration of anticipated joy or suffering; and finally, Anna's musings on her fateful trip toward the train station at the end of the novel and Levin's conversion experience that concludes the Epilogue will be compared by means of "ruminantion" and "meaning-making," which have been identified as two opposite ways of dealing with traumatic experiences.