

Title: Tolstoy and (D)Evolution
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In the 1892 bestseller *Degeneration*, Max Nordau claimed that the recent “extraordinary prominence” that “degenerates in literature, music, and painting have in recent years come into” warrants a careful examination because “[b]ooks and works of art exercise a powerful suggestion on the masses. It is from these productions that an age derives its ideals of morality and beauty” (Nordau, vii-viii). Among the writers, playwrights, and composers who were considered to be especially “degenerate” were Henrik Ibsen, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Emile Zola, and, surprisingly, Tolstoy, whose fiction nowadays is rarely thought of as such.

Nordau’s judgment is based on Tolstoy’s “post-conversion” writings from the early 1880s and onwards. Becoming increasingly more vocal in his criticism of contemporary society, Tolstoy published his views in pamphlets on topics such as nonviolence, slavery, and the nature of art. Derived from his interpretation of the Gospels, Tolstoy’s pamphlets espoused abstinence, vegetarianism, and pacifism, collectively known as Tolstoyism.

Tolstoy’s views were in part derived from his belief in the fallacy of progress and his skepticism toward technology as a civilizing agent for man. In *Anna Karenina*, he presents a belief that technological advances had only led to a greater pursuit of material and carnal desires that only accentuated man’s animal nature. His criticisms of technology were aimed at countering the controversial narrative articulated by Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). My paper will first provide a brief history of the reception of Darwinism in Russia. I will then discuss how *Anna Karenina* provides a counter-narrative to Darwin’s biological explanation of the evolution of man by focusing on the treatment of human beings as animals in that novel as well as *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

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