

“live and think of other things beside his wife” (p. 254). He justifies his view by labeling her a depraved woman, and refuses to recognize that his denial of warmth and love played a big part in her rejection of him. As Karenin dismisses Anna, so Tolstoy pronounces judgment upon the bureaucrat, and finds him wanting. The image of the toothache appears here as Karenin roots his wife out of his life and thoughts, just as an aching tooth is drawn out of a man’s body. “After terrible pain and a sensation as if something enormous, bigger than his whole head, were being pulled out of his jaw, he feels, scarcely believing in his happiness that the thing which has so long been poisoning his life and engrossing his attention no longer exists” (p. 254). Tolstoy obviously subscribes to an “organismic” view of marriage and of the family. The destruction of bonds between husband and wife indicates the collapse of the family unit and the disintegration of society.

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Note

¹ *Anna Karenina* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 106.

To the Editor:

In his engaging article “The Telltale Teeth: Psychodontia to Sociodontia,” Theodore Ziolkowski dates a change in the portrayal of teeth as objects of beauty: “In literature the inevitable inversion of the image took place among many writers at the beginning of our century” (p. 14). Three hundred years earlier another inversion of tooth imagery, which Ziolkowski fails to note, took place in English poetry. Partly in response to the dried up energies of Petrarchan imagery, and its consequent petrification, poets in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries produced a spate of anti-Petrarchan poems and images. “Deformed mistress” poems and “paradoxical encomia” were important in this reaction and often utilized unflattering pictures of teeth.

While, as Ziolkowski states, “teeth do not belong to the standard canon of attributes—such as hair, eyes, cheeks, lips—normally cited in classical and medieval literature” (p. 12), in Italy, by the end of the fifteenth century, teeth (pearly teeth in particular) began to appear as part of the expected beauty of a Petrarchan lady. In the sixteenth century, it was not out of place for Firenzuola, in his discussions of female beauty, to comment on the size (not too small), shape, spacing, and color (ivory) of a beautiful woman’s teeth. Among the first English reactions to this conventionalized picture was Sidney’s scrambling of attributes in an influential description of Mopsa (*Arcadia*, 1590). Thus, the pearls expected in Mopsa’s mouth turn up elsewhere: “Her twinkling eies bedeckt with pearls, her lips as

Saphir blew.” John Lyly, with a keen sense of effect, also used this kind of scrambling. In *Endymion*, Sir Tophas exults over the possibilities in loving old matrons: “What a sight would it be to embrace one whose haire were as orient as the pearle! whose teeth shall be so pure a watchet, that they shall staine the truest turkis!” Not content to be a mere detractor, Lyly, in the same play, became an extractor: “How harmlesse she is being toothlesse!”

The most obvious technique for depicting unflattering teeth was simple inversion; instead of pearl or ivory, teeth became black. William Drummond of Hawthornden, in “Thirsis in Dispraise of Beautie,” thus brought Tasso to English audiences: “Eyes set by Chance, and white, Teeth blacke and thinne.” Donne, in “The Anagram,” stressed the paradoxical nature of black teeth: “Though they be Ivory, yet her teeth be jeat.” The image of teeth “black as jet” was quite popular, and occurred in poems by Sidney, Donne, King, and Herrick, who contemplated, in “No Lothsomenesse in Love,” loving one who has “grinders black as jet.” Perhaps because teeth are small things, Herrick paid close attention to them; in “Upon Some Women” teeth became yet another area where women can be false: “False in breast, teeth, haire, and eyes.” Swift, of course, offered a much expanded version of this falsity in “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed.” Characteristically, Herrick also depicted beautiful teeth, as in “A Short Hymne to *Venus*,” in which teeth and lips are the only attributes mentioned:

*GOddesse, I do love a Girle
Rubie-lipt, and tooth’d with Pearl:*

A mid-century plea for similarly comely teeth came in the distinctly minor voice of Edmund Prestwich, who recommended, in “How to Chuse a Mistress,” “teeth even and white.”¹ But the teeth of many mistresses were not even or white, and were often half gone.

For instance, in “The Deformed Mistress,” by Suckling, teeth play a prominent, if conditional and half-negative, role:

Provided next that half her Teeth be out,
I do not care much if her pretty Snout
Meet with her furrow’d Chin, and both together
Hem in her Lips, as dry as good whit-leather:

Poets less well known than Suckling often matched, with less polish, his jauntily ugly descriptions. “A Poeticall Poem, by *Mr. Stephen Locket* to *Mistrisse Bess Sarney*,” from *Wit Restor’d* (1658), offered a strong picture of dental spacing and color:

Thy teeth more comely than two dirty rakes are,
Thy breath is stronger than a dozen jakes are.

Writers even more anonymous than Mr. Stephen Locket added, through ballads and conspicuously “low” verse, some of the most memorable tooth

images of the period. "A Backside Compliment," from *The Academy of Compliments* (1650), praised an unhappy but colorful flaw with a delicate "*O felix caro!*":

Pure saffron teeth—happy the meat
That such pretty millstones eat!

"In Praise of His Mistress's Beauty," from *Wit and Drollery, Joviall Poems* (1656), appealed to (or tried not to appeal to) several senses:

Her oven-mouth wide open stands,
And teeth like rotten peas.

Paradoxical encomia prospered into the eighteenth century, as did false teeth, black teeth, poorly spaced teeth, and breath foul to the point of rotting teeth from the gums.

In some ways the inversion of pearly, Petrarchan tooth imagery found in seventeenth-century English poetry is "psychodontic," for the impulse against Petrarchanism is partly an impulse against necessary ties of physical and moral beauty. Thus poets said that even though their mistresses are deformed (having, in this case, ugly or rotten teeth), they can attract lovers, make love, or be true. Of course teeth were not specifically the concern of these poets; they were concerned with imagery, humor, and ugliness. But their insistent and often striking inclusion of teeth shows the importance teeth had as an aspect of beauty, even if that importance became more evident with negative emphasis. That negative emphasis is nowhere more evident than in John Collop's "On Dentipicta; A Lady with Enamell'd Teeth, Black, White and Yellow. *F.W.*," perhaps the prize tooth poem of the seventeenth century, and surely all that need be said to show the century's delight in dental disorder:

The Wiseman Teeth call'd flocks of sheep:
Sure *Jacobs* speckled flocks here keep.
Where teeth are checker'd black and white,
Nay gilt too to enrich delight:
Her mouth ope, you at Chesse may play,
With teeth resembling night and day.
Each fondling reach will praise what's white:
Is there in Choak such strange delight?
Give me the mouth like th' Temple floor,
With speckled Marble paved o're.
Or oh more rich in gold thus set,
A row of pearl then one of jet.

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Note

¹ I owe this and other references to John M. Sullivan's unpublished paper "Age Cannot Wither Her": Some Versions of the Deformed Mistress."

To the Editor:

I should like to point out an error in the interesting essay on teeth by Theodore Ziolkowski. In footnote 1 he says, "In *War and Peace* Tolstoy implies that the French suffered such heavy losses in the battle of Borodino because Napoleon had a cold. And Voltaire once quipped that the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day occurred because Charles ix had an upset stomach."

Tolstoy's point was diametrically the opposite. In Book x (Maude trans.), Chapter xxviii, entitled "Napoleon's cold. Why the Battle had to be fought," is devoted to devastating the idea that Napoleon's cold, which he did in fact have on the day of the battle, had impaired his strategic and tactical genius, an idea that had been advanced by French apologists and/or historians. Tolstoy believed, and argued with his usual ferocity, not only that Napoleon's cold had nothing whatsoever to do with the outcome of Borodino but that Napoleon himself, ill or well, had nothing whatsoever to do with either choosing the site of the battle or dictating its outcome. From Tolstoy's point of view Napoleon could have been a corpse on 26 August (Old Style), 7 September (New Style), 1812, and the outcome of the battle would still have been the same. Tolstoy subjects "the cold" theory to a characteristic *reductio ad absurdum*:

If it had depended on Napoleon's will to fight or not to fight the battle of Borodino, and if this or that other arrangement depended on his will, then evidently a cold affecting the manifestation of his will might have saved Russia, and consequently the valet who omitted to bring Napoleon his waterproof boots on the twenty-fourth would have been the savior of Russia.

It is also *Tolstoy*, as Ziolkowski does not make clear but as my quotation above does, who cites Voltaire's jest about Charles ix's stomach and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day.

However, it is appropriate to bring in both Tolstoy and Voltaire in any discussion of teeth. Tolstoy had lost all of his by the age of thirty, and Voltaire also lost all of his although I am not sure at what age. In any event, when Boswell visited him at Ferney, the venerable sage, then 70, dictated that the conversation should be carried on in French rather than English for reasons of orthodonture:

On 24 December 1764 the conversation was in French, Voltaire explaining that one could not talk English without putting the tongue between the teeth and that he had lost his teeth.¹

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Note

¹ *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (New York: McGraw-Hill, n.d.), p. 3, n. 2.