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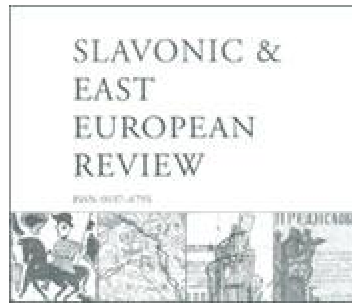

Anna Karenina
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Thus the author reveals that the whole play, apparently built on a gigantic lie, is in reality based on an accusation which is only too true.

In an epilogue to the trilogy, Sukhovo-Kobylin settles the question of the realism of his plays : " If, after all this, I were asked where it was that I saw such pictures, I must say, with my hand on my heart : Nowhere ! ! ! and everywhere ! As is the cry, so is the echo. . . ." He could not state the origin of his inspiration more clearly.

It is Sukhovo-Kobylin's great merit that he contributed to Russian drama a trilogy which, despite the influences which can be traced in it, was, in its finished form, entirely original. He dealt with an aspect of Russian life with which no other dramatist was familiar, for his knowledge of the organs of justice from the local police station to the very fount—the Senate. To the composition of his plays he brought an inimitable sense of the dramatic, a wit both sparkling and incisive, a breadth of conception and imagination which enabled him to crate types not only of his day and country but of the universal significance. In borrowing from the Western theatre of his time, he enriched the Russian stage with new variations on the treatment of subject-matter, which he employed to achieve an aim of his own, that of satirizing vice in such a manner that his satire would not evoke laughter but a shudder ; since, he declared, " Laughter in the face of vice is a lower potence, whereas a shudder is the highest form of moral feeling."

NINA BRODIANSKY.

ANNA KARENINA

ANNA KARENINA can claim a central place in the works of Tolstoy, not because it is greater than his other books, but because it displays Tolstoy both as an artist and as a thinker.

The variety of possible approaches to *Anna Karenina* is evident. It used to be treated by most critics as a psychological novel, and the elements of autobiography in it were also often discussed. Modern criticism is directed to its historical aspect as a picture of Russian society in the 'seventies. Recent publications in the U.S.S.R. have thrown new light on the genesis of the book, bringing out its original idea and inspiration, while the author's letters give one a deeper insight into the process of its creation.

Anna Karenina was written between 1873 and 1877.[1] The date of its conception can be traced back to 1868, when, at a society gathering in Tula, Tolstoy noticed a lady of about thirty, well built, erect and graceful, wearing a dress of black lace. " Who is she ? " he asked. " Marie Alexandrovna Hartnung, daughter of the poet Pushkin." Tolstoy was particularly impressed by her elegance, breeding and vitality, and admired the " arab curls " at the back of her neck. His son names other society women who may have suggested Anna's physical type, but none of them had these characteristic features of dress and coiffure. The Christian name of the heroine in the early drafts of the novel appears variously as Anastasia, Ana, Nana or Anna, the surname as Gagin, Pushkin and finally Karenin. In 1871 Tolstoy was studying Greek, and he took the word " karēnon " from the *Odyssey* to suggest the predominance of the " head " in the character of Anna's husband.[2]

The Countess's letter to her sister and her *Various Notes for Reference* of 24 February, 1870, record Tolstoy's wish to write of a society woman, unfaithful in marriage but more to be pitied than blamed. She says that several male

[1] The first part was issued separately in 1874. The novel came out in Katkov's periodical, *Russky Vestnik*, between 1875 and May, 1877. Owing to the disagreement over Tolstoy's attitude to the Slav problem, Part VIII—the Epilogue—was not accepted by the editor. The first full edition, including the Epilogue, was published at the press of T. Riss, Moscow, 1878.

[2] In *Literaturnoe Nasledstvo*, vols. 35/36 and 37/38, Academy of the U.S.S.R., 1939, see S. L. Tolstoy, *On the Reflection of Life in Anna Karenina* ; N. Gudzy, *The Unpublished Texts of Anna Karenina* ; G. Lukach, *Tolstoy and the development of Realism*. Also L. Myshekovskaya, *Leo Tolstoy, Work and Style*, Moscow, 1938.

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figures already living in his imagination now became clear and grouped themselves round the image of this woman.

In January, 1871, the mistress of a landowner near Tolstoy's estate threw herself, in a fit of jealousy, under a train. Like Anna, she sent a note just before her death; and the little railway station is also described in the story of Anna's end.[1] Again, Tolstoy had lately heard of certain divorce cases; and in the summer of 1872, while on his way with the family to the Samara estate, he met a married lady travelling with her consumptive lover. This young man was soon to die, and his last words found place in the novel.

It may be remembered that at this time Tolstoy was collecting material on Peter I. He was also carrying on his school, writing an A B C for peasant children and reading extensively on pedagogics, particularly in the summer of 1876, when he was thinking of what Karenin would read when he was left alone to bring up his son. In 1873 Tolstoy undertook relief work in the famine-stricken Samara villages; in addition to all this there was the bustle of a large family throbbing with life, constant visitors, and the joys and cares of a famous and prosperous landowner.

On 19 or 20 March, 1873, Tolstoy began to write his novel of contemporary society. The impulse was given by Pushkin's fragment, *The guests were arriving at the Villa*, which Tolstoy now re-read by chance.[2] Pushkin's story opens with a reception at which a young woman, ignoring all conventions, goes out on to the balcony to talk with the man she loves. Tolstoy admired this method of plunging the reader directly into the story. It is evident from the early drafts of *Anna Karenina*, now published, that it originally began not with the Oblonsky incident, but with the scene (now Part 2, Ch. 7) when Anna is at Betsy's and spends the whole time talking to Vronsky alone. Many other details have close parallels in the Pushkin fragment.

Thus, the beauty of Pushkin's daughter and his literary skill are both part of the inspiration of *Anna Karenina*. The initial plan included neither Levin nor Kitty. Anna alone was to be the centre of the novel (which was then conceived in four parts). Hence, the title and the epigraph.

Various opinions have been expressed as to the significance of the epigraph. Did the author really mean to show that Anna's sin provoked divine wrath and dreadful retribution? Can this be reconciled with the portrait of a woman more pitiable than guilty? Was it not rather a warning, and a plea that humanity should abstain from judgment which belongs to God alone? "To *me* belongeth vengeance and recompense" of Deut. xxxii. v. 35, can be interpreted in this way if one reads with it vv. 29 and 39. (In the English version the Epigraph is taken from Rom. xii. 19). A merciful approach to the sinful woman was not far from Tolstoy's thought when he so skilfully hinted at the theme of adultery by making Anna say at that fatal ball in Moscow—probably as a gentle rebuke to some gossip—"I would not have thrown the stone". According to Ivanov-Razumnik, Anna's fault consisted not so much in her passion for Vronsky as in her lack of pity for her husband, in her readiness to build her happiness on the suffering of another human being.[3] This interpretation would give a Dostoevskian note to the novel. Were it true, one might surmise that at the back of Tolstoy's mind was the Russian ideal of loyalty, Pushkin's Tatiana with her—

> "I love you. . . .
> But am another's, pledged; and I
> To him stay constant, till I die."[4]

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[1] P. Biriukov's *Biography of Tolstoy*, begun in 1901, mentioned some of these details —cf. 3rd edition, 3 vols., Berlin, 1921. See some important notes in *Anna Karenina*, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude, with a preface and notes by Aylmer Maude, Oxford Univ. Press, 1939.

[2] P. Sergeenko, *How Count Tolstoy lives and works*, Moscow, 2nd ed., 1903, gave inaccurate information on this point repeated by Biriukov, refuted now by S. L. Tolstoy and, more explicitly, by N. Gudzy.

[3] Ivanov-Razumnik, *Tolstoy. Velikie Iskaniya* ("The Great Search"), t. IV, 1912.

[4] Pushkin, *Evgeny Onegin*, translated by Oliver Elton.

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Anna's real fall seems to be when, after her recovery from her dangerous illness and after the sublime moment of Karenin's generosity and forgiveness, unable to remain on the heights she has attained, she breaks up her home and goes to her own and Vronsky's ruin. Whatever our speculations, Tolstoy's own attitude towards the breach of fidelity was severe. The Countess wrote in her Diary of March, 1877, that in *Anna Karenina* he loved the idea of the family just as in *War and Peace* he loved that of the people. Indeed, *Anna Karenina* may be viewed not as a story of passionate love but as an apology for the family.

Anna's disappointing home life was not sufficient to illustrate the idea of the Family. It takes Levin, Kitty and all her clan to make this point. They are more than a background, or a mere pretext for autobiographical digressions. The patriarchal, conservative and stable mode of life, dear to Tolstoy of this period, is there to nurture, to support, to heal and save Kitty and Levin. Family ties and childbirth, loving relatives, faithful retainers, peasants who had known one's ancestors—all these formed the sacred entity of the Family which stood, in Tolstoy's eyes, for the law of nature and the law of God. And even when, towards the end of the story, Levin, the happy family man, begins to look round for a beam from which to hang himself, he escapes through contact with the sound and simple righteousness of the peasants.

From the outset the reader is informed that Vronsky never knew family life. His father he does not remember, his mother he cannot respect. He has been stationed, rather than domiciled, in one town or another. He does not realize that his frequent calls compromise Kitty, or stop to think of the tragedy into which his passion will precipitate Anna. Anna herself has hardly more of a family background. Brought up by an aunt, she has been married off at a tender age to a middle-aged bureaucrat who was not even much in love with her at the time. She has adopted his house, his mode of life, his friends, all uncongenial to her. She had no one of her own except one charming and irresponsible brother. Thus the moral support of the family is denied to both lovers. The only creature to whom Anna is closely tied by morality or natural affection, her small son, is not present when she first meets Vronsky.

This estrangement from the family is followed by physical homelessness. Anna enters Betsy's frivolous set so as to meet Vronsky in other people's drawing-rooms; their furtive, agonising meetings take place in a stranger's garden; it is at the steeplechase that Anna discloses to her husband the true nature of her feeling for Vronsky. The free and happy privacy of a home is not for these two. Out of the respectable silence of Karenin's house Anna is thrown among interfering friends and foes or railway station crowds; she is followed by the trivial observations of strangers commenting on her looks or the value of her lace; her every step is accompanied by whispered scandal or murmured admiration. She will find quiet no more.

Tolstoy was a keener musician than is often supposed. There is one distinctive sound which he associates with the gamut of Anna's emotions. This menacing keynote recurs in the clanging of iron and the heavy noise of the train. Tearing and grinding, it enters Anna's dreams and wakes her. It reappears in the insistent nightmare which, in some mysterious way, Vronsky once shares. The peasant of her dream foretells her death in childbirth, but deeper down there lurks another horror, when he begins rattling something and repeating, as though speaking of iron: "Il faut le broyer, il faut le battre."

The railway becomes their true background. With incomparable skill, imperceptibly, casually, as if by a mere accident of the narrative, Tolstoy makes them meet for the first time at a railway station, where, deprived of the shelter of her home, Anna is taken unawares. The pleasure of seeing her brother and the acquaintance with Vronsky are oversnadowed by the ill omen of an accident; a railwayman is crushed by the train. On Anna's way homeward Vronsky follows her in the same train. Then come months of travelling abroad. The railway station symbolises their homeless love; it determines Anna's end. Vronsky too appears for the last time at a station, a volunteer to Serbia seeking

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death. He is worried by toothache (that toothache, an audacity of the author, saves Vronsky from becoming a conventional suffering hero), and as his eyes fall on the wheel of the tender, his toothache gives way to a sudden agony of mind as the two Annas blend in his inward vision : the one with the blood-stained body exposed to the sight of all, a revengeful expression on her face, and the one first met at the Moscow station, poetic, young, sparkling with life and joy.

It is difficult to speak of " artistic devices " in connection with Tolstoy who himself spoke of the organic growth of the work (mostly in his letters to A. Fet). Nevertheless, this symbolisation of a drama by the image of the railway belongs to art. So do a host of details. Tolstoy was not afraid of " harsh realism " when it was needed. He noted in his *Diary* that strong shades bring out a stronger light. Yet he could also convey ideas with the slightest touches. He made objects typical of their possessors. How can one forget the new upholsteries ordered by the propitiating Stiva for his wife's summer residence, where the wardrobes kept opening of themselves and there was no ironing-board ? " With Tolstoy we see," said Merezhkovsky : " with Dostoevsky we hear." He also drew attention to Tolstoy's " intuition of the body ". Anna's joyousness and vitality are all there in the obstinate curls on her neck. Her distinction is in the energetic movements of her small hands with chiselled fingers, off which her rings slip so easily. The light in the railway compartment falls on those hands, holding an English novel, while Anna's maid, by contrast, wears woollen gloves with a hole in one finger. Again, it is when Anna notices her husband's protruding ears that there is no more doubt that he has lost her. Even those fine qualities of character with which the conscientious author tries to endow Vronsky fade beside his handsome and somewhat fleshly appearance after a cold bath. There is an affinity between the sobbing Anna and the trembling broken race-horse Frou-Frou. Such telling strokes have been frequently noticed by the critics.

It may be of interest to consider Tolstoy's treatment of colours. He had gifts as a painter and may have had preferences. Purplish hues, for instance (" lilovoe " may imply several shades of lilac, petunia, heliotrope) seem to predominate, but this can hardly be meant as a reference to some passing fashion, for it appears in the novel over a period of many years. Not only women's frocks and the ribbons on a bonnet or a girl's hat but clouds in the sky and the hair of a newly-born foal, are all described as " lilovoe ".[1] More deliberately suggestive is the colour scheme of the two heroines at the ball. The girlish Kitty in pink with an " eloquent " black ribbon round her neck is contrasted with Anna, a mature beauty, framed in black velvet with Venetian lace, a string of pearls her only ornament and a few pansies (purple again) on her sash and among her natural curls. On the voyage, again, a final touch is added to Anna's elegance by the crimson leather of her travelling bag which brings out the paleness of her skin and her dark hair. Later, Anna's end is delayed for a few seconds when, before throwing herself under the cumbersome slow goods train, she detaches from her wrist a scarlet handbag. We see no blood—the bag is the only red that flashes before the mind's eye.

Tolstoy himself gave a clue to the manner in which he wrote this novel. None of his theoretical essays on art reveals his own creative life more than *Anna Karenina*. He worked unevenly, now all enthusiasm, now bored with his " trivial *Anna Karenina* ", dear to him nevertheless as " a ward who turned out to be a bad character " (as he wrote to his cousin Alexandra Andreevna). There was, first, an original " vision " which demanded to be expressed by an artist true to it. Wherever there was such a vision, " a child or a cook " could have done the writing. Part V, Chs. 9–13 (on the painter Mikhailov) are Tolstoy's testimony to his creative process. He was impatient with such words as " device " or " technique ". He spoke of " unveiling ", of taking off such elements of matter, shape or words as envelop and hide the true image. All that

[1] *Tolstoy and on Tolstoy, New Materials*, edited by N. Gusev, Moscow, 1927, etc. See Book 3.

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belonged to the surface had to be thus chipped away, by a bold stroke or gentle touch of the chisel. The artist alone knew his vision, and he alone was his own critic and judge. The visitors at the studio of the painter Mikhailov who fancied themselves connoisseurs never noticed the one figure in the background of his picture which he knew to be perfect. One creative mind could only be understood by another; so Tolstoy trusted the opinion of Fet and even, though he disliked him, of Turgenev.

A work of art is thus a reality in itself revealed to the artist. Its independent existence consists of a peculiar linking of events and characters (" stseplenie " spoken of in a letter to N. Strakhov on 25 April, 1876). Taken separately, thoughts and images are sterile; their very nature requires and evokes a certain context which makes of them the final, almost predestined expression of reality. Tolstoy mentioned in the same letter that Vronsky's attempt at suicide was not part of his plan, but when revising the chapter, he suddenly had to allow Vronsky to fire that shot. Later this event became organically necessary for the development of the action. This independent life of the protagonist well illustrates the depth of Tolstoy's artistic sincerity and his obedience to the hidden law of the creative image.

The details of daily life furnished material for the embodiment of that image. Mikhailov gave his tobacconist's nose to a biblical personage he was painting; and a spot of candle-fat dropped on his drawing helped him to catch the typical posture of the man he was sketching. A wealth of autobiographical detail and features of contemporary Russian life were naturally absorbed by Tolstoy; fitted into the framework of the novel, they added to its realism and veracity.

This, then, is a realistic picture of the 'seventies. Princess Shcherbatskaya is anxious about the society girls who go about unchaperoned, take it upon themselves to choose their own husbands, and keep running off to lectures of some kind. Some of these girls might have been the early " narodniki ", ready " to go among the people ". A new class seems to be emerging, typified by Levin's half-brother Professor Koznyshev no less than by the young doctor on Vronsky's estate of whom Anna says that " he is not quite a nihilist, but he eats with his knife ". These men of the intelligentsia—for whom Tolstoy did not care—talk of topical matters: economics, agrarian problems, the Samara famine, spiritualism and finally the Slavs (the Serbo-Turkish war broke out in June, 1876, and Russia declared war on Turkey in April, 1877). Their very vocabulary differs from that of the squires; a student of language might find it stimulating to follow up the various types of " class-dialect " as recorded and contrasted in the pages of this novel.

The aristocracy is presented in strictly defined layers. The higher bureaucratic *milieu* of Karenin and Countess Lydia, with their affairs of state, court receptions and administrative conflicts is in earnest, has a high sense of duty, and strives after a religious pattern of life. The official Church plays no part at all. Karenin's spiritual thirst leads him only to spiritualism or to some fashionable prophet, possibly a foreigner. From the life of Anna, too, the Church is conspicuously absent, and though she is nominally Orthodox, it never occurs to her to seek the advice of a priest or the solace of the Sacrament. Levin we see at least married in the Church; and Dolly, though she herself does not believe, takes her children to communion when she stays in the country.

Another set is that of the Princess Betsy and her friends. They are out for pleasure and money. Only a strong sense of convention keeps some of them from overstepping the subtle borderline between society and the *demi-monde*. So Betsy is the first to insist on the necessity for Anna to obtain a divorce and marry Vronsky. Betsy will receive young women followed by rich, elderly admirers, but cannot visit Anna while she is openly living with her lover. People below a certain degree of nobility do not exist for her—unless they reach a peak of moneyed recognition; then, be they Germans or Jews, Betsy and her like will go to their houses and discuss their hosts unashamedly afterwards. Within its still strong and decorous framework, this society is rotten. The Muscovite

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Stiva Oblonsky is related to everybody. He is drawn by his tastes to Betsy's set, whilst his desire for money and a sinecure necessitates his connection with Karenin, his brother-in-law. He represents that elegant, good-natured and carefree higher officialdom which looks upon its duty in terms of annual income and escape from the drudgery of family circle.

Country gentry, surrounded by their peasantry, are the class most in evidence. This fact merits closer study and can be mentioned here only in passing. The impoverished squires neglect their estates. A lady who spends years on the Riviera allows an agent to rule in her name and, "out of sheer innocence", suffers him to acquire a beautiful property for a nominal sum. A family of peasants working together grow prosperous; the lands of the gentry bring no profit. Some landowners still keep up the struggle. An intelligent and efficient landlord met by Levin works "like a peasant—out of a mysterious sense of obligation and attachment to the soil"; and he is sarcastic about Vronsky whose boredom and excess of wealth cause him to concern himself with rural elections, and develop his estate into a pattern of "agronomic industry". Levin is angry with the gentry for forsaking their proper field of action; but he is not averse from seeing the peasant "push out the idle men". More irkesome to him is the new type of enriched tradesman who is not interested in the land but buys it from the gentry and insists on felling for timber the age-old avenues of lime-trees. The whole of Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* is there in a nutshell. Levin himself is eager to solve the land problem. His contention is that the main factor is the personality of the peasant who works on the land. He does not reject the idea of property, but he is prepared to share profits with his peasant and is even spoken of by some as a communist. This attitude towards property marks a significant stage in Tolstoy's development. In this respect too *Anna Karenina* is a signpost to the road which its author was about to follow.

The intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage of Levin would require a treatment of its own; here one can only point out its autobiographical accuracy. Like Levin, Tolstoy lost his mother as an infant, and later idealised motherhood. After his brother's death he turned from the instinctive natural life to reflection and introspection. It is not for nothing that the only chapter of the novel which bears a title is that on *Death*. Levin's quest for the purpose of life is throughout that of Tolstoy himself. Both read philosophers, particularly Spinoza, Kant and Schopenhauer; both study treatises on land; then follows belief in the family, and at last, metaphysical despair. A ray of hope comes from contact with the traditional faith of the peasants. The vague assertion that man ought to live "for the sake of God and the soul" gives Levin such a relief that he is ready to accept the peasants' Christianity in bulk with all its dogmas, rites and superstitions. He deliberately closes his eyes to all that is unacceptable to his mind. New convictions do not change him at once into a perfect being. He makes no more than tentative attempts to apply them to life, to the right to property, to patriotism and the war, and he has a foreboding that one day he will have to reconsider this primitive system of beliefs.

There is a very close parallel between the Epilogue of *Anna Karenina* and the *Confession* (1879, revised 1881). A modern reader is surprised neither at the publication of this *Confession* nor at its contents, but rather at the explosion which it produced in Russian society. The year 1876, that of the Epilogue of *Anna Karenina*, was the real turning point when Tolstoy abandoned pure art in order to devote himself to the quest for the meaning of life.

NADEZHDA GORODETZKY.

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