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**Anna Karenina**  
by Leo Tolstoy



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# Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy

The modern American translation  
by Joel Carmichael

With an introduction by  
Malcolm Cowley



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ANNA KARENINA

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## COUNT LEO (LEV) NIKOLAYEVICH TOLSTOY

displayed an extraordinary duality of character in a life filled with deep contradictions. He was born to an aristocratic Russian family on September 9, 1828. His parents died when he was young, and he was raised by several female relatives. In 1844, he entered the University of Kazan, remaining there only three years. At the age of 23, Tolstoy joined the Russian Army and fought in the Crimean War. While still in the service, his first published story appeared, a largely autobiographical work, called *Childhood* (1852). Tolstoy returned to his estate in 1861 and established a school for peasant children there. In 1862, he married Sofia Behrs and gradually abandoned his involvement with the school. The next fifteen years he devoted to managing the estate, raising his and Sofia's large family, and writing his two major works, *War and Peace* (1865-67) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-77).

During the latter part of this fifteen year period, Tolstoy found himself growing increasingly disenchanted with the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the ensuing years, Tolstoy formulated for himself a new Christian ideal, the central creed of which involved nonresistance to evil; he also preached against the corrupt evil of the Russian state, of the need for ending all violence, and of the moral perfectibility of man. In practice, his asceticism required that he repudiate all vices, even forsaking physical contact with his own wife. In spite of these changes, he continued to write voluminously, primarily nonfiction, but also other works, such as the play *The Power of Darkness* (1886), the novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886), and the novels *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1891) and *Resurrection* (1899).

In 1910, still unable to reconcile the differences in the lives led by the aristocracy and the simpler existence he craved, Tolstoy left the estate. He soon fell ill and was found dead on a cot in a remote railway station. He was buried on his estate at Yasnaya Polyana.

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## INTRODUCTION

by Malcolm Cowley

**A**FTER finishing *War and Peace* in 1869, Tolstoy plunged into a series of violently unrelated activities. First he studied the German philosophers and rejected all but one, the most pessimistic; he announced that his summer had been "an endless ecstasy over Schopenhauer." But the ecstasy was soon forgotten, and he spent the winter of 1870 "busy with drama"—that is, busy reading the collected plays of Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe, Pushkin, and Gogol while dreaming about a comedy of his own. He also vaguely thought of starting a novel, which would be concerned—so he told Sonya his wife—with a married woman in high society who betrayed her husband. The author's problem, he said, "was to represent this woman as not guilty but merely pitiful."

In April he set out to gather material for a different sort of novel, a panorama of Russian life under Peter the Great. The project was laid aside in November, and he began to study Greek with daylong application. Reading Homer in the original, he became so excited that he decided "never again to write any such wordy trash as *War and Peace*." Then his health broke down from overwork or brooding—he was always subject to fits of depression—and he spent the summer of 1871 on the steppes of Samara Province, drinking kumys with the Tartar herdsmen. On his return to Yasnaya Polyana—"Clear Glade," the family estate—his interest turned to pedagogy and, with infinite pains, he wrote his *ABC Book*, designed as a complete curriculum for the sons of Russian peasants. He said in a letter to his older friend, Countess Alexandra Tolstoy, that he regarded the book as "the one important matter of my life."

For Tolstoy everything in turn was the one important mat-

ter. "Whatever I may do," he said in another letter to Alexandra, "I at least always feel convinced that forty centuries look down on me from the top of the Pyramids and that the world will perish if I ever stand still." He was almost never still in the four years after *War and Peace*, while the Russians were waiting for another novel from the man they already regarded as their greatest author. He made war on the pedagogues who had condemned his *ABC Book*. He bought another large estate—more than ten square miles—in Samara Province, east of the Volga. He reopened his school for peasant children at Yasnaya Polyana. Affronted by a local magistrate, he thought of emigrating to England. He went back to his novel about Peter the Great and amassed a huge store of material. After beginning the novel in twenty different fashions—by count of the manuscripts—he decided that he couldn't go on with it, since it would never fire his imagination. Would he have to stand still and would the world perish?

One evening in March, 1873, he found a volume of tales by Pushkin in the living room and began reading passages aloud to his wife. He was struck by the opening sentence of one tale: "The guests arrived at the country house." "That's the way for us to write," he exclaimed to Sonya. "Anyone else would start by describing the guests, the rooms, but he jumps straight into the action." Later that same evening, Tolstoy went to his study and started *Anna Karenina*.

The story of the adulterous woman had grown and ripened in his mind since he first thought of it in 1870. At first the writing went rapidly for Tolstoy, and in twelve months he accumulated a great pile of manuscript, besides a finished version of Part One. (There would be eight parts in all. Usually he rewrote each of them five or six times before sending it to the printer, and every new version was copied in a fair hand by Sonya.) It has always seemed to me that this first part, though not his greatest writing, is the absolute summit of Tolstoy's craftsmanship. He jumps straight into the action, and it never flags as he moves from one character or episode to another; the transitions are masterly. In almost pure narrative, with only a necessary minimum of description and exposition, he presents all his leading actors not only as striking individuals but also in their family groups, with children and retainers; he puts the plot in motion; he gives us three of his marvelous "set pieces," including the ball at which Kitty's heart is broken; he carries us from Moscow to Levin's

country estate and then to St. Petersburg, his other principal settings; and he prepares us for the distant end of the story. Part One is a model that other novelists have never ceased to imitate, though none has equaled it.

Tolstoy himself was not impressed, or pretended not to be. Instead of a superb craftsman, he wanted to be a teacher, a saint, a prophet; he was looking for a faith to protect him from the utter nihilism to which he reverted in moments of dejection. After Part One the novel went more slowly, with intervals when nothing was written. Partly that was because of illness and death in the family; in a little more than two years, Tolstoy lost three of his children, besides a niece and two beloved aunts. There was, however, a stronger reason for the delay. Rebelling at the task of being an artist, he went back to writing textbooks and propounding theories of teaching, he started a stud farm on his Samara estate, he made business trips to Moscow, and in fact he seized upon almost any excuse to stay away from his desk. It was not until 1875 that the novel began appearing in a new magazine, *The Russian Messenger*, where instalments continued for more than two years. The magazine refused to publish Part Eight, which expressed dangerous opinions about the Serbo-Turkish War, and Tolstoy had it printed at his own expense. Then he revised all the parts once more, and the book appeared as a whole in 1878, when the author was fifty years old. It was even more highly praised, if possible, than *War and Peace*. Dostoevsky ran about in Petersburg "waving his hands and calling Tolstoy 'the god of art.'" As for Tolstoy himself, he was in the midst of a religious crisis and could hardly bring himself to read the reviews. Two years later he wrote to an admirer, "Concerning *Anna Karenina*: I assure you that this abomination no longer exists for me, and I am only vexed because there are people for whom this sort of thing is necessary."

There are still people, including myself, for whom this sort of thing is necessary and who regard Tolstoy the artist as a more admirable figure than Tolstoy the prophet. For such people *Anna Karenina* is one of the very great novels of the nineteenth century. How does it stand in comparison with *War and Peace*? A little below it, I think, and here the measurement is justified, since these are works by the same author. But what about *The Brothers Karamazov* or *Great Expectations* or *Moby Dick* or *The Red and the Black*?



Given the separate natures of these works, the question is impossible to answer. Is a whale better than an elephant and for what, sperm oil or ivory? Of what value is a list of the Five Greatest or Ten Greatest if it makes no distinction between running, swimming, and flying creatures?

Judged in its own terms, *Anna Karenina* is not a perfect novel after Part One. There are dull passages, especially in Part Three, and Levin the hero—who of course is Tolstoy himself—expresses too many opinions about burning issues that were quenched long ago. A worse fault is Tolstoy's attitude toward the heroine. He keeps implying that Anna should be pitied not condemned, that judgment is in God's hands, but one suspects the novelist of confusing himself with the God of Moses. One also suspects him of hating Anna for being dark-haired and passionate, whereas Kitty is blonde, perhaps a little frigid, and therefore not to be feared. Yet the author loves Anna too, he brings her alive before flinging her under a train, and the great quality of the novel is this sense of vivid and abounding life, as revealed not only by her but by all the other characters. In its own genre, which is that of the domestic novel raised to an epic scale, *Anna Karenina* is unsurpassed.

In statistical terms, it is a book of 400,000 words divided into eight parts, each of which, except the last, is the length of a short novel. There are seven principal characters, all belonging to the Russian nobility, and more than 160 minor figures, including other nobles but also their servants, a few of their peasants, two artists, a merchant, and a setter bitch. Most of the characters are grouped either around Levin and Kitty, whose courtship is based on that of Tolstoy and his wife, or else around Anna, her husband, and her lover. The stories of these two groups, coming together at moments, but usually separate, move forward in a sort of counterpoint; thus, Anna commits suicide almost on the same day that Kitty is giving birth to her first child. All the events described are contemporary with the writing of the novel; apparently the story begins in the winter of 1874, and it ends in the summer of 1876, shortly after the outbreak of the Serbo-Turkish War.

But what are the differences between *Anna Karenina* and the new novels—especially those by younger writers—that are being admired today?

Perhaps I am asking the question too soon. At this point it might simply lead to the old picture of a giant standing

among pygmies or the even older contrast of a golden past with a drab present. That isn't at all what I wanted to suggest. I realize that the question is unfair if only for the reason that Tolstoy was a genius—in other words, something that seldom appears in any century—whereas the best of the younger writers have so far revealed nothing more than unusual talent. Genius is energy—mental energy first of all, but sometimes this is combined, as in Tolstoy's case, with physical, emotional, and sexual energy. Genius is vision, often involving the gift of finding patterns where others see nothing but a chance collection of objects. Genius is a memory for essential details. Genius is "the transcendent capacity for taking trouble," as Carlyle said; it is the capacity for brooding over a subject until it reveals its full potentialities; but that again is a form of energy. Genius is also a belief in oneself and the importance of one's mission, without which the energy is dissipated in hesitations and inner conflicts.

Tolstoy had all these forms of genius and he also had a social advantage that is not enjoyed, so far as I know, by any novelist of our own day. By birth he belonged to the small owning and governing class of Czarist Russia. He was not, it is true, one of its richer members. Besides the title of count—more proudly held in Russia than that of prince—his father had left him an estate of 5400 acres, with 350 serfs and their families grouped in four small villages around Yasnaya Polyana, but the estate yielded an income of only 5000 rubles a year. Though he couldn't live richly on that, even as a bachelor, the estate and the title gave him a feeling of assurance. Usually that feeling is bad for novelists. We are told that the novel is a middle-class form, and the fact is that no great novelist except Tolstoy has come from the true governing class of any country. Even Bulwer-Lytton, not a great novelist, was the *first* Baron Lytton; he earned his peerage by writing. Great novels about the aristocracy, like *Remembrance of Things Past*, are likely to be written by persons half in and half out of it, so that their perceptions are sharpened by their ambiguous position. The true aristocrat seldom becomes a novelist; he takes too much for granted.

That Tolstoy has been the one exception was owing partly to his genius, or energy, and partly to the terrible need he felt for being loved. Having lost his mother when he was two, he kept looking everywhere for affection. He burst into

tears of joy if he was petted, and tears of rage if anyone scolded him. This need for love—and also for admiration—gave him a lover's clairvoyance, and he was never indifferent to people; everyone was charged for him with positive or negative electricity. I think this continual watchfulness helps to explain his fictional talent. Once the talent had been displayed, his noble birth became an advantage to the writer; it enabled him to write from within the governing circle, as no other novelist could do, and it gave a feeling of centrality to his work, a sense of its existing close to the seats of power.

But none of this leads to the contrast I wanted to make. We shall have to put aside Tolstoy's noble birth—as he himself never put it aside even when he was dressing and working like a peasant—and we shall also have to put aside his genius, while not forgetting it. Besides the genius, however, he also had talent, in the sense of technical skill, self-critical ability, notions about how to present a character, and effectiveness in telling a story; on that level he can be compared quite fairly with recent writers. And so we return to the original question: What are the differences between *Anna Karenina* and the freshly written novels that are being admired today?

The first difference to strike me is that Tolstoy was a primary writer, whereas the new men are secondary; they write in a given fashion because they are following someone else or trying hard to be different from someone else. Tolstoy writes as if *Anna Karenina* were the first novel ever published. To be more accurate, he writes as if there are other novels and he has read them, but doesn't need to bother about them, being perfectly convinced that he can do better. He doesn't let other novelists frighten him away from any subject, no matter how grand or trivial it is or how frequently described in fiction. What he prefers, what he describes with the boldest color and deepest conviction, are the primary events of human life: a proposal, a wedding, a lingering death, a religious conversion, a suicide, and the birth of a first child. He also likes to describe social functions, including many that younger novelists would avoid as being commonplace: a ball, a dinner at a fashionable restaurant, a dinner party at home, an evening at a noblemen's club, and the rite of social excommunication as performed at the opera; always he finds details to give them

fresh life. There are still other set pieces in which he describes men's relation to animals or to growing crops, and in these he reveals a feeling of closeness to nature that is one more mark of the primary writer; nature has disappeared from many recent novels.

A second difference between *Anna Karenina* and most contemporary fiction is Tolstoy's method of presenting characters so as to give them substantiality. I can't think of a recent book that gives one such a sense of looking at people in the round, so that one can touch them on all sides and know them not merely as striking individuals but as members of a family and a social order. We are told how they spend their days and where their money comes from. If they have an opinion about social or intellectual problems of any sort, they don't hesitate to express it—sometimes at too great length, as in Levin's case, where we suspect that Tolstoy is using him as a mouthpiece, but usually with dramatic pertinence. The situation is different in recent novels, where characters are likely to be presented merely in relation to the story. We are told about their sex lives when the story deals with sex, as it usually does, and about their artistic lives when it deals with art, but we miss their connection with groups and institutions. If they are teachers, they don't teach; if they are merchants, they don't buy or sell; and if they are intellectuals, they don't talk about ideas, they don't even think but merely feel; and they sometimes read but we don't know what. Tolstoy was interested in everything, told everything, and made everything contribute to the roundedness of his people.

A third difference concerns the familiar matter of values. Tolstoy was writing for a traditional society in which there was no question who were "the right people"; therefore it was easy for him to surround poor Anna with glamor simply by mentioning some of her titled friends. He was also writing for a society that regarded some deeds as inherently sinful and believed all sins should be punished; therefore Anna's fate was accepted as the just outcome of a tragic situation. Today, with the weakening or confusion of moral codes, her story seems more pitiful than justly and inevitably tragic. We are inclined to sympathize with Anna more than Tolstoy intended, while suspecting the author of self-righteousness. Moreover, if the change in values has affected a nineteenth-century classic, it has created still greater problems for the novelists of our own time. How are they

going to make us feel that their characters are truly important persons when there is no fixed society against which to measure them? How are they going to construct a tragic situation without using the notion of guilt and punishment?

A last difference—or the last I shall mention—lies in the field of fictional technique. Here there have been real advances in the last eighty years, and most of our younger novelists have learned the Henry Jamesian method of reporting the action through the eyes of a single observer—or sometimes two or three observers, but always as few as possible. It is a most effective method, one that conceals the author and carries the reader directly into the action, but still it raises some awkward questions. How is the author going to convey a simple piece of information that his chosen observer would be unlikely to know or mention? How is he going to describe a social function at which more is happening than one man is likely to comprehend? Tolstoy is never bothered by problems of the sort. His general method is old-fashioned—that of the omniscient author—but he doesn't hesitate to change it as often as necessary, sometimes reporting a scene as if from a high balcony, sometimes entering one mind and sometimes another (even that of the setter bitch), sometimes shifting his point of view two or three times in a chapter, but without confusing the reader, and sometimes inventing a new method to meet a special situation: for example, the four chapters leading to Anna's suicide are perhaps the first prolonged use of interior monologue. He devotes ten or twelve chapters to the events of a single day, as witnessed by a single character, and then in a last short paragraph he gallops through a month or a season. In other words, he writes with perfect freedom, always adapting the method to the material, which he tries to make broadly human, and always conveying that sense of abundant life. For novelists of our own rather timid day, *Anna Karenina* might serve as an example of courage.

I am glad that the novel is being republished in Joel Carmichael's new translation. Besides being more direct than earlier translations and closer to current speech, it has the great advantage of simplifying the Russian names, so that the reader is no longer confused by all the -evnas and -oviches and can give his full attention to the story, as Tolstoy wanted us to do.




ANNA KARENINA

*"Vengeance is mine; I will repay,  
saith the Lord."*

*Romans 12:19*

**NOTE: On the name *Anna Karenina***

The form of the name, Karenina, does not agree with the system of nomenclature in this translation; it is used out of respect for the traditional title of this novel.



## PART · ONE

### I

**H**APPY families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Everything at the Oblonskys' was topsy-turvy. Oblonsky's wife had found out that he had been having an affair with the French governess who used to live with them, and told him she could no longer stay under the same roof with him. This was the third day things had been this way, and not only the married couple themselves, but the family and the whole household were painfully aware of it. Everyone in the house felt that there was no sense in their living together, and that people who had casually dropped into any inn would have more connection with each other than they, the Oblonsky family and household. Oblonsky's wife refused to leave her rooms; he himself hadn't been home for three days. The children were running around the house as though lost; the English governess had had a quarrel with the housekeeper and written to a friend of hers asking her to look out for a new job for her; the day before the cook had picked dinner-time to go out; the kitchen maid and coachman had given notice.

The third day after the quarrel Prince Stephen Arkadyevich Oblonsky—Stiva, as he was called in society—woke up at his usual time, that is, eight in the morning, not in his wife's bedroom but in his own study, on the leather-covered sofa. He twisted his plump, well-kept body on the springy sofa as though he wanted to plunge into a long sleep again; he hugged the pillow on the other side and pressed his cheek against it; then he suddenly jumped up, sat down on the sofa, and opened his eyes.



Now, what was that again? he thought, recalling a dream. What was it? Of course! Alabin was giving a dinner in Darmstadt, no, not in Darmstadt—somewhere in America. But that's where Darmstadt was, in America. So Alabin was giving a dinner, on glass tables—and the tables were singing "Il mio tesoro," though not "Il mio tesoro" but something better, and then there were some little decanters around and they were really women, he remembered.

Oblonsky's eyes sparkled merrily; he smiled to himself as he sat there thinking: Yes, it was great fun, all right. There were a lot of other good things too, but you can't put them into words, or catch hold of them at all when you're awake.

He noticed a streak of light that had slipped in at the side of one of the blinds; he cheerfully stretched his legs off the sofa and felt about with his feet for the bronze kid slippers his wife had embroidered for his last year's birthday present; out of a nine-year-old habit he stretched out his arm without getting up toward where his dressing gown hung in the bedroom. It was just then that he suddenly recalled why he wasn't sleeping in his wife's bedroom, but in his study; the smile vanished from his face and he frowned.

"Oh, oh, oh!" he groaned, remembering everything that had happened. And again all the details of the quarrel with his wife, his impossible position and, most painful of all, his own guilt sprang to his mind.

No, she'll never forgive me! She can't forgive me. And the most terrible thing about it is that it's all my own fault, I'm to blame, though I'm not really to blame either. That's the whole tragedy of it, he thought. "Oh dear, oh dear," he muttered in despair, recalling the most painful points of the quarrel.

What had been most disagreeable of all was the first moment when, on coming back cheerful and satisfied from the theater with a huge pear for his wife in his hand, he had not, to his surprise, found her in the drawing room or in his study, but finally saw her in her bedroom holding the unlucky note that had revealed everything.

There was his Dolly, whom he thought of as constantly harried and simple-mindedly bustling about, sitting motionless with the note in her hand, looking at him with an expression of horror, despair, and fury.

"What is this? This?" she asked, indicating the note.

As he remembered this Oblonsky was tormented, as often