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Anna Karenina

LEO TOLSTOY

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Introduction and notes by
E. B. GREENWOOD

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

The status of the book and the history of its compostion

There are good reasons for regarding *Anna Karenina*, rather than *War and Peace*, as the greatest novel ever written. *War and Peace* mixes history and fiction in a disconcerting way and, particularly in the second half, becomes overburdened with sometimes tendentious theorising and discussion on the author's part. *Anna Karenina* is a purer fiction. It is set in the author's own time and any tendentiousness is distributed dramatically among the characters. In an unsent letter to a fellow novelist in 1865 Tolstoy wrote:

> Problems of the zemstvo, literature and the emancipation of women etc. obtrude with you in a polemical manner, but these problems are not only not interesting in the world of art; they have no place there at all . . . The aims of art are incommensurate (as the mathematicians say) with social aims. The aim of an artist is not to solve a problem irrefutably, but to make people love life in all its countless inexhaustible manifestations. If I were to be

> told that I could write a novel whereby I might irrefutably establish what seemed to me the correct point of view on all social problems, I would not even devote two hours to such a novel; but if I were to be told that what I should write would be read in about twenty years time by those who are now children, and that they would laugh and cry over it and love life, I would devote all my life and all my energies to it.[1]

Anna Karenina is the product of such devotion and energies. Social problems of the day enter it, but they are subordinated to the loves and fates of the book's vivid characters.

When he finished *War and Peace* in 1869, Tolstoy was exhausted. The Russian critic Boris Eikhenbaum has called the gap between the completion of this great work and the start of *Anna Karenina* in 1873 'an unhappy period of doubts, struggle, and self-searching'.[2] Eikhenbaum sees Tolstoy's position on the Russian intellectual scene as curiously ill-defined. He was regarded as a reactionary by left-wing progressives and as a nihilist by conservatives. At first he withdrew from literature and became extremely depressed. His reading of the German philosopher and pessimist Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in August 1869 (just in time to influence the philosophic epilogue to *War and Peace*) may have confirmed him in his gloom. He resumed his interest in the education of the peasantry (the bulk of the Russian population) and wrote for his reading primer a story called 'A Prisoner in the Caucasus'. From spring 1870 to the winter of 1872–3 Tolstoy considered writing a historical novel about the times of Peter the Great, but he could not make the psychology of the characters of those distant times come alive. They were beyond living memory. He could not, in short, create characters who would absorb himself and his readers. Schopenhauer's rejection of history as a source of significant knowledge about the will in Section 54 of *The World as Will and Representation* would certainly have chimed in with Tolstoy's views on this matter. Schopenhauer writes: 'No man has lived in the past, and none will ever live in the future; the *present* alone is the form of all life . . . '[3] In the essay 'On History' in the supplementary volume to his work he adds: 'In truth, the essence of human life . . . exists complete in every present time, and therefore

1 *Tolstoy's Letters*, selected, edited and translated by R. F. Christian, University of London, the Athlone Press, London 1978, Vol. I, p. 197

2 Boris Eikhenbaum, *Tolstoi in the Seventies*, translated by Albert Kaspin, Ardis, Ann Arbor 1982, p. 28

requires only depth of comprehension in order to be exhaustively known.'[4] Only the events of the individual life have moral significance. In particular, 'Only the events of our *inner* life, in so far as they concern the *will*, have true reality . . . '[5] These are the kind of events which are prominent in *Anna Karenina*.

As early as 24 February 1870, however, an overview of a story of contemporary life very like that of Anna seems to have occurred to him. The entry in the Appendices to his wife Sonya's *Diaries* for that date runs:

> Yesterday afternoon he told me he had had the idea of writing about a married woman of noble birth who ruined herself. He said his purpose was to make this woman pitiful, not guilty, and he told me that no sooner had he imagined this character clearly than the men and the other characters he had thought up found their place in the story.[6]

Then on 4 January 1872 occurred the suicide of Anna Pirogova, the mistress of a local landowner and acquaintance of Tolstoy's, A. N. Bibikov. Jealous of the beautiful German governess with whom he had fallen in love, Anna Pirogova left Bibikov's house and went to a nearby railway station where she threw herself under a goods train. Sonya writes in the Appendices to her *Diaries:*

> Then there was a post mortem. Lev Nikolaevich attended, and saw her lying there at the Yasenki barracks, her skull smashed in and her naked body frightfully mutilated. It had the most terrible effect on him.[7]

The affair with the governess is transferred in the novel from the Anna story to the Oblonsky-Dolly story where it precipitates acute jealousy, but not suicide. It is interesting also that towards the end of the novel in Part VIII, Chapter V, when Vronsky rushes to see Anna's body in the railway shed, the mangling of the body is

3 All references to Schopenhauer are from Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, translated from the German by E. F. J. Payne, in two volumes, Dover Publications Inc., New York 1958. The reference here is to Vol. I, p. 278.

4 Schopenhauer, Vol. II, p. 441

5 Schopenhauer, Vol. II, p. 443

6 All the references to Sonya's diaries are from the following edition: *The Diaries of Sofia Tolstaya*, edited by O. A. Golinenko (and others), translated by Cathy Porter, Jonathan Cape, London 1985. The reference here is to p. 845.

7 ibid., p. 855

strongly emphasised, but it is stressed that the head is undamaged. This is no doubt so that Tolstoy can emphasise its accusing facial expression which is so wounding to Vronsky.

But Tolstoy did not begin work on the novel until more than a year after his attendance at the post mortem following the suicide of Anna Pirogova. Sonya writes in the Appendices to her *Diaries* for 19 March 1873 that Tolstoy had been stimulated by reading Pushkin's prose *Tales of Belkin* to start a novel 'about the private lives of present-day people'.[8] Boris Eikhenbaum writes:

> Indications have been preserved that, after reading the first lines of the fragment 'The guests were assembling at the dacha,' Tolstoy exclaimed: 'How charming! That is how one ought to write. Pushkin gets right to the point. Another would have begun to describe the guests, the rooms, but he leads into the action straight away.'[9]

Tolstoy disliked static introductions and background painting. He preferred to plunge directly into the middle of an action among persons unfamiliar to the reader so that the reader would be drawn into their situation like a participant, and not remain aloof like a mere observer.

A full account of the early vicissitudes of the composition of *Anna Karenina* can be found in C. J. E. Turner's book *A Karenina Companion*, published by the Wilfrid Laurier Press, Waterloo, Ontario, in 1993. Tolstoy began the novel on 18 March 1873 and finished it by July 1877. Serial publication in Katkov's *Russian Herald* started in January 1875, but the nationalistic Katkov disapproved of the criticism of the Serbian war in the eighth and final part due in May 1877, and refused to publish it, so Tolstoy brought it out separately in July 1877. The first edition in book form (in which Tolstoy's friend the critic Strakhov helped with revisions) appeared in January 1878. Turner also points out that the first draft, influenced by Pushkin, opens with material which corresponds to that in Part II, Chapters VI and VII of the novel where the guests arrive at Princess Betsy Tverskaya's salon. Tolstoy undoubtedly admired the spare, rapidly moving prose of Pushkin. But his own writing in *Anna Karenina* remains very different from Pushkin's. As early as 31 October 1853, Tolstoy had written in his *Diaries*:

8 ibid., p. 848
9 Eikhenbaum, p. 128

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> I read *The Captain's Daughter* and, alas, I must admit that Pushkin's prose is now old-fashioned – not in its language, but in its manner of exposition. Now, quite rightly, in the new school of literature, interest in the details of feeling is taking the place of interest in the events themselves. Pushkin's stories are somehow bare.[10]

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy evinces his gift for what the Russian critic Constantine Leontiev nicely called 'psychological eavesdropping.'[11] We are plunged not just into the actions of unfamiliar characters, but into the strange transitions of their inner feelings, the dialectic of their hearts. What is so marvellous about *Anna Karenina* is the perfect balance between the handling of outer events and inner feelings which characterises it.

The genre

If *War and Peace* is a chronicle novel that ends happily, *Anna Karenina* is, in substance, a tragedy with a double ending: the finality of Anna's death and the open-endedness of Levin and Kitty's problematic family life. What do I mean by saying that it is, in substance, a tragedy? Its form is that of a novel for private reading rather than that of a dramatic spectacle for public performance like Greek and Shakespearean tragedy. It has the substance of tragedy in that in it, as Aristotle required, a person neither of superlative goodness nor repellent wickedness (i.e. a character whom we can sympathise with, even love) makes a mistaken choice or set of choices. Aristotle called this mistaken choice *hamartia*. When this choice leads to a situation from which there is no way out but suffering, we have tragedy. Both Greek and Shakespearean tragedy involve poetic stylisation and elevation and actions out of the ordinary. Tolstoy's tragedy comes much closer to the type of tragedy described by Tolstoy's favourite philosopher Schopenhauer in Section 51 of *The World as Will and Representation*.

> Finally, the misfortune can be brought about also by the mere attitude of the persons to one another through their relations. Thus there is no need either of a colossal error, or of an

10 *Tolstoy's Diaries*, edited and translated by R. F. Christian, abridged one-volume version of Harper Collins two vols., Flamingo, London 1994, p. 63

11 Cited in D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature*, edited by Francis J. Whitfield, Vintage Books, Random House, New York 1958, p. 263

> unheard-of accident, or even of a character reaching the bounds of human possibility in wickedness, but characters as they usually are in a moral regard in circumstances that frequently occur, are so situated with regard to one another that their position forces them, knowingly and with their eyes open, to do one another the greatest injury, without any of them being entirely in the wrong. This last kind of tragedy seems to me to be far preferable to the other two; for it shows us the greatest misfortune not as an exception, not as something brought about by rare circumstances or by monstrous characters, but as something that arises easily and spontaneously out of the actions and characters of men, as something almost essential to them, and in this way it is brought terribly near to us . . . We see the greatest suffering brought about by entanglements whose essence could be assumed even by our own fate, and by actions that perhaps even we might be capable of committing, and so we cannot complain of injustice. Then, shuddering, we feel ourselves already in the midst of hell. In this last kind of tragedy the working out is of the greatest difficulty; for the greatest effect has to be produced in it with the least use of means and occasions for movement, merely by their position and distribution.[12]

As we shall see, Tolstoy shows his supreme skill in *Anna Karenina* in positioning and distributing the events so naturally that the novel seems to proceed as plotlessly and accidentally as life itself. In a letter dated 23 and 26 April 1876, Tolstoy wrote as follows to his friend Strakhov about what constitutes the unity of the book:

> In everything, or nearly everything I have written, I have been guided by the need to gather together ideas which for the purpose of self-expression were interconnected; but every idea expressed separately in words loses its meaning and is terribly impoverished when taken by itself out of the connection in which it occurs. The connection is made up, I think, not by the idea, but by something else, and it is impossible to express the basis of this connection directly in words. It can only be expressed indirectly – by words describing characters, actions and situations.

Later in the same letter he adds:

> . . . people are needed for the criticism of art who can show the pointlessness of looking for ideas in a work of art and can

12 Schopenhauer, Vol. 1, pp. 254–5

> steadfastly guide readers through that endless labyrinth of connections which is the essence of art, and towards those laws that serve as the basis of these connections.[13]

It is as though Tolstoy is anticipating the philosopher Wittgenstein's distinction between what can be shown (*gezeigt*) but cannot be said (*gesagt*).[14] Tolstoy's notion of the novel is one in which the web of connections between ideas, people and events is never explicitly stated but woven into the form of the novel itself. The task of the critic or reader is to uncover and piece together for themselves the strands of this web in a meaningful way.

An acquaintance, S. A. Rachinsky, complained to Tolstoy about the double plot, the alternating Anna/Vronsky, Levin/Kitty material, saying that the two sides were unconnected. Tolstoy replied on 27 January 1878:

> Your opinion about *Anna Karenina* seems to me to be wrong. On the contrary, I am proud of the architecture – the arches have been constructed in such a way that it is impossible to see where the keystone is. And that is what I am striving for most of all. The structural link is not the plot or the relationships (friendships) between the characters, but an inner link.[15]

Tolstoy does not just cut discontinuously from one episode to another. He makes us well acquainted with interconnected groups of characters whose lives and fates he follows continuously through the novel. There is no confusion. It is now time to look more closely at how Tolstoy constructs his 'labyrinth of connections'.

Some critical observations

Anna Karenina must have one of the best openings in world literature. We are immediately thrust into the chaos of the Oblonsky household, yet guided through that chaos with the sure authoritative hand of the narrator. In March 1877 Sonya recorded in the Appendices to her *Diaries* Tolstoy's remark:

> My ideas are quite clear now. If a work is to be really good there must be one fundamental idea in it which one loves. So in *Anna*

13 *Tolstoy's Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 296–7
14 Proposition 4.1212 of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1969, p. 50
15 *Tolstoy's Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 311

> *Karenina*, say, I love the idea of the *family*, in *War and Peace* I loved the idea of the *people* . . . [16]

This theme of family life is sounded at the outset, first by the teasing, and even slightly annoying, opening aphorism on the topic, and then by the presentation of a household in turmoil at the discovery by the wife of the husband's infidelity. The keynote of the human, all too human self-indulgence of the husband Stephen Oblonsky, who is to be such an important character in linking the diverse social worlds of the novel, is wonderfully captured in the following passage from Chapter II about his attitude to his wife Dolly:

> He even thought that she, who was nothing but an excellent mother of a family, worn-out, already growing elderly, no longer pretty, and in no way remarkable – in fact, quite an ordinary woman – ought to be lenient to him, if only from a sense of justice. It turned out that the very opposite was the case. [p. 3]

Tolstoy writes in brief dramatic chapters, keeping things moving and preserving a balance between narrative, description, dialogue and his favourite device of internal monologue which monitors the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

I have already mentioned in Part II that Tolstoy's narrative seems to move as plotlessly and accidentally as life itself. This has led many critics, for example Matthew Arnold, Henry James, Prince Mirsky and Philip Rahv, mistakenly to assume that what we have here is life not art; that, in Rahv's words: ' . . . in a sense there are no plots in Tolstoy'.[17] Henry James even referred to Tolstoy's novels quite inappropriately as 'loose baggy monsters'.[18] In one way all these critics are right. We do indeed have a wonderful realism and lifelikeness, but this lifelikeness is produced by the life of a classic art which conceals art. Tolstoy avoids both naturalistic objectivism and static aesthetic fine writing. Both of these tend to go with a purely spectatorial attitude to human affairs. Tolstoy encourages us to be suffering quasi-participants rather than distanced ironic observers.

16 Sofia's *Diaries*, p. 849

17 Philip Rahv, *Literature and the Sixth Sense*, Faber and Faber, London 1970, p. 135

18 Henry James, New York edition preface to *The Tragic Muse*, reprinted in *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*, edited by R. P. Blackmur, Charles Scribner's Sons, London 1950, p. 84

Already in the second chapter we learn casually that Anna Arkadyevna Karenina, Stephen Oblonsky's favourite sister (and the figure who will develop into the tragic heroine of the book) is coming to Moscow from St Petersburg to effect a reconciliation between Stephen and his wife Dolly, after Dolly's discovery of his unfaithfulness. But before we meet Anna, we meet Constantine Dmitrich Levin, the character who will be the main counterpart to Vronsky in the Vronsky-Anna, Levin-Kitty double plot. Levin is the character nearest in habits and views to the author himself, though, of course, without his literary genius. Whereas Oblonsky's marriage gives all the signs of breaking up, unless Anna can save it, his friend Levin's intention is to embark on marriage with Kitty, Dolly's younger sister. That is why he has come to Moscow from the country, which he much prefers. We have a wonderful contrast in the next few chapters between Levin and Oblonsky. The self-indulgent urbane Oblonsky loves the Liberalism exemplified in his newspaper 'as he loved his after-dinner cigar, for the slight mistiness it produced in his brain' (p. 7). He relishes the pleasures of the restaurant and the bedroom. The cranky, countrified, Rousseauistic Levin criticises the conspicuous consumption of the idlers in the restaurant they go to by comparing their fare with the frugal meals of those who work in the country, among whom he includes himself. The latter cannot linger over their food. Their breaks have to be short, so they can get on with their work (p. 35). Levin also has a very idealistic attitude to the love and marriage Oblonsky takes so lightly, if half guiltily. When Oblonsky says his situation is '"a terrible tragedy"' (p. 41), Levin cannot resist objecting. There can be no tragedy for the '"Thank you kindly for the pleasure, good-bye"' sort of love (p. 41). We do not know, of course, at this point, that it is because she will not be able to take her love for Vronsky lightly, that Anna herself will become a tragic figure. When we reread the novel, however, we see that Levin functions as a moral chorus on her fate in his comments, and that a major reason for the greatness of *Anna Karenina* is that the parts continually resonate with each other richly.

In this same Chapter XI Oblonsky gives Levin the unpleasant news that he has a rival for Kitty's hand, an army officer, Count Vronsky, '"a very fine sample of the gilded youth of Petersburg"' (p. 38). The fact that at this point they are rivals for the same woman Kitty (whom Vronsky will, in effect, jilt for Anna) serves to throw into high relief the contrast between Levin and Vronsky which will run all through the novel. For example, Part I, Chapter XVI opens:

> Vronsky had never known family life. His mother in her youth had been a brilliant Society woman, and during her married life had had many love affairs, known to everybody. He hardly remembered his father, and had been educated in the Cadet Corps. [p. 55]

A little later in the same chapter we learn:

> Marriage had never presented itself to him as a possibility. Not only did he dislike family life, but an accordance with the views generally held in the bachelor world in which he lived he regarded the family, and especially a husband, as something alien, hostile, and above all ridiculous. [p. 56]

Levin, on the contrary, like his creator Tolstoy, is in love with the idea of the family. In Part I, Chapter XXVII Tolstoy tells us that Levin could scarcely remember his mother, and that his conception of her was sacred. Tolstoy continues:

> He could not imagine the love of woman without marriage, and even pictured to himself a family first and then the woman who would give him the family. [p.93]

Marriage, for Levin, 'was the chief thing in life, on which the whole happiness of life depended' (p 93). But Tolstoy, for all his love of the idea of the family, is not, of course, as the creator of the novel, limited to Levin's perspective. Through the trials of Oblonsky's wife, Kitty's elder sister Dolly, he can show us the hardships of family life, the painful pregnancies, the difficulties of bringing up children. Much later in the book, in Part VI, Chapter XVI, Dolly, on the way from Levin's estate to Vronsky's, recalls a talk she had had with a peasant wife:

> 'I had one girl, but God released me. I buried her in Lent.'
>
> 'And are you very sorry?' asked Dolly.
>
> 'What's there to be sorry about? The old man has plenty of grandchildren as it is. They're nothing but worry. You can't work or anything. They're nothing but a tie . . . '
>
> This answer had seemed horrible to Dolly, despite the good-natured sweetness of the young woman's looks, but now she could not help recalling it. In those cynical words there was some truth. [p. 598]

Tolstoy's irony, unlike that of Hardy, for example, arises perfectly naturally from the convincing unfolding of the casually interwoven events. Anna, coming to heal the rift in her brother's

marriage, meets Vronsky, the man who will cause the break-up of her own. At the same time, in turning Vronsky's head, she frees Kitty from his pursuit, and though this causes much initial unhappiness it opens the way for Kitty's marriage to the idealistic Levin. In Part VI, Chapter II, Dolly herself reflects on this:

> 'How happily it turned out for Kitty that Anna came,' said Dolly, 'and how unhappily for her! The exact reverse,' she added, struck by her thought. 'Then Anna was so happy and Kitty considered herself miserable. Now it's the exact reverse! I often think of her.' [p.549]

Anna had travelled to Moscow in the same compartment as Vronsky's mother to whom she had recounted her sorrow at being parted from her son Serezha. Vronsky's mother says by way of comfort, ' "But please don't fret about your son, you can't expect never to be parted" ' (p. 62). This is another of the sentences of the book that resonates on a rereading. Vronsky's mother has no inkling of the fact that it is her own son who will precipitate the break-up of Anna's marriage and cause her deep unhappiness by bringing about a permanent separation from her son.

Vronsky is so infatuated with Anna's terrible and cruel charm that he, in effect, jilts Kitty. On the train returning to St Petersburg he says what Anna's 'soul desired but her reason dreaded' (p. 101), and the snowstorm outside parallels the emotional turmoil within her. Having met Vronsky she notes, for the first time, defects in her husband. His gristly ears 'pressing as they did against the rim of his hat' (p. 102) repel her as he meets her at the station. His habit of cracking his fingers to tranquillize himself begins to grate on her (pp. 142–3). It is typical that he only notices something is wrong because he notices that society has noticed. The situation comes to a climax in the famous steeplechase scene in Part II, Chapters XXV and XXVIII, when Vronsky falls killing his mare and Anna cannot conceal her agitation. She had already become his mistress in Part II, Chapter XI, in a scene in which Tolstoy obviously found it difficult to strike the right note in handling the sexual side of this relationship. But one sentence really does strike home – when Anna cries, 'I have nothing but you left. Remember that' (p. 147).

It is another feature of the novel's greatness that Tolstoy makes us feel and sympathise with the suffering of the cold, mechanical, careerist civil servant Karenin, a type who would have been antipathetic to him, just as much as he makes us sympathise with the suffering of Anna. Perhaps the doctrine of Christian forgiveness so

central to the later Tolstoy intrudes a little when Tolstoy makes Karenin momentarily forgive Anna. He thinks she may die of puerperal fever after giving birth to her little girl by Vronsky. Here Tolstoy makes feeling break through Karenin's usual crust of principle:

> He was not thinking that the law of Christ, which all his life he had tried to fulfil, told him to forgive and love his enemies but a joyous feeling of forgiveness and love for his enemies, filled his soul. [p. 407]

But Tolstoy shows us convincingly how Karenin succumbs to what he feels is the 'coarse power' (p. 413) of society. In any case, his initial magnanimity had oppressed Anna, so that she had determined to refuse the divorce that his momentary generosity has made him sadly accept.

In the end she goes abroad to live with her lover in Italy. But Vronsky, to whom she was once everything, now grows restive at having renounced his career: 'Soon he felt rising in his soul a desire for desires – boredom' (p. 460). Anna longs for her son Serezha; but meanwhile the momentarily magnanimous Karenin has fallen under the spell of the malign religiosity of a society lady, Countess Lydia Ivanovna. There is now no hope of a divorce or of the custody of Serezha. Though Vronsky can still move in Russian society after their return from Italy, Anna is soon cruelly shown that she cannot. Tolstoy skilfully builds up to a final dramatic misunderstanding. After a terrible quarrel, Vronsky goes for a brief visit to his mother in the country. Anna sends him an urgent request to return, but, through mischance, it does not reach him in time. Full of jealous imaginings, Anna decides to pursue him. She sets off for the station. Here, in Part VII, Chapters XXX and XXXI of the novel, Tolstoy gives her an interior monologue which embodies one of the greatest negative visions in world literature. Everything she sees seems to exemplify an ugly neo-Darwinian, egoistic struggle for existence. She sees the world as a whole as Schopenhauer's evil world of Will. She herself even wills to punish Vronsky by her suicide under the train, but then she has an involuntary childhood memory of making the sign of the cross and her last words are: 'God forgive me everything' (p. 755).

There is still an eighth book of about fifty pages. This is the section Katkov rejected because in it, Tolstoy, through Levin, criticises the factitious poisonous Slav nationalism which is leading Russians to volunteer to fight for the Serbs against the Turks. This is the war in which the morally shattered Vronsky goes off to seek

his death. Some critics regard the concluding chapters about Levin's married life and philosophical perplexities as too autobiographical and Levin as a prig and a bore. But these chapters deal dramatically with the sort of moral and philosophical issues every reflective person has to come to terms with. Moreover, in their tentative hopefulness, they form a neat counterbalance to the tragic darkness and despair we have just witnessed.

In 'On Death . . . ' Schopenhauer writes: ' . . . without death there would hardly have been any philosophising'.[19] The only chapter with a title in *Anna Karenina*, Chapter xx of Part v, is called 'Death'. In it Tolstoy gives a harrowing description of the death of Levin's brother Nicholas. Only Kitty's help enables Levin to overcome his grief. The fact that life ends in death naturally gives rise to the question of what confers significance on life itself. Some turn to natural science for the answer because it gives the fullest knowledge of cause and effect in the material world. But if we assume that natural science alone will answer the questions about time, love and death which trouble us, then, as the philosopher Wittgenstein says in *Culture and Value*, we are falling into a trap.[20] Tolstoy, through Levin's doubts and reflections, anticipates Wittgenstein's repudiation of the scientific optimism of the Enlightenment. But Levin also rejects the Schopenhaurian pessimism embodied in the despairing Anna's final vision. He reaches a sort of critical and sceptical compromise with the Christian moral tradition. The total rejection of Christian morality which was later to be expressed by Nietzsche would have held no attractions for him. At the same time he respectfully acknowledges the existence of other faiths outside whose traditions he stands. He also recognises, like Kant, that our vision is bound by the limits of what we can perceive in this present life. He prays, even though he recognises the senselessness of his prayer that Kitty and the baby should not have been struck by lightning (p. 798).

Levin appreciates how hard it is for human beings to be just in moral disputes in which they are parties. The much discussed epigram to the novel, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay', is surely meant to emphasise not the vengefulness of God but the fallibility of human beings when they make moral judgements. Yet our fallibility does not mean that we can simply repudiate judgement altogether.

19 Schopenhauer, Vol. II, p. 463

20 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by G. H. Von Wright, translated by Peter Winch, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1980, p. 56e