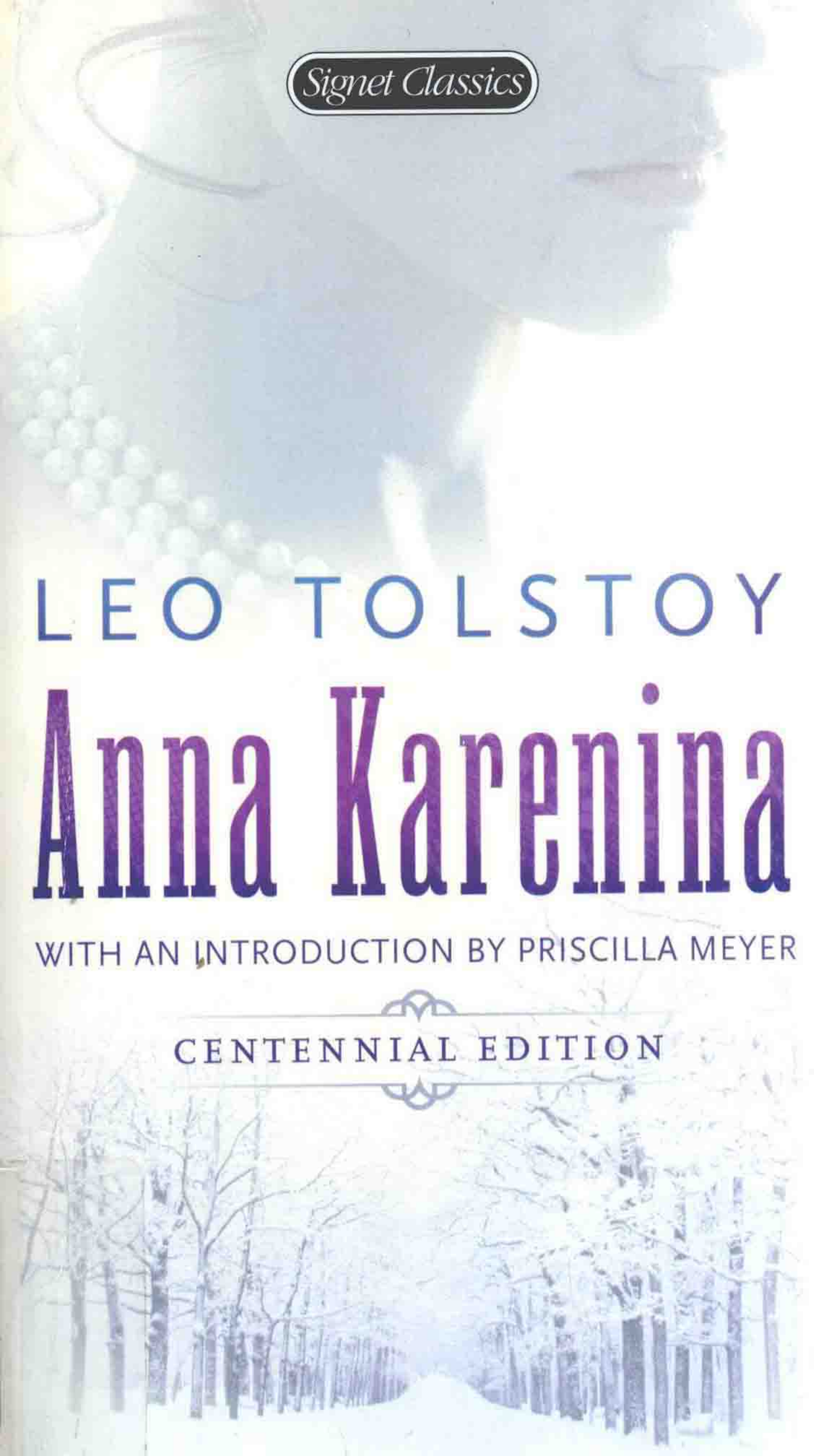
Signet Classics
LEO TOLSTOY
Anna Karenina
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY PRISCILLA MEYER
CENTENNIAL EDITION

LEO TOLSTOY

Anna Karenina

Translated by
David Magarshack

With an Introduction
by Priscilla Meyer

SIGNET CLASSICS

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Count Leo Tolstoy was born on September 9, 1828, in Yasnaya Polyana, Russia. Orphaned at nine, he was brought up by an elderly aunt and educated by French tutors until he matriculated at Kazan University in 1844. In 1847, he gave up his studies and, after several aimless years, volunteered for military duty in the army, serving as a junior officer in the Crimean War before retiring in 1857. His diary, started in 1847, was used for self-study and self-criticism; it served as the source from which he drew much of the material that appeared not only in his great novels *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877), but also in his shorter works. Seeking religious justification for his life, Tolstoy evolved a new Christianity based upon his own interpretation of the Gospels. Yasnaya Polyana became a Mecca for his many converts. At the age of eighty-two, while away from home, the writer suffered a breakdown in his health in Astapovo, Riazan, and he died there on November 20, 1910.

Born in Riga in 1899, **David Magarshack** translated the foremost works of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and Chekhov, among many others. He was also known for his critically acclaimed biographies of Russian writers, including Chekhov, Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky. He died in 1977.

Priscilla Meyer is Professor of Russian Language and Literature at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. She published the first monograph on Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden*, and edited the first English translation of Andrei Bitov's work *Life in Windy Weather*. She has co-edited collections on Gogol and Dostoevsky and most recently, with Jane Grayson and Arnold McMillin, *Nabokov's World*.

Introduction

In March 1873 Tolstoy began writing *Anna Karenina* as a novel of adultery in the European style, and completed a rough draft in three months. In May 1874, though he felt it would "hardly please others, because it is too simple," he took the first part of the novel to Moscow to be printed. But the novel began to seem "terribly disgusting and nasty" to him; he stopped the printing in June and appeared to have abandoned it until the following November, when the need for ten thousand rubles led him to agree to publish the novel serially in the *Russian Herald*. In the summer of 1875 he finally took up "tedious, banal Karenina" again but had trouble with it because "in order to work, it is necessary that the scaffolding appear," namely "questions of the meaning of life and death." Eventually, the love story that Tolstoy said he had written "in the very lightest, non-severe style" was to become a philosophico-moral novel, as the subject of marriage led him to the problem of the meaning of life; both required the consideration of religious faith.

Thus, the counterpart to Anna's tale became Levin's quest for faith, which reflected Tolstoy's own, and it allowed Tolstoy to complete his novel in 1877. A year earlier he had written to his sister-in-law, "I not only hate and scorn non-belief, but do not see any possibility of living without belief, and even less possibility of dying without it. And little by little I am building my own beliefs, but they are all, though firm, very indefinite and

unconsoling. When the intelligence asks, they answer well; but when the heart aches and begs for an answer, there is no support or consolation. With my intellectual demands and answers given by the Christian religion I am in the situation of two hands which would like to join, but the fingers collide."

Tolstoy began his tale of an adulteress who was "only pitiable and not guilty" in the context of intense debates in Western Europe and Russia about the "woman question"—women's rights, the nature of marriage and the proper treatment of the adulteress. Tolstoy followed French literature closely throughout his life, and drew the portrait of his adulteress in response to French texts in particular. Tolstoy's eldest son, Sergei, explains in his memoirs of his father, "My father was a very selective reader, which is not very usual. He remembered everything that he had read, and knew how to get the essence out of a book and what to discard." In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy recasts what he saw as the social and moral essence of French books on adultery from the late 1850s through the early 1870s. He uses French novels as a baseline against which to consider adultery, taking up not only their arguments but their imagery and motif systems.

Man-Woman (1872), an essay by Alexander Dumas *fils*, was one of the stimuli that led Tolstoy to begin writing a novel on these problems that had bothered him since he had finished writing *War and Peace*. In 1873 Tolstoy wrote to his wife's sister: "Have you read *Man-Woman*? This book startled me. One couldn't expect from a Frenchman such loftiness of understanding of marriage and in general of the relation of man to woman." Anna's adulterous relationship with Vronsky and the counterexample, the successful marriage of Kitty and Levin, are very clearly constructed in dialogue not only with *Man-Woman* but also Dumas' play *Claude's Wife* (1873) in mind. In both, the women are unredeemable, egotistical adulteresses and the men their victims. Thus Tolstoy's first version of the story features a morally and physically repellent adulteress, "fat to the point of disfigurement." But as he worked she grew into the vibrant Anna, and as she became an increasingly sympathetic character, her wronged husband became less of

one. During the novel's evolution, Tolstoy seems to have identified with Anna's need for passionate love; her stature grew as his sympathy increased.

Tolstoy's Anna is a complex, sympathetic adulteress with a moral sense. Her dilemma is thrown into relief through the parallel story of Levin, whose quest for how to live draws from Rousseauian ideals and from the Gospels.

In the story of Levin and Kitty, Tolstoy rejects Dumas' overall formulation of the embattled relationship between the sexes, but accepts Dumas' division of woman into three types: women of the temple (virgins), women of the household (wives) and women of the street (courtesans). In the course of *Anna Karenina,* Kitty's friend Varenka remains in the first category; Kitty moves from the first category to the second, in keeping with the church sacraments; and Anna moves from the second to the third, breaking the sacrament of marriage. Both Dumas and Tolstoy condemn their adulteresses to death. Dumas asks what to do with the adulteress and answers his own question: "kill her." The epigraph to *Anna Karenina* ("Vengeance is mine; I will repay," from Romans 12:19) can be read as an answer to this verdict: since for Tolstoy it is precisely the sacrament that is broken, it is for God, not man, to judge. Tolstoy not only rejects a husband's right to avenge himself by murder, but also contradicts the premise of Dumas' essay, that woman wins the grand struggle between the sexes that is marriage. Tolstoy refutes this in the story of Levin's marriage to Kitty, modeling scenes of marital tension and happy resolution on Dumas' negative descriptions.

The scene of Levin and Kitty's wedding is placed at the center of the novel both chronologically and ideologically. The novel's biblical epigraph can have meaning only if marriage is understood as a sacrament, blessed by God, and not merely a civil legality. Levin's doubts about going to confession underscore the importance of the religious dimension of the marriage vows, and hence their irrevocability. In fact, no civil authority could grant divorce in Russia; the Orthodox church could dissolve marriages on the grounds of adultery, either by proof or by confession, as Karenin's lawyer says (child custody was not regulated by Russian divorce law).

Levin's eventual conscious acceptance of God is presaged by his intuitive divine rapture on the morning before he makes his formal proposal to Kitty:

> And what he saw then, he never saw again. He was moved particularly by the children going to school, the grayish-blue pigeons flying from the roofs to the pavement, and the little loaves of bread, sprinkled with flour, that some invisible hand had put outside a baker's shop. Those loaves, the pigeons, and the boys were not of this earth.

The pigeons flying from roof to pavement evoke the dove representing the Holy Spirit in paintings of the annunciation; the loaves suggest the sacrament of Communion—Christ's body, offered by an invisible hand. Later Levin's vows are taken in a transcendent state in church following his touching confession to the sweetly reasonable priest (and Tolstoy wrote in a letter that he was "of course, on the priest's side"). The novel defines adultery in relationship to Christianity, as a breach of the sacraments that are the foundation of family life; both men and women (Stiva and Anna) err when they break them.

Tolstoy called *Anna Karenina* a labyrinth of linkages: "If I wanted to say in words all that I had in mind to express in this novel, then I would have to write the very same novel which I have written all over again." One of the ways he makes connections is by the sequence of chapters. In Part One, three characters return from their fateful trips to Moscow: Anna to her husband, Levin to his estate and Vronsky to his friends, and their very different homecomings highlight the contrast among their worlds and values.

The method is most vivid in the parallel between Levin's estate, Pokrovskoye, and Vronsky's, Vozdvizhenskoye. The names characterize the essence of their owners' values: the first comes from the church holiday Pokrova (the word means "cover"), which commemorates the freeing of Constantinople from the Saracens in the tenth century when the Virgin Mary "covered" the city with darkness; the holiday is propitious for weddings, a day for maidens to cover their heads. The name Vozdvizhenskoye comes from the verb "to erect," as a

monument, and the hospital Vronsky builds that lacks a maternity ward is more for his own glory than to help its future patients. Levin, in contrast, is concerned about his peasants and works to preserve the land of his ancestors.

In many ways Levin is Leo Tolstoy's self-portrait, a complement to the aspect of himself embodied in Anna, and Pokrovskoye is modeled on Yasnaya Polyana, where Tolstoy was born, lived with his family and wrote *Anna Karenina*. Many details in the novel are taken from life—Tolstoy's wife, Sonya, and her mother had made jam at Yasnaya Polyana in 1871; like Kitty with Dmitri, Sonya had been caught in a thunderstorm with their first baby, Sergei, in the wood on which Kolok is modeled; Tolstoy, like Levin, mowed with his peasants and endured his brother Nikolai's death from consumption in 1860 and subsequent deep depression. Other details too are drawn from life: Tolstoy's enjoyment of ice-skating; all his children getting scarlet fever in 1869; his proposal to Sonya by writing the initial letters of his phrases; her reading of his diaries; his lateness to church caused by the missing shirt. The Goldilocks joke about Kitty being "Tiny Bear" originates in Tolstoy's fondness for the three Behrs sisters, of whom Sonya was the youngest. Even the tooth motif that connects the major characters of the novel—Karenin feels he has had a tooth pulled when Anna confesses her adultery; Vronsky has a toothache when he leaves for Serbia looking to end his life—may originate in the fact that Tolstoy was missing most of his own when at age thirty-four he proposed to eighteen-year-old Sonya.

Similarly, Levin's practical concerns about running his estate reflect the real-life reforms of Alexander II, who liberated the serfs in 1861, initiated judicial reforms and in 1864 established the zemstvos, local administrative councils, so that landowners had to work out new ways to organize agricultural labor and local governance. Tolstoy opposed modernization as destructive of rural life. In Levin's economic analysis, agriculture is the basis of a nation's wealth; his spiritual analysis bases morality in working his land responsibly.

The Levin story is linked to Anna's through her brother, Stiva Oblonsky, whose pleasure-loving nature is contrasted with Levin's devotion to his land. It is em-

blematic that Oblonsky should arrive at Levin's with an entire separate satchel for cigars, which he calls the "the crown and hallmark of pleasure." It is part of his moral blindness: his smoking is the antithesis of Levin's joy in spring as he sets about manuring the fields. By the time Levin meets Anna, she has acquired a tortoiseshell cigar case; it contains the cigarettes she then smokes, tracing her decline. The drafts for this scene do not contain Oblonsky's satchel for cigars. Instead only "[Oblonsky's] elegant things—straps, suitcase, bag, gun—were carried in." Later Tolstoy gave Oblonsky a cigar case, which finally became a satchel when in 1878 he prepared the first edition of the novel for publication as a separate book. Anna's tortoiseshell cigar case is also absent from earlier drafts of the scene. Tolstoy was careful to complete the tobacco motif that connects the sensuality of brother and sister.

Oblonsky acts as go-between as well as purveyor of accepted views. He summons Anna to Moscow, which incidentally sets her affair with Vronsky in motion; he brings Kitty and Levin together, obtains Karenin's consent for a divorce and introduces Levin to Anna. Tolstoy endows Oblonsky with many lovable characteristics so that the reader tends to accept him as uncritically as Oblonsky's friends do, but nonetheless shows that he has no moral basis for his actions or capacity for independent thought. Most important, Oblonsky, preferring this world to the next, lacks any basis for restraining his sensuality, displayed when he takes Levin to dinner in Moscow at a restaurant whose elegance seems to defile Levin's feelings for Kitty. He orders three dozen oysters: " 'They're not bad,' he said, tearing the slippery oysters from their pearly shells with a silver fork, and swallowing them one after another. 'Not bad, not bad,' he repeated, raising his moist and glittering eyes from Levin to the Tartar and back again."

Anna's vitality is like Oblonsky's. The offspring of a father named Arkady (Arcadia), they share a firm, light tread, a full body and a thirst for sensual love. In this, Anna resembles Flaubert's Emma Bovary. But whereas Emma admires and imitates luxury, Anna already has it. Emma wants a passionate, aristocratic, dashing lover but finds only an imitation of one; Anna gets Emma's wish in Vronsky. Emma wants to be the heroine of a novel;

Anna is seen as one by her peers. Emma fantasizes about eloping to Italy with the pseudoaristocrat Rodolphe (who clenches his teeth in predatory passion); Anna and the truly aristocratic Vronsky (of the "even," "regular" teeth) do in fact go off to Italy. In this way, Tolstoy isolates and distills the moral and psychological aspects of adultery for a young married woman, purifying it of the concern with social status and material luxury that obsesses Emma and positing the most appealing, intelligent heroine he can imagine—one who rejects the accepted practice of deceiving her husband and, unlike Emma, understands that she has cut herself off from God by committing adultery.

Tolstoy's library contained a copy of the Russian translation of *Madame Bovary*, published in 1858. It had been torn out of the journal it appeared in and bound together with Shakespeare's *Othello*, suggesting that Tolstoy read Flaubert's novel in the context of the adultery question that so occupied him in the early 1870s. He follows the same pattern of adaptation in his dialogue with Flaubert's *Madame Bovery* as he does with Dumas. He uses several motifs to characterize Anna that Flaubert had used for Emma. Vronsky's relations with his racehorse, Frou-Frou, are clearly meant to comment on his affair with Anna; Emma's affair with Rodolphe begins when they go riding together on his horses. Both horses and heroines are linked by a bird motif, suggesting the women's captivity: in Tolstoy's novel, after Frou-Frou falls, she begins "fluttering on the ground . . . like a wounded bird" while Anna in the stands is described a few pages later as "fluttering like a caged bird." Emma has a "bird-like step," Rodolphe's house has two "swallow-tailed weathervanes" and Emma's dreams are said to "[drop] in the mud like wounded swallows." Flaubert even names the coach that takes Emma to Rouen for her trysts with Leon the Hirondelle, which means "swallow" in French.

While *Madame Bovary* has the Hirondelle, *Anna Karenina* has the railroad. In a letter to Turgenev in 1857, Tolstoy wrote that "the railroad is to travel as the whore is to love," and starting with the toy train that Oblonsky's children overturn while the household is upset by Stiva's affair with their governess, the railroad is associated with adultery and death. Anna and Vronsky first

meet at the station where a peasant is killed by a train; their understanding is sealed during the snowstorm on the platform on the return trip; in Part Eight, back at the Moscow station, we see Vronsky for the last time on his way to war in Serbia.

Anna and Vronsky dream of a dirty peasant with a matted beard, and oddly in both their dreams, he is speaking French. Vronsky "vividly recalled the peasant again and those incomprehensible French words he had been muttering, and a chill of horror ran down his spine." The grotesqueness of the dream has to do with the incongruity of the muzhik (peasant), that essence of Russianness, speaking French, the traditional language of the Russian aristocracy since the time of Catherine the Great. Throughout the novel the corrupt characters speak French, and the innocent ones are distorted by having to use French in elegant society, starting with the Tartar waiter who translates Levin's folksy order of porridge into "porridge *à la Russe*." Like the French language, the railroad is an artificial foreign graft onto Russia causing, as Levin writes, the concentration of wealth in the cities and the distortion of the economy by stimulating industry at the expense of agriculture. He calls Moscow a Babylon, seeing the city as the locus of luxury and debauchery.

Tolstoy's view of the city and urban society was clearly influenced by his devotion to Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "I have read all of Rousseau, all twenty volumes . . . . I made a veritable cult of him: at fifteen, I wore his portrait around my neck like a holy image." Tolstoy listed the group of *Confessions, Emile* and *Julie, or the New Heloise* third on a list of fifteen books that made a big impression on him between the ages of fourteen to twenty. At the end of his life, Tolstoy wrote: "Rousseau has been my master since I was fifteen. Rousseau and the Bible have been the two great and beneficent influences of my life." *Anna Karenina* may reflect *Julie,* whose heroine resists adultery. Her husband, Wolmar, like Levin, works with his peasants, struggles with the question of faith and begins to lose some of his skepticism when faced with the possibility of his wife's death.

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy examines the question of the meaning of life in order to consider the problem of adultery, returning to his beloved Rousseau for a basis.

Anna's great tragedy is that she is condemned by the very honesty that constitutes Levin's virtue: both characters adhere to Tolstoy's Rousseauian ideals by refusing to abide by public opinion and meaningless social convention. Levin resists the conventions of society, but comes to accept the wisdom of those related to God. Anna is caught in a web of social, family, moral and religious conventions, which she flouts but is unable to overcome, doomed by the inherent contradictions of her society and of adultery itself. Her candle flares up and goes out, while Levin comes through his near-suicidal condition dazzled by the light of revelation.

In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy reaffirms Rousseau's views. Levin is a true Emile, learning by his own experience the cost of luxury, the superiority of things made by oneself, the freedom to enjoy black bread and not to be a slave to public opinion. This is Tolstoy's antidote to adultery, an evolving answer to the question of how to live a meaningful life. Responding to the French novel of adultery with Rousseau, Tolstoy is able to reinfuse idealism into the realist novel, which he felt had become distressingly naturalistic. While the romantics insisted on the unattainability of a Platonic ideal in the real world, Tolstoy shows another possibility: the continuous approach toward the ideal in the real. The holy ideal of the beloved can be transformed, painfully and gradually, into the actual wife, and the novel of adultery into a *profession de foi.*

—Priscilla Meyer

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Anna Karenina

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

—Romans 12:19