

# Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina"

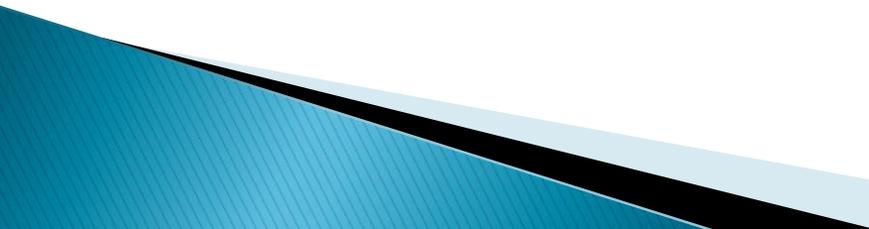
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# Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910)

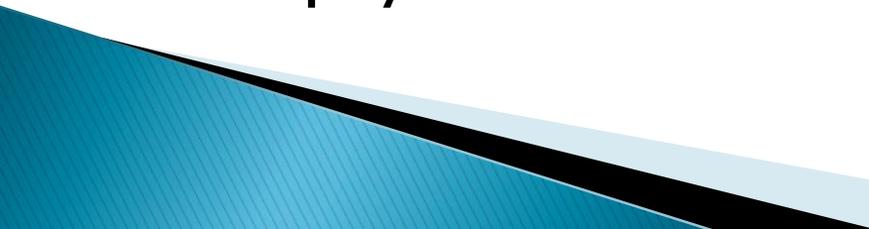
- ▶ Landowning Family
- ▶ Orphan by age 10; theme of death
- ▶ Army
- ▶ *War and Peace*, 1869
- ▶ *Anna Karenina*, 1877
- ▶ Founded Schools for his Peasants
- ▶ Religious Transformation and Non-Violence
- ▶ *Resurrection*, 1899



# Tolstoy and Realism

- ▶ Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to early 20<sup>th</sup> Century
  - ▶ Response to Romanticism
  - ▶ Balzac, Flaubert, Dickens, Henry James
  - ▶ Tolstoy and Dostoevsky
  - ▶ Stories and characters appear objectively Real
  - ▶ In fact, stories are controlled to function as a Social Criticism
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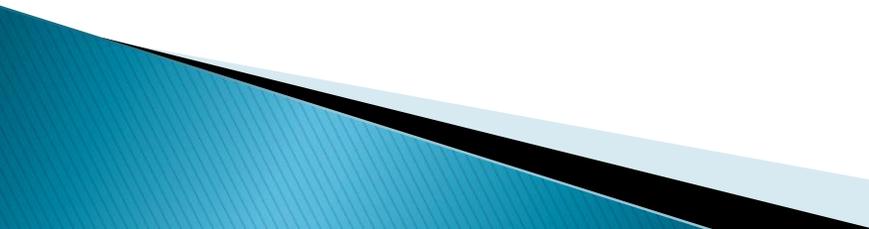
# Tolstoy and Marxism

- ▶ Marxists in Soviet Union were ambivalent
  - ▶ Applaud his criticism of Czarist Russia: lack of morals and spiritual emptiness
  - ▶ Uncomfortable with non-violence as social force of change
  - ▶ He saw family and religion as the solution to modernity; not a powerful state
  - ▶ He would most likely have been as critical of Soviet Union as an Authoritarian and morally empty state as Czarist Russia
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# Plot Overview

- ▶ Adultery of Stiva, with children's governess
  - ▶ Anna, Stiva's sister, mediates reconciliation
  - ▶ Courtship of Kitty: Levin vs. Vronsky
  - ▶ Later, Vronsky runs into Anna and falls in love
  - ▶ Karenin refuses to divorce Anna; she moves to country; discovers she is pregnant
  - ▶ She is spurned by society and unhappy with Vronsky
  - ▶ She throws herself under a Train
  - ▶ Levin's Insight into Happiness: Family and Faith
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# Key Themes in Anna Karenina

- ▶ Emptiness of Bourgeois Culture
  - ▶ Failure of Ruling Class as Moral Agents
  - ▶ Adultery and Romance: Sexual Nature as part of Human Nature—Critique of Romanticism
  - ▶ Technology and Modernization
  - ▶ Train as a Symbol both of Modernity and of Alienation
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# Immorality of Upper Class

- ▶ Contrast of Levin and Stiva at fancy dinner
- ▶ Levin is bursting with love for Kitty
- ▶ Stiva reveals he is having an affair (p. 51)
- ▶ Levin: “Don’t steal rolls!”
- ▶ Stiva: “O moralist! But you must understand that there are two women; one insists only on her rights, and those rights are your love, which you can’t give her; and the other sacrifices everything for you and asks for nothing. What are you to do? How are you to act? There’s a fearful tragedy about it.”
- ▶ Levin: Plago’s Banquet and two types of love.”

# Anna and Vronsky Meet

- ▶ At train station
- ▶ “from one glance at this lady’s appearance Vronsky classified her as belonging to the best society...;not that she was very beautiful, not on account of the elegance and modest grace which were apparent in her whole figure, but because in the expression of her charming face, as she passed close by him, there was something peculiarly caressing and soft.”
- ▶ **Anna as a good soul; not a family destroying vamp**

# After the Dance, she flees

- ▶ Kitty tries to tell Anna how good she is and thanks her for saving Kitty and Stiva's marriage
- ▶ "If it had not been for you, God knows what would have happened! How happy you are, Anna! Said Dolly. Everything is clear and good in your heart."
- ▶ "Every heart has its own skeletons, as the English say..."
- ▶ "been the cause of that ball being a torture to her [Kitty] instead of a pleasure. But truly, truly, it's not my fault, or only my fault a little bit," she said, daintily drawling the words "a little bit."
- ▶ "Oh, how like Stiva you said that!" said Dolly, laughing.

# Anna's Seduction and Moral Position

- ▶ She is not a “loose” woman
- ▶ She is a loving mother—we hear how she missed being away from her 8 year old boy
- ▶ She is a kind sister-in-law
- ▶ She is not willfully breaking society's moral rules
- ▶ She is startled herself at how she reacted to the dance with Vronsky
- ▶ Now she is leaving to avoid him
- ▶ **The point is that she is a real human being: both morally good and yet capable of failing**

# Karenin confronts Anna

- ▶ “I want to warn you...that through thoughtlessness and lack of caution you may cause yourself to be talked about in society. Your too animated conversation this evening with Count Vronsky...attracted attention.”
- ▶ “There are certain rules of decorum with cannot be disregarded without impunity...everyone observed that your conduct and deportment were not altogether what could be desired.”
- ▶ She doesn't believe his assertion that he loves her: “Love? Can he love?...He doesn't even know what love is.”
- ▶ **Emotional self-knowledge and honesty**

# Levin and Failure of Russian Bureacracy

- ▶ Levin, like Anna, is a true soul. He seeks to act in a way that aligns with his values
- ▶ “One longed to throw off that yoke that crushed us [serfdom], all decent people among us. But to be a town councilor and discuss how many dustmen are needed, and how chimneys shall be constructed in the town in which I don’t live—to serve on a jury and try a peasant who’s stolen a bit of bacon...”
- ▶ “when they made the raids on us students, and the police read our letters, I was ready to defend those rights to the utmost, to defend my rights to education and freedom...I am ready to deliberate on what concerns me; but deliberating on how to spend forty thousand rubles of district council money...I can’t do it.”

# Forgiveness

- ▶ Levin to Kitty: “I have nothing to forget and to forgive; I have never ceased to love you.”
- ▶ Afterward: “All that night and morning Levin lived perfectly unconsciously, and felt perfectly lifted out of the conditions of material life.” He is ecstatic with true joy and love.
- ▶ Contrast: Karenin forgives Anna; we see he is not a machine.
- ▶ “I forgive completely. I would offer the other cheek, I would give my cloak if my coat were taken. I pray to God only not to take from the bliss of forgiveness.”

# Anna's Death

- ▶ Anna and Vronsky fight: she accuses him of having another woman
- ▶ She sees a peasant woman and her daughter and is repulsed
- ▶ A couple in train car: “Anna saw clearly that they were sick of each other and hated each other. And no one could help hating such miserable monstrosities.”
- ▶ She prepares to jump between wheels and misses her chance; allows her to reflect— “life rose up before her for an instant with all its past joys.” After she does jump, she regrets, too late.
- ▶ **Her death is a rejection of the falsity of society**

# What Makes life Meaningful?

- ▶ Levin's brother, Sergey, publishes a book on statehood in Russia and politics—to no acclaim
- ▶ Sergey goes off to fight for Slavic rights in Serbia: but the message seems to be that meaning is not found in social action or politics.
- ▶ Vronsky is fighting too, but for him it is because life has no meaning.
- ▶ **Vronsky and Sergey seek meaning in Action.** One for a Cause and the other because there is nothing better to do than fight—but **clearly this is not satisfying**
- ▶ **Both fail to find good in satisfying, human relationships**

# Levin and Kitty: Family and Faith

- ▶ Levin watches Kitty scold the children for a childish prank and reflects on his Faith
- ▶ “Brought up with an idea of God, a Christian, my whole life filled with the spiritual blessings Christianity has given me...like the children I did not understand them...And as soon as an important moment of life comes, like the children...I turn to Him, and even less than the children when their mother scolds them for their childish mischief, do I feel that my childish efforts at wanton madness are reckoned against me.”
- ▶ He goes on to question the Dogma of the church, but... “And it seemed to him that there was not a single article of faith of the church which could destroy the chief thing—faith in God, in goodness, as the one goal of man’s destiny.”

# Summary

- ▶ Realism used to show an objective view of Russian life
- ▶ Emptiness of Russian nobility: Shallow, social conventions
- ▶ Contrast of three couples
- ▶ Anna and Karenin: False and Affected
- ▶ Anna and Vronsky: Passionate and True but ultimately unfulfilling; passion alone cannot fulfill
- ▶ Kitty and Levin: True love based on affection; fulfillment found in Faith in God—but not formal religion.
- ▶ An indictment of Bourgeois society and pointing towards Tolstoy's spiritual awakening