

NOTE

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*A Note on the Organization
of Part I of Anna Karenina*

Tolstoi took pride in the architecture of *Anna Karenina*. "The vaults are done in such a way that one cannot even notice the place where they are joined. I took more care in that than in anything else. The unification of the structure is achieved not by the story-line nor by the relationships (the acquaintance) of the characters, but by an inner linkage."¹ On another occasion he wrote that in *Anna Karenina* he had, as usual, been guided by "the need to express myself through an assemblage of thoughts which have been linked together."² He explained that the work as a whole could be comprehended only in its totality, but he went on to suggest that criticism had a role to play in the explication of "the endless labyrinth of linkages in which the essence of art consists."³

Tolstoi portrays himself as having consciously structured his work so as to cement its diverse strands together. The leading example of this diversity is the combining of two main lines of plot within the novel: that of Levin and that of Anna. While acknowledging in principle the importance of both lines to the novel's structure, most analyses continue to devote the lion's share of their attention to Anna and to remain relatively silent about Levin.⁴ Edward Wasiolek, in his recent book on Tolstoi, has gone so far as to suggest that "*Anna Karenina* is two novels—Anna's and Levin's," that is that the novel fails

1. Letter to S. A. Rachinskii (27 Jan. 1878), L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 90 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo khud. lit-ry, 1928-58), LXII, 377. All references to Tolstoi are from this edition.

2. Letter to N. N. Strakhov (23-26 April 1876), LXII, 268-69.

3. Beyond this, Tolstoi continues, critics should seek "the laws that serve as the basis of these connections." Despite the self-deprecating postscript which Tolstoi appended to this letter, there is some reason to accept the existence of a "law" which serves as a focal point and organizing principle of the interconnecting passages within the "labyrinth" of *Anna Karenina*. I touch briefly on this point in "The Image of the Railroad in *Anna Karenina*," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 25, No. 2 (Summer 1981), 1-10, and discuss it in detail in "The Unity of *Anna Karenina*," *Russian Review*, in press.

4. An opposite tack (emphasizing the artistic wholeness of the novel) is taken by E. Stenbock-Fermor, *The Architecture of Anna Karenina* (Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press, 1975).

to implement that "unification of structure" which its author thought crucial to the production of a genuine work of art.⁵

The purpose of this brief analysis of Part I of *Anna Karenina* is to indicate some of the "linkages" which bind Anna and Levin together at this stage of the narrative and thereby suggest the artistic wholeness of the sequel.⁶ The bulk of Part I (chapters 1-25) takes place in Moscow and deals with three situations which are developed in this setting: 1) the rift between Stiva Oblonskii and his wife, Dolly; 2) the rift between Levin's brother, Nikolai, and his half-brother, Sergei Ivanovich Koznyshev; 3) the romance developing between Vronskii and Kitty Shcherbatskaia. Anna and Levin are introduced into the Moscow setting and its situations from the outside: Anna from her home in St. Petersburg, Levin from his country estate. Levin's arrival in Moscow (chapter 5) is the result of his independent initiative and he is introduced as an unexpected factor into the three situations. Anna arrives in chapters 17-18, summoned by her brother Stiva to repair the rift between himself and his wife. Her arrival is anticipated, in contrast to Levin's, and, following the scene at the railway station, she is introduced into two of the Moscow situations: the family troubles of the Oblonskiis and the romance between Kitty and Vronskii.

When the plot of Part I is compared with the order of events as they "actually" occurred, a number of discrepancies arise. First, Levin's arrival in Moscow is actually simultaneous with the narrative of the first four chapters, although he first appears only in chapter 5. Second, his visit to Nikolai (24-25) in actual time immediately follows his departure from the Shcherbatskiis' (chapter 14). Third, his departure from Moscow (26) actually either precedes or is roughly simultaneous with Anna's arrival (17-18). In terms of the actual order of events, Levin and Anna are never in Moscow simultaneously. Levin is there for a bit less than the first half of the actual time represented by Part I, Anna for a bit more than the second half. This is in sharp contrast to the plotted structure in which the appearances of Levin and Anna are alternated: Levin (5-14); Anna (17-23); Levin (24-27); Anna (28-33).

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from this data is the roughly equal importance, in terms of space allotted to them, of Levin and Anna. Although hardly a surprise, this fact needs emphasis as a corrective to the rather

5. E. Wasiolek, *Tolstoy's Major Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 129.

6. The methodology used here is an extension of that devised by R. L. Jackson in "Chance and Design in *Anna Karenina*," in P. Demetz, T. Greene, N. Lowry, eds., *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 315-29. This is a study of the 18th chapter of Part I (Anna's arrival in Moscow). Jackson demonstrated the extent to which the structure and ornamentation of the smaller units of the novel may be rich in implications for the larger significance of the work as a whole.

common tendency (noted above) to augment Anna's role at the expense of Levin's. The balance between them which is suggested in Part I is scrupulously preserved in the remainder of the novel. Disregard of this balance has led to interpretations which are seriously dissonant with the novel's apparent structural intent.

The peculiar tension between the plot and the story in Part I suggests two other aspects of the aesthetic relationship between the characters of Anna and Levin. By representing them as dominating the Moscow setting by turns, the "story" indicates that they are mutually exclusive as characters and the emphasis is on the contrast between them. The plot, however, emphasizes their comparability as the reader's attention is directed from one to the other by turns. They are, indeed, contrasting characters, yet (it is suggested) they may and even should be fruitfully compared.

Even more significant are the particular conclusions about the characters of Levin and Anna which are suggested in the first Part of the novel. Both of them are, in a sense, "outsiders," although Levin has at the beginning (and throughout the novel) the reputation of a social eccentric⁷ while Anna is at first only nominally an outsider, for she is known as a pillar of St. Petersburg society. It is, however, her ultimate fate to be even more an outsider than Levin, and the signs of this are already apparent in her disappointment of Kitty's expectation of the role Anna would play at the ball, her precipitous departure from Moscow,⁸ and the discomfort and the sense of unfamiliarity which she experiences upon her return to St. Petersburg. Both Levin and Anna are delineated through their participation in the Moscow situations, and analysis reveals that their roles are consistent for the individual character and sharply contrasted as between the two characters. Thus, a rather intricate balance of emphasis is achieved. In the tension between story and plot, Tolstoi chose the more striking (in that it more immediately impinges on the reader's attention) of the two, the plot, to bear the emphasis of comparability between Anna and Levin. He faced a similar choice between the underlying pattern of the participation of Anna and Levin in the same situations and the expressed results (the more readily apparent of the two to the reader) of that participation. Here the more striking member of the pair emphasizes the contrast between Anna and Levin, as the following remarks will show.

7. *Viz.* he has given up his participation in the *zemstvo*, has come to Moscow with a purely personal end in mind (Kitty is to him more the incarnation of his private ideal than a real woman), prefers the isolation of the country to the social whirl of the city, and his return to Pokrovskoe is accompanied by a feeling of great relief.

8. The desire to flee from a particular social environment or situation is characteristic of the "outsider" in the novel. Compare Levin's desire to leave the Shcherbatskii house at once after Kitty has refused him, Kitty's rushing away to a private room to weep (after her humiliation at the ball), and Anna's later flights with Vronskii to Italy and to his country estate.

In Levin's meetings with his brothers he hears from each a vituperative attack on the other. More than personal antipathy is involved, for each associates his dislike with the social views of the other. Sergei Ivanovich considers Nikolai a dissolute wastrel and himself a leader in the movement for social reform. To Nikolai, Sergei Ivanovich is a conscienceless slave of a wicked social order while he himself is a leader of the morally inspired opposition to it. Whether Levin's role is viewed personally or socio-philosophically it is clear that he has no actual effect upon the development of the situation. He is able neither to reconcile the brothers personally nor to take a decisive and illuminating position on the philosophical questions which are raised. His role is one of passive involvement. Likewise, when Stiva puts his familial strife to Levin in the form of a hypothetical case, Levin's response is a generalized attack on "fallen women." Here again he makes no contribution to the development of the situation, even managing to avoid the central issue (the relations between Stiva and Dolly) and concentrating (by implication) on the peripheral question of the relations between Stiva and his mistress.

Levin's failure to participate actively or decisively in either of these situations may, of course, be ascribed to his being caught unawares and without time for reflection by the first and to Stiva's hypothetical obfuscation of the second. Such qualifications do not apply to the situation involving Kitty. Levin has come to Moscow with the considered purpose of changing Kitty's situation by making her his wife. To do so he must take an active part. After his proposal is refused the perception of him as an outsider is made absolutely clear as he endures the acerbic attacks of Countess Nordston and experiences a galling sense of personal isolation at the sight of Kitty's obvious infatuation with Vronskii and the latter's perfect fit within the company assembled for the Shcherbatskiis' "at home." Once again, Levin has no effect upon the course of the existing situation; Kitty's romance with Vronskii remains as it was. In summary, Levin arrives in Moscow from his rural isolation, is exposed to three situations, has no effect in the development of any one of them, and returns to his isolation, already compensating (inwardly) his disappointment in love with new dreams and ideals.

Anna's role is quite different. She comes to Moscow for the sake of others rather than in pursuit of her private goals, as Levin. Having heard both sides of the dispute between Stiva and Dolly, she acts decisively, and a reconciliation between the spouses shortly ensues. Thus, she fulfills the expectations the reader is led to have of her as a respected part of the social and familial order. Even as her efforts as peacemaker are bearing fruit, Anna is arousing in Kitty similar expectations about the role Anna will play at the ball. At the ball itself, however, Kitty sees not the sedate and politely bored matron in lilac she had expected but an alluring and animated woman in black velvet who completely disrupts her romance with Vronskii. By the end of the ball Kitty has become an outsider observing the increasingly abandoned relations be-

tween Vronskii and Anna. In summary, Anna brings about the reversal of both of the situations in which she plays a part.

The structure of Part I suggests that certain conclusions be borne in mind in approaching the novel as a whole. Clearly, the novel has two major *foci*: Levin and Anna. The relation between them is presented as both contrasting and comparable. Their comparability is suggested by their both having come to Moscow from outside, and by the end of Part I this superficial bond has developed into a genuine comparison: Anna has become a person with no refuge and, incipiently, even more radically an outsider than Levin. Through the active intensity of her personal involvement in Moscow even her own, pre-existing, St. Petersburg situation has been reversed. The signs of the fracture of her former position as a satisfied and respected matron are immediately apparent (she notes Karenin's peculiar ears, as though for the first time, is annoyed by his habit of cracking his knuckles, and is dissatisfied in the company of her friend, Countess Lidia Ivanovna).

The comparability between Levin and Anna is further enhanced by their both being described as characters with a double focus (thus harmonizing with the double focus of Part I as a whole). In Levin, this double focus is internal. It is described by Stiva as Levin's conflicting perceptions of the actual and the ideal and the frustrated desire to reconcile the two. In Anna the contrast is between her calm, sedate, surface appearance and the passionate "animation" (*ozhivlennost'*) within her, revealed especially by the repeated references to her eyelids covering the sparkle of her glance, her peculiar, involuntary smile, and the recalcitrant lock of hair which disrupts the good order of her coiffure. Thus, there is an implied contrast between exterior and interior in Anna, and, in the context of the structural comparison of Anna and Levin, the reader is led to speculate upon the possible connections between the dichotomies of "internal-external" and "ideal-actual" as manifested by Anna and Levin respectively. This suggests that the two main characters are co-equal and both contrasting and comparable also in terms of the larger social and philosophical themes which are woven into the fabric of the novel and especially of the differing ways in which Anna and Levin deal with their position as outsiders.

The structural integration of the stories of Anna and Levin which emerges from an analysis of Part I of the novel makes it difficult to accept the conclusion that *Anna Karenina* is two novels masquerading as one. The artistic care with which the two strands are linked together in Part I suggests instead that the novel is a carefully wrought unity. It is the task of scholarship and criticism to continue the search for a satisfying understanding of that unity in the novel as a whole.

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