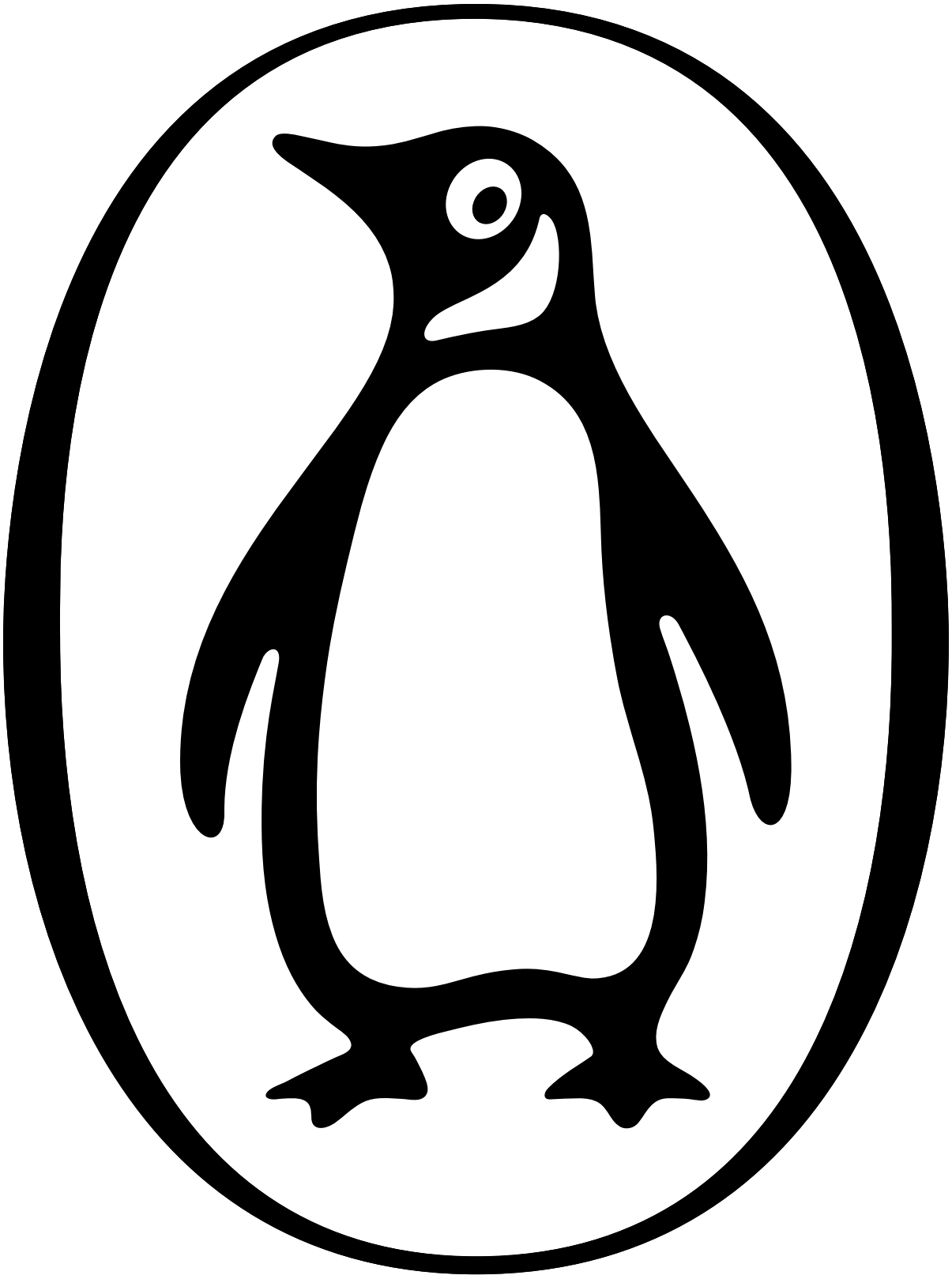
PENGUIN CLASSICS

LEO TOLSTOY

ANNA KARENINA



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ANNA KARENINA

‘William Faulkner, it’s said, was once asked to name the three best novels ever. He replied: “*Anna Karenina, Anna Karenina, Anna Karenina*.” If you don’t recall why, rush to buy a fine new translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky’ Boyd Tonkin, *Independent*

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‘The newest English-language translation by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky is a significant achievement… They have applied their hands-off, no-nonsense idea of translation… the shining result is that Tolstoy’s book reads as if it could have been written yesterday’ Ingrid Lunden, *San Francisco Chronicle*

‘Tolstoy’s greatness lies in not turning the story into sentimental tragedy… His world is huge and vast, filled with complex

family lives and great social events. His characters are well-rounded presences. They have complete passions: a desire for love, but also an inner moral depth' Malcolm Bradbury, *Mail on Sunday*

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COUNT LEO TOLSTOY was born in 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana, in the Tula province, and educated privately. He studied Oriental languages and law at the University of Kazan, then led a life of pleasure until 1851 when he joined an artillery regiment in the Caucasus. He took part in the Crimean War and after the defence of Sebastopol he wrote *The Sebastopol Sketches* (1855–6), which established his reputation. After a period in St Petersburg and abroad, where he studied educational methods for use in his school for peasant children in Yasnaya Polyana, he married Sofya Andreyevna Behrs in 1862. The next fifteen years was a period of great happiness; they had thirteen children, and Tolstoy managed his vast estates in the Volga Steppes, continued his educational projects, cared for his peasants and wrote *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877). *A Confession* (1879–82) marked a spiritual crisis in his life; he became an extreme moralist and in a series of pamphlets after 1880 expressed his rejection of state and church, indictment of the weaknesses of the flesh and denunciation of private property. His teaching earned him numerous followers at home and abroad, but also much opposition, and in 1901 he was excommunicated by the Russian Holy Synod. He died in 1910, in the course of a dramatic flight from home, at the small railway station of Astapovo.

RICHARD PEVEAR and LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY have translated Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* for Penguin Classics, and produced acclaimed translations of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Gogol. Their translation of *The Brothers Karamazov* won the 1991 PEN Book of the Month Club Translation Prize.

JOHN BAYLEY (CBE 1999) was Warton Professor of English Literature, Oxford University, from 1974–92. Among his many books are *The Characters of Love: A Study in the Literature of Personality*; *Tolstoy and the Novel*; *Pushkin: A Comparative Commentary*; *Shakespeare and Tragedy*; *Iris: A Memoir of Iris Murdoch*; *Iris and the Friends: A Year of Memories*; and a detailed study of A. E. Housman's poems. *Alice* (1994), *The Queer Captain* (1995) and *George's Lair* (1996) are his trilogy of novels. For Penguin Classics he has introduced Pushkin's *Tales of Belkin and Other Prose Writings* and *Eugene Onegin* and edited Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*.

LEO TOLSTOY

Anna Karenina

A NOVEL IN EIGHT PARTS

Translated by RICHARD PEVEAR
and LARISSA VOLOKHONSKY
With a Preface by JOHN BAYLEY

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Preface

Devoted readers of Tolstoy, and there are a great many of them, would find it hard to say which of his two great novels is their particular favourite. They are very different from each other, although neither could have been written by anyone else. Tolstoy himself always claimed that *War and Peace* was not a novel at all, 'as the West understands the term', but a form unique to himself, and only possible in Russia; whereas *Anna Karenina* he described to a friend as 'this novel, the first I have attempted…' Later in his long life he claimed that neither had any value, because all that mattered was God and the Truth, and the search to find them. But there is some irony in the fact that Tolstoy's later parables and polemical works are not much read today, whereas his two great novels – if for convenience we can agree to call them that – remain as popular as ever.

Tolstoy began to write *Anna Karenina* between four and five years after the completion and publication of *War and Peace*, and he began it, as he claimed, partly as a result of an accident. A woman threw herself under a train near his country estate of Yasnaya Polyana, and Tolstoy was involved in the subsequent inquiry. Jealousy and an unhappy love affair were involved, and led Tolstoy to reflect very seriously on the role of love and marriage in society. Then one evening he happened to be reading to his children a story by Pushkin, and was filled with admiration at the terseness and simplicity of its opening. 'That is how one should write', he exclaimed, and the famous beginning of *Anna Karenina* may well have been suggested by that moment.

‘All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.’ A wonderful opening it is; and it has never been better translated than by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky in this edition. At one stroke, and in a single sentence, we are brought into the heart and soul of the story: family life and the lives led by the separate members of families. Everyone in the novel knows all about the others; many are related. It is of importance, for example, that Dolly’s feckless and charming husband, Stiva Oblonsky, is also Anna’s brother. What is acceptable, or at least excusable, in his behaviour is culpable and ultimately fatal in hers. And in revealing this, as it were, Tolstoy and his novel are far from endorsing what used to be called the ‘double standard’ of sexual morality. When D. H. Lawrence said that Anna and Vronsky should have defied and banished the world by going away together, he was thinking of himself and his own wife Frieda, with whom he ran away and afterwards married, and he was missing the point. The point that the novel makes is that Anna and Vronsky *think* they can escape from society, but find they cannot. Without the freedom of the society they are accustomed to, their passion eventually becomes its own prison. Their world is too much a part of them: they need it too much; and the attempt to do without it in the end destroys them both.

However much Tolstoy himself may have tried later in life to escape from that world and to live in a more spiritual dimension, as he felt he saw the peasants doing, he himself knew society, the society described in *Anna Karenina*, through and through. And, with whatever apparent unwillingness, he always remained fascinated by it. Late in his life he would still ask his grown-up daughters who was doing what in Moscow and St Petersburg, and what the women were wearing at the balls. The idea of a novel about the *grande monde* had long haunted him, and he told his wife of the notion of writing about a married lady of that world who would ruin herself. He felt that as soon as he had ‘got hold’ of such a character the other persons in the story would also ‘become real’.

That is certainly what happened. All the characters in *Anna Karenina* are intensely real; and that includes the peasants mowing the field, the servants at the Moscow club where Stiva and Levin have lunch together, even the horses in the great steeplechase, where Vronsky makes a fatal error in going over a jump, and his mount, poor Frou-Frou, breaks her back. Such events are too much alive to be symbolic, and yet the symbolism of disaster is there and very much a part of the novel's rich and complex background.

Some critics and readers have felt that the seeming division of the novel almost into two different worlds – that of Levin (and later Kitty) in the country, and Anna and her friends in town – weakens and distracts us from the main theme. And yet this division is more apparent than real. They all know each other; they all live in the same world with the rest of the Russian upper class; and at the same time the inner mental life and struggle of Levin, which reflects Tolstoy's own state of mind at the time he was writing, parallels the emotional drama which engulfs Anna herself.

Is this drama now out of date? Would Anna today get a divorce, receive custody of her son, marry Vronsky and live happily ever after? Tolstoy did not think so; and the power of the novel, its truth to life and to human character, ultimately persuades the reader not to think so either. Tragedies like that of Anna Karenina do not depend on social change and enlightened social arrangements. Tolstoy's grip on the story, and his own remarkable identification with Anna and her situation – he too was beginning to be a self-appointed exile from the Russian society he still loved, in the teeth of his own growing spiritual convictions – ensure that the drama of the novel touches everyone in it, and that includes ourselves as readers.

And yet there is so much vitality there too, and richness, and gaiety. Anna has as much a power of happiness and life in her as of passion and affliction. How different she is, for instance, from Flaubert's Madame Bovary! There is so much humour in the great novel too, as there is in the

personality of Anna herself. One of its most moving moments comes near the end of the novel, when Anna is driving to the railway station and to her death under the train. She sees outside a shop on the street a hairdresser's name which strikes her as comical, and she thinks she will tell Vronsky – it will amuse him too. But then she remembers she won't be seeing Vronsky any more. It is a poignant moment. Quite unexpectedly Tolstoy makes us feel that if anything could have saved Anna it would have been her own sense of the comedy and absurdity of life, and the simple wish to share a joke with her lover. Tolstoy understood the comedy as well as he understood the sadness of things, and his great novels are full of both.

John Bayley

Introduction

> We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric,
> but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry.
>
> – W. B. Yeats

I

'I am writing a novel,' Tolstoy informed his friend the critic Nikolai Strakhov on 11 May 1873, referring to the book that was to become *Anna Karenina*. 'I've been at it for more than a month now and the main lines are traced out. This novel is truly a novel, the first in my life…'

Tolstoy was then forty-five. He had been writing and publishing for over twenty years. Along with some remarkable shorter pieces – 'The Snowstorm', 'Two Hussars', 'Three Deaths', 'The Wood Felling', 'Sebastopol Stories', 'Family Happiness' – he had produced longer works which he himself referred to as novels. For instance, it was as 'the first part of a novel' that Tolstoy sent the manuscript of *Childhood*, the opening section of the trilogy *Childhood, Boyhood and Youth*, to Nikolai Nekrasov, editor of *The Contemporary*, in 1852. Ten years later, apologizing to the editor Mikhail Katkov for his delay in producing the book he had promised him in return for a loan of a thousand roubles, he wrote: 'I've only just settled down to the novel I sold you the rights to, I couldn't get to it earlier.' This was *The Cossacks*, begun in 1857, worked on intermittently, and finished 'with sweat and blood' in 1862. In 1864, again writing to Katkov, Tolstoy mentioned that he was 'in the process of finishing the first part of [his] novel on the

period of the wars of Alexander and Napoleon', known then as *The Year 1805* but soon to be renamed *War and Peace*. Why, then, did he call *Anna Karenina* his first novel?

It is true that the early trilogy and *The Cossacks* are semi-fictionalized autobiography and in retrospect Tolstoy may have decided they could not properly be considered novels. But what of *War and Peace*? Isn't it the quintessential novel, the greatest of the species? Not according to its author. In a statement published after the appearance of the first three volumes, he declared enigmatically: 'What is *War and Peace*? It is not a novel, still less is it a poem, and even less a historical chronicle. *War and Peace* is what the author wished and was able to express in the form in which it is expressed.' For Tolstoy, a 'true novel' was evidently something more specific than a fictitious prose narrative of considerable length.

In fact, none of the great Russian prose writers of the nineteenth century, with the possible exception of Turgenev, was on easy terms with the novel as a genre. Gogol called *Dead Souls*, his only novel-length work, a poem. To define this unusual 'poem' he invented the notion of a hybrid genre, midway between epic and novel, to which he gave the name 'minor epic'. He found the novel too static a form, confined to a conventional reality, involving a set of characters who all had to be introduced at the start and all had to have some relation to the hero's fate, and whose possible interactions were too limited for his inventive gifts. It was the form for portraying ordinary domestic life, and Gogol had no interest in ordinary domestic life. Dostoevsky, who also referred to his work as 'poetry', transformed the novel into another sort of hybrid – the 'novel-tragedy' of some critics, the 'polyphonic novel' of others. Nikolai Leskov, an artist almost equal in stature to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, though less known outside Russia, made masterful use of the forms of the chronicle, the legend, the tale, the saint's life, even the local anecdote and the newspaper article,

but lost all his gifts when he turned to the novel. As for Chekhov, though he tried several times to write one, the novel was simply alien to his genius.

When Tolstoy called *Anna Karenina* his first novel, he was conceiving the form in the same restricted sense that Gogol found so uncongenial. He was deliberately embracing the conventional limits of the genre. This was to be a novel *in excelsis*, portraying a small group of main characters (in the final version there are seven, all related by birth or marriage), set in the present and dealing with the personal side of upper-class family and social life. Indeed, *Anna Karenina* introduces us to the most ordinary Russian aristocrats of the 1870s, concerned with the most ordinary issues of the day, behaving in the most ordinary ways, experiencing the most ordinary joys and sorrows. The one character who might seem out of the ordinary – Konstantin Levin – is also most ordinary, as Dostoevsky pointed out in his *Diary of a Writer* (February 1877, II, 2): 'But of Levins there are a great many in Russia, almost as many as Oblonskys.' The author's task was to manoeuvre us, for some seven or eight hundred pages, through and among these ordinary people and their doings. It was not that Tolstoy was so charmed by ordinary life. In 1883, six years after finishing *Anna Karenina*, he would begin the second chapter of a famous novella with the words: 'Ivan Ilyich's life was most ordinary, and therefore most terrible.' As with the novella, so with the novel: the polemic of *Anna Karenina* rests on the ordinariness of its characters.

Anna Karenina is polemical, first of all, in its genre. To publish such a book in the 1870s was an act of defiance, and Tolstoy meant it as one. By then the family novel was hopelessly out of fashion. The satirist Saltykov-Shchedrin noted at the time that the family, 'that warm and cosy element… which once gave the novel its content, has vanished from sight… The novel of contemporary man finds its resolution in the street, on the public way, anywhere but in the home.' The radical intelligentsia had been attacking the 'institution' of the family for more than a decade. Newspapers,

pamphlets, ideological novel-tracts like N. G. Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, advocated sexual freedom, communal living and the communal raising of children. Questions of women's education, women's enfranchisement, the role of women in public life, were hotly debated in the press. On all these matters Tolstoy held rather conservative views. For him, marriage and childrearing were a woman's essential tasks, and family happiness was the highest human ideal. As Nabokov observed in his lecture notes on *Anna Karenina*, 'Tolstoy considers that two married people with children are tied together by divine law forever.' An intentional anachronism, his novel was meant as a challenge, both artistic and ideological, to the ideas of the Russian nihilists.

There was always a provocative side to Tolstoy's genius, and it was most often what spurred him to write. *Anna Karenina* is a tissue of polemics on all the questions then being discussed in aristocratic salons and the newspapers, with Konstantin Levin acting as spokesman for his creator. There are arguments with the aristocracy as well as with the nihilists on the 'woman question' with the conservative Slavophiles as well as with the radical populists on the question of 'going to the people' and the exact geographical location of the Russian soul; with both landowners and peasants on questions of farm management; with advocates of old and new forms of political representation – local councils, provincial elections among the nobility – and of such judicial institutions as open courts and rural justices of the peace; with new ideas about the education of children and of peasants; with the new movements in art and music; with such recent fashions among the aristocracy as spiritualism, table-turning, pietism and non-Church mysticism, but also with the 'official' Church, its teachings and practices; with corrupt and ineffective bureaucrats, lawyers, capitalists foreign and domestic; with proponents of the 'Eastern question' and supporters of the volunteers who went to aid the Serbs and Montenegrins in their war with the Turks (Tolstoy's handling of this last issue was so hot

that his publisher refused to print the final part of the novel, and Tolstoy had to bring it out in a separate edition at his own expense).

There is, in other words, no neutral ground in Tolstoy's novel. His writing is 'characterized by a sharp internal dialogism', as Mikhail Bakhtin has noted, meaning that Tolstoy is conscious at every moment not only of what he is presenting but of his own attitude towards it, and of other possible attitudes both among his characters and in his readers' minds. He is constantly engaged in an internal dispute with the world he is describing and with the reader for whom he is describing it. 'These two lines of dialogization (having in most cases polemical overtones) are tightly interwoven in his style,' as Bakhtin says, 'even in the most "lyrical" expressions and the most "epic" descriptions.'* The implicit conflict of attitudes gives Tolstoy's writing its immediate grip on our attention. It does not allow us to remain detached. But, paradoxically, it also does not allow Tolstoy the artist to be dominated by Tolstoy the provocateur. His own conflicting judgements leave room for his characters to surprise him, lending them a sense of unresolved, uncalculated possibility. Pushkin, speaking of the heroine of his *Evgeny Onegin*, once said to Princess Meshchersky, 'Imagine what happened to my Tatiana? She up and rejected Onegin… I never expected it of her!' Tolstoy loved to quote this anecdote, which he had heard from the princess herself.

II

Tolstoy was mistaken when he told Strakhov that the main lines of *Anna Karenina* were already traced out. In an earlier letter, dated 25 March 1873 but never sent, he spoke even more optimistically about finishing the book quickly. The letter is interesting for its description of what started him writing. For more than a year he had been gathering materials – 'invoking the spirits of the time', as he put it – for a book set in the early eighteenth

century, the age of Peter the Great. That spring his wife had taken a collection of Pushkin's prose down from the shelf, thinking that their son Sergei might be old enough to read it. Tolstoy says:

The other day, after my work, I picked up this volume of Pushkin and as always (for the seventh time, I think) read it from cover to cover, unable to tear myself away, as if I were reading it for the first time. More than that, it was as if it dispelled all my doubts. Never have I admired Pushkin so much, nor anyone else for that matter. 'The Shot', 'Egyptian Nights', *The Captain's Daughter*!!! There was also the fragment, 'The guests arrived at the summer house'. Despite myself, not knowing where or what it would lead to, I imagined characters and events, which I developed, then naturally modified, and suddenly it all came together so well, so solidly, that it turned into a novel, the first draft of which was soon finished – a very lively, very engaging, complete novel, which I'm quite pleased with and which will be ready in fifteen days, if God grants me life. It has nothing to do with what I've been plugging away at for this whole year.

As it happened, the novel took him not fifteen days but four more years of work, during which much that had come together so suddenly through the agency of 'the divine Pushkin' was altered or rejected and much more was added that had not occurred to him in that first moment of inspiration.

The earliest mention of the subject of *Anna Karenina* comes to us not from Tolstoy but from his wife, Sophia Andreevna, who noted in her journal on 23 February 1870 that her husband said he had 'envisioned the type of a married woman of high society who ruins herself. He said his task was to portray this woman not as guilty but as only deserving of pity, and that once this type of woman appeared to him, all the characters and male types he had pictured earlier found their place and grouped themselves around her. "Now it's all clear," he told me.' Tolstoy did not remain faithful to this first glimpse of the guiltless adultress when he began writing the novel