

EN201 THE EUROPEAN NOVEL, WEEK 8: ANNA KARENINA

The 'Woman Question'

'Can it be that in our time when everywhere, in all of Russian society, there is so much activity, so much seething, so much striving forward—can it be that the Russian woman alone remains a passive, non-participating spectator to all this activity? Cannot some role for her in this common endeavor be found?'

Nadezhda Destunis qtd. in Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991), p. 34.

'Karenin expressed the view that the higher education of women is generally confounded with the question of women's emancipation, and that was the only reason for considering it injurious.

'I, on the contrary, think that these two questions are firmly bound together,' said Petsov. 'It is a vicious circle. Women are deprived of rights because of their lack of education, and their lack of education results from their lack of rights. We must not forget that the subjection of women is so widespread and so old that we often refuse to recognize the abyss that separates them from us.'

L. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. by Louise & Aylmer Maude (Oxford et al.: OUP, 1995) p. 386.

Family

'In order for a work to be good, one must love its main basic idea, as in *Anna Karenina* I love the idea of family.'

Tolstoy qtd. in the diary of Sofya Tolstaya, 3 March, 1877, qtd. in Barbara Lönnqvist, 'Anna Karenina', *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. by Donna Tussing Orwin (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 80-95 (80).

'All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

Everything was upset in the Oblonsky's house. The wife had discovered an intrigue between her husband and their former French governess, and declared that she would not continue to live under the same roof with him.'

(*Anna Karenina*, p. 1).

Adultery

'Women, not yet fully absorbed into capitalism, and the vehicles of unpaid labor, are more likely narrative occasions for revolt and resistance than men. The latter, unless they are young and dissatisfied [...], are more likely to be absorbed into the dynamics of business, and by way of success to open up the paradigms of the mass-cultural bestseller [...]. But women cannot be successful in this sense (unless domestic contentment and satisfaction is considered to be something positive, at which point the woman character falls to the second rank of minor character and of Dickensian foil or Mediterranean matriarch). The novel of adultery (taken in the largest sense) is thus a unique space in which the negation of the social order can be narrativized in the person of this other half of 'mankind': it is paradoxical and even a contradiction that women figures [...] become the great stars of the nineteenth-century novel – only compare Madame Bovary to the ineffectual Frédéric, or Anna Karenina to the vacillating Pierre! – a situation in which the role of the adulteress is the negative or privative one of showing that there is no place for them in bourgeois society and its most faithful expression, the bourgeois novel, in the first place!'

Fredric Jameson, 'A Note on Literary Realism in Conclusion', *Adventures in Realism*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Malden, MA, et al.: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 261-71 (264f.).

'Moral probity was bounded and even defined by acts of transgression. The most radical were sexual, homicidal or suicidal challenges to both social stability and contemporary moral sensibilities (the Russian word for crime, *prestuplenie*, comes from the verb, *prestupit'*, 'to transgress'). The authors of transgression were moral entrepreneurs who, wittingly or unwittingly, stepped outside the shifting bounds of the permissible in late Imperial and early Soviet society and challenged the sanctity of the status quo.'

Daniel Beer, 'Morality and Subjectivity, 1860s–1920s', *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Russian History*, ed. by Simon Dixon (OUP: Oxford Handbooks Online, 2013).

Realism

'[W]e are not to take *Anna Karenin* as a work of art; we are to take it as a piece of life. A piece of life it is. The author has not invented and combined it, he has seen it; it has all happened before his inward eye, and it was in this wise that it happened. Levin's shirts were packed up, and he was late for his wedding in consequence; Varenka and Serge Ivanovitch met at Levin's country-house and went out walking together; Serge was very near proposing, but did not. The author saw it all happening so—saw it, and therefore relates it; and what his novel in this way loses in art it gains in reality. For this is the result which, by his extraordinary fineness of perception, and by his sincere fidelity to it, the author achieves; he works in us a sense of the absolute reality of his personages and their doings. Anna's shoulders, and masses of hair, and half-shut eyes; Alexis Karenin's updrawn eyebrows, and tired smile, and cracking finger-joints; Stiva's eyes suffused with facile moisture—these are as real to us as any of those outward peculiarities which in our own circle of acquaintance we are noticing daily, while the inner man of our circle of acquaintance, happily or unhappily, lies a great deal less clearly revealed to us than that of Count Tolstoy's creations.'

Matthew Arnold, 'Essays in Criticism' (1888), Second Series, <<http://www.bartleby.com/316/1003.html>>

'The highest limit of the artist's relation to his subject will be such as evokes in all men an impression of reality—the reality not so much of what exists, as what goes on in the soul of the artist. This impression of reality is produced by truth only, and therefore the highest relation of an author to his subject is *sincerity*.'

L. Tolstoy, *What is Art? And Essays on Art*, trans. Aylmer Maude (London: OUP, 1930), p. 56.

'He copied that new pose, and, suddenly remembering the energetic pose and prominent chin of a shopman from whom he had bought cigars, he gave the figure that man's face and chin. He laughed with joy, for the inanimate, unnatural figure had become alive, and was just the thing. The figure was alive, clear, and well-defined. It was just the thing.' (*Anna Karenina*, p. 467)

The European Novel in Russia

'The Russian achievement was realized in sharp differentiation from the prevailing European mode, even in opposition to it. The Russian masters [...] did violence to the conventions of the genre as it had been conceived from the time of Defoe to that of Flaubert.'

George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast*. London: Faber & Faber, 1980), p. 18.