

# ANNA KARENINA



*Leo Tolstoy*

With an Introduction and Notes  
by Amy Mandelker

Translated by Constance Garnett

George Stade  
Consulting Editorial Director



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS  
NEW YORK

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## FROM THE PAGES OF ANNA KARENINA

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Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.  
(page 5)

Doctoring her seemed to her as absurd as putting together the pieces of a broken vase. Her heart was broken. Why would they try to cure her with pills and powders? )  
(page 113)

Standing still, and looking at the tops of the aspen-trees waving in the wind, with their freshly washed brightly shining leaves in the cold sunshine, she knew that they would not forgive her, that every one and everything would be as merciless to her now as was that sky, that green.  
(page 271)

There was apparently nothing extraordinary in what she said, but what unutterable meaning there was for him in every sound, in every turn of her lips, her eyes, her hand as she said it! There was entreaty for forgiveness, and trust in him, and tenderness—soft, timid tenderness—and promise and hope and love for him, which he could not but believe in and which choked him with happiness.  
(page 359)

She and Levin had a conversation of their own, yet not a conversation, but some sort of mysterious communication, which brought them every moment nearer, and stirred in both a sense of glad terror before the unknown into which they were entering.  
(page 364)

She tried to please him, not by her words only, but in her whole person. For his sake it was that she now lavished more care on her dress than before. She caught herself in reveries on what might have been, if she had not been married and he had been free.  
(page 474)

Already he saw himself a deceived husband, looked upon by his wife and her lover as simply necessary to provide them with the conveniences and pleasures of life.

(page 530)

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“Something magical has happened to me, like a dream, when you’re frightened, panic-stricken, and all of a sudden you wake up and all the horrors are no more. I have waked up.”

(page 566)

“I always loved you, and if one loves any one, one loves the whole person, just as they are and not as one would like them to be.”

(page 566)

Just as before, only by love and by charm could she keep him. And so, just as before, only by her occupation in the day, by morphine at night, could she stifle the fearful thought of what would be if he ceased to love her.

(page 613)

“He wants to show me that his love for me is not to interfere with his freedom. But I need no proofs, I need love.”

(page 649)

“Is this life? I am not living, but waiting for an event, which is continually put off and put off.”

(page 649)

There are no conditions to which a man cannot become used, especially if he sees that all around him are living in the same way.

(page 651)

Suddenly all disguises were thrown off and the very kernel of her soul shone in her eyes.

(page 652)

For an instant she had a clear vision of what she was doing, and was horrified at how she had fallen away from her resolution. But even though she knew it was her own ruin, she could not restrain herself, could not keep herself from proving to him that he was wrong.

(page 685)

Then, for the first time, grasping that for every man, and himself too, there was nothing in store but suffering, death, and forgetfulness, he had made up his mind that life was impossible like that, and that he must either interpret life so that it would not present itself to him as the evil jest of some devil or shoot himself.

(page 736)

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# LEO TOLSTOY



Frail and exhausted by familial unhappiness, Leo Tolstoy, at age eighty-two, quietly stole away from his home one evening in late October 1910, aided by his youngest daughter, Alexandra, and his doctor. The greatest living figure in Russia had no planned destination as he boarded a late-night train, but hours later his journey was cut short when pneumonia forced him to disembark at Astapovo. A medical frenzy of international proportions ensued as Tolstoy lay dying in the stationmaster's house, and days later the world grieved to learn that the literary giant had reached his final destination.

Tolstoy's life was much like his novels—expansive, complex, ambiguous, profound. Born into an aristocratic family on August 28, 1828, at their estate Yasnaya Polyana, Count Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy lost both his parents when he was a child, a fact that instilled in him a deep and lasting awareness of death. Educated by tutors and raised by aunts, young Leo revered Charles Dickens, Voltaire, Georg Hegel, and especially Jean-Jacques Rousseau. After a short time studying languages and law at the University of Kazan, he left school and returned to his estate, determined to improve the lives of the peasants who lived there.

Tolstoy's efforts at Yasnaya Polyana were not entirely successful, and the severe mental and physical rigors he imposed on himself were relieved by periods of debauchery in the gambling saloons and brothels of Moscow. Wanting something more than a life of philistinism, Tolstoy joined the military and devoted himself with great seriousness to his writing. His first novel, *Childhood*, and *Sevastopol Stories*, a collection of short fiction based on his experiences in the Crimean War, earned him the respect of both Czar Alexander II and the writer Ivan Turgenev, as well as a place among the leading writers of his day. The brilliant young author hardly courted his admirers, however. Outspoken, wild, and difficult, Tolstoy offended many with his radical contrariness and criticism of the Russian status quo. Love mellowed some of his legendary appetites, and in 1862 Tolstoy wedded Sophia Behrs, who would bear him thirteen children and handwrite thousands of pages of his manuscripts.

Over the next decade Tolstoy published two of the world's greatest novels, *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, which earned him the highest acclaim among his countrymen and secured him a reputation equal to that of other masters of the modern novel—George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Thomas Hardy, Henry James. But while Tolstoy's reputation grew, his private life degenerated. Neither philosophy nor organized religion could soothe his ennui or lead him to understand how he could live a meaningful life. In his long essay *A Confession*, Tolstoy states that during one period he was forced to abandon his favorite hobby of hunting for fear he would be tempted to turn his gun on himself: "At the very time that I was writing and finishing my book *Anna Karenina*, this despair reached the point that I could do nothing but only think, think about the dreadful situation that I was in." Sophia, overextended from perpetual pregnancies and wifely duties, responded to her husband's increasing spiritual unrest with incomprehension. The marriage suffered terribly and never quite recovered from that period of unhappiness. His writing suffered as well. In the years following his conversion, Tolstoy renounced his earlier masterpieces as worldly trash and

devoted his talents to hortatory essays and revisions of the New Testament. His public was appalled by this turn of events and a dying Ivan Turgenev begged Tolstoy to fulfill his deathbed plans and take up his pen once more.

During the time he spent educating the Russian peasants, Tolstoy came to believe that a literal interpretation of Christ's teachings, stripped of church doctrine, gave meaning to their lives. Following similar principles, he determined to improve his own spiritual well-being by signing over his property and following the minimalist program outlined in the biblical Book of Matthew—decisions that permanently alienated him from most of his family. In his essays *A Confession*, *What Then Must We Do?*, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, and *What I Believe*, Tolstoy presented his philosophy of simplicity and nonresistance to evil—an outlook that inspired Mahatma Gandhi, among many others. Leo Tolstoy died on November 7, 1910.

# THE WORLD OF LEO TOLSTOY AND ANNA KARENINA



- 1828 On August 28 Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy is born into a noble family at Yasnaya Polyana, the family estate.
- 1830 Leo's mother dies.
- 1833 Aleksandr Pushkin's Eugene Onegin is published.
- 1837 The family moves to Moscow. Leo's father dies.
- 1840 The Tolstoy children are taken in by their Aunt Alexandra. Leo loves stories, and is captivated by his brother Sergei's tale of a small green stick buried in the neighboring woods; on it, his brother claims, is written the secret to uniting all of humanity in mutual love. Mikhail Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time is published.
- 1841 Aunt Alexandra dies. Leo comes under the care of his beloved Aunt Tatiana in Kazan and is educated by tutors. A sensitive and precocious child, Leo displays the keen awareness of death that will haunt him throughout his life. He also reveals his attraction to extremes—he forces himself to adhere to grueling physical exercises, including self-inflicted back-lashing, only to be overcome by bouts of self-indulgence and laziness.
- 1842 Nikolai Gogol's Dead Souls is published.
- 1844 Tolstoy enters Kazan University, where he studies Oriental languages in preparation for a career in diplomacy.
- 1845 Tolstoy decides to study law. While in school, he takes up a rigorous program of self-betterment, which includes physical exercise, exhaustive study, and the painstaking documentation of his moral development in a diary some have considered to be his writer's laboratory. The works of Georg Hegel, Charles Dickens, Voltaire, William Shakespeare, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau are among his favorites.
- 1847-1850 Tolstoy quits his studies and returns to the family estate, which he has inherited. He dedicates himself to bettering the life of the local peasants with education and practical assistance. He is not completely successful, but his experience only increases his commitment to a lifelong struggle on behalf of the impoverished. True to his divided nature, Tolstoy counterbalances these noble efforts with gambling binges and sexual escapades in St. Petersburg and Moscow.
- 1851 He begins to write an autobiographical novel, *Childhood*, and joins the military with his brother.

1852 *Childhood* is published to great acclaim.

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1853-1856 Tolstoy fights in the Crimean War. He completes another novel, the sequel to *Childhood*, *Boyhood* (1854), and a collection of short fiction based on his wartime experience, *Sevastopol Stories* (1855-1856). Czar Alexander II, the writer Ivan Turgenev, and many other readers embrace Tolstoy as an important writer. The author manages to fend off some followers with his eccentric views and arrogant self-righteousness.

1857 Tolstoy publishes the third novel in his trilogy, *Youth*. He travels throughout Europe, and is repulsed by the barbarity of a public execution he witnesses.

1859 Tolstoy publishes *Family Happiness*, a novel. He devotes more energy to public education by lecturing and founding a school for peasant students.

1861 The serfs are freed by the Emancipation Manifesto. Tolstoy's brother, Nikolai, dies of tuberculosis, and Tolstoy experiences a profound depression.

1862 After much indecision, Tolstoy marries Sophia Behrs. As a condition of their union, Tolstoy demands that Sophia read journal descriptions of his past sexual promiscuity. Ivan Turgenev publishes *Fathers and Sons*.

1863 Tolstoy publishes *The Cossacks*, a novel, begins his research for *War and Peace*, and publishes the first of the epic work's six volumes. Sophia becomes her husband's secretary; over the course of their forty-eight-year marriage she will handwrite thousands of his manuscript pages.

1866 Fyodor Dostoevsky publishes *Crime and Punishment*.

1869 The last of the six volumes of *War and Peace* is published.

1870 Vladimir Lenin, who will lead the Russian Revolution of 1917, is born.

1872 Tolstoy views the corpse of Anna Pirogova, a young woman who has committed suicide by throwing herself beneath the wheels of a train after learning her lover planned to abandon her in order to marry another woman. Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, an analysis of capitalistic politics, circulates throughout Russia.

1875 *Anna Karenina* begins to be published in installments and is overwhelmingly popular. Nevertheless, three deaths—the extreme suffering and death of his baby son, the premature birth and death of a daughter, and the death of his Aunt Tatiana—plunge Tolstoy into a serious depression and contemplation of suicide. Continuing his search for a new philosophy of life, he studies the ancient philosophers, numerous religions, and the culture of the Russian peasantry.

1878 Although Tolstoy has submitted the final chapters of *Anna Karenina* to his publisher, the outbreak of war in the Balkans inspires him to write what he calls an Epilogue to the novel. The publisher refuses to issue it, and Tolstoy brings it out at his own expense, in the form of a brochure. In conversation with Sophia, Tolstoy agonizes that he is incapable of

continuing to live with the spiritual and philosophical questions that absorb him and that are articulated in the final, rejected pages of his novel.

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- 1879-1880 Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is published.
- 1881 Czar Alexander II is assassinated.
- 1882 Tolstoy publishes *A Confession*, an essay on religion and the meaning of life that is banned in Russia; in this work, he embraces a philosophy of Christian love and nonviolence unfettered by organized religion.
- 1883 Tolstoy meets Vladimir Chertkov, who becomes his disciple and a source of anger and resentment between Tolstoy and his wife. The Russian government becomes increasingly watchful of Tolstoy and his antigovernment sentiments.
- 1886 *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, a short novel considered another Tolstoy masterpiece, is published.
- 1889 Tolstoy writes *The Kreutzer Sonata*, an account of sexuality and wife murder so scandalous it cannot be published and must circulate in manuscript form. It is read aloud at social gatherings throughout Russia—sometimes by Tolstoy himself—and provokes extensive debate.
- 1891 Sophia and Tolstoy organize a massive relief effort for famine sufferers. The author signs over his property to his family and gives up most of the rights to his publications; the latter causes intense anger on the part of his family.
- 1898 Tolstoy begins writing *What Is Art?*, which condemns the world's greatest authors for not writing works accessible to all walks of life; in this essay he criticizes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, and Beethoven, as well as his own writings.
- 1901 The Russian Orthodox Church excommunicates Tolstoy for his criticism of a church official; the church's action sparks international outrage on Tolstoy's behalf. Anton Chekhov's play *Three Sisters* debuts.
- 1905 The first Russian Revolution begins.
- 1908 Tolstoy publishes *I Cannot Be Silent*, an essay against capital punishment.
- 1910 Feuds over Tolstoy's will make life at home intolerable for him. He leaves under cover of night with his daughter and doctor, boarding a late-night train with no planned destination. He contracts pneumonia and is forced to disembark at Astapovo, where he dies in the stationmaster's house on November 7.

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# INTRODUCTION



*Anna Karenina* is the second of the two great masterpieces written by Count Leo Tolstoy. His first and most vast work, *War and Peace*, an epic account of the Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812, was compared by the German writer Thomas Mann to Homer's *Iliad*. Like the Greek bard, Tolstoy wrote one national epic and one work that can be compared to Homer's *Odyssey*: Both *Anna Karenina* and the *Odyssey* place descriptions of everyday family life against the larger backdrop of a dangerous world that threatens to tear apart the fabric of society at its most intimately threaded points: the relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, individual and society. Tolstoy drew the comparison of the themes of his two great works: "In *War and Peace* I loved the idea of the people and nation, because of the War of 1812.... In *Anna Karenina* I loved the idea of family."

Since *Anna Karenina* is a novel (indeed, English literary critic F. R. Leavis called it "*the European novel*") the focus on the family is part of a wider social critique. The family idea is both anxious and troubled, as the novel's opening sentence announces: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (p. 5). The novel opens with a domestic crisis in the Oblonski family, but this is only a frame for or introduction to the more insidious destruction of the Karenin family and the eponymous heroine that constitutes the main narrative of the novel. The large backdrop of the novel is the reconstructionist period of Russian history following the sweeping reforms of the 1860s: the emancipation of the serfs, the restructuring of regional and local government, the institution of reforming committees, church and estate reform, the opening of the universities and professions to non-nobles and to women. Heavy censorship of the Russian press had pushed critical debates of government policy into the pages of novels. *Anna Karenina* is, therefore, more than a novel of adultery: It is topical and philosophical, and therefore has much in common with the works of Charles Dickens and George Eliot. The character who navigates the social and political dangers of the novel and connects the public sphere with the private family arena is Constantin Levin, whose efforts at estate management, agricultural reform, and the establishment of family happiness strongly echoes the life experiences of Count Leo Tolstoy himself.

The "family idea" was a constant ideal for Tolstoy throughout his life. His mother had died shortly after his birth, and his father in his tenth year. Later he would write that his childhood imagination dwelt on radiant images of a romanticized and harmonious, unbroken family life predating his birth. The four orphaned Tolstoy brothers developed an exceptionally close relationship, as demonstrated in their game the "Ant Brothers." In Russian, the word for "ant" is similar to that for "Moravian," and the boys, having heard about the Moravian brethren (a Christian sect that emphasized brotherly love), misconstrued the name. Clinging together in a long huddle, the boys became the "Ant Brothers," bonded in their love. The death of two of his beloved brothers later in life would be extremely traumatic for Leo, precipitating the philosophical and religious crisis that absorbed him by the time he wrote *Anna Karenina*.

As a young man and beginning author, Tolstoy touched on ideas of "family happiness," even writing a short novel by that name. Even so, like many of his contemporaries, he lived an immoderate life that

involved gambling, drinking, and venereal disease. But when he finally married Sophia Behrs in 1862, he immediately began putting into practice the dreams and plans for domesticity he had fostered in his fantasy for so long. Like Konstantin Levin in *Anna Karenina*, Leo had been a friend of his wife's family for many years and had been infatuated, in sequence, with each of the three daughters. The description of Konstantin Levin's courtship of Kitty Scherbatsky incorporates in the pages of *Anna Karenina* many actual episodes from the Tolstoy courtship and marriage.

It was an early marriage for Sophia and a late marriage for Leo. His discovery that actual family life bore little resemblance to his dreams and anticipations became a chronic source of psychological distress. Although in his family letters Tolstoy fancifully describes his wife as having turned into a china doll, Sophia was, in fact, a separate individual, and a sense of the strain in the Tolstoy marriage is evident in the couples' diaries and letters. Initially the marriage was successful: Tolstoy began working on *War and Peace* with Sophia serving as amanuensis; she recopied the lengthy manuscript several times, in addition to fulfilling her duties as housewife and mother. However, by the time Leo was completing his second masterpiece, *Anna Karenina*, he describes himself as experiencing great inner turmoil and torment. In the last year of the novel's composition, he turned to the study of religion and philosophy, which led him to a dramatic conversion experience, related in the novel's final pages. This was the final wedge exacerbating the estranged relations of the Tolstoy family; the children chose up sides while the numerous earnest disciples of Tolstoy's innovative ideas about faith and life overran the family estate. Any fiction of marital harmony was finally shredded in the notorious public scenes that brought the Tolstoys' married life to its close. In his last weeks, at age eighty-two, Leo fled from his home, concealing his plans from Sophia. When he collapsed and lay dying at the Astapovo train station, she was refused entry. A chilling photograph was taken of Countess Tolstoy peering anxiously through a tiny window in an effort to glimpse her husband before his death. She was admitted only when Leo was past all point of recognition or response.

Tolstoy's literary works express his perplexity and anxiety about the relationships between men and women: He would return in his writings time and again to the paradoxes of sexuality, maternity, and conjugality. His first literary experiment, "A History of Yesterday," portrayed the silent discourse of sexual attraction; an adulterous flirtation is carried out entirely in a dialogue of unspoken speeches. Later, in "Family Happiness," sexual love is exposed as destructive of family life—it must be suppressed and evicted from the marital relationship, which is reduced to a well-modulated partnership of coparenting. Toward the end of his authorial career, Tolstoy would savage all notions of a licit human sexuality and urge continence and abstinence on a bewildered public. In his irascible short novel *The Kreutzer Sonata*, he would describe a man who claims to have been driven to murder his wife; his self-defense consists of blackening all social institutions, especially marriage, as unnatural and perverse. Following what the author himself admitted to be a bizarre yet logical sequence of thought, marriage is denigrated as institutionalized and socially acceptable prostitution—even the procreation of the species—the traditional religious sanction for conjugal relations—dismissed as an inadequate reason for licensed cohabitation. No one should dare to give birth, ran the narrator, while destitute and needy children may be adopted. The only escape from the prison cell of the passions in this desultory philippic is into the monk's cell of celibacy.

Yet Tolstoy had at the time of his greatest creative prowess dedicated his art to what are perhaps the most elegiac and successful literary descriptions of family happiness in all literature: the magnificent closing scenes of *War and Peace*. The heroes and heroines who began the novel as children and youths have survived war and chaos, and now ripen and mature into the new masters of their parents' estate.



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