

PUSKIN'S LEGACY IN ANNA KARENINA

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Vol'skaia, in tears of indignation, decided to rebel against the authority of an unjust society. An opportunity soon presented itself.

-- Pushkin, "The guests were arriving at the dacha..." (1828-30)

Even as the first installments of Anna Karenina were appearing in press, critics began noting an affinity between Tolstoy's novel and the works of Pushkin. In February 1875, less than a month after serial publication began, a reviewer for Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti cited the novel's "lofty simplicity," its "subtle sense of measure," and allied these features with Pushkin's prose (Zelinskii, 3). In May of the same year V. Avseenko, writing in Russkii vestnik, compared Anna to Tat'iana in Eugene Onegin and to Zinaida Vol'skaia in Pushkin's unfinished fragment "The guests were arriving at the dacha..." (Zelinskii, 178). In 1877, when the final part of the novel was issued, Dostoevskii declared unequivocally (though without drawing specific parallels) that "Anna Karenina is...not something new in terms of its idea, nor is it anything previously unheard of among us...we can, of course, point Europe directly to its source, that is, to Pushkin himself" (200).¹

Subsequent criticism, by and large, has taken paths the suggested by these early reactions. It has been noted that various aspects of Tolstoy's narrative manner in Anna Karenina--the more compressed, vigorous style (in comparison to War and Peace), the rapid pace of plot development, the technique of leading the reader immediately into the action of a scene without lengthy introductions--are directly related to the author's rediscovery of Pushkin's prose in March 1873 (Eikhenbaum [1974], 148, 155; Gornaia, 191-198; Ishchuk [1978], 22-23; Zhdanov [1957], 209-210, 241-242).²

¹One should note, however, that the context of Dostoevsky's remark gives Tolstoy (and Tolstoy's novel) no privileged position with regard to Pushkin's legacy. Dostoevsky's argues that the entire "pleiade" of major contemporary prosaists "has worked only to fulfill [Pushkin's] behests and has said nothing new since Pushkin. All derive their origins from him"(200).

²Babaev (1975), however, quite correctly points out that Tolstoy's style is by no means identical to Pushkin's. Tolstoy, as he says, "clothes" the spare line of Pushkin's prose in "details of feeling,"

DAVID SLOANE

Considerable attention has been paid to textual parallels with Pushkin's "The guests were arriving..." and other prose fragments which we know from biographical evidence Tolstoy read immediately before he started writing *Anna Karenina* (Chicherin, 176; Eikhenbaum [1969], 178-179; Gudzii [1935], 152-153; Gudzii [1939], 584-585; Meilakh, 371).³ Finally, it has been suggested that *Anna Karenina* is a variation on or continuation of the plot of *Eugene Onegin*--whereas Tat'iana chooses marital fidelity over Onegin's advances at the end of Pushkin's novel, Anna enters into an illicit extramarital affair with Vronsky (Babaev, 228-229; Batiushkov, 15-17; Eikhenbaum [1974], 154; Maimin, 175; Meilakh, 371-373; Schultze, 7). The triangle of Anna's relationship with Karenin and Vronsky is deemed a direct analogue to the relationship between Tat'iana, her husband (who is wounded in the war of 1812 and presumably a much older man) and Onegin.

Existing critical literature contains biographical evidence that confirms Tolstoy's extraordinary fascination with Pushkin's prose at precisely the time he began writing *Anna Karenina*. Frequently cited, for instance, is Sof'ia Andreevna's account of what happened on March 18, 1873:

Yesterday evening Lev suddenly told me: "I have written one and a half sheets and they're good, I think." Assuming that this was another attempt at writing [a novel] from the era of Peter the Great, I paid no attention. But later I learned that he had begun to write a novel about private life set in contemporary times. And it is strange how he stumbled onto

expands and fills out where Pushkin strove for utmost simplicity and compactness (221-224).

³Though the parallels are indeed remarkable, researchers have at times been overzealous in searching them out. One problem is that care is not always taken to ascertain whether Tolstoy could have known a particular piece. In 1873 Tolstoy used the seven-volume collection of Pushkin's works edited by P.V. Annenkov: A.S. Pushkin, *Sochineniia* (SPb.: 1855-57). His contact with Pushkin's prose was through the fifth volume of this edition. Eikhenbaum (1969) states that Pushkin was probably influenced by Pushkin's "article about Baratynskii" (which he quotes at length) and an excerpt entitled "Thoughts While Traveling" ["Mysli na doroge"] (178-79). However, neither of these pieces appears in the Annenkov edition. Both Eikhenbaum (1974) and Meilakh suggest that the name Vronsky is taken from an early draft of the fragment "On the corner of a small square..." (Eikhenbaum, 150; Meilakh, 371), although this draft is not reproduced by Annenkov. Meilakh, it is true, argues that Tolstoy might have known this draft from his personal acquaintance with Annenkov in the mid 1850's, but this hardly seems plausible.

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

this. Seryozha [Tolstoy's eldest son] kept asking me to give him something to read aloud to his old aunt. I gave him *The Tales of Belkin* by Pushkin. But it happened that auntie fell asleep, and I, not having the energy to walk downstairs and return the book to the library, put it down on the window sill in the parlor. The next morning, while having his coffee, Lev picked up the book and started to reread it rapturously. In this volume (the Annenkov edition) he first came across [Pushkin's] critical notes and said: "I am learning a great deal from Pushkin. He is my father. And I need to learn [more] from him." Then he reread aloud to me about old times, how landowners lived and traveled on roads, and much that had been specially perplexing for him about the daily life of the gentry in the time of Peter the Great now became clear; but in the evening he read various fragments and under Pushkin's influence began writing. Today he continued further and he says he is pleased with his work. (Tolstaia, I, 500-501)

It is also common to cite Tolstoy's own account of the events, which in no way contradicts his wife's but provides other relevant details. It appears in an unsent letter to Strakhov dated March 25, 1873:

I have spent almost all my work hours this past winter on Peter [the Great]...and suddenly a week ago Seryozha, our eldest son, began reading *Iurii Miloslavskii* [a novel by Zagoskin]—with enthusiasm. I thought it was too early [for him to read it] and I read with him. Then my wife brought *The Tales of Belkin* from downstairs, intending to find something for Seryozha, but of course she found he was too young for this too. Inadvertently after work I picked up this volume of Pushkin and, as always (for the seventh time, it seems) I read all of it, not being able to tear myself away, and it felt as if I were reading it for the first time. But this is understating it—it was as if he had resolved all my doubts. I think I have never been so ecstatic about Pushkin before or about anything for that matter. "The Shot," "Egyptian Nights," "The Captain's Daughter"!!! And the fragment "The guests were gathering [sic] at the dacha" is in there. Involuntarily, unexpectedly, not knowing myself why and what I was doing, I conceived characters and events, began a continuation and then, of course, changed it. And suddenly it all came together so quickly and beautifully that a novel emerged.... (62, 16)

In interpreting Tolstoy's remarks and those of his wife, researchers have tended to emphasize the unexpectedness of Tolstoy's reaction, suggesting that it occurred virtually without warning and as a result of chance. Indeed, much in both accounts indicates that the events of March 18, 1873 contained a significant element of chance and were not

entirely comprehended by Tolstoy himself ("it is strange how he stumbled onto this," "suddenly," "inadvertently," "unexpectedly," "not knowing myself why or what I was doing"). As we shall see, the concept of chance or accident as a creative stimulus is extremely important in the design of *Anna Karenina*--a fact which suggests that the circumstances of the novel's creation were embodied meaningfully in the text.

Although existing scholarship has teased apart and examined many of the threads connecting *Anna Karenina* with Pushkin's oeuvre and uncovered part of the mechanism by which Pushkin's example gave birth to the novel, it has left several fundamental questions unanswered. Why did reading Pushkin at this point in his life so profoundly affect Tolstoy that he would suddenly abandon current work and immerse himself headlong in a new project? What is the essence of Tolstoy's interaction with Pushkin in *Anna Karenina* and how (if at all) did this interaction manifest itself at deep levels of textual structure? Existing criticism often leaves the impression that Tolstoy's apparently sudden fascination with Pushkin was a fluke and that the ties between the novel and Pushkin's oeuvre are superficial. The aim of the present study is to demonstrate that Tolstoy was in a sense ripe for Pushkin's influence in March 1873, that much in his life experience prepared him for an intense encounter with his predecessor. An attempt will be made also to show that Pushkin's example affected more than just the initial stages of Tolstoy's work and that his novel continually mediates Pushkin's legacy in very significant ways. To be sure, previous scholarship has indicated certain paths to explore these issues, but a basic understanding of how Tolstoy engaged Pushkin in *Anna Karenina* is still lacking.

Between 1868, when Tolstoy was putting the final touches on *War and Peace*, and March 1873, when he began writing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy thought of Pushkin repeatedly in ways which--directly or indirectly--would be reflected later in his new novel. In February 1868, he met Pushkin's eldest daughter, Mariia Gartung, who (as Tolstoy himself confirmed) served as the model for Anna's physical appearance.⁴ In September of the following year he stayed overnight in the town of Arzamas (near Nizhnii-Novgorod)--a locale that could not help but evoke the memory of Pushkin; Tolstoy's story "Diary of a Madman" (1884), a fictionalized account of his

⁴Kuzminskaja reports the circumstances of this meeting and writes that Gartung "served as the [proto]type for Anna Karenina--not her character, not her life, but her appearance" (in particular the dark, "Arabian" curls at the nape of her neck). She recalls that Tolstoy's wife became jealous of Gartung--a detail that parallels Kitty's reaction to Levin's meeting with Anna (465).

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

stay there, contains conspicuous reminiscences from Pushkin's lyric "Strannik."⁵ In general Pushkin's verses are especially dear to Tolstoy during the period between the great novels, as is apparent from the fact that he repeatedly quotes or paraphrases Pushkin's poems in these years.⁶ It is hardly accidental that *Anna Karenina* contains more quotations from Pushkin's lyrics than any other work Tolstoy wrote.⁷

During this period Tolstoy was involved simultaneously in two major projects, both of which brought him into contact with Pushkin's works and with Pushkin the man, toward whom circumstances apparently made him feel a certain affinity. In compiling *Azbuka*, the four-volume school reader, Tolstoy underwent a stylistic metamorphosis that brought him much closer to Pushkin's prose than he had ever been before. Discarding the diffuse, expansive idiom of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy turned to folklore and to Pushkin's tales in search of a spare, event-laden style of narration. At the same time Tolstoy undertook to write a tragedy set in the reign of Peter I (only later did he decide to switch to the genre of historical novel), and with this aim began studying both the theory of drama and well-known examples of dramatic art, including Pushkin's "Boris Godunov." Tolstoy's experiment with a more succinct style obviously helped prepare him for *Anna Karenina*, but the study of drama, which involved him in theoretical reading and forced him to contemplate the nature of tragedy, also proved extremely important in the creation of the novel.

⁵Blagoi points out that Tolstoy's story recalls the plot and reproduces that lexicon of "Strannik," which deals with the individual's retreat from society. "It is unlikely that this whole chain of correspondences is unrelated...Tolstoy could not help but have known Pushkin's 'Strannik'" (69).

⁶Tolstoy quotes from Pushkin's "Geroi" in 1868 (15, 52), "Poslushai, dedushka, mne kazhdyi raz..." and "Prorok" in 1870 (48, 344, 129), "Priznanie" in 1871 (61, 261), "Ezerskii" in March 1872 (61, 277) and "Pamiatnik" at the end of 1872 (61, 349).

⁷On two occasions Oblonsky quotes (imprecisely) from "Iz Anakreona" ("Uznaiut konei retivkykh...") (I, 10, 17). Levin quotes (accurately) from "Vospominanie" ("Kogda dlia smertnogo..."), one of Tolstoy's favorite poems (I, 10). Zhdanov and Zaidenshnur are mistaken, however, when they attribute to Levin a quotation from "Pir vo vremia chumy" (821).

DAVID SLOANE

What was it in the fifth volume of Pushkin's collected works (the Annenkov edition)⁸ that so captivated Tolstoy and why? To a large degree, and especially at the earliest stage, Tolstoy seems to have been interested in portions of the book that related to his previous and soon to be abandoned work. Hence, as his wife reports, he read aloud excerpts dealing with life "in olden times," "the life of the gentry in the era of Peter the Great." These almost certainly included "The Genealogy of the Pushkins and the Hannibals," located at the very beginning of the volume (3-6), which describes, for the most part, the life of Pushkin's maternal great grandfather, Ibragim (1697-1781), and "The Negro of Peter the Great" (113-146), a fictionalized account of Ibragim's youth. Reading these pieces may well have reminded Tolstoy that he was a blood relative of Pushkin and that their common genealogical link dated back to the time of Peter.⁹ Moreover "The Negro of Peter the Great," the beginning of a society novel about adultery and birth out of wedlock and set in a hedonistic, hypocritical milieu, may well have offered Tolstoy a conceptual bridge between his old project and the new one he was about to undertake. Tolstoy's attention was probably drawn also to a number of anecdotes and historical vignettes from the same era (55-56), perhaps most notably to "Olden Russian Oddities," which describe the lives of eighteenth century landowners (510-516). The very fact that the volume is filled with unfinished pieces must have struck a responsive chord in Tolstoy and offered some consolation to him, given the fact that he had just produced some thirty-four widely

⁸One should recall that Tolstoy was a personal acquaintance of P.V. Annenkov, a biographer of Pushkin who compiled the first critical edition of Pushkin's works. Tolstoy met him in December 1855 (the same year this seven-volume edition appeared) and encountered him frequently over the next year and a half. This close acquaintance with Annenkov coincided, not accidentally, with what might be called Tolstoy's first "Pushkinian" period (1856-57), during which he sought out many personal acquaintances of the poet and reread Pushkin with great fascination. Tolstoy reports reading the Annenkov edition enthusiastically in June 1856 (47, 78-80). Hence contact with this particular edition of Pushkin in March 1873 could not help but have had a deep impact on Tolstoy.

⁹Rarely is attention paid to the fact that Tolstoy was Pushkin's third cousin once removed. Their common ancestry originates with the marriage of I.M. Golovin (died 1738) and M.B. Glebova, who were, respectively, Pushkin's great-great grandparents and Tolstoy's great-great-great grandparents. (See the genealogical table in 46, 510, and also Apostolov, 13). It is not inconceivable that Tolstoy had this relation in mind when he told Sof'ia Andreevna, "He is my father."

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

divergent and unsuccessful beginnings of his historical novel.¹⁰

The "critical remarks" Sof'ia Andreevna mentions undoubtedly engaged Tolstoy in a similar, visceral way. Tolstoy was still smarting from adverse critical reaction to his beloved Azbuka, which was panned mercilessly by the critics at the end of 1872. Perhaps anticipating this reaction, Tolstoy had stopped reading reviews of his works and cancelled his subscription to current periodicals in 1870. At that time he wrote Fet, "this year I am not receiving a single journal or a single newspaper, and I find this useful" (Perepiska, I, 399), and at the same time he sensed the likeness of his own situation to that of Pushkin, who bore the brunt of brutal press attacks in the 1830s. "Pushkin," Tolstoy is reported to have said, "was beset by critics--it's better not to read them at all" (Tolstaia, I, 497). A feeling of affinity is apparent also in his letter to Strakhov from the end of 1872, wherein in one breath he refers to critical attacks on Azbuka and quotes Pushkin's poem "Monument" (1836), one of Pushkin's loftiest statements about literary ostracism: "Azbuka is not doing well and it has been vilified in Peterburgskie vedomosti; but I am sure that 'I have raised a monument' with this Azbuka" [Tolstoy's emphasis] (61, 349). Surely, Pushkin's "critical remarks," wherein he lashes back at his detractors, must have impressed Tolstoy and suggested to him a parallelism of their literary fates.

The biographical kinship Tolstoy felt with Pushkin, however, could not by itself direct him to a new literary undertaking. It was rather the creative works in the volume that provided inspiration, as Tolstoy's remarks of March 25 indicate. Of the works he mentions--"The Tales of Belkin," "Egyptian Nights," "The Captain's Daughter," "The guests were arriving..."--it is unlikely that all had precisely the same impact on him or that they influenced him in precisely the same way. Eikhenbaum (1969) is probably right that "The Belkin Tales" served Tolstoy as a model for "the creation of a stable, organized and harmonious form" of expression (183), that is, they suggested to Tolstoy a general narrative manner and style rather than particular topics or themes. The same is most likely true of "The Captain's Daughter." "Egyptian Nights," however, hardly seems a stylistic model for Anna Karenina. Whatever influence it might have had was most surely thematic. Certainly, the tale of illicit eroticism narrated by the improvisor finds resonance in Tolstoy's novel, but the story's central theme--artistic inspiration and

¹⁰Gusev reports the existence of only thirty three variants (124), but a newly discovered one is published in Iasnopolianskii sbornik 1988 (32-36).

DAVID SLOANE

esthetic freedom--may well have loomed larger in Tolstoy's mind at this time, as it did in 1857, when he wrote "Al'bert."¹¹ We shall see that the theme of esthetic creation and its relation to life is extremely prominent in *Anna Karenina* (although it is rarely discussed by critics), and the questions Pushkin raises about the role of chance and design in the esthetic process are raised by Tolstoy no less acutely.¹²

The relationship of "The guests were arriving..." to the novel is richly suggestive and requires special attention. To begin with, one needs to examine the version of this seminal fragment that Tolstoy had before him in March 1873, since it differs in significant ways from that in modern editions. The second and third chapters are missing in Annenkov, but more important is the presence of an additional sentence in the first paragraph:

The guests were arriving at the dacha ***. The hall was filling up with ladies and men who had arrived at the same time from the theater where a new Italian opera was performed. *Each guest, making his way up to the round table where they were serving tea, hurried to pay respects to the hostess and then disappear into the crowd.* Little by little order was established. The ladies took their places on the sofas. A circle of men was formed around them. Games of whist got started. A few young men remained on their feet, and the examination of Parisian lithographs took the place of conversation. [Portions of the text specific to this edition are italicized.]

The third sentence, omitted in subsequent editions, is crucial. It describes a pattern of social consciousness characterized by the anxiety and insecurity experienced by an individual in isolation from the collective: each guest separates out from the crowd, approaches the hostess and then hastens to complete the ritual and return to the fold. Later in the paragraph equilibrium is achieved, anxiety is

¹¹The influence of "Egyptian Nights" on "Al'bert" is discussed by Grineva, 200-201.

¹²It is virtually certain that Tolstoy also paid special attention to the fragment "On the corner of a small square..." (507-509). Whereas "The guests were arriving..." had its greatest impact at the beginning of Tolstoy's work on *Anna Karenina* and served as a model for Part II, chapters 6-7 in the final version, "On the corner of a small square..." appears to have provided Tolstoy with an archetype for Anna's final altercation with Vronsky before her suicide (Part VII, chapters 26-27).

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

dispelled, when the guests align themselves in smaller groups. The fourth sentence ("Little by little...") strengthens the contrast by indicating that the circumstances described in the first half of the paragraph represent "disorder," while those in the latter half represent "order." The social paradigm operative here is the following: people feel uncomfortable alone, standing apart from the crowd, but they also feel uneasy about nameless membership in the undifferentiated collective. They feel most at ease in the "ordered" environment of social subgroups ("ladies...on the sofas," "a circle of men" around them, players at the card table and a group of "young men" looking at Parisian lithographs). These emphases are strengthened elsewhere in the fragment. Pushkin depicts a society in which conformity prevails ("everyone tries with good taste and propriety to be inconspicuous"), but where the individual's primary allegiance is to cliques, special coteries or randomly formed contingents. Hence, the appearance of the beautiful heroine in the third paragraph ("At this time the doors to the hall opened and Vol'skaia entered....") has a divisive effect. The society around her immediately separates into two camps--a bevy of flirtatious men and a group of jealous women ("The men greeted her with a certain playful congeniality, the women with obvious dislike"). Two guests begin conversing privately about Vol'skaia's suspected liaisons, and Vol'skaia isolates herself on the balcony with Minskii, her alleged paramour.

The phenomenon evident here in microcosm is presented on a grand scale by Tolstoy. The society he depicts in *Anna Karenina* is splintered into discrete groupings, each of which has its own distinct perspective and belief system. At the beginning of Part II, for instance, Tolstoy delineates three separate circles with which Anna has contact: the official circle of her husband's colleagues, the circle of religious zealots led by Lidiia Ivanovna and the hedonist camp of Betsy Tverskaia (II, 4). To this list we could add Nikolai Levin and his decadent nihilists, Koznyshev and his liberal capitalists, Vronsky and his military coterie, and finally the *narod*, the class of peasants, which remains isolated from all the major characters except Konstantin Levin. *Anna Karenina* is perhaps foremost a novel about the breakdown of society into isolated encampments with a concomitant loss of shared values. *War and Peace* depicted a variety of social strata unified by a national struggle. *Anna Karenina*, by contrast, depicts a society lacking any unifying principle and groping in various directions for its ethical and cultural bearings. Hence Kitty's mother does not know whether she ought to follow a French, English or Russian model in arranging her daughter's engagement--all of them are equally alien to her (I, 15). There is no mutually agreed upon "code of rules" by which to settle the rivalry between Karenin and Vronsky--divorce is by

DAVID SLOANE

no means a universally approved option and dueling seems hopelessly outdated in the contemporary context, even as Vronsky privately acknowledges. Nor does the society have a universally shared attitude toward adultery. Anna Karenina depicts a fragmented world, where competing social conventions survive not so much as unquestionable models of behavior but as vestiges of obsolete beliefs or as borrowed rules of conduct not intrinsic to the culture as a whole. No one can be certain that Tolstoy derived this view of the world from Pushkin, but Napolova is probably right that rereading Pushkin in the 1870s made him sense the cultural affinity of his own time with the late 1820s, as depicted in "The guests were arriving...": both were eras of destabilized cultural values (163-164).

Another aspect of cultural malaise evident in Pushkin's fragment may have influenced Tolstoy. "The guests were arriving..." depicts a community of spectators, even voyeurs. Members of this society arrive "from the theater," where they have seen an "Italian opera," and one contingent gets engrossed examining "Parisian lithographs." Vol'skaia's entrance has the quality of spectacle ("Her...liveliness, the strangeness of her attire--everything attracted attention") (503), and not without reason Pushkin refers to this environment as "society's stage" (505). Watching her and gossiping about her gratify the voyeuristic penchant of a milieu that has forgotten the meaning of "passion" ("Passions! What an extravagant word! What are passions?", asks Princess G.) (504), and though society condemns her, it is grateful for the hint of impropriety, the sense of theatricality that she brings into "the ponderous monotony of the aristocratic circle" (505). In Anna Karenina Tolstoy also depicts a voyeuristic society, one that escapes the tedium of its daily existence through vicarious experiences. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the famous steeplechase scene (II, 28-29), in which the crowd of idle rich is titillated by the spectacle of young men risking their lives. It is specifically the danger of the event, the real possibility that any one of the racers may fall and be killed, that appeals to the decadent psyche of the onlookers, as one exchange between Princess Betsy and an unidentified woman makes clear:

"No, I shall not come here any more. It excites me too much," said Princess Betsy. "Isn't that true...?"

"It excites, but it's impossible to tear oneself away," said another lady. "If I were a Roman, I wouldn't miss a single gladiatorial contest." (II, 28)

The world of high society Tolstoy depicts, like that in "The guests were arriving...", is one where passions have become

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

obsolete ("[A marriage] out of passion? What antediluvian thoughts you have! Who speaks about passions these days?") (II, 7), so that overt manifestations of passion are perceived as something both scandalous and, at the same time, refreshing and exciting. It is a society addicted to spectacles and vicarious thrills--hence its fascination with opera, hence Dolly's fantasy about a love affair like Anna's, hence Anna's own yearning for a life like the one she reads about in an English novel. The phenomenon of viewing (or imagining) the feelings and thoughts of others and attempting to co-experience them is one of the most salient features of Tolstoy's novel, although it is by no means always presented as something negative, decadent. Understanding what another person thinks, experiencing what another person feels, projecting oneself into the psyche of another--these can be very positive phenomena, as are, for instance, Levin's attempt to internalize and co-experience the process of dying with his brother Nikolai (V, 20) or the artist Mikhailov's effort to see his paintings afresh, from the perspective of Golenishchev and Anna (V, 11). It is only when vicarious experience becomes a routine substitute for living that Tolstoy's characters risk the author's censure.

There are compelling reasons to believe that when Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina* he had in mind not only the example of Vol'skaia, but that of Pushkin's Tat'iana. In August 1883, when asked by a visitor why he treated Anna so cruelly and made her commit suicide, Tolstoy is reported to have drawn an analogy to Tat'iana:

This opinion reminds me of an incident that occurred with Pushkin. Once he told one of his friends: "Imagine what a crazy thing my Tat'iana went and did to me! She got married! I didn't expect this from her at all." I can say the same thing about *Anna Karenina*. And generally speaking my heroines sometimes do things that I myself didn't want: they do what they must do in real life.... (*L.N. Tolstoy v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, I, 232)¹³

We also know that Tolstoy had Tat'iana in mind in 1878, shortly after completing the novel, when he returned to his

¹³Tolstoy was fond of telling this anecdote. The peasant writer S.T. Semenov reports him telling it again in the early 1890's (*L.N. Tolstoi v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, I, 343-344).

DAVID SLOANE

long standing project, "The Decembrists."¹⁴ Perhaps the most persuasive evidence, however, is that in early drafts of Anna Karenina the heroine is repeatedly called by the name Tat'iana (20, 26-45). This, coupled with the fact that in one of these drafts her last name is "Pushkina" (20, 16), leaves little doubt that the image of Pushkin's Tat'iana was close to Tolstoy as he created the character of Anna. In what respect, however, was Tat'iana's image meaningful? To be sure, there is much truth in the observation made by several scholars, that the plot of Anna Karenina is a continuation of Eugene Onegin, but close analysis of Tolstoy's work suggests that he was reacting to Pushkin's example in a much more subtle way and at a much deeper level.

Tat'iana, as we first encounter her, is a creature totally engrossed in her reading:

She came to like novels early on;
They replaced all else for her;
She fell in love with the fabrications
Of Richardson and Rousseau. (II. xxix)

She has the habit of placing herself inside the world of her reading and giving herself up to a literary fantasy:

Imagining herself the heroine
Of her beloved authors—
Clarissa, Julia, Delphine—
Tat'iana meanders through the quiet wood,
Alone with her dangerous book.
In it she looks for and finds
Her secret passions, her dreams,
The fruits of her soul's abundance.
She sighs and, appropriating for herself
Another's joy, another's grief,
Oblivious to all, she whispers from memory
The letter intended for her beloved hero... (III. x)

Tat'iana projects onto life the esthetic designs she derives from her reading and thus sees the world around her as a reflection of literary models. Specifically, she derives a fatalistic worldview from the sentimentalist and romantic novels on which she was nurtured. She believes whatever happens in her life is predestined, fated from on high, and her own role is essentially a passive one: to divine her fate and await its realization. Hence when she meets Onegin, she

¹⁴In one plan of this novel, the young heroine is named "Tat'iana" and her life story closely parallels that of Pushkin's heroine (17, 257).

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

is convinced that he is her fated "hero." She is uncertain only whether he is a "Grandison" (a knight in shining armor) or a "Lovelace" (a conniving villain)--these being the only possibilities she knows from her reading. Subsequently, however, she sheds her romantic blinders and begins to see Onegin (and the world around her) more realistically. Her visit to Onegin's library makes her realize that the literary categories she has relied upon earlier are spurious--Onegin is an agglomeration of Byronic masks, himself a "parody" of life's effort to mimic literature. Though we know few details of Tat'iana's subsequent transformation, the Tat'iana we encounter in the final chapter of Pushkin's novel is quite different. She no longer sees life, primarily, as the enactment of an esthetic archetype. Instead, life is a free, unpredictable and dynamic construct governed as much by the laws of chance as by divine (or human) design.

Like Tat'iana, Anna enters into the world of her reading and projects this world onto the reality around her. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her reading of the "English novel" on the train before her return to Petersburg:

When she read how the heroine of the novel attended to a sick person, she felt like stepping silently about the sick person's room; when she read how a member of parliament gave a speech, she felt like giving this speech; when she read how Lady Mary went hunting on horseback, and teased the bride and surprised everyone with her audacity, she felt like doing this herself. But there was nothing she could do, and, fingering the smooth paper knife with her small hands, she forced herself to read on.

The hero of the novel had already begun to achieve his English happiness, a baronetcy and an estate, and Anna wanted to accompany him to this estate, when she suddenly felt that he ought to be ashamed and that she was ashamed of the same thing. But what was he ashamed of? "And what am I ashamed of?", she wondered with surprised indignance. She put the book down and leaned against the back of the seat, gripping tightly in both hands the paper knife. There was no reason to be ashamed. She sorted through her recollections of Moscow. All of them were good, pleasant. She remembered the ball, Vronskii and his infatuated, docile face, she remembered all her relations with him: there was nothing in them to make her ashamed. But at the same time, at this very point in her reminiscences, the feeling of shame grew stronger. . . . (I, 29)

It is quite clear from this passage that Anna transports herself into the esthetic realm of the novel and experiences vicariously the life of its hero. This, of course, occurs to all of us when we read fiction and "suspend our disbelief." But more than this, Anna sees her own life experience as a

reflection of that in the novel and conflates her own feelings with those of the hero ("he ought to have been ashamed, and...she was ashamed of the same thing...she remembered Vronskii and...the feeling of shame grew stronger"). This seemingly inconsequential incident is crucial for an understanding of Anna's behavior elsewhere in Tolstoy's novel. Like Tat'iana, Anna has a tendency to superimpose an esthetic model on life, but the evolutionary trajectory of her thought, as it develops in *Anna Karenina*, is precisely the reverse of that in *Eugene Onegin*. Pushkin's novel charts the progressive liberation of the heroine (and the hero) from the tyranny of literary models, whereas Anna progressively subjugates reality to an esthetic design of her own making. And whereas Tat'iana's model was the sentimentalist novel, Anna's is the genre of tragedy.¹⁵ In a real sense Anna composes the tragedy of her own life.¹⁶ The point I am making here is not just that events in the novel resemble tragedy or that Anna is a tragic heroine,¹⁷ but that Anna herself chooses to fashion a tragedy out of the accidents of her life, transforming accident into inevitability, as does the author of tragedy.¹⁸

Anna's tragic worldview and her tendency to subordinate the raw material of life to an esthetic design are evident throughout the novel, beginning with the reader's first encounter with her. Like a tragic author, she interprets a chance occurrence (the death of the train watchman) as a sign

¹⁵In *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy continually makes the reader contemplate tragedy in one form or another. On two occasions he situates his characters at the opera and has them discuss the performances (in an early draft the first opera is identified variously as "La Traviata" and "Don Giovanni"—both in the tragic mode)(20, 24). At another point, he has Levin listen to a quartet entitled "King Lear in the Steppe" and then has Levin's friend explain its tragic content ("You sense the approach of Cordelia, where the woman—the Eternal Feminine—enters into a struggle with fate")(VII, 5).

¹⁶It is by no means accidental that Tolstoy gives Anna an inclination to authorship. One will recall that she authors a novel for children, whose merits are discussed at some length (VII, 10).

¹⁷Several critics have, quite rightly, pointed out the resemblance of *Anna Karenina* to tragedy (Jahn, 157-158; Schultze, 80; Bulgakov, 62).

¹⁸Jackson's excellent article, "Chance and Design in *Anna Karenina*" was extremely helpful to me in formulating this view. As Jackson writes, Anna "seeks out and creates her own reality or realm to play out her drama" (40).

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

of fateful necessity ("a bad omen") (I, 18).¹⁹ The death of the watchman can indeed be seen as a "bad omen," but only from a perspective that places events into a mythical esthetic framework. As the novel unfolds, Anna fashions her own life into a tragedy with all the semblance of fateful inevitability that this genre requires. Betsy understands this intuitively when she chides Anna for seeing life "too tragically" and turning her situation into "torment" (III, 17). Anna understands this more consciously when she thinks near the end of the novel: "I am not living, I am waiting for a denouement [razviazka]" (VII, 12). Earlier in her ordeal she confesses to Oblonsky, "I feel that I am flying headlong into some abyss and I must not [ne dolzhna] try to save myself" (V, 21). This *ne dolzhna* reflects Anna's dual role as author and heroine of her own tragedy: she is "not supposed to" ("must not") save herself, she is destined and she destines herself for catastrophe. Indeed, many solutions to her dilemma--partial though they may be--present themselves to her and she rejects them all. Like a tragic hero she harbors within herself conflicting allegiances to various just causes and refuses to sacrifice any of them. When Karenin and Vronsky stand before her and she is apparently dying of puerperal fever, Anna suddenly realizes as she addresses them that both are named Aleksei--something which in real life would be a complete coincidence. But Anna, subordinating this fact to her tragic vision, interprets it as an inevitable stroke of fate: "What a strange, terrible fate that both of you are named Aleksei, isn't it?" (IV, 17). Here, as elsewhere, Anna is not content with being just the heroine of tragedy, she must also exercise her prerogative of authorial control by providing interpretive cues. Her suicide itself is an act of authorship: she chooses her means of death--not opium, not the pistol (Vronsky's favored device), but the train. By throwing herself under a train, she realizes her own prediction ("a bad omen") and thus gives the event an aura of inevitability. Moreover, certain choices she makes increase the likelihood that the fantasy of her recurring nightmare about the dishevelled peasant workman

¹⁹In the "first complete redaction of the novel" the suggestion is that the watchman's death was not accidental: Udashev (Vronsky) brings Anna the report of someone in the crowd that "the young man, apparently crazy, was at the station all day and threw himself [on the rails]" (*Pervaia zakonchennaia redaktsiia*, 704). Here Anna's responds, "this is a bad sign [znak]." In the final version, however, the death is clearly accidental ("The watchman, whether he was drunk or too tightly wrapped up from the freezing cold, didn't hear the train moving backwards and was crushed") and Anna's reaction is more fatalistic ("a bad omen [predzamenovanie]") (I, 18). Thus Tolstoy ultimately elected to strengthen Anna's subjective, tragic interpretation of the event.

DAVID SLOANE

will be fulfilled. She chooses to exit the train at the moment she sees "a dirty, deformed peasant" with "gnarled hair" working on the wheels of the railroad car (VII, 31). By positioning herself at the end of the platform near the water tender, where one might expect a workman to be attending to the train, she realizes the "denouement" she had anticipated earlier. In all of this there is something of an author's obsessive pursuit of esthetic form, an effort to correlate beginnings and endings and create the impression of poetic justice.²⁰ Like Pushkin's adolescent Tat'iana, Anna confuses art and life. Her tragic "flaw" is that she becomes progressively more oblivious to the fact that her tragedy is an esthetic construct which has no necessary claim over the structure of life.²¹

Like Eugene Onegin, Anna Karenina is a highly metaliterary and metaesthetic work. Just as Pushkin's portrayal of Tat'iana and Onegin reflects the author's effort to redefine the relationship of life to art and escape the prescriptions of romantic models, so too Tolstoy's presentation of Anna's authorial ambitions must be understood in the larger context of the work's metaesthetic concerns. No novel by Tolstoy is more persistent in its allusions to art, even where we might least expect them. As mentioned earlier, both Oblonskii and Levin quote Pushkin's poetry, despite the fact that we would hardly consider either of them artistically-inclined. Levin, moreover, discusses musical composition and sculpture (namely, one of the designs for the Pushkin monument) (VII, 5), Karenin reads poetry (I, 33), a diplomat quotes French verse (II, 6) and Vronsky paints. The references to esthetic creation and to the perceiver's

²⁰In an excellent discussion of *ekphrasis* (literary description of visual art) in *Anna Karenina*, Mandelker (1991) reaches a very similar conclusion: "Anna willfully completes her self-portrait by committing suicide, imposing her own aesthetic constraints on her presentation of self." (4)

²¹One may ask what psychological need drives Anna so persistently toward her dual artistic aim—to be author and heroine of a tragedy. The paucity of her biography makes the answer to this question elusive. However, Mandelker's (1990) argument that Anna "pursues" her tragic end as compensation for her "dependent status" in a male-dominated society makes considerable sense (64). What little we know of Anna's past (her adoptive childhood, her apparently involuntary marriage, her domestic obedience to Karenin) tends to confirm that through most of her life she played a subordinate and essentially passive role. The act of authoring the remainder of her life and playing the tragic lead in this design may indeed have a compensatory effect, affording her a sovereignty over her own destiny and elevating her in spiritual stature.

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

understanding of esthetic works are too numerous to itemize exhaustively here.

By far Tolstoy's most compelling treatment of art (and its relation to reality) centers around the work of the painter Mikhailov, whose creative strategy contrasts sharply with Anna's. Almost everything in the description of Mikhailov and his studio is counterpoised to Anna's tragic obsession. One of the first things the reader is likely to notice is that Mikhailov is never engrossed in any one of his works to the exclusion of others, hence he is able to shift from one painting or drawing to another with relative ease. When he receives the calling cards of Vronsky and Golenishchev he is hard at work on "a large painting," but the news of their impending visit and a spat he has with his wife make him forget this current project and resume work on a sketch he had discarded earlier (V, 10). This pattern is repeated in the scene which follows. In his studio, there are many unfinished paintings covered with sheets and in various stages of completion, including the painting of Christ and Pilate on which he had worked for three years before and completely "forgotten" (V, 11). Mikhailov focuses on this painting briefly and then turns his attention to another that appeals to Anna and Vronsky (V, 12). When the guests leave, Tolstoy describes Mikhailov's creative psychology: "He was equally incapable of working when he was unfeeling as when he was too sensitive and saw everything. There was only one stage during the transition from quiescence to inspiration at which it was possible for him to work" (V, 12). Unlike Anna, who tends to subordinate everything in her experience to her tragic design, Mikhailov is never so immersed in his work that he cannot exit it--he recognizes the dangers of the obsessive creative state. Mikhailov, moreover, welcomes his visitors (however uninformed they might be) to critique his work, hoping to hear from them some judgement that will prove useful to him when he resumes a neglected painting. He looks at his paintings "with their eyes" (V, 11), internalizes their perceptions, and returns to his work with fresh insights gleaned from their reactions. Inasmuch as the outsiders' views are subjective and virtually unpredictable, Mikhailov's receptivity to them suggests that for him chance is a valuable creative stimulus. The importance of chance is underscored in the opening paragraphs of the episode, where Mikhailov begins working on a drawing marred accidentally by a drop of candle wax. The blemish changes his original conception of the work and carries him in an new creative direction, thus resolving a problem he was unable to resolve earlier:

The sheet of paper with the discarded drawing was found, but it had been stained and splattered with candle wax. Nevertheless he picked up the drawing, put it on his table and, stepping

DAVID SLOANE

away and squinting, began to examine it. Suddenly he smiled and joyously waved his arms.

"That's it, that's it," he said and, picking up a pencil, immediately began sketching in haste. The spot of wax gave the figure a new pose.... He laughed out loud with delight. The figure, which had previously been lifeless and contrived, came alive and assumed a form which one would never want to change.

The paradigm of Mikhailov's creative method is the open text. For him the esthetic work is not a fixed system determined from the outset by an initial stimulus, but rather a dialectical process that remains receptive to the accidents of life, incorporating chance in ways unforeseen by the creator. It is worth noting too that he maintains a healthy distance between his work and his life, never forgetting that the two are separate spheres of activity. To be sure, life provides raw material for his art, and he never stops gathering impressions that may, potentially, prove useful (a merchant's protruding chin, Anna's dimly lit figure at the entrance to his studio, Vronsky's high cheek bones), but he has no inclination to conflate art and life. Hence "he never worked so zealously and successfully as when his life was going poorly" (V, 10), and he shuns social contact with Anna when he undertakes to paint her portrait (V, 13). All of this is directly opposite to Anna's tragic vision, which consistently molds life into a rigid esthetic construct and invalidates contingency at every turn.

Though Anna Karenina is very much a novel about contemporary life, Anna's passion for esthetizing life is an anachronism harking back to Pushkin's time--an era that celebrated creativity and poetic inspiration above the pragmatic knowledge of life. Indeed, as Lotman points out, the romantic milieu with which the young Pushkin kept company lived life as a perpetual esthetic fantasy:

Romantic behavior required that one adopt a bearing consistent with a particular literary model, which became a mask, an alter ego of the given person. Everything from real life that was routine, simple, extraliterary was assiduously removed, hidden; if it was impossible to remove, people tried not to notice it, and it was "improper" to talk about it. Only that which occurred in books, existed in life. (114)

It is no wonder that Anna falls in love with Vronsky. Himself an anachronism, a gallant hussar in an age of railroad magnates and nihilists, he fits her image of a mythical romantic hero and forges a stark contrast with Karenin's

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

"unpoetic" demeanor.²² In a sense Anna's conflict with society stems from this very outdatedness of her worldview, her allegiance to a romantic ethos that predominated in Pushkin's time and continually informed Pushkin's work (whether he endorsed it or reacted against it). While Anna herself may be unconscious of this affinity, Tolstoy was most certainly cognizant of it and, most likely, saw Mikhailov as his own alter ego in the novel, a vehicle for polemicizing with the romantics' belief that life must be fashioned solely after an esthetic archetype.²³

Certainly it is not insignificant that Mikhailov's receptivity to chance as a creative stimulus parallels the circumstances that initiated Tolstoy's work on Anna Karenina--his accidental rediscovery of Pushkin. Through Mikhailov's example Tolstoy seems to be arguing that both life and art mediate an ultimately unknowable balance between accident and intent. Mikhailov's genius lies in his ability to respect this balance. Anna's mistake is to disrupt this balance, forcing life into a predetermined mold and closing herself off from the therapeutic agency of chance.²⁴

The present discussion has focused on two works by Pushkin--"The guests were arriving..." and Eugene Onegin--treating them as separate and distinct influences on Tolstoy at the time he wrote Anna Karenina. Yet it is highly possible that Tolstoy was attuned more to their common features than their differences. The romantic tendency to merge life and art, which we located primarily in Eugene Onegin, for instance, is clearly evident in "The guests were arriving..." as well, although it appears to be somewhat outmoded in the setting of the late 1820s. Thus a certain B***, whom Vol'skaia considers as a possible paramour, is

²²Anna's esthetization of Vronsky is apparent from the first comments she makes about him to Kitty: "It is obvious he is a knight.... Well, for example,...he wanted to give up his entire estate to his brother,...in childhood he did something else extraordinary, saved a woman from drowning. In a word, he is a hero" (I, 20).

²³A remark Tolstoy makes in a letter to Strakhov from 23 September 1873, as he resumed work on Anna Karenina, seems to confirm this: "Just as a painter needs light to put on the final touches, so I need an interior light, which I always feel lacking in autumn."

²⁴The lesson Tolstoy seems to offer in Anna Karenina is not far removed from that elicited by Morson in War and Peace: "Chance as well as design drives events," therefore any effort to narrate the events of life (and thereby impose upon them the logic of cause and effect) inevitably creates a falsehood (150).

DAVID SLOANE

described as a person whose "whole mind is taken from *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*" (506), and Vol'skaia's biography contains a detail (omitted in later editions) which suggests that novels read in youth conditioned her amorous disposition (as it did Tat'iana's): "At fourteen years old she was stunningly beautiful, read novels and wrote love notes to her dance instructor" (504). This is in keeping with her characterization as one who aspires to be a "romantic/novelistic personality [romanicheskaiia golova]" (504) and who will end tragically ("Passions will do her in") (504). These details seem to have been adapted and transplanted by Tolstoy into the early drafts of his novel ("the time has arrived for her to become the heroine of a novel" [20, 17]; "You'll see, Anna will meet a disastrous end" [20, 22]). Thus Tolstoy could have derived the theme of life's esthetization (and theatricalization) not only from Eugene Onegin, but from "The guests were arriving...". Likewise the social paradigm in this fragment, cited earlier as a likely model for decadent high society in Tolstoy's novel, is essentially the same as that depicted in the closing chapter of Eugene Onegin:

...The guests entered.
The conversation was enlivened
With the crude salt of fashionable malice. (VIII. xxiii)

It is no wonder that Tat'iana finds this milieu despicable, as does Vol'skaia:

But for me, Onegin, this luxury,
The tinsel of a loathsome life,
My success in the whirl of high society,
My modish house and soirées,
What use are they? I would gladly exchange
The masquerade's trappings,
All this glitter and noise and revelry,
For a shelf with books, an unkempt garden,
Our poor abode,
Those places where I first
Saw you, Onegin.... (VIII. xlvii)

The society depicted here--the idle, spiteful upper crust of the late 1820s --is essentially the same milieu we find in Pushkin's fragments of this period ("The guests were arriving...", "On the corner of a small square...") and a close antecedent of the Betsies and Iashvins in *Anna Karenina*.

Whichever work we choose to focus on, or whether we choose to examine a number of other pieces that appear in the fifth volume of Pushkin's oeuvre as edited by Annenkov, it is clear that reading Pushkin had a profound influence on Tolstoy as he wrote *Anna Karenina*--one which occasioned not only an

PUSHKIN'S LEGACY

initial stimulus and not only superficial similarities of plot and style, but a genuine interaction and communication between artists, a "dialogue" (to use Bakhtin's term) without which we would not have Tolstoy's novel as we now know it.

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