
Research Notes

The "Loftiness" or the "Silence" of the Sky?

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The twelfth chapter of the third part of *Anna Karenina* tells the story of Konstantin Levin.

He glanced at the sky, hoping to find there the shell which he had been admiring and which for him embodied the whole train of his thought and feelings that night. There was nothing in the sky in the least resembling a shell. There, in the inaccessible loftiness, a mysterious transformation had already occurred. There was not so much as a trace of the shell, only an even cover of fleecy cloud stretching across a whole half of the sky, fading and fading. The sky had grown blue and bright, and with the same tenderness, but the same inaccessibility, it met his questioning gaze."

"No," he said to himself, "however good this life of simplicity and toil may be, I cannot return to it. I love her."¹

The passage has read like this for more than 120 years, and it was printed this way in the 90-volume *Full Collected Works* (*Polnoe sobranie sochineniia* [PSS], 1928-58), in the publication *Literary Monuments* [*Literaturnye pamiatniki*], and also in the 20-volume *Collected Works* [*Sobranie sochineniia*, 1960-65]. The texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth volumes of PSS, prepared by N. K.

¹Tolstoy, L. N. *Anna Karenina. A Novel in Eight Parts*. Publication prepared by V. A. Zhdanov and E. E. Zaidenshnur, Moscow: Nauka, 1970. 237. [*Literary Monuments series*].

Gudzii, demonstrate convincingly that Tolstoy's own work on the text concluded with corrections to the whole novel for its first separate publication in 1878; with two exceptions not relevant to this article, the proofreading was done by N. N. Strakhov. As is well-known, M. N. Katkov, editor of *Russkii vestnik*, refused to publish part eight of the novel because of the attack in it on the Russo-Turkish War. The pages cut out of *Russkii vestnik* of parts one through seven and the page proofs for the separate edition of the novel's eighth part were corrected by the author and Strakhov and became the printer's copy in 1878. Strakhov carefully collected and had bound all the materials for this printer's copy, which still retains traces of printer's ink and the names of the typesetters, and donated the beautifully bound book to the St. Petersburg Public Library. Today, it is held by the manuscript division of the Moscow Museum of L. N. Tolstoy. This printer's copy—and not the actual edition published by the printing house F. F. Ris, the proofs of which were corrected by Strakhov—is the authoritative text of the novel.

The original text in Katkov's journal of the passage quoted above is slightly different from it: "There, in the inaccessible silence [*tishina*]"—not "loftiness" [*vyshina*]. Where does this "silence" come from? The matter seemed so self-evident that, in 1878, Strakhov changed it to "loftiness," and the jubilee edition (PSS) did not even consider it necessary to mention the "silence" variant from *Russkii vestnik*.²

As we prepare *Anna Karenina* for the new Academy edition, we are obliged to question ourselves and to resolve all of these issues. As always, we must begin with the text of the first draft. This is how it appears (ms 39, sheet 10, insertions between lines and in the copy's margins):

² See: *Russkii vestnik* (1875): 4; 641. See also: *Jubilee Edition* (PSS) 18: 516.

He glanced at the sky, hoping to find [a point of reference,³ to see] the shell which he had left there and which for him embodied the entire outcome, the result of the whole train of thought and his feelings of that night. There was nothing in the sky in the least resembling a shell. There, in the high inaccessible [loftiness] silence a mysterious transformation had already occurred.

Thus, Tolstoy himself initially had written “loftiness,” but clearly and distinctly, with a firm stroke of the pen, then made the correction, changing it to “silence.” It is possible to think, because of proximity to the adjective “high,” that the change was made so as to avoid having “the high inaccessible loftiness.”⁴ But in the next draft, “high” was crossed out and “silence” remained. Thus it was published in the journal with no further changes made by the author, who did not change it in his corrections to the whole novel for the 1878 edition, and thus it *must* be preserved in the novel. It is clear that “silence” was not a mistake perhaps corrected in agreement with another source, but was a definite and deliberate choice made by the author.

In the poetic and philosophical context of *Anna Karenina*, it would seem that this variant, “the inaccessible silence” of the sky, is more fitting. The situation is different in *War and Peace*. There, for example, over several pages of the final chapter of the third part of the first volume (while an injured

³Tolstoy uses the word *reper*, from the French surveying term *repère*. The manuscripts indicate that during the course of his work, even these rare interspersed foreign borrowings and gallicisms were painstakingly eliminated from the text. It is well known that, in the year that *Anna Karenina* was begun (1873), Tolstoy completely cleansed *War and Peace* of French and German phrases for the new edition—all were translated into Russian. Of course, as a work, *War and Peace* is inconceivable without the foreign language passages, but the 1873 text in its full form rightfully exists as a separate publication, reproduced in the second part of the new edition of Tolstoy’s full collected works.

⁴In Russian, “vysokoi nedosiagaemoi vyshine.”
Translator.

Andrei Bolkonskii lies on the hill of Pratzensk), “high” sky is repeated six times. According to Tolstoy’s original intentions, Prince Andrei was to have perished in the battle of Austerlitz. Napoleon, looking at Bolkonskii lying supine, utters the dramatic line: “Voilà une belle mort.” Yearning for the “high” sky is a sign of death, as was rightly noted by Donna Orwin in private conversation with the author of this article. The word “silence,” which comes up in the last paragraph of Chapter Sixteen of the same part of *War and Peace*, is associated with “calmness,” eternal rest. “Inaccessible silence” implies height but at the same time captures the majestic calmness of divine creation and the possibility of universal harmony. In *Anna Karenina*, Levin looks up at the sky in search not of death, but of a *life* full of meaning and happiness. The sky, while appealing, does not answer his questioning gaze, and Levin turns back toward Kitty, toward marriage.

Note

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Saving Iasnaia Poliana

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Tolstoy was born and raised at Iasnaia Poliana, his mother’s estate, the residence most connected with his life and creative work.¹ He inherited the property on the death of his parents, and here he wrote *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. Although he owned other property, Iasnaia Poliana was his preferred residence. In the latter part of his life, as he