

**POETIC JUSTICE, FALSE LISTENING, AND FALLING IN LOVE:
OR, WHY ANNA REFUSES A DIVORCE**

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When I coined the term *prosaics*, I underestimated its fluidity and capacity for growth. Over the years, it begot a number of related ideas, such as "sideshadowing" and "misanthropology," which may or may not be considered part of it. Moreover, my own version of *prosaics* is not identical to the views expressed by my key exemplars, such as Tolstoy and Bakhtin. And my own interpretations of the central texts of *prosaics*—beginning with *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*—have changed over the years. All these reasons indicate that confusion is bound to occur and clarification is periodically in order.

Caryl Emerson remarks that she "is very sympathetic to the idea of a *prosaic War and Peace*" but that she finds "a *prosaic Anna Karenina*...a more tenuous and vulnerable project." It seems to me that what she offers is not an un*prosaic* reading but an alternative *prosaic* reading of the novel. When she questions my interpretation of Stiva, she insists that his cordiality and ability to make daily life run ever more smoothly represent specifically *prosaic* virtues. And in her concluding (and superb) reading of Anna's refusal to "sign" acts, she insists on the processual, extended nature of Anna's errors: "Tolstoy's morality in *Anna Karenina* is more insistently oriented toward 'process,' I would argue, than to any 'predetermined content.'" Her focus on patterns of small actions over time captures the *prosaic* sense of the world. It is just what we would expect in a novel by the author of *War and Peace*.

I agree with most of Caryl's article. When Anna calls the death of the railway worker an "evil omen"—that is, when she connects it to her own future—she is indeed making everything in the world fit into the plot of her life, and, as Caryl observes, Stiva is entirely correct in calling such an interpretation nonsense. Caryl's comparison of Tolstoy's views on love and art are, I think, illuminating and powerful.¹ Her reading of the Anna portraits and her idea that the heroine becomes "decayed art" are splendid, and her use of the "three types of love" works very well—and very *prosaically*.

I also accept many of her observations about Stiva and Dolly, and especially her comment that Dolly's limitations show "the inadequacies that grow out of virtue." Anna does misunderstand Vronsky's progress in love, in just the way Caryl describes. Again, Tolstoy was indeed fascinated by "the performative present." Most of all, I think Caryl's reading of Anna's postponement of choice, and her refusal to take responsibility for the choices she makes, is right on target. And of course, Caryl and I both take a critical stance toward Anna as anything but a tragic heroine. In outlining where I disagree with Caryl, then, I do so within the broader context of accepting and admiring most of what she says.

Let me take our differences in the order in which she presents them. Most of my responses can be made relatively briefly, but my last one—on why Anna refuses Karenin's offer of a divorce at the end of Part Four—will

require considerable length. And so, I must concede, the concluding section of this reply constitutes a little essay.

Poetic Justice

I begin with a point that Caryl does not stress, but which other readers mention quite often. Caryl speaks in a number of places of Tolstoy rewarding those who embody his favorite values and "punishing" those, like Anna, who do not. Other readers have gone much further and blamed Tolstoy for visiting such a terrible end on his heroine when (for instance) Stiva, whose sexual (and other) morality is surely much worse, seems to escape punishment entirely. Is this an example of a sexual double standard?

This sort of question, and this whole way of understanding the plot, seem to me misguided. The approach assumes a model of poetic justice, stipulating that the good get rewarded and the bad get punished, which allows the reader to calibrate virtue by fate. Some genres, like romances or morality plays, do indeed work this way, but not the realistic novel. Realism tries to describe how things do happen, and we all know that in life virtue often goes unrewarded while evil prospers. It would be unwise to conclude that Flaubert wants to praise Homais, who ends *Madame Bovary* enjoying honors and prosperity. And if Mary Garth thrives in *Middlemarch*, Lydgate, most readers feel, suffers far out of proportion to his vices. Whatever Myshkin's shortcoming may be, his fate seems horribly undeserved.

If plot had to distribute outcomes according to merit, we would never see unhappy endings. The virtuous would always be rewarded and the bad punished in due proportion. No good realism can be read this way, it seems to me. We all feel that in realism poetic justice constitutes a flaw, rather than a merit, because life does not work that way. Our expectations are quite different for romance, which demands improbable endings, but that is one reason that realism and romance differ. To interpret realist novels, whether explicitly or implicitly, according to a model of poetic justice is to impose an alien standard.

Moreover, to say that an author "punishes" or "rewards" a hero simply because that hero prospers or suffers is to make a plot—any plot—into a *deus ex machina*. Every kind of plot has its internal norms, and no author can whimsically distribute fates without ruining his or her work. Therefore, to speak of an author in such language, as if the fate of the characters depends on whether he likes them, is to convict his work of unbelievability in its own terms. Such a charge requires evidence, and therefore one cannot use such language properly unless one is willing to provide that evidence. In short, it is fair to speak of an author intervening in this way *only* when the internal logic of plot does not lead to its results and when one is prepared to show *why* the inner logic is insufficient or unconvincing.

One would speak of Turgenev "killing off" Bazarov if one meant that there was no good reason, within the logic of the novel, why he should die at that point, and one would reject that language if one thought the death followed believably from earlier events. In describing old Rostov in *War and*

Peace, Caryl remarks that "it was apparently sufficient punishment to give him a few bewildered months, a premature death, and then Tolstoy arranges matters so that Rostov's most gifted surviving progeny marry into vast wealth, thereby magically erasing the effects of his horrible habits." To read in this way—"sufficient punishment," "Tolstoy arranges matters" "magically"—is to judge the plot implausible and a failure. I would like to see why Caryl thinks the outcome magical, rather than plausible, within the universe of this work. Has Tolstoy added something arbitrary to make the story turn out spuriously "right"?

Generally speaking, to ignore the distinction between authorial imposition and inner development is to leap to a moral judgment simply because one thinks things should have been different.² In contrast to those critics who speak of Tolstoy punishing Anna, I would rather say, regardless of whether or not one is sympathetic with Anna, that if she *had* lived happily ever after, *then* there would have been something wrong with the story because the author had intervened to "reward" his heroine. Similarly, describing the different ways in which women and men faced society's pressures hardly constitutes an endorsement of those pressures, as some (not Caryl) assume. It by no means follows that because a heroine suffers the author wants either to punish her or to condemn the society that destroys her; the outcome may simply reflect the facts of the world as the author has described them and as they may actually be. To do otherwise would be to falsify the situation, and that is what would make the work implausible; just such a conclusion would constitute a mere authorial whim.

In realism, *plot is not verdict*. Stiva prospers and Anna suffers not because the author thinks Stiva is morally better but because that is the way things happen, by and large.

Stiva

Caryl points accurately to Stiva's many "prosaic virtues," which have "prosaic effects." It is entirely true that Stiva is pleasant and sociable. People like being around him, and working with him is agreeable, which is no mean feat. Lyovin could use some of these virtues, as Tolstoy makes quite clear. Moreover, Stiva is "energetic" and "efficient," as Caryl correctly says. He gets things done, and Anna would do well to take his sensible practical advice. Caryl asks, "Why are these not prosaic values?", and I answer: they are.

In my earlier writings, I have probably not made myself sufficiently clear. Prosaics does not hold that everything ordinary, efficient, daily, or—well—prosaic, is good. That would clearly be untrue. Rather, it contends that, by and large, prosaic facts govern how the world works, for good or ill. Goodness should be prosaic, in Tolstoy's view, because in the long run only prosaic goodness can be effective. But prosaic evil is also highly effective, for the same reason. To say a character knows how to act prosaically is not to say he is moral, but that he knows how things happen in the world.

Consider, for instance, the following passage about Prince Vasily in *War and Peace*:

Prince Vasily was not a man who deliberately thought out his plans. Still less did he think of harming anyone to gain his own ends. He was simply a man of the world who had got on, and to whom getting on had become a habit. Various plans and schemes for which he never rightly accounted to himself, but which constituted his whole interest in life, were continually forming in his mind, arising from the circumstances and the people he met. He had not merely one or two such plans and schemes under way, but dozens, some of which were just beginning to take shape, some nearing achievement, still others dissolving. He did not say to himself, for instance, "Now this man has influence, I must gain his confidence and friendship, and through him arrange to obtain a special grant"; nor did he say to himself: "Now Pierre is a rich man, I must entice him to marry my daughter and lend me the forty thousand rubles I need." But when he encountered a man of influence, his instinct immediately told him that this man could be useful, and Prince Vasily struck up an acquaintance with him and, without premeditation, took the first opportunity to gain his confidence, flatter him, get on familiar terms with him, and let him know what he wanted....Had he thought out his plans beforehand, he could not have been so natural in his behavior and so artless and familiar in his relations with everyone, whether above him or below him in social standing (251-52).

Prince Vasily intuitively understands Tolstoy's philosophy. Like the best generals and line officers, he seizes opportunities whenever they arise, without premeditation, and follows their progress. As a result, he always has many plans, and is ever alert to the dangers and opportunities of the moment. He presumes the radical uncertainty of the world, much as Tolstoy does, and he acts in the way most likely to be effective, given that uncertainty. And, like Stiva, he is utterly "natural" in doing so.

Also like Stiva, he is "artless and familiar" even with those below him in social standing. Stiva, we recall, "was on familiar terms [*byl na 'ty*] with all his acquaintances: old men of sixty, boys of twenty, actors, ministers, merchants and adjutant generals, so that many of his intimate chums [*mnogie iz byvshikh s nim na 'ty*] were to be found at extreme ends of the social ladder, and would have been very much surprised to learn that they had, through the medium of Oblonsky, something in common" (20). This form of "liberalism," as Tolstoy calls it, works very well into the genial, effective, but not malicious manipulation of others to which both Stiva and Prince Vasily are inclined.

What is wrong with Prince Vasily has nothing to do with his failure to understand prosaics. He understands superbly. The problem with Vasily is the uses to which he puts his efficiency. His goals are amoral, and so prosaics creates ill effects in the world.

I think it will be generally agreed that Prince Vasily is one of the truly evil characters in *War and Peace*, and yet Tolstoy stresses that Vasily means no harm, does not have a shred of malice in him. He never even thinks of harming anyone to gain his own ends, and still less does he act

from spite, revenge, or hatred. His evil is done without wishing it at all. In this respect, too, he is much like Stiva.

Here let me clarify what I do and do not mean by saying that Stiva is the novel's symbol of evil. Tolstoy wants to argue that most evil in the world derives neither from grand actions nor even from malice. Certain spectacular and highly noticeable disasters arise that way, but most of evil happens in the small, resulting from trivial acts of neglect. It thrives because of what we *don't* do, what we overlook doing for no particular reason except that we have not trained ourselves or thought to do it. To illustrate this point, it was necessary to create a character to whom malice could not possibly be attributed. And so Stiva, even more than Prince Vasily, intends no harm: to invert Goethe, he wills forever good and does mostly ill.

The idea that evil is neither grand nor dramatic, but ordinary and banal, is one of the most profound in Russian thought. It seems likely that, in creating his petty devil, Dostoevsky had Stiva in mind. In my earlier article, I cited some parallel passages. Whether Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are right on this point, it is hard to say, but they are surely profound and original. They are also highly unsettling because it makes evil anything but alien, mysterious, and other: it is like ourselves; it is ourselves. We have met the enemy, and he is us. And we like this kind of evil when we encounter it, which is another reason that Stiva is so attractive. The devil has power to assume a pleasing shape, and we all like drinking with him. That, presumably, is why evil is so common. How else could it be?

The difference between Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's concepts is that, for Dostoevsky, evil is still active and a matter of bad intentions: we all want to kill our fathers. Tolstoy eliminates such intentions altogether: evil derives from an *absence*. Caryl writes that, in my view, "because Oblonsky is so nice, lets people down as well as lifts them up and does not appear to work at life, he must be the embodiment of active evil." If I have given this impression, I have not been clear. Stiva is not the embodiment of *active* evil, but of very passive evil, evil that never intends harm or recognizes itself as such. It is not because of what he does but because of what he neglects that he becomes the novel's symbol of evil.

Nevertheless, in saying that Stiva is the book's symbol of evil, I do not mean to say that Tolstoy would have us believe no worse person could exist. Not at all. Actively malicious people would obviously be much more harmful than he is. Tolstoy's point is not that Stiva is the most evil man one could encounter, but that most evil happens because so many of us are, to some degree, like Stiva. Not the worst, yet most evil happens in the Stiva way.

In the famous restaurant chapter, we see Stiva as a master of amoral prosaics. He correctly describes how the world works, but responds with no interest in making it, or himself, any better. Lyovin has just been endorsing Platonic love, and condemning Stiva's sort of love, but has suddenly pulled himself up short as he suddenly remembers his own sins, and evidently asks himself: who am I to talk? These are the reactions of an honest man, who compares his statements with his previous statements and behavior—something that Stiva never does. As Lyovin is confused, Stiva draws a moral about the world:

"It's like this, don't you see," said Stepan Arkadyevich: "you're very much all of a piece. That's your strong point and your failing. You have a character that's all of a piece, and you want the whole of life to be of a piece too—but that's not how it is. You despise public official work because you want the reality to be invariably corresponding all the while with the aim—and that's not how it is. You want a man's work, too, always to have a defined aim, and love and family life always to be undivided—and that's not how it is. All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life is made up of light and shadow"³ (46-47).

Up until the last sentence, everything Stiva says is correct. Things are not whole in the world, and nothing is set up so perfectly as to proceed in a straight line towards an aim. Lyovin makes a demand for purity in work very much like his demand for sexual purity, and in this passage Tolstoy shows the naiveté of both. This desire for the pure and whole is closely connected to Lyovin's tendency, which he shares with his brothers, to see the world in terms of theory. It is just this intolerance of complexity, messiness, and contingency that he will have to overcome. In large part, his story deals with how Lyovin ceases to be so much of a Lyovin, how he comes to be more unlike his brothers.

Where Stiva goes wrong is in the conclusion he draws from the messy, prosaic nature of the world: if work does not fit its aim, let's enjoy the discrepancy, and make an aesthetic out of fragmentation. Thus all the waste, cruelty, and unhappiness in the world become part of a grand and beautiful spectacle, if one only could see it in the right way, as Stiva can. A moral perspective, Tolstoy suggests, would involve creating wholeness and integrity, to the extent that one can, in a world that does not naturally contain it. It consists in making things more like what they ought to be rather than just finding the aesthetic to see them as beautiful in their present state. Thus, I would not accept Caryl's parallel of Stiva to Razumikhin, who "sins his way" to rightness—which for Razumikhin includes moral rightness—because Stiva, unlike Razumikhin, is entirely uninterested in such a conclusion.

Caryl objects to my reading of the passage in which Stiva meets Vronsky on the train taking him to the Eastern War in Part Eight. I had argued that the scene illustrates Stiva's remarkable "forgettory"—his ability to live only in the present—and that while he is capable of grief, sincerely, it leaves no lasting mark. At the beginning of the novel, he is sincerely sorry for his wife's predicament, but that grief will pass the moment he is out of her presence. In Part One, he is able to wish first Vronsky and then Lyovin success in wooing Kitty, and even quote the same encouraging verses to each of them. But he is not recommending bigamy. Is he therefore dissembling with one of them? No, because in each case, there is only the present moment, and his forgettory insures that his feelings at each moment will have no capacity to alter his behavior at a subsequent moment. The horror of such a stance, I argued, is visible when Stiva meets Vronsky at the train station, and the sight of him momentarily recalls Anna. Caryl quotes the following sentence:

Na mgnovenie litso Stepana Arkad'icha vyrazilo grust', no cherez minutu, kogda...on voshel v komnatu, gde byl Vronskii, Stepan Arkad'ich uzhe vpolne zabyl svoi rydaniia nad trupom sestry i videl v Vronskom tol'ko geroia i starogo priiatelia.

For an instant Stepan Arkadyevich's face expressed sadness, but a minute later, when [smoothing his whiskers and with a spring in his walk] he entered the room where Vronsky was, Stepan Arkadyevich had already wholly forgotten his own sobbing over the corpse of his sister and saw in Vronsky only a hero and an old friend (AK, 806-7).

My comment, to which Caryl objects, was: "Still more horribly, in part 8, the sight of Vronsky reminds him of his sister and he grows deeply and sincerely sad *for a few seconds* but then gladly greets Vronsky as an old friend in whom to take his usual companionable pleasure." Caryl sees nothing horrible here, only that Stiva is "trying to be kind, not morose" with the already bereaved Vronsky and that he works "easily with the present and the potentials of the present." That is surely true, but there is horror here nonetheless—horror in his very ability utterly to forget his grief so quickly. Notice the words Tolstoy uses to emphasize the point: "*vpolne zabyl*" (*completely* forgot); "*na mgnovenie*" (for an instant) he was sad; but "*cherez minutu*" (a *minute* later) that sadness entirely passed; he saw in Vronsky "*tol'ko geroia i starogo priiatelia*" (*only* a hero and an old friend). Completely, only: Tolstoy did not have to include these words unless he wanted to stress the unnaturally horrifying proficiency of Stiva in forgetting anything disagreeable, even his own despairing sobs over his sister's corpse. There was, indeed, no need to use the word corpse; and we remember what that corpse must have looked like.

Falling in Love

Caryl next objects to my comment that Anna's habit of lying to herself begins because, unlike Stiva, she has a conscience, and so to do something she knows is wrong, she develops a habit of misperceiving her husband. This process is enacted over many chapters and over a great deal of time, until it becomes habitual. The habit briefly breaks down when she is dying in childbirth and she says, explicitly, that she tried to think as badly as possible of Karenin, but that such thoughts were not true: "But there is another woman in me, I'm afraid of her: she loved that man [Vronsky], and I tried to hate you, and could not forget about her that used to be" (AK 434). As for her conscience, we see it in numerous passages, and, in particular, her dreams.

I am sorry for the ambiguity in the comment that Caryl quotes: "The combination of Stiva's responsiveness and dishonesty with a conscience leads her into habits of protective lying to herself. She wants to be unfaithful to Karenin, and knows there is no justification for it." I meant "no justification for it" as a description of Anna's own feelings, not my own.

It is she who feels guilty for what she is doing, whether or not readers today would share her feelings.

Caryl writes that it is "astonishing" I leave out the crucial fact that Anna "fell in love," an action that Caryl describes as "a powerful involuntary commitment." She quotes how Anna's nerves tighten during the train ride home. Here, however, I strongly disagree with Caryl's description of what falling in love (according to this novel) is like. Tolstoy makes something clear that I think most of us, in the depths of our hearts, would agree with: that falling in love, like losing one's temper, or some other supposedly involuntary actions, are only partly involuntary. There is also a decided element of choice. The idea that falling in love is *wholly* involuntary—figured in medieval romance by a love potion—is itself an ideology, with which Tolstoy strongly disagrees and which I also think is not entirely accurate. In the train scene, in the lines right after those Caryl quotes, Tolstoy makes this point clear:

She felt her nerves were strings being strained tighter and tighter on some sort of peg. She felt her eyes opening wider and wider... . Moments of doubt were continually coming upon her, when she was uncertain whether the train was going forward or backward or standing still altogether; whether it was Annushka at her side or a stranger. "What's on the arm of that chair, a fur cloak or some beast? And what am I myself? Myself or some other woman?" She was afraid of giving way to this delirium.⁴ But something drew her toward it, and she could yield to it or resist it at will [*ona po proizvolu mogla otdavat'sia emu i vozderzhivat'sia*]. (107)

For the modern reader, the motion of the train recalls Einsteinian illustrations of relativity: if two trains are passing each other at forty miles an hour, it is impossible to tell (unless there is acceleration or palpable friction) from within either of them whether one train is stopped and the other going eighty miles an hour, or one going one hundred miles an hour and the other twenty miles an hour backward, or any other combination that adds up to the *relative* difference of eighty miles an hour. Tolstoy figures this familiar and disorienting experience as one of *moral* relativity. Anna is morally at sea here.

She feels acted upon from without—"something drew her toward" the delirium—which is how love does feel. But Tolstoy makes clear that, nevertheless, "she could yield to it or resist it at will." There is always an element of choice in yielding and, I think, all of us know both the power of the external force and the residual power of will. The idea of simply being overwhelmed by love, as by a potion, is part of the romantic ideology that *Anna Karenina* is directed against.

Lying

She can be "myself or some other woman," a line that will be echoed later when she says, at her near deathbed, that she did become that other woman who tried to hate Karenin. But becoming that other woman was a

choice. And it led to monstrous unfairness and cruelty to others, especially Karenin. I am not speaking here of her affair, but of the additional and gratuitous acts of cruelty to her husband: the extraordinarily vulgar and offensive way she tells him about the affair on her way back from the races, for instance; and, most of all, her total refusal to acknowledge that he is a human being who is suffering. In Part Four, chapter four—when the affair has been going on for a very long time—Karenin, in his anger and hurt, stutters his words, and Anna reacts:

She wanted to laugh and was immediately ashamed that anything could amuse her at such a moment. And for the first time, for an instant [*v perviy raz, na mgnovenie*], she felt for him, she put herself in his place, and was sorry for him. (AK, 384)

For the first time—and only for an instant—it occurs to her to put herself in his place. I do not see what else one can conclude from this fact—that she has not once tried to see and feel things from his point of view—except that she has been terribly cruel and selfish. It is entirely possible to fall in love, have an affair, and still worry about the person one is hurting. Note that Tolstoy stresses here not her lack of any external action to help him—for then one could ask what she could do—but that the question of Karenin's feelings has not once even occurred to her. The most significant moral judgments we make in this novel concern what characters think or fail to think of, something we usually cannot know in life. A minute later she again denies that he can even feel pain: "No, can a man with those dull eyes, with that self-satisfied complacency, feel anything?" If one wants to do something that will hurt someone, it pays to deny that the person can even feel pain.

But Anna knows better, as she reveals in the near deathbed scene and as we also know. Karenin, we are told, can feel pain, and feels it very deeply; that is why he breaks down when women cry in his office. The sight of others' suffering affects him, if anything, too deeply. He is simply unable to control his feelings. His conversion comes precisely because he *cannot* leave Anna's deathbed and is forced to experience what he usually escapes. The text makes this character trait explicit.

When I say Anna lies, I am referring to something beyond mere stating untruths. Like honesty, lying becomes a rather broad concept in this book; it includes false listening and false seeing. Anna teaches herself systematically to misperceive the world, and to be false to herself and others in numerous ways. When, in Part Two, chapter nine, Anna returns from her soiree, where she has been speaking privately and almost indecently (in the view of her friends) with Vronsky, Karenin waits for her to talk about what has happened. This chapter offers a model of a certain kind of false conversation, in which one simply will not understand what is said to one:

"You're not in bed? What a surprise!" she said, and without stopping, she went on into the dressing room. "It's late, Aleksey Aleksandrovich," she said, when she had gone through the doorway. "Anna, it's necessary for me to have a talk with you."

"With me?" she said, with surprise. She came out from behind the door of the dressing room and looked at him. "Well, what is it? What about?" she said, sitting down. "Well, let's talk, if it is so necessary. But it would be better to sleep."

Anna said what came to her lips and marveled, hearing herself, at her own capacity for lying. How simple and natural were her words, and how likely that she was simply sleepy! She felt herself clad in an impenetrable armor of falsehood (AK, 154).

Tolstoy and Anna both know she is lying here (the word *lozh'* is used twice), but she has not technically *said* anything false. Her lying consists in her principled refusal to understand. You are up? Heavens, why! You want to talk *with me*? Whatever for? The falsity here lies in the way she constructs the dialogic situation. Throughout the conversation, she makes any real exchange impossible by consistently taking her husband's words the wrong way.

Karenin mentions that her "'too animated conversation with Count Vronsky' (he enunciated the name firmly and with deliberate emphasis) 'attracted attention'" (AK 155). He emphasizes the name to show he is not jealous, because otherwise the name would be hard to pronounce. But then he sees her "laughing eyes, which frightened him with their impenetrable look, and as he talked, he felt the uselessness and futility of his words" (AK 155). Anna's reply typifies the conversation and a particular kind of falsity:

"You're always like that," she answered, as though misunderstanding him, and of all he had said only taking in the last phrase. "One time you don't like my being bored, and another time you don't like my being lively. I wasn't bored. Does that offend you?" (AK 155).

As Anna knows perfectly well, Karenin is not criticizing her for being lively at a party, although, in another context, of course the words could bear that meaning. Anna does not speak falsely, she listens falsely, and *false listening* is also a form of lying. Elsewhere in the book, and repeatedly, she *sees* falsely.

What Caryl calls Anna's "refusal" to sign also constitutes another form of lying, this time to herself. She refuses to acknowledge the choice she has made, to take responsibility for it. Her taking of opium, her dropping her eyes so as not to see things, and many similar gestures are all part of this by now habitual refusal to see and acknowledge *what is before her eyes*, just as she developed the habit of refusing to hear what was said to her. Caryl writes: "What matters in that [Anna's] fate is its irresponsible dynamic, its ever-increasing unwillingness to 'sign.' Such signing...would have made possible a first step—and for Tolstoy...the first step is the crucial one. Only a first step makes concrete expression possible. Otherwise one has to lie." I agree, with one addition: the refusal to see and sign is already part of lying, as Tolstoy presents it.

Why Anna Refuses a Divorce

I do not think it is fair to speak, as Caryl does, of Karenin's "initial vindictiveness and the fact that he does appear to care more for social opinion than for fact." Karenin's response to the affair is hurt, and he responds with anger and pain, as all of us would. Where lies the vindictiveness? As for his caring more for social opinion than for fact, I think this is a misreading of his character as Tolstoy presents it.

As some men are color blind, Karenin is social blind and emotional blind. He is unable to read events charged with emotional significance, and so often hides behind bureaucratic formulae, which he does understand. Seeing Anna and Vronsky at the soiree, he has no idea whether what they are doing is improper. Indeed, the text tells us that he sees nothing wrong with it. But others noticed it, and Karenin, knowing his own lack, suspects that perhaps there is something to worry about. He cannot see by himself, so he relies on the eyes of others. He depends on triangulated vision. That is by no means the same thing as not caring about the fact. When he tells Anna she can see her lover (because he cannot prevent it) but not at the house, and when he tells her not to call his name into unnecessary disgrace, Karenin is asking not to have his nose publicly rubbed in the intolerable fact. It is quite clear from the text that he is deeply hurt by the fact of Anna's affair, as anyone would be.

Let me turn to one further scene that I think Caryl misreads or underreads. At the end of Part Four, Karenin has agreed to a divorce, but Anna and Vronsky leave for Italy "not having received a divorce and having decisively refused it" ("*ne poluchiv razvoda i reshitel'no otkazavshis' ot nego*"). The decisiveness of the refusal and the fact that this is the last sentence of Part Four lend it particular weight. Anna could have had the divorce, and her son as well as her daughter, but she herself refuses. Why? Almost no one who writes about the novel addresses this question, perhaps because the very fact that Karenin has offered the divorce—along with custody of Serezha—goes a great distance toward exonerating him. And if one acknowledges that Anna refuses the divorce and custody of her son, she seems to be something less than a tragic heroine pursued by a relentless fate, as so many readers prefer to think.

Caryl observes:

Oblonsky persuades Karenin to a divorce; then Karenin, with Dolly's help, mounts many reasons against it, all of them wrong; but confused and sensitized to Christian forgiveness, Karenin agrees to grant a divorce all the same; Betsy Tverskaia then manages to catch Vronsky just before he leaves for Tashkent; a passionate reunion takes place between the two lovers Anna and Vronsky, both still convalescent. And then—in a stunning show of compression and authorial self-control, Tolstoy withholds all further information and ends Part Four with the astonishing comment that, a month later, "*Anna s Vronskim yekhala za granitsu, ne poluchiv razvoda i reshitel'no otkazavshis' ot nego*." So a divorce was offered and refused. But how

did it happen, and into what time-and-space warp in the novel did this crucial event disappear?

I think I can answer Caryl's question, and some related ones about Karenin, Anna, and Stiva, if I go through the text slowly.

In chapter nineteen, we learn about the sincerity and depths of Karenin's Christian forgiveness of his wife. He discovers that before that forgiveness, "he had not known his own heart. At his sick wife's bedside, he had given way to that feeling of warm compassion always roused in him by the suffering of others" (AK 440). Pity for her and the joy of forgiveness make him conscious of "a spiritual peace he had never experienced before. He suddenly felt that the very thing that was the source of his sufferings had become the source of his spiritual joy; that what had seemed insoluble while he was judging, blaming, and hating had become clear and simple when he forgave and loved" (AK 440). These words come directly from the author, who speaks these lines from above. There is no doubting the reality of Karenin's conversion, and, while Karenin himself is surprised at what he can feel, the author—who knew his heart—is not.

He forgave his wife and pitied her for her sufferings and her remorse. He forgave Vronsky and pitied him, especially after reports reached him of his desperate action. He felt more for his son than before. And he blamed himself now for having taken too little interest in him. But for the newborn little girl he felt a special sentiment, not of pity only, but of tenderness. At first, from a feeling of compassion alone, he had been interested in the delicate little creature who was not his child, and who was cast to one side during her mother's illness, and would certainly have died if he had not troubled about her, and he did not himself observe how fond he became of her. He would go into the nursery several times a day and sit there for a long while, so that the nurses, who were at first afraid of him, got quite used to his presence. Sometimes for half an hour at a stretch he would sit silently gazing at the saffron-red, downy, wrinkled face of the sleeping baby, watching the movements of the frowning brows, and the fat little hands, with clenched fingers, that rubbed the little eyes and nose. At such moments particularly, Aleksey Aleksandrovich had a sense of perfect peace and inner harmony, and saw nothing extraordinary in his position, nothing that ought to be changed (AK 440-41)

I have quoted this passage at length because it illustrates one of Tolstoy's techniques, which I described in my earlier article. In accord with Tolstoy's idea that the most important facts are often the least noticeable, he often buries key facts in the middle of long paragraphs. They are there for the looking, but usually remain hidden in plain view unless we train ourselves to find them by reversing our normal habits of perception and reading. In this case, in the fourth clause of a sentence containing five clauses, buried in the middle of a paragraph, we learn that the little girl would have surely died if not for Karenin's attention, another fact about him not usually

mentioned in readings that are unrelentingly anti-Karenin. And the portrait of this stiff bureaucrat with swollen hands attending the poor baby, who was cast aside, and not himself even knowing how fond he had become of her, is truly moving. He does not himself know how fond he had become of her, and so the author must supply the information: utterly unselfconscious in his affection, he shows it without a shred of self-congratulation.

But Karenin soon becomes aware that his position does not seem natural to anyone else and that, "beside the blessed spiritual force controlling his soul, there was another, a brutal force [grubaia sila], as powerful, or more powerful, which controlled his life, and that this force would not allow him that humble peace he longed for" (AK 441). I have discussed the brutal force elsewhere, so I will say rather briefly that it represents the sum total of small, ordinary events, against which all direct resistance is futile. The same force, in the form of the daily habits of the peasants, defeats Lyovin's agricultural reforms, until he learns that reforms must never contradict the sum total of habits and daily actions. In this case, Tolstoy calls the force "brutal" because it does ill, works against Christian love and compassion—another illustration that prosaic forces, though effective, do not have to be good.

The force manifests itself in a number of incidents, none of which would defeat Karenin's spiritual force by themselves, but which, taken together and occurring over a long enough time, will eventually wear it down. When he is concerned about the sick Annie, and discovers the source of the illness is the wet nurse's lack of milk, Karenin asks why he has not been told before. "Who is one to say it to? Anna Arkadyevna is still ill," one of the other nurses replies. "The nurse was an old servant of the family. And in her simple words there seemed to Aleksey Aleksandrovich an allusion to his position" (AK 442). Anna is ill, Vronsky is not around, so whom can one consult about Annie's health? There is indeed an allusion to the fact that Karenin is not the baby's father, though no harm is meant to him. But it is just that lack of intent to harm that makes the allusion all the more telling. He cannot escape the brutal force, which treats his position as unnatural and absurd. It affects him even when he deals with people well disposed to him.

In addition, Karenin's acquaintances seem to greet him as if "concealing a kind of mirth....Everyone seemed, somehow, enormously delighted, as though they had just been to a wedding. When they met him, they inquired about his wife's health with hardly disguised glee" (AK 441). Here again, everyday forces and habits work ill. Karenin recognizes that Princess Betsy "represented the incarnation of that brutal force which would...hinder him from giving way to his feeling of love and forgiveness" (AK 444).

Karenin meets Betsy in Anna's room, where the two women have been talking about whether Vronsky should visit Anna before departing for Tashkent. Karenin, disturbed at having to address such a question before an outsider, leaves the decision to his wife. Both before and after Betsy leaves, he notices Anna's feelings of utter loathing for him. Alone with him, she cannot conceal her irritability at his presence.

Nevertheless, he is guided by his feelings of love and forgiveness, as well as by his appreciation that the "mysterious brutal force" cannot be resisted, and he repeats that the decision is hers:

He believed that for Anna herself it would be better to break off all relations with Vronsky; but if they thought this out of the question, he was even ready to allow these relations to be renewed, so long as the children were not disgraced and he was not deprived of them or forced to change his position. Bad as this might be, it was better than a complete break, which would put her in a hopeless and shameful position and deprive him of everything he cared for. But he felt helpless; he knew beforehand that everyone was against him, and that he would not be allowed to do what seemed to him now so natural and good, and would be forced to do what was wrong, though it seemed the proper thing to them (AK 446-7).

Here, and for the rest of Part Four, Karenin cares about "the children," and we note the plural. This plural represents another key fact buried in a long passage. Karenin cares, as Anna will not, about the little girl that is hers but not his. He cares also about her and her position. He would allow her to continue her affair with Vronsky, and therefore allow her to see him. But she refuses, irritably and petulantly (chapter twenty).

One begins to suspect here what will become explicit in the pages that follow: his very goodness offends her, in part because it deprives her of her earlier excuses for mistreating him. He is now clearly not a "puppet," "an official machine," as she has called him, and she knows it. In an almost underground way, she resents him for his goodness, for his evident moral superiority over her, much as Vronsky, sensing that superiority, feels humiliated and shoots himself. But the act of shooting himself cleanses him of the humiliation, whereas Anna dwells on it. She cannot accept her husband's permission for Vronsky to visit their house precisely because that is something Karenin is granting, and she will not accept anything from him. Thus, she irritably declines his offer, and has this information conveyed to Vronsky through Betsy. Vronsky comes only later, after Karenin has agreed to a divorce, and he comes passionately on his own, without any invitation or permission.

It is at this point that Stiva comes to solve Anna's problems. Chapter twenty-one introduces him comically in its first sentence: "Before Betsy had time to walk out of the drawing room, she was met in the doorway by Stepan Arkadyevich, who had just come from Yeliseyev's, where a consignment of fresh oysters had been received" (AK 447). Tolstoy's complete mastery of tone shows in his willingness to use bathos at a moment when Anna sees everything in terms of tragedy and death and Karenin is torn between exalted Christian love and the brutal force. "Oysters," of course, is an Oblonsky motif, recalling the restaurant scene in Part One, where it symbolizes his completely hedonistic and amoral view of life. He has come, he tells Betsy, partly to repair Anna's situation, but also to thank Karenin for having been made a chamberlain; even now (and,

indeed, later in the book) Oblonsky is making his career through his brother-in-law.

Anna immediately explains her feelings, which she has evidently been considering, about Karenin:

"I have heard it said that women love men even for their vices," Anna began suddenly, "but I hate him for his virtues....The sight of him has a physical effect on me, it enrages me....Would you believe it, that knowing he's a good man, a splendid man, that I'm not worth his little finger, I still hate him. I hate him for his generosity (AK 448).

This is Tolstoy as Dostoevsky, and what Anna demonstrates here is the psychology of the underground. Before she has hated him for his supposed selfishness and coldness, now she hates him for his very goodness and generosity, which she cannot deny. It is this feeling that will prompt her to refuse his offer of a divorce and custody of Serezha: she hates his generosity, and cannot, will not, accept anything he offers, especially something that really matters. Anna is truly perverse here and anything but tragic. She makes this motivation even more explicit later in Part Four.

Oblonsky tries to persuade her that the solution is not death, but divorce, and he leaves realizing that she wants a divorce but will not ask for it. What he does not fully understand is *why* she will not ask for it. "From the look on her face, which suddenly brightened into its old beauty, he saw that if she did not desire this, it was simply because it seemed to her unattainable happiness" (AK 450). The perverse motivation, which makes her want a divorce but only so long as it does not depend on Karenin's generosity, utterly escapes Stiva, for whom underground psychology is entirely alien.

When Stiva goes in to Karenin's room, he becomes "aware of a sense of embarrassment unusual in him" (AK 450). He fidgets with a cigarette case and continues to struggle with a feeling of timidity whose cause he is utterly unable to identify. And so the author does it for him: "This feeling was so unexpected and so strange that he did not believe it was the voice of conscience telling him that what he was about to do was wrong" (AK 450). In *War and Peace*, there is one moment, after the death of old Bezukhov, when Prince Vasily speaks sincerely about death and the vanity of all earthly plans, an effusion utterly out of character with him. Tolstoy uses this sort of *realistic inconsistency* frequently, as if to acknowledge that no one is entirely whole. Such actions lead to no change in the character, but for the reader they mark the human complexity present in even the most apparently monolithic of people. Here, realistic inconsistency, like oysters at a tragedy, produces a comic effect, brilliantly out of keeping with the tone of the scene and the serious issues at stake. So unused is Stiva to thinking in moral terms, or to feeling shame or guilt, that when his conscience does speak to him he cannot identify it.

In this sentence sounds the unambiguous voice of the author, saying that what Stiva wants to do—persuade Karenin to grant a divorce—is wrong. Karenin, in fact, has already written a letter telling Anna he will do whatever she wants, but, as Stiva tells Karenin, she will not say what she

wants. It must be given to her, she cannot ask for it. "She is crushed, simply crushed by your generosity. If she were to read this letter, she would be incapable of saying anything, she would only hang her head lower than ever" (AK 451). If Stiva thinks he is merely making up a flattering explanation of her behavior, Tolstoy suggests that the explanation is true, but not at all flattering.

Stiva outlines the case for a divorce, which he sees as a very simple solution but which Tolstoy recognizes is not simple at all. The author's voice merges with that of his character as Karenin meditates:

All that seemed so simple to Stepan Arkadyevich, Aleksey Aleksandrovich had thought over thousands of times. And, far from being simple, it all seemed to him utterly impossible. Divorce, the details of which he knew by this time, seemed to him now out of the question, because the sense of his own dignity and respect for religion forbade his pleading guilty to a fictitious charge of adultery, and still more allowing his wife, pardoned and beloved by him to be exposed and put to public shame. Divorce appeared to him impossible for still more important reasons (AK 452).

We hear the voice of Tolstoy in the comment that what seems simple at first glance is far from being so. Later, Dolly will see birth control as too simple a solution to too complex a problem, which does not make birth control itself wrong, but does impugn the process of reasoning by which Anna arrives at it. However much *Anna Karenina* is concerned with what we think, it is still more concerned with *how* we think. When Lyovin blames Dolly for making her children speak to her in French, a practice he sees as "teaching insincerity," Tolstoy comments that Dolly had thought over this question many times, and had considered Lyovin's point, but had also realized that there were other considerations and that the situation was not so simple as Lyovin has so hastily assumed. *Anna Karenina* repeatedly expresses distrust of simple solutions.

Honesty means a great deal to Karenin, as it does not to Stiva, and so pleading guilty to a fictitious charge of adultery is more than distasteful to him. And he, unlike Stiva or even Anna, has considered the public shame to which Anna is bound to be exposed: he is thinking of her, as she and Stiva are not thinking of him. Stiva has also not given a thought to the "still more important reasons":

What would become of his son in case of a divorce? To leave him with his mother was out of the question. The divorced mother would have her own illegitimate family, in which his position as a stepson and his education would not be good. Keep him with him? He knew that would be an act of vengeance on his part, and that he did not want (AK 453).

Although Anna will later be so concerned about keeping Serezha, she has not yet raised the question with Stiva, and he has not even given a thought to it. Karenin is entirely judicious to wonder what Serezha's position would

be in Vronsky's household, especially should Anna and Vronsky have more children; indeed, he would be remiss not to consider this question. And yet, to keep Serezha with him would constitute an act of vengeance "and that he did not want." Unless one considers the child a minor concern, it is clear that the question of divorce cannot be a simple one. Karenin is the deeply responsible moral reasoner here, much more so than Anna, Stiva, and many readers.

But apart from this, what more than anything made divorce seem impossible to Aleksey Aleksandrovich was that by consenting to a divorce he would be completely ruining Anna. The words of Darya Aleksandrovna at Moscow, that in deciding on a divorce he was thinking of himself and not considering that by this he would be ruining her irrevocably, had sunk into his heart (AK 453).

If Karenin is not reasoning morally here, and with real compassion for his wife, it would be hard to imagine what compassionate reasoning would be. Neither Stiva nor Anna show any similar concern for him.

And connecting this with his forgiveness of her, with his devotion to the children, he understood it now in his own way. To consent to a divorce, to give her her freedom, meant in his thoughts to take from himself the last tie that bound him to life — the children whom he loved; and to take from her the last prop that supported her on the path of virtue and cast her down to her ruin (AK 453).

"The children he loved": we again note the plural, and the way in which even in his deepest thoughts he makes no distinction between the child that is his and the child that is Vronsky's. For that matter, he could keep them both, since both are legally his. But if he expects to lose his "children," then he has evidently decided that, even though they are the last tie to bind him to life, he would give them both up, so as not to act out of vengeance or what would seem like vengeance. Again we are admitted here to his private thoughts, and even here there is no false posturing, no making a show of his decency to impress himself: there is only (so far) complete decency. Few of us, I imagine, would be capable of thinking this way.

If she were divorced, he knew that she would join her life to Vronsky's, and their tie would be an illegitimate and criminal one, since a wife, by the interpretation of the ecclesiastical law, could not marry while her husband was living (AK 453)

This consideration may seem a light one today, but to understand a novel, and for that matter a culture of a different time and place, requires taking seriously what it takes seriously, or finding some equivalent from our own culture. Karenin is concerned for his wife's soul, as well as her welfare, and he is not mouthing such concern hypocritically.

He goes on to worry what would happen to her if Vronsky should abandon her. Although Vronsky does not abandon her, the concern is a perfectly reasonable one that any thoughtful person would have, and Anna herself will soon worry about it. And yet, despite his conviction that a divorce is impossible for so many reasons, although "he did not believe a single word Stepan Arkadyevich said to him" (AK 453), he knows he will have to submit, because Stiva's words "were the expression of that powerful brutal force which controlled his life" (AK 453). "With the same gesture with which Vronsky had covered his face, he hid his face in shame in his hands" as he realizes that he will indeed plead guilty to a fictitious charge of adultery. The words of the Gospel, which he has now come to understand from within, occur to him:

"Whoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also," thought Aleksey Aleksandrovich.

"Yes, yes!" he cried in a shrill voice. "I will take the disgrace on myself, I will give up even my son, but...wouldn't it be better to leave it alone? However, you may do as you like...." (AK 453-4).

Stiva will later see in Vronsky, who has volunteered to go to the Eastern War, "a hero," but if there is a true moment of heroism in this book, it is this one. Karenin would allow Anna to stay and continue her affair with Vronsky; if she wants a divorce, he would impugn his own dignity, integrity, and the immortal soul in which he believes by pleading guilty to a fictitious charge of adultery; and he would give up both the children. He would do all these things even though he knows no one would appreciate his action, but would only laugh at him the more. Readers and critics, who to my knowledge have not pointed out the incredible nobility of this moment, and have largely continued to think only the worst of Karenin, have behaved rather like the society people who constitute that brutal force. Did Tolstoy know in advance they would?

And yet, Tolstoy, with his unerring realism, does not allow even this moment of supreme nobility to remain pure:

And turning away so that his brother-in-law could not see him, he sat down on a chair by the window. There was bitterness, there was shame in his heart, but with bitterness and shame he felt the joy and emotion at the greatness of his own humility (AK 454).

This is the first moment of the scene in which any posturing or pride enters into Karenin's thoughts, and it happens *after* he has made his decision. He is impressed by the greatness of his own humility, a fault with which even a saint like Tolstoy's Father Sergius struggles. This final admixture of pride makes the scene all the more convincing and yet its placement at the end of the scene leaves the nobility of his previous meditations untainted.

The truly Christian act is to forgive and be willing to sacrifice; but at this moment Karenin takes sacrifice as a sign of Christianity. Christian

love may require sacrifice, but it does not follow that sacrifice is always the most Christian act. One wonders whether not sacrificing his son would be better for his son, no matter how much it would appear an act of vengeance to keep him. We simply do not know.

Stiva leaves the interview with a comment about "the will of God," that even he realizes is "stupid," and trying to formulate a lame joke about his diplomatic abilities. As in *What Is Art?* Tolstoy was later to make fun of operas by showing a rehearsal, so here he gives us not the joke but the labored process of formulating one. The most significant and morally troubling questions become subject to a *bon mot*, which is sure to be appreciated in society, as Stiva's other *mots* are. It is no wonder why the brutal force is so powerful. From oysters to witticisms, Stiva's participation in this scene bespeaks the amorality and superficial judgments that make his life so pleasant and the serious world of real questions so far from his consciousness.

Betsy runs to Vronsky to tell him that Karenin has agreed to a divorce, and Vronsky in turn runs to Anna, heedless of the possibility he might encounter Karenin or anyone else. He smothers her with kisses, overwhelming her with his passion. This reunion cannot help being infected with a tone of irony when contrasted with Karenin's unnoticed nobility. Anna and Vronsky then utter the clichés of romantic love:

"So it had to be," he said. "So long as we live, it must be so. I know it now."

"That's true," she said, getting whiter and whiter and putting her arms around his head. "Still there is something terrible in it after all that has passed."

"It will all pass, it will all pass; we shall be so happy. Our love, if it *could* be stronger, will be strengthened because there is something terrible [*chto-to uzhasnoe*] in it" (AK, 456).

Fatalism—it "had to be"—and the sense that love is strengthened by the terrible: these are the truisms of medieval romantic love, and of modern romantic fiction, in which they so thoroughly believe. And yet they are not insincere at all, because they thoroughly accept this idea of love.

They can have the divorce and the children, but Anna now rejects both:

"Stiva says that *he* has agreed to everything, but I can't accept *his* generosity," she said looking dreamily past Vronsky's face. "I don't want a divorce, it's all the same to me now. Only I don't know what he will decide about Serezha."

He could not conceive how at this moment of their meeting she could remember and think of her son, of divorce. What did it all matter? (AK 457; italics in original).

No matter what it might mean for her son, or for herself, she cannot accept Karenin's offer because it is *his* offer, and the more generous he is, the less she can accept it. Her underground willingness to spite herself (and

incidentally harm her son) rather than have to admit his generosity leads to her fatal decision.

We see here her deep narcissism, which she will indulge even at her own expense and that of her son, reinforced by the narcissism of romantic love when it has no admixture of any other kind of love. Vronsky speaks this thought when he cannot even conceive "how she could remember" her son at such a moment. But Anna's motives here are less romantic than perverse.

It is in this context, I think, that we must understand the closing sentence of Part Four as very well prepared for and not at all bewildering:

A month later Aleksey Aleksandrovich was left alone [*ostalsia odin*] with his son in his house at Petersburg, while Anna and Vronsky had gone abroad, not having obtained a divorce, but having absolutely refused one (AK 457).

Karenin is left alone; but he has his son, whom Anna has decisively refused to take as she has decisively refused the divorce. Her adamant unwillingness to accept anything from Karenin's generosity evidently represents not just a single moment of perversity but a feeling she adheres to over time and upon which she acts "decisively."

Later, when Anna laments that she loves two beings, Vronsky and Serezha, but that one excludes the other, does she recall that she *could* have had them both? Is her sense of her tragic destiny ever tempered by the recollection that her situation is of her own making? Do readers who simply blame Karenin, and see Anna as a tragic heroine, recall her own refusal and the rather unflattering motives that led to it? By and large, I think they do not, and the question one wants to ask is why?

Anna begins the novel as a person of tremendous seductiveness and power. She is able to bring Dolly back to Stiva by force of her charm, and she enchants Vronsky, who forgets all about Kitty. Even later in the novel, she herself takes explicit pride at turning Lyovin's head. Part of her attractiveness lies in her great power and her awareness of it. She can manipulate anyone if she can manipulate Lyovin. Since the novel was published over a century ago, she seems to have extended this power beyond the text to the majority of her readers.

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NOTES

¹ But I am not quite convinced that what Tolstoy called infection must be instantaneous. It must, in the sense that Tolstoy is distinguishing between our immediate emotional response and an artificial chain of reflections guided by considerations other than our experience of reading. But the process of reading, as Tolstoy often emphasized, is itself temporally extensive, and we do not have one but many responses to a work, accumulating over time as we read. In that sense, infection may be processual.

² Or, in a more interesting version, the reader may believe that life does not work out that way, and therefore the author has not been true to realism's demand for plausibility. Such a judgment raises a thorny question: is the work true to its own inner logic nevertheless? Is the problem that the reader's view of plausibility differs from that of the work or of realism generally?

³ This and several other passages about Stiva's genial irresponsibility, and his tendency to view the world of human suffering as an aesthetic spectacle, suggest that Dickens's Harold Skimpol (in *Bleak House*) may have been an element in his portrait.

⁴ "otdavat'sia etomu zabyt'iu," which is perhaps meant to connect to the Oblonsky trait of forgetting.