

Professor Mandelker mean to suggest that Anna commits adultery for the sake of estate?

On the whole, the notion of Anna seduced by fiction would seem to require her to be a clean slate, written upon by the text she takes in. But what does she bring to her reading? After all, even Dante presumes that Paolo and Francesca were not indifferent to each other before they hit upon the pastime of reading aloud. ("...by what occasion did love grant you to know your uncertain desires?") What in the novel rules out taking Anna's encounter with the English novel as symptomatic rather than causal? Can we imagine Anna, as Tolstoy has created her, as fulfilled by her life with Karenin, as Tolstoy has created him? Indeed, Mandelker elsewhere offers the suggestion that both Anna's reading and her adulterous passion are implicated in attempts at self-knowledge and self-expression: "Within the confines of a life that denies her spiritual growth and autonomy, Anna's only avenue for the pursuit of complete psychic awareness is through adulterous passion." Further, Mandelker interprets Anna's suicide as in part an act of (largely unconscious) rebellion in the wake of what self-knowledge brings (98, 99, 162). I cannot see Anna as the product of a discursive field called "Victorian fiction." Rather, it seems to me that Anna's lived experience, her situation, and her chain of choices determine how she will read, how she will live, and how she will die.

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Mandelker is a critic's critic, who in *Framing Anna Karenina* has waded bravely into the thicket of received opinion about the novel and its author. She covers several loosely related questions, which she weaves together with her own brand of intelligent feminism. In what follows I comment on several aspects of her general argument. Often I elaborate on something I have learned from her. Where I disagree with her I make my point as forcefully as possible in the interests of debate.

Mandelker counts herself a student of Richard Gustafson, whose *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger* is one of the most important and original books on Tolstoy to appear in recent years. Mandelker continues Gustafson's revision and expansion of our understanding of Tolstoyan realism. Gustafson has coined the phrase "emblematic realism" to describe Tolstoy's particular blend of the real and the ideal. True mimesis for Tolstoy would include a revelation of the unseen as well as the seen, just as Homer depicted gods as well as human beings. For Tolstoy, however, human beings have no direct access to the unseen world, and therefore he never portrays it directly. It reveals itself through patterns that the reader picks up within ostensibly realistic stories. In the last third of her book Mandelker shows very convincingly that Tolstoy does not include random details for their own sake, and that seemingly realistic motifs, like the mushrooms in the courtship of Varenka and Koznyshev, have symbolic undertones.

We sense unseen reality through the sublime. The sublime, Mandelker explains, is essentially mysterious, and this distinguishes it from the beautiful, which applies to things we desire and want to have. Mandelker argues, however, that Tolstoy goes beyond the Kantian sublime to

what she calls the "iconic," which opens direct windows on the unseen. "Iconic aesthetics" thereby removes barriers erected by Western thought to "supersublime" communication between souls. As Mandelker reads *Anna Karenina*, this evolving new aesthetic undercuts the value of Lyovin's sublime experiences in nature because they are solitary: they "carry Lyovin away from human relations," while Anna's portrait "belongs to the category of the iconic because it "[makes] it possible for him to empathize even with someone completely different from himself" (121). Eventually this evolution results, in *What is Art?*, in Tolstoy's theory of infectious art.

Mandelker's treatment of the sublime and its relation to Tolstoy's aesthetic theory is, for me, the most fascinating part of this very good book. The sublime becomes a conscious category in *Anna Karenina* because in the 1870s Tolstoy had begun to read and appreciate Kant as well as Schopenhauer. As a result, in *Anna Karenina* he emphasizes the mysteriousness, the impenetrable otherness of external reality to a much greater extent than in *War and Peace*. The introduction of the Kantian sublime therefore coincides with an intensification of Tolstoy's sense of the moral isolation of each individual soul. Lyovin can neither truly bond with nature (as Pierre Bezukhov does) nor even with his beloved wife (as Pierre again does). Even though Lyovin's viewing of Anna's portrait helps him pity rather than judge her, I would argue that the two souls remain apart. When Lyovin stands before the portrait of Anna, he is struck by the mysterious expression in her eyes. The portrait is alive because it is impenetrable—not "framed" as a beautiful object to be possessed. Here Mandelker makes one of her best points: that Mikhailov has painted Anna in her essential and inaccessible perfection, so that Lyovin, when he sees her in the flesh, must take her inner life seriously rather than simply judging her as a fallen woman (114-115). I agree with this conclusion, but Lyovin and Anna for all that do not commune with one another. The only true communion of souls described in *Anna Karenina* is erotic, between Kitty and Lyovin in their courtship and yes, between Anna and Vronsky in their initial attraction to one another.

Gustafson and Mandelker insist on a unity of Tolstoy's complete *oeuvre* so strong that one may read back from Tolstoy's later theoretical statements to explain his earlier artistic practice. I agree that a well-marked road leads from the earliest pronouncements of Tolstoy to the latest ones, and that one may often apply a later statement to an earlier work. This is because, as Gustafson's book documents very well, Tolstoy was obsessed with the same set of (relatively few) questions from start to finish. The answers, however, do change as Tolstoy ages and the Russian intellectual climate evolves. The critic, therefore, should reverse direction on the Tolstoyan highway cautiously, on the lookout for forks that give trouble only on the return trip. I am uneasy on this account about Mandelker's (as well as Gustafson's) insistence on an Orthodox Christian and ascetic reading of Tolstoy's preconversion works. I especially think that Mandelker underrates the value of family life and child bearing and raising in *Anna Karenina*; and I will therefore offer a version of Tolstoyan feminism somewhat different from Mandelker's.

In Mandelker's outstanding treatment of the Victorian theme in the novel, Anna is identified with a full-blooded fallen woman in the continental style, but her maternal love for Serezha makes her a Victorian heroine as well. "Anna is thus unique in literature in that she combines the maternal instinct of the Victorian fallen woman with the passionate sensuality of the French mistress. By giving Anna two love stories, Tolstoy reinstates the narrative of passion into the Victorian paradigm and questions the objects of desire erected by the Victorian ethos" (61-62). Anna has a true dilemma, a choice that she cannot make between true passion for a man and true love of her child.

I agree with Mandelker that Anna is neither victim nor villain. She is trapped in a loveless marriage in which friendship, but not intimate friendship, is the most she can expect from her husband. Would Lyovin be happy in such a marriage? And unlike Dolly or the peasant women at the church who comment on Kitty's marriage that she is a sacrificial lamb, Anna does not have a large number of children to give meaning to her life. Surely it is to Anna's credit that she hesitates to give up her son Serezha. Once she has done so, she seems to forget him; and it is only on returning from Italy that she begins to pine for him. Why? Perhaps because in Italy, on her honeymoon, she, like Kitty in the first weeks of her marriage, has complete control over her man. But Vronsky, like Lyovin, begins to chafe under this control. Then Anna needs another, unconditional love, and she turns back to Serezha to get it. The suggestion (first proffered in *Family Happiness*) is that women sacrifice themselves for their children in return for the unconditional love that their children give them. Tolstoy thereby supplies a natural, psychological explanation of motherly love. But Anna forgoes this natural unconditional love when she abandons Serezha for Vronsky. The later part of the book documents her hopeless struggles to maintain control of Vronsky as well as to find some activity to substitute for motherhood.

Anna is at her spiritually most beautiful as she struggles between her passion for Vronsky and her knowledge that to abandon her family is bad. Once Vronsky's seduction succeeds, Anna becomes a case study of what happens to someone in her situation. Mandelker wants to read Tolstoy's later ascetic views about chastity back into *Anna Karenina*. Here I must disagree. I see Varenka as suspect because she seems to fear her own sexuality: she and Koznyshev are afraid to take the plunge into marriage because they are too timid to yield to passion. Koznyshev can't bring himself to propose, and she can't bring herself to make him do it: the proposal scene is a faintly comic failed act of love.

Tolstoy loved the Victorians for their real concern with duty and virtue. But, as Mandelker shows, he exposed the essential sentimentality of the domestic Victorian novel, with its failure to deal fully with the problem of passion. In *Anna Karenina* he proposes Russian tradition as a way of channeling passion. This is why the wedding of Kitty and Lyovin, with its elevated tone and its unironic use of Church Slavonic, stands at the centre of the book. Even Stiva turns solemn before the gravely ecstatic faces of Lyovin and Kitty. Classes are drawn together. Lyovin wants to raise his family as his parents did, while Kitty, to his surprise and ultimate delight, brings Shcherbatsky traditions to the estate. All this is happening while

Anna is cutting herself off from traditions of society and domesticity. (She, presumably, has no family traditions of her own.) She lives abroad for a while, and then, after returning to Petersburg and realizing that she cannot live in society, attempts, with Vronsky, to create a life based on English model. That can't work just because it is foreign. It is a role, not a life rooted in Russian tradition.

Mandelker underestimates the attraction of family life and therefore of Victorian ideals in *Anna Karenina*. The Victorians believed that "the idea of the home as a separate domestic sphere for all but the most remarkable women was as natural as the idea of the family." For most Victorians, this meant that the woman was naturally inferior to the man, because of the woman's "incapacity for public life." For some, however, the spheres were separate but equal, and for some the domestic sphere was higher because, as one clergyman put it, "The Mother is the father of the Child" (Himmelfarb 60). Tolstoy would have held this last position, because he did not believe in the other great tenet of the Victorians, in representative institutions. Tolstoy attacks these directly in the scenes of the Duma elections in Part 6 of *Anna Karenina*. The novel systematically attacks all form of public life: the bureaucracy as practiced by Karenin, elected officials and official do-gooders as exemplified by Vronsky and the mysterious Sviiashkii, even the military, as least in peace-time. That leaves little for men to do.

In Part 7, chapter 9 of the novel, Lyovin and Stiva are talking about Anna just before visiting her. When Lyovin asks if Anna is occupied with her daughter, Stiva answers, "I think you see in every woman only a female [*samka*], a *couveuse*." Stiva goes on to explain that Anna is having her daughter well-raised (*vospitana*) by others, while she leads a life of her own. Tolstoy, of course, had already taken a lot of criticism for turning Natasha into a *samka* at the end of *War and Peace*, and he has Stiva level the same criticism of Lyovin. But the irony for Tolstoy is that women are better off than men precisely because they are *samki*, *nasedki*, brood-hens. They have natural work to do, whereas men have to search for meaningful occupations. The only acceptable male callings in *Anna Karenina* seem to be farming as Lyovin and the peasants practice it and perhaps army life as represented by Serpukhovskoy or the old general in Part 8. Lyovin's brother-in-law L'vov, a diplomat, even shuns career goals to devote himself to raising his sons. (Like Lyovin, the name L'vov is a play on Tolstoy's own first name Lev.) It's true that Tolstoy regards women as intellectually inferior to men, but men must use their minds to arrive at knowledge that women have instinctively. When women, like Anna or Lidiia Ivanovna, give up their instincts for intellect, Tolstoy mocks them. The only useful and true thoughts of men, however, are those that extend the instinctive ideas held by women.

According to Himmelfarb, "Victorian values"—devotion to family and country based on duty—were originally derived from religion, specifically from Wesleyanism and its offshoot Evangelicalism in the 18th century (55). As the nineteenth century progressed, religious fervor waned, and the home itself became an object of worship. Some of the Victorians themselves saw this as a problem. G. K. Chesterton "described the Victorians as the first generation that "asked its children to worship the hearth without the altar" (Himmelfarb 57). Tolstoy, with his Russian sensitivity to the religious

question and to the need to ground morality in philosophic or religious principles, could not take the English practical approach to morality. He saw that the family without religion was on shaky ground. Tolstoy associates the English with pragmatism and materialism, and he opposes Russian Christian tradition to these.

Tolstoy also provides another justification for family life in *Anna Karenina*. At the center of female existence and family life as portrayed in the novel is childbirth, the ordinary experience which, like death, is "equally beyond the usual conditions of life: they [death and childbirth] were like openings in that usual life through which something higher became visible" (Pt. 7, Ch.14). Childbirth provides the most purely sublime moments in *Anna Karenina*, in which Anna (also on her deathbed) temporarily regains her good, moral self, and in which Lyovin has an intimation of Nirvana. After witnessing the birth of his son, Lyovin defines the woman's world as sublime in ' precisely this sense: it was "so high in his estimation that his imagination could not grasp it" (xvi, 329). As souls slip into and out of the world, that window on the unseen of which Mandelker speaks opens a crack.

WORKS CITED

- Gustafson, Richard. *Leo Tolstoy, Resident and Stranger*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986.
 Himmelfarb, Gertrude. *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Professor Mandelker's Reply...

It is a great honor to have the opportunity to respond in the pages of *Tolstoy Studies Journal* to such insightful and stimulating reviews of my book on *Anna Karenina*, by colleagues whom I esteem and whose own work on Tolstoy and Russian literature has been so seminal to my own. I am deeply grateful to have my work read so closely and summarized so gracefully as has been done by Professors Emerson, Isenberg, and Orwin. In particular, I can only respond with gratitude to Professor Emerson's generous appraisal of my work. Curiously, the one argument of my book she finds to be "not so surprising," the proposition that Tolstoy's location as archrealist is problematic, turns out to be the very aspect of my thesis that has generated the most debate, both from Professors Isenberg and Orwin here, and in the reviews that have appeared elsewhere since my book's publication. In what follows, therefore, I will focus my response on the questions raised by Professors Isenberg and Orwin concerning my comparison of *Anna Karenina* to the Victorian novel, as these center on two related issues: realism and Victorianism, (which might be conceived of as real/ estate).

It is not altogether far-fetched to observe that, semantically speaking, "realism" is distantly connected with "real estate." That quasi-legal connection is tangibly supported by the bonds of interest that tie so many novelists to the realistic tradition: by Balzac's sense of property, Dicken's inventories and Tolstoy's estates, Henry James' preoccupation with "things."
 Harry Levin, "What is Realism?"