

Tolstoy. These short stories are often taught, and the instructor may find many speculative ideas in this book that can do service in classroom discussion. Any student of Tolstoy's later works will find much to contemplate in its pages.

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Liza Knapp and Amy Mandelker, eds.
*Approaches to Teaching Tolstoy's Anna
Karenina*. New York: The Modern
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Whether the competition is for "greatest novel ever written," "most popular Russian novel in the undergraduate curriculum," "most studied Russian novel in the English language," "most often quoted first sentence of a novel," or even "novel, least faithful film adaptations of," *Anna Karenina* will surely finish in the money. *Anna Karenina* is a reliable frontrunner in the American undergraduate literature curriculum. *Approaches to Teaching Tolstoy's Anna Karenina* [*Teaching AK*] is a welcome addition to the long-running series *Approaches to Teaching World Literature*, sponsored by the Modern Languages Association's Publication Committee.

The overarching goal of the MLA series is to "encourage serious and continuing discussion of the aims and methods of teaching literature" at the undergraduate level (vii). Each volume in the series seems to adhere to a fairly regimented protocol, beginning with a questionnaire widely distributed among teachers. For *Teaching AK* thirty nine teachers responded, of whom twenty-three have contributed short essays to the volume. In keeping with the series format, *Teaching AK* is organized around three basic themes: background materials, critical approaches, and classroom methods.

The background materials, ably and concisely handled by editors Liza Knapp and Amy Mandelker, include essential information on names and setting in *Anna Karenina*, a few words on various

Russian editions of the novel, a fair and balanced characterization of the merits of various English translations, and recommended readings available in English. The list of readings, which features recent scholarship (much of it published within the past fifteen years), attests to the growing interest in Tolstoy studies in English.

The editors give well deserved recognition to C. J. G. Turner's *A Karenina Companion* (1993) "an invaluable guide to the novel" (48). They also note that the *Tolstoy Studies Journal* (a source for earlier, scholarly versions of some of the essays represented in *Teaching AK*) represents the best Tolstoy scholarship and criticism" (48). The editors pay special tribute to Richard Gustafson's *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, calling it "the definitive study of Tolstoy's prose" and "the critical work most frequently cited by questionnaire respondents" (47).

Praise for Gustafson's radiant work on Tolstoy almost mollifies this reader's discomfort with the MLA's cookie-cutter approach to the methods and organization of the series, but not quite. Many of the essays on *Anna Karenina*—and here an appreciative "thanks" to editors Knapp and Mandelker, themselves Tolstoy scholars of the first rank—transcend the nominal categories into which they are organized. The twenty-three contributors (mostly American) to *Teaching AK* bring a trove of teaching experience to the novel. The diverse topics and approaches embrace a smorgasbord, something for every taste: close reading of key passages; materials to assist teaching the novel in English translation; the demonstration of specific critical approaches (Freudian, feminist); attention to the novel's form and structure; the novel in cultural context (social and legal status of women; agrarian and political reforms); the literary context of adultery; the use of filmed versions of the novel, the influence of Plato and Platonic dialogue, etc.

In some of the best essays the scholar's voice has ceded authority to the teacher's down-to-earth "how do we engage students with the novel" voice. That collective pedagogic voice, which sounds throughout *Teaching AK*, is one of the volume's greatest strengths. Gary Jahn, for example, writes "I have found that students experience the sense of

disjunction between the stories of Anna and Levin very keenly. Their solution is very often the same as [in] . . . an early film version of the novel . . . Levin appears. . . for about thirty seconds and then vanishes forever. [. . .] . . . the thorny problem of how [Levin's] story connects to Anna's is the crux of any discussion of the book's unity" (70,71). And Harriet Murav writes "The novel's most profound exploration of marriage unfolds. . . in the interrelations between the Anna plot and the Levin plot. . . The law penetrates the characters' consciousness of themselves and their situation in the world. . . This point is difficult to get across to American students, most of whom believe that their freedom has practically no limit (76-77).

There is a special treat in store for readers who know the original published scholarship on which several essays are based. Compared to their antecedents, the essays, which are strongly marked by their focus on the art of teaching, suggest the indivisibility of good scholarship and good teaching. In reframing his work on the novel's serialization, for example, William M. Todd III focuses on "manageable reading assignments" (53). His elegant and simple proposal: to read *Anna Karenina* the way its first readers did, as a serialized novel divided into fourteen installments. "By planning reading assignments to coincide with installment breaks, a teacher can help students share in the suspense and surprises the novel's first readers experienced. . . ." (53). In recasting her work on Bakhtin, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, Caryl Emerson's voice resonates with scholarly authority, yet speaks in language that is at once straightforward, simple, and wise: "Try an experiment. Ask your students what Raskolnikov stands for and they will be able to say. Ask them what Levin or Anna Karenina stands for and they will draw a blank. Tolstoyan characters are too much like us. They are trying to get through the day. Their environment grinds them down, they are constantly disillusioned and reillusioned, and they embarrass themselves too often in public to want to talk about what they live by" (112).

Of the pedagogic goals and strategies that are advanced in *Teaching AK*, none is more fundamental than teaching students to read. *Anna Karenina*

begs to be read slowly and attentively, with attention to the small details and repetitions that lead the reader to that "infinite labyrinth of linkages" (mentioned in several essays) of which Tolstoy was so proud. Of reading in *Anna Karenina* David Sloane writes "Teaching students to focus on such small portions of text and draw larger insights out of them is one of the most important things we do in our profession. It lets them see that in great works tiny windows open on to vistas of great depth" (130). This theme is taken up by Gary Saul Morson, who advocates a bottom-up approach to the big ideas of the novel, ". . . learning to pay close attention to the small events and contingencies of the world before our eyes. Education may be described as learning better ways to pay attention so as to perceive more finely" (63).

A few contributions, written prior to and without reference to the MLA series, are reprinted with very few changes. Robert Louis Jackson's absolutely brilliant essay on Part One, Chapter 29, "Anna's train ride" scene (curiously included in the category of "Classroom Approaches") substantially repeats an article published in 1997. While the Jackson essay does not explicitly address the goals of the volume, it is a "must read" for anyone who aspires to teach the novel well. That rationale, "must read," would justify the inclusion of other, older but memorable articles on *Anna Karenina* (Joan Delaney Grossman's incandescent article, "Tolstoy's Portrait of Anna" [1976] comes to mind), but that kind of selection would defeat the expressed purpose of *Teaching AK*.

In the final analysis, and perhaps not thanks to, but in spite of, the MLA series format, editors Knapp and Mandelker have assembled a mostly splendid collection of essays. Taken as a whole—and the book should be read as a whole—*Teaching AK* is an engaging read, even for an experienced teacher of the novel, these essays illuminate many of the central issues of the novel. In an undergraduate classroom what is "central" to *Anna Karenina*, of course, has changed and will continue to change over time, as we bring into the classroom new information, new perspectives on the novel and new perceptions on what to teach and how to teach it. But for now, *Teaching AK* admirably models, in

the words of co-editor Mandelker, "the collective wisdom of our field."

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Anna in the Tropics. A play in two acts, by
Nilo Cruz.

In his Pulitzer prize-winning drama, *Anna in the Tropics*, American playwright, Nilo Cruz, heats up the debates of *Anna Karenina* by relocating the novel to the subtropical zone of Tampa Bay, the site of Cubo-American cultural fusion. The play is set in a cigar factory outside Tampa, Florida, in 1929, where the lector hired by the cigar-workers selects Tolstoy's novel to read aloud. As we learn in the course of the play, a tradition of the cigar factory is that a lector is hired at the workers' expense to read aloud to the cigar rollers:

I don't ever remember seeing a tobacco factory without a lector. As a child I remember sitting in the back and listening to the stories. That has always been our pride. Some of us cigar workers might not be able to read or write, but we can recite lines from *Don Quixote* or *Jane Eyre*.

The action of the play is punctuated with readings from the novel, in an atmosphere redolent with tobacco leaves and smoke, evoking the cigarette factory setting of the opera, *Carmen*. As the drama unfolds, key passages from *Anna Karenina* are read aloud, analyzed, quoted, and discussed by the men and women in the cigar factory, who use their interpretations as the means for construing their own relationships and their understanding of gender issues.

In the recent production (now headed for Broadway) which opened the new Ber Lind Theater at Princeton's McCarter Theater, Jimmy Smits performed the role of the lector in impeccable pressed white linen suits with an understated air of seductiveness. However, the brilliant performances turned in by the supporting cast were undermined

by the mispronunciation of the name, Anna Karenina. Although the emphasis on the penultimate syllable suggests a Latino reinvention of the heroine, the end result is to undermine the play's assertion of the workers' cultural understanding and insight. A more effective, visual creole is the result of the unveiling of the image on the cigar label for the "Anna Karenina" cigar: the heroine poses in black furs against a backdrop of palm trees, sun and beaches. For the student of Russian literature, that particular juxtaposition evokes Chekhov's Yalta setting for the most famous of his Anna stories, "Lady with a Dog." Further, the reframing of *Anna Karenina* adds one more image to the gallery of paintings inside the novel, where Anna is repeatedly framed and viewed. For the general audience, these details are probably as evanescent as the tobacco smoke which suffuses the stage in each act.

The play opens with three women, a mother and her two daughters, one married, one single, who anticipate the arrival of their new lector. The previous lector had departed with the wife of the factory manager, Chester, who is now bitterly opposed to the idea of a lector, of reading, and of love; his rejection of the lector tradition is underscored by his vision for a highly mechanized cigar factory. The first stage of his plan for modernization is to wrest control of the factory from the owner by gambling on cock-fights.

The reading and interpretation of the novel exposes the frayed relationships in the factory owner's family. The men of the factory, in a surfeit of machismo, assert that they hear a different novel than the women do, and in fact, most of the passages quoted refer to Karenin's suffering as a result of his wife's infidelity and his reflections about challenging her lover to a duel. The mechanism that tends to the destruction of the factory and the lector tradition is fuelled by the manager's personal tragedy, the loss of his wife who had eloped with the previous lector. His suffering reprises Karenin's unarticulated grief and humiliation. How to respond to the infidelity of a wife is debated noisily by the husbands in the play with the consensus being to shoot to kill, a restyling in machismo of Dumas fils's challenge "Tue-le! Tue-la."