



### The Stone Guest and *Anna Karenina*

Anna Karenina's nightmare about the peasant mumbling in French is a critical moment in Tolstoy's novel. Scholars interpret the passage in different ways. It seems never to be omitted from any film version of the text, and it invariably catches the reader's attention. In the first chapter of the novel, however, there is another dream—Stiva Oblonsky's—that scholars generally bypass:

“Yes, yes, what was going on?” he thought, remembering his dream. “Yes, what was going on? Yes! Alabin was giving a dinner in Darmstadt; no, it wasn't Darmstadt but something American. Yes, but Darmstadt was in America there. Yes, Alabin was giving a dinner on glass tables, yes—and the tables were singing *Il mio tesoro*, except it wasn't *Il mio tesoro* but something better, and there were some little decanters and they were women,” he remembered. (Tolstoy 3–4)

*Il mio tesoro* is the beginning of the famous aria from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. The question as to why we find a reference to the opera at the beginning of *Anna Karenina* seems obvious at first: Stiva is a kind of Don Juan, a fact he doesn't hide: “[W]omen are the pivot on which everything turns. I'm in a bad way too, very bad. [...] Let us suppose you are married, and you love your wife, but you are attracted to another woman...” (Tolstoy 42). Levin, to whom these remarks are addressed, “could not help himself from smiling.” Stiva's “women frenzy” (женобесие—a word from Dal's *Dictionary*) initially seems amusing, but already in this dialogue, the comedic element is partly removed, by Stiva himself, who, speaking about the fullness of life and lovers, suddenly concludes: “It's a terrible drama” (Tolstoy 44).

It seems completely appropriate that Stiva has dreamed of Mozart's music: In the opera, Don

Juanism is presented in both comedic and tragic keys. This generic peculiarity of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* has been discussed before. It is fundamentally important to note that the comedic and tragic in the opera are not mixed but rather coexist organically:

The thematic unity of Mozart's opera [...] reveals the mutual reversibility of opposites [...] and even demonstrates a new generic quality: the ‘diffuse’ interpenetration of tragic and comedic, which is not reduced to a single definition and comprises the opera's generic specificity. (Чигарева 50)

There is no tragicomedy to speak of in *Anna Karenina*, only tragedy and comedy that coexist. This topic requires a separate study, but one might at least hypothesize that such a combination of the tragic and comedic informed the novel's second ending. After the death of Anna, we have part eight, which deals with the fate of the other characters. In *Don Giovanni*, there are also two endings: the death of Don Giovanni and the final ensemble. And although the concluding moral became part of tradition, the role of the second ending is undoubtedly broader:

The unique finale of *Don Giovanni* is at once tragic and comedic, but what is important is not only the uncommon effect of such a merging, but also the light, triumphal joy of existence, before which the very unity of tragedy and comedy must retreat. (Михайлов 67)

One could perhaps say the same about the ending of *Anna Karenina*, which closes with Levin's inner monologue:

“I will continue to lose my temper with Ivan the coachman, and I will continue to argue and express my thoughts out of turn; there will still be the same wall between the holy of holies of my soul and other people, even my wife, and I will continue to blame her for my own fear and

later repent of it; I will continue to fail to understand with my mind why I pray, and I will continue to pray, but my life now— my whole life, irrespective of everything that might happen to me, every minute of it—is not only not meaningless like it was before, but has the indisputable meaning of goodness, which I have the power to instil in it!” (Tolstoy 821–822)

It is well known that directors of the opera often omit the second ending. Similarly, the majority of films and stagings of *Anna Karenina* close with the heroine’s death. Partly because of this, the reader risks forgetting that the novel does not end there.

The aria Stiva Oblonsky dreams of is particularly significant. This is *Il mio tesoro*, in which Don Ottavio sings about the vengeance that will come crashing down on Don Giovanni. The idea of vengeance informs Tolstoy’s epigraph: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” It is clear that the theme of vengeance, and by extension *Don Giovanni*, pertains not just to the story of Stiva but to the entire novel.

But first: was it Mozart who directly influenced Tolstoy? As V. E. Bagno notes, the whole “myth of Don Juan is one of vengeance” (*Миф о Дон Жуане* 7).

If one were to scan the many reworkings of the Don Juan story that could have been as influential on Tolstoy as *Don Giovanni*, one would have to consider Pushkin’s *The Stone Guest* (*Каменный гость*), the most famous Russian interpretation of the myth. A. V. Parin notes:

Just as Pushkin became for all time the center from which and through which all Russian writers proceed, so too Pushkin’s Don Juan incorporated all the mythological features that have become foundational in Russian Don Juanism. (*Дон Жуан Русский* 9)

Ultimately, *Anna Karenina* is a Pushkinian novel. We know that it was conceived as a kind of continuation of *Eugene Onegin*, as the story of a Tatyana who steps outside of her conjugal relations. In the original drafts, Tolstoy even calls his heroine Tatyana.

In *Leo Tolstoy in the Seventies* (*Лев Толстой. Семидесятые годы*), Eikhenbaum examines the influence of Pushkin’s prose, and in particular “The Guests Were Gathering at the Dacha” and “In the Corner of a Small Square,” on *Anna Karenina*. Eikhenbaum points out not only textual correspondences but also the continuity in poetics. *Anna Karenina* is narrated by a detached observer, a manner genetically linked to Pushkin’s narrative purity and precision (Эйхенбаум 147–160). This line of inquiry was taken up by Barbara Lönnqvist, who compared *Anna Karenina* to Pushkin’s “The Lady Peasant” (Lönnqvist 67–76).

Nothing has been written about the influence of Pushkin’s dramaturgy on *Anna Karenina*, which seems a large oversight. Eikhenbaum writes in «Пушкин и Толстой»: “It is not in Gogol, Turgenev, or Dostoevsky (for all his interest in certain Pushkinian themes), but in Tolstoy that we find a kind of maturation, or rather, a regeneration of Pushkin’s ideas, themes, and plots” (*О прозе* 167). If this is the case, we should revisit the question of influence not only in terms of Pushkin’s prose and poetry, but also his dramaturgy. Such a study ought to begin with *The Stone Guest*, since that work’s influence on *Anna Karenina* seems most apparent.

Comparing *Anna Karenina* and *The Stone Guest*, one notices right away the similarity in their plots. *Anna Karenina* starts with the fateful meeting of Anna and Vronsky and traces its consequences: his wooing of her, Anna’s “fall,” her tragic death. The main plot of *The Stone Guest* deals with the love of Don Juan and Donna Anna, which is also somewhat adulterous in nature: A widow, Donna Anna is faithful to the memory of her husband. Her relations with Don Juan, who

also turns out to be the murderer of her husband, are presented as a betrayal and crime.

One need hardly note that the heroines have the same first name: Anna Karenina and Donna Anna. The heroines are also physically similar: both are beautiful brunettes with curly hair. Don Juan says of Donna Anna:

I only watch you from afar with reverence,  
And when your head is quietly bowed down,  
Black tresses spilling on the marble's  
whiteness—  
Then it seems to me an angel comes [...].  
(Pushkin 80)

And later:

When you make your way to that proud grave  
To lay your ringlets on it and to weep. (Pushkin  
82)

Tolstoy draws attention to Anna's black hair throughout the text: "She took off her scarf, and her hat, and shook her head to disentangle a lock of her abundantly curly black hair which had got caught in it" (Tolstoy 69). And later: "Her hair arrangement was inconspicuous. Only those obstinate little locks of curly hair constantly escaping at the nape of her neck and on her temples were conspicuous, and they enhanced her beauty" (Tolstoy 81). It is possible that the black hair in both instances has symbolic significance. G. A. Grodetzkaya notes that in Orthodox culture, thick, curly black hair could be a sign of a demonic nature (Гродецкая 122). At first glance, one discerns nothing demonic in Donna Anna. On the contrary, she is twice called an "angel." Leporello, however, ironically deflates Don Juan's elevated description of her: "Oh widows, you're all the same" (Pushkin 84). And indeed, the "virtuous" Donna Anna leads Don Juan to his death.

Meanwhile, perhaps Kitty gives the best description of Anna, in whom one discerns demonic features as the novel progresses: "Yes, there is something alien, demonic, and lovely about her" (Tolstoy 85). This occurs to Kitty at the ball,

when she realizes that Anna has enchanted Vronsky and is herself enchanted by him.

Anna wears "a low-cut black velvet dress" (Tolstoy 81). Having recently buried her husband, Donna Anna, too, is dressed in all black. If one were to stage *Anna Karenina* and *The Stone Guest* simultaneously, the same actress could perform both roles without having to change radically her hair or costume.

Both heroines are persistently courted. At first, both decisively reject their wooers, but in the end, they surrender even faster than might have been expected. Compare the following passages, the first from Pushkin:

*Don Juan:*

I shall be silent then; but do not drive away  
One whose only joy is seeing you.  
I cherish no presumptuous hopes,  
I ask no sign of favor from you, but still  
I must see you, so long as I am doomed  
To live.

*Donna Anna:*

Leave—this is not the place  
For such words and such madness. (Pushkin  
83)

The second from Tolstoy:

"Why am I travelling?" he replied, looking straight into her eyes. "You know that I am travelling to be where you are," he said. "I can't do otherwise." [...]

"That's enough, enough!" she cried out, vainly trying to impart a severe expression to her face, which he was eagerly scrutinizing. (Tolstoy 105)

Seduction is one of the central themes of both works, and it is noteworthy that in both instances, it is linked to the theme of death. Tolstoy describes Anna's fall as a murder:

He [Vronsky] meanwhile was feeling what a murderer must feel when he looks at the body he has robbed of life. That body he had robbed

of life was their love, the first period of their love. There was something terrible and loathsome in the memories of what this terrible price of shame had bought. Shame at her spiritual nakedness oppressed her and communicated itself to him. But in spite of the murderer's deep horror before the body of his victim, the body must be hacked to pieces and hidden, and the murderer must take advantage of what he has gained by murder. (Tolstoy 151–152)

When Donna Anna asks Don Juan what he wants, he responds emphatically: “To die” (Pushkin 81). And indeed, death looms over their brief romance from start to finish. As Barbara Heldt Monter writes:

Pushkin's irony stems from the fact that while the Don knows how to use life and death to serve the ends of love, he is not aware of how close his kind of love is bringing him to death. He courts Donna Anna first in a cemetery, at the grave of her husband. Pushkin has made Don Alvaro the husband of Anna, not her father, and the Don invites him to his wife's bedroom, not to dinner at his house. (69)

Here we have two stories of love shrouded in death. The final remark in *The Stone Guest*—“(*They descend.*)”—almost surely refers to the death of both characters. Following Anna's suicide, Vronsky departs for the Russo-Turkish War with the intent of killing himself.

If the connection between *Anna Karenina* and *The Stone Guest* amounted to nothing more than a few surface parallels, there would be little need to speak of it. The relationship between the two works, however, is deeper, and to trace it, one needs to determine what Pushkin contributed to the Don Juan myth.

In *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein suggests that Pushkin “introduces some variations on Hoffmann's” version of the myth,

which proved a turning point in the history of Don Juanism (Weinstein 91). Hoffmann's Don Juan is a rebellious character who tragically experiences the rupture between the ideal and reality. From this stems a fundamentally new view of the character:

If we agree that Don Juan is not just a young, carefree madcap in search of women to deceive, or a cynical and witty nobleman intent on living according to his pleasure, but that he flees feverishly from one woman to the next in order to find at last satisfaction in the ideal woman who will give him paradise on earth—then we have no right to condemn his behavior or send him to Hell. In that case we shall either watch his punishment with regret or else try to save him. (Weinstein 76–77)

Pushkin follows Hoffmann in yet another respect: He simplifies the plot and reduces the number of characters, letting Donna Anna take center stage. In Pushkin, however, Donna Anna can be interpreted in different ways, both positively and negatively.

The same can be said of Don Juan. He has been considered irreproachable by some, worthy of disdain by others.

One could consider these opposing viewpoints at length, but the point seems to be that *The Stone Guest* invites mutually-exclusive interpretations, and it is this feature that best describes the play. According to L. S. Ospovat, the artistic world of *The Stone Guest* cannot be interpreted as the “expression of a single authorial position,” as a monologic world, because the nature of this world is fundamentally dialogical (Осповат 1–2).

In all likelihood, it is this dialogism that influenced Tolstoy. It is hardly worth mentioning that *Anna Karenina* has also been interpreted differently. The question as to whether or not she is to blame for own misfortune has been debated for at least a century and a half. *Anna Karenina* is undoubtedly a dialogic work, and when the word “dialogism” is used in connection with the novel, it

almost acquires its desired significance and reveals its “inner form.”

Following Hoffmann and Pushkin, Tolstoy focuses less on Don Juan (what sort of Don Juan is Vronsky?) than on his ideal lover, on Donna Anna. One should not forget that Anna Karenina appeared in literature after Donna Anna and thus ended up being associated with her. I. M. Nusinova writes of Pushkin’s new figuration of Donna Anna: “Before Pushkin, every Donna Anna was invariably represented as a happy woman, a woman satisfied with her lot. Don Juan, by and large, bursts into her life through deceit, against her will. [...] In Pushkin, Donna Anna is miserable before and during her marriage to the knight-commander” (Нусинов 432–433). Like Donna Anna, Anna Karenina is married against her will.

What do we know about the knight-commander? For one, in Pushkin’s play, he is the husband, not the father of Donna Anna (as in versions of the myth preceding *The Stone Guest*). We can assume that the knight-commander is a wealthy man respected by all, whom Donna Anna married not out of love. Don Juan says of him:

The man himself was small and puny,  
If he were here and stood on tiptoe,  
His fingertip couldn’t reach to his own nose.  
When we went out beyond the Escurial,  
He stuck himself upon my sword and died  
Like a dragonfly upon a pin—but still  
He was proud and bold, and stern of spirit...  
(Pushkin 79–80)

It’s not hard to see that the description anticipates Karenin, the third main figure in Tolstoy’s novel. His real presence, which Kitty Shcherbatskaya calls “unpoetic,” would also, in all likelihood, produce less an impression than his monument in Petersburg. Of course, there is no such monument in the text, but Karenin himself, by nature reserved and methodical, a man who does not imagine himself outside of his rules, algorithms, and habits, recalls an inanimate object that has become animate. As Anna says to

Vronsky: “He’s not a man, he’s a machine, and a vicious machine when he’s angry” (Tolstoy 192–193).

Pushkin took the title of his play from the first literary adaptation of the legend, Tirso de Molina’s *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*. Analyzing Pushkin’s “myth of the destructive statue,” Roman Jakobson notes: “The statues in his poems are usually designated as *idols*, and Tsar Nicholas was particularly shocked by this designation in *The Bronze Horseman*. [...] The Orthodox tradition, which severely condemned the art of sculpture, which did not admit it into churches, and which understood it as a pagan or diabolic device [...] suggested to Pushkin the close *association of statues with idolatry*, with devilry, with sorcery” (Jakobson 40). The statue of the knight-commander, which refuses to “stand guard at the door,” appears in order to exact revenge. It is hardly possible to consider such vengeance unjust (and the same goes for the vengeance that is inflicted on Anna and Vronsky).

The epigraph to *Anna Karenina*—“Vengeance is mine; I will repay”—is perhaps the most enigmatic in Russian literature. Here I will note the two main lines of interpretation. The first and most obvious emphasizes Anna’s inexpiable guilt for which she must be cruelly and justly punished. The other interpretation stresses “mine” and “I,” rather than “vengeance.” This changes things entirely and suggests that only God can judge Anna. A. G. Grodetskaya approaches *Anna Karenina* as a *vita* or purgatory through which Anna passes in order to be forgiven (Гродецкая 127–130).

Suggesting that the epigraph needs to be read as a verdict delivered to Anna, Shklovsky notes: “The novel contradicts the epigraph. That is why it, the epigraph, will never be explained” (Шкловский 233). The same could be said for the entire novel. Of course, at any moment, one could answer the question about the vengeance that has been prepared for the heroine, but, like philosophical questions, it will arise again and again. From this

perspective, the novel and epigraph do not contradict one another but rather form a dialogical whole.

The question of vengeance as a central motif of *The Stone Guest* is also dialogical. Pushkin, it seems, did everything in his power to rehabilitate his Don Juan. In the play, there is no opposition between seducer and victim; in fact, there is almost no distinction at all. Don Juan wins Donna Anna's love, but does she not also try to seduce him by using all her feminine tricks befitting the situation? The knight-commander tries to use violence against the lovers, but is he not also a victim of their passion? In any event, vengeance is prepared for all, which is confirmed by the last line of the tragedy: "They descend." L. S. Ospovat notes that in Pushkin's drafts, only Don Juan descends—an ending that corresponds to Mozart's opera and Moliere's comedy. In revising the ending, Pushkin introduced a new idea to the Don Juan myth: Vengeance can await everyone who is drawn into Don Juan's game, insofar as everyone is a hangman and a victim in this game.

*Anna Karenina* (also a "tragedy") is a story in which the characters are victims of an ineluctable and fateful confluence of events:

Her original dilemma had been painful, to yield to Vronsky or to continue to be stifled by Karenin. She had committed herself to Vronsky. But then she found herself demanding a full commitment from him and placing both in a situation from which there was no way out except by her death. We do not feel that Tolstoy indulged her and then got satisfaction out of punishing her. Her fate has a contingency and yet a pattern that bears the marks not of the author's vindictiveness, but of the poetic inevitability we associate with tragedy. Even with her descent into hysteria and morphine addiction Anna is never denied the protection of that aura of dignity with

which tragedy always invests its protagonists. (Greenwood 118)

It is worth pointing out that when scholars call *Anna Karenina* a tragedy, what they mean is the seeming irrevocability of the events that lead to Anna's death. As O. V. Slivitskaya notes wittily, "the path of the rail is the path you can't jump" (СЛИВИЦКАЯ 15).

Almost a half century separates *The Stone Guest* and *Anna Karenina*, a period that witnessed several literary movements. One senses that Pushkin's "little tragedy" could have influenced Tolstoy at least in part because it was ahead of its time. Blagoi notes perceptively: "Pushkin anticipates the edgiest forms of European decadence that were to arise several decades later" (Благой 95). Exactly: Don Juan and Donna Anna's cemetery romance smacks of the Silver Age, a period that virtually excluded a satirical perspective on Don Juan. Balmont, for instance, writes:

What repels us about Don Juan is not that he loved several women, but that he mixed love and deceit. [...] When we obtain what we desire, the beauty that we wanted either disappears like the petals and fragrance of flowers subject to the implacable law of universal nature, or is hidden from our eyes under the veil of the quotidian. By a strange psychological and optical law, we cease to see what we have looked at for a long time. Beauty, if it has not faded from our touch, becomes for us something other than what it was. (БАЛЬМОНТ 542–545)

It's telling that these words also convey the conflict between Anna and Vronsky. In essence, the revenge that is exacted on the Don Juans (Anna and Vronsky) is the inevitable change in their feelings for one another. Anna reflects thus on the day of her suicide: "Before our relationship we really were moving towards each other, but since

then we have inexorably been drifting apart. And that cannot be changed” (Tolstoy 765).

In his *Notebooks*, Sergei Dovlatov claims that the biggest tragedy of his life was the death of Anna Karenina. This is, of course, a joke, but it contains much truth: Anna’s death is the most tragic denouement in Russian literature. The reader experiences it more acutely than the parting of Onegin and Tatyana or the death of Bazarov. Death and vengeance, however, do not encompass the whole novel. It is typical that the narrative begins with the banal, *comedic* intrigue of Stiva Oblonsky and the pretty governess.

The generic structure of *Anna Karenina* is extremely complicated, and one could say the same for its ideological structure. One senses, though, that Dostoevsky was correct in discerning the connection between Tolstoy and Pushkin: “[*Anna Karenina*] is not new in terms of its idea or unheard of in Russia until now. Instead of it we could, of course, point out its source to Europe: Pushkin himself” (Достоевский 201).

In June 1856, Tolstoy wrote his sister, Maria Nikolaevna: “I came home at four in the morning. Everyone was asleep, and I sat on the balcony and read Pushkin’s *Don Juan*. I was so ecstatic that I immediately wanted to write Turgenev about my impression” (PSS 60: 63). In his diary from this time, we have the following: “Read Pushkin’s *Don Juan*. Delightful. A truth and strength I’d never expected from Pushkin” (PSS 47: 78). Tolstoy wasn’t even thinking of *Anna Karenina* in the 1850s, but the “truth and strength” he discerned in *The Stone Guest* was quite possibly of great significance for his novel.

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### Tolstoy and Napoleon

Like practically all topics investigated by Tolstoy scholars, this one is not new. It has long been established that the figure of Napoleon is based on the “contradiction between the true pettiness of his role and his own opinion of himself as a great reformer” (Строганова 66). The only reason to return to this topic is if one approaches the study of literature (литературоведение) as the study of human nature (человековедение). Tolstoy himself described this principle in 1853 when he proposed

to write a Russian history from Mikhail Romanov to Alexander I, explaining all historical events in human terms [...] It is critical to explain every historical fact *in human terms* [человечески] and to avoid routine historical expressions. (PSS 46: 293, 212)

It is not my intent to demonstrate either that Tolstoy did not like Napoleon, or that he nurtured his antipathy for the man long before he began *War and Peace*. Here I am interested in three

issues. The first has to do with the parameters of Tolstoy’s anti-Napoleonism. I am aware that it is nearly impossible to explain adequately Tolstoy’s antipathy, and that is why I confine my inquiry to clarifying how Tolstoy himself explained matters. The second issue pertains to the ways this antipathy was expressed in *War and Peace*. Finally, the third issue raises the question of Tolstoy’s “Napoleonism,” that is, the similarities between the commander and the writer.

### Tolstoy’s Three Antipathies

In the drafts of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy explains his dislike for Napoleon simply: It is not befitting an aristocrat to approve of a parvenu. Consider Count Mortemart’s remarks on Napoleon’s affair with Mademoiselle Georges:

“In 1803, friends wrote me from Paris that Mademoiselle Georges did not lack for admirers, and that among the crowds of new people, parvenu de la finance, administrators, and this entire, unsavory new breed of people that now reigns in Petersburg, she did not deign to throw her handkerchief to anyone; when, at one soirée, her admirers saw Roustan, cette âme damnée, ce valet de cet autre valet qui s’appelle Buonaparte at the new goddess’s door.” (PSS 13: 213)

And a bit further: “When all these gens de dessous terre [...] realized that their master was their rival [...] they obsequiously withdrew from the field and disappeared” (PSS 13: 214). In this description of Napoleon and his hangers-on as “bourgeois gentlemen,” one discerns, first and foremost, Tolstoy’s personal view. Tolstoy sees Napoleon as a “little man in a little gray frock coat and cocked hat, with his aquiline nose and clever eyes,” who “imagined to himself that he governed history, and tried to inflate himself to match the grandeur of his position, as he understood it” (PSS 13: 76). Napoleon’s contemporaries saw him as “something incomprehensible, now as terrifying as the