

The Epigraph to *Anna Karenina* and Levin

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Tolstoy begins *Anna Karenina* with a sentiment known to all the Abrahamic faiths as an assertion of the supremacy of the Almighty: “Vengeance is mine, and I shall repay.” Although the quote, which Tolstoy leaves without attribution, makes more than one appearance in the Bible, Boris Eikhenbaum was the first to point out that the wording is more similar to a direct translation from a passage of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, which Tolstoy closely read and with which he held deep disagreements (Medzhibovskaya 176, 194). Regardless of the origins of the phrasing in Schopenhauer, “Vengeance is mine, and I shall repay” references two specific passages in the Bible, one of which is found in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32: 35), and the other in the New Testament (Romans 12: 19). Whereas a more vengeful God speaks of how he will punish the wicked in Deuteronomy, a merciful God tells his followers in Romans to forget themselves and their egos because they are

fleeting in comparison with the eternity and omniscience of God.

Tolstoy’s contemporaries and some later critics examine the epigraph from the Old Testament stance and tend to focus on Anna. Eikhenbaum (138) and Dostoevsky (1070–1071) see Anna as a “fallen” woman who has transgressed against universal mores, regardless of what societal mores might be, and a vindictive God accordingly punishes her. Viktor Shklovsky, following a New Testament reading, finds that God has not exacted vengeance on Anna, but rather society in general has both judged and passed sentence on her contrary to the message of the epigraph (436). Nekrasov takes yet another view as he places the author, Tolstoy, as the omniscient figure that claims vengeance as his own and punishes Anna (690).

More recent critics continue a similar orientation toward Anna with few exceptions. Inessa Medzhibovskaya in her recent study of Tolstoy’s conversion regards the epigraph as part of a larger experiment in which the extent of freedom

is tested within a network of individual reactions to responsibility. She finds Anna's suicide to be a desperate cry for help, an admission of her inability to resist the evil force bearing its weight down upon her (180–182). Robert Louis Jackson sees the epigraph as a statement of the inevitability of Anna's fate, which lends a tragic air to the novel (qtd. in Mandelker 46). Saul Morson, however, opposes such a view of the epigraph. *Anna Karenina* as a realist novel avoids foreshadowing as a device, and the signs that Anna sees and deems omens are of her own making. Her death on the railroad tracks at the end of her novel is inevitable only in her mind (*Omens* 149). He also suggests both a third biblical variant in which Anna has usurped proprietorship of vengeance, killing herself to punish Vronsky and a fourth in which she pronounces retribution on herself as Medzhibovskaya conjectures (“In Our Time” 130, 139).

Curiously, few commentators have discussed Levin in relation to the epigraph. Andrew Wachtel suggests that Eikhenbaum too readily concludes that the epigraph applies only to Anna and Vronsky simply because it was included in earlier versions of the novel which did not yet contain Levin and Kitty. In addition, with the exception of Dostoevsky's *Demons*, *Anna Karenina* is the first major novel since the time of Pushkin to contain an epigraph, and Tolstoy, employing such a powerful statement, must have thoroughly considered its connection to the rest of the novel (Wachtel 111). Wachtel thus splits the epigraph, suggesting that a vengeful God punishes Anna and Vronsky, while a forgiving God shows mercy to Levin and Kitty, who have turned towards Him (112).

Medzhibovskaya argues that the ambiguity of the authorship of the epigraph actually represents a challenge to Schopenhauer's formulation that a person cannot set himself up as a moral judge. While Schopenhauer questions the authority of the individual to judge, he contradictorily insists that people must closely scrutinize themselves in

resisting evil in their own lives (180). Levin represents part of an experiment in response to Schopenhauer as he is a man who both judges others and strongly reprimands himself for his moral failings.

With the exception of Medzhibovskaya and Wachtel, who each devote portions of their arguments to the matter, studies of *Anna Karenina* do not focus on positioning Levin in relation to the epigraph; however, Tolstoy fully intended his participation. He went through many drafts, which included several changes to the epigraph, and therefore he must have considered Levin's connection to that critical first statement. For Levin the epigraph is an injunction that commands both that he limit his judgment, and that he accept God's judgment of himself. Levin's understanding of those two mandates makes possible his acceptance of the beginnings of faith in Part VIII.

The Dichotomy of the Epigraph

Properly understanding the epigraph demands its being separated into two parts. It consists both in renouncing retribution against others, because only God possesses that prerogative (“vengeance is mine”), and also in submitting one's self to God to be judged (“I shall repay”). The Russian variant of “I shall repay” sheds light on the meaning of the second part because a different word (Аз) is reserved for God's “I”—Tolstoy's transcription reflects the Church Slavonic rendering of the biblical quote—while a typical “I” is rendered with a lowercase я. To live according to the epigraph means a person must forget his own ego, his own “I,” and acknowledge the superior consciousness held by God.

An individual can accept the two parts independently of one another, but a Tolstoyan faith in God unites the two parts. The truly faithful in Tolstoy's definition have forgotten their own egos, and thus do not seek revenge against those who have transgressed against them or against God's law. They leave God to judge those offenses and

determine a fitting punishment. In forgetting their own egos, they also submit themselves fully to God's judgment. No longer attached to their vanity and having realized their insignificance, they can accept God's verdict without impediment. Tolstoy himself notes the connection of these two parts in a segment of his later work *On Truth, Life and Behavior* (*Об истине, жизни и поведении*, 1908): "Judgment is unjust, but even just judgment harms three people at once: it harms the censured person, it harms the listener of the censure, but most of all it harms the censorer. 'Hide another's sin, and God forgives two,' says the proverb. And it's true" (PSS 41: 91). Tolstoy invokes a proverb noted by Dal'—Dal' has the slightly different *закрой чужой грех—Бог два простит*, compared to Tolstoy's *скрой чужой грех, бог два простит*—in order to demonstrate the link between the two actions. An individual must forego his ability to judge, surrendering it to God, within whose power it is to forgive. At the same time, the individual acknowledges God's prerogative in this transaction and submits to Him. Levin, at times, adheres to one or the other principle, that is, he may abstain from judgment while not submitting himself to God, or vice versa. However, he does not abide by both precepts until the end of the novel.

Fallen Women

Levin, from his first appearance in the novel, demonstrates that he can judge others cruelly. When Levin and Oblonsky enter the Anglia restaurant, the narrator describes the French woman to whom Levin bows as "offensive to him, all composed, it seemed, of another's hair" (18: 37). After explaining how, in the countryside, people maintain their bodies in order to work, Levin goes on to lecture Oblonsky that "people here intentionally grow out their nails as much as possible and use saucers as cuff links so that it is completely impossible to do anything with their hands" (18: 39). Oblonsky tries to justify these

people and, in part, his own way of life to Levin, but Levin will have none of it.

Levin continues to dwell on this woman and specifies his true feelings for her. "I have not seen and will not see any charming fallen creatures, and those like that made-up French woman by the counter [...] are disgusting, and all fallen" (18: 45). Oblonsky even cites the Gospels, although he does not lead a life any more in line with them than Levin, to remind Levin not to judge, but Levin nevertheless maintains his "revulsion towards fallen women" (18: 45). While Oblonsky is no man of faith, he is arguably the most likable character in the novel, often forgiving others their failings. It is thus no coincidence that, despite all of Oblonsky's unsuccessful attempts to convince Levin of the error of his ways, he later plays a pivotal role in his friend's change of heart towards fallen women when he convinces him to visit Anna.

While Levin feels out of place in the restaurant with its decadent women and its French-speaking Tatar waiters with long tailcoats, he abstains from criticizing his friend Oblonsky, who asks him to understand his extramarital affair. It certainly follows that Levin should castigate Oblonsky too, given his disparagement of women engaged in similar affairs, but he holds his tongue because Oblonsky is his friend. His misunderstanding of the imperative of the epigraph does not make him attack vehemently all things disagreeable to him, but it does prevent him from reaching the answers he desires in life.

Levin "Refuses to Judge" out of Secular Conviction

When his half-brother Koznyshev comes to visit his estate, Levin ostensibly exhibits the first tenet of the epigraph by refraining from judgment, much as he does earlier with Oblonsky. Sequestered in the woods, removed from civilization, dandies, and decorated women, Levin feels at home and claims that he is incapable of judgment: "I do not and cannot understand how to judge where to allocate forty thousand [rubles belonging to the zemstvo] or

how to judge Alesha the fool” (18: 260). Unlike when he is with Oblonsky, however, Levin at his estate lets his capricious character get the better of him. His refusal to judge is actually a judgment in itself. He disdains the zemstvos and therefore cannot see any possible good emerging from them.

Levin still has some contempt left to dispense in this passage. Despite his grief over the zemstvos, he is still “ready to discuss (обсуждать) that which concerns [himself]” (18: 260). Imitating his peasant, Alesha the fool, in a court case Levin says to Koznyshev, “The chairman asks of my old [worker] Alesha the fool: do you, the defendant, acknowledge the fact that the ham was stolen?” – ‘Me?’ (ась)” (18: 260). (Levin does not specify whether this case is something he has himself witnessed or whether he is speaking hypothetically, but the plethora of trivial details points to the fact that it has actually occurred.)

The “ась” that Levin employs is strongly reminiscent of the language of the epigraph, in particular God’s “Аз,” and Tolstoy likely meant it as a play on that theme, given the courtroom context. Tolstoy renders the second imperative of the epigraph “I shall repay” in Church Slavonic: “Аз воздам.” “Аз” in pre-modern times indicated the first-person pronoun “I” regardless of who spoke it, but by the time Tolstoy wrote *Anna Karenina* “я” had become the word of choice. “Аз” appears nowhere else in the book other than the epigraph, and all the characters use “я” when speaking of themselves. In the nineteenth century “аз” existed in a world apart from everyday life, only being found in Old Russian and Church Slavonic texts; thus in *Anna Karenina* that pronoun is reserved for God. “Ась,” on the other hand, was (and perhaps still now is) a colloquialism employed by peasants that typically meant “what?” or “how?”; but, as Dal’ notes, it is likely derived from “аз.” Unlike “аз” and “я,” it can never be used as a personal pronoun. However, I have translated it as “me?” because of its etymological background and because it helps emphasize my point. In addition, it

possesses similar sonic qualities to аз due to Russian’s tendency towards final-consonant devoicing: “аз” (az) sounds exactly the same as “ась” (as), differing only in the palatalization of the word-final “s” in ась.

For Tolstoy “ась” does not have a malevolent connotation, but rather enjoys association with the simplistic in Tolstoy’s other works. The unsophisticated and forgetful Platon Karataev of *War and Peace* answers Pierre’s question about his prayer with the same “ась” (12: 48). Levin, however, is not the naïve peasant he quotes, and coming from him at this moment the “ась” mocks God’s “Аз” more than anything. The peasant leads an honest life and utters “ась” in tune with God, knowing his place in the universe, but Levin uses the word to cap a long, frustrated rant in which he mercilessly casts judgment on the zemstvos and the people who support them.

In 1907 Tolstoy recorded some of his daily thoughts about the nature of *I*: “My body is not *I*, my reason is also not *I*. And my consciousness is also not *I*. *I*, my true *I*, is that of which I am conscious. I am conscious of my spiritual, divine essence” (56: 47). (Tolstoy uses “я” for every instance of “I,” and emphasis is his.)

Levin, declaiming against his petty irritancies, does not fully understand this higher concept of his *I*. The “I” that Levin utters in the woods—the ась which plays on God’s Аз—coupled with the harsh words that precede it, reveal that he has not relinquished his pride. Levin acknowledges only his own sequestered “I” while ignoring the presence of the superior consciousness with which he is connected.

Because Levin does not recognize his connection to the divine, he presumptuously assumes God’s role in the judgment of others and of himself.

Ivan Turgenev views Levin as a character incapable of love because he cannot relinquish this personal “I.” He continually views himself as something special and does not allow that ego to

dissipate, which true love requires (qtd. in Eikhenbaum 152).

While Levin is capable of great arrogance and pride, this is an unfair characterization. Despite the fact that Levin does not recognize his spiritual *I*, he still loves Kitty and his friend Oblonsky. He demonstrates that he can truly understand and empathize with them at the card table at Oblonsky's and in the Anglia restaurant respectively. However, once Levin begins to understand his spiritual *I*, he expands that love to those that he so harshly judged earlier.

Levin's Confession

Although Levin seemingly refuses to reprehend his peasants in a secular setting, a religious background pulls him in a different direction. Having finally won the love of one of the Shcherbatsky daughters, Levin must confront yet another challenge to his ego and another station to be passed on the way to faith: He must take confession. As Tolstoy explains, "for Levin, like for any non-believer who also respects the faith of others, attendance and participation in church rituals were very difficult" (19: 4). While Levin presumably respects the right of others to believe, the church arouses ambiguous feelings in him.

During the service he at times listened to the prayers, trying to ascribe to them such a meaning that didn't part with his own views, and, at times, feeling that he could not understand and must condemn them, tried to not listen to them, and instead he occupied himself with his own thoughts, observations, and reminiscences, which with extreme vivacity wandered through his head while he idly stood in the church. (19: 5)

Levin does not reproach anyone in this passage: he respects the beliefs of others and even before entering the church fears that his mere presence could offend the believers who regularly attend. On the other hand, it does show that he still possesses

the inclination to judge. While he tries to assimilate the prayers into his own beliefs, he simultaneously desires to censure those prayers because they are of no use to him. He tries to tune them out and withdraw into himself both to silently condemn the prayers as well as to protect himself from disapproval by not allowing an embarrassing or offensive misunderstanding to emerge. As he hears the deacon pronounce the words of God's forgiveness at the end of the service, designating who holds the ultimate authority over judgment, his thought of doubt and criticism becomes all the more

locked and sealed up, and he mustn't touch or move it now, otherwise confusion would arise and therefore he, standing behind the deacon, continued, not listening and not trying to understand, to think his own thoughts. (19: 5)

Levin might not have immured this thought quite as tightly as he believes, because at the end of the confession he feels differently, although he cannot express how. As the confession begins it appears that Levin and the deacon are simply talking past one another. When Levin divulges that he doubts the existence of God, the deacon answers that doubt is peculiar to human weakness, and he must pray for strength, but when Levin further specifies that his greatest sin is doubt, seeking an answer that the deacon cannot immediately provide, the deacon answers with the same words. The deacon asks who then could have created the universe if not God, and Levin can only answer that he does not know. The confession at this juncture has hit an impasse: Levin is looking for answers the deacon cannot give, and the deacon is giving answers that do not satisfy Levin. The deacon senses this deadlock and steers the conversation to a personal level, asking Levin about his future wife and what he will tell his son when he comes to him seeking answers for himself. Levin cannot answer this question either, and the confession ends with

the deacon commanding Levin once again to pray to God for strength.

Although this may seem like a failed confession, something in Levin has changed, and the deacon's more personal line of questioning has affected him. Levin recognizes that he has to reconsider his relation to faith, especially in regard to his future progeny. At the same time he relinquishes some of his prejudices about the priest and the church, which "was not at all as stupid as it had seemed to him before" (19: 8). Furthermore, that thought, which he had sealed up, is now combined with a new "vague and unclear" feeling in his soul. That feeling is unclear because of the hypocrisy he has committed in reproaching others for their similarly ambiguous relations to religion. Having realized his hypocrisy, he is now in a better position to reanalyze both his bias and his faith, but, "of course, not now [...], but sometime later" (19: 8).

Levin's strange feeling is more than mere Pharisaism, since he personifies it with the image of his friend Svyazhsky. To Levin, Svyazhsky represents the ultimate hypocrite because he maintains a wide berth between his life and his principles. Svyazhsky holds liberal ideas but at the same time operates his traditional estate and station; he is a man of little faith but assists the area's clergy; he claims to hate the nobility but serves them in local government. Morson calls this, the fact that Svyazhsky keeps two contradictory beliefs at once without self-deception, the Svyazhsky enigma, and Levin will discover that it operates not by some secret theory waiting to be discovered, but by the mere circumstances of life ("In Our Time," 198). Levin still has much work to do to resolve this enigma, but he has taken the first step by feeling the tug of contradiction within himself. Accepting that contradiction will help him release the firm clasp he holds on his ego and allow further access to the answers he seeks. His meeting with Anna will lead him further into this as of yet

locked corridor to which he unknowingly holds the key.

Levin and Anna Meet

Although Oblonsky cannot convince Levin of his critical mistake regarding fallen women, he does persuade Levin to visit his sister, Anna. As he enters the house, Levin is confronted with Anna's portrait before he meets Anna herself, which, presumably, would allow for his prejudices against fallen women to solidify. A portrait, of course, cannot defend itself. Anna's portrait, however, is painted by Mikhailov, a real artist according to Tolstoy's own definition and description. Tolstoy juxtaposes Mikhailov to Vronsky who also practices painting while in Italy. Vronsky has mastered technique, but Mikhailov paints passionately without regard for method. Therefore the painting reveals more than the woman's actual image does and opens Levin to a new view of the woman:

He could not tear himself away from [the portrait]. He even forgot where he was, and, not listening to what was said, he could not move his eyes from the marvelous portrait. It was not just a picture, but a living, charming woman, with black curling hair, bare shoulders and arms and a pensive smile on lips covered with soft down; triumphantly and softly she looked at him with eyes that baffled him. (19: 273)

Anna's portrait so enchants Levin that it throws him off his guard and forces him to rethink his position.

It is not, however, Anna's portrait alone that knocks down Levin's guard. Amy Mandelker observes that even before Levin encounters Anna's portrait he chances upon a mirror, sees his flushed red face, but denies to himself that he is drunk. Looking at himself in the mirror and then at Anna's portrait allows him to conflate the two images and sympathize to a greater degree with

Anna (112). The need to disallow that he is drunk ultimately humbles him to the point that he can accept Anna not as a fallen woman, but as a “lost” (потерянная) woman, as he calls her after their meeting (19: 284).

As Anna enters and replaces the portrait with her own image, Levin, now open to a new interpretation of Anna, can see the beauty that the artist hinted at in the portrait. “She was less shining in reality, but on the other hand in [the real Anna] there was something new, attractive, which wasn’t in the portrait” (19: 274). Levin is undoubtedly drawn to Anna’s beauty in this scene, almost more intoxicated by it than the alcohol he drank at the club before their meeting. Some scholars have understood this as the reaction of a man seduced, an interpretation for which there is certainly evidence. Not only does Kitty suspect that Levin has betrayed her in spirit, but Anna is confident of that when she spitefully looks Kitty in the face shortly before her death at the train station. Ronald LeBlanc argues that Levin’s visit to Anna’s dimly-lit house with her portrait resembles that of a young man to a brothel. Levin, already drunk, appears like a man prepared to engage in an illicit act for the first time (although, of course, this would not be Levin’s first time as he reveals some of his indiscretions to Kitty when he shows her his diary). To conclude the matter LeBlanc adds “Levin’s memories of this evening betray a closeness, a tenderness and an empathy that are characteristic of sexual intimacy” (13). However, it is not only Anna’s beauty that enamors Levin, but also her truthfulness.

Levin saw yet another trait in this uncommonly appealing woman. Besides her mind, grace, and beauty there was veracity (правдивость) within her [...] and, before having so severely condemned her, he now by some strange direction of thoughts justified her. (19: 277–278)

Although Oblonsky fails to evoke Christian sympathy in Levin towards even the most wayward of souls, a former Oblonskaya, now Karenina, manages to inculcate these feelings in him and direct him towards faith. Oblonsky, however, comments on the success of his effort, despite the fact that he could not manage the task himself: “What did I tell you, in the future don’t judge” (19: 279).

While Oblonsky cannot persuade Levin to abandon his prejudice himself, he expertly places Levin in the right position to rethink his stance. Oblonsky does not drag Levin there with only altruism in mind; justifying Anna’s life to Levin justifies his own life in part. As for Levin, unlike his refusal to pass sentence on the peasants in the woods with Koznyshev, he casts off his intolerance out of a true spiritual feeling evoked by the connection between Anna and himself. Kitty reproaches Levin when he returns home, accusing him of falling in love with Anna, which makes him reevaluate his experience with her. But, regardless of Kitty’s influence on him, Anna has nevertheless left her imprint, improving his outlook, and readying him for the acceptance of faith.

Tolstoy not only shows Levin’s development towards a true understanding of the epigraph, but also creates a feeling in the reader that implores him or her not to condemn Anna. After all, Levin’s half-brother, Koznyshev, beseeches the Countess Vronskaya that it is not for us to judge Anna (19: 359). Robert Louis Jackson also sees the embodiment of a similar injunction presented by the epigraph realized in this portion of the novel. Tolstoy says of himself that he does not judge Anna, but rather understands her and imparts that empathy to the reader (346).

Levin’s Putative Conversion

In the final installment of the novel, Levin undergoes what appears to be a conversion in which he rejects his scientific knowledge and accepts at least the beginnings of a new faith;

however, the extent of this conversion is questionable. Dostoevsky feels that this is not a true conversion because Levin has not become one of the people; he does not recognize Russia's mission in relation to Christianity and history and does not appreciate the people's knowledge of that mission (1073–1077). I would argue that Tolstoy would agree with Dostoevsky that Levin's conversion is not complete at this moment but for different reasons.

Levin's experience in the field is not actually a conversion, but rather an episode precipitated by his confession and acquaintance with Anna. Instead of a conclusion, it represents a new beginning to be followed by further revelations. Medzhibovskaya explores the nature of Tolstoy's own conversion and reevaluates the idea that the novelist experienced a sudden crisis which resulted in an about-face turn towards faith. She argues that, while a person does not hold two contradictory beliefs at once, he or she is capable of oscillating between two ideas or faiths for long periods of time before finally completing a transition. Using the work done by Lewis Rambo and other scholars of conversion, she suggests that the act can be a long process just as easily as it can be a short one and applies this to Tolstoy, who underwent a long conversion with regressions and experimentation in the teachings of multiple faiths, not just those of Christianity. Thus, we might surmise that Tolstoy would not likely have pictured a conversion for Levin, one of his autobiographical characters, as abrupt and finite.

Levin's acceptance of the first inklings of faith is catalyzed by a conversation with the peasant supplier Fedor. He tells Levin that one peasant, Mityukha, "lives only for his need [and] only stuffs his belly" while Fokanych, an older peasant, forgives his debtors and "lives for his soul [and] remembers God" (19: 376). This, of course, while unpretentious and nothing extraordinarily revealing, shocks Levin. Having studied so many Western farming manuals in order to make his

estate profitable, he finds living for anything other than one's survival and material needs to be entirely alien, although part of him has always known that the answers he seeks lie outside those works. He goes to an isolated field to reflect on this unexpected statement.

However, immediately after the revelation, as Levin returns to his estate, he shows that his ego still remains. The coachman Ivan instructs Levin in how to direct his horse, but Levin retorts bitterly and is immediately disappointed that he has not lived up to the enormous magnanimity that his "conversion" dictated. He refuses to surrender the reins of both his horse and his ego because his transformation has simply allowed him to place pride in his humility, much as Tolstoy's character Father Sergii does in the eponymous tale.

Levin's departure and return in this episode is doomed to be accompanied by some ostentation and pompousness. According to K. Kedrov, Tolstoy's oeuvre is replete with the theme of departure. Tolstoy admired the wanderer's (странник) ability to abandon civilization and seek solitude in order to free his thoughts from society's trappings; however, he knew that often the human quality that drives the wanderer from his abode is the same quality that propels the prophet from his hermitage towards the ready ears of the masses waiting to hear his message (Кедров 253).

Levin is hardly a wanderer, but with his epiphany achieved in solitude he believes he has found the answer to all his problems. This state of mind is not uncommon for Levin as he more than once holes himself up in his study, writing a book to enlighten his backwards country. While he no longer wishes to communicate the idea that he has discovered, he feels that, having "found his master (God) [...] he has been freed from deception" and now sees everything in perfect clarity (19: 378).

Even as he contemplates his epiphany, he demonstrates that he still knows something of judgment as he toys with a bug: The novel describes how Levin "turned the leaf of a weed so

that it didn't hinder the bug, and bent another blade of grass so that the bug could climb onto it [... but] the bug refused to climb onto the blade of grass, spread its wings and flew off" (19: 378). Though Levin benevolently tries to redirect the bug, he forcibly ordains what path is best for it. This incident may seem insignificant by itself, but Koznyshev later interacts with another insect in a more telling episode.

While Levin, Koznyshev, Katavasov, Dolly, and the old Prince discuss the Russian volunteers in Serbia fighting the Ottomans, Koznyshev "extricated a bee that had fallen into the poured honey with a blunt knife [... and set] it from the knife onto a sturdy aspen leaf" (19: 386). As he saves the bee, Koznyshev, to make his point about the Russo-Turkish war, adds: "People sympathize with the sufferings of their neighbors and are eager to help them" (19: 387). Levin sees the flaw in this argument immediately. Koznyshev's statement is correct, but his illustration is off. He feels compassion for the bee in front of him because of its proximity, but the Slavs fighting a distant war with Turkey cannot evoke the same sympathy. For Tolstoy, a person owes more care and love to the people close to him, family and friends, than he does to others. A person can love all other peoples, but it is impractical to think that he can do so to the same degree as his or her family. Therefore, Levin retorts that "there is not and can be no such *immediate* feeling for the oppression of the Slavs" (19: 388) (emphasis added).

Levin's interaction with his bug is not the same as Koznyshev's. Levin's bug does not need saving and rejects Levin's attempts to redirect it, but the bug, like Koznyshev's bee, illustrates a flaw in Levin's reasoning. Levin's pride has still not left him. Just as Levin thinks it easy to change the bug's course, he imagines that he can now effortlessly lead a perfect life in which "that alienation from [his] brother is gone...; no fights with Kitty, with guests, whoever they might be, I will be kind and

tender, with people, with Ivan—everything will be different" (19: 382).

Levin quickly comes to realize the insufficiency of his beliefs about the epiphany. Truly something spiritual happens there which advances him towards faith, but Levin invests too much in it, believing that he holds the ultimate answer, allowing him to settle all disputes, be they with servants, friends, or bugs. Upon discovering the error he has made he thinks to himself, "was it really just a momentary disposition, and will it simply pass without a trace?" (19: 386). The answer is no. At the same time a feeling within him returns him to that same insight he feels in the field. It is no coincidence that a group of insects help to confirm the truth of that insight, giving him a second chance to atone for his mistake. Bees swarm around him, threatening and at the same time amusing him, depriving him of his physical composure and then his spiritual freedom, but Levin nevertheless remains whole. He does not swat at them or attempt to move them like he does with the bug in the field, but rather enjoys the test of his harmony with which they provide him as though sent from God to corroborate the basic truth of his revelation and reject the rest that Levin mistakenly adds to it.

Levin is not Tolstoy's only character to receive a revelation in the solitude of nature with the accompaniment of insects. Olenin of *The Cossacks* returns to the deer's lair, which he had found the previous day, where a feeling of love for everything and everyone washes over him such that he crosses himself out of habit learned long ago, much like Anna does before throwing herself upon the train tracks, and thanks "someone" (6: 76). Feeling this overwhelming love for his surroundings Olenin empathizes with the mosquito hordes around him, imagining himself as one of them, and then as a pheasant or a deer. Olenin recognizes the egoism that he once possessed and intends to cast it aside; however, the divine love for everything he feels here disappears when he falls for Mar'yana, making

his love personal and selfish and planting his ego in another quality as Levin does when he returns from the field. Kedrov finds that Olenin's epiphany in the forest is wanting and may result in his misdirected love because, while it does include the "vegetation of the earthly vine," it omits "the celestial flight of angels" of Pushkin's "Prophet" (256).

In contrast to Olenin, Levin experiences both sides of the phenomenon described by Pushkin, although he errs the first time around. Levin "almost listens to the mysterious voices joyfully and anxiously calling to one another" (19: 382), ascending to the heights of angels, and he feels that he has touched the depths of divine love by attempting to redirect his small bug, giving him over to the mantle of prophet, bearer of God's truth. But with Ivan the coachman and Katavasov he discovers that he has not found the answer to all questions and thus doubts whether he has really found anything at all. At this moment he truly descends to the vegetation of the earthly world, confirmed by the entrancing dance of the bees around him that threaten to sting him, just as Olenin's mosquitoes threaten to eat him. This is the proper order in which ascent and descent occur in Pushkin's poem, and, not surprisingly, they occur at the ends of consecutive chapters in Tolstoy's work. The correct completion of this process, unlike in Pushkin, has not made a prophet of Levin, but rather started his resurrection with a new faith which he has decided to keep to himself.

Levin's Last Lessons

Levin still has more to realize and more of his pride to relinquish after his debate with Koznyshev. As he thinks about how the Church's teachings relate to the truth he has discovered about the need for God in one's life, Levin grasps that non-Christians must know something of this truth because they feel the same needs that Christians do. "And Jews, Mohammedans, Confucians, Buddhists – what are they? [...] could these hundreds of millions of

people really be deprived of that great good without which life has no point?" (19: 398). Levin only happens upon this now, but he has a vague sense of it earlier in his debate with Koznyshev. Levin questions the war not only because of the Slavs' remoteness, but also because the war's supporters depict it as a holy war. Tolstoy believed that Christ best expressed the good, but he also asserted that all religions know something of that good. Levin earlier sees that the Turks cannot automatically be considered the offending party in the conflict simply because of their religion, but now he clearly understands that he is no different than the many other people of the world in search of truth.

Finally, Levin submits to God beyond the commitment he makes following his conversation with Fedor. When the old oak collapses in the woods, Levin prays for his wife and infant son, "Oh my God! Oh my God, don't let it have fallen on them!" (19: 394). Levin acknowledges that this prayer is still more senseless than the previous one he makes when Kitty gives birth to his son; he wishes for something that may have already happened to be undone. Because of its absurdity, Levin's reaction may appear like reflexive praying in a moment of potential disaster, but his pleas to God acknowledge, if only subconsciously by the invocation of the name, God's superior authority in his life. In essence, he expresses his own insignificance by admitting that he is powerless to affect his own fate and that of those around him and thus must appeal to a higher authority. Levin's final thoughts betray that he may never quite understand why he prays: "I will still not understand with reason why I pray, and I will pray" (19: 400). He will continue to pray because his newfound faith in God lends him a sense of order in his life that cannot be explained through reason. With the novel's close Levin understands in whose hands rests the power of retribution, and he submits to this authority without restraint.

Levin after the Novel and Anna the Judge

The novel ends with Levin on the verge of faith, but he has not yet passed all the turning points and crossroads to which his faith will lead him. Unlike Anna, he will have the opportunity to go further and uncover still other mysteries that connect his will and God's. He has ascertained that reason, while pragmatic and useful in the mastery of humanity's environment, cannot produce an argument for the eternity of justice. Only faith in something greater than an individual can assure humanity of that justice and give him the peace that he has long desired. God does leave room for judging because it is practical, but those with faith, like Levin, know in what context that judgment takes place. They are capable of regulating their own actions and those of others, but they abstain and even forgive when the time comes, knowing to whom the power of ultimate condemnation belongs. Levin may continue to evaluate the success of the *zemstvos* by how well they serve their respective communities, but he can no longer look upon fallen women the same way. He will know first to pity them because they have broken with morality, and he will leave God to determine a fitting punishment or lead those women back to righteousness should He decide that they have wronged Him.

Tolstoy applied the epigraph to Levin in two senses: Levin must cease judging others and submit himself to God to be judged. But what of Anna? Anna doubtlessly falls from grace, but does her story move in opposition to Levin's? Anna arrives in Moscow to attempt to reconcile Dolly with her cheating husband, Stiva. The reader does not forget that Anna's interests in this matter seem mercenary. According to Morson, Anna is a consummate actress, even before her encounter with Vronsky. She deliberately lies to Dolly, pulling at the strings of her heart, in order to return an uneasy peace to the marriage, but, on the other hand, Morson also notes that Anna's deception

saves Dolly's pride ("In Our Time" 81). Although Anna manipulates her, she does so to give Dolly a soft landing in a hard place. Dolly can return to her normal routine without the further humiliation of a divorce proceeding. Furthermore, Tolstoy notes that Anna does not cruelly mislead Dolly as "unfeigned concern and love were visible on Anna's face" (18: 73). That love and concern may just as easily be for her brother as for Dolly, but she feels that love and implores forgiveness now, whereas later she knows only hate.

Her affair with Vronsky, however, quickly destroys her faith and the forgiveness she preaches earlier. Anna exclaims "My God!" as she anxiously recalls how she confessed her love for Vronsky to her husband, and she realizes that neither word possesses any meaning for her, although perhaps it is better to say that the words have ceased to mean anything for her (18: 304). She lets slip the same two words when speaking of Dolly's children, although she may be acting, but does not question them as she does later (18: 72). Anna's final moments also hint that she possesses some faith prior to her passionate affair with Vronsky because she crosses herself on the train tracks. She, at the very least, is raised a Christian like Levin, but begins to deny this after her encounter with Vronsky.

Not only does Anna reject her belief in God, but also she begins to disallow that she can be judged. Having spoiled the ball for Kitty, Anna tells Dolly that she had set out only to play matchmaker to Vronsky and Kitty, but things turned out completely differently, as she puts it, "against her will" (18: 105). Undoubtedly, she had not planned before the ball that Vronsky would seduce her, but she goes even farther than that, saying that she had no choice in the matter. The seeds planted by denying her will grow into a weed of fatalism that blocks Anna's view of the truth. In Morson's view, Anna imagines herself as a character in a tragic novel, the very kind into which she is drawn on her dark train ride to Petersburg, and thus sees omens

and fate where another person might see only strange coincidences (*Omens* 142). On Vronsky's estate Anna questions the very fact that she can be found guilty in any deed, much less stealing Vronsky from Kitty. "Yes, yes,' said Anna turning away and looking out the open window.' But I was not to blame. And who is to blame? What's the meaning of being to blame? Could it have been otherwise?" (19: 212). Anna believes that she cannot be held accountable for her actions because they have already been predetermined.

Not long before her death she begins to disparage everyone around her ruthlessly, wrapping them in the same blanket of hate in which she herself feels rolled up. When she meets with Kitty and Dolly at Levin's estate she presumes that Kitty must hate her for luring Vronsky away, and thus assumes that she must respond in kind and punish Kitty. With a cruel smile Anna reminds Kitty of Levin's visit to Anna's home. This hate ultimately culminates when Anna appropriates God's tool of vengeance to her own ends. She throws herself under a train purportedly to chastise Vronsky. After reading Vronsky's scrawled note at the station she thinks to herself: "No, I won't let you torment me,' [...] threatening neither him, nor herself, but whomever was tormenting her" (19: 347). Anna actually does not quite know whom to blame, but she knows that someone or something is at fault which must be punished. She takes her own life to redress that unknown tormentor, but begs God's forgiveness before the train crushes her. This may be a true moment of faith that inspires sympathy in the reader, but Tolstoy deliberately makes it unclear whether God can accept the punishment she selects for herself. Nevertheless, she misappropriates God's power by casting sentence on herself and, up until this point, does not submit herself to be judged contrary to the two principles of the epigraph.

Levin, because he has learned to lead a life in line with the sentiment of the epigraph, unlike Anna, lives out his life beyond the back cover of the

book. He has learned to be more lenient with others and has embraced his vague, unclear feeling, the beginning of faith, to which he relates with caution after his confession. This is not the end for Levin, however. The conclusions Levin has made in *Anna Karenina* are but stepping stones to still greater insights later. He still has more to discover about judgment, although he already knows the basics, and he is well aware that any truth he finds will not solve all his problems, not instantly improve his marriage, nor repair his relationship with his servants and his brother's friends. Levin sits on a dock, ready to head out to the sea of ordinary life, which, contrary to his life in *Anna Karenina*, will not be chronicled, but will be filled with the same sorts of decisions and predicaments, but, unlike before the novel, he now has all the tools to undertake that voyage.

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