

READING ANNA IN PARTS

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Russia's newspapers and journals have left us numerous reviews printed while novels of the 1870s were still being serialized, and the Russian archives contain significant letters to novelists written during the course of serialization. Few of these letters, however, comment on more than one installment, and students of literary response lack examples of non-professional readers who have left their reactions to novels over the course of the part publication in "thick journals," which dominated the literary process during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The diaries of Prince Vladimir Mikhailovich Golitsyn¹ (1847-1931) offer a rare exception. Golitsyn, who read *Anna Karenina* as it was appearing in *The Russian Herald* (*Russkii vestnik*) kept a diary which is now preserved in the Manuscript Division of the former Lenin Library. Golitsyn would read the installments at the English Club, then record his impressions. A civil servant who later became Governor of Moscow (1887-1891) and Mayor of Moscow (1897-1905), Golitsyn was neither an aesthete, nor a critic, nor a particularly perceptive literary historian, but he was a thoughtful reader with strong opinions about aesthetics, fiction, morality, and the state of Russian society.

Golitsyn's diaries frame the reading of *Anna Karenina* with comments on aesthetics, foreign policy, service in the imperial bureaucracy, and other contemporary issues. He shows little interest in imaginative literature apart from *Anna Karenina*, although ten days before reading the first installment of the novel he does make a clear "*profession de foi*," stating his general principles on the limits of fiction: "Literature as art, as a fine art *par excellence*, must not be defiled by anything which could defeat the sense of the elegant; in literature, as in society, there are rules of decorum." His reaction to *Anna Karenina* shows that these rules of decorum, for Golitsyn, should govern both the creature and spiritual aspects of human life.

I will translate only the sections which pertain to *Anna Karenina*, noting the installment to which they refer. In this summary of the novel's serialization history, the installments to which Golitsyn referred are marked with an asterisk.

Installment	Date	Serialized Separate Edition		Contents of Final Chapter in Serial Installment
		Chapters	Chapters	
1*	Jan. 1875	1:1-14	1:1-23	Anna leaves the ball
2*	Feb. 1875	1:15-2:10	1:24-2:11	Consummation of Anna and Vronsky's affair
3*	Mar. 1875	2:11-27	2:12-29	Anna tells Karenin about her affair with Vronsky
4	Apr. 1875	2:28-3:10	2:30-3:12	Levin sees Kitty in a carriage
5*	Jan. 1876	3:11-28	3:13-32	Levin thinks of death, goes abroad
6*	Feb. 1876	4:1-15	4:1-17	Vronsky visits Anna, who appears to be dying
7*	Mar. 1876	4:16-5:6	4:18-5:6	Kitty and Levin leave for the country
8	Apr. 1876	5:7-19	5:7-20	Nikolai Levin dies; Kitty is pregnant

9	Dec. 1876	5:20-29	5:21-33	Vronsky and Anna leave for the country after a scandalous scene in the theater
10	Jan. 1877	6:1-12	6:1-15	Vasen'ka's expulsion from Pokrovskoe
11	Feb. 1877	6:13-29	6:16-32	Anna and Vronskii leave for Moscow
12*	Mar. 1877	7:1-15	7:1-16	Birth of Levin's son
13*	Apr. 1877	7:16-30	7:17-31	Anna's death

[M.N. Katkov refused to publish the final part of the novel in *The Russian Herald*, and it appeared as a separate brochure.]

[Response to the first installment, 21 February 1875]

The first chapters of L. Tolstoy's novel recently appeared. Rarely can one encounter in literature something more bright, more fragrant than this work, which promises to stand alongside *War and Peace*.

[Response to the second installment, 17 March 1875]

In the evening we were at a large and brilliant rout at the Meshchersky home. I can't say that I enjoyed myself, although I prefer routs to balls. The recently published second part of *Anna Karenina* produced far from that pleasing impression which I experienced from the first. It turns out that the author has succumbed to a fashionable illness -- the striving for false realism: there are phrases, even whole pages, which it is painful to read, especially when I see Tolstoy's signature over them. Not a single author can quite free himself from realism, especially an author who has set himself the task of analyzing contemporary life, but why describe these sides of life with unconcealed satisfaction? Why, from a desire to expose the shortcomings and vices of society, voluntarily succumb to cynicism? Fortunately Count Tolstoy has not come to this, but many features of the second part of his novel make me think that even he is ready to give in to the general fascination, even he is ready to fall into this general defect of most contemporary authors, who take the fatal path of denouncing everything. As pleasing as it was to read the first part of *Anna Karenina*, so great was my disappointment upon reading certain details which found a place in the second.

[Response to the third installment, 15 April, 1875]

Anna Karenina continues to occupy all minds, giving rise to all possible interpretations. But the third part is marked by the same elegance and the same shortcomings as the first two. This novel, it seems to me, has to play a very serious role: it will show the reader, in elegant and fascinating form, the fashion to which contemporary clandestine depravity, which has taken possession of the notorious highest level of society (primarily Petersburg), can lead. Depravity has been taken by this novel to such a terrifying extent that it may brand society with the mark of disgrace and shame, and it may save certain victims, who are prepared to fall into misfortune. It would be too hypothetical to assert that this novel will serve to improve society, but one can say with certainty that it will make many people become thoughtful about themselves, and this is already a great deal, especially with us, who are not used to thinking very much, and least of all about ourselves. This denunciatory-educational significance of the novel has come to light most

clearly in its third part. I wish from the heart that it will continue this way, develop, and, unsparing and unslackening, reveal, discredit, and condemn certain phenomena of contemporary life, bearing witness to the vulgar decline of our moral force and to the disappearance of our self-consciousness.

[Response to the fifth installment, 16 February 1876].

The continuation of *Anna Karenina* has appeared, and no small disenchantment has ensued. Indeed, as much as the first part was artistically polished, so much the succeeding parts reveal a gradual decline in talent, so much the latest part has cut off all hopes of seeing a work worthy of *War and Peace*. The development of the novel in this part is based on complete falsehood. The characters of the husband, the wife, and the lover are not in the least bearable; they strike me by their complete lack of anything elegant, any moral side, and, on the contrary, by their excess of hollowness and lack of personality. These are dolls, and, moreover, antipathetic dolls, inspiring neither love, nor respect, nor even sympathy. Then come endless passages on agriculture, on labor, which could quite freely be cast out of the novel, as they have no connection with it. In general, only those people could admire this new part of the novel who consider it their duty to admire everything signed by Tolstoy or those whose petty, trifling pride has been deluded by certain little ideas poking through the canvas of the novel. To the latter belongs the well-known Moscow circle of *boudeurs* and Bismarcks *en herbe*, who with malicious delight will applaud Tolstoy's way of thinking about the government, but who, if they were the government, would not fail to shatter it under the weight of their scorn.

[Response to the sixth and seventh installments, 8 April 1876].

In the new monthly parts of *Anna Karenina* our salon experts are trying to guess which of our acquaintances Tolstoy intended to depict in this or that character. This is too petty and poor a way of appreciating true talent, supposing that it only sketches portraits and does not create types by the force of its own creative genius. The latest part of this novel has offended many by depicting a confession and a wedding and presenting something of a critical analysis of these sacraments. Fiction writers, no matter what genius and talent they possess, should not touch upon the spiritual life of man; and so the depiction of confession is either a caricature or sacrilegious with respect to the human soul. And so it is in *Anna*: you sense the author's mockery; you sense a desire to give all of this a ridiculous turn, and this is little conducive to the adornment of the work; it gives the novel little value. I am no fanatic, as is well known, but I cannot help saying that the unbelief, the absence of religion and respect for the religious life of the human soul impede the development of true talent.

[18 April 1876]

In one of Octave Feuillet's novels a woman who is not ruined, but who is carried away by the example of others and is embittered by life, is intending to make a mistake. She receives a note from a friend, "*Vous serez bien*

malheureuse demain," and these few words stop her. What a profound knowledge of the human heart this feature of the author reveals, and together with this, what subtle taste, what elegant understanding! Yes, such reflection might stay many on the path to perdition. These words contain the profound truth that a soul which has still not completely lost the ability to realize the truth cannot help but be struck by it. I dare say that in *Anna Karenina* there is nothing resembling this in elegance and truthfulness. We Russians have still not attained to such ideas, and we shall not soon attain to them.

[Response to the twelfth installment, 31 March 1877]

Anna Karenina continues to appear and continues to disturb me with its disgusting realism. The photographically faithful description of childbirth, no matter how faithful it may be, has no place in a work of fiction. Up to now Russian literature has been free from blind imitations of Zola, Sue and others; now the way is paved.

[Response to the thirteenth installment, 2 May 1877]

I was at the Club yesterday, where I read the recently published penultimate part of *Anna Karenina*. I confess, it made a profound impression on me and has blotted out my dissatisfaction with the preceding parts.

NOTES

¹ V.M. Golitsyn, *Dnevnic*, Part 5 (1874-75). GBL, Fond 75, GVM 5, p. 152. The translated passages are taken from Part 5 (187s75), Part 6 (16 October 1875-19 August 1876), and Part 7 (20 August 1876 4 August 1877). My attention was drawn to the existence of the diaries by a brief mention of them in V.Z. Gornaia, *Mir chitaet "Annu Kareninu"* (Moscow: "Kniga," 1979) 22. The attentive reader of the novel will note that the Golitsyn family appears twice in it: in Part 1, Chapter X a Prince Golitsyn is entertaining a lady friend in a private room of the restaurant; in Part VI, Chapter XIV, a Princess Golitsyna dies in childbirth because of inadequate medical help.