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## Brooding Stiva: The Masterpiece Theatre *Anna Karenina*

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### 1. Solicitous Anna, Innocent Levin, Perfect Kitty

Masterpiece Theatre productions and similar filmed versions of classics purport to be faithful renditions of the original insofar as the shift of medium and the limits imposed by the time span of the film allow. If we have any doubts, we have only to listen to the introducer of each segment as he or she describes what Jane Austen or Tolstoy were trying to do.

Length, of course, affects our expectations of what a faithful rendition might be. We anticipate more of the original in a five-hour version of a four-hundred page novel than in a ninety-minute version of *Remembrance of Things Past*. Orson Welles's "Mercury Theatre on the Air" once produced a ten-minute dramatization of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which reminded me of the ten-second "Proust Summarizing Contest" in Monty Python.

Masterpiece Theatre productions tend to follow the original quite closely. They cannot (or do not attempt to) render the complexities of the narrative voice, and one expects to lose all the complexities that Bakhtin described as characteristic of novelistic prose. And so Henry James, Anthony Trollope, Jane Austen, and Lev Tolstoy tend to sound much more similar seen than read. It is as if all stories were told by the same voice, the voice of Masterpiece Theatre.

When Russell Baker introduces Part One of the two-part, four-and-a-half hour Masterpiece Theatre version of *Anna Karenina* by telling us that Levin's and Kitty's love precludes even the thought of sin or infidelity, we know we are in for a sentimentalized version of both love stories.

Needless to say, the scene in which Anna uses her seductive wiles on Levin, and reflects that she has succeeded as much as she could in one encounter with an honourable man, is changed decisively. It becomes an encounter in which both pure characters, one faithful to a wife and the other to a lover, become very good friends who appreciate each other's worth. The scene in which Kitty reproaches Levin for what must have been going on (and she is right) is omitted: for Kitty, too, is entirely saintly in this version and would never be jealous. Naturally, there is no Vasenka Veslovsky, either.

Predictably enough, perhaps, Anna constantly expresses concern over how much she is hurting poor Karenin, and she refuses his offer of a divorce (with Seryozha)—now, get this—because she does not want to damage his career, not because, as the text makes explicit, she hates him for his very goodness and does not want to be indebted to him in any way, no matter what that stance might mean for her son or herself. There are a number of genuinely Dostoevskian moments in Tolstoy's novel, and this is one of them. There is no indication in this film that Anna deliberately "schooled herself to despise and reproach" Karenin in her thoughts or that she tries to think of him as an "official machine" whom she need not fear to hurt because he cannot feel pain at all; as in the Garbo film, her deliberately distorted version of Karenin is offered pretty much as what he is. The complexities of motives for his keeping his son—what would be the boy's position in Vronsky's family?—are reduced to a simple desire to be as nasty as possible to Anna. When the couple is still together, and Karenin, having met Vronsky in the doorway, at last announces he wants a divorce, in which he will try to keep his son, Anna accuses him of doing so only to hurt her. He answers, "That's true. But I will keep him anyway."

I suppose it is predictable that Karenin should be nothing but a heartless villain, rather than a man who has difficulty in expressing his feelings; or that Anna should be utterly pure morally, someone who wants to spare Karenin's feelings and even would be willing to let Vronsky leave her just out of a desire to make him happy; or whose love for Seryozha has nothing to do with how he fulfills her needs. Tolstoy meant to shatter the myth of romantic love that dominates our

culture, but that myth, it appears, is so central to it, that he is routinely read as endorsing the very values he meant to criticize. It is as if *Don Quixote* were taken as a tale of knight-errantry, a phenomenon that might be called de-parodization. Shall we anticipate the Betty Crocker edition of "A Modest Proposal"?

## 2. Who Is to Blame?

In the novel, Stiva remarks that "it is all my fault—all my fault, though I'm not to blame. That's the point of the whole situation"<sup>1</sup> and Anna more than once says something quite similar. Misfortune happens through us, but we are not to blame because we had no choice; and so Anna, in her one moment of metaphysics, asks Dolly whether it could have happened that she had not become the wife of Stiva. I am not to blame because no one is ever to blame.

And so anyone connected with Anna (except Karenin) becomes purified. We have no sense that Vronsky is in any sense a limited man; anyone would fall in love with this Vronsky. He breaks off relations with Betsy Tverskaya and, in public, calls her a whore, because she has allowed Anna to be insulted—one of several scenes actually added to the original. In one sense, this portrait of Vronsky is an improvement on the Garbo film. In it, in a wonderful deconstruction of the concept of cause and effect, Anna commits suicide because Vronsky is abandoning her to go off and fight the Eastern War whereas, of course, in the original he goes to the Eastern War because Anna has committed suicide. But Masterpiece Theatre replaces one error with another. Where the Garbo film has the whole world leagued against poor Anna, so that her very narcissism becomes captivating, Masterpiece Theatre represents Anna as the very opposite of narcissistic and Vronsky as utterly free from fault or blame.

A conversation is added to explain why Vronsky goes off, in effect, to commit suicide by volunteering. He is not just grieving over Anna's death; he has also lost his daughter, because "Karenin came for her and I could do nothing about it." Ordinarily, little Annie is forgotten by

the critics as she is by her parents. In the original, the almost stream of consciousness description of Anna's progression to suicide allows us to see what does *not* even cross her mind, her daughter; and after her suicide, Vronsky also in effect abandons the child to indulge his grief. We may then *infer* that the child will be raised by the mad Karenin and Countess Lydia Ivanovna. But such a conclusion suggests criticism of Vronsky, which Masterpiece Theatre cannot allow, and so, instead of abandoning his child to Karenin, Karenin must take her by force of law. A double grief motivates Vronsky's enlistment.

Much the same happens with Stiva. The first scene after Anna's death is, believe it or not, Stiva brooding—Stiva *brooding!* "I can't bear that life goes on without her," he explains. No ballet dancer will assuage this sorrow. When Stiva goes to Karenin to ask for the divorce that Karenin once promised and Anna refused, he is not, as in the original, also thinking about how he might still use Karenin's influence to advance his career. He has none but the best of motives and a sense of high honour. He loses his temper because Karenin has changed his mind and thereby broken his word. This is not so much Stiva as David Copperfield (a novel that the Masterpiece Theatre Anna reads aloud to Karenin, perhaps because she, too, suffers so much). In the original, when Stiva at Karenin's hears the name "Sergei Alekseevich," he has to think for a minute who that could be before he remembers Seryozha; but in this version he demands to see his nephew and forces his way in. In our last view of Stiva, he dances with Dolly, lovingly and devotedly, and she responds in kind.

We may well ask, then, who is supposed to be responsible for Anna's death, if not herself, and not Vronsky? There is no scene where she visits Dolly shortly before committing suicide and, recognizing that Kitty is reluctant to see her, taunts her about having flirted with her husband. Kitty is completely innocent and cherishes no ill feelings for Anna in this version. But if there is so much innocence, why is there tragedy?

Of course, Karenin is partly to blame, but it is far from clear that his behaviour is sufficient. How about that all-purpose agent that is every-

body and therefore nobody, Society? Yes, of course, but it is again far from clear why social cuts would drive Anna (who in this version does not care much for society) to her death. Anna's drug addiction is stressed. I was pleased that this important fact was not omitted. But it is small comfort to see that, instead, it is exaggerated. Anna here seems to consume enough opium to impress Coleridge or De Quincey.

All these factors are allowed to play their part, but seem insignificant in comparison with two others, which, upon reflection, appear to be versions of the same thing. The first and most obvious cause of tragedy is sheer Fate. It is noteworthy that the film begins not at Oblonsky's house but with a scene, absent from the original, in which Seryozha and Karenin see Anna off on the train to Moscow. Trains are everywhere in this version; Seryozha is always playing with toy ones. We are allowed a long shot of the train that is to run over Anna in which its headlights eerily resemble eyes, as if this were the very face of Fate. And as the Fates are traditionally represented as old women, Fate is here personified by Vronsky's mother, who becomes, interestingly enough, the only irredeemably evil character. This is no feminist reading. Nor is there any possibility of seeing that it is not fate, but Anna's belief in fate and omens, that is at work: though trains are omnipresent, Anna's comment that the trainman's death is an "evil omen" is omitted. Even in recounting her dream of dying in childbirth, she understands it not as an omen but as a reminder that her mother died in childbirth—an interesting addition to Tolstoy's story. Apparently, no one is responsible for evil and suffering: great goodness and love just have to end this way, by the horrible but inscrutable will of Fate.

A version of cruel fate is religion. This version stands as about the most anti-religious interpretation of this novel I have ever encountered. God is present only through the hypocritical protestations of Lydia Ivanovna and Karenin or the sheer blind and mindless ritual of several very bearded Orthodox priests. In one unintentionally comic moment, such a priest gives Nikolai Levin last rites in Latin. I know it sounds strange, but

Masterpiece Theatre has almost made Tolstoy's novel into an anti-Catholic film.

### 3. How to Perform a Miracle

The most remarkable instance of the film's anti-religious bias is to be seen in how it treats, or fails to treat, Karenin's conversion. Tolstoy's scene is one of the most remarkable in world literature. So far as I know, no one else, not even Dostoevsky, has ever been able to describe Christian love as psychologically plausible. Dostoevsky believed in it, of course, but it is as if the voice of Ivan Karamazov was always artistically present to say, as he does in "Rebellion," that one cannot truly love one's neighbours, much less one's enemies. All that is possible is "the self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of the charity imposed by duty. . . . Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth He was God. But we are not gods."<sup>2</sup> We know that Dostoevsky originally planned to start with a corrupt Idiot and convert him, but, unable to do so plausibly, eventually chose to begin with a Christ-like Idiot and test him. But the miracle of portraying Christian love realistically and yet convincingly was performed by Tolstoy not once but twice: when Prince Andrei loves Anatole Kuragin and in Karenin's conversion.

How does Tolstoy perform this miracle? In both cases, I think, he uses the same method. We, and most authors, typically trace a sequence of thoughts from A to B to C, but Tolstoy notices that between A and B there are actually several, tiny, tiny steps. Tolstoy's amazing realism consists in part in giving us the small gestures of the mind that come *between* the mental actions we usually note or remember.

In both Andrei Bolkonsky's and Aleksei Karenin's conversion experience, Tolstoy traces their thoughts moment by moment, breaking them down into ever finer mental actions. Having granted each step as plausible, we find ourselves, without ever taking a leap, at the endpoint, surprised (as is the character) at where we have arrived. It is as if, by taking an unnoticed bypath and having followed it for a few arduous miles, we had arrived in the afterlife.

The *War and Peace* sequence is even better done, in my view, than the one in *Anna*, because the steps are even finer in the earlier work; but the *Anna* version is quite plausible enough. I imagine it is scenes like this that Dostoevsky had in mind when he observed that no one with more literary talent than Count Tolstoy ever lived; and we can hear Tolstoy, like Mikhailov, replying that it has nothing to do with talent, but with observation.

#### 4. Eavesdropping and the Superaddressee

Tolstoy's sequence draws on what we have learned about Karenin. He feels others' suffering so deeply, and is so inept at handling or understanding emotions, that he expels any woman who cries before him and avoids all show of emotions. Here is an answer, which Anna understands, to the charge that Karenin is unable to feel. He is not an official machine but a raw nerve encased in armour, armour made up primarily of the metal of bureaucratise.

The sequence begins by describing how Karenin interprets Dolly's speech urging him to forgive Anna: "The applicability or nonapplicability of the Christian precept to his own case was too difficult a question to be discussed lightly, and this question had long been answered by Aleksey Aleksandrovich in the negative" (430). The bureaucratic language of the narrator here double-voices the manner of Karenin's inner speech. Forgiveness becomes one possible official response, and Karenin thinks more of Turovstyn's silly comment about a man who challenged his wife's lover to a duel and so acted like a man. Karenin's sense of self, his masculine dignity, troubles him as it would trouble most men.

Karenin then receives not one but two telegrams, one from Anna and another announcing Stremov's "appointment to the very post Karenin had wished for" (430). Only after reading this telegram does he open the one from Anna saying she is dying and begging his forgiveness. Always with Tolstoy the purity of any emotional sequence is interrupted. Levin can enjoy a fine day while anxious to ask Oblonsky about Kitty. Any other writer would bend everything to the purpose, but

Tolstoy never forgets that life allows for neither purity nor wholeness.

Karenin assumes that Anna has some stratagem in mind. If this assumption seems unwar-ranted, we may recall that later Anna actually sends a strategic telegram to Vronsky just to get him to come home. First Karenin focuses on what the strategy could be, and only then does he attend to the telegram's words "I am dying"; and "suddenly the plain meaning of what was said in it struck him" (431). Here again we have Tolstoy dividing up the sequence: no one else would have had a character read but only partially grasp, until a moment later, the words "I am dying."

He resolves to go whether the telegram is or is not a trick. He then banishes the subject from his mind precisely because

in picturing what would happen he could not drive away the reflection that her death would at once remove all the difficulty of his position. Bakers, closed shops, night cabmen, porters sweeping the pavements flashed past his eyes, and he watched it all, trying to smother the thought of what was awaiting him, and what he dared not hope for and yet was hoping for. (431)

We may recall this passage when Anna, on her way to suicide, sees every shop sign, indeed everything she encounters, in a wholly hateful light. Rather than distract herself from evil thoughts, she indulges them willfully, even joyfully. The wish Karenin experiences for the death of someone who is causing him so much pain would be experienced by almost anyone; but we sense Karenin's morality in his active and protracted attempt to smother the thought. At the same time, we sense again that his habitual way of handling the uncomfortable is to block it out, and so we are reminded of how he banishes crying people. As he drives up, he "seemed to draw his resolution from the remotest corner of his brain"—there is a struggle here—and tells himself, "If truth, do what is proper" (432).

Entering, he asks the servant about Anna, and is told simply that there was a successful delivery, which naturally suggests that she is doing well. This misunderstanding is just the sort of thing that

would happen, but which no one else would have reproduced for any purpose other than comedy. Immediately, Karenin "felt distinctly now he intensely he had longed for her death" (432). But he then asks explicitly how she is doing and, upon hearing that she is very ill, "feels some relief that there was still hope of her death" (432). Tolstoy is merciless here in exposing the very thought he is trying to banish and in expressing it without softening, in a way that would make Karenin shudder. Karenin then sees a military overcoat and so learns that Vronsky is present; we imagine his resentment and probably some sense that Vronsky would be present only if the situation was grave. The midwife approaches him with "the familiarity given by the approach of death," and tells him that Anna "keeps talking about you and nothing but you"; he hears the doctor demand ice right away (432). A flood of information, each with a strong emotional charge—his hopes, his guilt at his hopes, his jealousy of Vronsky, the fact that she may really be dying—rapidly confronts a man with very little ability to handle anything emotional. If we imagine what he senses at each point, we are watching the progress of a man being overwhelmed and clinging to his resolution to do what is proper, a resolution that looks increasingly simplistic and impossible to carry out.

His first sight on entering the boudoir is Vronsky weeping. The strong man of whom he has been jealous and afraid is himself so afraid that he draws down his shoulders as if wanting to disappear. Karenin next witnesses, almost as a voyeur, how Vronsky tries to master himself. Pronouncing himself in Karenin's power, Vronsky begs to be allowed to stay. The situation has totally reversed; so helpless before, Karenin now has the power, as he did not expect. One of the remarkable paradoxes of this whole sequence is that Karenin is treated as powerful, good, and kind, treated as he has never been in his private life; and this satisfaction of his ego does not feed it but allows him to go beyond it. Indeed, it almost drags him beyond it, because he seems to be the mere object of impressions.

Something similar happens to Prince Andrei for a quite different reason. Because of his illness,

he is unable to direct his attention according to his will and so the sequence of thoughts and some external impressions acts upon him. In both cases, the will is largely superseded. The most obvious difference between these scenes is that Prince Andrei's psychology is traced internally, as a sequence of thoughts inaccessible from the outside; whereas from this point on, Karenin's thoughts and feelings are depicted from without. We watch the impressions Prince Andrei has accumulated work out their own inner logic within him and the external experiences Karenin is now undergoing leading him he knows not where.

Encountering Vronsky, Karenin is seeing tears—and not just of a woman, but of a man; beyond that, of a military man; and beyond that, of his formerly triumphant rival. The effect of those tears is therefore especially powerful, and "Aleksy Aleksandrovich, seeing Vronsky's tears, felt a rush of that nervous irritation always produced in him by the sight of other people's sufferings, and turning away his face, he moved hurriedly to the door, without hearing the rest of his words" (433). He therefore enters Anna's room, is almost driven into it, already escaping from a flood of uncontrollable emotion. Though he expected to advance to her bedside, he finds himself retreating.

I think it is only Tolstoy who would notice that a woman suffering from feverish delirium might appear "as though she was not only well and blooming, but in the happiest frame of mind" and would be not raving but talking "with exceptionally correct articulation and expressive intonation" (433). The author resists the temptation to make a state of mind and body look like its conventional representation. We again speculate on what Karenin must be thinking and feeling: is she not dying after all?

What follows is a remarkable version of a literary trope, involuntary eavesdropping. As we have seen, it is prepared for by Karenin's first sight of Vronsky. We believe most readily what we overhear, because such speech is not shaped for our benefit; and when someone is in a fever, and near death, their disguises fall away. We have already witnessed Anna putting on her attitudes in the morning. Karenin therefore is in a position to

hear his wife's inner thoughts the way we almost never can in life; he can follow what we normally only see in novelistic characters to whose inner speech the author gives us access. Karenin almost enters our space. He can finally learn what Anna really thinks of him.

For Aleksey—I am speaking of Aleksey Aleksandrovich (what a strange and awful things that both are Aleksey, isn't it?)—Aleksey would not refuse me. I would forget, he would forgive. But why doesn't he come? He's so good, he doesn't know himself how good he is. Ah, my God, what agony! Give me some water, quick! Oh, that will be bad for her, my little girl! Oh, very well, then give her to a nurse. Yes, I agree, it's better in fact. He'll be coming, it will hurt him to see her. Give her to the nurse.

"Anna Arkadyevna, he has come, here he is!" said the midwife, trying to attract her attention to Aleksey Aleksandrovich. (433)

Bakhtin speaks of the "superaddressee," the ideal listener, the third person implicit in all our utterances—the ideal one who would understand us perfectly, who would utterly justify us, and whom we never actually expect to meet, anymore than we expect to encounter the perfectly forgiving God. But here she is: she knows everything, knows how good he is, even better than he knows he is, because she understands people much better than he does, as he is well aware. And this is the person he has been wishing dead! We can sense all that hatred now in the process of reversing itself, changing its sign without changing its strength. Indeed, flowing in the opposite direction, it acquires all the added force provided by the tears he has seen in Vronsky's eyes and by the sight of Anna's suffering.

Her thought is of how the sight of her daughter will affect him. His enemy loves him, focuses entirely on him, and as he focuses entirely on her, we sense how easily he can love his enemy.

## 5. Will

Anna does not yet grasp his presence:

"Oh, what nonsense!" Anna went on, not seeing her husband. "No, give her to me, give me my little

one! He has not come yet. You say he won't forgive me because you don't know him. No one knows him. I'm the only one, and it was hard even for me. His eyes I ought to know—Seryozha has just the same eyes—and I can't bear to see them because of it. Has Seryozha had his dinner? I know everyone will forget him. He would not forget. . . ." (433)

What she calls "nonsense" [*vzdor*] is the thought that she need hide her daughter, as she would from any other person in Karenin's position: for he would rise above the resentment and feel only love. After his conversion, that in fact turns out to be the case. She knows him as no one else does, and sees him differently, not only because it is hard to know anyone, but also because it is especially hard to know him, given his defences against emotion—the very ones that are now utterly failing him. She knows that he is far from unfeeling and that the very defences others mistake for the lack of compassion testify to the opposite. Do we ever expect to be so appreciated? And indeed, as he knows, the very emotions he is feeling show that she does know him better than he knew himself.

The love she feels for Seryozha she feels for him, too. Though everyone would forget, he will not forget: in a novel where evil is identified with negligence—we think of Stiva and his wonderful "forgettory"—this is high praise.

Suddenly Anna shrinks back in terror, as though expecting a blow: she has at last seen him. We ask: what is he feeling when, loving and justifying him as she just has, she still fears him? He must be thinking: if the one who vindicates me shrinks for me, then I am the one who has wronged *her*, not the reverse. Here we see another basis of forgiveness, the sincere sense not that she is to blame, still less that no one is to blame, but that I myself am to blame. She then insists that she is not afraid of him, but of death: but perhaps, he must feel, it is both, and he has wronged her irreparably?

His "wrinkled face wore an expression of agony; he took her by the hand and tried to say something, but he could not utter it; his lower lip quivered, but he still went on struggling with his

emotion, and only now and then [*izredka*] glanced at her" (433-4). His emotion overcomes him, but he struggles with it because he is still trying to master it, rather than let it master him. He does so out of habit, the lifelong fear of losing control. "And each time he glanced at her, he saw her eyes gazing at him with such passionate and triumphant tenderness as he had never seen in them" (434). "Each time" [*kazhdii raz*]: evidently, his looking away and his looking at her alternate and so we sense a repeated process of seeing her triumph that she has judged his goodness rightly while he still struggles to retain some control. Unlike all other situations of strong emotions he has experienced, he can neither banish her nor depart himself. He must endure and listen:

"Yes, yes, yes, this is what I wanted to say. Don't wonder at me, I'm still the same. But there is another woman in me, I'm afraid of her; she loved that man, and I tried [*khotela*] to hate you, and could not forget about her that used to be. I'm not that woman. Now I'm my real self, all myself. I'm dying now. . . ." (434)

Anna describes here quite accurately what the novel has traced: that her revulsion at Karenin was not spontaneous, as she had claimed, but deliberately acquired. It was manufactured by repeated practice so that she might then cope with her guilt by telling herself that the revulsion she feels simply makes it impossible for her to do other than leave him. She constructed her own inevitability. But to will a situation in which one has no will is to will no less surely; and she expresses this idea by her metaphor of two women, the real one being the one who chose to be the other. If we are free, belief in determinism or fatalism is a choice.

From Karenin's standpoint, her image of two women means that she has always loved him, even when he hated her, and that her very cruelty was proportional to the love and guilt she had to overcome. From Tolstoy's perspective, we sense the irony that for her truth comes from admitting what she did control whereas for him it derives from surrendering to what he cannot. She finds morality, he is on the way to grace.

## 6. Grace

She begs to be forgiven and says she cannot be; she calls him "too good" and "held his hand in one burning hand, while she pushed him away with the other" (434). For her, the contradictory gesture expresses both her unforgivable guilt and her certainty that he will forgive. As she becomes his vindicator, he becomes her forgiver; both are semi-divine to the other. Both her affirmations, of guilt and of his Christian goodness, propel him to at last surrender control, the one because he has hated her wrongly and the other because he is already forgiving her in his heart, without having willed to do so. That is what real forgiveness feels like. It is something we can put ourselves in the way of but cannot do on our own.

The nervous agitation of Aleksey Aleksandrovich kept increasing, and had by now reached such a point that he ceased to struggle with it. He suddenly felt that what he had regarded as nervous agitation was on the contrary a blissful spiritual condition that gave him all at once a new happiness he had never known. He did not think that the Christian law that he had been all his life trying to follow enjoined him to forgive and love his enemies; but a happy feeling of love and forgiveness for his enemies filled his heart. (434)

The final sentence is spoken in Tolstoyan absolutes. It admits no doubt that this act of Christian forgiveness is real; neither does the paragraph expanding on it at the beginning of chapter nineteen a few pages later. The distinction drawn is between real Christian love and the sort of fake Christian "love" that Ivan Karamazov would have admitted: either prideful assertion of one's moral superiority in a condescending act of fake forgiveness; or a sincere attempt to forgive, which inevitably leads to pride in one's efforts; or a Kantian act of moral duty, again with great effort. Karenin has known all of these kinds of forgiveness before, but this forgiveness is not really an act at all. Oedipus at Colonus understands that he suffered his deeds more than he acted them, and Karenin's act is also in large part a suffering, a passion. It seems to come by itself, and what he must do is

not impede it. And yet there is a choice involved: the decision *not* to resist.

When Anna is falling in love with Vronsky, Tolstoy indicates her state of mind when she is dozing in the train, the novel's earlier moment of delirium.

Moments of doubt were continually coming upon her, when she was uncertain whether the train was going forward or backward, or standing still altogether. . . . "What's that on the arm of the chair, a fur cloak or some beast? And what am I, myself or some other woman?" She was afraid of giving way to this delirium. But something drew her toward it, and she could yield to it or resist it at will. (107)

The external force is powerful, but she can choose to resist; if she does not, she will become "some other woman." It is presumably this line of thinking she recalls in her delirium after giving birth.

Anna's choice not to resist leads her morally astray, but Karenin's analogous yielding enables his forgiveness. In both cases, self is transcended, for good or ill, by will used to surrender will. Tolstoy here seems to offer an answer, in the form of a detailed case study, to one of the most vexed questions in Christian theology, the operation of grace. Is grace *sufficient* to save us, but only if we choose to accept it, as the Molinists (and others) contended? Or is it absolutely *efficacious*, leading the will along by itself, as the Jansenists apparently suggested? Tolstoy shows us the complexity of the question through a detailed psychological description of a process—a process whose complexities make the theological opposition seem rather thin, but which very definitely requires some act of will, even if a negative one, to accept grace.<sup>3</sup>

## 7. The Novel as a Theological Instrument

In *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, we see, psychologically, that Christian love is possible for fallen human beings. The Gospel demands the difficult but not the impossible. The genre of the realist novel has become a kind of test: if it is possible to show in a psychologically plausible

way how a state of soul can come to be, then one has refuted arguments that it is inconceivable. For if it were inconceivable, the novelist could only assert the change, not show it. Realism, supposedly the enemy of transcendence, has become its vehicle. One signature of Russian literature is its use of the novel as a theological instrument.

## 8. Enter the Hero

How is this conversion scene handled by Masterpiece Theatre? Given the film's deeply anti-religious bias, the result is what we might expect. The eavesdropping on Anna's thoughts is entirely omitted; and whereas some scenes in the novel are treated at great length, this one is shortened more than most. Karenin, to be sure, does undergo some sort of change, but it has nothing to do with Christianity. He does not mention turning the other cheek, but appeals to family and the renewed love of a husband. "We're going to stay together now," he tells Vronsky, in words that would make a Hollywood scriptwriter blush. "That's what she wants, her family by her side . . . you can do or say what you like, make me a laughingstock, I'll never leave her."

Vronsky, in fact, becomes the central character in this drama. Part One of this version ends with his shooting himself, not so much out of humiliation, as in the novel, as out of a belief that he has lost Anna. Masterpiece Theatre gives us a supremely unTolstoyan cliffhanger, in contrast to the original, in which the conversion and the attempted suicide occur in the middle of Part Four. I imagine that any other writer who had accomplished the apparently impossible task of showing true Christian love realistically would have laid down his pen forever; or at least have ended his novel with the scene. For what can one do after that? But Karenin's conversion ends neither the novel nor this part of the novel. Neither, of course, does Vronsky's attempted suicide.

One may ask whether a film could go a reasonable distance to showing this conversion. It would obviously be possible to show the preparation for the scene, Karenin's reaction to the display of suffering, in any number of ways, if the



director could once give up the notion of Karenin as unfeeling. But what about the scene itself?

Actually, if one reads it closely, one recognizes that once Karenin arrives at the house and, until the moment of his conversion, virtually the entire process is rendered by external signs, by just the sort of surfaces that a film can easily capture. In marked contrast to Prince Andrei's conversion, here we encounter virtually no free indirect discourse rendering an inner state of soul. We must constantly *infer* what Karenin must be feeling when he hears Anna's words or sees her gestures. If any psychological scene in a novel ever lent itself to film, this is it.

The reasons it is abridged and changed, then, are conceptual. What Tolstoy has done here evidently goes against the moral grain of the filmmakers. One senses that they were somewhat embarrassed by it, as if it were too Christian, too old-fashioned, even to be rendered as a period piece. There is very definitely a consistent moral point in this version. We have seen some of what it excludes—responsibility (surrendered to Fate) and spirituality (always hypocritical). It also excludes ideas: Levin's meditations on the meaning of life are entirely omitted, as are his contemplation of suicide, his discussion of the Eastern War, and his worries about agricultural and social reform. The Mikhailov passage is also entirely eliminated, and there is no Sergei Ivanovich. Levin has only one brother and, so far as we can tell, never does anything but love Kitty and milk cows. The only moment in this film that touches on an idea is a brief dinner discussion about the woman question that forms the background to the letterbox proposal. There we see Stiva the feminist, with no irony cast on why a philanderer might hold such a position (a point that Dolly understands all too well in the novel).

The Garbo version of the film celebrates Romantic love in its most extreme, most clichéd form: that is its ideology. Of course, such a perspective is the reverse of the novel's, but just as a weatherman whose predictions were always exactly wrong would be worth watching, so a perfect inversion has a kind of fidelity of its own. The Garbo film realizes just what Tolstoy paro-

dies. Or to put the point differently, it is *Anna Karenina* as *Anna Karenina* would have told the story; which is why its omission of the Levin plot is even appropriate.

But Masterpiece Theatre goes in quite a different direction. To be sure, the usual romantic clichés are used, but they are secondary. It is not romantic love, but sheer hedonism that this film endorses, not so much out of reflection as out of an assumption that no sensible person could see life in any other way. At least Epicureans like Stiva argue for their beliefs. Here, even romance is valued as a goad to erotic pleasure. We see Anna and Vronsky naked three times. There is even one scene where Kitty, on her wedding night, offers to do to Levin what the women described in his diaries have done. As in the novel, Dolly dreams of having an affair like Anna's, but in the film she does not come to any realization that in fact such a life is empty or fake and that her own life, though difficult, is real and meaningful.

As a result, in a way that is quite unintentional, Anna loses the dignity she has in the novel, where her mistaken view leads to immorality and destruction but where we take her utterly seriously. If she is wrong, so are we; her belief in the ideology of romance is so widely shared that her death does become mythic, even if the myth is not the one she imagines. But Masterpiece Theatre makes her nothing but a beautiful seeker of life's only good, pleasure, and her death is neither tragic nor ironic but simply regrettable.

The real hero of this version is neither Dolly (as I think it is in the novel), nor Anna (as many readers have read the book), nor Levin (as others have assumed), but—Stiva, the pleasure-seeker. The next to the last scene, where he dances lovingly with his wife, whitewashes him from any lingering reproach. The Masterpiece Theatre version is *Anna Karenina* as *Tom Jones*. Or maybe not even that: it is *Anna Karenina* as *M\*A\*S\*H\**.

### Notes

1. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, the Garnett version revised by Leonard J. Kent and Nina Berberova (New York: Modern Library, 1965), 4. References to this translation (which I occasionally amend for accuracy) will henceforth be given in the text.

2. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1950), 281.

3. Tolstoy would certainly have become familiar with the terms of this debate when he became seriously interested in Pascal in 1876. (Pascal served as a Jansenist polemicist, and was deeply concerned with the theological issues they raised.) On the significance of Pascal for Tolstoy, see Donna Tussing Orwin, *Tolstoy's Art and Thought, 1847-1880* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), especially 146-7 and 161-3.