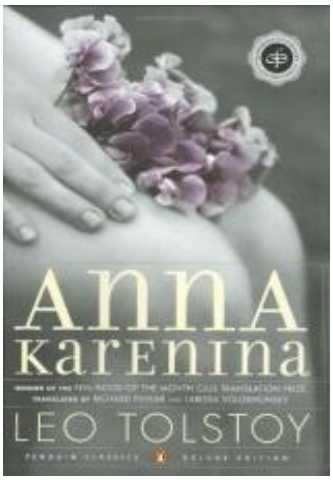
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Anna Karenina

by Leo Tolstoy



About the Book

Anna Karenina tells of the doomed love affair between the sensuous and rebellious Anna and the dashing officer, Count Vronsky. Tragedy unfolds as Anna rejects her passionless marriage and must endure the hypocrisies of society. Set against a vast and richly textured canvas of nineteenth-century Russia, the novel's seven major characters create a dynamic imbalance, playing out the contrasts of city and country life and all the variations on love and family happiness. While previous versions have softened the robust, and sometimes shocking, quality of Tolstoy's writing, Pevear and Volokhonsky have produced a translation true to his powerful voice. This award-winning team's authoritative edition also includes an illuminating introduction and explanatory notes. Beautiful, vigorous, and eminently readable, this **Anna Karenina** will be the definitive text for generations to come.

Discussion Guide

1. How are we to understand the epigram "Vengeance is mine, I will repay"? Should Anna's fate be considered the result of God's vengeance? Is Anna's desire to take vengeance on Vronsky being condemned?

2. When Vronsky first meets Anna, "it was as if a surplus of something so overflowed her being that it expressed itself beyond her will..." (p. 61). What is this something? Why is it expressed beyond her will?

3. Why is Anna able to reconcile Stiva and Dolly?

4. We are told that it is unpleasant for Anna to read about other people's lives because she "wanted too much to live herself" (p. 100). Why are reading and living placed in opposition to one another?

5. When Anna and Vronsky have satisfied their desire for one another, why does Tolstoy compare Vronsky to a murderer?

6. After telling her husband about her affair, why does Anna feel that "everything was beginning to go double in her soul" (p. 288)?

7. Why does Tolstoy counterpose Levin and Kitty's marriage with Anna and Vronsky's relationship?

8. Why does Levin continually imagine his future in such detail, only to have his actual experience differ from what he had expected?

9. What keeps Dolly from having an affair like Anna's, even though she imagines one "parallel to it, an almost identical love affair of her own" (p. 609)?

10. While explaining her affair to Dolly, Anna says, "I simply want to live; to cause no evil to anyone but myself" (p. 616). Does the novel present these two objectives as compatible or incompatible?

11. Why, as she later admits to herself, did Anna want Levin to fall in love with her when she met him?

12. Why does Anna kill herself? Why does everyone and everything seem so ugly to Anna just before she does so?

13. Is it Anna herself or the society in which she lives that is more responsible for her unhappiness?

14. Why are the consequences of Stiva's adultery so insignificant relative to those Anna faces?

15. Why does Vronsky go to war as a volunteer after Anna's suicide?

16. Of all the novel's characters, why is it only Anna and Levin who contemplate suicide?

17. Why does Levin believe that he must keep the revelation in which he comes to understand faith a secret from Kitty?

18. Why does Tolstoy end the novel with Levin's musings about the nature of faith and his embrace of morally justifiable actions as the basis for the meaning of life?

Author Bio

Count Leo Tolstoy was born on September 9, 1828, in Yasnaya Polyana, Russia. Orphaned at nine, he was brought up by an elderly aunt and educated by French tutors until he matriculated at Kazan University in 1844. In 1847, he gave up his studies and, after several aimless years, volunteered for military duty in the army, serving as a junior officer in the Crimean War before retiring in 1857. In 1862, Tolstoy married Sophie Behrs, a marriage that was to become, for him, bitterly unhappy. His diary, started in 1847, was used for self-study and self-criticism; it served as the source from which he drew much of the material that appeared not only in his great novels **War and Peace** (1869) and **Anna Karenina**

(1877), but also in his shorter works. Seeking religious justification for his life, Tolstoy evolved a new Christianity based upon his own interpretation of the Gospels. Yasnaya Polyana became a mecca for his many converts At the age of eighty-two, while away from home, the writer suffered a break down in his health in Astapovo, Riazan, and he died there on November 20, 1910.

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