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Tolstoy and the English Novel: A Note on *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina*

In the famous train ride scene of *Anna Karenina*, Anna reads “an English novel” and imagines herself the heroine—caring for a sick man, making speeches in Parliament, and riding to hounds (1:29).¹ That she is reading about other people distresses her, because she wants to do all these things herself. She envisions herself joining “the hero of the novel [who] was about to attain the English notion of happiness—a baronetcy and an estate.” The English novel traditionally conveys a sense of orderliness, propriety, and happiness in marriage and home,² and if we judge from appearances, Anna’s daydreams of English happiness find fulfillment at Vozdvizhenskoe. There is a deliberate accumulation of things English on Vronsky’s estate, as if these outward trappings might assure stability and well-being. When first we see Anna on the estate she is riding a “kob” (both the horse and the word are borrowed from the English). Vronsky has a racing stable and stud farm, and keeps an English trainer and jockey in his employ; his horses are clipped short in the English fashion. The nursery furnishings are all imported from England, including the head nurse. Billiards, tennis, and sailing are a part of the life style Anna and Vronsky have created. Dolly (it is from her vantage point that we see Vozdvizhenskoe) is overwhelmed by the luxury she witnesses, “which she had only read about in English novels” (6:19). And Princess Varvara describes life at Vozdvizhenskoe to Dolly: “Tout-à-fait à l’anglaise” (6:20).

The novel Anna reads on the train has not been identified; probably Tolstoy intended to suggest a composite rather than a specific novel. But perhaps the general aura of the English novel in *Anna Karenina* has identifiable sources. I would like to consider one such source in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (published in 1871–72, a year before Tolstoy began work on *Anna Karenina*). Nowhere among Tolstoy’s writings does he refer to *Mid-*

1. The edition of *Anna Karenina* used is L. N. Tolstoy, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvadtsati tomakh*, vols. 8 and 9 (Moscow, 1963). References are to part and chapter.

2. Lord David Cecil in *Early Victorian Novelists* (London, 1948), p. 288, has written of the English novel prior to George Eliot, “The English novel in its first period consisted of a number of characters and incidents knit together by an intrigue centering around a young ‘attractive’ hero and heroine and rounded off with their happy marriage.”

dlemarch, nor is that novel mentioned by Tolstoy's biographers or memoirists.³ Conversely there is no evidence to suggest that George Eliot was familiar with the corpus of Tolstoy's works. Therefore the conclusions reached in this article are based wholly on a consideration of the similarities in the two novels. Of course, in novels as large as *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina* similarities are bound to occur which may appear to be borrowings, when in fact they may be attributable to a common pool of imagery,⁴ or treatment of similar social, economic, or political problems, or to coincidence.⁵ A case in point is

3. Tolstoy's library, letters, and late writings, however, reveal his considerable interest in the novels of George Eliot. An often-cited letter, Tolstoy's famous book list (*Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [Leningrad and Moscow, 1928-58], 66:67-68), indicates that the novels of George Eliot were of greatest significance to him between the ages of thirty-five and fifty (1863-78). Tolstoy's library at Iasnaia Poliana supports this remark (*PSS*, 54:423). Among Tolstoy's collection are *Adam Bede* (1859), *Felix Holt the Radical* (1867), *Romola* (1863), *Mill on the Floss* (1860), and *Middlemarch* (1872-74). The first three of these novels contain marginal comments by Tolstoy. All but *Middlemarch* are in English, a part of the Collection of British Authors series by the prominent Leipzig publisher, C. B. von Tauchnitz. *Middlemarch*, a Berlin edition, is probably in German. (The only Berlin edition of *Middlemarch* which at all correlates with the dates given by *PSS* is a German translation by E. Lehmann dated 1872-73.) Quite possibly Tolstoy was also familiar with Eliot in Russian translation, since her novels were held in high regard in Russia at this time and were translated almost as soon as they appeared in England. *Adam Bede*, for example, appeared in both *Russkii vestnik* and *Otechestvennye zapiski* in 1859, *Mill on the Floss* in *Ot. zap.* in 1860, and *Middlemarch* in *Ot. zap.* in January-June 1872, January-April 1873, and June-August 1873.

During the mid-1880s Tolstoy reread George Eliot; letters of the period indicate his interest in having her novels translated (*PSS*, 83:477, 64:29, 85:189). Subsequently the publishing house Posrednik was formed to pursue Tolstoy's interest in printing simplified, inexpensive editions of the classics. George Eliot was among the authors published, and Tolstoy's niece, Vera Sergeevna, translated for Posrednik *Adam Bede*, *Mill on the Floss*, and *Silas Marner*. During the last ten years of Tolstoy's life his interest in Eliot was again manifested in print. In *Krug chteniia* and similar compendia he included a number of quotations from her work—all of an abstract, didactic character (*PSS*, 41:49, 162, 491).

4. Such a confusion considerably weakens the argument of W. Gareth Jones's study, "George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and Tolstoy's Conception of *Anna Karenina*," *Modern Language Review*, 61, no. 2 (July 1966), pp. 473-81. In an otherwise interesting paper Mr. Jones concludes, primarily on the basis of similarities in hair style and facial gesture, that "the prototype for *Anna Karenina* is Hetty Sorrel." The conclusion is wholly insupportable considering the evidence offered. An examination of hair styles, facial gestures, and attire in *Adam Bede*, *Middlemarch*, and *Anna Karenina* shows a high correlation between simplicity and modesty of demeanor and hair style with virtuous women, while elaborate or especially appealing attire and coiffures are associated with attractive, sensual, coquettish women. What is operative is simply the use of hair and appearance as an archetypal symbol of womanliness and sexuality or the lack of it. In defense of Mr. Jones's association of Hetty Sorrel and *Anna Karenina*, perhaps the similarities in the climactic delirious journeys experienced by Hetty and *Anna* just before their attempted and actual suicides might provide evidence of Tolstoy's borrowing from Hetty to *Anna*.

5. The novels do overlap in several broad thematic areas—the treatment of agricultural and political reforms, political elections, the social etiquette and obligations of the landowning class, and the changing status of women in society. To these areas of shared

the similarity between Kitty (Celia) Brooke and Kitty (Katerina Aleksandrovna) Shcherbatskaia. Celia is addressed as Kitty by her sister during moments of affection. In *Anna Karenina*, Kitty is the name that most of the characters (and the narrator) use to refer to Katerina Aleksandrovna. Since the usual diminutive of Katerina is Katia, Kitty is an obvious anglicism (just as Dolly is an anglicized form of Dasha, both diminutives of Daria). Drafts of the novel indicate that Tolstoy's use of the name Kitty was deliberate from the outset.

Of greater interest than this coincidence in names are the similar functions served by the two Kittys. The Kitty in each novel marries and gives birth to a son on whom she dotes, and finds motherhood to be her happy and appropriate vocation. Both lead conventional family lives, but within this circumscribed environment they display great common sense. A certain condescension is evident in the authors' treatment of the Kittys, for they are not intelligent, questing people like Dorothea and Anna. In an era of great change they lead the simple, almost predetermined lives traditionally assigned to women.

Although the two Kittys may seem cast in the same mold, it is doubtful that George Eliot's Kitty was the direct model for Tolstoy's Kitty. Tolstoy's espousal of motherhood as the ideal vocation for women is documented in such early stories as *Family Happiness* (1859). The most obvious model for Tolstoy's Kitty is Natasha in *War and Peace* (published in 1866, before *Middlemarch* was written). We know that Tolstoy borrowed from himself freely.⁶ Possibly he took the name Kitty from *Middlemarch*, but this remains conjectural.

Kitty Chetham and Kitty Levin are foils to the major heroines, Dorothea and Anna, who seek their happiness outside the family unit and whose behavior reflects a departure from the accepted social code. In both characters this independence is highlighted by a metaphor of eye affliction. Dorothea has myopia and Anna develops a squint. Dorothea's nearsightedness is mentioned frequently in *Middlemarch* (she herself says in chapter 3, "I am rather short-sighted")⁷ especially by Celia whose comments help to accentuate its implications. Celia sees Reverend Casaubon's "two white moles with hairs on them,"

experience in the novel must be added the fashionableness of things English in Russia at the time—horse racing, yachting, the English clubs, English hired help, and English inventions. All of these phenomena find expression in *Anna Karenina*. In *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina*, then, there is a record of the process of political and social evolution—which in itself provides a source for much that is common in the novels.

6. I have discussed this in my unpublished M.A. essay (Columbia University, 1968), "The Ideal Woman in Tolstoy," pp. 47–50.

7. The edition of *Middlemarch* used is *Novels of George Eliot*, vols. 5–7 (New York, 1878). References are to chapters.

but Dorothea sees a man of “great soul” (chap. 2). Dorothea’s affliction is mentioned in a number of instances:

[Celia:] “Everyone can see that Sir James is very much in love with you. . . . I thought it right to tell you because you went on as you always do, never looking just where you are, and treading in the wrong places. You always see what nobody else sees; . . . yet you never see what is quite plain.” (chap. 4)

Of lower experience such as plays a great part in the world, Mrs. Casaubon had a very blurred, shortsighted knowledge, little helped by her imagination. (chap. 76)

Anna develops a peculiar eye movement beginning in part 6, when Dolly visits Vronsky’s estate. The verb *soshchurit’sia* (the more common form is *prishchurit’sia*) occurs several times, in each instance related to a problem that Anna cannot face:

“She [Annie] hasn’t got a name. I mean she’s a Karenin,” said Anna, and she squinted till only the meeting eyelashes could be seen. “However,” and her face brightened suddenly, “we’ll talk about it all later.” (6:19)

“After all, you know I have seen him—Seryozha, I mean,” said Anna, squinting as if peering intently at something far off. “However, we’ll talk about it later.” (6:19)

Dolly interprets this squinting gesture and makes the metaphor explicit:

She suddenly thought of Anna’s new habit of squinting. And she recalled that Anna squinted just when the most intimate aspects of her life were affected. “As if she were squinting at her whole life so as not to see it all,” thought Dolly. (6:21)

When the verb “squinting” recurs during Levin’s visit to Anna (7:10), it betrays the distress Anna is experiencing, though otherwise she is composed and gracious. Before her suicide Anna squints again, and this time she is so distraught that her only response to a question by Dolly is a squint (7:28).

The metaphor of eye affliction suggests a dilemma shared by Dorothea and Anna. Dorothea marries a man considerably older than she is, despite the objections of her family. Anna forsakes her family to run off with Vronsky and is censured. The two women are deceived in their search for happiness and have difficulty in adjusting their illusions of fulfillment to reality. But the similarities between Dorothea and Anna end there. Dorothea’s myopia and Anna’s squint are physically different, and ultimately the metaphors serve rather to differentiate the characters. Dorothea, with her pure-minded

idealism, is unaware of all that is gross and vulgar in life, and she always thinks people better than they are. There is a positive aspect to Dorothea's perceptual myopia, for the absence of a pragmatic perspective makes Dorothea a warmer, more charitable person. But Anna's eye trouble is not innate, nor does it contain redeeming features. With her squinting gestures Anna wishes to avoid focusing on her problems; she is only too aware of her misconduct. The squint becomes an inner moral wince of self-condemnation, but it also suggests a deliberate refusal to look for any alternative course of behavior.

The motif of philanthropy—specifically the construction of a hospital—is another theme present in both novels. Vronsky devotes a great deal of time to overseeing the design and construction of a modern hospital on his estate, and he is paying for the entire project. Like Dorothea, who during empty moments of her life donates money to New Hospital, Vronsky takes up charity work to expend his energy. Vronsky and Dr. Lydgate are both victims of their own excess; neither New Hospital nor the one Vronsky is constructing will be of any practical benefit to the neighborhood. Lydgate proposes a hospital only for fever cases, where he may conduct theoretical research, but we learn of no fever in Middlemarch. Vronsky's hospital will not treat maternity patients or infectious diseases, but the doctor's quarters will have parquet floors and the hospital facilities will include the most modern equipment from abroad. We never read of the completion of either hospital; presumably all the money and labor have been wasted.

Book writing is another activity the novels have in common. Several characters in *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina* write books. Reverend Casaubon's work in progress, *Key to All Mythologies*, is the most important one and is the pattern for the entire motif in *Middlemarch*. The *Key* consumes Casaubon's life, yet it hardly merits the sacrifice. Research for the book physically exhausts him and deprives him of warmth and sensitivity toward other people; consequently he becomes a "lifeless embalment of knowledge" (chap. 20) and hastens his own death. Casaubon's book is a familiar topic of jest to Middlemarchers, and they censure his marriage plans by mimicking his pedantry:

"Somebody put a drop [of Casaubon's blood] under a magnifying-glass, and it was all semicolons and parentheses," said Mrs. Cadwallader. . . . "He dreams footnotes, and they run away with all of his brains. They say, when he was a little boy, he made an abstract of 'Hop o' my Thumb,' and he has been making abstracts ever since." (chap. 8)

For the sake of a sustained comparison, one might be tempted to search for a book in progress among Karenin's numerous governmental reports, because Karenin and Casaubon are similar in so many other ways. Each lives a pas-

sionless life, governed by intellect, precision, and formality. Each man avoids direct confrontation with his emotions and problems—in short, with life itself—by burying himself in work and encasing himself within the walls of his study. Both are considerably older than their wives, who sooner (Anna) or later (Dorothea) turn to younger, more vibrant and physical men to satisfy their emotional needs. But Karenin does not write a book nor can his work be placed entirely in the same category with Casaubon's research. Karenin is an efficient administrator who introduces several practical and progressive reforms within his department. He loves his wife with far greater feeling than Casaubon, with his "exceedingly shallow rill" (chap. 7). In these distinctions between Karenin and Casaubon, Tolstoy is more successful than Eliot in creating a balance of sympathies in characterization. Eliot tries to mellow the character of Casaubon, typically in long narrative sections, but these sympathetic addenda are far less effective than her imagery, which works against a favorable evaluation of him.

Although Karenin does not write a book, there is a counterpart for Casaubon's *Key* in Golenishchev's *Two Principles*. Golenishchev, like Casaubon, assumes that scholarly research will provide him with the knowledge and wisdom to write a book of great significance:

I'm writing the second part of *Two Principles*. . . . That is, to be exact, I'm not writing yet but preparing and collecting material. The book will be much more comprehensive and will touch upon almost all problems. We in Russia don't want to understand that we are the heirs of Byzantium. (5:7)

In book 7 of *Anna Karenina* the motif of arid, pretentious scholarship is repeated. Koznyshev publishes *A Survey of the Foundations and Forms of Government in Russia*, the result of six years' labor, a book that has cost him his youth and possibly the emotional equipment needed to propose to Varenka. Koznyshev expects the publication of his book to create a serious impression in learned societies, but far from creating a furor, the book is greeted only by a witless, misinformed review.

A different kind of book writing is undertaken by Fred Vincy. His work, *Cultivation of Green Crops and the Economy of Cattle Feeding*, based on his own experiences as a farmer, is an amusing coda to his quest to become a self-reliant man, worthy of Mary Garth's love. (The book is also the means Eliot uses to conclude the lesser plot of Fred and Mary. Fred's book, which Middlemarchers believe Mary wrote, and Mary's book, which is generally attributed to Fred, serve to reveal the compatibility which Fred and Mary enjoy in their marriage.)

Levin tries several times to write a book on agriculture and the farm laborer, but the task eludes him. He can never remain confident of an idea long

enough to make a book of it. His quest in life has no end, and at the close of the novel he no longer attempts to write his book (an act assuming knowledge) but seeks guidance in “Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, the philosophers who explain life other than materialistically” (8:9).

One more set of books may be mentioned together. Mary Garth writes a small book, *Stories of Great Men, Taken from Plutarch*, for her three sons (the first mention that she has children) and has it published locally. A modest book completes and complements her modest life. Anna Karenina is also writing a book for children just before her death. There is an obvious misplacement of priorities in Anna’s decision to write a book. “She’s busy, but not exactly with her children,” says Stiva.

“I think she’s bringing up her daughter splendidly, but one doesn’t hear anything about her. She’s busy, first of all, with her writing.” (7:9)

Anna’s book is an ironic comment on her failure to care for her own children. She has left Seryozha and neglects Annie, yet she has adopted a child and supports and tutors the family of Vronsky’s trainer.

The motif of book writing in *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina* objectifies the strivings of each character. Only one of the writers has had a book published previously, and none depends upon writing for a livelihood. Obviously their motives for writing are more personal. The book motif is a clever, shorthand notation that shows something significant about a character; the associations and implications are left primarily to the reader. This is less true of Casaubon’s book (about which there is ample commentary by Eliot), and in general impersonal narration is more characteristic of *Anna Karenina*.

The most striking similarities in the novels occur when the honeymooning couples—Casaubon and Dorothea, Vronsky and Anna—vacation in Italy. The period of adjustment proves difficult for each couple, and they cannot sustain themselves unaided. Consequently a third person becomes a conspicuous addition to the wedding party—Dorothea rejoices in Ladislav’s companionship, and Golenishchev relieves the tedium Vronsky feels. Italy serves as the backdrop for discussions of art and artists. Ladislav and Vronsky pass the time in painting. Their imitative efforts are juxtaposed against the work of the professional artists, Naumann and Mikhailov. The artists’ studios are visited, and Casaubon, Dorothea, and Anna have their portraits done. A most significant feature in both Italian episodes is that they combine two fairly common, but unrelated, literary situations—honeymooning on the continent (especially Italy), and art and the artist discussed in a classical setting.

The correlation between these events and attitudes is unusually close, but Tolstoy treats the theme of art somewhat differently than Eliot does. In *Middlemarch* art serves to reveal character. In Brooke’s eclectic art collection

we get a glimpse of his dilettantism. In Casaubon's dry appraisal of Raphael we have one more instance of his arid nature. More important, art frames the encounters of Will and Dorothea in Italy and elsewhere in the novel. Their meetings are often initiated by a discussion of art, though art itself is not a theme. There is no deliberate treatment of aesthetics by Eliot except as it relates to the understanding of her characters. In *Anna Karenina*, art also reveals character; the reactions of Anna, Vronsky, and Golenishchev to Mikhailov's portrait of Christ are systematically delineated. Of greater interest, however, is the considerable space in the novel devoted to Mikhailov himself. In Mikhailov, Tolstoy develops his own notions on the nature of the creative process, art as a revealer of truth, and the morality of art—all of which far exceed plot exigencies.

The comparisons offered do not exhaust the subject, but the kinds of similarities I have cited permit a few tentative conclusions. The unusually close parallels in the plotting of the Italian episodes alone seem to me to be persuasive evidence of borrowing by Tolstoy from Eliot. Furthermore, there are similarities between the characters (Dorothea–Anna, Casaubon–Karenin, Ladislav–Vronsky) and in their relationships to each other to attest the influence of *Middlemarch* on *Anna Karenina*.

Overall, the specific material apparently borrowed seems less significant than the way it is used by Tolstoy. He avoids an overtly proselytizing narration in *Anna Karenina* by injecting his moral lessons into the actions of his characters and the objects that surround them. Tolstoy borrows from *Middlemarch* certain succinct moments of moral objectification—images which telescope a complex situation, and details which by revealing a character through his own actions provide a self-contained evaluation (often ironic) of these actions. This is clearly illustrated in the book-writing motif. The subject a character chooses to write about and the success or failure of his undertaking afford a more general commentary on his life. The books in *Middlemarch* have direct counterparts in *Anna Karenina*. Casaubon's *Key* is parodied in Golenishchev's *Two Principles* and (with greater poignancy) in Koznyshev's *Survey*. Fred's book on agriculture, apparently written with little expenditure of effort, finds its tragic opposite in Levin's inability to write or to hold on to any concept of truth. Mary's book for her three sons is echoed with considerable irony in Anna's book for children, the writing of which keeps her from her children. Another example of an image which objectifies a larger issue is New Hospital and its equivalent on Vronsky's estate. These unfinished projects are symptoms of the failure to find a vocation, or to find peace of mind and self-fulfillment.

The similar motifs found in *Middlemarch* and *Anna Karenina* work, in both novels, to create a moral bias which appears to exist apart from the author-narrator. If we sense a greater objectivity or impersonality in *Anna*

Karenina, it is not because Tolstoy is less of a moralist than Eliot; rather he has been more successful in constructing a self-effacing narrative and in hiding behind his imagery.

To what degree these borrowings are conscious cannot be determined. The simplest explanation would be that Tolstoy read and absorbed *Middlemarch* shortly before or during the composition of *Anna Karenina*, since we can see so many signs of his familiarity with Eliot's novel in *Anna Karenina*. However, *Middlemarch* does not constitute a major influence on Tolstoy's novel; we are not dealing with a literary relationship of the scope of *Middlemarch* and Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*. Though *Anna Karenina* has numerous sources in English, French, and Russian novels, the importance of *Middlemarch* to Tolstoy should not be discounted. In studying Tolstoy's art it is as important to understand the nature of a borrowing and the way in which he used a particular source as it is to determine the extent of the borrowing.

English critics have placed the best of George Eliot *almost* on a par with Tolstoy. Walter Allen writes: "Yet, though the comparison with Tolstoy and the praise it implies are just, it needs great qualification if it is to make complete sense. One may compare George Eliot to Tolstoy—one would never dream of comparing Tolstoy to George Eliot; for there are whole vast ranges of human experience that Tolstoy has which are not to be found in George Eliot at all."⁸ Such qualified praise should not obscure the possibilities of Tolstoy's debt to George Eliot. A study of the entire Eliot-Tolstoy relationship, especially one relying on Tolstoy's annotated copies of Eliot's novels, may help to provide the answer.

8. Walter Allen, *George Eliot* (New York, 1964), p. 184.