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Anna Karenina (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

One of the greatest novels ever written, *Anna Karenina* sets the impossible and destructive triangle of Anna, her husband Karenin, and her lover Vronsky against the marriage of Levin and Kitty, thus illuminating the most important questions that face humanity. The second edition uses the acclaimed Louise and Alymer Maude translation, and offers a new introduction and notes which provide completely up-to-date perspectives on Tolstoy's classic work. About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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Customer Reviews

Tolstoy's classic *Anna Karenina* is a masterpiece. If I were stranded on a desert isle, this is one of the books I would want with me. The story is essentially about a woman who leaves her husband for another man, only to come to a tragic end. Yet the main character is not really Anna, but Kostya Levin, almost the antithesis of Anna. And it is this polarization of characters that is one of the sublime features of this novel. The characters themselves are especially an element that engrossed me. While there are a dizzying number of personalities, each lives "outside" of the story as well as within it - that is to say, even the most minor of characters seems to have a life of their own, only

dropping in the story to play a small part before going on about their business. Each character has depth - they are much more than caricatures of "good" and "evil", showing their humanity in their follies and in their decisions - for both good and evil. Tolstoy has an alternative motive in Anna Karenina, though. The story has a barely perceptible religious tone to it, Tolstoy makes a moral statement about how life should be lived, and what a person's role in life should be in order to be "truly happy". This is the result of an epiphany that Tolstoy experienced while writing the novel - an event that changed his life and eventually estranged him from many of his children. The only problem I foresee readers having is keeping characters straight (as this translation uses names as well as patronymics - meaning "the son / daughter of" as in Stepan Arkadyvitch: Stepan, son of Arkady). Individuals are referred to by name, patronymic or sometimes nickname (Kostya for Konstantin for example).

This review is for the Wordsworth Classics edition, translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude (there seems to be some confusion as reviews of different editions are appearing under the same listing). This is the only version I've read so far. To enter into the sometimes controversial "Great Books" issue, I think it's good to read books that rank highly on these lists no matter how you feel about such systems of classification. That way, you can form your own opinions about what constitutes greatness and also perhaps learn how greatness is defined culturally. As I see it, most "Great Books" really are great; yet there is also a certain element of arbitrariness that places some books and novelists on the literary Mount Olympus. Tolstoy, along with a very few others such as Shakespeare, is often placed at the very top of such lists. While I don't worship Tolstoy (or Shakespeare for that matter), and have reservations about this whole Great Books mindset, this doesn't mean I can't appreciate a book like Anna Karenina as a "merely" great novel. Anna Karenina can be seen as a study of 19th Century Russian society. In this way, it is comparable to some of Jane Austen's work, as well as *The Age of Innocence*, by Edith Wharton. Tolstoy, however, goes deeper than merely reflecting social mores and their often tragic consequences. There are some truly profound passages in Anna Karenina that explore the fundamental questions of life. Many characters -- Levin, Vronsky, Anna and even Anna's apparently superficial husband Karenin, fall into what might be called existentialist crises. Levin in particular is constantly struggling with the issue of materialism vs. religious faith. The black despair Anna experiences late in the novel is beautifully and tragically described.

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