

Title: Anna's Peasant as a Mirror of Tolstoy's Evolution
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Anna Karenina's terrifying visions of the French-speaking peasant have been interpreted in psychoanalytical, religious and moral, and mythical terms (Barran, Browning, Gustafson, Lonnqvist, Nabokov, Wasiolek). A sociologically and biographically-oriented hermeneutics can reveal another aspect of the "peasant dreams" in Anna Karenina. The incongruous figure of the francophone muzhik represents a crucial juncture in the "labyrinth of linkages" within the architecture of the novel whose content reflects Tolstoy's growing anxiety over the problems of social injustice in Russia (Lenin). The peasant is central to Levin's story: he commands Levin's attention as much as Kitty and God. Levin's unfinished treatise on Russian agriculture is focused on the role of the peasant in the new, postserf, economy. Levin's own appearance has uncanny resemblance to the peasant in Anna's dreams: Levin is bearded, fond of simple clothing (Oblonsky's doorman doesn't allow him to enter Stiva's office), and is in habit of fidgeting with his muscular hands; he is also fluent in French and, like his peasants, is mistrustful of the technological innovations. The last item—the rejection, often through wrecking, of the new machinery at Pokrovskoye—resonate with the admonition of the peasant in the dream: the iron must be "beaten" and "pulverized." The Marxist ideas of the destruction and reappropriation of the means of production are delivered by Konstantin Levin's brother Nikolai, whose function in the novel is also analogous to that of the peasant in Anna's nightmare: both Nikolai and the peasant terrorize their corresponding protagonists by invading their private spaces, disturbing their worlds with the image of a rebellious peasant, and embodying a message of an impending violent end, not only of an individual death, but foreshadowing annihilation of an entire social class.

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