

Title: *Anna Karenina: Railroading Madame Bovary*  
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Nikolai Leskov's short story "Zhemchuzhnoe ozherel'e" (1885) opens with the narrator correlating the spread of the railroad in Russia with the lamentable meagerness of "plot [fabula]" in contemporary Russian literature: "The perceived literary poverty first of all was related to the spread of railroads, which are...harmful to literary fiction" (Leskov, 3). Because trains travel so quickly, passengers have no time to form any strong impressions and avoid many of the unpleasanties afforded by carriage rides, such as rude coachmen and dodgy innkeepers, encounters which were potentially sources for narratives. As Leskov's tale raises questions about the relationship between railroads and plot, this paper is concerned with how literary representations of the railways reflect metaliterary concerns with plot in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* [AK], in which the train functions as a metaliterary symbol of the conventional plot with its beginning-middle-end structure.

The novel's well-established intertextual relationship with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is also inter-meta-textual, for Anna's Bovaryism—the desire to live life according to a previously read novel—is associated with the railways. Tolstoy contrasts the linearity of railway travel with other modes of transportation—walking and carriage-riding—to represent more open-ended possibilities. This paper juxtaposes episodes in which Anna, Dolly, and Levin are in transit between two places. During these scenes, Tolstoy details how Anna internalizes memories and impressions according to the plots already read, whereas similar reflections made by Dolly and Levin shape themselves into seemingly haphazardly constructed plots corresponding to the more open-ended nature of carriage rides and walks. The associations between different modes of transportation and different types of plots suggest a self-consciousness about plot, its function, and limitations. This reading underscores Tolstoy's preference for organic plots over teleological ones, promoting open-ended movement toward a clearer understanding of life.

Leskov, Nikolai. "Zhemchuzhnoe ozherel'e." *Sobranie sochinenii: v piati tomakh*. Moscow: Pravda, 1981.