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Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

This will not, perhaps, be very helpful to you, future reader, to hear but: in my humble opinion, there is no way to *learn* to like Tolstoy. There's no process of adjustment, no method of accustoming oneself to the prose, the descriptions, the style, the themes. It's either there within you or it's not. In

other words, if you begin "Anna Karenina" and you are not immediately swept up into the story, with its many characters, family tensions, and ornate depiction of Russian society on many levels... If you are ten chapters in and going forward on pure stubbornness... Put the book down. Walk away. This is not for you. For example: I read in an earlier review that the reader was "bored" by Levin's description of working in the fields with the peasants on his estate. Personally, I find that to be one of the most compelling passages in the entire book. I'm not right while the other reader is wrong, but I will say this: it's a matter of taste. If you are not engrossed by the complexities of this vast and entrenched society, if you do not feel sympathy for Levin, or feel drawn to Anna, or understand the attraction of Vronsky, then do not torture yourself, and move on. If you're staying, though -- Anna remains, I believe, one of the most interesting protagonists in literature, and precisely because while the reader is almost unwillingly forced to sympathize with her feelings, it is similarly impossible to remove the stigma of blame from her, watching the wreck she makes of her life. Her transformation from the alluring and enchanting woman who so impresses young Kitty, to the sad and scorned woman that Vronsky himself no longer truly loves, in the end, is all of her own doing -- but who among us can say we would have successfully avoided all of her misjudgments?

According to Tolstoy, the genesis of Anna Karenina was derived from three specific events: (1) An idea for a story Tolstoy developed in 1870 about a woman who deserts her husband for another man, based, in part, on the life of his sister, Marya; (2) a newspaper story concerning the mistress of one of Tolstoy's neighbors, who, feeling only despair at being abandoned by her lover, hurled herself under a train; and (3) a sentence from Pushkin's Tales of the Balkins ("The guests were arriving at the country house..."), that Tolstoy read by chance one day in 1873. Supposedly, this sentence from Pushkin fueled Tolstoy's imagination to such a degree that he completed a first draft of Anna Karenina in only three weeks. A novel about the meaning of life and the role happiness does or does not play in it, Anna Karenina is the story of a married woman's adulterous affair with Count Vronsky. As foreshadowed in the book's early pages, the affair ends tragically, for both Anna and Vronsky. The novel (which Tolstoy's contemporary, Dostoyevsky, considered "a perfect work of art"), also tells the story of Constantine Levin, a gentleman farmer whose lifelong pursuit of happiness and fulfillment culminates, not in his long-awaited marriage to Kitty Shcherbatskaya, but with the advice of a simple peasant about "living rightly, in God's way." From a few simple, yet melodramatic events (and the depths of a dizzyingly fecund imagination), Tolstoy fashioned a beautiful, profound and enduring novel dealing with stark questions of both life and religious faith as seen through the eyes of the farmer, Levin.

While the format on Kindle2 is not perfect, it's good enough to read easily and for those that like the text-to-speech function, you can listen to it. I can't believe I've not read this before and having it available free for the Kindle spurred me into doing just that. Tolstoy is such a great master. I read once that he worked on each paragraph until it was perfect, then moved on to the next and when he got to the end, the book was finished--no editing. Amazing. Since I don't read Russian I won't get to appreciate that and the translation isn't quite so clean, but still his prose is generally so clear and crisp, it's easy to get lost in the story and spend longer reading than you intended. I truly felt drawn into the Russian society life and could picture the scenes in my mind. I appreciated Tolstoy's ability to verbalize thoughts and emotions from a character's expression or tone of voice, a real skill. It's important to note, however, that this is not as easy reading as many modern works partly because of the more stilted writing style of the period and elaborate detail and partly because of the Russian names and ways of expressing things. Each character seemed to have half a dozen name references, formal, nicknames, etc. and being unfamiliar with the Russian culture, that presented a bit of a challenge to me at first. Still the characters are so vividly portrayed eventually I got the hang of it. There is no table of contents, but I find that less of an issue in a fiction work that I intend to read straight through. Some paragraphs are split with a line left unfilled and the next not indented, probably a result of its conversion to ebook format, and I found some oddities I expect were typos.

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