
Liza Knapp and Amy Mandelker, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Tolstoy's Anna Karenina*. NY: Modern Language Association, 2003. 226p.

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The fact that the seventy-eighth volume of the *MLA Approaches to Teaching* is dedicated to a work from Russian literature is an amazing factor in itself: the Slavic field is finally emerging from its isolationism! The editors of this volume have done a terrific job of gathering together some of the best names in the field and sharing with the readers their collective knowledge and expertise.

As one of Tolstoy's most popular and widely taught works, *Anna Karenina* is an excellent choice for inclusion in the *MLA Approaches to Teaching* series. Materials from this volume are suitable for graduate seminars, thematically organized undergraduate courses, general surveys, or comparative literature courses.

Like the other volumes in the *MLA Approaches to Teaching* series, this one consists of two parts: Materials and Approaches. The former includes Russian editions, English translations, and suggestions for further reading. The information on Russian editions is useful primarily for graduate students and general scholarly purposes. The section on English translations compares and analyzes the advantages as well as the shortcomings of each. It provides information on the cost, and even gives insights into the topography of a book (narrow margins!). There is also a list of references and secondary readings useful in teaching *Anna Karenina*. What is lacking, perhaps, is a list of online resources for undergraduates, or at least a suggestion for the uses of the Internet.

The Approaches section is divided into three parts: *Anna Karenina* in Tolstoy's Life, Thought, and Times, *Anna Karenina* in the Literary Traditions of Russia and the West, and Classroom Approaches to *Anna Karenina*. The first part takes more traditional approaches to the novel, such as biographical (Gary Jahn), historical (William M. Todd III, Murav), philosophical (Morson and Orwin), and ideological, Marxist (Kashuba and Dareshuri) and feminist (Goscilo). Perhaps the most useful in *teaching* the novel would be William M. Todd's suggestion of planning the reading assignments to coincide with the installment breaks. Then the students will experience the same suspense and surprise as Tolstoy's contemporaries. Harriet Murav's historical information on Russian divorce law and imperial marriage will help instructors answer the perennial question of American undergraduates reading the novel: why won't she just divorce him and get on with her life?

The second part of the Approaches section shifts its focus from ethical, philosophical and historical issues to the questions of aesthetics, of artistic form and

genre. Emerson questions the Bakhtinian distinction of Tolstoy “monologic” or absolute discourse and Dostoevsky’s polyphonic discourse. Armstrong and Evdokimova discuss the generic features of the novel. While considering *Anna Karenina* within the context of the European novel of adultery Armstrong emphasizes the deviation from the norms of the genre, and Evdokimova places the Levin’s plot within a hybrid genre of novelized Platonic dialogues on the nature and essence of love. Julie Buckler’s essay continues the common theme of this part of the volume which challenges the reading of the novel for moral and theme, as well as character and plot. In her view, the novel as an artistic construct stages Anna’s persona as that of opera diva, tragic heroine, melodramatic character, and even perhaps as having generic origins in farce.

The most valuable and practical information from the standpoint of teaching is contained in the Introduction and the last section of the volume, Classroom Approaches. Particularly helpful for non-Slavic specialists will be the Introduction, written by Liza Knapp. She discusses semantics and the stylistic and contextual usage of names and nicknames. She also provides background information on the myth of St. Petersburg in Russian culture and draws comparisons with other European novels.

The section called Classroom Approaches offers guidance for the choice of discussion topics, from the role of the epigraph (Holland) and the symbolism of Anna’s dreams (Barran) to the role of the portraits in the novel (Weir). This section contains practical suggestions for several assignments appropriate for the classroom, ranging from keeping a diary of reader-responses (Kovarsky, Merrill) to mind-mapping (Laurita), which is discovering how characters relate to one another, and “scavenger hunt” (Knapp)—to observe a recurrent item in the text and look for a possible pattern to emerge. (The websites listed in Laurita’s article are commercial websites requiring a subscription, and their use should have been described in a more detailed manner.) Lanoux takes on a question of relationship between content and form. She then offers a design of a course that would explore different adaptations of literary texts in film. This entry also supplies a list of films for comparative study, which is useful for those who wish to use movies in their courses on literature.

While all the contributions to this volume are valuable, some are more about critical interpretation rather than the process of actual teaching, and none reflect the new research on learning and writing. Nevertheless, the contributions to Classroom Approaches as well as to Introduction include hands-on advice and discuss successful pedagogical tactics of teaching the text. *Anna Karenina* is a welcome contribution to the *MLA Approaches to Teaching* series which provides a forum for

discussion of successful critical and pedagogical tools in the teaching of literary works. ✱