

# Anna karenina analysis essay



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Anna Karenina Leo Tolstoy's novel, Anna Karenina, upon its release received a mixed critical reception, with Russian critics either condemning or applauding the novel primarily on its views of Russian society. Thematically, the novel parallels its heroine's, Anna Karenina, moral and social conflicts with Constantin Levin's internal struggle to find the meaning of life. There are many others underlying themes which links the novel as a whole, yet many critics at the time only looked upon its critical view of Russian life. Henry James called Tolstoy's novels as "loose and baggy monsters" of stylelessness, but Tolstoy stated of Anna Karenina "..... I am very proud of its architecture—its vaults are joined so that one cannot even notice where the keystone is." That is absolutely correct, because within Anna Karenina, there exists many themes that are all linked together to create such a wonderful piece of work. Critics tend to miss the role that the theme of life and death plays in Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. Despite its apparent meanings, these two themes are intertwined in the novel and provides a backbone for some of the other existing themes. With a masterful touch, Tolstoy is able to use these two themes to show the characters in their true forms at both stages. The characters are shown to be living in a state of delusion, and as the characters find themselves at times of near death situations or on their deathbed, they are able to reveal themselves truthfully. Many of the characters in the novel are able to show their "real self" and at times of death, there is a point of reversal in the characters. This is most evident in the scene of Anna's near death experience during her illness. This event brings about a change in Karenin and even Vronsky as they trade positions. Karenin suddenly becomes human and not hidden from life by his administrative regulations. His carapace cracks, and he becomes drunk with

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sympathy, dazzled by his own generosity. Death for Karenin becomes the basic truth which makes him \_\_\_ a living human being capable of love. While on the other hand, Vronsky takes on the role of Karenin, he is unable to deal with Anna's deathbed crisis and even goes as far as attempting to suicide. This awareness of life-in-death provides the climax of the novel, with the main characters perceiving the truth from the heights of their emotional intensity. Hate and deceit no longer exist in the presence of death, and the three characters live in a moment of pure innocence. Yet as the crisis ends, and everything returns to normality, Anna, Vronsky and Karenin return to their old ways to live in that world of delusion. Anna and Vronsky continue with their ill-fated love, while Karenin despite his ennoblement, finds Anna cannot love him and reverts back to his old ways. This clearly shows that death brings about the ultimate truth of life and the world of the living is just a delusion. Death in the novel is personified by Levin's brother, the all-too-intimate Nikolai, whose lingering, ghastly death pushes Levin to make the leap of faith. This is the leap of faith which the other characters had experienced, but were unable to retain after their dramatic experience with death. Levin is unlike them, and is in fact, able to discover for himself the meaning of life in the world and retain his leap of faith. For Levin in the end, he is no longer afraid of death and even though he does not completely change, he now knows the meaning of life and is at peace. Levin's example here provides for the reader an insight into Tolstoy's intertwining and complex structure in Anna Karenina. The reader is able to better understand how the role of death is critical to the novel. Levin serves as the backbone for Tolstoy's emphasis on the "natural life" where one loves and procreates, as opposed to the "unnatural life" where one lives by abstract principles. The <https://assignbuster.com/anna-karenina-analysis-essay/>

natural man, according to Tolstoy, grasps life through all its realities and can then understand death. Intellect and spirit merely bypass essential truths. While in the world of the living, Tolstoy shows the reader the delusions of life through various characters. Especially apparent is the princess Betsy Tverskoy who is so caught up in her daily life and is unable to change. She throws extravagant dinner parties for that part of society which feasts on delusions. The irony behind it is that they, despite their disillusionment, mock Anna at one of the parties where she had shown up with her lover, Vronsky. This is in essence the downfall of Anna, who has succumbed to passion for her lover. The themes of life and death will come to review itself in the novel. As for Anna, she embodies the both of them even though she didn't know it. In the end as Anna traces the career which drives her to suicide in her long soliloquy, she discovers that her love had turned to hate, that her life has become a "stupid delusion" and death provides the only alternative. Anna now accepts death as she had spontaneously and naturally confronted her love. Anna's death is an affirmation of her deep commitment to life and that death is the final truth to her illustrious career. "And the candle by which she \_ had been reading the book filled with trouble and deceit, sorrow and evil, flared up with a brighter light, illuminating for her everything that before had been enshrouded in darkness, flickered, grew dim, and went out forever." (Tolstoy, p. 816) Tolstoy cleverly uses the themes of life and especially death beneath the other themes in an intricate structure. Tolstoy uses the themes as a vehicle to link the themes together to relate it to the readers. The theme of death is most critical to the novel, because it invokes the characters in the novel to do what they do. That fear of death and not being able to understand it, is the reason for characters'

actions. It is the backbone for the other themes of the “natural man,” love and deceit, “unhappy family,” adultery, and some other themes that exist in the novel.

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy seems to be in search of answers for his own questions through the two main characters of the novel, Anna and Levin. There are aspects of each character that can be accredited to Tolstoy himself, and this provides the reader with a chance to see the development of not only Anna and Levin, but also Tolstoy himself. Tolstoy is also afraid of death and through his character's development he is able to discover for himself. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* provides a lot of insight into our own lives. We need to look to the past to protect the future, and yet we tend to forget that. Nevertheless, Tolstoy has created a wonderful piece of literature with an intricate plot structure. As Sydney Schultze puts it, “the study of the novel's construction is rewarding because the book is so beautifully created.” With regards to the theme, I would be justified to say that it is the keystone, which Tolstoy mentioned about, of the architecture of the book. Death is an integral part of everybody's life and no matter who it is, everybody fears death. To come to terms with death is something that takes a lot of courage and a full understanding of oneself. Tolstoy in his novel, has revealed to us the effect that death can have on a person and advocates us to not succumb to the daily life of the world which we live in, because it is all a delusion. Yet if we live as naturally as possible, we can get a better grasp on the true essence of life as Levin does in the novel. He finds joy out of working and enjoying the fruits of his labor, instead of indulging himself in the materialism of the

hypocritical aristocrats. Modern culture has lost this aspect of life and we need to check ourselves before we lead our lives into a downfall.