Las cartas olvidadas de Jane Eyre and Anna Karenina
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The Lost Letters of Jane Eyre and Ana Karenina is an epistolary novel based on the fictional correspondence between two of literature's most fascinating female characters. In the prologue, the authors tell us that the novel was written in Barcelona in 2021, during the Covid lockdowns, when reading and rereading an indispensable means of dealing with life confined to the home. Divided into three sections, the novel follows the growing relationship between the characters, their differences and common concerns. Anna's letters are written from St Petersburg, Moscow, Baden Baden and Florence, plus her country estate in Russia, while Jane writes from London and Thornfield.

The first section ("Two Friends") opens with a letter from Anna to the London publishing firm Smith, Elder & Co, asking them to forward a letter to the author Charlotte Brontë, whose novel Jane Eyre has had a strong impact on her at an extremely difficult point in her life. In the letter she expresses her desperation after the suicide of her lover Andrei, the vicissitudes of her arranged marriage to her older husband Aleksei Aleksandrovich and her fear that she will be incapable of loving the child she is expecting. Only Charlotte Brontë can help her.

As Charlotte Brontë is by then dead, the letter is forwarded by the publishing house to Jane Eyre (the "real-life" person on whom the fictional character was based), now living in London with her son Andrew after the recent death of her beloved husband, Edward Rochester. Jane shows concern for Anna's predicament and hopes she will continue to write to her.

The following correspondence displays the growing friendship between the women and the contrasts in their lives. Anna is initially focused on marriage, her emotions, her search for love and the emergence of a strong maternal bond with her child after they both contract scarlet fever. Jane, for her part speaks of her new life in London, so different from the seclusion of Thornfield, and her entry into the artistic and literary society of the capital, which includes introductions to Dickens and Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot), who both become close friends. These experiences lead the women to discuss many of the ideas and disciplines current at the time, including the Pre-Raphaelite movement, paranormal phenomena and animal magnetism. While staying in the fashionable spa town of Baden Baden, Anna also undergoes hypnotism in an attempt to overcome her emotional woes.

In these letters, Jane's role is to support and advise Anna and to analyse the possible causes of her emotional instability. Anna, in turn, encourages Jane to enjoy the new freedoms her life is offering and overcome her feelings of inferiority in the relation to the literary figures who she meets. A clear sense of female solidarity emerges between them.

The second section (“Sarah’s Murder”) opens with Jane’s shocking account of the discovery of the body of her maid of all work, the seventeen-year-old Sarah, lying naked on a bed, covered in blood. Jane seeks the assistance of Lionel Braywoods—a friend of her husband, from whom she rents the London house—who calls in the police. At this point the novel considers the issue of the murders of young women in the capital and the lack of attention paid to it by the police. Jane knows that Dickens has worked to help women forced into prostitution and also asks his advice. When the police appear ready to close the case without finding the murderer, he suggests Jane (via Braywoods) consult a private detective, Stephen Carter. Anna warns Jane of the dangers of becoming too closely involved in the investigation, but also, during a spiritualism session, asks to speak to the girl who, through the medium, tells her that the culprit is an important person who is missing the tip of one finger. Anna thinks that he must be a member of the Braywoods family.

Jane confesses a growing closeness to Stephen Carter, who eventually becomes her lover at Thornfield. He suspects Lionel Braywoods of having committed the murder as he has previously been inspected for involvement in other crimes. She decides to return to Thornfield and continue with the writing and painting she has taken up in London. In the meantime, Anna has had a dalliance with a neighbour’s coachman that ends in him forcing himself on her. Jane considers this to be rape, while Anna herself insists that she found a sense of freedom in the act, saying that she had eventually given herself freely to the man. Braywoods is finally convicted of another attempted murder, causing a great scandal in London society.

“Love Comes”, the final section of the novel, finds Anna in St Petersburg, where she has met and fallen instantly in love with Vronsky. Their affair causes a scandal, although it is Anna rather than Vronsky who bears the brunt of the censure, so making clear the contradictory values related to a woman’s conduct in society. Jane urges Anna to seek a divorce from her husband; at the same time, after a great deal of deliberation, she has agreed to marry Stephen Carter. As in the novel, Anna and Vronsky travel abroad but Anna finds herself shunned while Vronsky is welcomed everywhere. Her isolation only exacerbates her jealous concerns that he may leave her for another woman.

While renovating Stephen’s London house to accommodate their needs, Jane receives news of Dickens’s death. Having heard nothing from Anna for some time, she writes what seems a farewell letter and thanks her for her friendship. Some time later, she receives a letter from Vronsky, informing her of Anna’s death in a train accident.

In a letter dated a year after this event, Leo Tolstoy informs Jane that Vronsky has given him custody of her letters; he was moved by their friendship and comments on her concern for social justice. He tells her that Anna’s death was in fact suicide and that he has now finished the novelistic version of her life, which he hopes to send to Jane. Jane’s final letter emphasises the importance of the friendship, which had been a form of refuge for them both.

The Lost Letters of Jane Eyre and Ana Karenina is a novel that I am sure will fascinate lovers of these novels. The characters of the two women are well drawn, and show insight into their psychology. The projection of the future Jane is coherent with previous actions and attitudes and Anna gains depth in her representation. The writing style is clear and this book is obviously well researched, with references to events, social movements and ideas of the time. The focus on social injustice, particularly in relation to the dual values that oppress women, reflects similar concerns in contemporary life and although, in the first section, Anna’s views of poverty and social position in Russia might now seem somewhat crass, as she and the friendship mature, these become more nuanced.

As a deeply felt tribute to female friendship and the mutual support and an intelligent discussion or the social mores of the day, many of which are still relevant over a century later, I feel the novel

would find an appreciative readership in English and, given that it is based on such well-known books, should offer few problems in terms of translation.