

The Whole World of Tolstoy

“Tolstoy—he’s a whole world...”

M. Gorky

L.N. Tolstoy in the Twenty-First Century and the Academic Complete Edition in One-Hundred Volumes

Editor’s Note: This paper by A.V. Gulin was presented on October 16 at a forum on Tolstoy in the Public Sphere at the International Symposium “Tolstoy in the Twenty-First Century” at the New School.

Preparation for publication of the Academic Complete Edition of Lev Tolstoy’s Works is underway at the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMLI RAN). Because some of these works will turn out to be too extensive for publication, it is expected that the edition will number 120 volumes. Seven volumes have been published to-date.

The new edition is divided into five series: Artistic Works; Redactions and Variants; Pamphlets and Literary-Critical, Pedagogical, and Religious-Philosophical Writings; Diaries and Day Journals; and Letters and Paperwork.

The chief initiator and longtime leader of this project was Lydia Dmitrievna Gromova-Opulskaya. She was the heart and soul of the initiative, the Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, an outstanding textology specialist, and a well-known expert on Tolstoy’s art. She oversaw all the work during the period of preparation, and the first volumes came out during her lifetime. Four were prepared almost exclusively by her. Without her intensive editorial work, other volumes would not have been possible.

For those who undertook preparation for the new print edition, life has not been easy. During the nineties, scholarship in our country—and in the humanities most of all—experienced great hardship. After the passing of Lydia Dmitrievna

and of several other staff members of the older generation, hard times befell our edition. But we continued preparing new volumes nonetheless; we were gaining experience, and we started inviting younger scholars to work on the edition. We very much hope that two new, finished volumes will soon see the light of day, and that more will follow.

Naturally, representatives of scholarly institutions other than IMLI RAN have participated in the production of this new edition. We have received help from the staff of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), the Russian Academy of Sciences, and the faculty of the State Pedagogical Institute in Moscow. Our work would be unthinkable without our close collaboration with the State Museum of L.N. Tolstoy in Moscow, and the Museum-Estate Yasnaya Polyana.

But do we really need this edition? Is our project not too ambitious? Perhaps our intent to publish the academic edition of Tolstoy for the first time seems outdated, and looks backwards rather than forwards? Perhaps, in the midst of our ever-changing world, Tolstoy and other literary classics are simply relics of a time past?

It is true that one can sometimes get the impression that Russia, as well as the world in general, has changed more in the past two or three decades than in the past two millennia. Undoubtedly, this is an exaggeration—but not an outlandish one. The current age of revolutionary technologies is always changing, often threatening to alter everything in every aspect of one’s life; such changes can put generational heritage at risk, and can make for an often unpredictable tomorrow. We notice this especially in Russia, where we seem to be experiencing change more acutely, perhaps as a result of our specific scholarly and literary history.

The above predicament threatens the livelihood of Russian classics and applies especially to the contemporary literary realities in the country. It is well known that Russian cultural life has traditionally strong ties to the word and has been a bookish country for centuries. Even Russian music and pictorial arts—as well as cinema in the twentieth century—developed under the powerful influence of literature, the “mother-art-form” in our country.

But the Russian world today seems eager to let go of its literature-centered culture. Its main treasure, the word, is undergoing a precipitous devaluation. Only some forty or fifty years ago, the voice of the writer—be it Mikhail Sholokhov, Leonid Leonov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Yury Trifonov, Valentin Rasputin, or Vasily Bykov—could command universal attention and was considered to be prophetic. Their voices were heeded and much anticipated, though, truth be told, not all anticipations proved worthwhile. Yet this is how things have been since the times of our legendary bard, Boyan.

Today, the true writer is barely heard in Russia. Publication runs are minimal not only for the contemporaries, but for classics as well. Literature is about to disappear as the central subject of school curriculum. It is rapidly changing from being our national and universal human cause to being classified as an elitist hobby for connoisseurs. This situation is thus: If you enjoy the violin, go to the Philharmonic, and if you like reading, well, go ahead, crack your book open. Everyone has something they like to do, but others may very well do without it.

As far as whether or not this movement is inevitable—whether this is a disease we will need to survive—only time will tell.

And yet it is under these precise conditions that we are publishing the first complete edition of Tolstoy.

We are driven neither by some blind adherence to the past, nor by a professional egoism; rather, we

are driven by a strong conviction that what we have begun is in fact up-to-date and necessary. Being responsible and sensible human beings, we are convinced of this: Russian and world literary classics are not mere trinkets or toys for snobs, but as in the past, embody some of the most powerful forces active in the world—and forward-looking forces, too. Without literature’s vigorous aesthetic, ethical and philosophical charge, humanity is doomed to undergo a profound degradation.

As a matter of fact, I recall something I recently read in a school composition book belonging to a particular young man, who wrote, “It is often said that our generation is degrading, but in my opinion we are degrading for the better.” Let’s try to avoid thinking that degradation is our ideal.

But is Tolstoy in particular relevant enough today to dedicate one’s life to his study and publication? A rhetorical, but hardly idle question. For example, one often hears complaints that *War and Peace* (still an obligatory item in school curricula) is wasted on contemporary students. It seems fair to add that the young people who read *War and Peace* in school are not few in number. Is it perhaps true that the time has come for only abridged, less wordy editions of the classics? Perhaps when it comes to the literature of centuries past, our contemporaries most value levity and brevity of expression? In Russia, too, they have started to publish digests of *War and Peace*. Could it be that artistic thoughts and images created by Tolstoy, so precious to the older generation, belong to a rich but departing era in the history of humankind?

That same question may be applied to the ideological and religious debates during the life of our writer, whose creativity often conflicted with the existing ideologies of his time. Tolstoy’s particular dissimilitude, his resistance to any ideology, and his enormous lack of compromise highlight one of the prevailing polemics of his lifetime, towards which both sides were bitter, and which persisted throughout the twentieth century. It is generally known that representatives of all religions, without

exception, all artistic movements, philosophical schools, and political parties, debated contemporary culture, and that Tolstoy was seen as both an appeaser and an inconvenient, confrontational figure. He was someone who combined, incomprehensibly but all at once, tradition and revolution, realism and utopianism, triumph and defeat. How much of this complexity does a contemporary man need? Is Tolstoy's time up, gone with the tempests of the past century? Can humanity have grown tired of Tolstoy, with all of his entanglements and paradoxes? Isn't it easier to just be content with a pleasant, conflict-free myth about Tolstoy—our great old sage—and turn his paradoxes into simple anecdote and be done with it? This is how it seems to play out in mass consciousness.

Nonetheless, we are publishing, and intend to continue publishing, the *Complete Works of Tolstoy*.

We continue because of the artistic perfection of his works, precisely as they were written by the pen of this Russian genius, and which cannot leave a single living human heart indifferent. Because of his attitude towards the universality of life, unique in its power, Tolstoy, despite all issues, still makes more and more new readers “laugh and cry, and fall in love with life...in its countless, never exhaustible manifestations,” just as his work did more than one hundred years ago.

Really there's nothing new that I can say here. So far as Tolstoy's ideology goes, you just can't escape it. Whether we like it or not, and whether or not we are conscious of it, we still reside in Tolstoy's epoch.

For the Russian world, Pushkin's thoughts on Russia, and humanity in general, are forever contemporary. For us, the epoch of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, and other great writers is not over. But Tolstoy is arguably the most historical of all literary personalities in the past two centuries, and not only in Russia, but the world, where he still very much lives on. He expresses, in his work and in his very being, the most complex and forward-moving

processes. He is as complex as our contemporary realities because he is at the apex of this reality's original source. His ability to “capture” the dilemmas within his own time, and to also see them from without, is astounding. And for everyone, whoever would enter the argument, and irrespective of one's personal opinion, the questions of Tolstoy's time become poignant in contemporary times, relevant to the here and now.

But why would we need a new complete edition if we already have the ninety-volume Jubilee edition, in addition to other multivolume editions, and the innumerable other compilations of Tolstoy's individual works?

As strange as it may seem, much of what was written by Tolstoy has not been published. It is therefore true, in some respects that our conception of Tolstoy is not authentic. Even though the Jubilee edition is called “Complete,” it is not. Still, this ninety-volume set is remarkable in many respects. Its importance to Tolstoy scholarship, and to the development of textology as a subfield of literary studies, was and remains immense. Not a single researcher focusing on Tolstoy, including ourselves, who are currently busy preparing a new edition, can do without the Jubilee edition. We are by no means in a competition. We, as much as is in our power, hope to continue the efforts of those who have published Tolstoy editions before us. But it is from this vantage point that we cannot help but notice the substantial gaps present in the Jubilee edition of the writer's works.

This concerns, first and foremost, the different versions and redactions of Tolstoy's novels. The drafts of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Resurrection* have been sorted through, but not all have been published. The other half of Tolstoy's manuscripts for each of these novels remains unread and unpublished. This means that nobody can yet sufficiently imagine the history of Tolstoy's masterpieces. Our knowledge of these novels' development inevitably runs into the problem of relativity, and depends on which of his many drafts

has been published. And so we intend to publish, for the first time, alongside the canonical texts of Tolstoy's works, all of the redactions and versions of his artistic work, once we decipher them word-for-word.

The *Jubilee* published all of Tolstoy's pamphlets. In and of itself, this was a great achievement. But the drafts of these pamphlets have not been published, even in fragmentary form, leaving a sea of unpublished manuscripts. Take this famous example: The drafts for the tract *The Kingdom of God is within You* outweigh the volume of manuscripts for *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* together. Concerning public pamphlets specifically, it is too soon to even speak of the possibility of publishing all redactions and versions; but, these manuscripts, which are an enormous part of Tolstoyan legacy, will without a doubt be read and published as far as the most significant selections are concerned. The possibility of their complete publication, however, should not be excluded. The new collected edition will undertake this task.

In the half century that has elapsed since the publication of the ninety-volume *Jubilee* edition, textology, to which this edition specifically owes a great deal, has moved a good deal forward. We are faced with the task of not only publishing absolutely all redactions and versions of all of Tolstoy's works, but also to make the publications extremely authentic, distinct, and credible. Our task is to place all autographs in sequence, so as to be true to the small details and the logic of Tolstoy's developing artistic thought. Because we have at our disposal a whole special series, "Redactions and Versions," we can complete this task in accordance with the changes textology has since undergone. For a scholar of course, no published text could ever replace a manuscript, but we would love it if anyone who might come across our edition would be able to find a fully-deciphered and readable equivalent of the original manuscript. The second series will simultaneously publish other extant published versions of Tolstoy's work. For example,

we have published both the first book of the 1873 version of *War and Peace* as well as the version titled "1805," which first appeared in the journal *Russian Messenger* in 1866, long before the completion of *War and Peace*.

Working with Tolstoy's manuscripts for our edition is closely tied to our main objective, which is the preparation of canonical artistic texts. Importantly, selecting which text will serve as the basis for publication is no simple question. Yet we have given ourselves the task of creating such a text, both utterly reliable and true to authorial will. It will be our job to remove copyist errors, and errors made by proofreaders and typesetters. We do not publish a single work without an exhaustive and complete study of all related materials. Our task is to prepare the model version, an impeccable and verified text. This is not easy. All of the miniscule corrections that we make in Tolstoy's texts are reflected on and substantiated by a method tailored to fit each specific work—and these corrections are certainly discussed by qualified specialists in textology.

Clocks are set to standard time, and so Tolstoy texts in the new editions should be a standard for all future reprints. In this respect, the ninety-volume *Jubilee* edition is not up to the task. It is significant that the volumes of *War and Peace* published by *Jubilee* were released in two different editions, and years apart. These texts are very much imbalanced. To cite a novel from this edition is still considered problematic for scholarly purposes. Every researcher confronts this problem in practice. A novel is first cited from the *Jubilee* edition, then cited from the twenty-two-volume edition from the end of the 1970s or the early 1980s; and surely then, this same novel is cited differently by different researchers. We would like to put an end to such confusion, and not just in relation to *War and Peace*.

Commentaries in the new edition would also inevitably differ from the often very rich commentaries in the *Jubilee* edition. It is obvious that a

comprehensive and full study of Tolstoy's manuscripts yields a more complete, and often radically different, take on how the writer worked. For the first time, we have the opportunity to restore the creative history of his manuscripts with exhaustive completeness, and in correct sequence. The new data accumulated via scholarship in the past fifty years has enriched our understanding of how Tolstoy worked. We are hoping to utilize these advantages in order to complement our existing knowledge of his life with even richer and more truthful content.

The publication in the ninety-volume Jubilee edition of Tolstoy's fiction was not accompanied by real-time commentary. In other words, the whole mass of historical facts and life details reflected upon in Tolstoy's work has never been commented on. Rather, this data was relegated to explanatory essays on this or that work.

I have heard the opinion that Tolstoy's work should not be accompanied with page-by-page commentary and that the artistic reality created by Tolstoy is a world apart from the reality of the world in which he came into being. Here is one such argument: The Napoleon of *War and Peace* is a special, Tolstoyan Napoleon and does not belong in history; rather, he belongs only in the novel. This argument contends that it is unnecessary to footnote the real events from the past or to list biographical details from the life of the historical Bonaparte. It is impossible for me to agree with this perspective. This is not the right time to delve into the philosophical problems this argument presents, but for our purposes it is important to understand that Tolstoy's creations are more deeply-rooted in the historical and contemporary reality than most other literary works of his day. With all the transformative power of his creative imagination, his creativity was never pure fantasy. Even though he constructed his own conception of reality, Tolstoy sought foundation in reality, and so we need to know the real, historical aspects of his works. Otherwise, we will understand neither the movement

of his thought nor the true meaning of what he has written. Our edition will publish all of Tolstoy's works with exhaustive and complete historical commentary: historical names, concepts and terms, obvious or obscure citations, sources for imagery, scenes and situations, and the real events mentioned by the writer, so as to shed light on all geographic and scientific realities.

It is both a joy and a pain to publish Tolstoy. We are likely to be dealing with the most voluminous among all extant literary legacies. Although Tolstoy's works are classified as Russian literature, his very creativity is in a sense inexhaustible, boasting such a richness of style that it has reached all aspects of human life in both national and world history, from the eighteenth through the beginning of the twentieth centuries.

From the point of view of textology, we have a model writer. Tolstoy's manuscripts, with rare exception, have been almost fully preserved. However, they are unbelievably difficult to decipher. Tolstoy's handwriting is not easy. His proofing is even harder to understand. Scribble marks sometimes fill the pages so densely that it is a cause for despair to read the original text. It is often in the margins, or in his thread-like script in between the lines, that Tolstoy begins and continues the new redaction of his work. Older fragments are often stricken out in the process. These obstructions present in the texts would be easier to get through if we were dealing with only a few pages of long-hand; but we are talking dozens, hundreds, sometimes thousands of such pages. How do these scribbles and marks become something whole? What is the process by which the various parts of the manuscript come together? There is not a single problem of textology that Tolstoy's work has not presented us with. The variety of these problems and difficulties is striking; they could leave one in awe. But it's necessary to solve these problems. We are obligated to read and understand everything.

The writer's art is similarly rich as seen from a historical vantage point. To comment on Tolstoy is a task no less arduous than to prepare his texts. Think of *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *Resurrection*, *Hadji Murad*. Hundreds of instances require an exhaustive historical study. It's a good thing if the source is found at once, but it may very well be that the source is a needle in a haystack. Or, we may come across some other, previously unknown material. This is a bit like creating an astronomical map to which new information is always being added, or like Mendeleev's periodic table on which there are vacant cells, which will sooner or later be filled. We would like our astronomical map, and our periodic table, of commentary on Tolstoy's work, to be exact and complete in each and every case.

Preparing commentary may appear to some to be a dull and thankless task. Undoubtedly, this task requires a very high level of qualification, which can only be acquired through many years of assiduous work. However there is an exciting, even inspirational aspect to this work, alongside the hard labor it entails. To decipher something that nobody before you has been able to decipher, to date this or that work correctly, to locate a completely unknown source, is always a joy.

In our work, such discoveries, both large and small, are inevitable. Perhaps the most vivid and most well-known of such discoveries is the diary of Mason Titov, discovered by Victor Igorevich Shcherbakov in the Department of Manuscripts of Russian State Library. It had previously been known that Tolstoy read Masonic papers, but that's all the information we had. Shcherbakov not only discovered these papers, but he also discovered that they had been directly reproduced in the Masonic diary of Pierre Bezukhov (*War and Peace*). Moreover, Shcherbakov also found a copy of Titov's diary, made to order for Tolstoy, in the Manuscript division of the State Museum of L.N. Tolstoy.

Or take the notebooks of the Russian officer Nikolai Evstafievich Mitarevsky, which served as

one of Tolstoy's sources for the description of Pierre Bezukhov at the Raevsky battery during the Borodino battle. Because these notebooks were not released as a book until 1872, Tolstoy could not have used all of these notes. I was able to establish that only one of the fragments, specifically the Borodino one, had been published in a newspaper, *The Russian Invalid*, ten years prior, in 1862. This version would have been known to Tolstoy.

We are now in the process of completing work on the ninth volume, which will come out before volumes five through eight. (Volumes five through eight contain *War and Peace*.) Volume nine is comprised of the unfinished work of the 1860s and 1870s. Some of the more important works include the comedy "The Infected Family," the novel *Peter the Great*, "The Laboring and the Burdened," "A Hundred Years," and the novel *Decembrists* from the 1870s. Roughly a score of smaller, unfinished fragments will also be included. The volume is very difficult in every sense due to the fragmentary nature of the works included, as well as due to the wide expanse of the writer's historical interests at this point in time. We nonetheless hope that these works will be well-received. New discoveries are a certainty.

There are numerous ways to understand Tolstoy in today's world. One could very well continue to interpret his life and his art based on the facts already known—and very well known because Tolstoy's life is a phenomenon that has been studied seriously throughout the twentieth century. This method is both necessary and fruitful, but it is also necessary to replenish this databank, and to develop a way to systematically analyze new findings for study. Tolstoy's manuscripts are a veritable treasure trove for such discoveries of new data. We believe that the academic edition of Tolstoy's Complete Works is the foundation upon which, given time, a new, substantially expanded biography will appear. This biography could serve to revise earlier biographies as new, previously unknown aspects of his art become known. As we

uncover the development and history behind each work, and as we uncover new facts as we complete commentaries, we will be getting closer to truth, a truth which might serve generations of future researchers and readers studying Tolstoy.

A. V. Gulin

IMLI RAN

Editor-in-chief, *Academic Complete Edition of L.N. Tolstoy in One Hundred Volumes*
(Translated by Inessa Medzhibovskaya)



The Realm of Darkness at La Mama, March 4–7, 2010: Interviews

Editor's note: Tolstoy's play The Realm of Darkness (Власть тьмы) was performed on March 4–7, 2010 at La Mama Ellen Stewart Theater, New York City, under the auspices of the Arts Program at Eugene Lang College. Zishan Ugurlu, artist-in-residence at LaMama, designed and directed the production; Inessa Medzhibovskaya was the literary adviser. These interviews were conducted by Candess Webster.

The production is reviewed by Caryl Emerson in the Review section of this issue of the Tolstoy Studies Journal.

Interview with Zishan Ugurlu

Candess Webster: What attracted you to this specific Tolstoy play?

Zishan Ugurlu: This is the centennial; the hundredth anniversary of Leo Tolstoy's death. Last year Inessa Medzhibovskaya and I decided to teach a Tolstoy class based on his wonderful novel *Resurrection*. Our plan was to create an adaptation. At the

end of the semester there was boundless creativity and so much potential, but with the time limitation the students couldn't reach the level of completion they would have like to. So at the end we decided to go in a different direction.

I started reading Tolstoy at 12. My father had Tolstoy around the house, and I mostly imitated and tried to read what he read. I probably didn't understand Tolstoy's thought provoking stories then, but I still became an avid reader. So after rereading all his plays and considering time constraints, I thought *The Realm of Darkness* would be the best choice to work on with the students for the Tolstoy Centennial; both challenging and invigorating. Also the journey to *Resurrection* with a Tolstoy Scholar Inessa Medzhibovskaya was an amazing, enlightening journey. The knowledge of my college is vast and endless source of discovery and exploration.

CW: In this moment, how are you feeling about the production?

ZU: We are very close to the opening. I always have a moment of anxiety mixed with an incredible hope inside me. The logic of bringing all the elements of theater and all these creative people into one room in such a short time is challenging. It creates incredible intensity. But meditating on a play in such a short time is also transformational. Tolstoy wrote the play in a month, so rehearsing for only a month brings ritual to the play. Working on Tolstoy's play is so magical.

CW: You are resetting the play in an American context, but with some of the Russian culture. What is your reasoning behind this ambiguity?