

Reviews

M. V. Muratov. *L. N. Tolstoy and V. G. Chertkov*.
Trans. Scott D. Moss. Tenaflly, N.J.: Hermitage
Publishers, 2002. 335pp. \$29.50.

М. В. Муратов. *Л. Н. Толстой и В. Г. Чертков по
их дневникам и переписке. Издание
подготовил Скотт Мосс. Тенафли, Н.Д.:
Hermitage Publishers, 2003. 344pp. \$18.00.*

This attractively printed and illustrated two-volume set, in English and Russian, alas, can only be considered a curiosity, ill-conceived and ill-executed, a sad example of a constructive impulse gone astray. In my view the reprint of the Russian volume, originally issued in 1934, was hardly needed, at any rate not a high priority for reissue among out-of-print Tolstoyana; and the English translation is simply a disaster. How did it happen?

From the preface to the English volume we learn the following. The translator, Scott D. Moss, an American, had studied Russian in high school with one Nicolai S. Tchertkoff, a distant relative of the well-known Vladimir Grigor'evich Chertkov, Tolstoy's long-term disciple, collaborator and close friend. Moss later attended a summer course at the Tolstoy Foundation in New York and the following year volunteered at its nursing home. He was to work there and at other positions in the Foundation for the next fifteen years. During this time he reconnected with Mr. Tchertkoff, traveled with him to Russia, and discovered the existence of the book by Muratov on the Tolstoy-Chertkov relationship. To Moss's surprise Tchertkoff owned a copy of this supposedly rare and forgotten book and lent it to him. Moss spent the next seven months translating it. He acknowledges help received from friends on "half the manuscript." He then made contact with Igor Yefimov, the "driving force" at Hermitage Publishers. Yefimov deemed "heroic" Moss's seven months of translating effort and agreed not

only to "become involved in publishing it," but himself to turn "the rough manuscript into the work that it is today." This whole venture is thus something of a collaborative effort, though Moss is given primary credit both for the translation and the Russian reprint.

It seems appropriate to speak first about the original text. The author, Mikhail Vasil'evich Muratov (1892-1957), as a young man became interested in ethnography, notably folk religious movements in Russia. He also published a book on the history of Russian book publishing. In the early 1930s he made contact with V. G. Chertkov, then serving as the editor-in-chief of the *Jubilee Edition* of Tolstoy's works, won his confidence, and was given access not only to the entire Tolstoy-Chertkov correspondence, then mostly unpublished, but also to other private documents in Chertkov's archive, including his diaries and letters to and from his mother and his wife. The result was this remarkable book, published in 1934 by the State Tolstoy Museum (504 pp.). For some years after that Muratov remained a *sotrudnik* at the Museum and helped edit several of the volumes devoted to the immense Tolstoy-Chertkov correspondence. In the first of these, vol. 85 (1935), edited by Liubov' Gurevich, he is only thanked for assistance, but he is the chief editor of vols. 86 and 87 (1937), as he is of vol. 88, which did not appear until 1957, the year of his death. In the meantime Muratov earned distinction in an entirely different area, writing for children a series of biographies of distinguished Russians.

The 1934 volume is of high quality, remarkable especially for its completely un-Soviet tone, the open-mindedness and even sympathy with which it treats its subject. An unsigned, "passport" introduction from the publishers explains that adequate critiques of Tolstoyism were already available and well-known to right-minded Soviet readers, centrally, of course, in Lenin's

immortal articles, which had established once and for all that Tolstoy's eloquent and commendable protest against tsarism and capitalism represented only the half-way position of the "patriarchal peasantry," not that of the history-leading industrial proletariat; it thus had its reactionary side. There was therefore no need for Muratov to rehearse these familiar truths. Using the voluminous correspondence between the two men, his aim was only to present as objectively as possible the development of a relationship which was a central factor in the last 27 years of the great writer's life.

This aim Muratov surely achieved very fairly and conscientiously, with respect especially to Chertkov's biography, since Chertkov did not enjoy anything like the sacrosanct protective aura that surrounded his world-famous master. Scion of a rich Petersburg aristocratic family with high court connections, Chertkov "got religion" while serving in the Horse Guards and leading a life of pleasure among the *jeunesse dorée*. By thought, reading, and discussions he arrived independently at a position very close to Tolstoyism. In late 1883 he called on Tolstoy in Moscow, and they quickly became close friends, with Chertkov more and more taking on the role of Tolstoy's principal agent. He was the chief initiator and for many years the guiding spirit in the publishing firm *Posrednik*, disseminating Tolstoy's more accessible writings in very cheap editions aimed at the common folk. Later, forced to emigrate to England, he organized there a free press that published in Russian Tolstoy texts forbidden at home and translations into English of Tolstoy's non-fictional writings. Chertkov was also prominent in organizing the migration to Canada of the persecuted Dukhobors, paid for by the earnings from *Resurrection*.

With extensive, judiciously selected and connected quotations from the letters (931 from Tolstoy to Chertkov, 1127 from Chertkov to Tolstoy) Muratov gives a vivid account of this

crucial relationship. The master had in Chertkov a faithful disciple who revered him and shared his views almost completely, but at the same time was intelligent and independent enough to argue over nuances and over ways and means of disseminating those ideas in the world. He even occasionally made bold to suggest improvements in Tolstoy's writings. Tolstoy came to trust him completely and frequently accepted his criticisms. "He and I are surprisingly concentric (одноцентричен)," Tolstoy wrote in his diary as early as 6 April 1884, and the statement was just as valid 26 years later. Muratov's book was the first thoroughly to explore and document this symbiosis, and it remains an excellent introduction to the topic, though of course serious scholars will want to tackle the whole correspondence in the five volumes of the *Jubilee Edition*, where the Tolstoy letters are given in full along with extended commentaries and substantial quotations from Chertkov's replies.

In short, Muratov's was a good book for its time, and there was certainly no harm in reprinting it, though Tolstoy scholars might have preferred, for example, reprints of the early volumes of the monumental Gusev-Opuł'skaia biography. The American reprint of the Muratov is well enough done, though it does contain a fair number of misprints not in the original, and one does regret that it does not include the original's much fuller explanatory index. The statement on the back of the English volume that the original Russian edition had no name index is simply not true.

The translation, however, is quite another matter. The translator shows every sign not just of inexperience, but of sheer incompetence. The problem is not so much misunderstanding the Russian; his helpers, no doubt principally Mr. Yefimov, have presumably saved him from gross misunderstandings. The trouble is that as a native speaker of English Moss had a responsibility to produce genuinely English sentences to match

Muratov's Russian ones. This task he has grotesquely shirked. Strangely, the translation reads not like the amateurish effort of an American student struggling to make sense of the Russian, but rather that of a Russian student struggling with English. The translation abounds in the most characteristic errors made by Russians with English: misuse of the articles and inability to cope with English verbal tenses and their sequences. A few examples must suffice.

1. Articles. (p. 26) Moss: "N. F. Fedorov [...] author of *the* original teaching about the resurrection of all *the* people in [no article] flesh." Such errors with articles occur even in the introductory note "From the Translator," which is not itself translated, e.g., p. 9: "rare books about *the* Russian history."

2. Tenses (p. 138) Moss: "[...]Chertkov often at this time expresses[...]the hope that it would be easier for him to change the conditions of his life if he *fre*s himself from the current business at Mediator and *will be* able to concentrate on searching for an exit." (The name of the publishing firm Posrednik has long been known in English as Intermediary, but Moss prefers Mediator.)

But besides these recurrent systemic faults, there are constant blunders with bad word choice, unidiomatic word order, and just plain clumsiness. E.g., p. 65: "Grigorii Ivanovich Chertkov [Vladimir's father] suffered from gangrenous legs for a period of several years already [...], and Elizaveta Ivanovna [his wife], worrying about his health, did not have grounds to worry about him." This absurdity of this sentence needs no commentary, though the reader might well wonder what on earth it means. (Mme. Chertkova had worried for years about her husband's health, but did not expect any immediate crisis; in fact he died just then.)

In addition there are third-grade mistakes like "it's" as the possessive of "it" (pp. 10, 16).

Furthermore, the translator apparently lacked energy to track down and explicate references. As noted, the explanatory index of the original was not translated, and no other notes of any kind have been added. On p. 151 the translator writes, "In the summer of 1894 [...] Chertkov works on English translations of Tolstoy's articles concerning festivities in Tulon [*sic*]." Besides the fact that there is only one article and one translation, Moss has simply transliterated the Cyrillic "Тулон" and left it at that. It does not seem to have occurred to him that this is the name of a French city, Toulon, or to find out what kind of "festivities" had been held there that Tolstoy might have written about. Even a very little research would have revealed that in 1893 a Russian naval squadron had made a ceremonial visit to Toulon to reciprocate for a similar one paid earlier by a French squadron to Kronstadt. These events celebrated the new Franco-Russian alliance and disturbed Tolstoy as an example of the increasing militarism and belligerence he so much deplored. The article that figured in his correspondence under the name "Toulon" eventually became "Christianity and Patriotism" (1894). But Moss does not bother to find out any of this.

I must conclude, therefore, that publication of this really abominable translation was a grave mistake. It is so clumsy as to be simply unreadable. If there are English-speaking readers innocent of Russian who want to explore the Chertkov-Tolstoy relationship, they will be thoroughly frustrated. Sad.

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