

News of the Profession

Tolstoy and World Literature 2014, Yasnaya Polyana

The Ninth “Lev Tolstoy i mirovaia literatura [Lev Tolstoy and World Literature]” International Conference, organized by Galina Alekseeva of the Yasnaya Polyana Museum Estate and Donna Orwin of the University of Toronto, was held at Yasnaya Polyana on August 11–15 2014. Scholars from Israel, Canada, France, and Great Britain; Italy, Romania, Ukraine, and America; Japan, Kazakhstan, universities throughout Russia, and Yasnaya Polyana itself, gathered to hear papers on each stage of Tolstoy’s career, from his early writings to stories of reception, adaptation, and discipleship from long after his death. Interspersed with walks around the estate (and refreshment from bowls of Yasnaya Polyana apples), the more than forty papers presented offered a rich, varied account of current Tolstoy scholarship and its future directions.

Among the many common threads linking the presentations, perhaps the widest was a concern with tracing the encounters between Tolstoy and other thinkers, and the intellectual, biographical, and cultural circumstances in which they took place. On the first day of the conference alone, the sites of these encounters ranged from the classics (Tolstoy’s “Life of Socrates,” Homer and “The Cossacks”), through nineteenth-century philosophy (Tolstoy and Hegel), psychology (Tolstoy and William James), and poetry (Tolstoy and Fet); and through twentieth-century literature and thought (Tolstoy’s place in Soviet aesthetics;

the “feminine myth” in Tolstoy and Pasternak; Tolstoy in the writings of Gustav Shpet, Pietro Citati, and Pier Cesare Bori). Subsequent panels broadened the field of juxtapositions, to painting, political thought, science, film, French and Victorian literature, and Kazakh literature and history, among a host of other subjects. Fittingly, the theme of “brotherhood”—the topic of the opening paper and of numerous discussions afterwards—ran alongside these explorations throughout the conference. As a group, the panels created the sense of a living network extending from the complex nucleus of Tolstoy’s life and writings to other figures and ideas far removed in time and space: not only “Leo Tolstoy and World Literature,” but more sweepingly, Lev Tolstoy in the world.

The final session closed with presentations of new editions and conference proceedings on Tolstoy, including the second, expanded edition of the encyclopedia *Lev Tolstoy i ego sovremenniki* [*Lev Tolstoy and his contemporaries*], whose ongoing compilation at Yasnaya Polyana was also the subject of several inspiring papers.

Each day of the conference ended with opportunities for memorable conversations: meals in the Yasnaya Polyana hotel restaurant, an evening walk to Tolstoy’s grave site, and a screening and discussion with the director of a new documentary on the sculptor Ilya Yakovlevich Gintsburg, and particularly the periods he spent working on busts of Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana. Many of the most striking can be seen on tours of the Tolstoy House

museum, alongside a gallery's worth of photographs and portraits of Lev and other Tolstoy's, and the peripatetic desk that occupied a different room for the writing of each of Tolstoy's major novels. On the last evening, conference participants gathered for a festive final dinner and concert given by Moscow pianist Natalya Bogdanova.

Midway through the week, one panelist drew out an unexpected kinship between the transcendent reach of Tolstoy's epic *War and*

Peace, and that of a Japanese haiku. It is tempting to note that this illuminating juxtaposition captures an aspect of the "Leo Tolstoy and World Literature" conference itself. Almost miraculously compressed into three days, the diverse investigations into Tolstoy's life and work presented at Yasnaya Polyana this August offered material for much extended reflection in the months to come.

Chloë Kitzinger
University of California, Berkeley