

Roundtable Discussion from IMLI: The Complete Correspondence of Leo Tolstoy and Nikolai Strakhov

On February 22, 2006, at the Institute of World Literature in the Russian Academy of Sciences, a roundtable discussion examined the two-volume *Leo Tolstoy & Nikolaj Strakhov: Complete correspondence*, published by the Slavic Research Group, University of Ottawa, in conjunction with the State L. N. Tolstoy Museum; edited by A.A. Donskov; compiled by L.D. Gromova and T.G. Nikiforova (Ottawa, 2003).

While reviewing multiple sources in connection with the preparation of the new Academy edition in one-hundred volumes of the *Complete Collected Works of L.N. Tolstoy*, Tolstoy scholars turned their attention to the monumental correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov, which had been published only once, in 1914 by B.L. Modzalevskij. His edition included 269 letters: seventy-five from L.N. Tolstoy, 190 from N.N. Strakhov to Tolstoy, and three to S.A. Tolstaya, as well as a rough draft, handwritten by Strakhov, of a letter by Tolstoy about Katkov's response to the ending of *Anna Karenina*. We now know that the correspondence, which lasted twenty-five years (1870-1895) and to which Tolstoy assigned particular significance, believing it to be a reflection of his spiritual biography, included considerably more letters.

The first publication from the collection of letters as it now stands was *L.N. Tolstoy and S.A. Tolstaya: Correspondence with N.N. Strakhov* (Ottawa, 2000), prepared by A.A. Donskov, L.D. Gromova, and T.G. Nikiforova. It contains fourteen letters from Tolstoy with twenty-four from Strakhov; forty letters from Strakhov with thirty-nine letters from Tolstaya; and eight joint replies to Strakhov from the Tolstoyes. This edition also contains an introduction, commentary, annotations, an index, and various illustrations.

Leo Tolstoy & Nikolaj Strakhov: Complete Correspondence in Two Volumes then appeared in 2003, the 175th anniversary of the birth of both correspondents.

These volumes contain 466 letters and 1080 pages, including Donskov's critical essay "L.N. Tolstoy and N.N. Strakhov: A Dialogue on Life and Literature." In preparation for the edition, Tolstoy's archives and Strakhov's private funds were examined anew: all the letters were annotated, and all omissions in them were restored. From this research, we now know the fate of seventy-five of Tolstoy's letters (namely those published by Modzalevsky in 1914). On March 8, 1909, B.I. Sreznevskii, A.A. Shakhmatov, and M.A. Stakhovich sent the following telegram to I.P. Matchenko, the husband of Strakhov's niece and heir: "We strongly urge you to send the correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov to the Academy care of Sreznevskii for exhibition. We guarantee they will not be published. If you do not have them, tell us where to look for them. They are extremely necessary." On the back side of the surviving telegram, written in pencil, is a draft of the answer: "How many should be sent, it would be difficult to send them all, not in order. The valuable ones have to be returned." By March 11, 1909, Matchenko had already sent the letters written by Tolstoy to Petersburg. On a separate card, a register was recorded in his handwriting indicating how many letters and from which years. It is these same seventy-five letters from Tolstoy, and only these, that went into Modzalevsky's publication.

Strakhov's very first letter to Tolstoy, dated November 18, 1870, previously thought to have been lost, was also found among Strakhov's papers. Not yet personally acquainted with Tolstoy, Strakhov wrote, "You have raised me up, revived me, banished that melancholy and tedium which literature and my work in it was beginning to induce in me. You may be said to have given me strength in private matters and helped me overcome certain difficult circumstances. To you and to the author of "Russia and Europe" [N. Ia. Danilevsky] I owe the fact that after ten years of work a

new epoch in literature has come into being before my very eyes, with all the joy and vivacity of any new epoch, bringing shining hopes for the future.”

Strakhov quickly became Tolstoy’s closest confidante. In 1896, upon Strakhov’s death, V.V. Rozanov wrote that “there is no doubt that Tolstoy never had a better friend.” At a certain stage Strakhov seemed to have been Tolstoy’s teacher in philosophy and religion. Strakhov’s letters contain thoughts about the fate of Russia, her past, present, and future; and discussions of terrorism, nihilism, mysticism, Darwinism, and materialism in general. He embraced Danilevskii’s idea that Russia alone possessed a certain type of spiritual life and polemically appraised the speeches of Vl. S. Solov’ev. Tolstoy always noticed Strakhov’s main attribute, so close to his own position on the artist, and valued it highly: “Under the clarity and brevity of the exposition is a softness, coupled with strength: you do not rip with teeth, but with soft, strong paws.”

Tolstoy’s knowledge of the natural sciences was formed and defined by Strakhov. A naturalist by education, in 1857 Strakhov began his journalistic work in the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Education* in the division “Natural Science News.” In 1872, one year after the appearance of the separate publication *Critical Analysis of War and Peace*, he released *The World as a Whole: Scientific Sketches on Nature*. Tolstoy and Strakhov discuss this book in their correspondence, and Tolstoy consulted Strakhov often about the natural sciences in the 1870s in connection with his work on *Azbuka* and *New Azbuka*.

Finally, Tolstoy valued Strakhov as an editor who worked on *Azbuka*, *New Azbuka*, *Books for Reading*, the publication of *War and Peace* in 1873 within the collected works that appeared then, and the separate publication of *Anna Karenina* (1878).

These and several other issues were discussed on February 22, 2006, at the Gorky Institute of World Literature by the Tolstoy group working on the *Complete Collected Works of L.N. Tolstoy in 100 Volumes*. Group members included Piotr Vasil’evich Palievskii, Aleksandr Vadimovich Gulin, Marina Ivanovna Shcherbakova, Liudmila Viktorovna Gladkova, Liia Nikolaevna Kuzina, Tatiana Vasil’evna Kandybina, Irina Igorevna Sizova, Tatiana Iur’evna Plastova, and Galina Nikolaevna Kovaleva. Editorial board member Galina Iakovlevna Galagan and Anna Glebovna

Grodetskaia, contributors to the new Tolstoy edition, came from St. Petersburg. Other attendees included Tatiana Georgievna Nikiforova from the State Tolstoy Museum as well as scholars from Moscow who participated in the round table: Boris Nikolaevich Tarasov, Vladimir Nikolaevich Zakharov, Evgeniia Vasil’evna Nikolaeva, Inna Grigor’evna Ptushkina, Viktor Igorevich Shcherbakov, and Andrei Borisovich Tarasov.

What follows are selections from the remarks of some of the participants.

P.V. Palievskii, Doctor of Philology, General Research Officer, IWL RAS, member of the editorial board of the *Complete Collected Works of L.N. Tolstoy*.

“Tolstoy remains close to us. As time passes, it becomes clearer that he is one of the few on whom we can rely in our present dilemmas, artistically, morally and for a general direction of life. Too much around us is filled with inauthenticity, caving in under our feet the moment we try to reach it. With Tolstoy everything is just the opposite—with him you rise up and soar. Therefore it is an enormous joy and privilege to study him and to help advance his ideas.

The publication of his correspondence with Strakhov is an important step down this path. For the first time, we have a completely restored picture of Tolstoy’s communication with a contemporary with whom he was completely open, with whom he expected to find and found understanding, and with a man who was indisputably distinguished in his own right. Strakhov was a philosopher and served as a sounding board for many of Tolstoy’s ideas, which he would often try out on his trusted friend. For example, in April 1876 Tolstoy expressed his thoughts on ‘links,’ which is still the best account of why the artistic portrayal of life is better than the journalistic one; elsewhere he laid out his idea of tracing the development of Russian literature in the form of a parabola. Gogol had previously broached this topic in his distinguished essay “What Then, At Last, Is the Essence of Russian Poetry and What Is Its Uniqueness?” But Gogol was writing when there was still no Tolstoy, no Dostoevsky, and no Chekhov. With one swift stroke of the quill, Tolstoy gathered everything, including Glinka, on a single line, at the gateway to the future, so that his idea seemed to be the most fruitful for the understanding of

Russian culture in its entirety. A reproduction of this graphic description is provided in the present publication for the first time.

We know that a book cannot come to life without very long preparations. In 1914, the Tolstoy Museum published Mozdalevskii's correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov, and in 1929 a volume of the correspondence between Tolstoy and Stasov appeared. Stasov was the opposite of Strakhov, closer to revolutionary Russia (Tolstoy and Strakhov talked about Stasov between themselves), and this volume provides another perspective on Tolstoy's ideas. It is here, for instance, that Tolstoy proclaimed for the first time that 'In this whole revolution I exist as the voluntarily and willfully self-appointed advocate of the one-hundred-million-strong agricultural public.' A year earlier the Tolstoy Museum had published N.N. Apostolov's valuable overview *The Living Tolstoy*, as well as letters from the Academy collection, diaries of those close to Tolstoy, and research by Strakhov scholars. In our own time, thanks first and foremost to the labors of L.D. Gromova-Opuł'ska, we have worked to reconstruct all of Tolstoy's epistolary correspondence, including international contacts. In 1995, Lidiia Dmitrievna published Tolstoy's correspondence with P.V. Veriginyi, the head of the Doukhobours whom Tolstoy helped to resettle in Canada; she initiated and prepared the published volume of Tolstoy's correspondence with people in the United States; and in 2000, with the same coauthors as in the present publication, she published a corpus of unknown letters from Tolstoy to Strakhov and unique correspondence between Strakhov and S.A. Tolstaya.

Now we have this book. The comprehensive foreword by A.A. Donskov, unfortunately only in English, explains how it came into being and how invaluable material was retrieved from the archives of Kiev, Pushkin House, and other repositories. It also outlines the entire history of the relationship between Strakhov and Tolstoy. Most importantly, the book enables ideas to speak again, ideas without which, it turns out, we cannot manage today. We extend our thanks to the editors, commentators, and publishers who have brought these ideas back into our lives."

A.V. Gulin, Doctor of Philology, Editor in Chief of the CCW of L.N. Tolstoy.

"The publication of the correspondence between Strakhov and Tolstoy is, without question, an extraordinary event. In its intensiveness, intellectual variety, candor of expression, and finally, its duration in time, this correspondence is an exceptional occurrence in Tolstoy's epistolary legacy. Even the several-decades-long exchange of letters between Tolstoy and A.A. Fet in some respects still 'loses' when held up to this correspondence, as it doesn't provide as comprehensive an account of the writer's creative process. For Tolstoy scholarship, his correspondence with A.A. Tolstaya is perhaps no less significant. But in it, Tolstoy's innermost, spiritual identity unfolds exceptionally fully, while in the correspondence with Strakhov we witness Tolstoy in his creative struggles, the insecure development of his artistic and philosophical thoughts. I am speaking, of course, primarily as a Tolstoy scholar. But I understand perfectly well that the 'Strakhov component' of the correspondence provides much for the understanding of the internal world of this unusual thinker and writer.

Published for the first time as an integrated whole, the correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov appears as a monument, a monolith. And it is an amazing monument, both artistically and historically. We have here the history of two Russian fates in a critical epoch of Russian history. Tolstoy's famous letters and Strakhov's widely known letters will naturally now be read anew, in the general context of the bilateral correspondence. We are now able to penetrate into its rich, private subject matter and grasp it in one view, to understand how such personages relate to one another, to see them during their development over many years.

Everything in this correspondence is fascinating. But for me, the letters from the beginning and middle of the 1870s, which is certainly the most enigmatic period in Tolstoy's life, still carry a special value. The conventional outlook on this epoch as a period of preparation for the upcoming 'revolution' in the *Weltanschauung* of the writer has seemed overly simplistic for a long time. The correspondence between Tolstoy and Strakhov is an important document from this era, which sheds light on the actual, multi-faceted nature of the moral and creative aspirations of the artist in the

ten years prior to the 'turning-point.' This was already clear, but now, with the publication of the correspondence as a unit, it has become perfectly self-evident.

The renewal of Tolstoy's spiritual ideal during the period after the completion of *War and Peace* and the artist's quest for the means to express it were echoed in his letters to Strakhov more fully than anywhere else. In turn, Strakhov was uniquely gifted in his ability to capture the moral process of his correspondent and to follow his creative evolution. The history of the publication of *Azbuka*, the writer's work on the novel *Peter the Great*, the preparation of a new edition of *War and Peace* with the participation of Strakhov in 1873, and the creation of *Anna Karenina* are all brought to light in the correspondence particularly as stages in Tolstoy's spiritual-aesthetic renewal during that period. But the correspondence reveals not so much progress towards the 'spiritual revolution' experienced by the writer between the 1870s and 1880s (more in his earlier quests), as much as a tentative bid at a return to the national spiritual tradition and work in traditional poetics or traditional artistic forms.

The publication of the complete correspondence of Tolstoy and Strakhov also helps to explain many other complex moments in the life and work of the creator of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. This publication will undoubtedly become (and is already becoming) essential for all researchers occupied by the study of Tolstoy's oeuvre (and Strakhov's as well). I will not touch upon the subject of the necessity of similar academic publications for the preparation of the Academy's *Complete Collected works of L.N. Tolstoy*. Such a need is self-evident."

E.V. Nikolaeva, Doctor of Philology, professor at the Moscow State Pedagogical University, colleague of the Tolstoy group.

Nikolaeva remarked that the nature of the discussion allowed her to address the genre of "meditations":

"In Tolstoy scholarship, the view has long prevailed that Tolstoy's correspondences with T.A. Ergol'skaya and with A.A. Tolstaya can be viewed as traditional epistolary novels, in the tradition of sentimentalism. It was in Tolstoy's correspondence with T.A. Ergol'skaya that he began to realize the need to express his thoughts as precisely as possible in a letter. Thanks to the comprehensiveness of the correspondence of Tolstoy and

Strakhov and, most importantly, to the serious and detailed commentary, the correspondence acquires the character of a full novel in letters. I'd venture to define this novel not as epistolary but as *intellectual*, a novel in which dozens of plotlines develop and often intersect, identifying and defining the creative and intellectual interests of both correspondents.

Systematic reasoning played an important role in the correspondence. When a person is more captivated by the creative process than the logical one, as was the case with Tolstoy, it is important for him to find a support to help him ground his notions. Strakhov was, it seems to me, exactly such a support. Here, questions of philosophy are at issue and through the letters we can follow Tolstoy's creative and spiritual crisis and the process of his work on *Azbuka* and *Anna Karenina*. This intellectual and creative dialogue exist not only in the context of Tolstoy's creative work, but also in the context of discussions of Strakhov's articles and books, of his associations with N.Ia. Danilevskii and F.M. Dostoevsky, and also in allusions to important problems of the era (discussion of the positions of Renan, Darwin, and others)."

G. Ya. Galagan, General Research Officer, IWL (Pushkin House) RAS, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Russian Literature magazine.

Galagan gave examples of the creative impulses that came out of the correspondence of Tolstoy and Strakhov. "I will start with the fact that on October 26, 1910, in Tolstoy's diary, amongst undoubtedly prosaic and tendentious articles, this entry appears: 'I had a dream. Grushenka. A novel, so it seems, by Strakhov. A marvelous plot.' On October 28 he asks Aleksandra L'vovna to send him the second part of *Brothers Karamazov*. Tolstoy did not manage to read Dostoevsky's novel again, nor to realize his conception of the marvelous plot. But it is remarkable that in his creative consciousness these two names were joined together. How did this happen? The Canadian publication helped the outstanding Dostoevsky scholar V.A. Tunimantov build a hypothesis that will be published in the form of a lengthy article in an upcoming issue of the journal *Russian Literature*. Reading the letters of the correspondence, prepared by L.D. Gromova, A.A. Donskov and T.G. Nikiforova, as a complete and uninterrupted text provides the opportunity to see, to

keenly feel, and to experience the interaction between two minds, two different perceptions, and to experience the connections and the labyrinths of these connections, where things are revealed that cannot be seen if you read, for example, the 1914 publication, or a separate work by Strakhov, or even the separate *Collected Works of Tolstoy* where there are snippets and fragments everywhere that require you to refer to the sources. The Canadian publication has already played two important roles. First, it clarifies issues in the relationship between Strakhov and Dostoevsky, including biographical details and the circumstances of the final stage of Strakhov's work on the biography of Dostoevsky and his unexpected outburst of hatred. Second, it helps reveal Strakhov's duality as the dominant feature of his emotional life. These new materials helped V.A. Tunimanov show previously unseen but now self-evident material. As we know, a hypothesis existed that Strakhov's outburst in the letter to Tolstoy may be traced to the moment when, in the process of working on the biography, he became acquainted with drafts, items from 1876-1877, particularly from *Diary of the Writer*, which contained exceedingly unflattering comments. It was very clear who the object of these comments was, but there was no evidence corroborating Strakhov's acquaintance with these documents. However, Tunimanov's very close reading of the part of the correspondence in which Strakhov renounced Dostoevsky revealed the answer to the unresolved question. When Strakhov made his comment in the well-known letter of November 28, 1883, and simultaneously asked what impression the biography had made on Tolstoy, the latter simply restricted himself to one phrase: 'I skimmed your book.' Subsequent attempts at a confession before Tolstoy in no way absolve Strakhov because it was momentous and consequential for Tolstoy to discover that everything that Strakhov had done was a half-truth and that this biography of Dostoevsky was a half-truth. As we all know, for Tolstoy, truth was paramount, for its sake one lived and worked. I am convinced that soon questions of this kind will be clarified and resolved thanks to the splendid and exceedingly valuable publication of the correspondence of Tolstoy and Strakhov. Once more I give a small bow and thank you to the original collective—Lidia Dmitrievna Gromova, Andrei Donskov, Tatiana

Georgievna Nikiforova, and the State Tolstoy Museum."

B.N. Tarasov, Doctor of Philology, Rector of the Gorky Literary Institute.

Joining in to express his gratitude Tarasov remarked: "It would be wonderful if there were many such correspondences in print. They are extremely important in all respects, not only for the publications of *Collected Works*, but also so that we can accurately evaluate and solve crucial issues. In the correspondence of contemporaries, in between discussions of mundane or secondary questions are nuggets of profound thoughts—whole passages, for example, when Tolstoy and Strakhov discuss *The World as a Whole*, or an article about psychology, or *On Renan*—that is, one of the important crucial questions such as what makes up the mystery of man? Who is man: 'a natural swine,' as Rakitin says in *Brothers Karamazov*, or 'the image and likeness of God'? This eternal question is constantly weighed and debated in the correspondence and it links the correspondence with other writers. Take Pascal, for instance, who often speculated about this mystery and about whom both thinkers write in their letters. Similar links which make up the era, and the publication of new correspondences, bring together seemingly disparate writers—in their discourse on the contemporary milieu, on consciousness, on science, and on the differences between science and consciousness (for example, how limited science is in comparison with the depth of consciousness). Those times were enveloped in ideas and ideals which are completely lost today. Today, the 'natural swine' dominates. A second question arises: how to bring this lost atmosphere not only to the scholarship, to the university auditorium, but also, to speak plainly, the prevailing tendency today is toward the decline of cultural standards. In contrast, publications like the correspondence of Tolstoy and Strakhov halt such processes, oppose them, and subvert the dominant atmosphere and dominant policies."

L.V. Gladkova, Academic Secretary of the Complete Collected Works of L.N. Tolstoy.

Gladkova noted the multifacetedness of the surviving and well-known correspondences with T.A. Ergol'skaya and A.A. Tolstaya. In these correspondences, the work of Tolstoy's heart and soul is found. "The correspon-

dence with Strakhov has a completely different tone and style—calm and poised; it is truly the work of the mind. For me Strakhov's secret and allure has always been a riddle. What was he like? Why did great men respond as they did to his letters and judgments? His ability to elicit responses from both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky was extremely valuable. It appears that Strakhov's talent as a journalist played a considerable role. Strakhov's subtlety is principled: it is obvious how he adheres to it in his correspondence with Tolstoy, so that he is able to capture a barely outlined thought. Not infrequently the role of Strakhov as a correspondent seems provocative—for example, when, speaking about Dostoevsky or Fet, he evokes retaliatory comments from Tolstoy, the likes of which Strakhov (and now we along with him) would never have heard if he had not hit a such a raw nerve."

M.I. Shcherbakova, Doctor of Philology, Chair of the Department of Russian Classical Literature IWL RAS

Shcherbakova turned to the issue of publishing perspectives. "Philological scholarship values Strakhov as the first biographer of Dostoevsky, the author of articles on Tolstoy (among them on *War and Peace*) and on Turgenyev, Pushkin, and others. Strakhov was one of the first who comprehended the history of Russian literature as 'the gradual development of our unique identity.' A relevant issue is that of the scale and scope of material. Strakhov's vast literary legacy is a result of his forty-year-long creative journey. In domestic Russian periodicals—twenty-three journals and newspapers—254 of his articles appeared; added to that are fifteen serious contributions in the form of forewords and essays in anthologies. Finally, there are sixteen independent publications of works and six additional reissues. These are original sources, documents of the epoch, in which events often appear in unexpected lights. In Strakhov's works the fundamental constants of the "heavenly" and "earthly" life of Russia and of the historical unity of Holy Rus' and Great Russia are formulated and much is said about Russia as the sole occurrence of a certain type of spiritual life, about Russia's foreign policy and the Eastern Question, and about the necessity of unifying the Slavic world. The real problems of nihilism and mysticism, the attitude towards terror, the controversy around Darwinism,

behind which stands the more general controversy about materialism in general, are all discussed in detail. The stormy journalistic polemic of those years is reflected.

Meanwhile, it is hard to call the fate of Strakhov's literary legacy fortunate. Rather, it was the opposite. During the critic's life his articles were suppressed more than once by censors, after which a secret ban lasted for years; independent publications were undertaken in modest circulation. After his death, some of Strakhov's chief works were republished: *The Battle with the West in Our Literature* in three volumes; *Critiques* in two volumes; *Remarks on Pushkin and Other Poets, Philosophical Studies*; and *On the Fundamental Concepts of Psychology and Physiology. The Poverty of Our Literature: Critical and Historical Studies; From the History of Literary Nihilism 1861-1865; The World as a Whole: Scientific Sketches on Nature; On Eternal Truths: My Debate about Spiritualism*; and *Memoirs and Excerpts* were not republished. Strakhov's works were never published as a complete edition. Today we should think seriously about the scientific publication of his literary legacy—complete with critical and scientific articles, poetry, prose, diaries, and letters, with comprehensive academic commentary and explanatory notes. Limitations of an ideological-political and religious nature, which formerly prevented this, have been removed, and we could reconstruct the full appearance of a critic who remains in the shadows. Textological science and editorial practice have proven that the significance of the preparation of a scientific publication and its value are defined by how thoroughly the history of the text has been studied. A 'textual critique' of Strakhov's books has never before been undertaken, and this work appears to be extremely important. We have new and reliable material which is necessary for such a critique. As a rule, Strakhov created his books from journalistic publications which were thematically close, united by a general idea, and with an internal bond. 'Journalism,' wrote Strakhov 'is like a wide and boisterously flowing river, formed by a host of tributaries. But its flow is exceedingly short—it quickly falls into the Lethe and every day not only that which was written expressly for this is carried off, but also that which was written with hope for a longer existence.'

Sections of Strakhov's epistolary legacy which were published at the beginning of the twentieth century and

are important for the history of Russian thought also require a self-critical attitude: I refer to letters to N. Ya. Grot, V. V. Rozanov, V.S. Solov'ev, and N. Ia. Danilevskii. There are important omissions in these publications, and moreover, they do not represent the whole epistolary legacy of the critic. In correspondence with him in various years were Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, N. Ia. Danilevskii and I.S. Aksakov, Ap. A. Grigor'ev and K.N. Leont'ev, V.V. Rozanov and V.S. Solov'ev, and also Ia. K. and N. Ia Grot, Ap. N. and L.N. Maikov, D.V. and S.V. Averkiev, A.A. Kraevskii, M.N. Katkov, N.S. Leskov, A.A. Fet, P.D. Boborykin, Ia. P. Polonskii,

M.S. Gromeka, P.D. Golokhvastov, O.F. Miller, E.L. Radlov, V.I. Lamanskii, E.A. Shtakenshneider, L.I. Veselitskaia-Mikylich, and others. Strakhov's correspondents were constant opponents of revolutionary-democratic ideas; at the same time, the majority of them had literary talent, encyclopedic knowledge, the gift of conviction and sincerity. They have clear and interesting views on events. As we can see, the literary legacy of N.N. Strakhov has for a long time and by rights awaited its turn to be published."

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