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## News of the Profession

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### The Over-Examined Life: New Perspectives on Tolstoy

"The Over-Examined Life: New Perspectives on Tolstoy"—a two-day conference devoted to the Russian literary giant—took place on April 19-20, at the Barker Center for the Humanities of Harvard University. The conference was organized by Julie Buckler and Justin Weir, both of the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Harvard, and supported by a conference grant from the Davis Center for Russian Studies, which accepts proposals from Harvard faculty in Russian and Eurasian Studies for bringing scholars together to share their work.

"How can we experience the shock of the new again in our approach to Tolstoy? How can we 'defamiliarize' our cherished ideas about the great defamiliarizer himself?," asked the conference's initial call for papers. The conference aimed to stimulate a renewal of Tolstoy scholarship, inviting new approaches to Tolstoy's life and works, as well as commentary on past traditions of Tolstoy criticism. Conference participants came from the United States, Canada, and England, and they were joined in discussions by other scholars who traveled to Cambridge to attend the panels.

The conference showcased twenty-three scholars, arranged into five panels with discussants, and included a keynote address. The first panel, "Returning to *Anna Karenina*," considered Tolstoy's novel of adultery in terms of repetition principles, the poetics of listening, and the aesthetics of silent film. "Textual and Cultural Space in Tolstoy" examined the place of the country estate in Tolstoy's oeuvre and personal mythology, the hyper-textual relations between drafts of *War and Peace*, and explored the connection between Tolstoy's aesthetics in *What is Art?* and the artistic precepts espoused by modernist groups such as the World of Art and the Russian Futurists. "Tolstoy as Philosopher" pondered Tolstoy's ideas through traditional

philosophical categories such as ethics, desire, and non-violence. "Reconsidering Tolstoy's Life and Legacy" posed a broad series of questions about Tolstoy's advocacy on behalf of the Dukhobors, his conversion, his wife's fictional reply to *The Kreutzer Sonata* in "Who Is to Blame?," and Tolstoy's still-evolving place in contemporary Russian culture. "Narrative and Tolstoy" treated fictional storytelling through the prism of gender, anti-narrative drive, and fundamental narratological principles themselves. The keynote address by Professor Caryl Emerson of Princeton University, titled "Revisiting Bakhtin on Tolstoy, 2002," returned to Bakhtin's early lectures on Tolstoy in order to question this theorist's later dismissal of Tolstoy as "monologic" and less interesting in literary terms than his polyphonic counterpart Dostoevsky.

Buckler and Weir plan to edit and publish a volume of essays based on papers from "The Over-Examined Life." Synopses of the conference papers and discussants' remarks are available on the Davis Center website.

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### Tolstoy in the 1850s: The Birth of a Writer

June 5-8 2002, Tbilisi

Tbilisi is not the most obvious place for a Tolstoy conference. Tolstoy lived there only briefly, and while the Caucasus certainly play a role in his writings, they were far more important in the works of other Russian writers, such as Lermontov or Pushkin. Furthermore, the perception of many of us in the West is that Georgians are separating themselves not only from Russian political structures, but also from the Russian culture that was forced upon them for so long.