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## Report from Iasnaia Poliana September 29-October 3, 1998.

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A conference on *Tolstoy and World Literature* took place at Iasnaia Poliana from September 29 to October 3, 1998. The meeting celebrated the 170th anniversary of Tolstoy's birth, as well as to mark the completion of a bibliography of Tolstoy's collection of non-Russian books in his personal library at Iasnaia Poliana. The event was organized by Vladimir Il'ich Tolstoy, director of the Iasnaia Poliana Estate Museum and Park, Galina Alexeeva, head of the research division at the estate, and Donna Orwin, editor of *Tolstoy Studies Journal*. Seventy-two speakers were scheduled to appear at the five-day conference, funding for which came from the Open Society Institute.

The meeting focused on Tolstoy as reader of world literature and assimilator of world culture. Several of the sessions were devoted to Tolstoy's relations to specific religious, philosophical and literary authors or texts (including the Bible, Herodotus, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Pascal, Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Kant, Goethe, Gandhi, Bertold Auerbach, Ruskin, Thoreau, Whitman, Wilder, Hemingway, and Mann). Other sessions examined his relations to various national literatures and literary traditions, including reception in other countries. Many of the papers used the books in Tolstoy's Iasnaia Poliana library as their primary source material; the conference indeed offered a thorough reading of Tolstoy's marginalia. There were also studies based on foreign sources, including one that reported on previously unknown manuscript pages from *War and Peace*. Peter Crane, a descendent of Tolstoy's first biographer, Raphael Löwenfeld, presented previously unknown material from his family archive. In general, there was a tremendous wealth

of material presented, a witness to both the erudition of Tolstoy, and to the broad interest in Tolstoy throughout the world.

As at the 1995 Ottawa conference on *Tolstoy and Brotherhood*, the conference opened with plenary remarks by Lidia Dmitrievna Opul'skaia and Galina Iakovlevna Galagan. This was not the only gesture of deference to their authority as Tolstoy scholars; the audience became so used to their discussion of the papers that at the conclusion of one presentation, when there were no comments from the audience, Opul'skaia was surprised to find everyone gazing expectantly at her. (She responded with an embarrassed chuckle and promptly granted her approval.) This respect, which was duly given to these two scholars in particular, was also afforded to other participants in the conference: audience members often audibly thanked presenters after the conclusion of their papers, indicating their heartfelt gratitude for the contribution that had been made to the collective project of studying and understanding Tolstoy.

The atmosphere was, in this sense, significantly different from that at other academic conferences: this meeting was a function of an established cultural institution, representing the very stable Russian tradition of meeting to mark the anniversaries of major authors and, more specifically, the work of a community of scholars devoted to preserving and enriching the legacy of Tolstoy. This same community produces the vast research apparatus available to Tolstoy scholars—the collected works and other scholarly editions, with their tremendously rich annotations. The encyclopaedic nature of this enterprise was evident in the very discourse of the papers, many of which simply described what Tolstoy had read and when—the emphasis being not to analyse or challenge current conceptions of Tolstoy, but rather to build upon an edifice of collective understanding. Thus there was an inherent selflessness in the rhetoric (as presenters sought to illuminate not their own thoughts, but Tolstoy's), and a certain lighthandedness (as presenters carried no burden of proof regarding the relevance of their work, insofar as Tolstoy's own significance as a cultural monument was unquestionable). Likewise, insofar as many of the papers did not intend to raise points for debate, there was often not a

great deal of discussion. Thus the meeting was less an occasion to argue than to learn about Tolstoy, and to consider the scope of his involvement in world culture.

From a cultural historian's point of view, the conference also offered the opportunity to explore the author's estate as a national landmark. Cultural layers were abundant. At the local *Dom otdykha*, where the guests were housed, Moscow radio was broadcast from morning to evening through loudspeakers in the courtyard; nearby stood a large statue of Lenin, a bronze representation of Lenin's authority, throughout the Soviet period, over the legacy of Tolstoy. (A copy of the local communist party organ, *Tul'skaia pravda*, from the day of Tolstoy's anniversary revealed more vestigial Leninism—a piece on Tolstoy's biography was carried under the headline: "Lev Tolstoi kak zerkalo russkoi revoliutsii".) Walking from the *Dom otdykha* to the estate, one passed the hospital and school, both built in connection with the 1928 celebration of the 100-year anniversary of Tolstoy's birth, and adorned with quotes from Lunacharsky on the significance of Tolstoy in the Soviet age. (A visit to the school revealed that the curriculum is once again, as it was in 1928, based on Tolstoy's pedagogical principles.)

Indeed, two great democratic experiments met here in conflict. A walk up the lane to the estate, which was swept by grounds keepers who deferentially inclined their heads away from the passing visitors, showed that neither Tolstoy's populism, nor the Soviets' communism, had erased "class consciousness" at the estate.

For everyone attending the conference, and I think especially for those coming from abroad, the opportunity to spend a number of days in the environs of Iasnaia Poliana was an added bonus. One of the treats of the visit was a tour of the grounds and house led by Nikolai Puzin, who has worked at Iasnaia since 1944. He enlivened the tour with his comments marked not only by an intimate familiarity with the house and its history, but also by a poetic language perfected over his many years at the estate. The conference was held in a room in the Volkonskii House that also served as a gallery of paintings of Iasnaia Poliana, con-

stant reminders of another poetic language—the iconography of the estate that was initially created by painters such as Repin, Ge, Nesterov, and Pasternak, and which, judging by the paintings on display, is being recreated by a number of fine contemporary artists. The room also housed a baby grand piano, which served, during one rainy interlude in the schedule (and in keeping with another tradition at the estate), as the site for an impromptu recital. The rain in fact persisted throughout the first days of the conference, causing the cancellation of a visit to the Tolstoy family burial grounds at the nearby Nikolo-Kochakovskii Cemetery, and then turned to snow on the night of October 1st. There followed, however, a gloriously sunny morning that awakened all of the natural beauty captured in the paintings—beauty that is indeed part of the lore of the estate. The last afternoon and following morning could be spent enjoying picturesque walks, gathering the delectable Antonov apples from the estate orchards, or standing near the stables watching the horses. Passing through the gates of the estate one could find a range of Tolstoy paraphernalia for sale: *znachki* and lacquer boxes with images of Tolstoy and Iasnaia Poliana, maps of the estate and surroundings, and a variety of books, including a cookbook based on Sofia Andreevna Tolstaya's recipes. These walks inevitably led to Tolstoy's grave, where one was inclined to ponder the ultimate meaning of Tolstoy's place not in world literature, but in the world.

The cultural enterprise of Iasnaia Poliana extends beyond the grounds of the estate as well. Twice the conference-goers were taken into nearby Tula to attend events at the "Iasnaia Poliana" art gallery, which, as they were told, is intended to serve as an international cultural centre. (We were treated to a concert of medieval European music by the Madrigal ensemble of the Moscow Philharmonic, and an art opening of the works of Provence painter Josef Bayol, who was in attendance throughout the conference.) Also attached to the gallery are a publishing house and a bookstore, which has a special section of Tolstoy materials for sale, including lovely calendars and two "Tolstoyan" journals: one bears the name

of the estate (at least the third journal of its kind), the other entitled *Voskresenie*. Both are of very high quality and feature publications on Tolstoy, as well as other, primarily literary, material.

The fate of other Tolstoy publications remains less certain, however. The organizers of the conference intend to publish the proceedings, but they confessed that this project would require funding that is, as yet, not available. Other Tolstoy publications, including the aforementioned bibliography and the new *Collected Works*, are also in similar states of limbo. Times are such that even such labours of love for a national treasure must await the patronage of some moneyed interest. Thus Tolstoy continues to ride the juggernaut of this century, and to share the experience of his native land as it undergoes yet another difficult period of transition. Several people with whom I spoke bemoaned the lack of young scholars working on Tolstoy, and commented that compara-

tively little is being done to fit Tolstoy into interpretive landscape of the late twentieth century. (Among the major classical writers, both Pushkin, who is benefiting from the impending 200-year anniversary of his birth, and Dostoevsky are faring better in this regard.) The diligent work being done in the archives and on the new edition indicates, however, that Tolstoy's legacy is in very capable and caring hands. Resilient interest in Tolstoy was indicated not only by the conference on *Tolstoy and World Literature*, but also by other gatherings which marked the anniversary, including another meeting earlier in September on the theme of *Tolstoy and the Contemporary World*. Tolstoy has emerged from the Soviet period, despite its official ambivalence toward him, with a firmly established scholarly apparatus, and he continues to hold his position as a cornerstone of the national literary heritage.