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**READING RUSSIA.
A HISTORY OF READING
IN MODERN RUSSIA**

Volume 2

Edited by Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena

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List of abbreviations

In the notes the following will be used:

d. (dd.) *delo (dela)*

ed. khr. *edinitsa khraneniia*

f. *fond*

AGE *Arkhiv Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha*, St. Petersburg.

GAIO *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Ivanovskoi oblasti*, Ivanovo.

GMT OR *Gosudarstvennyi Muzei im. L. N. Tolstogo, Otdel rukopisei*, Moscow.

IRLI *Institut Russkoi Literatury i iskusstva*, St. Petersburg.

l. (ll.) *list (listy)*

op. *opis'*

NA RT *Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan*, Kazan'.

OR RGB *Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi Biblioteki*, Moscow.

OR RNB *Otdel Ruskopisei Rossiiskoi Natsional'noi Biblioteki*, St. Petersburg.

RA *Russian Anthology (Polnaia russkaia khrestomatiia, ili obraztsy krasnorechiia i poezii, zaimstvovannye iz luchshikh otechestvennykh pisatelei*, edited by A. Galakhov).

RGALI *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva*, Moscow.

RGIA *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, St. Petersburg.

READING THE NEWS ON TOLSTOI IN 1908

Raffaella Vassena

When Tolstoi made public his spiritual conversion at the beginning of the 1890s, he offered the world an unprecedented point of view on his person. In the following years, the crack that Tolstoi himself had opened gradually expanded: the audacity of the issues addressed in his new narrative and journalistic production, his involvement in charitable social activities, his public renunciation of the copyrights on his works published after 1881, his close criticism of governmental institutions and, of course, the scandal of his excommunication by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901—all of this increased the curiosity of the public, which was attracted and at the same time disoriented by the charisma of such a complex and contradictory personality. The effects of this growing clamour around Tolstoi's name were unprecedented. Especially in the final ten years of his life, his image modified, fragmented and multiplied itself before the eyes of the world: any small event concerning his everyday life at Iasnaia Poliana, his new works, his alleged movements, his visitors, his health, even the sporadic fires in his estate or the quarrels among the peasants there became the subject of debates on the press, in which every detail was magnified, dissected, distorted and, bouncing from one newspaper to another, thrown to the reading public.¹

This chapter will consider the case of Tolstoi in the light of the spread of new communication technologies in Russia and of the new reading practices that these implied. Recent studies have convincingly demonstrated that studying the reception of the later Tolstoi cannot ignore a serious reflection

1 The morbid interest in the person of Tolstoi was a widely debated phenomenon in the Russian press, which wondered to what limits the public could be pushed. See for instance A. Voznesenskii, "O pisatele i chitatele," *Odesskie novosti*, 18 December 1902; K. Fabianskii, "Genii i tolpa (Lev Tolstoi i publika)," *Russkoe slovo*, 8 July 1907; L. N., "Obrazets nekul'turnosti," *Russkoe slovo*, 5 October 1907.

on how his image was mediated by the press.² To what extent did the media transform the nature of this image, affecting the way in which it was received and creating new interpretative models for it? This turns out to be a major issue which needs further investigation. Here we limit ourselves to highlighting some aspects of such issues, namely, the mechanisms through which daily coverage of Tolstoi created an illusion of intimacy, offering the reader the opportunity to take possession of him as an object from an ever closer distance. This gradual cancellation of distances makes it possible to compare the case of Tolstoi to a primitive “global village,”³ in which news about him spread incredibly fast, up to the borders of Russia and beyond, changing and transforming his image every time news about him was republished by a new newspaper. To grasp the significance of this phenomenon, it is necessary to consider the diffusion and the evolution of newspapers in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century.

Especially after the publication of “The Manifesto on the Improvement of the State Order” of 17 October 1905 and the subsequent imperial decree of 24 November of the same year, which sanctioned the end of preventive censorship and promised new guarantees in freedom of speech, the Russian periodical scene underwent further diversification, adapting itself to the tastes and pockets of very diverse audiences. 1891 statistics report the existence of 296 newspapers, 70 of which were dailies; in 1908 the number of dailies increased to 440, of which seven were published twice daily.⁴ Within a decade, the circulation of newspapers grew exponentially: while at the end of the 1890s the average circulation was about 20-25,000 copies (with peaks of 70,000 as in the case of *Svet* [*The Light*]), after 1905 it doubled, reaching exceptional figures in some cases, like in that of *Russkoe slovo* (*The Russian Word*), which had a circulation of 250,000 copies a day.⁵ The unstoppable growth of newspapers

2 See M. Denner, “‘Be Not Afraid of Greatness...’: Leo Tolstoy and Celebrity,” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 42, 4 (2009), 614-645; by the same author see also: “The Proletarian Lord: Leo Tolstoy’s Image During the Russian Revolutionary Period,” in D. Tussing Orwin (ed.), *Anniversary Essays on Tolstoy* (Cambridge, 2010), 218-244; “Introduction,” in L. Fitzsimmons, M. A. Denner (eds.), *Tolstoy on Screen* (Evanston, Illinois, 2015), 3-19. A milestone in the study of Tolstoi and the press of his time is W. Nickell, *The Death of Tolstoy. Russia on the Eve, Astapovo Station, 1910* (Ithaca, London, 2010).

3 H. M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, 1962), 31.

4 These figures are reported in J. Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read. Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton, 1985), 112, and L. McReynolds, *The News Under Russia’s Old Regime. The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1991), Table 2. It should be noted that these figures differ, albeit slightly, from those reported by Makhonina, who, for 1913 counts 417 dailies, of which 10 went out twice a day (S. Ia. Makhonina, *Istoriia russkoi zhurnalistiki nachala XX veka* [Moscow, 2003], 60). On the spread of newspapers in late nineteenth-century Russia see also A. I. Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal’montu i drugie raboty po istoricheskoi sotsiologii russkoi literatury* (Moscow, 2009), 113-132; D. R. Brower, “The Penny Press and Its Readers,” in S. Frank, M. D. Steinberg (eds.), *Cultures in Flux. Lower-Class Values, Practices and Resistance in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1994), 147-167; B. I. Esin, *Istoriia russkoi zhurnalistiki 1703-1917* (Moscow, 2000).

5 Makhonina, *Istoriia russkoi zhurnalistiki*, 60.

signalled the advent of a new type of reader, a phenomenon acknowledged by more than one contemporary author—including Tolstoi—with some concern.⁶ In 1904, the populist journalist S. N. Krivenko (1847-1906), already a collaborator with authoritative periodicals like *Sankt-Peterburgskie-vedomosti* (*St. Petersburg News*), *Otechestvennye zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*), *Russkoe bogatstvo* (*Russian Wealth*) and *Novoe slovo* (*New Word*), painted a portrait of this new *gazetnyi chitatel'* [newspaper reader], implicitly contrasting him with the old reader of the thick journals. In contrast with the old reader, the new newspaper reader would not interpret what he read in the light of reason, would not devote to his reading the time that was necessary for him to assimilate and reflect on what he had read, but, rather, would be satisfied with a hasty and superficial reading:

We read or, rather, thumb through newspapers in passing, between tea and morning errands, and mainly to keep ourselves up to date. First of all, the reader goes through the telegrams or the obituaries, then takes a look at the stock exchange or the governmental decrees, then browses the news section and the sub-headings of articles and sections, so as not to miss something exceptional, sensational, about which people are bound to talk. If he still has time, then he will also browse the local feuilleton, or otherwise he will leave it for after lunch or for the evening, to scan quickly before falling asleep. [...] When you meet people in offices or on suburban trains in the summer and overhear their conversations, without fail you can tell which of them have leafed through which newspaper, and what kind of material they have been subsisting on. And the same thing happens again the next day, and on and on. This attitude, one might say, is superficial. This is not a type of reading that implies a necessary reflection on what is being read; this is merely browsing, a very easy thing to do if one has a minimum set of skills.⁷

After denying that newspapers possessed any integral ideological content and consistency of opinions (i.e. the qualities which instead characterized thick journals), Krivenko criticised their language. He deemed it an empty,

6 Tolstoi's concern was the naivety of lower-class readers, who were unable to distinguish false news from true news and prone to being affected by the sensationalist tones of newspapers. D. P. Makovitskii reports a statement by Tolstoi about his waiter Vania: "About the way today's newspapers insinuate themselves into family affairs and write blatantly, L. N. said that Vania (the waiter) is getting his education from the newspapers (he reads them diligently every day). This is bad, because the consequence of reading newspapers is that it allows you to judge things you don't know. Currently, 99% of people who read the newspapers repeat what they have read in them, they do not have their own opinion on things." D. P. Makovitskii, "Iasnopolianskie zapiski," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 90 (Moscow, 1979), part 4, 351-352.

7 S. N. Krivenko, "Gazetnoe delo i gazetnye liudi," *Russkaia mysl'*, 10 (1906), 7.

bureaucratic language, composed of simple clichés, which often reflected the reporter's own poor level of education and very nearly dazed the reader, inhibiting his capacity to judge the facts as they were reported. The reading modality of the newspaper reader described by Krivenko was therefore influenced not only by the social and cultural profile of the reader, but also by the specific form of the medium, i.e. the structural features of the newspaper—by its style, language, genre of published materials, the way these were arranged, etc. The situation described by Krivenko leads to the question of whether it is possible to isolate some interpretative models suggested by the formats of the newspapers themselves and verify their effect on the public. To test this hypothesis, we chose to narrow the field of investigation to 1908 and to focus on a selection of newspapers representing the main categories of the pre-revolutionary Russian press.⁸

On August 28, 1908, Tolstoi turned eighty years old. Despite a rich, long-standing tradition of celebrations and literary festivals in Russia, Tolstoi's jubilee was an unprecedented event. For months, in spite of Tolstoi's preemptive condemnation of any manner of celebration, the news about his birthday dominated the pages of all newspapers, from the most serious and authoritative dailies to the yellow press, from Moscow and St. Petersburg to the most remote provinces. While initially coverage of the event seemed to be a simple exchange of ideas about whether and/or how to celebrate the occasion, over the course of several months, it took on aspects of a political, social, and religious debate on a national scale. Tolstoi's life, as well as his political, social, and religious theories (or, rather, the infinite derivations of these) became, for some, a pretext for promulgating foggy concepts of equality and democracy; for others, for open attacks on the interests of both Church and State; for others, again, for condemning the rampant crisis of values in modern Russian society. Manufactured, modelled, and endlessly reproduced, the news about Tolstoi's eightieth birthday also lent itself to commercial purposes, both in the field of publishing and in that of consumer goods: from newspaper pages and the covers of supplements and journals, to candy wrappers and cigarette boxes, Tolstoi's images multiplied, each time adapting to the tastes of reader-consumers. This story (which,

⁸ In 1901, basing his distinctions on parameters such as the format, content, style, and cost of subscription or retail sale price, the social-revolutionary journalist A. V. Peshekhonov (1867-1933) divided newspapers into *bol'shaia pressa* (authoritative, large format, political information newspapers that cost between 8-12 roubles, addressing a selected and educated public), *malaia pressa* (smaller-sized and lower-priced newspapers [annual subscription between 7 and 10 roubles] aimed at the lower urban classes) and *deshevye* or *bul'varnye gazety* (cheap and scarcely informative newspapers, printed on low quality paper, for a poorly educated audience) (A. V. Peshekhonov, "Russkaia politicheskaiia gazeta. Statisticheskii ocherk," *Russkoe bogatstvo*, 1901, 3). More recent studies have identified a fourth category in the so-called "informationnaia pressa," represented by two newspapers such as *Novoe vremia* and *Russkoe slovo*. Cf. Makhonina, *Istoriia russkoi zhurnalistiki*, 66, 82-99.

by any measure, has all the features of a “pseudo-event”⁹ was reconstructed in several biographies and studies of Tolstoi,¹⁰ none of which, however, considered it in light of Russia’s developing journalism industry and of the appearance of a new type of reader. The ‘montages’ of the articles published about Tolstoi during that year, while effective in rendering the chaotic heterogeneity of opinions, fail to grasp the mechanisms of manipulation to which Tolstoi’s image was subjected, nor do they tell us what effects these articles had on the public. The aim of this chapter is to shed new light on the media coverage of Tolstoi’s jubilee in 1908 by proceeding on two levels: on the one hand, drawing from the continuous and apparently disordered flow of materials on Tolstoi’s jubilee (articles, surveys, parodies, caricatures, but also private and public letters from and to Tolstoi) a narrative of the media debate that dominated the first half of 1908; on the other, highlighting some of the strategies used by the media in constructing Tolstoi’s image and bringing them into dialogue with the target-reader of selected newspapers published in Moscow and St. Petersburg on 28 August 1908.

I. THE MEDIA DEBATE ON TOLSTOI’S JUBILEE AND THE FIRST REACTIONS OF READERS

In the early months of 1908, on the initiative of M. A. Stakhovich (1861-1923), a longtime friend of Tolstoi’s and a member of the State Duma, a committee was set up in St. Petersburg for the celebration of the writer’s eightieth birthday. The intense activity of the committee, which included authors, artists and journalists, resulted in a meeting that took place on 23 February 1908 and saw forty delegates from the Russian periodical press of the time gather to discuss the possible forms of the event. However, there was much more at stake than just a celebration: a powerful catalyst for public attention, Tolstoi’s name represented, for the progressive press, an impediment to the policies supported by the tsarist government concerning the distribution of land to peasants, capital punishment, and the prison system. Precisely for this rea-

⁹ Daniel J. Boorstin coined the term “pseudo-event” to indicate artificial news which gains credibility in the eyes of the public only because of its media impact. According to his definition, a “pseudo-event” possesses the following characteristics: “it is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it [...]; it is planted primarily [...] for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced [...]; its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity [...]; it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy” (D. J. Boorstin, *The Image. A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* [New York, 2012], 11-12).

¹⁰ Among the others, see the extensive and valuable research of Russian scholar Irina Petrovitskaia: *Lev Tolstoi – Publitsist i obshchestvennyi deiatel’* (Moscow, 2013); “Tolstovskii s’ezd russkikh zhurnalistov. 1908 god,” Idem (ed.), *Iz istorii russkoi literatury i zhurnalistiki. Ezhegodnik* (Moscow, 2009), 245-256. A recent collection of excerpts from the articles on Tolstoi published in Russian newspapers in 1908 is also worthy of note: F. Tolstaia e al., *Kak zhal’, chto Tolstoi ne arbuz* (Moscow, 2018).

son, as early as the month of March, the state and religious authorities became alarmed, issuing warnings about maintaining the public order. In the coming months, these became actual prohibitions to celebrate the event.¹¹

Despite these circumstances, a debate on the ways in which the celebration should take place emerged in all Russian periodicals from the very beginning of that year. The question of how to mark the occasion resonated in almost every publication, giving rise to answers of all kinds, from the most polemic to the most creative, and thus creating more than one opportunity for satire:

When he sewed boots, they demanded that he write novels, and when he wrote novels, they demanded that he sew boots. They spied in his kitchen to see if he was breaking his fast by eating meat [...] They have bought and sold his words, his gestures and his thoughts at wholesale and retail prices. [...] And so they got to the eightieth birthday of the great writer of his own land. And they started discussing why and how they should celebrate this jubilee.¹²

Some newspapers published phantasmagorical news: the American billionaire Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) was about to buy from S. A. Tolstaia the rights to Tolstoi's works in order to distribute them to the population for free; funds were being raised to buy Tolstoi's birth house, or even Iasnaia Poliana, in order to turn them into national museums.¹³ Other newspapers launched surveys to establish the most appropriate way to celebrate Tolstoi's birthday. The answers published in the pages of the newspaper *Rannee utro* (*Early Morning*, 1907-1918) testify to the ongoing ferment at all levels of the Russian society. Among the individuals interviewed, several came from the world of politics and culture; these believed that traditional forms of celebration did not suit Tolstoi, and suggested more appropriate initiatives, such as the publication of his complete works.¹⁴ Common readers instead proposed to celebrate Tolstoi's birthday by raising funds to open universities, schools or libraries for the people, while others suggested distributing Tolstoi's works for free in the countryside and in villages, where apparently he was known only by dint of his excommunication by the Holy Synod:

Many, very many, especially in the countryside and in villages, do not know Tolstoi, but have heard of him only through rumours ac-

¹¹ "Tolstoi i o Tolstom: Novye materialy," *Tolstovskii muzei* (Moscow, 1924), vol. 1, 81-83.

¹² Vlad. Azov, "Malen'kii fel'eton. V trekh sosnakh," *Rech'*, March 1, 1908.

¹³ See for instance "K iubileiu L. Tolstogo," *Russkoe slovo*, 1 February 1908; "Kak oznamenovat' iubilei L. N. Tolstogo," *Penzenskie vedomosti*, 5 February 1908; "K tolstovskomu iubileiu," *Russkoe slovo*, 11 March 1908.

¹⁴ See for instance the letters of lawyer Mikhail L. Mandel'shtam and of the member of the State Assembly Z. A. Maklanov, published in "Kak chestvovat' Tolstogo?," *Rannee utro*, 26 February 1908; see also the answer of Tolstoi's son, S.L. Tolstoi, in "Kak chestvovat' Tolstogo?," *Rannee utro*, 9 March 1908.

ording to which Tolstoi is a heretic, excommunicated by the Holy Synod, and this means a lot to the masses of faithful peasants.¹⁵

The ongoing debate in the press went hand in hand with an exponential increase in the mail arriving at Iasnaia Poliana. Tolstoi's archive in Moscow contains over fifty thousand letters addressed to him, still largely unpublished, reflecting the lively dialogue between Tolstoi and his contemporaries: almost half of these letters reached Tolstoi in the decade before his death, between 1900 and 1910; of these, over four thousand date back to 1908; of these, those that refer to the jubilee number 1,364.¹⁶ Even the periodicals publicized the extraordinary flow of letters addressed to Tolstoi, from Russia and from abroad, offering brief samples of their various types, and sometimes even indulging in satirical interpretations of the phenomenon.¹⁷



“Tolstoi at work” (*Seryi volk*, 23 March 1908, n. 12)

15 Letters by “Provintsial P. F. Veselovskii” and “M. Alf-ii” in “Kak chestvovat’ Tolstogo?,” *Rannee utro*, 2 March 1908 and 9 March 1908.

16 http://tolstoy-manuscript.ru/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.browse&category_id=414&Itemid=8 (accessed May 6, 2020). Over the years only a small part of the letters to Tolstoi has been published. A huge selection of letters can be found in V. A. Zhdanov (ed.), “Iz pisem k Tolstomu (po materialam tolstovskogo arkhiva),” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 37/38, L. N. Tolstoi, book 2, (Moscow, 1939), 369-396.

17 “Perepiska L. N. Tolstogo (Vesti iz Iasnoi Poliany),” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 13 February 1908; “L. N. i tri rozy,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 29 February 1908. G. Sergeenko, “Arkhiv Tolstogo,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 14 June 1908; “Perepiska Tolstogo,” *Kievskie vesti*, 20 June 1908. See also the caricature published in the satirical magazine *Seryi volk*, 12 (23 March 1908), 170.

Many of the letters protested against the celebration of the jubilee, which was seen by Tolstoi's followers as a base and corrupt event antithetical to his teachings, and by his opponents as a dangerous instrument of mass propagation of his anticlerical ideas. It was precisely these letters that prompted Tolstoi to take a more defined position with respect to what was happening, even if, at first, he only did so in private, in answering some of his individual correspondents.¹⁸ What struck him most was a letter that he received from Princess M. M. Dondukova-Korsakova, a benefactor and a woman with a marked religious sensitivity, who had written to him on 22 February, begging him to give up his jubilee so as not to cause further pain to Orthodox Christians. In his response of 27 February, Tolstoi admitted his profound discomfort with the clamour that the media had generated around him and agreed with Dondukova-Korsakova as to the harmful effects that the celebrations would have on parts of the Russian society. In line with this position, the following day Tolstoi wrote to M. A. Stakhovich, asking him to stop any initiative related to his jubilee and motivating his request with his desire not to offend the sensitivity of the Orthodox.¹⁹

News of Tolstoi's letter to Dondukova-Korsakova appeared in newspapers on 13 March, resulting in controversy centered either around the correspondent who had unwittingly presented herself as spokeswoman for all the Orthodox believers, or around Tolstoi himself, who was seen as spiteful of the affection that the Russian society showed for him.²⁰

A few days later, the controversy became sharper with the publication of a passage from another of Tolstoi's private letters, this time addressed to one of his followers, the former landowner A. M. Bodianskii. In an open letter to the newspapers, Bodianskii had proposed to honour the writer's jubilee by locking him up in prison. In his private response, Tolstoi was very pleased with this idea, stating: "Really, nothing would satisfy me and give me more joy than being put in prison, in a beautiful, real, smelly, cold, hungry prison."²¹ Tolstoi's paradoxical declaration came out in the Moscow newspaper *Russkie vedomosti* (*Russian News*, 1863-1917) on 18 March, and was taken up by other newspapers, sparking controversy and sarcastic jokes even on the

18 See Tolstoi's letters of 24 February to I. A. Samsonov, of 27 February to M. M. Dondukova-Korsakova, and of 17 March 1908 to the peasant A. I. Shashkin (L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh* [Moscow, 1928-1958], vol. 78, 68-71, 96).

19 Letter of 28 February 1908 to M. A. Stakhovich (Ibid., 73-75). A summary of Tolstoi's letter to Stakhovich was made public on 23 March, after Stakhovich's public reading of the letter during a meeting of the Tolstoi honors committee (see "Otkaz L. N. Tolstogo ot iubileia," *Russkoe slovo*, 23 March 1908; "K chestvovaniiu L. N. Tolstogo," *Rech'*, 23 March 1908). The text of the letter was published on the Russian press on April 6.

20 See for instance "K chestvovaniiu L. N. Tolstogo," *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 13 March 1908; "K iubileiiu L. N. Tolstogo," *Rannee utro*, 13 March 1908.

21 Letter of 12-13 March 1908 to A. M. Bodianskii, Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 78, 88-89. Bodianskii was serving a six-month sentence for spreading Tolstoi's prohibited works.

part of the public.²² The great confusion generated by the breathless circulation of such news only swelled river of correspondence entering Iasnaia Poliana. Some took the opportunity to reiterate their longstanding hatred of Tolstoi.²³ Others outlined to him the political objectives that the jubilee might help realize: there were those who hoped that it would put pressure on the government to grant amnesty to exiled sectarians, and those who suggested that it could be a favourable opportunity to obtain the abolition of capital punishment.²⁴ Then there were those who, misrepresenting what was written in the newspapers, hypothesised Tolstoi's involvement in the preparations for the event and asked him about them directly. Thus, for example, one lady reader from Odessa wrote to him at the end of March:

From everywhere comes word that all of Europe, America, and, so to speak, the whole world is preparing to celebrate your eightieth birthday.
Debates are being held on how it is best to do it, they ask for your opinion about it.
You agree with these celebrations, and this is incredible.²⁵

After pointing out not only the risk that the debate between the supporters and the opponents of Tolstoi's thought might become harsher, but also the enormous economic expenditure that organising the jubilee would entail, the correspondent came to formulate the usual request for Tolstoi's public rejection of the event, adding precise indications of what Tolstoi's statement should include:

Stop all this publicly, write a letter to the newspapers saying that you renounce these celebrations on, say, material grounds. But if people so want to pay tribute to you, show them a really good and useful action that they could do, and [show them] what would give moral satisfaction to both them and yourself. Certainly, to stop death sentences in your name, to open the doors of prisons

22 In a letter of 1 April 1908, an anonymous correspondent joked about Tolstoi's desire to shut himself up in a prison, signing his letter "An old fool": Gosudarstvennyi Muzei im. L. N. Tolstogo, Otdel rukopisei (hereafter GMT OR), Moscow, f. 1, 149/66.

23 Letter of 14 March 1908 from N. A. Dunaeva, who attended Moscow's Women's Higher Courses: "I, Nadezhda Dunaeva, daughter of a merchant, attending the Moscow Women's Higher Courses, feel a personal hatred for you... I have never seen you, I have not read all of your works, but what I have read put me against you" (Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 78, 91).

24 Letter to Tolstoi from S. N. Maiboroda from Kharkiv, 24 April 1908 (Ibid., 336).

25 Letter to Tolstoi from Varvara Doiban from Odessa, 26 March 1908. GMT OR, f. 1, 47249.

to all those who suffer in the name of an idea, all this would be a great demonstration of humanity and love for your neighbour.²⁶

In another letter from 16 March 1908, a man from Kursk, K. Voinov Razumov, having read about the jubilee in the newspapers, accused Tolstoi of colluding with the Babel that the media had unleashed around him:

Dear Mr. Lev Nikolaevich!

Reading every day of the approaching jubilee in your honour, I am truly amazed that you, a man of intellect [...], have not yet examined your conscience, against which you have acted for half a century, and that now, nearing the end of your life, still read and listen to the masses of people who are only capable of repeating somebody else's words, including yours [...]²⁷

Unlike other correspondents who asked Tolstoi for a public rejection in the press, the correspondent from Kursk showed greater awareness of his influence; he aspired to be a protagonist, and not only a passive consumer, of the media show. After having urged Tolstoi to renounce falsity (which significantly, for this particular writer, coincided with disposing of the clothes worn in the portraits that circulated in the press), he challenged Tolstoi to have his [i.e. the correspondent's] letter published in a newspaper:

In conclusion, I will say that if you have ever had the conscience of a reasonable person, then you should take off your mask (your sandals and shirt) and, after reading this letter, you should not throw it away with the useless papers, but send it to the editorial staff of important newspapers and ask them yourself to publish it in full, so that the whole world may judge who the true believers really are, and not those corrupted by you, and this will purify your conscience.²⁸

In an attempt to calm things down and distance himself from the accusation of participating in an ambiguous and harmful system, Tolstoi paradoxically ended up using the same means attributed to that system. After noting his discomfort in his diaries,²⁹ he also expressed it in a letter of 21 March

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 56, 483-484.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ "21 March 1908 Ias. Pol. [...] I have now received an abusive letter in this regard. I want to fulfil the sender's wish—send the letter to a newspaper and take advantage of it to express myself more and more clearly" (Ibid., 110-111).

to his son Lev,³⁰ and finally decided, on 25 March, to make a public pronouncement about it. In an open letter to the newspapers, Tolstoi officially distanced himself from the preparations for his jubilee, attaching the letter from the Kursk reader, as the reader had commanded, and asking them to publish it.³¹ In his letter, Tolstoi used as his first argument his natural distaste for public ceremonies, which years before had led him to decline Turgenev's invitation to take part in the Moscow celebrations in honour of A. S. Pushkin. His second argument, more importantly, was the awareness that these manifestations risked initiating a vicious circle, disproportionately propagating and increasing negative feelings towards him:

[...] the celebrations that are being prepared, even their very preparation, arouse in a large number of people quite negative feelings toward me. These negative feelings may remain unexpressed, but this only stimulates and fosters them. I know that these negative feelings were caused by me; I myself am guilty of them, I am guilty of the harsh and reckless words with which I dared judge other people's beliefs. I sincerely regret this and I am very happy to have the opportunity to declare it. But this does not change the question. At my age, with one foot in the grave, the only thing one wants is to be in loving relationships with people as much as possible, and to take leave of them with these same feelings. This letter and other similar ones that I receive show precisely that the preparations for the jubilee arouse in people— and absolutely rightfully so— feelings totally contrary to love. And this is very painful to me.³²

However, perhaps fearing the consequences of his action,³³ at the last moment Tolstoi decided not to post the letter, but to give it to his friend N. V. Davydov, who had come to Iasnaia Poliana on behalf of the Moscow committee for the celebration of the jubilee. Davydov read out Tolstoi's letter during a session of the Society of Lovers of Russian Literature (*Obshchestvo liubitelei russkoi slovesnosti*) and the Moscow committee decided to respect Tolstoi's wishes, publicly renouncing its intentions.³⁴

³⁰ "My jubilee is a very difficult task for me: how can I not offend friends or stir up enemies? I am looking for a way to affect the people's natural feeling of love as little as possible" (Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 78, 98-99).

³¹ "Letters like these, from people who see my next jubilee negatively, I have received a certain number. This, I ask you to publish, as its author wishes" (Ibid., 104-106).

³² Ibidem.

³³ Precisely in those days Tolstoi, who had been asked to use the jubilee as a means to obtain the repatriation of emigrated sectarians, stated: "If I asked for an amnesty, those words would be lost in the wind. I commit to this: I shall intervene as little as possible" (Makovitskii, "Iasnopolianskie zapiski," vol. 3, 41).

³⁴ That said, as soon as 31 March, newspapers reported its resurgence, under the name of "Obshchestvo imeni L'va Nikolaevicha Tolstogo," with the intention to found a museum

Although creating a sensation, Tolstoi's refusal immediately lost part of its effectiveness because it coincided with an interview with Tolstoi's son Lev, published in the 30 March issue of the Moscow newspaper *Rus' (Russia)*.³⁵ This interview included excerpts of the letter written to him by his father on 21 March, in which he seemed to be torn between conflicting feelings. In the interview, moreover, Lev was misleadingly quoted as saying that his father would not have liked the interruption of the preparations for the celebrations. The statements attributed to L. L. Tolstoi forced him to retract them publicly, in an article published in St. Petersburg's *Novoe vremia (New Time, 1868-1917)* on 1 April. Lev distanced himself from the article published in *Rus'* and tried to re-establish the correct version of the facts, reporting the words that his father himself had used in his letter of 21 March.³⁶

The conflicting rumours about the attitude of Tolstoi and his family toward the jubilee merely exacerbated speculations and conjectures about the writer, providing material for serious and satirical articles alike. Over the course of several days, *Novoe vremia* published an article by A. Stolypin positively commenting on Tolstoi's statements regarding the jubilee; then the aforementioned letter to the editor from Tolstoi's son; then a caricature that represented Tolstoi, intent on fleeing from the jubilee celebrations, riding a galloping horse exhausted by fatigue; and finally a moving article by Vasilii Rozanov, in which he proposed to celebrate Tolstoi in silence, and fantasized about an unlikely press release he would like to see in Russian newspapers the day before the fateful anniversary: "Simply, we will think of you in silence, and we will rejoice in the fact that you are still with us, that you see and feel, just as we see and feel you."³⁷ It was no different with St. Petersburg's *Birzhevye vedomosti (Stock Exchange News, 1880-1917)*: in the 2 April 1908 issue, just a few days after publishing an article respectful of Tolstoi's reasons (one sympathetic to and inspired by the open letter of the writer's son published in *Novoe vremia*), the news of Tolstoi's rejection of the jubilee was reported as an April Fools' joke.³⁸

dedicated to Tolstoi. See for instance "K 80-ti-letnemu iubileiu L. N. Tolstogo," *Peterburgskii listok*, 31 March 1908. The committee spread the will of Tolstoi through a press release that was taken up by the main Russian newspapers (Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 56, 485).

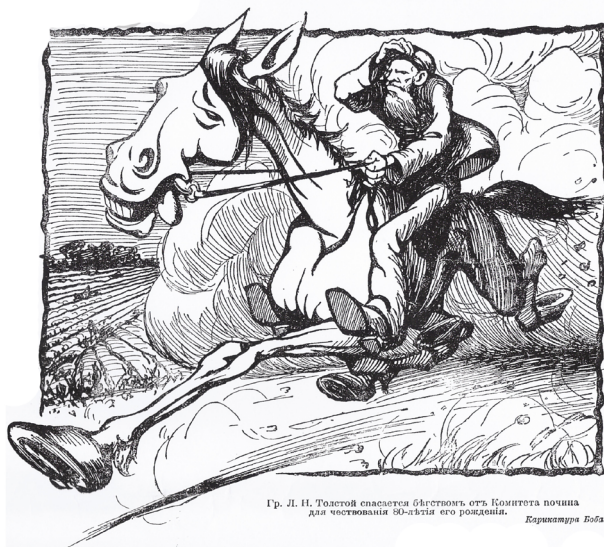
35 "O iubilee," *Rus'*, 30 March 1908.

36 "O iubilee L. N. Tolstogo (Pis'mo v redaktsiiu)," *Novoe vremia*, 1 April 1908.

37 See: A. Stolypin, "Otkazannyi iubilei," *Novoe vremia*, 29 March 1908; "The end of the jubilee company," *Novoe vremia*, 2 April 1908; V. Rozanov, "Krasota molchaniia (K iubileiu L. N. Tolstogo)," *Novoe vremia*, 3 April 1908. In turn, Rozanov's proposal aroused controversial reactions on the part of the yellow press, which saw Tolstoi's jubilee as a possible source of income. See "Sovershenno novoe predlozhenie, kak otprazdnovat' iubilei grafa L'va Tolstogo..." *Peterburgskii listok*, 4 April 1908.

38 See: A. Izmailov, "Iubileia Tolstogo ne budet," *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 28 March 1908; "Malen'kii fel'eton. 1-e aprelia," *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 2 April 1908.

КОНЕЦЬ «ЮБИЛЕЙНОЙ КОМПАНИИ».



Гр. Л. Н. Толстой спасается бегством отъ Комитета почина для чествования 80-летия его рождения. Карикатура Боба.

“The end of the jubilee company,” *Novoe vremia*, 2 April 1908.

Among the most important consequences of the report was the uncontrolled publication of Tolstoy’s other private letters, in which his statements, deprived of any context, lent themselves to increasingly conflicting interpretations. Around that time, first excerpts from and then the entire text of Tolstoy’s 28 February letter to his friend M. A. Stakhovich, in which he asked for the jubilee preparations to be halted, were published. The full text of the letter to Stakhovich appeared on 6 April in the supplement to *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, the popular *Ogonek* (*Spark*); it was introduced by the headline “L. N. Tolstoy renounces his jubilee. A historical document”³⁹ and accompanied by a note specifying that the typescript was reproduced by courtesy of Stakhovich. In the same issue of *Ogonek*, there was also another of Tolstoy’s private letters (penned on 28 February 1908 to Arvid Järnefelt), interesting not so much for its content as for the editor’s introduction. It justified the letter’s publication on the grounds that any word pronounced by Tolstoy possessed value *a priori*, in spite of what he said and no matter how public or private it was. Hence the absolute subordination of the reliability of the news or of the private nature that it may have: any event concerning Tolstoy, any sentence pronounced by or attributed to him was already news in and

39 *Ogonek*, 6 April 1908.

of itself, and it was therefore the reporter's duty to ensure its maximum dissemination and thereby foster an informed public.⁴⁰

In the following weeks, preparations for Tolstoi's looming eightieth birthday did not cease or even slow. Newspapers reported daily about fervent initiatives of all kinds: schools and libraries for peasants named after Tolstoi; his appointments as an honorary member of institutions and associations; proposals to name streets after him; charity publishing projects.⁴¹ However, voices of protest were also raised against the prospect of official celebrations, which had resumed following an 8 April decree of Moscow's city Duma, and which also resulted in the creation of new associations against the jubilee.⁴² Once again, it was Tolstoi himself who fuelled the media hype around his name with an open letter dated 18 May to the newspaper *Rus'*, in which he openly asked to be punished instead of those arrested for spreading his writings.⁴³ Tolstoi's statements, published in the *Rus'* issue of 22 May, triggered a new flow of reactions on the part of the press and led to a peak in the correspondence reaching Iasnaia Poliana: between July and August, sixty letters in support of Tolstoi and twenty-one abusive letters were delivered to his estate, including an envelope with a rope hanging from it and an anonymous note saying: "Count—here's the answer to your letter. Without disturbing the government, you can do it yourself, it's not difficult. Thus you will do your country and our youth a favour".⁴⁴

40 A key figure in the new journalism that sought to inform rather than interpret, the reporter sought both to guarantee the reader's right to truthful and reliable information and to safeguard the commercial interests of the newspaper that he worked for. On the rise and evolution of the reporter profession in Russia see McReynolds, *The News Under Russia's Old Regime*, 145-167.

41 One of these cases reveals how not only the image and words of Tolstoi but also those of his family underwent media proliferation. The announcement of the publication of an anthology of children's texts by Tolstoi (*Khrestomatiia iz pisanii L'va Tolstogo, sostavlena gruppoi detei pod redaktsiei P. A. Sergeenko*, Moscow, 1908) prompted S. A. Tolstaia to write an open letter to the editors of *Russkoe slovo* in which she stated that she owned the copyright on her husband's works prior to 1881. Tolstaia's letter stirred many reactions, both from the public and from other newspapers. On 5 August, *Golos Moskvy* reported the news that a group of Moscow journalists had provocatively decided to publish an anthology of Tolstoi's texts prior to 1881, whereas *Veche* published a caricature which represented the countess in the act of threatening the publisher of the incriminated anthology ("Grafinia S. A. Tolstaia i detskie khrestomatii," *Veche*, 17 August 1908).

42 "Russkie' liudi i iubilei L. N. Tolstogo," *Russkoe slovo*, 1 June 1908.

43 Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 78, 142-144.

44 Letter to Tolstoi signed "A Russian mother," Moscow, 26 August 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 250/20. Tolstoi's repeated requests to be punished in place of others also aroused the reactions of satirical magazines (see for example the caricatures published in *Knut*, 5, 1908; and *Budil'nik*, 33, 1908). New disputes arose in July due to the article "I Cannot Be Silent" ("Ne mogu molchat") that Tolstoi wrote in reaction to the news, reported in *Russkie vedomosti* of 9 May, of the hanging of twenty peasants in the Kherson province. On 4 July 1908, an edited version of that article was also printed in some Russian newspapers; they were sanctioned for this act, and the full text began to circulate clandestinely.

2. FOUR READERS' LETTERS IN AUGUST

The daily, wild press about Tolstoi, his articles, and the forthcoming jubilee aroused great curiosity among the public, but also bewilderment and concern. For example, let us consider four distinct letters which arrived in Iasnaia Poliana in August 1908. The first correspondent is the very A. M. Bodianskii who had been imprisoned on charges of having spread Tolstoi's works: Bodianskii expressed to Tolstoi all his indignation at the clamour that had arisen around his jubilee, and urged him to publicly distance himself from it, and even suggested the words with which he should do it: "I can't stand it! But this time I turn to other recipients. I cannot bear your greetings and good wishes, and my soul hates your praise."⁴⁵ The second correspondent, a certain Nikolai Zhegulov from a village in the Nizhnii Novgorod province, sent an ungrammatical letter to Tolstoi on 15 August that joined the chorus of greetings and praise but drew a vital distinction, however, between Tolstoi's 'secular' works and those in which had addressed the religious theme:

... the day of the eightieth year of your earthly life is approaching and everywhere, as can be read in the newspapers, people are preparing to express in their own way their profound respect for your literary works, and exactly for your secular literature you also receive my deepest respect, but this concerns your writings. As for the questions about the Christian religion in your works, you, Lev Nikolaevich, have made a huge mistake in daring to challenge the fundamental religious principles of Christianity. First of all, you have touched one of the Most Holy Christian Sacraments, the Eucharist, and for this they have excommunicated you, it is a pity you have these convictions, and what will become of those who read these works of yours, there are already many people, especially among the youths of Christian families, who are infected by these works of yours.⁴⁶

The reference to Tolstoi's disrespectful attitude toward the Eucharist Sacrament suggests that Zhegulov might have read the novel *Resurrection* (*Voskresenie*) or at least knew the contents of the Decree of the Holy Synod of February 1901. We might surmise that he had merely read it in the newspapers, from which he derived his familiar evaluative stance towards Tolstoi's work (the distinction between the *Anna Karenina*'s or *War and Peace*'s [*Voina i mir*] Tolstoi and the Tolstoi of his moral-religious writings was typical). The same aspects of Tolstoi's ideology that concern Zhegulov are instead exalted by the peasant Mikhail Alekseev, who wrote from St. Petersburg. In his letter of

45 Excerpts from Bodianskii's letter were published together with Tolstoi's reply in *Russkoe slovo*, 13 September 1908.

46 Letter of N. Zhegulov to L. N. Tolstoi, Selo Sosiovskoe, 15 August 1908. GMT OR, f. 1, 254/140.

26 August, Tolstoi's image acquires a sacred aura that does not, however, prevent Alekseev from changing his address over the course of the letter. Although he initially adopts a formal tone, he soon begins addressing Tolstoi by name, achieving a *crescendo* of devotion and filial affection that breaks every social barrier. Recalling Tolstoi's 1901 excommunication, Alekseev uses the same term (*otluchit'*) to describe the Church's attempt to separate Tolstoi from the people:

Great writer of the Russian land, Count Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, I wish you well for your eightieth birthday. May God keep you healthy for many years to come. Our pastors have excommunicated you from the church and they excommunicate us from you, count, but this gives more glory to you, count, and we Russians love you more and are proud of you, long live Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi for many years to come!⁴⁷

On 21 August, another correspondent, Ivan P. Koshkin, a worker from the Viatsk province, decided to write to Tolstoi after accidentally come across his name:

Lev Nikolaevich! Forgive me if I have the audacity to address you! Not only without knowing you, but also without knowing anything about you. I only know that you are a great man, a great writer, but why you are great and what you write, this I don't know. With what pleasure, with what interest I would read you. Who you are and all your works. But instead I heard about you from the newspaper that they used to wrap the sausage [that I bought]. I heard that it will soon be your birthday. That you are very good, that the whole world knows you. When I studied, I only knew that you were a writer. And I've never read any of your works, thanks to the fact that the teacher didn't give us reading books from the library, while the little ones read everything, and I was stupid not to listen to the younger pupils and I thought that once I finished school I would read everything. But when I finished studying in the rural school I saw that there was no time to read, I was too busy working. And so one ends up knowing nothing and when one sees something one doesn't know what it is, and why, and how. And one doesn't know anything, and one has many questions, but answers—none.⁴⁸

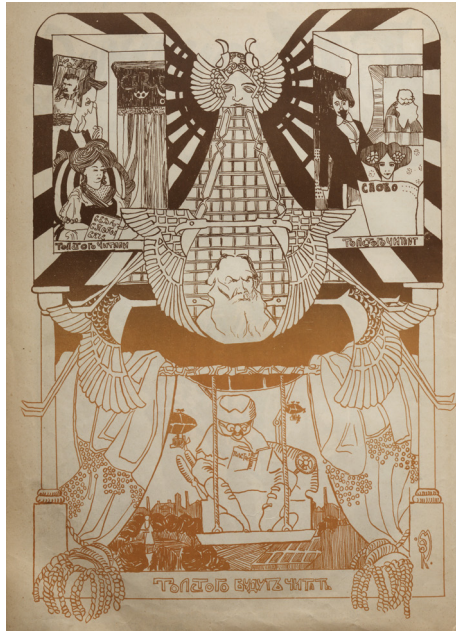
Although Koshkin's letter was dismissed by Makovitskii as "ridiculous,"⁴⁹ it offers multiple insights. First of all, it denotes a certain maturity on the part

47 Letter of M. Alekseev to L. N. Tolstoi, St. Petersburg, 26 August 1908. GMT OR, f. 1, 131/38.

48 Letter of I. O. Koshkin to L. N. Tolstoi, Vyatsk Gov., 21 August 1908. GMT OR, f. 1, 158/30.

49 Makovitskii, "Iasnopolianskie zapiski," vol. 3, 186.

of its author, who, although he admits he does not read, seems to be aware of the opportunity for social integration and moral enrichment that reading represents (“when one sees something one doesn’t know what it is, and why and how. And one doesn’t know anything, and one has many questions, but answers—none”). Then, it integrates and adjusts Krivenko’s observations on how the newspaper reader reads, showing how, in lower social contexts, hasty reading was also the necessary consequence of an actual lack of time, and not only a lack of judgement. No less importantly, Koshkin’s letter shows a rather widespread modality, in the Russian society of the time, in which people learnt the news and, in this specific case, learned about Tolstoi. The correspondent not only states that he has never read any of Tolstoi’s writings and that he hardly knows who Tolstoi is, but candidly confesses that he has learned of his importance as a public figure in an absolutely random manner, from a newspaper used as a food wrapper. These ‘random’ events were not even so ridiculous: a study published in *Russkaia mys’* (*Russian Thought*) in 1900, specifically dedicated to working readers, reported that 51.5% of those interviewed had declared that they read newspapers occasionally because they came across some specimens left in restaurants, or because they bought newspaper for uses other than reading—for example, rolling cigarettes.⁵⁰



“Tolstoi was read; Tolstoi is read; Tolstoi will be read” (*Budil’nik*, 24 August 1908, n. 33)

⁵⁰ P. Shestakov, “Materialy dlia kharakteristiki fabrichnykh rabochikh,” *Russkaia mys’*, 1 (1900), 178-179.

Returning to the representation of the jubilee in newspapers, the approach of 28 August was marked by a veritable explosion of feuilletons—almost as if their light and joking tone were designed to soothe public tensions made worse after a further warning by the Holy Synod on 22 August.⁵¹ They satirized all the sorts of gifts that were delivered to Tolstoi, or the processions of journalists and curious people who came to Iasnaia Poliana, and certainly not just for their disinterested admiration for the writer: Moscow's *Russkoe slovo* published a rather explicit feuilleton on the economic value of a subject like Tolstoi.⁵² Reporting the statements of those jubilee supporters who claimed they wanted to celebrate “Tolstoi the writer” and not “Tolstoi the essayist,” a journalist from the *Kazanskii telegraf* (*Kazan Telegraph*) regretted that Tolstoi was no watermelon that one could cut into halves to satisfy the tastes of both types of admirers of his work.⁵³ The popular *Peterburgskaia gazeta* (*Petersburg Newspaper*) in turn published a humorous anecdote about Tolstoi's ambiguous position between the role of the media victim and that of the skilled manipulator in search of advertising:

They say that to L. N. Tolstoi in Iasnaia Poliana it is customary to go in pairs.

- So that the journey is more cheerful?

- No, not for that... One converses with the count, while the other secretly photographs them... Then the latter starts talking, and the first one takes pictures of them...

[...] So it's better to go in pairs and with a camera.⁵⁴

Going *en masse* to Iasnaia Poliana numbered among the popular forms of paying tribute to Tolstoi. Stripped of the usual sacred aura,⁵⁵ these journeys were alternately presented as picnic trips or tourist excursions. In newspapers, one of the most commonly cited reasons for such journeys was the urgent need to ‘see’ Tolstoi in his environment. Not satisfied with the surrogates that the press provided them, Tolstoi's contemporaries yearned to confront the original version, who in turn, under the distorting lens of the medium, ended up turning into yet another copy with a life of his own.⁵⁶

51 S. I. Pozoiskii, *K istorii otlučeniia L'va Tolstogo ot tserkvi* (Moscow, 1979), 115.

52 See: “Malen'kii fel'eton. Iubileinye podarki,” *Večer*, 25 August 1908; “U grafa L. N. Tolstogo,” *Peterburgskii listok*, 12 August 1908; “Malen'kii fel'eton. V Iasnoi Poliane,” *Russkoe slovo*, 31 August 1908.

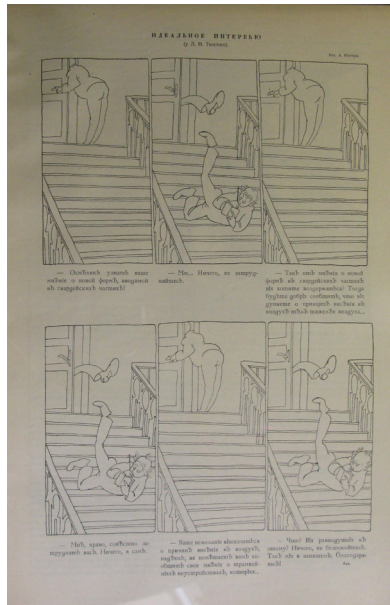
53 Starover, “Mnogo shuma iz nichego,” *Kazanskii telegraf*, 22 August 1908.

54 Chicherone, s.t., *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 21 April 1908.

55 On the image of Iasnaia Poliana in the Russian press cf. R. Vassena, “Nell'occhio dei media. Visioni di Iasnaja Poljana nella stampa russa tra Otto e Novecento,” *Russica Romana*, 23 (2016), 79-102.

56 On the autonomous life of the copy in the age of mass circulation see N. M. Zorkaia, *Unikal'noe i tirazhirovanoe. Sredstva massovoi informatsii i reproduktivnoe iskusstvo* (Moscow, 1981), 13-25. No less interesting are the cases of those who did not want to see Tolstoi

One sees as much not only in correspondence from Iasnaia Poliana and interviews with Tolstoi that began spreading in the 1890s, but also in the parodies of these genres, with reports of visits never paid or interviews never made, which had started appearing in magazines as early as the early 1900s.⁵⁷



“The ideal interview (at Tolstoi’s)” (*Satirikon*, 28 August 1908, n. 21)

In August 1908, for example, a verse parody of correspondence from Iasnaia Poliana was published on *Birzhevye vedomosti*, entitled “At Iasnaia Poliana I was and Count Tolstoi I saw” (“V Iasnoi Poliane byl i grafa Tolstogo videl”), in which Tolstoi had a farmer replace him, misleading the journalist.⁵⁸ A few days later, an anonymous article appeared in the same newspaper entitled “Disagreements of eyewitnesses about Tolstoi” (“Raznoglasiia

in order to preserve their own idealized image of him (cf. I. A. Belousov, *Ushedshaia Moskva. Vospominaniia* [Moscow, 2002], 221), or those who, after seeing him, expressed disappointment (see Z. Gippius, *Zhivye litsa* [Moscow, 1992], 174-176).

⁵⁷ Cf. V. Ia. Lakshin (ed.), *Interv’iu i besedy s L’vom Tolstym* (Moscow, 1986). See other examples of fictitious interviews or memoirs about Tolstoi: Teffi, “V Iasnoi Poliane,” *Svobodnye mysli*, 27 August 1907; Don Perets, “Krivoe zerkalo. Ili moi vospominaniia o L’ve Tolstom,” *Teatr i sport*, 3 December 1910. In satirical journals, caricatures of interviews with Tolstoi were popular: see for example “Chto videli i vidiat ‘sobstvennye korrespondenty’ v Iasnoi Poliane,” *Seryi volk*, 8 (1907), 124; “Ideal’noe interv’iu (u L. N. Tolstogo),” *Satirikon*, 21 (1908).

⁵⁸ “V Iasnoi Poliane byl i grafa Tolstogo videl’. Shutka,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 22 August 1908.

ochevidtsev o Tolstom”), where the author compared the different versions of Tolstoi’s physical appearance that had been circulating for years. Finally, he wondered: “If these differences are possible now, then what inconsistency of ideas can be expected when the image of L. N-ch becomes semi-legendary?”⁵⁹ The theme of Tolstoi’s contemporaneity clearly emerges from an article published in the newspaper *Peterburgskaia gazeta* and significantly entitled “A Pilgrimage to L. N. Tolstoi” (“Palomnichestvo k L. N. Tolstomu”), where the author reports an imaginary conversation with a student:

- You should go for a ride on the Volga now, after the effort you put into your exams –they say to an exhausted young man. It’s excellent for calming your nerves.
- Who cares about the Volga? Just looking at in on the map bores me.
- Well, then, abroad, to Switzerland. How beautiful!
- I’ll still have time to see Switzerland, but now I and four companions of mine—Ivanov, Petrov, Sidorov, Petushkov—have decided to go to Iasnaia Poliana immediately after the exams.
- And why?
- Petushkov goes to beg for a literary blessing; after all, he has been a poet since the fifth grade, while we simply go to see Lev Nikolaevich. In fact, it is strange to be contemporaries of such a great man and to have never looked him in the eye. St. Peter’s Cathedral, the Dresden gallery, Paris and London won’t run away, while we risk not seeing Tolstoi! Were Pushkin’s contemporaries who hadn’t seen him alive happy?⁶⁰

The comparison with Pushkin’s contemporaries helps us to detect the specificity of the Tolstoi case. New technologies only allowed the contemporaries of the latter the opportunity of some intimate knowledge, or at least of an illusion of intimate knowledge with Tolstoi (which was also reinforced by his continuous public declarations); this had the effect of eliminating any physical or virtual barrier that could hinder the realisation of one’s biggest dream—to see “the great writer of the Russian land” with one’s own eyes. Tolstoi’s contemporaries distinguished themselves for their awareness of being, in turn, the protagonists of an unrepeatable historical moment, which obliged them to fix every single detail of the long-awaited meeting in their memory. It was in this vein that Vasilii Rozanov, this time under the pseudonym of V. Varvarin, published in *Russkoe slovo* the memory of his visit to Iasnaia Poliana in 1903; he observed that a Russian who had never seen Tolstoi was like a European who had never seen the Alps, and

59 “Raznoglasiia ochevidtsev o Tolstom,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 28 August 1908.

60 Saturn, “Palomnichestvo k L. N. Tolstomu,” *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 6 May 1908.

emphasized the fateful moment when his gaze met that of the writer.⁶¹ For Rozanov-Varvarin, listening to Tolstoi's thought was of secondary importance compared to the urgency of contemplating his figure; more potent than his curiosity for the Iasnaia Poliana environs and even his interest in Tolstoi's now-empty words was his awareness of being a *spectator to a unique and unrepeatable phenomenon*. The articles and supplements that the Russian newspapers dedicated to the jubilee on 28 August 1908—ignoring the campaign for silence that 'the other' Rozanov had launched only a few months earlier—met such people's precise need to 'see' Tolstoi.

3. 28 AUGUST 1908: THE NEWSPAPERS AND THEIR PUBLIC

Officially, Tolstoi's Day in Moscow was not celebrated, but Moscow's society expressed their respect for the great writer with many letters and telegrams. Most newspapers dedicated their entire issues to the jubilee. Some newspapers published illustrated supplements that were immediately snapped up. The benches along the boulevards were occupied by many who read the newspapers and looked at the illustrations dedicated to Tolstoi.⁶²

When the evening editions of the newspapers reporting on the jubilee were brought in from the capital, the kiosk square was crowded with workers. Newspapers and portraits of L. N. Tolstoi were snapped up [...]. With newspapers in hand, the workers hurried to their villages. In the slums, the lights came on and an ordinary evening suddenly turned into a happy and festive night.⁶³

These accounts of a Moscow intent on reading newspapers illustrates the turning point that the date of 28 August 1908 represented in the history of Russian journalism. The newspapers so dominated that whole day that those who could not afford to purchase them found themselves isolated from the world, as the then student and historian Nikolai M. Druzhinin noted in his diary: "Today is the eightieth birthday of Tolstoi. For me it went unnoticed. This morning I had no money to buy the newspaper, and I im-

⁶¹ V. Varvarin, "Oдно vospominanie o L. N. Tolstom," *Russkoe slovo*, 11 October 1908. In his memoirs, Tolstoi's secretary, N. Gusev, writes that Tolstoi used to reply to visitors who claimed to have come just to look at him: "Look: I have an ordinary face, two eyes and a nose in the middle..." N. N. Gusev, *Dva goda s L. N. Tolstym* (Moscow, 1973), 361.

⁶² "Otkliki tolstovskogo dnia," *Golos Moskvy*, 29 August 1908.

⁶³ "Iubilei L. N. Tolstogo," *Golos Moskvy*, 2 September 1908.

mediately felt a sense of isolation from the life surrounding me.”⁶⁴ Nearly every newspaper dedicated its issue or a special supplement to Tolstoi, and it would therefore not be possible to list and comment on all of them here. However, it is possible to identify some features common to the various categories of newspapers examined. Even in the media kaleidoscope that fragmented and recomposed the image of Tolstoi in ever different and contradictory ways, a careful analysis can reveal some structural criteria with which the information on Tolstoi was organized in newspapers, and which show how each newspaper tried to provide its public with its own version of Tolstoi—that is, a relatively unitary and coherent one in line with its readers’ expectations and appropriate to their cultural level.

The 28 August 1908 issue of A. S. Suvorin’s conservative St. Petersburg newspaper *Novoe vremia* offered a choice of materials suitable for its typical reader: a sufficiently educated reader probably familiar with Tolstoi’s narrative work and possessed of a reasonable budget (the annual subscription to the newspaper amounted to 14 roubles). In addition to a biographical profile of the writer, the article entitled “Russia and Lev Tolstoi” (“Rossiia i Lev Tolstoi”), summarised the national meaning of Tolstoi, defined as the “creator of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*.” Of a similar nature was the article authored by A. S. Suvorin in the “Malen’kie pis’ma” (“Short letters”) column which underlined the significance of Tolstoi as a novelist. While adopting a softer line than his collaborator M. O. Men’shikov (who, a few weeks earlier, had harshly attacked Tolstoi’s article “I Cannot Be Silent”),⁶⁵ Suvorin too reduced the significance of Tolstoi’s essayistic production to a mere pastime “for amateurs.”⁶⁶

The same message underlies the supplement to *Novoe vremia* and is communicated to the reader through a process that is no longer inductive but deductive. Among the prime features of contemporary mass journalism, the free supplement had spread to Russia in the 1880s and 1890s to meet the tastes of lower-class readers and increase circulation: the subscriber found in the supplement a pleasant and restorative diversion from the newspaper, thanks to the more visual components that made it accessible even to semi-literate readers. The supplement to the issue of *Novoe vremia* of 28 August had on its cover a portrait of Tolstoi standing near a chair with a cap in his hand, staring at the photographer’s lens with a stern and severe look. In the supplement attached to *Novoe vremia* the textual component was predominant, and did not merely perform a commentary func-

64 E. I. Druzhinina (ed.), “Dnevnik Nikolaia Mikhailovicha Druzhinina,” <http://prozhito.org/notes?date=%221908-01-01%22&diaries=%5B141%5D> (accessed May 5, 2020).

65 M. O. Men’shikov, “Lev Tolstoi, kak zhurnalist,” *Novoe vremia*, 11 July 1908.

66 A. S. Suvorin, “Malen’kie pis’ma,” *Novoe vremia*, 28 August 1908. Suvorin had immediately looked at Tolstoi’s spiritual crisis of the early 1880s with suspicion, dismissing it as a “moment of wavering” (*vikhliatstvo*) and a lordly “eccentricity” (*chudachestvo*) (*Pis’ma russkikh pisatelei k A. S. Suvorinu* [Leningrad, 1927], 58).

tion, as in other cases. The supplement was indeed entirely occupied by the “Memoirs of Count Tolstoi in the Sixties” (“Vospominaniia o grafe L. N. Tolstom v shestidesiatykh godakh”) by T. A. Kuzminskaia (1846-1925), the younger sister of Sof’ia A. Bers-Tolstaia. The first part of the reminiscences had been released in the previous issue of 23 August,⁶⁷ and the memoirs of Kuzminskaia published in the 28 August supplement were dedicated to the first years of the marriage between her sister Sof’ia and Tolstoi, of whom the author draws a vivid psychological portrait, with fine literary sensitivity. The conventional depictions of serene and laborious family life at Iasnaia Poliana alternate with reports of episodes about and dialogues with the writer. Kuzminskaia aims to highlight the profound moral stature but also the simple and genuine humanity of the author. The images are likewise designed for this purpose, and they visually fix in the reader’s memory particular sequences from the memoir. The first part is dominated by photographs of the fields around Iasnaia Poliana, as well as inside and outside views of the house. The second part contains images that capture different moments of old Tolstoi’s everyday life: at work in his studio, meeting with peasants and beggars, his work in the fields, his horseback riding, his games of chess, the lunch time, his relationship with his nun sister, but also and above all his relationship with his wife, with whom he is portrayed in several shots. To the reader of *Novoe vremia*, the images of the present-day Tolstoi alternated with oval portraits of Tolstoi at a young age, as if to suggest a harmonious and coherent development of his personality, to deny the theory of a split between the “old” and the “new” Tolstoi.

Equally rich was the content of the main competitor of *Novoe vremia*, the cheaper (7 roubles per year) but authoritative Moscow newspaper *Russkoe slovo* published by I. D. Sytin.⁶⁸ Tolstoi had collaborated with Sytin’s newspaper for a decade, as indicated by a page three advertisement, titled “For the jubilee of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi (“K iubileiu L’va Nikolaevicha Tolstogo”), for the Posrednik editions of the writer’s works. Although considered a popular publication, *Russkoe slovo* addressed relatively educated and middle to upper class audience;⁶⁹ hence the certain literary pretentiousness of the contents dedicated to Tolstoi, boasting grandiloquent titles, such as “Tolstoi among the Great of the World” (“Tolstoi mezhdru velikimi mira”) by V. Varvarin and “The Duel of the Giants—Tolstoi and Shakespeare” (“Poedinok gigantov [‘Tolstoi i Shekspir’]”). Among these stood out a long article by the journalist and writer P. D. Boborykin: in “The circle closes” (“Zakonchennyi krug”), he tries to justify the human, spiritual, and artistic parable of Tolstoi. The supplement,

67 This story, also published later the same year in a small volume published by A. S. Suvorin, initiated the successful edition of Kuzminskaia’s memoirs about Tolstoi, which from that moment onward would be published by Suvorin on several occasions until they were collected in the monograph *Moia zhizn’ doma v Iasnoi Poliane: Vospominaniia* (Berlin, 1928).

68 *Russkoe slovo*, 28 August 1908.

69 Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 118.

specifically addressed to the lowest social component of the *Russkoe slovo* audience, was made up exclusively of photographs assembled into thematic sections. In general, the photographs on the pages of early twentieth-century Russian newspapers made the reader feel like a spectator of the social and cultural life not only of Russia but also of Europe: new scientific and technological discoveries, the current fashions, celebrities and glimpses of their luxurious residences, public events, war scenes, natural catastrophes, and victims of homicides offered themselves to the curious gaze of readers who were ready to leave the narrow spaces of their daily reality to immerse themselves in those of a far vaster and more stimulating global society.⁷⁰ The photographs could correspond to the textual reports of the related news, or stimulate the reader's imagination more actively. The montage of images saw wide usage, above all in magazines and in supplements. Devoid of captions but arranged according to chronological or thematic criteria, these images created a narrative about the titular topic while still giving the reader freedom to interpret them as they liked. And readers did willfully interpret the photographs of Tolstoi that were reproduced in the periodical press, and sometimes pointed out their inconsistencies. In a letter dated 28 August, a man from Kharkiv, A. Golovin, underscored the paradox between Tolstoi's noble title and the peasant clothing in which he was always portrayed:

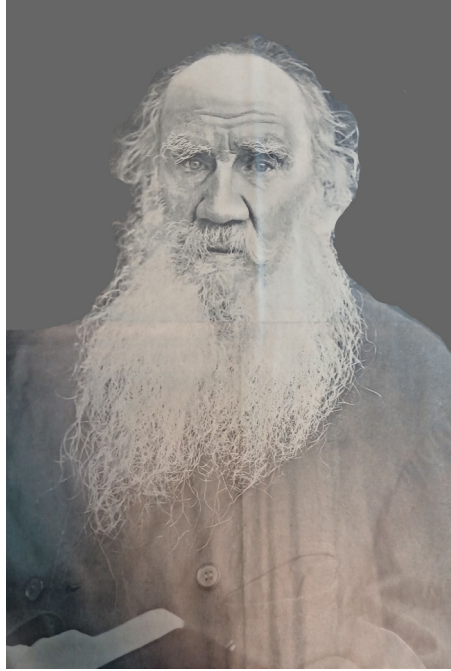
It amazes me that until now you have not yet renounced your title of count, which really does not match your convictions. Of course, it is very interesting when they publish the portrait of a count in a peasant shirt and then they write below: Count L. N. Tolstoi. This shirt is interesting only because it covers the body of a count. On the body of a simple mortal, it would be of no interest.⁷¹

Similarly, the supplement attached to *Russkoe slovo* offered a visual synthesis of Tolstoi's life—sometimes through frames that seemingly sought to reveal his private dimension above all. On the cover there was a giant poster of Tolstoi: a book in his hand, a clear gaze, a frowning forehead; Tolstoi seemed to look the reader straight in the eye. On the second page of the supplement, there were some portraits of the writer. These were arranged in chronological order and accompanied by a brief explanatory key. The final images in this series depicted Tolstoi in his recent state of ill health, and thus, with the turn of a page, the “giant among pygmies”⁷² was transformed into a frail and sick old man before the reader's very eyes.

⁷⁰ On the role of photographs in early twentieth-century Russian newspapers and magazines see C. Stolarski, “Another Way of Telling News. The Rise of Photojournalism in Russia, 1900-1914,” *Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 12, 3 (2011), 561-590.

⁷¹ Letter of A. Golovin to L. N. Tolstoi, Kharkiv, 28 August 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 144/25.

⁷² “Velikan i pigmei. Lev Tolstoi i sovremennye pisateli” was the caption under a famous caricature of 1903 (Iu. I. Bitovt, *Graf L. N. Tolstoi v karikaturakh i anekdotakh* [Moscow, 1908],



Portrait of Tolstoi (Supplement to *Russkoe slovo*, 28 August 1908)

Attached to *Russkoe slovo* was also the weekly illustrated magazine *Iskry* (*Sparks*, price 3 roubles / year, or with *Russkoe slovo* for a total of 9), which greeted Tolstoi's jubilee by dedicating articles to him in three different issues between August and September. On the cover of the 24 August issue, the image of Tolstoi, absorbed and intent on reading, is enclosed in a frame that rests on four books: *War and Peace*, *Childhood and Boyhood*, *Resurrection*, *Anna Karenina*. Inside the supplement, the narrative function was entrusted exclusively to the images, which attempt to offer a comprehensive portrait of Tolstoi through the frame of his manuscripts, a montage of works of art that represent him, and a series of sequences taken from his daily life at Iasnaia Poliana.⁷³ In the 7 September issue, *Iskry* offered its readers a more intimate and domestic reading of what happened on 28 August, publishing under the title "On 28 August at Iasnaia Poliana" ("28-avgusta v Iasnoi Poliane") a dossier of photographs of Tolstoi in pain, with his leg aching, sitting in a wheelchair and surrounded by his loved ones.⁷⁴

69).

⁷³ *Iskry*, 24 August 1908.

⁷⁴ "28 avgusta v Iasnoi Poliane," *Iskry*, 7 September 1908.



“Lev Tolstoy in different periods of his life” (*Iskry*, 24 August 1908, n. 33)

A representative example from the yellow press is offered by the newspaper *Peterburgskii listok* (*Petersburg Sheet*, 1864-1918, 7.5 roubles for the annual subscription in Petersburg).⁷⁵ Printed with a circulation of about 80,000 copies, *Peterburgskii listok* addressed a large audience, ninety percent of whom, according to one of the newspaper’s collaborators, was made up of “patrons of third-rate pubs and taverns, employees, craftsmen and small traders.”⁷⁶ Other memoirs suggest that *Peterburgskii listok* was particularly prone to sensationalism and dedicated to gossip—which in a certain way also predetermined its type of audience: “In bakeries, not all, of course, but many were passionate about newspapers. But which newspapers did they usually buy? *Peterburgskii listok* and *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, which almost everyone called ‘The Petersburg Liar’ and ‘The Petersburg Gossip.’”⁷⁷ In line with these newspaper features, in the 28 August 1908 issue, after a front page hosting an article with alarmist tones about the spread of epidemics, the second page contained several pieces of content concerning Tolstoy’s jubilee that seemed to cater to a none-too-sophisticated audience: articles ranged from an anonymous and conventionally celebratory article entitled “Tolstoy as an Artist of the Word” (“Tolstoy, kak khudozhnik slova”); to a list of greetings sent to Iasnaia Poliana by various organizations and associations; to a brief memoir by N. N. Kuz’min of his meeting with Tolstoy seven years before entitled “My Encounter with L. N. Tolstoy” (“Moia vstrecha s

⁷⁵ *Peterburgskii listok*, 28 August 1908.

⁷⁶ S. S. Okreits, “Literaturnye vstrechi i znakomstva,” *Istoricheskii vestnik*, vol. 144, 6 (1916), 30

⁷⁷ D. I. Grazkin, *Za temnoi noch’iu den’ vstaval... Vospominaniia starogo bol’shevika* (Moscow, 1975), 74.

L. N. Tolstym”); to the communication of a newspaper correspondent who had once been at Iasnaia Poliana and who now offered the reader a detailed chronicle of Tolstoi’s daily routine—and, per the newspaper’s inclination to scandal, a not precisely idyllic description of the living conditions of peasants at Iasnaia Poliana. The material on the jubilee ended with a contribution entitled “Tolstoi in Anecdotes” (“Tolstoi v anekdotakh”): according to a widespread practice, various kinds of news on Tolstoi were assembled here, strictly without indicating their sources, and casually placed next to the reports of a murder or a cholera epidemic in St. Petersburg. The supplement to *Peterburgskii listok*, in line with the newspaper’s vocation as a champion of the rights of the meekest, emphasized Tolstoi’s “humanitarian side.” The images indeed seem to focus on Tolstoi’s relationship with the poor and the needy: in one photograph, peasant children are shown sitting next to the so-called “tree of the needy” in Iasnaia Poliana, while another drawing immortalises Tolstoi in the act of meeting the poor on his estate’s veranda.



“Tolstoi’s reception of visitors to Iasnaia Poliana” (Supplement to *Peterburgskii listok*, 28 August 1908)

The same desire to offer its readers a bit of everything underlies the 28 August issue of *Peterburgskaia gazeta* (1867-1918) (annual subscription: 7.5

roubles in Petersburg; 9-10 roubles outside Petersburg).⁷⁸ This newspaper differed from its competitor *Peterburgskii listok* not only in its less sensational tones but also in its lower circulation (20 thousand copies). The lack of informational rigor that characterised the newspaper is evident right from the front page, which advertises *Iasnaia Poliana*, a magazine published in Petersburg since 1906 that—together with the homonymous publishing house—sold economical editions of Tolstoi's works and boasted a (non-existent) collaboration with the writer.⁷⁹ On the second and third pages, there were short notes (mostly initialled or signed using pseudonyms) related to different themes; these included Tolstoi and art ("Tolstoi and Artists. A Conversation with I. E. Repin" ["Tolstoi i khudozhniki. Beseda s I. E. Repinym"]); "Prince Paul Trubetskoi on Tolstoi. A Conversation with P. Trubetskoi" ["Kniaz' Pavel Trubetskoi o Tolstom. Beseda s P. Trubetskim"]); "Tolstoi on Artists and Talents. From a Conversation with G. G. Ge" ["Tolstoi ob artistakh i talantakh. Iz besedy s G. G. Ge"] and Tolstoi and literature ("Leonid Andreev on Tolstoi. A Conversation with L. Andreev" ["Leonid Andreev o Tolstom. Beseda s L. Andreevym"], "Tolstoi and Kuprin. A Conversation with A. I. Kuprin" ["Tolstoi i Kuprin. Beseda s A. I. Kuprinym"]). Per the confidential style typical of the yellow press, the *Peterburgskaia gazeta* reported statements about Tolstoi made by different important literary and artistic figures in the form of interviews or anecdotes—without ever specifying the source from which they came, or the precise context of the so-called 'conversation.'

A very different attitude was exhibited by one of these newspapers' less popular⁸⁰ Muscovite counterparts of the *malaia pressa*, *Moskovskii listok* (*Moscow Sheet*, 1881-1918), published by N. I. Pastukhov. *Moskovskii listok* almost passed over Tolstoi's jubilee in silence, maybe due to the well-known right-wing sympathies of Pastukhov, who was evidently deferred to governmental and religious authorities' orders of to boycott Tolstoi's jubilee. The only exception was an article entitled "Forcibly Celebrated Anniversary" ("Nasil'no prazdnuemyi iubilei"), which retraced the events of the earlier months and denounced the degeneration of the press. Significantly, precisely a newspaper like *Moskovskii listok* (which, under its founder, had made

⁷⁸ *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 28 August 1908.

⁷⁹ Following the many letters of protest from deceived readers, on 8 December 1908 Tolstoi wrote a public statement declaring that he had no connection with this publishing house (Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 78, 278-279).

⁸⁰ In the 1880s, Pastukhov's newspaper enjoyed some extraordinary popularity among the lower classes, mainly thanks to Pastukhov's novel *Churkin the bandit* (*Razboinik Churkin*), and in the following decade it continued to garner appreciation among clerks, shopkeepers, and servants. However, with the beginning of the new century, *Moskovskii listok* entered a phase of decline, and in fact closed down in 1911 following the death of its founder (Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 129-130).

quality of reportage its main hallmark)⁸¹ defended the dignity and the ethical code of this genre, strongly condemning the media racket around Tolstoi:

The “jubilee” inflation has continued following all the rules of the art of the modern reportage, as if it did not regard L. N. Tolstoi but a *bénéfice* of a fashionable tenor, a “favorite of the public”. A newspaper, for example (*Birzhevye vedomosti*), reported that the shoemakers of St. Petersburg sent Tolstoi boots and a diploma, awarding him the title, theretofore nonexistent, of “Honorary member of the shoe factory”; another newspaper (*Rechʹ*) stated that the “Fars” waiters sent Tolstoi a message and a samovar, while a third newspaper (*Novaia Rusʹ*) drew the following conclusion: if the Petersburg shoemakers and even the “Fars” waiters have sent Tolstoi boots and a samovar, it follows that “all the people” want to take part in the “jubilee” celebration... So, it’s all there, printed out clearly!⁸²

Not too different were the contributions published in other pro-government yellow press publications, such as Petersburg’s *Svet* (*The Light*, 1882-1917) and Moscow’s *Veche* (*The Council*, 1905-1910). In the first months of 1908, *Svet* had taken a clear position of disagreement with regard to jubilee initiatives, which it compared to a “political masquerade” that did not do justice to the literary talent of the author of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* (*Voina i mir*), the only Tolstoi worthy of celebration.⁸³ In the 29 August 1908 issue, the monarchist and conservative journalist Sergei F. Sharapov dedicated his column “My Diary” (“Moi dnevnik”) to a reflection on the jubilee, noting that, due to Tolstoi’s excommunication, this was a day of mourning and not of joy, and expressing regret for the celebration of Tolstoi not as the author of *Anna Karenina* or *War and Peace* but as a symbol of denial.⁸⁴ Similarly, in the monarchist and nationalist newspaper *Veche*, the anonymous article “A Mournful Day” (“Skorbyi den”) expressed regret for the loss of Tolstoi the writer to the deplorable “Tolstoi the philosopher—Tolstoi the godless—Tolstoi the heretic”.⁸⁵

The contents of the most economical newspaper of the time, the *Gazeta-Kopeika* (1908-1918), were of a different tenor.⁸⁶ All the images contained in

81 Pastukhov’s reportages stood out for their narrative rhythm, clear style and topicality of the contents, which had to be reliable and personally verified by the reporter. Cf. V. A. Giliarovskii, *Moskva gazetnaia. Druzʹia i vstrechi* (Minsk, 1989).

82 Chelovek shestidesiatykh godov, “Nasil’no prazdnuemyi iubilei,” *Moskovskii listok*, 28 August 1908.

83 “Kartinki zhizni,” *Svet*, 28 January 1908.

84 S. Sharapov, “Moi dnevnik,” *Svet*, 29 August 1908.

85 “Skorbyi den” *Veche*, 28 August 1908.

86 *Gazeta-kopeika* had been founded only two months before, in June 1908, under the direction of the entrepreneur M. B. Gorodetskii. Makovitskii reports Tolstoi’s positive opinion

Gazeta-Kopeika, 28 August 1908

Significantly, the same imagery also occurs in many letters sent to Tolstoi, almost as if, eager to address him in an obsequious manner but devoid of suitable linguistic tools, some readers drew on the simplified rhetoric of mass newspapers, where the most inflated semantic field was that of light/darkness: "I prostrate myself before you, dear teacher. May God grant you health for many years to come! May your genius live and shine with that light that has illuminated your whole life...Let the darkness vanish!"⁸⁹ To the same semantic field belongs the image of the sun, which the press had taken up (often in a parodic vein) from an open letter by Sof'ia Tolstaia addressed to the journalist M. O. Men'shikov and published on 17 August in *Russkoe slovo*:⁹⁰

...The time is near when the "Sun of Truth" will rise and illuminate us with its long-awaited light. We sincerely hope that you live to see that happy day and that you may rejoice together with us. A group of workers.⁹¹

Among the letters sent to Tolstoi for his eightieth birthday, there are many in which the authors also resort to the metaphor of rural work. One letter, signed by some peasants from Vyatsk, states:

Great ploughman and sower of the infinite field of the universe! We are amazed by the bold power of your work in the sacred field which, before you, was a vale of tears. With trepidation we observed how you tilled the soil, where you sow the Word of love. With what skill, with what strength and precision do you eradicate the thorns, thistles, shrubs, useless weeds, the rotten logs and the branches of the centuries-old oaks that suffocate your Seed-Word [...] ⁹²

Similarly, the media coverage of Tolstoi's jubilee informed the actions of those Russians who, residing in the provinces, far from the vivacity of the

⁸⁹ Letter of A. V. Vasil'ev to L. N. Tolstoi, St. Petersburg, 28 August 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 139/123.

⁹⁰ "Pis'mo grafini S. A. Tolstoi," *Russkoe slovo*, 17 August 1908. Tolstaia's letter was the reply to Men'shikov's article "Tolstoi i vlast'," *Novoe vremia*, 10 August 1908. Tolstaia concluded her letter with these words: "Mr. Men'shikov does not understand that, no matter how he stretches and clicks with his tiny poisonous tweezers, he only has the power to blow out the tallow candle in front of him, and not the world-shining sun."

⁹¹ Letter to L. N. Tolstoi signed "A group of workers," Moscow, 28 August 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 248/142.

⁹² Letter to L. N. Tolstoi signed "Peasants from Vyatsk," Vyatsk, 28 August 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 142/47.

capitals, wished to celebrate it nonetheless. Some materials preserved in the Tolstoi archive suggest that reading newspapers containing news about him was in some cases a family practice shared by parents and children. Two children from Saratov wrote to Tolstoi on 28 August, telling him that their parents had told them about him and rejoiced at his leg having healed—the news had been published in newspapers a few days before.⁹³ The news about Tolstoi and the telegrams of greetings published in the newspapers put in contact readers who were otherwise physically distant from one another, constituting them in a sort of ‘community of Tolstoi fans.’ The sense of identification could reach extreme levels, as in the case of this reader who signed her letter to Tolstoi with the name of the protagonist of *Resurrection*:

Dear grandfather! Greetings also from Katiusha Maslova. May God give you health and a long, long life. I hope so because I love you, I am grateful to you because you, a highly placed count, have not been ashamed to pity me. You are right: conscience and pain cannot be drowned in wine, and man, however humiliated, will always remain a man. Holy tears flow from my eyes when I read the greetings for you in the newspapers. For you I embrace all those who have understood you and esteem you. I’m not drunk. Forgive my chatter: it is incoherent, but what can one expect from Katiusha Maslova.⁹⁴

The writer’s archive also preserves some pages of the diary of an eleven-year-old girl from Penza who, in her simple, childish language, thoroughly describes the actual ritual that her family had established on 28 August to celebrate Tolstoi at their home:

11 October, Saturday. I forgot to write how we celebrated Tolstoi’s jubilee. As soon as our mother and I woke up, we removed Tolstoi’s portrait from Dad’s desk and hung it between the two windows, above the small table.

Then we went to the garden to get some flowers and wove them into a wreath and placed it around the portrait. Then we took a bust of Tolstoi and put it on the table, and we placed a bouquet of flowers and a larger flower on either side. Next to the table we spread a rug and there we put all the big flowers, then under the portrait we hung small cards and placed a flower next to each card. All those who came to our house that day looked at it in admiration. On that day they sent him telegrams and letters from

⁹³ See for example “Bolezn’ L. N. Tolstogo,” *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 23 August 1908. Letter to L. N. Tolstoi signed “Arkhangel’skie children,” Saratov, 28 August 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 133/85.

⁹⁴ Letter to L. N. Tolstoi signed “Katiusha Maslova,” 3 September 1908. Published in Zhdanov, “Iz pisem k Tolstomu,” 377.

all the countries, but he was sick that day. Today, in the newspapers, he thanked all for the letters and gifts.⁹⁵

In this young girl's diary, the celebration of Tolstoi's birthday exhibits three dimensions: an intimate and familial one ("As soon as our mother and I woke up, we removed..."); a community-based ("All those who came to our house that day looked at it in admiration"); and a global one ("On that day they sent him telegrams and letters from all the countries, but he was sick that day."). The distance between the periphery (any provincial house) and the center (Iasnaia Poliana) of this global village is obviated by the newspapers: by reading the news on Tolstoi, the author of the diary and her family overcome the sense of isolation that resulted from living in the provinces.

In the last sentence, the young girl refers to an open letter by Tolstoi which appeared in many newspapers on 8 October and which was also taken up by the provincial newspapers. Of this letter, addressed "to the people and institutions that sent greetings for the day of my eightieth birthday," there are two versions: the one that Tolstoi sent to the editorial offices of newspapers, in which, in a dry and very formal style, he thanks all for the good wishes he had received and makes only a laconic reference to his unheard requests not to celebrate anything; and the one he wrote in the first place. In the original version, much more extensive than the one he sent, Tolstoi dwells on the background of the jubilee, openly declaring that he did not deserve any celebration and saying the following of the celebrations: "Honestly, I can say that lately I was hoping that [...] they would ultimately understand that my desire for some special praise for my person was just a misunderstanding." This "misunderstanding" is a subtext that occurs periodically in the diaries and letters of the late Tolstoi. On more than one occasion, Tolstoi himself identified the main culprit of this misunderstanding between him and the Russian society as located within the newspaper medium itself—specifically in its inaccurate and biased habit of "fabricating" news.⁹⁶

In conclusion, the materials presented here show how in early twentieth-century Russia the transition from a culturally critical public to a "cul-

95 A 10 year-old girl from Penza, 12 October 1908, GMT OR, f. 1, 254/117.

96 Also see a note from 1908 in which Tolstoi denounced the media "muddle" to which his name was subjected, and in which he significantly referred to himself now in the first, now in the third person, as if his own perception of himself were conditioned by the split between the 'authentic' Tolstoi and the media's 'Lev Nikolaevich': "Clear and strong desire to get rid of this whole jubilee affair, which suits me so little. And it would be desirable that no one in this matter let himself be guided by anything other than what I personally stated. A muddle And the muddle is such that the news reported by the newspapers is not only false and exaggerated, but it is often absolutely baseless, and even that which reaches Lev Nikolaevich he is neither able nor wants to answer, to restore the truth of the facts." (Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 78, 114).

ture-consuming public"⁹⁷ was taking place. Instead of a forum for discussion and critical confrontation of the public sphere, newspapers represented an arena in which opinions and images were probed, changed, and manipulated, creating "pseudo-events," or pseudo-Tolstois, that the public perceived as real and which it appropriated as a commodity for consumption. The materials analyzed also show to what extent a newspaper reader could change his role from the object to the subject of manipulation, interpreting these "pseudo-Tolstois" to his own liking and reconstructing as many as he liked. This research has exposed other questions in need of further investigation. One of these worried Tolstoi's contemporaries: to what extent did Tolstoi himself consciously use the newspapers to spread his own ideas, and how was this reconciled with his criticism of contemporary civilization and with his purpose, repeatedly stated in the diaries, to strip himself of his own personality? Although Tolstoi despised the newspapers and claimed he only read few of them, his diaries and those of people close to him show that at Iasnaia Poliana the news reported by newspapers was discussed daily, and that Tolstoi himself asked the members of his entourage to update him on any articles concerning him and his writings.⁹⁸ So how can we interpret the stern judgements about the periodical press that Tolstoi formulated so clearly in the same years? These questions imply others—in particular those about the relationship between Tolstoi's case and a 'celebrity culture' which found nourishment in Europe's technological and industrial progress of the second half of the nineteenth century. What repercussions did this culture of celebrity have on the traditional writer-reader relationship in Russia, and how did it affect the mechanisms of editorial production and consumption? In Tolstoi's case, the materials collected suggest that many Russian readers of the early twentieth century founded their knowledge of Tolstoi not so much on direct readings of his fiction or essays so much as on the image that the media returned of him—an image so reiterated, edited, and altered that it had completely lost its authenticity.

Becoming aware of the complexity of the relationship between Tolstoi, the media, and the Russian public means rereading his biography and especially the journalistic and narrative works of his last years in the light of the conditioning that he inevitably suffered at the hands of the media, but whose powers he also knew how to exploit. It means promoting sources linked to popular and mass culture and analyzing their role in constructing

⁹⁷ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), 169.

⁹⁸ According to Makovitskii, in 1908-1909 Tolstoi used to read *Novoe vremia*, *Slovo*, *Novaia Rus'*, *Russkie vedomosti*, and sometimes *Gazeta-Kopeika* (Makovitskii, "Iasnopolianskie zapiski," vol. 3, 103, 218, 419, 444). Despite this, many other newspapers were delivered to Iasnaia Poliana every day: *Rus'*, *Golos Moskvyy*, *Russkoe slovo*, *Birzhevyye vedomosti*, *Sibirskie otgoloski*, *Golos Samary*, *Sibir'* (Ibid., 14, 29).

Tolstoi's image, in Russia and abroad, before and after his death.⁹⁹ Finally, it means investigating the relationship between the image, or images, of the writer as it was in the consciousness of his contemporaries and his image as it exists today, in a no less mediated and conventional form, as well as the relationship between both images and the possibility of an original, 'authentic' Tolstoi.¹⁰⁰

99 See for example A. Tuliakova's engaging survey "Tolstoi as a hero of pop culture" ("Tolstoi kak geroi pop-kul'tury") in <https://arzas.academy/mag/444-tolstoy> (accessed May 5, 2020).

100 I owe this insight to Denner, "Be Not Afraid of Greatness...": Leo Tolstoy and Celebrity," 618-619.

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