The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Tolstoy Tale Takes Literary Prize

By Joy Neumeyer

November 24, 2010



Basinsky

Writer Pavel Basinsky claimed the 2010 Big Book award for his work "Leo Tolstoy: Escape from Paradise." Basinsky's book traces the renowned Russian author's life after his flight from Yasnaya Polyana, his childhood home and literary sanctuary, shortly before his death.

The committee announced the three winners in an awards ceremony on Tuesday at the Russian National Library's Pashkov House.

Basinsky has been a cultural critic at Literaturnaya Gazeta since 1981, as well as a regular contributor to publications including Novy Mir and

Oktyabr. For "Leo Tolstoy," he logged long hours in archives researching the writer's life. "[Yasnaya Polyana] is like a second home for me, and I was always interested in why Tolstoy ran away," Basinsky explained at the ceremony's press conference, RIA-Novosti reported. This year marks the 100th anniversary of Tolstoy's death.

Critic Barbara Barbitskaya wrote that the book “possesses the energy and fascination of a pulp [novel],” in a review published on Openspace.ru earlier this year.

The runner-up was three-time nominee Alexander Ilichevsky, who took home 1.5 million rubles ($48,000) for his novel “Pers,” or “Persian,” which follows a young Russian scientist returning to his boyhood town on the Caspian Sea from the United States after a difficult divorce. There, he encounters a childhood friend, now a falcon trainer, and together they form a commune in honor of futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov.

Viktor Pelevin claimed third place for his novel “T,” which won the public vote. While Pelevin’s book also focuses on Tolstoy’s life after leaving Yasnaya Polyana, he offers a more fantastical take: On his way to Optina Pustyn Monastery, a martial arts master by the name of “count T” encounters a cabbalistic demon who brags that he created the world.

The academy also bestowed a posthumous special award on Russia’s beloved late-19th-century author Anton Chekhov at the ceremony for his contribution to literature. Previous winners of the special prize include gulag chronicler Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

The Russian Academy of Literature established the Big Book award in 2005 to support promising Russian authors and encourage public interest in literature. The prize is awarded by a committee established by the academy’s board of trustees. All 14 of the finalists’ works also were accessible for free to the public on newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda’s web site, where readers could vote for their favorites.

Last year, crime writer Leonid Yuzefovich won the prize for his novel “Cranes and Pygmies.”

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/11/24/tolstoy-tale-takes-literary-prize-a3230