



# **Tolstoy's False Disciple: The Untold Story of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov**

*Alexandra Popoff*

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On the snowy morning of February 8, 1897, the Petersburg secret police were following Tolstoy's every move. At sixty-nine, Russia's most celebrated writer was being treated like a major criminal. Prominent Russians were always watched, but Tolstoy earned particular scrutiny. Over a decade earlier, when his advocacy on behalf of oppressed minorities angered the Orthodox Church and the Tsar, he was placed under permanent police surveillance.

Although Tolstoy was wearing his peasant garb, people on the streets had no trouble recognizing him from his portraits. He was often seen in the company of his chief disciple, Vladimir Chertkov. A man of striking appearance, twenty-five years younger, Chertkov commanded attention. His photographs with Tolstoy show him towering over the writer.

Close to the Tsars and to the chief of the secret police, Chertkov represented the very things Tolstoy had renounced —class privilege, unlimited power, and wealth. Yet, Chertkov fascinated and attracted Tolstoy. He became the writer's closest confidant, even reading his daily diary, and by the end of Tolstoy's life, had established complete control over the writer and his legacy.

Tolstoy's full exchange with Chertkov comprises more than 2,000 letters, making him the writer's largest correspondent. The Russian archives have suppressed much of this communication as well as Chertkov's papers for more than a century. The product of ground-breaking archival research, Tolstoy's False Disciple promises to be a revelatory portrait of the two men and their three-decade-long clandestine relationship.

## **Tolstoy's False Disciple: The Untold Story of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov** **Details**

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# **From Reader Review Tolstoy's False Disciple: The Untold Story of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov for online ebook**

## **Nancy says**

Alexendra Popoff provides lots of information about the relationship of Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Chertkov. It isn't much of a spoiler to say that Chertkov was a hypocritical manipulative man who knew how to get his way. The middle section of the book seems repetitive with all the examples of Chertkov controlling Tolstoy for Chertkov's benefit.

The story Poppff tells is fascinating but it felt incomplete. I came away still wondering what the spark was that allowed Chertkov to get so many people to do his bidding.

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## **Louise says**

Who was Vladimir Chertkov and why did he attach himself to Leo Tolstoy and a movement so at odds with his aristocratic standing and his lifestyle? This book will make you even more curious about the answers.

The questions begin early on. Like many of his aristocratic peers, he was able to do most anything financially, but his access to royal favor is staggering. Was he the bastard son of Alexander II? The Wikipedia portraits of the two men strongly suggest this is so. Sophia Tolstoy claimed to recognize his voice and its cadence in the voice of Alexander III, whom, again checking Wikipedia, Chertkov also resembles.

What was his motivation in attaching himself to Tolstoy and his movement? Was he a "groupie" to the rock star of his time? Was he working for the tsar's secret police? His family participated in what seems to be a fundamentalist Christian movement. Did the youthful Chertkov have idealism? Guilt? Altruism? Was Tolstoy the love of his life? Was Tolstoy being manipulated for status, for favor with the tsar? Was the manipulation merely for Chertkov's own sadistic pleasure? Was cashing in on Tolstoy's copyrights from the start?

We can conclude some things about his personality, the two most salient being his incredible power of persuasion and his lifelong lack of empathy.

How Chertkov survived and thrived in Stalin's Russia needs a more thorough treatment. There is surely more to know about how he convinced Stalin to grant him a full bureaucracy devoted to publishing a work so at odds with Stalinism. There is only an outline on how he got preferred housing, first class rations, a budget, space and staff for his work, support for an artistic community and travel privileges for his son. He got to have paintings and a sculpture made of himself. He was able to keep documents that would cost others their lives. Can it be that Popoff has uncovered all that is knowable?

Sophia Tolstoy and her suffering are in the background here. This book should be read in tandem with Popoff's *Sophia Tolstoy: A Biography* to get a full portrait of the effects of Chertkov's corrosive partnership with her husband.

I first became aware of Chertkov through Paul Giamatti's rendering of him in *The Last Station*, a film I will have to see again with this added background.

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## Claire says

No wonder. (Someone in this room has happily been reading Tolstoy for years and years, only mildly cognisant of everything else going on like the pressures on him. There are so many other things to glean from Tolstoy, such as the Russian language!)

I like how much A. Popoff cites the letters written around these people. I think it's best to draw conclusions about people from these as opposed to how others around them claim they've acted.

So the State Museum of Leo Tolstoy is on Prechistenka Street, Moscow! Oh!

Checking Google, that's only 11 hours and 55 minutes away from home! \*giggle\* It's highlighting the Philadelphia Railway Station. Aw, no walking directions...

I was so surprised when I saw this on the new book shelf that I had to pick it up and see how it compared and contrasted with the sources of Russian history I've comprehended so far over the past ten years.

Like the others, I found it exciting to read.

Unlike the others, I wasn't really clearly aware that Tolstoy had been hounded by this other person, V. Chertkov.

If you want to know some Russian history, too, I thought this book was passing and likeable. If you **know**, it might be a bit irritating in the way all history books can get.

I enjoyed seeing the context of what was happening when he was writing certain specific things I liked reading, personally.

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## Janette McMahon says

An interesting look at Tolstoy's very manipulated life. The mysterious Chertkov was a man who could defy all conventions and integrate into different levels and even warring factions. While Chertkov was not a person anyone could trust, his abilities were mind boggling and continue to be researched.

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