

which he was preparing shortly before his death, will be published in 2011 by Berghahn Press. Confino died in Israel on 16 June 2010.

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 November 2010

## Il'ia Zakharovich Serman, 1913–2010

Il'ia Zakharovich Serman, a noted scholar of Russian literature, died in Jerusalem on 9 October 2010. Born on 22 September 1913, Il'ia Zakharovich did his undergraduate work at Leningrad University, graduating in 1939. There he drew inspiration from the gifted literary historian G. A. Gukovskii. In June 1941, immediately following the German invasion, Il'ia Zakharovich left his first teaching position to work on the daily radio broadcast "This Is Leningrad Speaking." In December 1941 he joined the Red Army and fought on the Volkhov front outside Leningrad. Discharged in 1942 after suffering from shell shock, Il'ia Zakharovich spent the remainder of the war in Tashkent, where his mother and stepfather had evacuated to escape the Leningrad blockade. In Tashkent he wrote and defended his PhD (*kandidat*) dissertation on Fedor Dostoevskii. In 1943, also in Tashkent, he met and married Ruf' Aleksandrovna Zernova, who went on to a distinguished career of her own as a writer.

In 1949, during the "anticosmopolitanism" campaign of the late Stalin era, Il'ia Zakharovich and Ruf' Aleksandrovna were arrested for "anti-Soviet propaganda" and sentenced to ten years at hard labor. A device that authorities had placed in their apartment recorded the concerns they had expressed over the antisemitism that had become such a dominant feature of state policy in the late Stalin years. A second trial increased Il'ia Zakharovich's sentence to twenty-five years at hard labor. After a journey of some nine months, he arrived at Kolyma, where he remained until his release (and amnesty) in July 1954.

His return to Leningrad at the outset of the thaw, while an obvious relief, did not guarantee an easy life. Between 1954 and 1956, without regular employment, Il'ia Zakharovich managed to eke out a living through his writing. In 1956, he gained a secure appointment as a *mladshii nauchnyi sotrudnik* at the Institute for Russian Literature (Pushkinskii Dom) in Leningrad, where he joined the eighteenth-century sector. Here, over twenty years, he enjoyed a productive career, and his books and articles brought him increasing scholarly recognition.

In the spring of 1969, Il'ia Zakharovich successfully defended his advanced doctorate at Pushkinskii Dom. His dissertation explored the rise of a new, secular Russian literature in the eighteenth century, and he focused on the role that poets such as Antioch Kantemir, Aleksandr Sumarokov, Vasilii Trediakovskii, Mikhail Lomonosov, and Gavriila Derzhavin played in creating and developing that literature. While best known for his writing on the eighteenth century, Il'ia Zakharovich also had a specialist's knowledge of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature. As part of his duties at Pushkinskii Dom, he edited individual volumes in the larger collected works of Nikolai Leskov, Dostoevskii, and others, providing these volumes with substantial introductions, annotations, and explanatory material.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Il'ia Zakharovich and Ruf' Aleksandrovna extended their hospitality and friendship to numerous western scholars who were doing research in Leningrad. Although they were not unique in doing so, the openness with which they welcomed foreigners outside official channels was remarkable, and not without risk to themselves. In their company—and that of their children, Nina and Mark—one encountered a world in which the vitality and existential significance of Russian literature formed the warp and woof of the household.

In 1976, after granting written permission for his daughter, Nina, to emigrate from the Soviet Union, Il'ia Zakharovich was dismissed from his job at Pushkinskii Dom. Soon afterwards, he and Ruf' Aleksandrovna left the Soviet Union for Israel, where he joined the faculty of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Emigration, which is inevitably disruptive and fraught with practical problems, may also bring new opportunities. Il'ia Zakharovich

focused steadfastly on the latter, celebrating the freedom that emigration provided to continue his scholarly work among new colleagues, many of whom he had known while still in Russia. Whether in Jerusalem or on periodic visits, lectureships, and research appointments in the United States, France, and Great Britain, he continued the steady pace of research and writing on Russian literature that was so central to his very being. In addition to a host of articles, he completed substantial monographs on Lomonosov (1988), Mikhail Lermontov (1997), and Nikolai Karamzin (2005), all of which refined insights that he had accumulated over a lifetime. He was also a major contributor to the multivolume *Histoire de la littérature russe* (1992), which he edited together with Georges Nivat, Vittorio Strada, and Efim Etkind.

During the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Il'ia Zakharovich was able to participate actively once more in the scholarly world of Russia itself. He returned periodically to Leningrad, attended numerous conferences, and his articles and books began once again to be published in Russia. To his scholarly articles he now added memoir essays about his mentor Grigorii Gukovskii, who died in 1950 while under arrest, as well as about his own experience in the gulag.

For a phenomenal seven decades, Il'ia Zakharovich remained an active, publishing scholar. Even a cursory review of his publications reveals the extraordinary breadth of his erudition and his unusual talent for identifying fruitful questions. As a student of Russian literature, he was understandably interested in problems of style, genre, and aesthetic evaluation, and he was a skillful and insightful analyst of individual works. But he was very much an intellectual historian as well, someone concerned to locate individual writers in their specific historical context, assessing the sources of their inspiration, their relationships to others, and their place in the broader evolution of Russian literature and society.

Il'ia Zakharovich experienced many of the most difficult chapters of the twentieth century firsthand: he lived through the Stalin era, was wounded in World War II, served more than five years at Kolyma, suffered twice from the Soviet government's antisemitic policies, and experienced the challenges as well as the rewards of emigration. Life presented him with many trials, but he never regarded himself as a victim: I never heard him complain, even in difficult circumstances. Rather he retained a sense of humor, an unflinching interest in the life around him, and a quiet determination to complete his own life mission. Through all the stages of his life, Il'ia Zakharovich clearly drew sustenance from the Russian literature that he loved.

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December 2010

For biographical data about Il'ia Zakharovich, Samuel C. Ramer has relied in part upon the computer database "Vospominaniia o GULAGe i ikh avtory" compiled by the Muzei i obshchestvennyi tsentr "Mir, progress, prava cheloveka" imeni Andreia Sakharova. See [www.sakharov-center.ru/](http://www.sakharov-center.ru/) (last accessed 10 February 2011).