

Dmitri N. Shalin

Introduction to Grigorii Konovalov's Letters

Grigory Ivanovich Konovalov (1908-1987), Soviet-era writer who won the 1969 Maxim Gorky Prize, graduated from the Perm Pedagogical Institute, studied at the Institute of Red Professors, and taught at the Ulyanovsk Pedagogical Institute. He is best known for his novels *University* and *Origins*, as well as his service as a secretary of the USSR Writers Union. Little is known about his formative years as a writer and reaction to the political purges of the Stalin's era. The present selection from Konovalov's letters sheds light on Konovalov's attitude toward Russian classics, his literary sensibilities and professional aspirations in the late 1930's when he enrolled as a graduate student at the Moscow Institute of History, Philosophy, and Literature. At the time, Konovalov served as docent at the Leo Tolstoy Memorial Estate in Yasnaya Poiana and worked on his first novel *Ilya Kozharov*. The letters are addressed to Evgenia Gutman (1919-2016), the 19-year-old student from Leningrad who worked at the same time as a guide at the Tolstoy Museum. As one can gather from Evgenia Gutman's diary and Konovalov's letters, the two became romantically involved, with the marriage proposal entertained and turned down by the undergraduate of the Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad. I hope to publish separately the diary of Evgenia Gutman-Shalina regarding this riveting story. Here, the readers are offered a selection of Grigory's letters where he discusses his work on the novel and the literary world of that era and offers a surprisingly frank assessment of Maxim Gorky's death.

I wish to thank Vera Miranda, graduate student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, for her assistance with transcribing the letters.

Materials and Discussions