

SLAVICA NORVEGICA IX

CULTURAL DISCONTINUITY AND  
RECONSTRUCTION

the Byzanto-Slav heritage and the creation  
of a Russian national literature  
in the nineteenth century

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fied by the Assumption of the Most Holy Mother of God (15th of August), the Birth of the Most Holy Mother of God (8th of September), and the Veil of the Most Holy Mother of God (1st of October). In this context the following image of autumn is found: "those first days of October, transparent and cold – autumn's parting glory!" (186; 42).

All these details form an image of a Russia which is a Russia of peasants and landowners alike, a Christian Russia – and the "antonovka apples" in Bunin's story become its symbol.

The ethnopoetics of Russian literature is undoubtedly a much broader subject than is indicated by the title of this essay. The national peculiarities of Russian literature are determined by folklore, where pagan roots, transformed by Orthodoxy, remain very strong. Orthodox ideas and themes are evident in the plots of Russian novels, tales and short stories. Although much has been written about the humanism of Russian literature, its undeniably Orthodox nature has yet to be defined. Russian literature fully identified and adopted an Orthodox Christian anthropology, where the idea of the salvation of the soul, the concepts of suffering, atonement and transfiguration determined its humanistic pathos. It is my hope that the above may instigate discussion, and that the ethnopoetic analysis of Russian literature will be thoroughly undertaken.

Returning to Belinskii's words ("we have no literature and no national literature"), I should like to differ: Russia does have a national literature and its beginnings lie in the origins of the Russian State. As is now evident, this is linked to the conversion of Rus' to Christianity, which, in turn, led to the formation of a Russian literary language and the emergence of a Russian literature.

## *Sobornost'* in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature

*Ivan Esaulov*

ACCORDING TO Sergii Bulgakov, *sobornost'* is "the soul of Orthodoxy."<sup>1</sup> In Aleksei Khomiakov's view, "this word alone (*sobornost'*) contains in itself an entire confession of faith."<sup>2</sup> He attempted to define *sobornost'* as "a free, organic unity, the living source of which is the divine grace of mutual love."<sup>3</sup>

S. Khoruzhii believes that after Khomiakov, "*sobornost'* was steadily profaned with increasing force and potency, and lost its content of grace, only to be reduced to a mere social and organic principle. In one sense, this process may be considered to be the very essence of the ideological evolution of Slavophilism."<sup>4</sup> In my own view, however, it is necessary to distinguish between the spiritual reality (*sobornost'*) as such and the various *interpretations* of this reality. If one accepts a degradation of *sobornost'*, but treats it at the same time as the soul of Orthodoxy, then one should be precise and also accept that Orthodoxy

1 S. N. Bulgakov, 1991, *Pravoslavie: ocherki ucheniia pravoslavnoi tserkvi*, Moscow, p. 145. Unless otherwise indicated, translations, here and throughout, have been prepared for this essay.

2 A. S. Khomiakov, 1867, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Prague, vol. 2, p. 282.

3 Khomiakov, 1867, p. 101.

4 S. S. Khoruzhii, 1991, "Khomiakov i printsip sobornosti," *Vestnik russkogo khristianskogo dvizheniia*, 162-163, p. 98.

too has been degraded. But if, however, we are also concerned with the different interpretations of a given category, then we have to argue more carefully.

Let us consider but one example. In order to emphasise the process of “degeneration” – which in his view lies precisely in the fact that “*sobornost'* was steadily profaned” – Khoruzhii turns to the authority of Georgii Florovskii to support his ideas, citing Florovskii’s judgement: “it is not difficult to discern in those carried away by the ideals of the *phalanstère* or the commune a subconscious and errant *craving for sobornost'*” (my italics).<sup>5</sup> Here Khoruzhii gives insufficient heed to the context from which Florovskii draws his judgement. The fact is, that Florovskii does not speak at all about a “profaning destructive degeneration” of *sobornost'* which led to a *spiritual* category becoming a *secular* one. On the contrary, Florovskii emphasises not the profane, but precisely the religious character of those carried away. It is simply that the religiosity generating the ideals is not Christian. For this very reason, it cannot be considered to be an evolution of the category of *sobornost'*, but only an “errant craving” for it.

Indeed, in the section of his work devoted to the history of *sobornost'*, Florovskii speaks of the characteristic “craving” of Dmitrii Pisarev, in the formation of which a decisive role was played by the Treskin circle. The circle itself “resembles the mystics and masons surrounding Alexander I,” and he recalls Nikolai Chernyshevskii, who “simply converted to a different ‘catechism,’ like Feuerbach.” He says explicitly that “it was only possible to consolidate this epileptic enthusiasm through *the creation of a new religion*” (Florovskii’s italics). He also quotes O. Aptekman, who was convinced that “only religion – the religion of the heart – can bring humanity happiness,” adding “it was often a very strange religion; ... the preaching of some sort of humanistic religion, almost the apotheosis of man – ‘we are all god-men (*bo-gocheloveki*)’.”<sup>6</sup>

These statements clearly contain no arguments to support Khoruzhii’s thesis that the profanation of *sobornost'* was the reason for its degradation. Florovskii’s argument tries to persuade the reader of

5 G. Florovskii, 1983, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, Paris, p. 295.

6 Florovskii, 1983, pp. 292–295.

something very different: it is not a question of an ideal spiritual being secretly replaced by a material, terrestrial one, but of one type of spirituality (Orthodoxy, with its “soul” – *sobornost'*) being superseded by another, different type of religiosity and religious consciousness. In the view of Florovskii, this may be “a very strange religion,” but as such, it never ceases – for all its strangeness – to be a religion, albeit of a specific type, though not a profaned variant (or evolution) of Orthodox *sobornost'*.

Khomiakov did not discover a hitherto unknown concept of *sobornost'* as the nucleus of Orthodox Christianity. He only formulated it as such. Thus, we may perceive a universal replacement of *sobornost'* by something different, outside of Orthodox spirituality, something that had its origins in the declaration of a “humanistic religion,” a “religion of the heart,” and its culmination in the Bolshevik Revolution and in the violent eradication of the Orthodox foundation of life and culture. Repudiating the Orthodox past in legislative terms, Soviet Russia was only the apex of a more general process of de-Christianisation, which was enforced with particular brutality and religious fervour within the borders of the former Russian Empire.

Finally, in my view, Khoruzhii’s distinction between communality (*obshchinnost'*) and *sobornost'* is hardly sustainable. Khomiakov was clearly aware of *sobornost'* as the Orthodox foundation of communality, though he never identified the two, but he never separated the “human and profane” from “grace” by an “*uncrossable border*,” as Khoruzhii seems to assume.<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, the idea of an impenetrable barrier between the grace and the world would imply the impossibility of *sobornost'* penetrating into life, and the impossibility of the incorporation of life into the Church. For Khomiakov, the idea of *sobornost'*, inherent in Orthodoxy, was the inspiring ideal for secular life in Russia.

The essential incorrectness of Khoruzhii’s conceptual juxtaposition, which he ascribes to Khomiakov, becomes clear when we consider the characteristically Orthodox conviction of the absence of an uncrossable border between a visible Church and an invisible Church triumphant in Heaven. According to “the teachings on the universality

7 Khoruzhii, 1991, p. 98.

(*sobornost'*) of the Church, its unity is absolute: there is no visible and invisible, no heavenly and earthly church, but one Church united in Christ, which in the fullness of its unity exists or resides in every local church.<sup>8</sup> From the fact that "the invisible Church fully manifests itself in the visible Church, and the visible reveals the invisible"<sup>9</sup> we cannot necessarily deduce a merging of a secular communality with a *sobornost'* of grace. However, according to Orthodox philosophy, the foundation of *sobornost'* on grace is the heavenly reference-point for the earthly community.

In Orthodoxy there is a different kind of opposition, more fundamental and all-encompassing, which runs through the entire thousand-year history of Russian Christianity. I have in mind the opposition between Law and Grace, through which it is possible to explain the foundation of *sobornost'* on grace, avoid any incorrect broadening of this concept, as well as prevent the transformation of *sobornost'* from a category open to scholarly investigation into an amorphous principle eluding every kind of scholarly analysis.

It is significant that Russian literature *begins* with a work where the author successively manifests, with unusual precision and intensity, these two spiritual poles as well as two different human ways of understanding values. Ilarion's *Sermon on Law and Grace* holds the key to the category in question. If the soul of Orthodoxy is *sobornost'*, then divine grace is the core of this *sobornost'*. The opposition established by the early Russian author is so universal in the Orthodox mentality that it permeates the entire thousand-year history of Russian literature, and very likely determines the spiritual peculiarities of Russian literature as a whole.

I have analysed elsewhere the Orthodox subtext of *The Lay of Prince Igor*.<sup>10</sup> Igor's un-blessed campaign, his self-willed departure from the borders of the Russian lands, his wilfulness, culminate when "Prince Igor' exchanges his golden saddle for the saddle of a slave."

8 N. Afanas'ev, 1971, "Vlast' liubvi: k probleme prava i blagodati," *Pravoslavnaia mysl': trudy Pravoslavnogo Bogoslovskogo Instituta v Parizhe*, 14, p. 9.

9 Afanas'ev, 1971, p. 10.

10 I.A. Esaulov, 1994a, "Kategoriia sobornosti v russkoi literature (k postanovke problemy)," *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII-XX vekov: tsitata, reminitsentsiia, motiv, siuzhet, zhanr*, ed. V.N. Zakharov, Petrozavodsk, pp. 41-46.

The hero's miraculous return to the borders of the Russian lands may be seen as the direct fulfilment of God's Will. In the words of the author: "God shows Prince Igor' the way out of the land of the Polovtians to the land of Rus'"

Igor's departure for the Polovtsian lands begins with an ill omen, not with a prayer in the church. The significant absence of any mention of the Orthodox church at the outset of the campaign, and its appearance in its final stages (when Igor's campaign comes to an end), permits us to speak in the concluding part of the recovery not only of his earthly native land – the Russian land – but of his native heavenly homeland as well.

The almost incomprehensible manifestation of universal rejoicing in the land of Rus' after the return of Prince Igor' from his unsuccessful (from a military point of view) campaign, can partly be explained by the hero's free choice of the path of grace (which he could find only once he had lost his external freedom). His slaughtered retinue, after all, was left behind on the battlefield.

From the author's point of view, however, the hero's choice of the path pleasing to God is hierarchically more important than a military defeat on earth, and in the highest degree worthy of a final glorification. According to Christian doctrine, the soul of one single man outweighs everything else. Furthermore, the universal homage shown to the living Prince Igor' and his deceased retinue, seemingly wholly out of place after the return of the lone hero, resurrects, as it were, his army as well. For God there are no dead.

Within the framework of the text, the hero's upward spiritual path along the Borevich slope and culminating in a prayer in the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God, which remains outside the text, can be seen as the attainment of the highest spiritual goal possible for a Christian. For in the church – the *sobor* – the union of the living and the dead becomes possible (that is, the *sobornoe edinienie* in the literal sense, *one universal Church*). Thus, Prince Igor's path of the Cross atones for his shame. Like Christ, who with His death atoned for the sin of Adam, Prince Igor' atones for his own sin – pride – with military defeat and shameful capture.

In Russian literature, *sobornost'* has always been linked with *Christocentrism*. The religious character of early Russian literature is so ev-



ident that to argue anew for such a thesis would be superfluous. Throughout the first seven centuries of its existence, Russian literature was clearly Christocentric, that is, oriented first and foremost towards the New Testament. Moreover, characteristic of "Russian sanctity" (Averintsev) is precisely "the attempt to accept the word of Christ about loving one's enemies, non-resistance to evil, and the necessity of turning the other cheek in an absolutely literal sense, without reservations, without misinterpretations."<sup>11</sup> This is a manifestation of the same Christocentrism which, to my mind, constitutes the unity between early Russian literature and the Russian classics of more recent times, above all of the nineteenth century. Possibly, the profound, close and never broken tie with the New Testament is the main factor that unites Russian culture as a whole.

In early Russian literature the principle of *sobornost'* is developed explicitly, indeed the main purpose of this literature is the incorporation of man into the Church. The liturgical year – in Orthodoxy linked to and beginning with Easter – affirms the final victory over death, thereby giving a meaningfulness to the life of every human being who has embarked on his or her path towards God. While trying to identify the most important poetic features of early Russian literature, many Soviet literary scholars and medievalists had to avoid emphasising its predominantly religious purpose. While it is quite clear, for example, that the high moral idealism characteristic of this literature has a distinctly New Testament flavour, its "ensemble structure" (Likhachev's term) is markedly based on the idea of Orthodox *sobornost'*.

As we all know, the *aesthetic* aspect (the beauty of the divine service) was probably the most decisive factor in the choice of confession, at least in the consciousness of the early Russian *literati*. In Russian culture, the good and the beautiful were originally not only not mutually exclusive, but even inseparable. The sacred was perceived in its aesthetic aspect, whilst the later maxim "beauty shall save the world" would therefore also mean – apart from anything else – a renewal of the Orthodox tradition, the very "return to the religious principle of life," which Georgii Fedotov writes about.<sup>12</sup>

11 S. S. Averintsev, 1988, "Vizantiia i Rus': dva tipa dukhovnosti," *Novyi mir*, 9, p. 231.

12 G. Fedotov, 1990, "Bor'ba za iskusstvo," *Voprosy literatury*, 2, p. 223.

In the Russian literary classics of the nineteenth century, the Christocentrism of the Gospels is made manifest both directly (for example, in Lev Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, Dostoevskii's *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Idiot*) and – which is more common – implicitly: in the author's ethical and aesthetic orientation towards Jesus Christ as the highest moral ideal. Moreover, the central character of the New Testament often remains, as it were, outside the brackets of the narrative, but is invisibly present in the consciousness of the author and readers. Hence the constant feeling of the imperfection of all the other characters, as well as the social and moral criticism implied when the hero's "real" life is projected against the ideal life of Christ, even if the author himself is not fully conscious of this projection.

Christocentrism is that suprapersonal goal which everyone must try to reach, however difficult. But this aspiration is not at all the expression of an utopian consciousness. On the contrary, for a person with an Orthodox mentality, it is not "a place, which is not," but "a place, which *has already been*." Christ revealed himself to the world both as the Saviour who atoned for the sin committed by Adam, and as a model of the highest moral standards.

The above considerations make it easier to understand the maximalist ethical demands imposed on the nineteenth-century Russian literary hero, far more severe than in Western European literature of the same period, where the burden of demands put on man is much more practicable.

Russian writers oriented towards Orthodoxy did not wish (or, perhaps, were unable) to yield to the demands of a secularised life. Compared with an analogical process in Western Europe, the secularisation of Russian culture was a far softer phenomenon; it occurred much later, and had not even reached completion by the beginning of the twentieth century. That is why, in the Russian classics, there are so few central heroes who stand comparison with the early Russian literary tradition of moral perfection. Every person is "worse" than Christ. There are so few good heroes precisely because the "best one" is always present in the author's consciousness (or subconsciousness). The constant dread of spiritual imperfection in the face of an ideal Holy Rus', the fear that the lower, given reality (*dannost'*) may not correspond to this higher, ideal reality (*zadannost'*), renders all other earthly problems

of human life secondary and insignificant. Hence the constant preoccupation with the ultimate problems, with the "cursed questions."

The reverse side of this spiritual maximalism in Russian literature is the complete and unconditional acceptance of God's world. Before God we are all equal as his servants. True, there is a distance between sinners and saints, but both are unworthy of him in equal measure. This means, however, that everyone is worthy of pity, love and sympathy. Hence the love for the wretched, the fools in Christ, the destitute and the convicts. Hence too, the striking forbearance, and the aesthetic rendering of this forbearance. This is an aestheticisation of the love for one's neighbour, his imperfections notwithstanding.

The gallery of heroes in the Russian classics may be seen as variations on a universal (*sobornyi*) striving towards the hero of the New Testament. Therefore, in my view, Russian nineteenth-century classics sometimes appear to constitute not a body of separate texts, but indeed one united work. Moreover, in its internal scheme this united work is implicitly oriented towards a different book, the Gospels, just as the early Russian body of texts was explicitly oriented towards that same book.

Despite the external formlessness of many of the Russian classics (for example, the "superfluous" digressions in *War and Peace*, Dostoevskii's *polyphony*, or Chekhov's refusal to formulate any ultimate truth), and despite their differences in world outlook, all these writers possess one common denominator: they share an Orthodox attitude to the world. Their divergencies are different manifestations of the principle of *sobornost'*.

On the level of textual composition and representation of character, we observe an almost spiritual trepidation on the part of the author when faced with the power (realised through the heroes) over the Other. It is a trepidation when confronted by our own possibility of creating a "finalised" and "complete" world. We also perceive an uncertainty as to whether one's role as a judge of one's neighbour is a rightful one (even if the latter only appears as a fictional character). For the "final truth" uttered about the Other is fixed by the text of the work, and it therefore deprives him of the hope of transformation and the possibility of spiritual insight, of which the Other cannot be deprived, as long as he is alive.

To claim that the hero is complete is almost the same as to pronounce a last Judgement over him, thereby disregarding the fact that the last and ultimate truth about man is known only to God. However, as is expressed in Chekhov's short story "The Duel," no one knows the real truth within the boundaries of the earthly world created in the artistic work. No one knows, not because truth is relative and the real truth does not exist, but because the final truth about man is revealed even to God only after his death. Until this boundary is reached there is only hope, and to deprive the Other of this hope means, in a sense, to perform towards him an anti-Christian act.

The famous *polyphony* of Dostoevskii's novels, discovered by Bakhtin, and the *equality* of both the author's and the characters' voices, have in my view the same profound universal sources, deeply rooted in Orthodox Russian spirituality. It is precisely in the face of this absolute, and not relative, truth – which in its completeness is known only to God – that the author and the hero possess equal rights. In relation to this higher truth, any other truth is relative; any thought uttered on earth, as Tiutchev expresses it in his poem "Silentium," is a lie.

In this context, we shall now turn to some of the more important texts of nineteenth-century Russian literature, a large number of which deserve to be re-examined.<sup>13</sup>

Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin's novel *The Golovlev Family* may serve as our starting-point, in that the author is apparently so far removed from the Christian spiritual tradition that any search in his works for even the slightest trace of an Orthodox axiology would seem disingenuously futile. However, in this novel we are confronted with one of the most significant examples of the Christian tradition in modern Russian literature. I have in mind Porfirii Golovlev's astonishing final "awakening of conscience,"<sup>14</sup> which is portrayed very much in the spirit of the Orthodox conception of man.

Porfirii Golovlev is a "living spectre," "the last representative of a derelict family" (280), and a *Pharisee*. In contrast to the publican, he

13 For a more detailed study, see I.A. Esaulov, 1995, *Kategoriia sobornosti v russkoi literature*, Petrozavodsk.

14 All references are to M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1988, *Sobranie sochinenii v desiaty tomakh*, Moscow, vol. 6. The translation used is M. Saltykov-Shchedrin, 1988, *The Golovlyov Family*, transl. R. Wilks, London.

would seem to have no hope of salvation. The impetuosity and the apparent lack of motivation, with which the hero's awakening of conscience is realised, have given ample opportunity to the author's contemporaries and modern commentators alike to repudiate the shortcomings of the work's conclusion. Are they right?

The hero experiences after all a need for his neighbour: "there was no one in the world who would approach him and who would take pity on him. Why was he all alone? Why did he see not only indifference all around, but hatred too?" (281).

Porfirii Golovlev's repentance of his past life coincides with the Orthodox yearly cycle: "It was towards the end of March and *Holy Week* was drawing to a close" (282). In this phrase we recognise the opposition of the natural cycle (spring-awakening) and the spiritual one (the severest week of Lent).

The human passions culminating in the novel are projected onto the Passion of Christ, not only by the author, but also by the hero. Turning to Annin'ka, Porfirii Golovlev says: "Didn't you hear what was read during the service tonight? ... Oh, what *sufferings!* *It is only through such sufferings that one can...*" Porphyry started striding around the room again *in great distress and anguish (stradaia)*, and he did not feel the drops of sweat on his face" (282).<sup>15</sup> What is striking here is not only the merging of the author's voice with that of the hero (through details of speech) and the striving to identify human suffering with that of Christ, but also the author's implicit comparison of the perspiration of Christ with the drops of sweat co-experienced by his fictional hero.

The author emphasises several times the particular importance of the last days of Lent for every single character in the novel. The textual density of this allusion is exploited as if to atone for the hitherto false piety of the entire Golovlev family. In the novel's conclusion, there is not a single ironical allusion to prayer, fasting or faith, and the name of God is not once uttered in vain. It appears that a certain residue of Christian humanity has remained in Saltykov's characters all along, but is realised only in the novel's conclusion.

15 Here and in the following quotations, italics are mine.

The central element in the novel's poetics is the possibility of expiation of guilt by the hero, and of his absolution, which is linked with this expiation. His absolution, which undoubtedly occurs in the novel's conclusion, has a marked New Testament quality about it. It is not insignificant that the last conversation between Annin'ka and Porfirii Golovlev unfolds "no more than an hour" after the reading of the Twelve Gospels, and that is why "there was still a strong smell of incense in the room" (282).

The traditional bringing together of the eternal and the present in Porfirii Golovlev's words is not parodied, but is serious in the highest degree. For the first time the hero enters the aura of the Orthodox mentality, allowing himself, only twenty-four hours before Christ's Resurrection, to pass from "the *agony* of remorse" (281) to a real, fully consummated penance. But this cannot be achieved without support from Christ, indeed, it is unthinkable outside of Christ: "...and He forgave! He forgave everyone for ever!" (285).

The exclamation "everyone for ever!" contains both the unconditional acceptance and absolution of any sin, and the finality, the solemn irreversibility of the main event in the Gospels, which knows of no exception, no halfway case unaffected by the aura of forgiveness. Meanwhile, Porfirii's exclamation is in contrast to the *evasiveness* of all his other speeches and actions:

"He forgave them all!..., – he said out loud to himself. – Not only those who gave Him vinegar and gall to drink then, but those who afterwards, *now and in the future and for all time* will continue to put vinegar and gall to his lips... ... Now, you... Have you forgiven?" ... Instead of replying, she [Annin'ka] rushed to him and embraced him. "You must forgive me, – he continued. *For everyone's sake...* for yourself and for those who are no longer with us..." (285)

Thus the reader witnesses the absolution of the hero, which has already taken place – without words. The absolution "for everyone's sake" uttered by the hero now refers to himself, as it had earlier referred to Christ. Thus an image emerges of the sacred wholeness of the world. The separate parts of a chain are linked up and united by love



towards the Other: the Lord “forgave... everyone” – “You must forgive me... for everyone.”

In Dostoevskii, for example in *The Brothers Karamazov*, we find the same Orthodox orientation: Can one be the judge of one's fellow men?... every man is guilty for each and every one. Therefore, in Dostoevskii's aesthetic world there is the notion of a universal guilt and a universal salvation. It is said of Alesha that he does not wish to be the judge of people, he does not wish to take judgement on himself, and will not judge for anything in the world.

Returning to Saltykov's novel, it must be emphasised that the reader, too, is included in the category of “everyone”: in the image of Porfirii Golovlev there is also contained the image of everyone's neighbour. Just like the salvation of Prince Igor, so the salvation of Porfirii becomes a symbol of the entire Christian world.

If the reader is prepared to accept the hero's repentance, he will also accept the repentance of all other people. But if he, following the awakening of conscience, rejects it and considers Porfirii's insight useless, then he remains both outside the Christian scale of *ethical* values, and outside the novel's aesthetic whole. Such a reader will see only the publican “Iudushka,” whereas the core of the work resides in the almost instantaneous change that occurs in the hero, as well as in the very possibility, the reality, of such a change. This change becomes a universal symbol representing the possibility of salvation for all, for publicans and Pharisees alike. A disbelief in the hero's awakening of conscience indicates a disbelief in the salvation of everyone else, a disbelief in God's mercy, which in turn renders the suffering of Christ ultimately meaningless.

By going to visit his “Mamma's grave,” the hero as if atones for all the unsuccessful and rejected past homecomings of the “prodigal children” to the Golovlev estate. Physically, the hero does not reach his goal (“the frozen corpse of the master of Golovlevo had been found only a few steps from the road” 285), but in fact, it is precisely and only in this fashion that he could arrive at “Mamma's grave.” Before setting out, he “stopped before the icon of the Redeemer with the crown of thorns, illuminated by an oil-lamp, and peered closely at it. At last he made his mind up.” The road to his mother is Porfirii Golovlev's Golgotha.

The road towards his fellow man is equally difficult. He finds, however, sufficient spiritual strength in himself to pity and forgive – “for everyone's sake” – “the licentious tart” Annin'ka: “Porfirii stood up and paced the room several times, visibly agitated. Finally he went over to Annin'ka and stroked her head. ‘You poor girl! You poor, dear girl!’ – he said softly” (285).

Thus, we see the instantaneous change of Iudushka Golovlev into Porfirii Vladimirovich actually taking place, without any intermediate stages. Bearing in mind the time of the hero's death – within “a step” of Christ's Resurrection, twenty-four hours before the end of Lent – one might question the finality of his “conversion.” Nevertheless, one cannot fail to observe the impetuosity of the transition, which is credible for two reasons, both ensuing from the Orthodox mentality.

Firstly, hope of transfiguration and spiritual insight cannot be removed whilst the inveterate sinner himself is still alive. Readiness to condemn the hero while he is still among the living would be an unrighteous infringement of the Last Judgement, and a rejection of the all-encompassing inclusiveness and omnipotence of divine grace.

Secondly, the Orthodox consciousness repudiates the idea of Purgatory as an intermediate and independent place, on a par with Hell for sinners and Paradise for the righteous. The emergence of Purgatory in Catholicism in the twelfth century was a clear sign of the commencing secularisation of Western culture.<sup>16</sup>

The sudden insight of the hero, the unexpectedness of which results from the absence of an intermediate state between Iudushka Golovlev and Porfirii Vladimirovich Golovlev, can only be understood within a system that recognises only the two extremes of Heaven and Hell.

In Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter*, the two diametrically opposed characters, Catherine II and Pugachev, are both characterised by a consistent orientation towards “mercy” (*milost'*), (not “justice” – *pravosudie*) and the “grace of God,” as well as towards the rejection of the rule of law. In a world based on Christian values, it is only logical that “a boy's sheepskin coat, given to a vagrant, saved him from the scaffold.”<sup>17</sup> In this work we find the same Orthodox subtext that in-

16 J. Le Goff, 1981, *La naissance du Purgatoire*, Paris.

forms all Russian classical literature, which had in its turn absorbed the Christian mindset of early Russian literature and thus believed in the incorporation of every human being into the Church.

Central to the poetics of *The Captain's Daughter* is the problem of blessing, around which the episode of Grinev's dream about "something prophetic" is structured. Grinev "decides to write to his father, imploring his paternal blessing" in order that he might wed Masha Mironova. Having received a refusal ("I have no intention of giving you ... my blessing" 225), Grinev declares "I am ready to face anything" (227). At this stage in the narrative there emerges a Romantic variation of "the possible plot" – to use Sergei Bocharov's term – in which the protagonists' mutual love provides a fully satisfactory condition for marriage without a blessing. However, Pushkin's heroine rejects this opportunity: "God knows better than we do what is good for us ... Let us submit to God's will ... No, Petr Andreich, ... I will not marry you without your parents' blessing. Without their blessing there can be no happiness for us."

It is interesting that the attitude of different characters towards the duel depends on whether they belong to the sphere of Orthodox ethics, or whether they fall outside it, remaining in a marginal position. For example, from Shvabrin's "lawful" point of view, the duel is a "satisfaction." For Ivan Ignat'ich, however, the duel is nothing but a "murder" ("is killing one's neighbour a good deed?") The punishment of having the swords taken away and put in the store-room by Palashka, has as its aim the devaluation of lawful satisfaction, and carries a pseudo-sacred meaning. At the same time, another kind of sacredness is emphasised, according to whose unwritten norms human behaviour is evaluated. Rebuking Petr Grinev, Vasilisa Egorovna indicates exactly why she "did not expect" that he would transgress these unwritten norms: "It is all very well for Aleksei Ivanovich – he does not even believe in the Lord; but imagine you doing a thing like this! Do you wish to imitate him?" (219). From this point of view, "to imitate him" means to occupy a position which is fundamentally marginal and to overstep the bounds of Christian morality.

17 References are to A.S. Pushkin, 1964, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 10-ti tomakh*, Moscow, vol. 6.

Finally, the opposition of Law and Grace established by Metropolitan Ilarion is essential for the understanding of the poetics of *Dead Souls*. The desire of the hero in Gogol's *poema* to "acquire dead souls, who are still registered as living in the census,"<sup>18</sup> (44) demonstrates the sharpest conflict between Law and Grace in nineteenth-century Russian literature. Chichikov wishes to acquire the "peasants who are not alive in reality, but who are still alive according to the law" (44). Thus "law" is opposed to "reality." That which according to the law is alive, is "in reality" dead.

The hero is given the opportunity to be the arbiter over the souls of the dead in a fashion similar to that of God. This undermines the very foundations of the Christian faith. It is of no small importance that Chichikov uses outdated (that is, *old*) information about the souls listed in the census. He plays on the gap between reality and the lawful information about this reality. It is, however, precisely this understanding of the Old Law – as being outdated and having lost the privilege of being sacred – that is revealed in the *Sermon on Law and Grace*.

Gogol' himself is certain that the characters he describes in the first volume – who have, as it were, dead souls – have not yet really lost hope of revelation within the framework of "the surplus of authorial vision" (Bakhtin).

Thus, when describing Sobakevich, the author informs the reader that it *seemed* as though his body had no soul at all" (109), but then corrects himself, for it *turns out* that "it did have one, but ... it was covered with a thick shell" (110). Even for Pliushkin there is a ray of hope, which, it would seem, could not have been anticipated: "And all of a sudden a sort of ray of warm light slipped across that wooden face ... something like the unexpected appearance of a drowning man on the surface of the water, giving rise to a shout of joy in the crowd on the bank" (135). This is the characteristic joy of others at the appearance of a once petrified human soul. And this joy has a distinctly New Testament quality to it: "But in vain do his rejoicing brothers and sisters throw him a rope from the bank and wait..."

18 All references are to N.V. Gogol', 1960, *Sobranie khudozhestvennykh proizvedenii v piati tomakh*, Moscow, vol. 5. The translation used is N. Gogol, 1961, *Dead Souls*, transl. D. Magarshack, London.

It is well known that according to Gogol's plan *Dead Souls* was meant to have a tripartite structure. However, a tripartite cosmos – where the first volume corresponded to Hell, the second to Purgatory, and the third to Paradise – would, had it been created, have corresponded more to Roman Catholic thinking than it would to Orthodox ideas concerning the nature of man. Gogol's failure to carry out his plan may be explained by the profound contradiction between the *binary* Orthodox consciousness and the self-imposed necessity of presenting in the second volume a certain "place in between," similar to what Dante described in the *Divine Comedy*. It is not accidental that an allusion to Dante emerges just at the moment when Chichikov signs the diabolic contract, voluntarily entering into possession of the souls of dead people.

But the most essential thing for our current context is the fact that according to the author's plan, his hero may be saved and liberated from Hell – dead souls can be revived. The gradual "Catholic" road to salvation was not realised by Gogol and could not be realised within the Orthodox framework of the Golden Age of nineteenth-century Russian literature.

Another realisation of the same pattern is Chekhov's short story "The Student," where the Gospel plot of the return of the Prodigal son is re-enacted through the hero's almost instantaneous liberation from the "old man" within himself.

However, the Silver Age, which is linked above all with the flowering of Russian Symbolism, almost realised Gogol's plan. In an article with the symptomatic title "The Dantesque Code of Russian Symbolism," Lena Szilard and Peter Barta observe that the Russian Symbolists used Dante's images "in the capacity of a kind of metalanguage."<sup>19</sup> In my view, the use of the Dantesque code may be understood as an aesthetic attempt in Russian twentieth-century literature to convert the binary system of Orthodox spirituality with its soul – *sobornost'* – into an essentially different, strictly hierarchical system, resembling the axiology of Roman Catholicism, albeit not entirely sympathetic towards it. It

19 L. Szilard & P. Barta, 1989, "Dantov kod ruskogo simvolizma," *Studia Slavica Hungarica*, 35 (1), p. 63.

seems to me that a scholarly study of this abrupt turning-point in the spiritual coordinates of Russian literature could be highly productive.

I should like to conclude with a few propositions, which have, for the time being, only a hypothetical character.

Could it be that the spiritual assimilation of the New Testament, in its Orthodox interpretation, also constitutes a kind of touchstone in Russian culture, which is based on *sobornost'* and Christocentrism? Is this an assimilation of something which in the early Russian literary tradition was oriented more towards external manifestations of the grace of God, but which in nineteenth-century Russian literature comes closer to its inner nucleus? Furthermore, are we not dealing here with a significant (although very relative) analogue to the Old and the New Testaments?

Perhaps the actual impossibility of creating a united "work" of Russian literature truly in keeping with the New Testament (where the artistic worlds of the respective authors would constitute the "chapters"), led many Russian writers at the height of their fame – from Gogol through to Tolstoi – towards a wholly unexpected repudiation of artistic writing *per se*, either through commentary on the divine liturgy (as in the case of Gogol) or through missionary activity; and all because of their direct devotion to this highest spiritual truth?

These are some of the many questions answerable only within the bounds of an essentially new conception of the history of Russian literature. In my view, however, such a conception would be possible only within the framework of a new and specific axiology of literary criticism.<sup>20</sup>

20 For further details see I.A. Esaulov, 1994b, "Literaturovedcheskaia aksiologija: opyt obosnovaniia poniatiia," *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII-XX vekov: tsitata, reministsentsiia, motiv, siuzhet, zhanr*, ed. V.N. Zakharov, Petrozavodsk, pp. 378-383.