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Russian thinker Lev Shestov from a literary perspective

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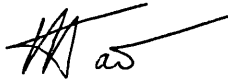
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to study the irrationalist and existentialist trend in the history of Russian thought through the Silver Age perception of classical Russian literature. The main focus is on the most controversial representative of those currents of thought – the philosophical writer Lev Shestov (1866-1938).

An examination of Shestov's legacy from a literary perspective is offered – an approach which, as we argue, is crucial in interpreting Shestov's works. It also appears novel in comparison with more conventional treatments of this thinker as philosopher or theologian. The main objective is to explore the literary dimension of Shestov's creativity and its interplay with his philosophical ideas. We examine Shestov's works dedicated to classical Russian writers, which represent a bridge from literature to philosophy, and attest to his ceaseless journey in this direction. Our main conclusions are derived from Shestov's ambivalent treatment of aesthetics. The thesis explores the paradox that Shestov is appreciated more by artists than by philosophers despite his predominantly applied treatment of art (resulting from his view of philosophy as a form of art rather than science). This stance frequently leads Shestov to misinterpret literary texts, while the nature of his philosophy, we argue, remains essentially artistic.

Part I of the thesis provides a conceptual explanation of the legitimacy and vital importance of taking a literary approach to Shestov. Part II substantiates our main arguments through case studies of classical Russian writers. Using a combination of formalist, intertextual and biographical approaches, it examines Shestov's treatment of these writers in relation to the existing critical literature.

It is hoped that this dissertation will shed some new light not only on Shestov's life and work, but also on the literary heritage of certain major nineteenth-century Russian writers, as well as on the existentialist and irrationalist trend in the history of Russian thought.

PREFACE

In writing up the thesis I have followed the University of Bath Specifications For Higher Degree Theses. I have also adhered to the MHRA style guide as much as possible. The primary sources, which this dissertation draws on, include works by Lev Shestov, written originally in Russian, as well as a substantial body of texts by Russian writers, both classical and contemporary. The secondary sources also contain a considerable number of Russian texts. Other non-English materials quoted herein include French and German sources, as well as occasional quotations in Ancient Greek. I quote Russian texts in the original, as much as possible, and provide translation for other foreign texts (into English, and on occasions into Russian). Wherever possible I give official translations; otherwise I provide my own (by default, unless otherwise stated).

Although I predominantly use the original Russian for titles and quotations, when referring, in English, to a Russian name, I use the Library of Congress transliteration system. However, for simplification, and due to long-established conventions in the spelling of well-known names, I have opted to shorten Russian surnames ending in 'ii' to 'y' (for example, Dostoevsky instead of Dostoevskii), and to write Tolstoy instead of Tolstoi. For the same reason I have omitted diacritics. However, all these simplifications apply to the main body of the text only: in the references and bibliography I adhere strictly to the Library of Congress transliteration system in the spelling of Russian names (in Russian sources). If an unconventional spelling of a name occurs in an existing book or article I keep it as in the original.

In the footnote references I normally give the full reference when the item is first mentioned, and thereafter use a short title and a surname only. It is then easy to check in the bibliography for the full reference (rather than searching through the thesis for the first occurrence of the item). In the cases where there is just one work quoted by an author I only give the author's surname after the first mention of the source (i.e. after the full reference). If more than one work by the same author is quoted in the thesis I give his/her surname and the relevant short title every time. However, if there are two works only by the

same author, and one is quoted frequently, whereas the other is only referred to a few times, I give the author's surname only to imply the first work (frequently quoted), and when referring to the second (rarely quoted) work I provide both the surname and the short title. This convention is used in the following instances:

1) Aikhenval'd Iurii, Review of Lev Shestov's book *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, (63) *Русские Ведомости*, 7 March 1905 (the title is used)

Aikhenval'd, Iu. I., 'Чехов', А. П. *Чехов: Pro et Contra. Творчество А. П. Чехова в русской мысли конца XIX – начала XX в. (1887-1914)*, Anthology, ed. I. N. Sukhikh, A. D. Stepanov (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo Instituta, 2002) (the surname only is used, after the first occurrence)

2) Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Автор и герой. К философским основам гуманитарных наук* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000) (the title is used)

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Проблемы творчества Достоевского* (Moscow: Alkonost, 1994) (the surname only is used, after the first occurrence)

3) When the surname only (Martin) is used it refers to: Martin, Bernard, *The life and thought of Lev Shestov*, Introduction to Lev Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem*, transl. Bernard Martin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), 11-44

4) Milosz, Czeslaw, 'Shestov, or the Purity of Despair', *Emperor of the Earth. Modes of Eccentric Vision* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1977), 99-119 (the surname only is used, after the first occurrence)

Milosz, Czeslaw, 'Борьба с удушьем', *Иосиф Бродский: труды и дни*, eds. Lev Losev and Petr Vail' (Moscow: Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 1998), 237-247 (the title is used)

5) Valevicius, Andrius, *Lev Shestov and His Times: Encounters with Brandes, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Husserl* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) (the surname only is used, after the first occurrence)

Valevicius, Andrius, “‘Celui qui édifie et détruit des mondes’: Léon Chestov et le post-modernisme à partir d'une lecture de Tolstol’, *Cahiers de l’émigration russe* 3 (Paris: Institut d’Etudes Slaves, 1996), special issue ‘Léon Chestov. Un philosophe pas comme les autres?’, 133-140 (the title is used)

During my research on Lev Shestov’s creative legacy I have produced several publications and forthcoming publications related to various aspects of my thesis.¹ I have given papers relevant to my thesis topic at symposia of the British-French Association for the Study of Russian Culture in Bath in October 2003 and in Paris (in October 2001 and October 2002), and at the BASEES conference in Cambridge in March 2003, as well as at the VII World Congress of ICCEES in Berlin in August 2005. I also gave a presentation at a research gathering at the Russian bookshop ‘Les Editeurs Réunis’ in Paris in May 2002 during my Entente Cordiale Scholarship to the Sorbonne which I held in 2001-2002 to work in Shestov’s archive. I have also published papers and given conference presentations on topics closely related to my research on Shestov, but which have had to remain outside the scope of this thesis (such as Lev Shestov and twentieth century writers: Joseph Brodsky, Marina Tsvetaeva and Venedikt Erofeev).

¹ Aspects of Chapters 3 and 6 of the thesis are included in Olga Tabachnikova, ‘The Treatment of Aesthetics in Lev Shestov’s Search for God’, in *Aesthetics as a Religious Factor in Eastern and Western Christianity*, eds. Wil van den Bercken and Jonathan Sutton; Eastern Christian Studies 6. (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 2005), pp. 179-195; Olga Tabachnikova, ‘The Religious-Philosophical Heritage of Lev Shestov in the Context of Contemporary Russia and the Wider World’ (forthcoming in the *Heythrop Journal: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology*). Another work related to Shestov’s biography is R. Fotiade and O.Tabachnikova, eds, *Unpublished correspondence between Lev Shestov and Boris de Schloezer* (a fully annotated edition) (Moscow-Paris: Russkii Put’ – YMCA Press, forthcoming in 2008). I am also currently preparing for publication an edited volume, *A. P. Chekhov through the eyes of Russian thinkers: V. Rozanov, D. Merezhkovsky, L. Shestov and S. Bulgakov. Modern perspectives*.

I would like to thank the Department of European Studies and Modern Languages at the University of Bath for providing a grant to pay my part-time fees during the years 2000-2005 and for sponsoring my attendance at the international symposium on the philosophy of A. P. Chekhov in Irkutsk in August 2006. I also wish to thank the BASEES Research and Development Committee for funding my participation at the VII World Congress of ICCEES in Berlin in August 2005 and for supporting my attendance at BASEES annual conferences in Cambridge, where I have been able to test my research findings.

I am also grateful to my supervisors Professor Rosalind Marsh and Dr Peter Wagstaff of the Department of European Studies and Modern Languages who have provided continuous help and support during my work on this dissertation. My thanks also go to my family and friends for both moral and practical support, as well as stimulating discussions and encouragement.

INTRODUCTION:

Lev Shestov – beyond classification. Preliminary remarks.

The topic of our research is the Russian-Jewish thinker, philosopher and writer Lev Shestov who remains one of the most fascinating and controversial figures in the history of Russian culture. Born in Kiev in 1866, Shestov emigrated to Paris in 1920 where he wrote his most significant philosophical works and where he died in 1938.

In his writings Shestov provided a systematic critique of the whole history of Western speculative philosophy and laid a foundation to what later became known as existentialist philosophy. He started his philosophizing from an analysis of literature, especially of classical Russian literature, and gradually moved towards purely philosophical writings.

His works were prohibited in the USSR and it is only now, with the fall of communism and the active revival of religious thought in Russia, that Shestov's writings are being republished and enjoy a growing interest among the general public, together with other Russian philosophers of the Silver Age, who have also hitherto hardly been available within the country. Yet Shestov remains, as he always was, a solitary figure in Russian thought in particular and in world culture in general.

Indeed, as we shall see, it is even problematic to classify his intellectual heritage precisely: was he truly a philosopher, or rather a theologian or a writer? There is no real agreement on this issue. On one hand he is known as a philosopher of tragedy, and some say, like Galtseva, that he was 'экзистенциалист, появившийся задолго до экзистенциализма',² others assert, like Zenkovsky, that Shestov's philosophy is only superficially existential, but is in fact theocentric and truly religious.³ However, when he emigrated to France he was

² Renata Gal'tseva, *Очерки русской утопической мысли XX века* (Moscow: Nauka, 1992), p. 77.

³ Прот. В. В. Зеньковский (archpriest V. V. Zen'kovskii), Профессор Богословского Православного Института в Париже (Professor of the Theological Russian-Orthodox Institute in Paris), *История русской философии (в двух томах)* (History of Russian Philosophy, in two vol.), (Paris: YMCA PRESS, 1948-1950). The references in the sequel will be given to a Russian republication of the original book: В. В. Зеньковский (V. V. Zenkovskii), *История русской*

discovered by the emerging French existentialists and Camus later wrote about him in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942).⁴ Moreover, Shestov's response to Husserl's philosophical ideas was one of the first in France and made a significant impact on the resonance that the phenomenological movement received in that country, with far reaching consequences for the whole of modern French philosophical thought.

Many debate to this day whether he was a philosopher at all, judging by his unscholarly, literary style and, more crucially, by the fact that the roots of his philosophical ideas grow out of the depth of classical Russian literature (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev, Pushkin) as well as the works of Shakespeare and other world classics. His books written on literature are regarded by many as literary criticism of high quality and originality. Yet, from his later works and philosophical statements he may in principle be interpreted as a theologian or even a preacher, although this view is not normally shared. To our mind, a definite classification here is pointless. The truth, as usual, lies in the middle – he was all of the above and therefore cannot be pigeon-holed.

In his essay 'Shestov, or the Purity of Despair'⁵ written in 1973, Czeslaw Milosz speaks of the remarkable bravery with which Lev Shestov attacks the eternal questions of human existence, arguing against virtually each and every living or dead existential thinker and their theories and perceptions of the universe. 'Few writers of any time could match his daring, even insolence, in raising the naughty child's questions which have always had the power to throw philosophers into a panic',⁶ – writes Milosz. As a result Shestov cannot be regarded as part of any school or movement, he is broader than any label and bursts out of any boundaries.

φωλοσφου (в двух томах) (*History of Russian Philosophy, in 2 volumes*), (Rostov-on-Don: Fenix, 1999), p. 366

⁴ Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*), in *Essais* (Paris: NRF/Gallimard, 1965).

⁵ Czeslaw Milosz, 'Shestov, or the Purity of Despair', in *Emperor of the Earth. Modes of Eccentric Vision* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 99-119.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 103.

This is well summarised by Taras Zakydalsky: ‘Shestov's asystematic thought is like a many-faceted gem: to be appreciated it has to be viewed from many different angles [...] As long as one does not attempt the impossible – to give a complete and definitive interpretation of Shestov – one can construct an interpretation that is both consistent and illuminating’.⁷

However, the situation with Shestov studies remains essentially unsatisfactory. Not because there have been doomed attempts to give an impossible ‘complete and definitive interpretation’ of Shestov, but rather for the opposite reason: the attempts made so far appear rather fragmentary and certainly scarce in comparison to what this thinker really deserves. Despite the widely acknowledged opinion of Shestov's importance for the history of European thought of the 20th century he remains largely under-researched, especially in the English-speaking world. It is quite possible that the very characteristics by which he can be truly distinguished, which make him so interesting and important, are responsible for Shestov being omitted from mainstream philosophical studies and overall more avoided than highlighted.

Amongst these characteristics there is first of all Shestov's adogmatic style of thinking, his being forever unconventional, straining himself to the limit to find his own, very personal way to the truth. His friend and translator Boris de Schloezer wrote in 1922:

Away from these regular troops [of conventional philosophy] there are partisans, free spirits, adventurers. Having left the big road they throw themselves audaciously across the brambles, prickly bushes and savage copse which surround the main route. They fight fearlessly [...] They try to clear and mark new trails [...] And what they discover [...] they cannot communicate to others [...] because their experience is so intimate and special, so profoundly personal that it cannot be translated into common formulas. [...] Amongst these outlaws of thought, Pascal and Nietzsche are probably those whose action was most felt, and not in the milieu of scientists, but that of artists and poets [...] I cannot see among our contemporaries anyone apart from Leon Shestov who could be named in their company.⁸

⁷ Taras Zakydalsky, ‘Lev Shestov and the Revival of Religious Thought in Russia’, in *Russian Thought after Communism: the recovery of a philosophical heritage*, ed. by James P. Scanlan (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 153-164 (p. 158).

⁸ Boris de Schloezer, ‘Un Penseur Russe Léon Chestov’, *Mercure de France*, 1(X) (1922), 82-115 (pp. 83-84).

Indeed, Shestov's originality was born out of his persistent and uncompromising refusal to borrow the ready-made ideas of others, the existing self-evident 'knowledge', of his determination to be faithful to his own perception of the world which came as a result of intense efforts to think independently, to search on his own, to get to the bottom of things. This led Shestov to his very personal philosophical discoveries which landed him in opposition to the majority of the mainstream philosophers and made him fall outside any classification. 'Among the outstanding Russian philosophers of this century, Lev Shestov was the most isolated [...] thinker. His exclusive and steadfast concentration on the tragic fate of the individual in this world as well as his skeptical "adogmatic" style of philosophising placed him outside the main trends of Russian philosophy',⁹ writes Taras Zakydalsky.

One of the most important distinguishing features of Shestov was the truly existential nature of his ideas. This should not be confused with Existentialism as such, as David Gascoyne warns, which is 'the post-experimental intellectual exploitation of the experience of existing'. The existential philosophy of Shestov is 'actual spiritual activity [...] Shestov believed philosophical activity to consist in absolutely undivided truth-seeking, and this he could not reconcile with telling people they need seek no more, [...] but simply attend his classes and pay the proper fee at the end of the term. [...] To adopt the role of a teacher of this kind, would have been altogether in contradiction with the inner position, the adoption of which is a necessary prerequisite of Existential Philosophy, properly so-called'.¹⁰

Yet another peculiarity of Shestov which alienates him from the rest of Russian philosophy is his tendency to avoid burning social questions. Given Russia's turbulent history such questions traditionally preoccupied its thinkers, of whatever school or direction of thought, and in one way or another Russian philosophers inevitably addressed political and social issues. Shestov's reluctance to turn to these questions in his philosophy is even more surprising if we take into account his background in jurisprudence and economy as well as

⁹ Zakydalsky, p. 153.

¹⁰ David Gascoyne, 'Leon Chestov' in *Death of an Explorer* (London: The Enitharmon Press, 1980), pp. 127, 128, 131.

the dominant ideas – notably Marxism – of that time. We shall take a closer look at these phenomena later when considering Shestov's biography and the specifics of his epoch.

Perhaps the last, but not the least reason for Shestov's relative obscurity is his manner of exposition by which, instead of constructing his system explicitly and making direct claims, he expresses his ideas in terms of a polemical relationship with other philosophers, presuming the reader's knowledge of their teachings. This indirect and implicit discourse undoubtedly complicates the understanding of Shestov's writings and even makes them virtually incomprehensible to an unprepared reader.

However, what makes Shestov an object of our study is above all his obvious literary talent, not only syntactical and linguistic, but also, and equally, semantic (that is to say, in the content of his ideas as well as in their form and style of expressing them). This hypothesis will unfold gradually in the course of this dissertation, since it is precisely the literary perspective on Shestov that will be the focus of our study.

As we said before, despite all these distinguishing features, or perhaps largely due to them, the existing corpus of Shestov studies is by no means comprehensive. This situation has been pointed out multiple times, but not much has changed over the years.

Vasilii Zenkovsky in his famous *History of Russian Philosophy* mentioned above, stated the importance of Shestov by saying that he is a figure of the same stature as his friend and contemporary Berdiaev, but much deeper than the latter.¹¹ Yet he gave only a couple of references to papers written on Shestov (Berdiaev's, Lazarev's and his own), saying that the literature on Shestov is extremely poor and these are the only writings known to him.¹² However, he was obviously unaware of some more research on Shestov which, although indeed scarce, was still existent. This included a PhD thesis by a Dutch scholar, J. Suys, in 1931, and several publications by Boris de Schloezer in leading French journals such as

¹¹ In the original Russian Zen'kovskii described Shestov as 'во многом очень близкого Бердяеву, но гораздо более глубокого и значительного, чем Бердяев' (Zen'kovskii, II, p. 365).

¹² See Zen'kovskii, II, p. 365.

Nouvelle Revue Française and *Mercure de France*. A lot of publicity was attracted to Shestov's name by his only disciple - a French poet of Romanian-Jewish origin, Benjamin Fondane, who promoted Shestov's ideas with real vigour and enthusiasm and, amongst other things, composed a very valuable factual source – a book of memoirs on Shestov.¹³ Generally Shestov's name was well known to the French intellectuals of that time and Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, mentioned above, basically represents an open polemic with Shestov. References to various writings on Shestov of varying length and importance can be found in the full (to date) bibliography composed by his younger daughter Natalie Baranova-Shestova and published by the Institute d'Etudes Slaves in Paris in 1978. Also, introductions to the English translations of Shestov's books were written respectively by John Middleton Murry in 1916 (to *Anton Tchekhov and Other Essays*)¹⁴ and by D. H. Lawrence in 1920 (to *All Things are Possible*).¹⁵

Still, back in 1949 David Gascoyne wrote about representatives of Existentialism:

It is extremely seldom that anyone refers to the one great thinker who can justly be described as a representative of authentically existential philosophy, Leon Chestov. [...] While it would be untrue to say that Chestov remains quite unknown in this country, since three books of his have been translated and published here [...] it is still necessary to say that this great, profoundly disturbing Russian thinker [...] is unjustly neglected and his importance altogether underestimated.¹⁶

The situation had not changed much by the 1960s when Bernard Martin echoed the above opinion:

Lev Shestov belongs to the small company of truly great philosophers of our time and his work deserves the closest attention of all who are seriously concerned with the problems of religious thought. Unfortunately, Shestov's stature has not hitherto been generally recognised nor has his work been widely studied. Even in Europe – where his genius was acknowledged by such figures as Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergei Bulgakov in Russia, Jules de Gaultier, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Albert Camus in France, and D. H. Lawrence and John Middleton Murry in England – he did not enjoy any great popularity in his lifetime and now, a quarter of a century after his death, his writings are

¹³ Benjamin Fondane, *Rencontres avec Leon Chestov* (Paris: Plasma, 1982).

¹⁴ Lev Shestov, *Anton Tchekhov and Other Essays*, trans. S. S. Kotelianskii and J. M. Murry (Dublin: Maunsell, 1916).

¹⁵ Lev Shestov, *All Things Are Possible*, trans. S. S. Kotelianskii (London: Martin Secker, 1920).

¹⁶ Gascoyne, p. 128.

little read. In America his name is practically unknown to the general public, and even many professional philosophers and theologians are unacquainted with his work.¹⁷

However, Martin himself made a huge effort to introduce Shestov to the English-speaking world in the 1960s and 1970s by writing about him and translating several of his books into English.

Today Shestov's books are translated into many world languages and almost the entire collection of his works has been re-published in Russia itself. 'The amount of his writings and the sources in which they have been reprinted indicate that there is a wide and growing interest in Shestov's ideas in Russia'¹⁸ writes Taras Zakydalsky in his aforementioned article 'Lev Shestov and the Revival of Religious Thought in Russia' where he also gives a coherent overview of Russian research on Shestov. He points out the extreme scarcity and obvious tendentiousness of Shestov studies in Russia before perestroika and remarks on a 'noticeable increase in the quantity of interesting work on Shestov's philosophy'¹⁹ in recent years. Amongst the researchers who have made the most original contributions to Shestov studies are such leading scholars as V. Azmus, V. Erofeev, N. Motroshilova, V. Kurabtsev and A. Akhutin. Interesting and valuable analysis has also been provided by R. Galtseva, L. Moreva, V. Kuviakin and A. Novikov.

Shestov's continuing importance for Russian studies and beyond is, in particular, in providing a bridge between different cultural eras. On one hand his problematics is rooted in classical Russian literature; on the other his premonitions foresaw the most significant developments of 20th-century culture with its horrible spiritual dangers. Indeed, as Leopold Sev wrote in 1909, in raising the most important questions in the most distinctive way Shestov crowned the evolution of the whole Russian literature of the preceding half

¹⁷ Bernard Martin, *A Shestov Anthology*, ed. with an introduction by Bernard Martin (1970); *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche*, trans. with an introduction by Bernard Martin (1969); *Potestas Clavium*, trans. Bernard Martin (1968); *Athens and Jerusalem*, trans. with an introduction by Bernard Martin (1966). Publication data for all these: (Athens: Ohio University Press).

¹⁸ Zakydalsky, p. 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

century.²⁰ On the other hand, using the words of Russian writer Viktor Erofeev, Shestov, just like Kierkegaard, became a certain “corrective” of the epoch.²¹ Such prominent cultural figures of the Russian Diaspora abroad as Professor Nikita Struve, when naming those Russian philosophers whose contribution to the development of Russian thought in the 20th century has been of utmost significance, places Shestov next to Sergei Bulgakov, Semen Frank and Nikolai Berdiaev.²² As Taras Zakydalsky observes, post-Soviet Russian society has yet to learn to live in uncertainty and to liberate itself from dogmas of all kinds, and ‘there is no finer teacher of this than Shestov’.²³ Yet, as Zakydalsky points out, ‘much more attention has been devoted to religious thinkers such as Vladimir Solovev, Nikolai Berdiaev and Pavel Florensky than to Shestov’,²⁴ which brings us back to the situation described by Shestov scholars decades ago.

In a broader – European and even world context – there exists at present a certain body of publications on Shestov amongst which there are very few books fully dedicated to him (at best he gets a chapter in a book of a more general character, or a critical introductory essay in an anthology).²⁵ In English, to our knowledge, there are only two scholarly books written exclusively on Shestov: by Louis S. Schein, *The Philosophy of Lev Shestov (1866-1938): A Russian Religious Existentialist*,²⁶ 1991 and by Andrius Valevicius, *Lev Shestov and his Times: Encounters with Brandes, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Ibsen, Nietzsche and*

²⁰ Leopold Sev, ‘Новая книга Льва Шестова’ (‘New Book by Lev Shestov’), *Russkaia Mysl’* (1909), 61-67 (p. 67).

²¹ Viktor Erofeev, “‘Остается одно: произвол’ (Философия одиночества и литературно-эстетическое кредо Льва Шестова)” (‘“Only One Thing Remains: Arbitrariness”; Philosophy of Solitude and Literary-Philosophical Credo of Lev Shestov’), *Вопросы литературы*, 10 (1975), 153-188 (p. 186).

²² From Nikita Struve’s recent interview on Russian television, and from my personal conversations with him in Paris during my Entente Cordiale scholarship to the Sorbonne in 2001-2002.

²³ Zakydalsky, p. 162.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 161.

²⁵ Apart from the aforementioned anthologies specifically devoted to Shestov, edited, translated and prefaced by Bernard Martin, see also *Essays in Russian Literature: a Conservative View: Leontiev, Rozanov, Shestov*, ed. and transl. E. Roberts Spencer (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 1968) and *Great Twentieth Century Jewish Philosophers: Shestov, Rozenzweig, Buber*, ed. Bernard Martin (New-York: Macmillan, 1970).

²⁶ Louis S. Schein, *The Philosophy of Lev Shestov (1866-1938): A Russian Religious Existentialist* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

Husserl,²⁷ 1993 (even though there have been several PhD theses over the years dedicated to Shestov, but none of them evolved into a monograph).²⁸ As was mentioned, the situation may be slightly better in Russia, because, to use Zakydalsky's words again, 'interest in Shestov has grown rapidly among Russian intellectuals'²⁹ and Shestov's works have been extensively republished. However, even though the amount of scholarly papers and book chapters on Shestov is consequently rising, monographs fully dedicated to him have yet to start appearing (with the exception of L. Moreva's *Lev Shestov*).³⁰ More books have been written where Shestov's name shares the place in the title with other thinkers, but again the number of them in English is extremely limited, and the situation in Russian is not significantly better. Those books which prevail amongst the latter came out in Russia during Shestov's life-time, such as Griftsov's *Три мыслителя. В. Розанов, Д. Мережковский, Л. Шестов*³¹ (*Three Thinkers. V. Rozanov, D. Merezhkovsky, L. Shestov*), 1911; Zakrzhevsky's, *Подполье, психологические параллели (Достоевский, Л. Андреев, Ф. Сологуб, Л. Шестов, А. Ремизов, М. Пантюхов)* (*Underground, Psychological Paralels (Dostoevsky, L. Andreev, F. Sologub, L. Shestov, A. Remizov, M. Pantiukhov)*),³² 1911 and Ivanov-Razumnik's *On the Meaning of Life. F. Sologub, L. Andreev, L. Shestov*,³³ 1908. In English the following books appeared over the years: by James C. S. Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers: An Essay in Berdiaev and Shestov*,³⁴ 1968; by Jose Maria Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism: Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard and*

²⁷ Andrius Valevicius, *Lev Shestov and his Times: Encounters with Brandes, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Husserl* (New-York: Peter Lang, 1993).

²⁸ See, for example, Victoria Rooney, 'Shestov's Religious Existentialism: A Critique' (D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1990) or David Patterson, 'Literary and Philosophical Expressions of Faith: Kierkegaard, Tolstoy, Shestov' (D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oregon, 1978).

²⁹ Zakydalsky, p. 161.

³⁰ L. Moreva, *Lev Shestov* (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo leningradskogo universiteta, 1991).

³¹ B. Griftsov, *Три мыслителя. В. Розанов, Д. Мережковский, Л. Шестов* (Moscow: izd. V. M. Sablina, 1911).

³² A. Zakrzhevskii, *Подполье, психологические параллели (Достоевский, Л. Андреев, Ф. Сологуб, Л. Шестов, А. Ремизов, М. Пантюхов)* (Kiev, izd. zhurnala 'Iskusstvo', 1911). The book was dedicated to Shestov.

³³ Ivanov-Razumnik, *О смысле жизни (Ф. Сологуб, Л. Андреев, Л. Шестов)* (St Petersburg: tip. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1908). [*On the Meaning of Life. F. Sologub, L. Andreev, L. Shestov*] (republished: Letchworth, England: Bradda Books Ltd, 1971)]. Further references will be to the latter.

³⁴ James C. S. Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers: An Essay in Berdyayev and Shestov* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

Shestov,³⁵ 1995; by Ramona Fotiade, *Conceptions of the Absurd: From Surrealism to the Existential Thought of Chestov and Fondane*,³⁶ 2001, as well as an edited volume (by Fotiade) *The Tragic Discourse: Shestov and Fondane's Existential Thought*,³⁷ 2006. The most recent book in Russian where Shestov's name is mentioned in the title seems to be by Tatiana Blagova and Boris Emelianov, *Философемы Достоевского, Три интерпретации: Л. Шестов, Н. Бердяев и Б. Вышеславцев*³⁸ ('*Philosophemas*' of *Dostoevskii, Three interpretations: L. Shestov, N. Berdiaev and B. Vysheslavtsev*), 2003. The book by Natalie Baranova-Shestova *The life of Lev Shestov*³⁹ (in Russian, 1983, also translated into French in 1991-1993), remains the main source for the facts of Shestov's life and work. Fondane's *Rencontres avec Leon Chestov* mentioned above, 1982 (published posthumously) is another important source.

It is remarkable that the studies described above provide an investigation of Shestov's writings from philosophical, religious and generally intellectual points of view only. In contrast to this existing body of research on Lev Shestov, we have declared our main focus as literary. No substantial study on Shestov, known to us, provides a comprehensive analysis of him from a literary perspective. Those few works which concern his treatment of writers (mainly Russian classical writers) still adopt a predominantly philosophical or theological approach, even if they declare literary analysis amongst their objectives. Such is, for example, David Patterson's article of 1979 'The unity of existential philosophy and literature as revealed by Shestov's approach to Dostoevsky'⁴⁰ based on his PhD thesis 'The literary and philosophical expression of existential faith: a study of Kierkegaard, Tolstoi

³⁵ Jose Maria Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism: Scepticism and Faith in Pascal, Kierkegaard and Shestov* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995).

³⁶ Ramona Fotiade, *Conceptions of the Absurd: From Surrealism to the Existential Thought of Chestov and Fondane* (Oxford: Legenda, 2001).

³⁷ *The Tragic Discourse: Shestov and Fondane's Existential Thought*, ed. R. Fotiade (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006).

³⁸ Tatiana Blagova and Boris Emelianov, *Философемы Достоевского, Три интерпретации: Л. Шестов, Н. Бердяев и Б. Вышеславцев* ('*Philosophemas*' of *Dostoevskii, Three interpretations: L. Shestov, N. Berdiaev and B. Vysheslavtsev*) (Ekaterinburg: Ural University Press, 2003).

³⁹ Natalie Baranova-Shestova, *Жизнь Льва Шестова* (*The life of Lev Shestov*), in two volumes (Paris: La Presse Libre, 1983).

⁴⁰ David Patterson, 'The unity of existential philosophy and literature as revealed by Shestov's approach to Dostoevsky', *Studies in East European Thought*, 19 (3) April (1979), 219-231.

and Shestov' (1978). Alternatively, such publications may offer a summary of the existing research under the umbrella of a broader, uniting goal. An example of this kind is a recent book by Edith W. Clowes, *Fiction's Overcoat. Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy*⁴¹ where Shestov gets a chapter devoted to him. Amongst those works which come closest to a literary point of view on Shestov we would like to distinguish the following: V. Erofeev's aforementioned article "“Остается одно: произвол” (Философия одиночества и литературно-эстетическое кредо Льва Шестова)", 1975, L. Kolobaeva's comparative paper "“Право на субъективность”. Алексей Ремизов и Лев Шестов"⁴² ("Right for Subjectivity". Aleksei Remizov i Lev Shestov'), 1994, as well as an article 'Dostoievskie chez Chestov'⁴³ by Michel Aucouturier, 2001, (in French), and the chapter dedicated to Shestov in Blagova's and Emelianov's book above together with several sections in Fotiade's edited volume. Yet, they remain fragmentary and restricted in their scope and focus, and do not offer a comprehensive analysis of the literary dimension of Shestov's works. However, the articles by Erofeev and Aucouturier contain some very valuable insights into the nature of Shestov's relationship with literature and into his method, which we use as a springboard for our own investigations offered in this thesis.

It is also noteworthy that some important landmarks in Shestov studies were laid by those who themselves were representatives of literature rather than philosophy, theology or other branch of scientific knowledge. Thus in 1973 the Polish-born poet Czeslaw Milosz wrote a brilliant piece 'Shestov, or the purity of despair', which we have already mentioned above, where he gave an artistically concise and deep overview of the whole phenomenon of this unusual thinker. A French poet, Yves Bonnefoy, wrote two highly original and inspiring articles on Shestov: 'A l'impossible tenu: la liberte de Dieu et celle de l'ecrivain dans la

⁴¹ Edith W. Clowes, *Fiction's Overcoat. Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

⁴² L. Kolobaeva, "“Право на субъективность”. Алексей Ремизов и Лев Шестов", *Вопросы литературы*, 5 (1994), 44-76.

⁴³ Michel Aucouturier, 'Dostoievskie chez Chestov' in *Diagonales Dostoïevskiennes, Mélanges en L'Honneur de Jacques Catteau*, ed. Marie-Aude Albert (Paris: Presses de L'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002), 77-86.

pensee de Chestov'⁴⁴ and 'L'obstination de Shestov'.⁴⁵ We have also mentioned above some texts dedicated to Shestov by two other poets: Benjamin Fondane and David Gascoyne. In general, it is known that Shestov has always been held in higher regard by poets and writers than by philosophers. In this connection it is even more surprising that no significant research has been conducted on him from a specifically literary viewpoint.

It is precisely the intention of our thesis to bridge this unfortunate gap and to give the literary dimension of Shestov's legacy the attention it deserves by exploring its interplay with his philosophical ideas and the overall shaping of his existential thought. Our aim is to demonstrate the way in which his aesthetics interacts with his ethics and to show that it is the ultimate and inseparable merging of the two which yields the phenomenon of Shestov.

Our dissertation is organised into two main parts. Part I provides a conceptual explanation as to why a literary approach to Shestov is not only legitimate and fruitful, but also of such a crucial importance. It also explains what exactly this approach includes. This part starts with a reconstruction of Shestov's method of literary studies which we consider to be highly significant. In an interpretation of this method, which is provided in Chapter 1, lies one of our principal claims (which appears to be novel). We also show in this chapter the relevance of Shestov's biography to his works and discuss the specifics of his times with all their literary and philosophical implications for Shestov's work. Chapter 2 gives a brief outline of Shestov's philosophy in so far as it is relevant to his literary discourse. Although any purely philosophical analysis remains outside the scope of our research we nevertheless take not only a descriptive, but also a critical approach to our exposition of Shestov's ideas. In particular we demonstrate some of Shestov's conceptual misapprehensions which can be found on the mathematical borders of philosophy. We regard this analysis as a necessary diversion which highlights in particular Shestov's paradoxical personality and its implications for his works. It is also grounded semantically because Shestov had had some

⁴⁴ Yves Bonnefoy, 'A l'impossible tenu: la liberte de Dieu et celle de l'ecrivain dans la pensee de Chestov' in *Léon Chestov, un philosophe pas comme les autres?*, Cahiers de l'émigration russe 3, (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1996).

⁴⁵ Yves Bonnefoy, 'L'obstination de Shestov', preface to the French edition of Shestov's *Athens and Jerusalem* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967; Aubier, 1993).

mathematical background on one hand, and had striven to be involved in philosophy professionally, on the other. Finally in Chapter 3 we continue stating our main claims which provide a conceptual justification for a literary perspective on Shestov.

Part II consists of five major chapters containing our close readings of Shestov's works on classical Russian writers. In this part we substantiate our main claims declared in Part I through the case studies of these writers, using a combination of biographical, formalist and inter-textual approaches. This means that we examine closely separate texts by Shestov in their own right, but also study them in their entirety (in relation to each other) and analyse his work against the background of his biography. This particular combination was necessary to overcome a particular methodological problem which exists in Shestov studies and accounts for the discrepancy between Shestov's major influence on Western (especially French) philosophical thought on one hand and the relative obscurity in which he is held by the Western scholarly tradition. This is rooted, as was briefly mentioned above, in the difficulty of singling out the main thrust of Shestov's thought, which is often lost in his indirect and aphoristic mode of discourse, as well as in his personified approach which unites individuals with their existential problems.

All but one of the five chapters of Part II are situated in chronological order by the first appearance of texts dedicated to a particular writer, although on many occasions Shestov returned to the same writers in various works throughout his entire career. Thus in these chapters we explore Shestov's writings on Pushkin, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Turgenev respectively. The only exception from chronology is the article on Pushkin which was written after the book on Tolstoy, *Философия и проповедь: добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше*.⁴⁶ However, ideologically it echoed the first book by Shestov written on Shakespeare and thus represented a digression into Shestov's early phase: dogmatic and idealistic. For that reason we have placed the chapter on Shestov and Pushkin before that on Shestov and Tolstoy, instead of keeping them in strict chronological order.

⁴⁶ Lev Shestov, *Философия и проповедь: добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше* (*Philosophy and Preaching: Good in the Teaching of Count Tolstoi and in Nietzsche*) (St-Petersburg: Stasiulevich, 1900).

It is hoped that this dissertation will shed some new light not only on Shestov's life and work, but also on the literary heritage of the Russian classics in question, as well as on the existentialist and irrationalist trend in the history of Russian thought.

PART I

Conceptual justification for a literary approach to Shestov

Chapter 1. Setting the problem: a reconstruction of Shestov's method

1.1. The Author and His Lyrical Hero

It is of primary importance to our further investigations to understand what constituted Shestov's method of approaching the works of literature, above all of classical Russian literature, that he wrote about. The core of his method was invariably to replace the author by his literary heroes, to interpret through them the convictions and ideas of their creator and ultimately to draw conclusions about the writer, or more precisely about his system of beliefs. This is, as it were, the 'outside' of Shestov's method, its 'external' description, or, in other words, its form. In this section we shall focus primarily on this form and see what conclusions can be derived, whereas in the next section we shall attempt to decode the underlying content.

Of course, such a conspicuous method was noted before by almost every scholar who ever studied Shestov from any perspective. To exemplify this we shall quote here some valuable and perceptive descriptions of this method.

The French scholar Michel Aucouturier wrote:

Shestov's critical method resembles [...] the Russian tradition of "real criticism" where a work of literature is only an excuse rather than an object of study [...] Moreover, the reality that interests Shestov is not the outside world, but the inner world of the writer. **Shestov sees in a work of literature a personal confession of the author and the characters are simply representatives of the latter.**¹ He is not trying to explain a literary piece, but seeks in it a confirmation of what the writer has lived through – as the only guarantee of the philosophical value of the work. For true philosophy in his eyes can grow only out of an existential revelation.²

¹ The bold font is mine (O.T.).

² Aucouturier, p. 79.

The Russian researchers T. Blagova and B. Emelianov stated (following V. Erofeev) that arbitrariness dominated Shestov's method of interpreting writers (in their case study: Dostoevsky), at least in his early period, and supported their statement by referring to Shestov's own claims that mistakes are possible in interpreting certain places and even whole novels and that critical intuition is not reliable either, so only one way out remains: arbitrariness.³ Interestingly, while Aucouturier traces the connection of Shestov's method with earlier currents of Russian literary criticism (introduced by Dobroliubov), Blagova and Emelianov connect it with a later – postmodernist – method introduced by the French phenomenologist Giles Deleuze.⁴ This, we note in parenthesis, explains in part what seems paradoxical to Aucouturier – that a thinker like Shestov, who applies an old traditional method, should be labeled modernist. However, it must be said that Blagova and Emelianov perceive a certain evolution in Shestov's method (at least in his approach to Dostoevsky) to a more authentic, less subjective reading. Still, they distinguished the same thesis in Shestov's claims about Dostoevsky as Aucouturier did more generally – that **all the heroes are Dostoevskii himself, who is telling his own story.**⁵

In the broader context of the later, purely philosophical works of Shestov, which are still marked by the same treatment of thinkers under his study as his early works, Lévy-Bruhl famously accused Shestov of ‘hogging the covers’.⁶ That is, of ascribing to various thinkers his own convictions as a way of ‘interpreting’ their works, thus largely displaying the same arbitrariness that was mentioned above. Of course, other researchers have not failed to make this observation too. Aucouturier, as we already stated, speaks of a work of literature being for Shestov an excuse rather than an object of study. Blagova and Emelianov point out that ‘Шестов создал такие интерпретации, которые позволили ему “вписать” (контекстуализировать) Достоевского в свою парадигму “философии трагедии”. [...] Ему нужны только те тексты, на которые он может “наложить” свой голос’.⁷ In close connection with Shestov's tendentiousness in selecting texts for his analysis they note the

³ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 110.

⁴ Ibid, p. 111.

⁵ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 46 (the bold font is mine. O.T.).

⁶ See, for example, Milosz, p. 102.

⁷ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 114.

same subjectivity in his choice of characters to be interpreted. As the discussion in the next section will show all these opinions about the nature of Shestov's method are fundamentally correct and can be inscribed into the model that we shall provide there.

We regard Shestov's provocative and subjective method as very significant, and it is in examining it closely in the course of the thesis that we shall be able to evaluate his conclusions. Moreover, it is this method that gives rise to one of our principal claims which we shall now explain. This claim, while stemming from a widely noted method, sheds some additional light on its interpretation, thus extending previous research on Shestov.

Of course, a method of identifying the writer with his heroes applied blindly, randomly and unsystematically, would necessarily be faulty and misleading, and Shestov undoubtedly knew that. When discussing Taine's reading of Shakespeare (as early as in 1898, i.e. in Shestov's first book) Shestov agrees with the claim that although a poet is defined by his oeuvre, one has to have the skill of correctly and skillfully interpreting his writings, and a blind identification with the hero is usually wrong. In fact he goes as far as saying that 'самый неумелый прием драматического творчества - изливаться "устаами" действующих лиц. У хороших писателей их герои говорят за себя, а не за авторов'.⁸ Later on Shestov did not go that far in his statements, for he did substantially 'look for the writer' in the heroes; yet, he was capable even then of making a certain distinction between the two. Thus he wrote in *Достоевский и Ницше...* '...несомненно, что ни герой романа, ни автор не верят в спасительность идеи "любви к ближнему". Если угодно - Достоевский идет дальше Ивана Карамазова...'.⁹ In fact, Shestov's analysis alone of Taine's treatment of Shakespeare, where he criticises Taine for a too subjective and biased reading of the poet where Shakespeare is identified randomly (in Shestov's view) with his heroes leaves no doubt that Shestov acknowledged that applying the method of extracting as much information as possible about the writer through interpretation of his heroes should be treated with considerable care.

⁸ Lev Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), I, p. 36.

⁹ Lev Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше: философия трагедии* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), I, p. 387.

Indeed, unquestionably there is a great subtlety in the skill, largely subjective, of applying this method legitimately as part of proper literary analysis. However, it is virtually impossible to avoid such an interpretation. Still, there is a great difference between an interpretation of literary heroes so that they contribute to our understanding of the writer, and an actual identification of them with the author. What matters is how exactly the selection of 'meaningful' characters (carriers of the main ideas) is made and how exactly the interpretation is derived. It seems to us that it is precisely this grey area, which may not appear too significant at the first glance, that nevertheless conceals the crucial issues for understanding Shestov's approach and for analyzing his work as a whole. What we mean by this requires careful explanation.

The problem of the author and his hero is an old one and has been subject to serious analysis over many years. In particular, as William Mills Todd III writes, 'проблема места автора в литературном процессе и в тексте на разные лады обсуждалась американской новой критикой и французским постструктурализмом'.¹⁰ Russian scholarship, including such influential figures as Mikhail Bakhtin, have also addressed this problem in various ways. However, what is most relevant to our perspective is a reference to modern Russian literature, more precisely – that of the late twentieth century. In his essay on Dostoevsky, 'The Power of the Elements', Joseph Brodsky says:

Every writing career starts as a personal quest for sainthood, for self-betterment. Sooner or later, and as a rule quite soon, a man discovers that his pen accomplishes a lot more than his soul. This discovery very often creates an unbearable schism within an individual and is, in part, responsible for the demonic reputation literature enjoys in certain witless quarters. Basically, it's just as well, for the seraphim's loss nearly always is the mortal's gain. Besides, either extreme, in itself, is quite boring, and in a work of a good writer we always hear a dialogue of the spheres with the gutter. If it doesn't destroy the man or his manuscript (as in the case of Gogol's Part II of *Dead Souls*), this schism is precisely what creates a writer, whose job therefore becomes making his pen catch up with his soul.¹¹

¹⁰ William Mills Todd III, 'Introduction' in *Современное американское пушкиноведение. Сборник статей*, ed. W.M. Todd III, transl. from English by M. B. Kuteeva, G. A. Krylova and others, (St Petersburg: gumanitarnoe agenstvo 'Akademicheskij proekt', 1999), pp. 5-16 (p. 14).

¹¹ Joseph Brodsky, 'The Power of the Elements', in *Less Than One, Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 157-163 (p. 161).

The contemporary writer Sergei Gandlevskii in his paper entitled 'Olympic Game' wrote about this schism in relation to Brodsky himself:

Последние двести приблизительно лет поэты напрямую вторгаются в свои произведения на правах главного героя. Творчество уподобляется автопортрету. Романтизм и предполагает такое вмешательство художника в собственное изделие. В читательском восприятии лирический герой и автор – одно. ... Жёсткое требование жить как пишешь и писать как живёшь налагает на автора обязательство соблюдать подвижное равновесие между собой-прототипом и собственным запечатлённым образом.¹²

We find the same sentiments concerning the age of Romanticism in V. M. Gasparov: 'отношение к своей жизни как к части художественной миссии, переключка между литературным и жизненным "творчеством" в высшей степени свойственны поведению романтика'.¹³ This creates, using Gandlevsky's words, a dramatic relationship and a continuing struggle between the author and his hero.¹⁴ Such a struggle acquires a particular intensity, especially in Russian literature with its distinctive anthropocentric character.

Indeed, Russian philosophical thought, according to Vasili Zenkovsky,

больше всего занята *темой о человеке*, о его судьбе и путях [...]. Прежде всего это сказывается в том, насколько всюду доминирует (даже в отвлечённых проблемах) *моральная установка*: здесь лежит один из самых действенных и творческих истоков русского философствования. Тот панморализм, который в своих философских сочинениях выразил с исключительной силой Лев Толстой, с известным правом, с известными ограничениями может быть найден почти у всех русских мыслителей, даже у тех, у которых нет произведений, прямым образом посвящённых вопросам морали.¹⁵

¹² Sergei Gandlevskii, 'Олимпийская игра' in *Иосиф Бродский: творчество, личность, судьба, Итоги трех конференций*, ed. Iakov Gordin (St Petersburg: Zhurnal Zvezda, 1998), p. 116-118 (p. 116).

¹³ V. M. Gasparov, 'Поэтика Пушкина в контексте европейского и русского романтизма' in *Современное американское пушкиноведение. Сборник статей*, ed. by W. M. Todd III, pp. 301-327 (p. 326).

¹⁴ Gandlevskii, p. 116.

¹⁵ Zen'kovskii, I, pp. 18-19.

To a certain extent Bakhtin's words about Dostoevsky can be generalised to Russian literature as a whole: 'он знает одно движение – вовнутрь человека'.¹⁶

Literature in general is a self-reflective process. Probably when the process of reflection exceeds its authority and becomes an independent type of activity – much more captivating than the event which gave rise to it – literature begins. That is to say, an echo exceeds the sound which generated it. Apparently, it is in these efforts to trace simultaneously both the echo and the sound, that a split of consciousness, so characteristic for a writer, starts. As Akhmatova writes,

Уже безумие крылом
Души накрыло половину,
И поит огненным вином,
И манит в чёрную долину.

И поняла я, что ему
Должна я уступить победу,
Прислушиваясь к своему
Уже как бы чужому бреду.¹⁷

This is a look at oneself from the side (as the last line particularly emphasises); a type of alienation which is constantly in danger of becoming unhealthy, of bordering insanity. However, it is precisely literature which constitutes the way to invest the destructive nature of self-reflection with a certain harmony. For having taken up a pen an author gets a unique opportunity 'несбывшееся воплотить'.¹⁸ His lyrical hero as it were shortens the distance between the desirable and the real. This is even more significant if one takes into account that 'для поэта [...] толковость в творчестве подразумевает бестолковость в жизни',¹⁹ according to one of Fazil Iskander's characters. As Sergei Dovlatov said in his interview to the magazine 'Slovo': 'Литературная деятельность – это скорее всего попытка

¹⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Автор и герой. К философским основам гуманитарных наук* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), p. 243.

¹⁷ Anna Akhmatova, 'Реквием' in *Собрание сочинений в 6 томах* (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1998), vol. 3, p. 27.

¹⁸ Aleksandr Blok, 'О, я хочу безумно жить...' in *Стихотворения, поэмы, театр; в 2 томах* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1972), vol. II, p. 150.

¹⁹ Fazil' Iskander, 'Поэт' in *Сюжет существования* (Moscow: Podkova, 1999), p. 98.

преодолеть собственные комплексы, изжить или ослабить трагизм существования'.²⁰

In his bitter letter to Igor' Efimov, Dovlatov says:

Правы Вы и в том пункте, в котором проявили наибольшую степень проницательности. Вы пишете, и это может быть гораздо умнее, чем Вы думаете, и имеет отношение не только ко мне, но и к литературе вообще, и даже во многих случаях объясняет эту литературу, потому что очень часто, чаще, чем кажется, писатель старается не раскрыть, а скрыть, я говорю о Вашей фразе: "Всю жизнь Вы использовали литературу как ширму, как способ казаться".²¹

Thus, as a natural continuation of an author's life his literature often replaces it in some sense, and having burst onto paper from the author's subconscious his lyrical hero determines as it were a vector of the author's aspirations.

Now, returning to Shestov, as we shall see, he was largely a product of the age of Romanticism which was still influential in European culture at the time. Extremely well and broadly educated, he was very sensitive to the dominant literary and philosophical currents of the epoch. Moreover, he himself became a representative of neo-Romanticism in Russian philosophical thought. Thus, we are facing a situation where, on the one hand, the romantic tradition itself suggests, as a rather natural phenomenon, a certain identification of a writer with his heroes. On the other hand the aforementioned schism between an author's life and literary creativity, the distance between 'the pen and the soul', the problem of 'to be and to seem' in some sense provides the antithesis to this identification.

In our opinion, what Shestov's method quite consistently accomplishes, is, in some sense, to resolve this conflict by exposing the schism between the author and his hero. In other words, by trying to read off the heroes the writer's own convictions and the main aspects of his life and sensibility, Shestov simply drags, as it were, the writer from behind the curtain of his literary characters. He attempts to bring the writer 'into the open' from the protective cover of his heroes; he finds and points to the writer's inner struggle, to all the aspects of his

²⁰ Sergei Dovlatov, *Собрание прозы в трех томах* (St Petersburg: Limus-Press, 1993), III, p. 341.

²¹ Igor' Efimov, *Эпистолярный роман с Сергеем Довлатовым* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2001), p. 435.

inner world that the writer is trying to overcome by means of writing or sometimes to conceal even from his own self. John Bayley sensed in Shestov this preoccupation when he wrote back in 1970 that 'what interests him is the gap between what a great literary artist thought he was saying (intelligere), and what he was actually saying, with the Godlike confidence of a creator'.²²

In short, our assertion is that Shestov exposes the writer's inner conflict, the undercurrents of his consciousness, by trying to invade the 'forbidden', carefully guarded, secret rift between 'to seem' and 'to be'. Thus, in particular, Shestov's method transforms his literary and philosophical analysis into a form of suspense of sorts, into a captivating process of unmasking the writer, and consequently into a secondary literary work where Shestov's own literary hero becomes the writer himself. Blagova and Emelianov define the genre of Shestov's writings as philosophical essay-dramas where philosophers of different times and schools act alongside one another.²³ It may be illuminating to note in this connection that in his extreme youth Shestov tried to become a writer and a poet, but apparently unsuccessfully. Czeslaw Milosz suspects that Shestov's personal drama was in 'lacking the talent to become a poet to approach the mystery of existence more directly than through mere concepts'.²⁴

To summarise: one of our principal claims is that Shestov's widely criticized method, which consists of a seemingly arbitrary identification of an author with his heroes, is in fact an attempt (not necessarily recognised by Shestov himself) to expose the existing schism between 'the pen' and 'the soul', between the writer's 'divine' literary achievements and his real 'earthly' personality. It is our ambition in Part II to substantiate this claim by examining Shestov's critical writings on major Russian writers. We shall also engage in a consistent and coherent assessment of his method and subsequently of his conclusions.

²² John Bayley, 'Idealism and Its Critic', *The New York Review of Books*, 14 (12) June 18, 1970, p. 4.

²³ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 37.

²⁴ Milosz, p. 102.

However, it is worth noting that while Shestov deems his conclusions ultimate and true, we point to their relativism, or rather we assert that the main value of his method is not in his conclusions as such, but in his daring attempt - novel in its intensity and concentration - of invading the very private, intimate area named 'the writer versus his heroes'. By doing so he has not so much, as he invariably appeared to believe, 'caught' the writer and uncovered the true interpretation of his ideas, but highlighted the existence of the above schism between 'pen' and 'soul', of the literary problem of 'to seem' and 'to be'.

This explains in particular why in his apparently arbitrary identification Shestov often rejects the 'positive' heroes as artificial and irrelevant (as being only a concession to public opinion and accepted norms) and interprets a writer via his 'negative' characters. However, the exposure of this schism is rather a by-product of Shestov's analysis. As we shall see, he always has his own agenda in his interpretation of writers. His selection of texts and characters, contrary to his own claims quoted above, are by no means arbitrary. His high subjectivity and tendentiousness, noted by Shestov scholars, have deep underlying causes which appear to be concealed in Shestov's biography. It is there that we shall seek a model for Shestov's interpretation of writers and their literary works. To this end, in the remaining two sections of this chapter we shall look attentively at Shestov's life and at his times with their dominant literary-philosophical currents that undoubtedly affected, if not shaped, his views.

We shall then introduce, in the next chapter, an overview of Shestov's philosophical ideas without which it is impossible to understand his writings on Russian literature. Interestingly, there is a certain vicious circle concealed here, as Shestov drew and developed his philosophical ideas from this very literature, only to interpret that literature later on in such a way that it can be inscribed into his philosophy. In other words, Russian classical writers led him to his own original philosophical revelations, which he then 'rediscovered' (or possibly re-invented) in their works.

As a result Shestov provided fresh and original interpretations of classical Russian writers; in his writings he introduced famous authors in a new light, as if without the veneer of

traditional critical opinions. Like a skilful photographer, in order to reveal to the world what he deemed the true nature of his protagonists, he changed the angle of view, he rearranged their positions and adjusted the lighting accordingly. Having apparently portrayed them on his photograph, he at the same time created his very own image of them, which was sometimes unrecognisable to others. Moreover, or perhaps above all, from these unconventional images that he essentially created we can learn a great deal about Shestov himself.

1.2. Shestov's biography in relation to his model of interpreting a writer

In this section we shall trace the close connection between Lev Shestov's biography and the evolution of his ideas. We shall highlight some key aspects of his life which we deem a crucial contributory factor in the birth of Shestov's philosophy of tragedy. This will allow us to establish a system in Shestov's analysis of literary figures and consequently to provide a model for Shestov's interpretation of the writers under study. Thus our ambition here is not a mere exposition of Shestov's biography, but a critical reconstruction.

Before we start examining the facts of Shestov's life it is instructive to understand that Shestov's own approach to various thinkers that interested him was extremely personalised. As Milosz puts it, he was in 'opposition to those who separate the propositions of a given man from his personal tragedy – to those who, for instance, refuse to speak of Kierkegaard's sexual impotence or of Nietzsche's incurable disease'.²⁵ In other words Shestov saw a causal connection between the existential experience of a thinker on the one hand and his philosophy on the other. Moreover, the personal life of an individual interested Shestov only in so far as it helped to uncover his inner world, his spiritual development. Sensational facts and cheap revelations were completely outside the scope of Shestov's interests. Thus he conducted his existential research into people's biographies at the highest moral level – he simply viewed their lives as a spiritual journey, interlinked through their creative works with their systems of beliefs. That is why Michel Aucouturier quite rightly asserts that Shestov 'is not trying to explain a literary piece, but seeks in it a confirmation of what the writer has lived through – as the only guarantee of the

²⁵ Milosz, p. 102.

philosophical value of the work. For true philosophy in his eyes can grow only out of an existential revelation'.²⁶ Shestov himself liked to say that the really important things in people's biographies are not those exposed by researchers, but those hidden in small incidents, in certain crucial details which remain forever unknown. This belief Shestov carried through from his early idealistic phase to his mature period. 'Обстоятельных биографий не бывает', he wrote. 'Обыкновенно в жизнеописаниях нам рассказывают все, кроме того, что важно было бы узнать'.²⁷ Therefore the only instructive pieces of evidence, he repeated, are writers' works supplied by the chronology, and your own wit. In the same vein Boris de Schloezer wrote about Shestov that 'what attracted him in a person was not those things that can be explained by some general causes, that can be reduced to the national or professional characteristics, but something particular, exceptional, inexplicable in the etymological sense of the term'.²⁸ With the same approach in mind Schloezer suggested looking at Shestov himself. However, all things subjective grow out of an objective background which therefore cannot be ignored. Hence our ambition here is to consider both and distil one from the other.

Lev Shestov is the pen-name of Lev Isaakovich Shvartsman, a Russian Jew, born in 1866 in Kiev to a big family of seven children. His father Isaak was a successful merchant-manufacturer of textiles who managed to develop a small shop into a large and famous business. The father was a Zionist and a religious scholar and believer, yet regarded as a free, even rebellious, spirit in the local Jewish religious community. Although his father's opinions on such issues of Judaism as marrying out were undoubtedly orthodox, he was nevertheless far from rigid in his overall attitudes and judgements. In fact he was even at one point under the threat of being expelled from the synagogue for his frivolous behaviour – telling anecdotes, mocking religious fanatics and turning the synagogue into a club of sorts. At the same time he was a real connoisseur of ancient Hebrew and Jewish culture.

²⁶ Aucouturier, p. 79.

²⁷ Lev Shestov, *Творчество из ничего* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, p. 186.

²⁸ Schloezer, 'Un Penseur Russe Léon Chestov', p. 86.

The figure of Isaak Shvartsman and the whole milieu in which their family life evolved provided an intellectual and cultural background for Shestov against which the shaping of his character took place. This background, it seems, was forever imprinted in Lev Shestov's personality as an inseparable mixture of earthly and heavenly, of the sober necessity to stand on your feet and a lofty aspiration of the soul. This rare blend of common sense and intense spiritual searching appears to us a striking feature of Shestov.

The Shvartsmans' household was generous and open to numerous visitors. Celebrated Jewish scholars, writers, musicians and other cultural figures were their frequent guests. According to various memoirs Isaak Shvartsman was a witty and charismatic man. We can deduce from scattered pieces of indirect evidence that he was also an autocratic father. Indeed, he would not tolerate the disobedience of his oldest daughter Dora (by his first wife) who married a gentile, and cut off all connections with her. This was his attitude with respect to any of his children if they had any intentions of marrying out. He also behaved in a firm and uncompromising way when a disaster struck Shestov himself at the age of 12 – a story that we shall discuss below. In other words, Isaak Shvartsman, in charge of his big family, behaved as a patriarch – which was rather the norm at the time. Thus, in some sense, the independence of mind and rebellious tendencies of Shestov (who was the oldest of the sons) come as no surprise. His father's practical wisdom and intellectual wit must also have served as suitable points of departure for the growing Lev.

Perhaps as a natural result of his upbringing Shestov throughout his life combined contradictory activities – as it were the earthly and the heavenly, as we said above. Isaak Shvartsman never regarded Shestov's interest in philosophy and literary writings seriously and hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps and inherit the business. Shestov had indeed been involved in the family business almost throughout his entire life, even though he invariably viewed it as a burden and an obstacle to his vocation as a writer. Yet, he managed to combine his passionate philosophising with maintaining the family company. John Bayley writes that despite his irrationalist philosophy Shestov 'remained himself a

model of sanity and common sense' – the phenomenon that Bayley assigns to Shestov's 'remarkable and unique kind of cultural balance'.²⁹

It looks as if while growing up next to the best textiles in the country, he acquired a habit of being always well dressed, which again might have somewhat disguised the true image of his inner world. Interestingly Evgeniia Gertsyk mentions in her memoirs that he was

...такой деловой, крепкими ногами стоящий на земле. Притронешься к его рукаву – добротность ткани напомнит о его бытовых корнях в киевском мануфактурном деле. Когда садится к столу – широким хозяйским жестом придвинет себе хлеб, масло, сыр... Сидит, так сидит. Так не похож на птичьи повадки иного поэта-философа: вот-вот вспорхнет... Во всем его облике простота и в то же время монументальность.³⁰

Ironically perhaps, the way Shestov was turned out may have influenced Lev Tolstoy's misguided impression of him after Shestov visited the famous Russian novelist in Yasnaia Poliana in March of 1910. 'Смелый парикмахер', was the remark that Tolstoy made, and explained this comparison: 'Пришло в голову, модный он, шикарный – и вспомнился парикмахер из Москвы на свадьбе у дяди-мужика в деревне. Самые лучшие манеры и лянсье пляшет, отчего и презирает всех'.³¹

In reality Lev Shestov was very far from despising mankind. Every record about him that has survived to this day, sometimes by very different people, tells us of his extremely generous, helpful and pure personality that was invariably attractive to others. 'В его отношении к близким ему людям ни тени позы или литературного учительства (в те годы это в диковину) – просто доброта и деловитая заботливость',³² writes Gertsyk.

Amongst the examples she gives are assistance to free someone from unjust imprisonment, arranging a period of study abroad, finding an editor, sorting out family dramas and helping

²⁹ Bayley, 'Idealism and Its Critic', p. 2.

³⁰ Evgeniia Gertsyk, *Воспоминания* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1973), p. 103. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 94.

³¹ Maxim Gorkii, *Lev Tolstoi* (Letchworth: Bradda Books, 1966), pp. 58-59. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 106.

³² Gertsyk, p. 110. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 94.

people financially. ‘Звонок. Он в передней – и лица добреют’, Gertsyk recollects. ‘И эти люди, порой спорившие друг с другом до остервенения, все сходились на симпатии к Шестову, на какой-то особенной бережности к нему’,³³ she points out referring to a circle of friends which included Viacheslav Ivanov, Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Gershenzon and others.

Sergei Bulgakov wrote about Shestov that it was impossible not to love him even if you were his firm ideological opponent:

Шестова нельзя было не любить, даже совсем не разделяя его мировоззрения, и не уважать в нем отважного искателя истины. Л. И. обладал личной очаровательностью неотразимой. Нельзя было не радоваться ему при встрече, как это я наблюдал на разных лицах, по мировоззрению ничего общего с ним не имевших. Это объясняется, вероятно, удивительным даром сердца, его чарующей добротой и благоволением. Оно составляло основной тон его отношения к людям, при отсутствии личного соревнования (что редко встречается в нашем литературном мире), но это соединялось с твердым стоянием за свои духовные достижения. Странно было думать, что под этим покровом скрывался дух, беспрестанно борющийся за веру. [...] ...как показывает выписка из письма, которое он прислал мне летом 1938 г.: “Нужны величайшие усилия духа, чтобы освободиться от кошмара безбожия и неверия, овладевшего человечеством”.³⁴

In this connection it is interesting to note that while Shestov's religiosity is obvious, his confessional choice still remains somewhat obscure to scholars. For instance, Milosz writes: ‘We know nothing about his confessional options and not much about the intensity of his personal faith’.³⁵ This, in fact, is not entirely correct, as Shestov clearly treated both Old and New Testaments as the ultimate source of truth. Indeed, Vasilii Zenkovsky writes in a more affirmative fashion: ‘Мы не знаем достаточно содержания его верований, хотя не будет большой ошибкой сказать, что он принимал и Ветхий и Новый Завет, во всяком случае, у него есть немало высказываний, говорящих о принятии им христианского откровения’.³⁶ Judaism and Christianity were the dominant confessions

³³ Gertsyk, p. 111-112. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 131.

³⁴ Sergei Bulgakov, ‘Некоторые черты религиозного мировоззрения Льва Шестова’, *Современные записки*, No 68, 1939, 305-323, p. 305, 319. Cited in German Lovtskii, ‘Лев Шестов по моим воспоминаниям’, *Grani* (Frankfurt on Mein), no 45 (1.01.1960), pp. 78-98, and 46 (1.04.1960), pp. 123-141 (p. 125).

³⁵ Milosz, p. 118

³⁶ Zenkovskii, II, p. 371

that preoccupied Shestov most of his life, although he did not, indeed, indicate a clear and firm personal preference for either. He also kept an open mind about other religions and towards the end of his life became very interested in Hinduism. When he died there were two books by his bedside: The Bible and a book on Hinduism: *The Vedanta system*. What is clear, however, is that Shestov certainly was a deeply religious person, as his passionate philosophical writings demonstrate, even though his faith may not have had a definite confessional embodiment.

As far as his Jewish roots are concerned, it is somewhat surprising that in the Shvartsmans' home Shabbath was not kept, but their poor relation, who lived in, did hold this weekly celebration. This apparently made a lasting impression on the ten year-old Lev who 'прибегал к ней и слушал, что она ему читала и говорила, любил ее простую веру',³⁷ as Baranova-Shestova writes in her book. She mentions as well how Shestov was also impelled by an incidental encounter with the Russian Orthodox Church: 'Раз он случайно зашел в православную церковь. Ему так понравилась тишина, горящие лампадки, вся обстановка, что он пожалел, что это не его церковь, где, ему казалось, было бы так хорошо молиться'.³⁸ He compared unfavourably the simplicity and poverty of the synagogue with the festive religious ceremonies of Russian Orthodoxy. At the time he could have been easily converted, he confessed, if there had been some enthusiastic monk to attempt the conversion. It is interesting to mention in this connection that years later Shestov's daughters by his Russian Orthodox wife were baptised with his consent.

On the subject of Shestov's attitude to Judaism an instructive account is given in Shteinberg's memoirs. From the words of Lev Shestov in his old age, quoted by Shteinberg, it follows that practising Judaic traditions met a definite rejection in Shestov as being a manifestation of a scholastic and hollow interpretation of the obligations of a religious faith. The very spirit of fastidiousness, of incredible precision and thorough diligence in Shestov's mind ran into contradiction with the nature of Truth:

³⁷ Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 5

³⁸ Unpublished part of Lovtskii's memoirs. Cited in Baranova, I, p. 5.

Вы вот все гейдельбергской точности добиваетесь... Вычисление бесконечно малых... Категорический императив... Чтобы ризы без единого пятнышка! [...] Это у вас прирожденный ритуализм – кошерная пища: [...] чтобы, не дай Бог, не попала в мясной суп капля молока... [...] будь вы моим сыном [...] я бы столкнул вас со стези праведной. Но что говорить! Теперь уж, вероятно, поздно, да я и сам уже не советник самому себе.³⁹

In the same conversation they talked about Shestov's possible visit to Palestine and his hesitation as to whether to take up the invitation. Shteinberg, who had always been a practising Jew, was strongly in favour of this trip and generally advocated Judaic attitudes to any spiritual and practical matters. In a somewhat provocative way he even accused Shestov of being a Jew under a Hellenistic disguise, which caused a definite protest in the latter. In this regard a suggestion of Sidney Monas that '...Shestov was, in some not very orthodox sense, a Jew and a Christian'⁴⁰ seems closer to the truth and is interlinked with our observations above on the nature of Shestov's beliefs. In fact, shortly before his death Shestov wrote in his letter to Sergei Bulgakov the following remarkable lines: 'Для меня противоположности между Ветхим и Новым Заветом всегда казались мнимыми'.⁴¹

Yet, Monas also wrote that 'it is tempting to see a connection between Shestov's work and the Jewish mystical tradition that must have been somewhere an intimate part of his background and milieu'⁴² and assigned Shestov in philosophical terms to Hassidism, or rather to its spirit – claims which we will address in the next chapter when discussing Shestov's philosophy more closely. However, here we would like to say that while there are indeed some common features inherent in both – Hassidism and Shestov's thought – the origins of such proximity are hardly to be found in Shestov's cultural upbringing. In the light of the above evidence the conjectures of Monas regarding this point seem to be far-fetched and largely speculative, even though atmospherically Shestov's philosophising may indeed display some proximity to the spontaneity of Hassidic tradition. However, when viewed against the evidence from Shestov's life that we outlined above, Monas's assertions

³⁹ A. Z. Shteinberg, 'Лев Шестов' (Fragments of the chapter in Shteinberg's book of memoirs *Друзья моих ранних лет (1911-1928)* (Paris: Sintaxis, 1991)) in Lev Shestov, *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), I, pp. 493-510 (pp. 505-506).

⁴⁰ Sidney Monas, 'New Introduction' in Lev Shestov, *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), pp. v-xxiv (p. xiv).

⁴¹ Shestov's letter to Sergei Bulgakov of 26.10.1938. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, II, p. 193.

⁴² Monas, p. viii.

appear ungrounded, or at least disproportionately exaggerated. Shestov's deep affinity first and foremost to Russian literature with its strong underlying Christian orientation also testifies against them. More importantly, his remarkable unification of the two Testaments undermines his alleged bias towards Jewish mysticism. John Bayley's observation, quoted above, about Shestov's remarkable and unique cultural balance, in our opinion, portrays the situation much more adequately than Monas's suggestion which, by the way, he himself phrases so carefully, as if to avoid investing it with too much credibility.

Similarly, Czeslaw Milosz succumbs to the same temptation, it seems, implying that because 'in Kiev Shestov absorbed Jewish religious literature, including legends and folklore, at an early age',⁴³ as opposed to the areligious upbringing of Simone Weil's (who was also Jewish by birth), their loyalties were split respectively between Jerusalem (Shestov) and Athens (Weil). To us, although Shestov's early exposure to his Jewish milieu is, of course, undeniable, we do not think that it automatically gives us the right to play up its role in Shestov's outlook on life. Schloezer's approach of essentially placing Shestov beyond, or rather above, narrow national and confessional boundaries,⁴⁴ seems to us much more productive in this respect.

Indeed, Shestov grew up being both very sensitive and open to the outside world and the intellectual currents of the epoch. He was well-educated – in gymnasiums in Kiev and Moscow and then in Moscow University. In Baranova-Shestova's book he is described as an extremely able youngster, full of inner spiritual strength and being in search of a noble cause to which to apply his potential. However, quite early in life he experienced an extraordinary upheaval. His great-nephew Igor Balakhovsky writes about it in his article on Shestov, tracing Shestov's deep interest in the tragic to this frightening experience of his teens:

Ужасы жизни, лишь среднестатистические для многих, для некоторых всегда реальность, тем более ужасная, что они, эти “некоторые”, исключение на общем фоне, хотя бы относительного благополучия. Наделённый живым и пронизательным умом 12 летний Лёля

⁴³ Milosz, p. 114.

⁴⁴ Schloezer, 'Un Penseur Russe Léon Chestov', p. 86.

Шварцман, будущий Лев Исакович Шестов, в полной мере познал эти ужасы, когда его похитила неизвестная группа, видимо анархического направления, надеясь получить выкуп. Отец, богатый киевский купец, проявил твёрдость, денег не дал и через три месяца ребёнок вернулся домой, живой и невредимый, но сколько переживший! Такова официальная биография, а неофициальное предание добавляет, что всё это не так просто – мальчик мог играть в “похищение” как другие играют в казаков-разбойников. Как, после этого, не искать в самых обычных, повседневных вещах грозный признак чего-то несокрушимо ужасного, прячущегося по углам и готового выскочить в любой момент?⁴⁵

Yet, this event was only a warning of fate, a rehearsal as it were for Shestov's future entry into the realm of tragedy. The subsequent decade, however does not suggest any unusual changes in the evolution of Shestov's psychology or of his intellectual predilections. Like many advanced young men of his generation Shestov was fond of Marxism and full of idealism. His study at Moscow University which started in 1884 with the course in mathematics subsequently changed into a study of law and eventually resulted in a dissertation in law which concerned the conditions of the Russian working class and the new Factory Legislation. This dissertation remained undefended because it was found too left-wing. However, with the rise of Bolshevism Shestov's views changed completely and in 1920 he emigrated from Russia and settled in Paris. It is then that he wrote his only political book *What is Russian Bolshevism?*. Except for this single incident and for his student past, social and political issues remained almost completely outside the scope of Shestov's interests as reflected in his books and articles, which he started to write in the mid-1890s – while still in Russia. At the time they took the form of literary criticism, although they were increasingly and unstoppably turning into philosophical essays.

In 1897 Shestov married a Russian Orthodox woman Anna Berezovskaia, by whom he had two daughters – Tatiana, born in 1897 and Natalia, born in 1900. However, since his wife was not Jewish Shestov kept his marriage secret from his parents in the fear that they would be devastated, especially the father with his orthodox views on Jewish marriage, given that he had already been mortally wounded once when his oldest daughter Dora had married

⁴⁵ Igor' Balakhovskii, 'Доказательство от абсурда', in *Léon Chestov. Un philosophe pas comme les autres?*, Cahiers de l'émigration russe 3 (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1996), pp. 41-70 (p. 49).

out. Interestingly, a year earlier – in 1896 – Shestov already had the intention of marrying a gentile (Nastia Malakhova-Mirovich), but it fell through due to his parents' violent opposition. However, Shestov did ultimately go against their will and only revealed the existence of his family to his mother after his father's death in 1914. However, again an alternative story, or rather a family legend, says that his mother knew all along, whereas his father genuinely did not and never found out.

It was therefore a difficult life full of forced separations in order to hide from Shestov's parents the existence of his family. For some years he lived in Kiev while his wife and daughters stayed abroad. However, it was a stable long-distance relationship whereby Shestov, whenever possible, would go to see his family, supported them financially and was in regular correspondence with his wife. They were only able to re-unite more than a decade later, and after the turbulent years of the war and revolutions their life eventually settled in emigration. There Shestov was gradually recognised in French intellectual circles, taught as a professor of philosophy in the Russian extension of the Sorbonne and was a member of various European societies of cultural and philosophical orientation. He was personally acquainted with and held in high esteem by many celebrated Western intellectuals. During this period his philosophy significantly strengthened and developed without undergoing, arguably, any drastic turns. It is then, in emigration, especially after 1922, that he wrote his most significant philosophical works. As Monas writes, 'Camus owed him something, as did Sartre and Merleau-Ponty',⁴⁶ and Rayfield puts it even more strongly: 'What would Sartre and Camus have written if Shestov had not existed?'.⁴⁷ Shestov died in Paris in 1938 having left behind numerous writings, most of which are translated into different languages. Nevertheless, in his very personal and passionate search for the ultimate truth Shestov remained largely alone and his voice was crying in the wilderness. He undoubtedly knew that (and even used the latter phrase as a subtitle for one of his books).

⁴⁶ Monas, p. v.

⁴⁷ P. D. Rayfield, 'Introduction' to Ivanov-Razumnik, *On the Meaning of Life* (Letchworth, England: Bradda Books Ltd, 1971), pp. v-viii (p. vi).

These are the main facts of Shestov's biography which, according to his own perception, shed, indeed, very little light onto the origins of his philosophy and the evolution of his ideas, including in particular the questions we are pursuing – Shestov's treatment of Russian literature. On the other hand, we did make a few omissions in the above exposition of the factual texture of Shestov's life, and what we have so far suppressed may hold a key to our quest.

In addition to his two daughters Shestov also had a son, who was an illegitimate child by Aniuta Listopadova – a maid in the wealthy Shestovs' household. This happened in about 1892, long before Shestov married. Once again the woman was a gentile. Their son, Sergei Shestov, first lived with his mother in Moscow and then in the family of a Moscow journalist. He was killed young in the First World War. For Lev Shestov this was a major tragedy, as the father and the son were apparently very close. Sergei Shestov is mentioned in Pasternak's prose *Охранная грамота*,⁴⁸ whereas there is no mention of the mother virtually anywhere.

In 1895 (when Sergei should have been roughly three) Shestov had a major mental and spiritual crisis which resulted in a nervous disease and his going abroad for treatment. Some sources suggest that it was caused by him having to take over the failing business from his father – in an atmosphere where he felt totally suffocated. However, others hint at something much more personal and profound, but allegedly no-one knows for sure what exactly happened. More precisely, Baranova-Shestova writes: 'Некоторые из друзей Шестова, вероятно, с его слов знали о трагическом событии, и упоминания о нем встречаются в их работах, но в чем именно заключалась трагедия, они, очевидно, не знали'.⁴⁹ This in a way is supported by Shestov's own words from his *Дневник мыслей* about the most significant things in one's life: 'о них же никто, кроме тебя, ничего не знает'.⁵⁰ However, the memoirs of Shestov's friends remain, in our view, rather

⁴⁸ Boris Pasternak, *Охранная грамота* (Roma: Ed. Aquario, 1970), p.80. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 22.

⁵⁰ Lev Shestov, 'Дневник мыслей', *Континент*, (8) 1976, pp. 235-252 (p. 252, entry of 11.06.1920).

inconclusive with respect to the extent of their knowledge on the matter. For example, from the following recollections by Gertsyk, very carefully phrased, it is impossible to deduce unambiguously how much she actually knew: ‘Этот такой чистый человек’, she writes referring to Shestov, ‘нес на совести сложную, не вполне обычную ответственность, от которой может быть и гнулись его плечи, и глубокие морщины так рано состарили его... Это было время глубочайшего отчаяния Льва Исааковича, его внутренней катастрофы’.⁵¹ Moreover, when Gertsyk describes Shestov more than twenty years later, following the tragic death of his son, she implicitly refers again to the previous mysterious tragedy of 1895 by saying about his face that it was ‘все то же. Не потому ли, что скорбь уж провела раз навсегда все борозды – глубже нельзя, горше нельзя...’.⁵² Shestov's close friend A. M. Lazarev describes what happened in 1895 as ‘нечто [...] страшное’, as ‘тяжкое событие’, and his words are repeated by Zenkovsky and Baranova-Shestova.⁵³ Shestov himself refers to this date in his *Дневник мыслей* written 25 years later by an allusion to Shakespeare: ‘распалась связь времен’.⁵⁴

Looking at the chronology and the circumstances it is not unreasonable to suppose that this deep crisis could have been connected to the fate of Sergei Shestov's mother: either she died, or she might even have committed suicide. However, while this was our initial conjecture which was still to be substantiated by getting, if at all existent, the appropriate archival evidence, we are now inclined to reject it in the light of the evidence from Shestov's letter written to his friend Varvara Grigor'evna Malakhova-Mirovich in April 1896. In this letter Shestov writes: ‘Бывают грустные настроения – но они относятся к тому проклятому случаю, который наделал столько бед в моей жизни’.⁵⁵ For a pure and noble person, which Shestov undoubtedly was, such phrasing would be incompatible with a tragic fate of Anna Listopadova. It is therefore much more likely that the very

⁵¹ Gertsyk, pp. 102, 106. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 22.

⁵² Ibid, pp. 112-113. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 148.

⁵³ A. M. Lazarev [Adolphe Lazareff], ‘La Philosophie de Léon Chestov’ in *Vie et connaissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1948), p. 11. Cited in Zenkovskii, II, p. 369 and in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 22. The phrase in the French edition reads ‘il lui est arrivé quelque chose de plus terrible’.

⁵⁴ Lev Shestov, ‘Journal de mes pensées’ (‘Дневник мыслей’), transl. Blanche Bronstein-Vinaver, *Le Beffroi, Revue Philosophique et littéraire*, I, December 1986, pp. 9-30 (p. 30). Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 23.

⁵⁵ The letter cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 24.

situation with its awkwardness and burdening shame and responsibility was a cause for Shestov's breakdown at the time. This, however, does not exclude the possibility of certain tragic incidents taking place as a consequence of this situation. In the entry from his *Дневник мыслей* Shestov actually gives the time-frame for this dramatic happening in his life – the beginning of September 1895. This, together with the above phrasing, refutes the above suggestions of some scholars that Shestov's crisis was simply due to the excessive stress induced by his obligatory involvement with his father's business. Instead the lines from his letter and his diary clearly point to some concrete event, some irreversible personal deed at which Shestov looks back with a mixture of annoyance and deep regret. The burden of business involvement could have served, in our opinion, as an aggravating circumstance, but no more than that.

Igor Balakhovsky views the situation in a similar vein: 'Охотно допускаю', he writes, 'что для Льва Исаковича [...] сознание того, что сын в глазах общества не был его сыном, что он потому такой "весь издёрганный", что ему "воздух меряют так жалобно и скупо" (Тютчев) было незаживающей раной'.⁵⁶ It is this crisis, Balakhovsky thinks, that opened Shestov's eyes to the 'страшную бездну, окружающую всех нас, бездну, заглянув в которую, человек становится философом не "от удивления", как считал Аристотель, а "от отчаяния"'.⁵⁷ However, Balakhovsky also thinks that Shestov was by nature predisposed to a tragic outlook on life:

Врачи хорошо знают, что люди впадают в депрессию не потому, что для этого есть внешняя причина, а потому, что таково их внутреннее, эндогенное устройство. И если Шестов тратит столько сил, чтобы смывая толстый грим, показывать, что философия многих великих людей это философия отчаянья, то только потому, что он сам принадлежит к этой же породе и даже как-то гордится этим.⁵⁸

The above suggestion of Balakhovsky lays the ground for modelling Shestov's interpretation of the literary figures he wrote about. Indeed, Shestov's own attitude to human life and thought was certainly first and foremost existential. His approach is perhaps

⁵⁶ Balakhovskii, p. 50.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 50.

⁵⁸ Balakhovskii, p. 50.

best exemplified by the importance he attributed to a single tragic event in an individual's life which served as a life-changing experience. On this issue we would side with Balakhovsky and definitely argue against John Bayley's unsubstantiated assertion that Shestov himself 'underwent no tormenting spiritual pilgrimages like those of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky' and 'had no pretensions to anguish'.⁵⁹ On the contrary, putting together Shestov's close attention to existential details with his own personal crisis leads us to presume that the reason for such a biased approach to other biographies is precisely because he himself underwent such a tragic transformation of convictions. This, indeed, provides a natural explanation as to why he was inclined to view everyone's biography and inner world in the same light – as being transformed by a catastrophe – no matter whether visible and tangible to others or only to the person himself. It is in these existential details that he must have seen the keys to unlocking the life and personality of the writer.

An especially explicit example is Shestov's interpretation of the origins of Plato's philosophy. He asserts:

Источником его [Платона] творчества являются не только идеи Сократа, наследие, полученное от раньше него живших, и собственное дарование, но не в меньшей, а может быть, в большей ещё мере те особые переживания, которые пробудили и довели в нём до такого крайнего напряжения его метафизическую потребность. Какое это переживание? Все без колебания могут согласно ответить на этот вопрос: смерть Сократа. [...] Несомненно, что смерть Сократа потрясла неслыханно душу молодого Платона и заставила его с новой, другим непонятной и странной силой ставить философские вопросы.⁶⁰

In the same way Shestov talks about Nietzsche's tragic experience, reconstructing the thoughts of the latter. Nietzsche, Shestov writes, should have naturally said to himself:

...один тяжелый удар судьбы, простой, ординарный, глупый случай, несчастье, которое могло бы приключиться со всяким, с великим и с малым сего мира - и я вдруг убеждаюсь, что тот эгоизм, которого я никогда в себе не подозревал, свойствен мне так же, как и обыкновенным смертным. Не значит ли, что и все другие учителя притворяются, что и они, когда вещают об истине, добре, любви, милосердии - только играют торжественную роль, - кто добросовестно и в неведении, как когда-то я, а кто, может быть, недобросовестно и

⁵⁹ Bayley, 'Idealism and Its Critic', p. 1.

⁶⁰ Lev Shestov, *Лекции по истории греческой философии* (Moscow-Paris: Russkii Put' – YMCA-Press, 2001), p. 130.

сознательно? Не значит ли, что все великие и святые люди, если бы их поставить на мое место, так же мало могли утешиться своими истинами, как и я? И что, когда они говорили о любви, самопожертвовании, самоотречении, под всеми их красивыми фразами, как змея в цветах, скрывался тот же проклятый эгоизм, который я так неожиданно открыл в себе и с которым я так безумно и так напрасно борюсь?" Эта мысль, еще неясная, может быть, даже не мысль, а инстинкт, определила собою характер ближайших исканий Ницше.⁶¹

Numerous examples of this kind are scattered throughout Shestov's works. They testify in favour of the above assertions that he attributed a vital significance to a turning point in a biography, to a sudden rupture in someone's life, to a tragedy - whether it had a concrete and immediate embodiment or was of a hidden and slow-acting nature. Moreover, he was convinced, it seems, of the invariable existence of such a rupture and viewed it almost as his personal mission to uncover it.

Along these lines Shestov's first book *Shakespeare and his critic Brandes* serves as a very important point of departure, since it demonstrates how his philosophy originated from idealism and dogmatism, only to take later an irreversible turn in the completely opposite direction. Looking at Shestov's treatment of Shakespeare over time we can see very clearly the evolution of his own convictions – from believing in the sense and meaning of existence to entering an eternal struggle against cruel, senseless and indifferent necessity. Between these opposite beliefs the rupture in Shestov's own life took place, and the philosophy of tragedy was born. *Shakespeare and his critic Brandes* was, by a precise formulation of Ivanov-Razumnik, the last (and therefore especially passionate) expression of faith before the ultimate faithlessness: 'перед окончательным неверием особенно горяча бывает последняя вспышка веры'⁶² are Ivanov-Razumnik's precise words. By faith he means here not a religious faith, of course, but a collection of idealistic beliefs. Shestov himself describes it in the following words: 'Я тогда еще стоял на точке зрения морали, которую вскорости оставил. Но уже и тогда эта точка зрения дошла до такого накала, что можно было предвидеть, что рамы начинают трескаться'.⁶³

⁶¹ Lev Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше: философия трагедии* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), I, p. 424.

⁶² Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 201.

⁶³ Benjamin Fondane, *Rencontres avec Léon Chestov* (Paris: Plasma, 1982), p. 85.

The breaking point lies between this first book of Shestov and his subsequent books, marking a total re-evaluation of all his values. In his first book Shestov justified life with all its horrors; he saw in Shakespeare the great power of life-assertiveness despite the tragedy that the world order is steeped in. In his later writings Shestov exclaimed, on the contrary, that Shakespeare does not give a single satisfactory answer to 'the accursed questions' of existence: 'у Шекспира [...] так много страшных вопросов и ни одного удовлетворительного ответа'.⁶⁴ Ivanov-Razumnik spells out the obvious truth that Shestov used Shakespeare only as a cover behind which to hide his own self. He writes,

Когда Шекспир писал своего Гамлета, говорит Лев Шестов ... то для него "Пала связь времен [...] Это значит - прежняя, бессознательная, дающаяся нам всем даром вера в целесообразность и осмысленность человеческой жизни рушилась. Нужно сейчас же, немедленно найти новую веру - иначе жизнь обращается в непрерывную, невыносимую пытку. Но как это сделать? Где найти веру? И есть ли такая вера на земле? ... Ответ не только не придет сейчас, но не придет и через многие годы, а Шекспир [...] будет жить с сознанием, что для него все погубило, и что все ответы, когда-либо дававшиеся на гамлетовский вопрос - были лишь пустыми словами".⁶⁵

'Здесь всюду пишется "Шекспир", а произносится "Лев Шестов"', Ivanov-Razumnik summarises, and adds that 'людям нашего роста всегда удобно стать под защиту такого великана, как Шекспир'.⁶⁶

Ivanov-Razumnik was one of the first to observe this rift separating the old Shestov from new Shestov. He uncovered this pattern of Shestov hiding behind great writers and projecting his own inner evolution onto theirs. This outstanding phenomenon did not go unnoticed by other researchers, and we already mentioned above⁶⁷ the words of Levy-Bruhl who accused Shestov of 'hogging the covers'. In the same manner, as our dissertation will in particular demonstrate, Shestov traced the same profound transformation of convictions as his own - from idealism and positivism to scepticism and irrationalism - in all major Russian writers. Shestov's apparent existential pattern in his attitude to various thinkers, his

⁶⁴ Lev Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, pp. 117-118.

⁶⁵ Ivanov-Razumnik, pp. 197-198.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 198.

⁶⁷ See Section 1.1.

belief in achieving a revelation only through inner catastrophe was also spotted by his only disciple, a French poet of Romanian-Jewish origin, Benjamin Fondane. Fondane writes in his memoirs:

I wrote to him saying how difficult it is to follow in his footsteps because, using his own words, in order to do that one has to live through one's own inner trauma, spiritual disaster ...I added: who would want to wish upon himself such a disaster only for the sake of one's love for the truth? Who would agree to become his disciple? A few days later I received an invitation from Shestov's daughter Tatiana to visit them. There were quite a lot of people there. Shestov grabbed hold of me. "I am used", he said, "to people writing to me about my talent, about my penetrating understanding of Dostoevsky, about my style... And now, probably for the first time, someone has become interested in the question *per se*".⁶⁸

Thus, Shestov believed that tragedy is the sole route to philosophy and ultimate truth, that only through tragic personal experience can one's eyes be opened to see the true meaning of life and death. Undoubtedly his own life-changing experience of 1895 prepared the grounds for constructing a philosophy of tragedy. However, the final spark which set alight his emerging ideas and transformed his own tragic experience into his philosophy of tragedy came when Shestov discovered for himself the Bible and the writings of great thinkers, and was completely overwhelmed by them. 'Shakespeare had shaken me in such a way that I lost my sleep',⁶⁹ Shestov told Fondane decades later. He also confessed that when he started reading Nietzsche he felt that in his books the world was turning upside down. 'I can't even describe the impression he made on me,'⁷⁰ – Shestov said to Fondane. Similar sentiments were evoked in him by Dostoevsky, whom Shestov forever regarded as his main teacher.

It is interesting to note that in his treatment of writers, when Shestov invariably uncovers the rift between the writer's pen and his soul, as we mentioned in the previous section, he essentially launches a certain attack on the author in an attempt to expose the inner crisis (the breaking point) of the latter. The corollary of our assertions above is that this attack by Shestov is, in fact, always directed at Shestov himself.

⁶⁸ Fondane, pp. 42-43.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 85.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 85.

Thus, for example, as we shall see in more detail in the chapter on Chekhov, when accusing the writer of his unhealthy interest in ‘overstressed’ people, Shestov in fact is fighting with his own image in the mirror, or rather beyond the looking-glass, in that domain of tragedy into which (in his own words) ‘люди идут лишь поневоле’.⁷¹

A related conjecture was expressed by Boris de Schloezer in his introduction to Shestov's book *L'homme pris au piège: Pouchkine, Tolstoï, Tchekhov*. There he considers exactly this extreme interest of both thinkers in the overstressed person and regards it as a continuation of their own personal crises, a turning point in their ideologies which clearly took place in the case of both Chekhov and Shestov. ‘In fact there is nothing in common between the naive idealism and moralism of Shestov's Pushkin and his passionate interrogations addressed to Tolstoi’, - Schloezer writes; ‘A natural question arises which cannot be ignored’, - he says later, - ‘how precise is Shestov's interpretation of Chekhov, isn't this portrait in fact a self-portrait?’⁷²

We can now formulate the following conclusion from our considerations above. Although Shestov in the course of his life underwent a certain evolution in his ideas and perception of the world, which we shall touch upon in this dissertation in connection with every writer under study, the main turning point of his biography and his thought can be dated to 1895 when his personal tragedy took place. The mysterious crisis which happened to Shestov then caused an inner catastrophe which completely overturned his outlook on life – from idealism and positivism he made a leap to the opposite camp of adogmatism, scepticism and irrationalism. He preserved these attitudes until the end despite evolutionary variations that his philosophy underwent. His main ideas related to the struggle against the restrictive power of mind and necessity as well as speculative philosophy in general, which are even referred to by some as ‘idées fixes’, stayed essentially unchanged.

⁷¹ Lev Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше: философия трагедии* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), I, p. 327.

⁷² Boris de Schloezer, ‘Préface’ in *Léon Chestov, L'homme pris au piège: Pouchkine, Tolstoï, Tchekhov* (Paris: Plon, 1966), pp. 7-12 (pp. 11-12).

This deep personal crisis coincided with Shestov having discovered for himself some fundamental achievements of human thought through the Bible and through such writers as Shakespeare, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and other classics. The re-evaluation of all values that ensued formed him as a philosopher of tragedy passionately obsessed with the tragic fate of the individual in the face of indifferent nature and soulless eternity. It shaped his attitude towards all the thinkers that interested him as existential and personified. This means that he trusted only the personal, existential experience of a thinker as holding the key to his writings and being the only true route to his spiritual discoveries. He was invariably seeking in all of these writers a breaking point, an inner disaster similar to his own which would have caused in them, as in his case, the total transformation of their convictions. Shestov was convinced that every human ultimately runs into a dead end of tragedy and consequently undergoes a catharsis which gives him, as it were, a second birth. Moreover, he believed that the only way to the Truth lies through a tragic experience and therefore those whose works he perceived as revelations, in whose works at least a glimpse at the Truth could be witnessed, must have gone through such an overwhelming trauma resulting in the total transformation of their convictions.

Thus Shestov largely imposed his own model on the writers under study and projected his own portrait onto theirs. As a result of this projection he often fought against his own image and launched a certain attack on these writers which was ultimately an attack directed at Shestov himself. The by-product of this process of submitting these thinkers to the closest scrutiny and most 'passionate interrogations', using Schloezer's words above, was his attempt to filter their true personality through their artistic aspirations, to separate their 'pen' from their 'soul' and to uncover not only their discoveries – the results of their search - but also, if not first and foremost, the existential road leading to them.

1.3. At the turn of a century – the specifics of the time and its impact on shaping Shestov's thought

In this section we shall look more closely at the temporal landscape of Shestov's life, for his philosophical convictions as well as their literary expression should inevitably be viewed in the context of his time. In this respect the initial period in Shestov's biography is of most importance, as it is then that his views were taking shape. Therefore of most interest to us is the *fin de siècle* era, although we shall provide a broader background by undertaking some brief excursions back and forth on the temporal axis.

Any human society has a tendency to attribute some mystical significance to artificial temporal markers. Thus the end of every century is marked by certain typical social moods which include a brooding nostalgia for the departing age as well as new hopes and expectations mixed with anxiety and uncertainty about what the future holds. This in turn nourishes those mystical and apocalyptic tendencies which otherwise remain dormant. However, the end of the nineteenth century was also marked by some qualitative difference which is best described in the following lines of Joseph Brodsky taken from his foreword to an anthology of nineteenth-century Russian poetry. These lines serve as an excellent preface to a more systematic overview of the epoch that we intend to provide here, for they make the reader feel, as it were, the emotional texture of the time.

‘What we call the nineteenth century’, Brodsky writes,

marks what appears to be the last period in the history of our species when its scale of reality was quantitatively human. Numerically at least, an individual's interplay with his likes was not any different from that in, say, antiquity. It was the last century of seeing, not glimpsing; of responsibility, not the incoherence of guilt. Similarly, no matter how homicidal one might have felt, one still lacked the means to commit what would pass today as mass murder. Relations with space were based on the pace of one's own step; and whenever one travelled, one did so in a charabanc driven by the same number of horses as a Roman chariot; i.e., by four or, at best, six. The invention of the engine, whose efficacy is measured in so many horsepower (i.e., in such scores of these animals that there is no way to assemble and harness them for the purposes of coherent motion), chipped a lot from the reality of space and soiled what remained with abstractions hitherto confined to the works of one's imagination tackling either the life of sentiments or that of time.

That was the real, not the calendar, end of the nineteenth century. That is, its poets, up to then, could be more easily understood by their Latin counterparts than by ourselves. The acceleration of pace (subject more of enjoyment than of manly regret) has set us clearly apart, if only due to its

curtailing effects on any form of commitment or concentration. For a man travelling at bullet or supersonic speed to his destination, it is difficult to comprehend wounded honour, the grid of class barriers, someone's brooding over a ruined estate, the contemplation of a single tree, or ambivalence at prayer. Yet such was the stuff of the nineteenth century's poetry, concerned with the movements of the individual soul, whose evolutions turned out to foreshadow all the laws of thermo- and aerodynamics.

To put it differently: an age ago, much less stood between man and his thoughts about himself than today.⁷³

In this atmosphere of human beings contemplating their predicament, as reflected in classical Russian literature with its distinctive anthropocentric nature, Lev Shestov grew up. The psychological flavour of this literature rooted in early nineteenth-century Russian poetry, with its intellectual passion and emotional intensity, made a lasting impact on the young Shestov and undoubtedly contributed to the existential turn of his thought.

He was born in a rather turbulent period of Russian history when serfdom had only been abolished five years before – significantly later than in the rest of Europe – and reforms introduced were so tragically incomplete that instead of bringing long-awaited political relief they only aggravated the explosive situation in Russian society. Terrorist organisations, whose aim was to overthrow the monarchy and to facilitate a revolution in the country, grew and spread at high speed. Moreover, they were rapidly gaining support amongst very broad strata of the population. The country was boiling over in a state of political instability, fear and rising anger and dissatisfaction with the regime. The response of the latter was to tighten the autocracy, which was becoming increasingly helpless, and to establish an infrastructure of secret police agents. Thus the social climate in the country grew more and more unhealthy.

This social turbulence naturally found its way into literature. In this state of restricted freedom, so characteristic of Russia, literature played a crucial role in society. More precisely, amongst the educated classes (that is to say, all those who were able to read),

⁷³ Joseph Brodsky, 'Foreword' to *An Age Ago, A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry*, selected and translated by Alan Myers (New-York: Farrar-Straus-Giroux, 1988), pp. xi-xix (pp. xii-xiv).

great writers had the status of prophets. However, the gap between the vast peasantry and quickly growing proletariat on one hand, and the nobility and emerging stratum of *raznochintsy* on the other, remained huge and disturbing. Therefore the problems of social justice together with associated deeper questions, which are usually referred to as eternal, were burning particularly brightly in Russian society.

This was a time of intense spiritual searching and intellectual hesitation. Traditional movements of Slavophiles and Westerners, which originated at the beginning of the century, had evolved by the end of it to produce a broader spectrum of ideas. The rise of nihilistic attitudes was widespread and ultimately interlinked with the rapid loss of religious faith. Russian secularism drew strength from Hegelian idealism and positivism which grew extremely popular. The ideas of scientific progress took strong hold of Russian intellectuals, and materialism in the form of Darwinism and Marxism became the dominant philosophical trend.

A movement of legal Marxists, led by Petr Struve, promoted an evolutionary path of development for Russia – as opposed to the militant revolutionary Marxism which later gave rise to Bolshevism. However, legal Marxists eventually became disillusioned with this ideology and gradually moved back to Russian Orthodoxy. It was a time when neo-romanticism prevailed in Russian society in the atmosphere of decadent and apocalyptic moods which reflected in particular a *fin de siècle* search for a new aesthetics and new religious consciousness. The result of this search was the renaissance of Russian literature and philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, known as the Silver Age. It was then brought to an end by the Bolshevik regime.

Against this background of continuous social questing, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, the theme of ‘the little person’ – one of the main strands in Russian literature – gained particular momentum. Indeed, this issue has always lain at the heart of Russian life and preoccupied its intellectual elite – to find the ways and means of liberating the masses enslaved by ignorance and poverty. This theme engaged poets such as Nekrasov

and his generation, and critics such as Belinsky and Dobroliubov. It permeated literary works from Gogol's *Overcoat* to Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* and *The Insulted and Injured*.

The young Lev Shestov was clearly influenced by the same sentiments and strongly affected by all the spiritual and social questions that he found in the works of Russian and world classics. This is particularly evident in his early literary experiments. In his unfinished and untitled story with a young unsuccessful writer Mirovich as the main hero, Shestov wrote the following revealing lines:

В пятом и шестом классе Мирович уже хорошо ознакомился с существовавшими в России “направлениями”, и первым безусловным требованием ко всякому, претендовавшему на его уважение человеку, была принадлежность к последнему направлению, стремление продолжать еще при Пушкине начатое дело русской интеллигенции. Он знал Онегина, Печорина, Базарова, Нежданова, как последовательных носителей русской идеи, и требовал от современников стремления к выработке новой идеи, которая была бы для них тем же, чем идеи 20-40-60 и 70 годов были для перечисленных выше представителей литературных типов... Все размышления его сводились в конце концов к определению современного русского интеллигента. Идеалисты сороковых годов, реалисты-шестидесятники имели свое дело и сделали его... Что теперь нам нужно делать? Он не мог ни в первые годы юности, ни, как выяснилось впоследствии, и в зрелые годы, ответить на этот вопрос, но он глубоко был убежден в том, что ответ на этот вопрос есть и должен быть, что со временем он его узнает. Он нисколько не сомневался, что людям его времени нужно сказать новое слово и начать новое дело. Необходимо подсчитать оставленное предками наследство, и тогда все станет ясным. России, несомненно, предстоит великая будущность. Она осуществит те великие задачи, перед которыми оказалась бессильна Западная Европа – государства и народы которой пошли быстро по ложной, ведущей к гибели дороге... Он уже тогда с гордой радостью ходил взад и вперед по комнате, декламируя известные стихи Пушкина:

Увижу ль, о друзья! народ неугнетённый
И рабство, падшее по манию царя,
И над отечеством свободы просвещённой
Взойдёт ли наконец прекрасная заря?

Это четверостишие, говаривал он, было первым призывом гениального поэта к русской интеллигенции. И она успела откликнуться на эти великие слова. Она бодро работает, как работала с Белинским во главе над самообразованием и над выяснением предстоящей задачи. Сколько поработали люди 60-х годов над делом освобождения крестьян. Где еще, восхищался он, бывало, в упоении, можете указать вы нам акт столь великой государственной мудрости, как освобождение крестьян. Он благоговел перед Александром II и его сотрудиниками в великих реформах...⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Unpublished (and untitled) story by Lev Shestov. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, pp. 12-13.

We deliberately quoted a long extract as it testifies to the profound idealistic orientation of the young Shestov and his deep affinity with and knowledge of Russian cultural life. It is also evident from the above lines that in his extreme youth Shestov quite possibly laboured under some naive monarchist delusions and his political views at the time could have been, as we would now say, centrist – for progress and liberation by moderate evolutionary means. However, we do not know the intended continuation of this story and therefore cannot be sure how much the author's ideas can be identified with those of his hero. Baranova-Shestova describes this period in Shestov's life as follows: ‘талантливый юноша, полный духовных сил, искал приложения своих незаурядных способностей’.⁷⁵ In another story of Shestov - *In the wrong place* - of the same period and with the same protagonist Mirovich, only this time written in the first person, he wrote

...в Некрасове я высоко чтил любовь к ближнему, любовь к простому народу. Его поэзия санкционировала в моих глазах еще тот уголок правды, о котором мало говорили другие поэты. Вся поэзия представлялась мне тогда апофеозом правды, точнее добра... Я всегда думал, что жизнь есть не что иное, как постоянное стремление этого “добра” к победе над злом и что носители идеи добра постоянно увеличиваются в своем числе и победа их есть только вопрос времени.⁷⁶

Thus Shestov was passionately, even if naively, preoccupied by the destiny of Russia as well as general questions of good and evil from his early years.

When he reached the age of entering university, his political views, as in the case of many advanced young people of his generation, had already become extremely left-wing. For precisely this reason his law dissertation was turned down by the censors. However, these political views were short-lived in him. No sooner was the century over than Shestov wrote to his wife from St Petersburg the following rather sceptical and ironic lines about the legal Marxists and their leader:

⁷⁵ Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Unpublished story by Lev Shestov ‘Не туда попал’. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 14.

...встретил [...] Струве, того самого, который заведует экономическим материализмом и являет собой Мазини⁷⁷ марксистов. Ведь он здесь в концертах выступает: поет арии из политической экономии. И после концертов марксистки обрывают ему фалды, чтобы иметь кусок сюртука на память... Сам длинный, тощий, бледный. За неимением другого сравнения в нем находят сходство с Христом. Разве после 40 дней искушений в пустыне Христос был таким! Только я не полагаю, чтобы Струве знал искушения. Он уже от природы лохматый и тощий, да еще от Маркса...⁷⁸

Even less enthusiasm was evoked in Shestov by the Bolsheviks. They tried to take Shestov under their wing and to turn him into an advocate of their policies, but to no avail – Shestov was never compromised by them. Moreover, when he left Soviet Russia he wrote a devastating critique of Russian Bolshevism. The times of the revolution and civil war were deeply disturbing for Shestov. It is then that he wrote in his ‘Diary of Thoughts’ (‘Дневник мыслей’), ‘Никогда так упорно, напряженно не работала мысль, как в эти ужасные, кровавые дни. И никогда – так бесплодно’.⁷⁹

Yet he was a bad prophet and did not notice the danger beyond Bolshevism. That is to say, he overlooked the rise of fascism in Europe. In 1927 he wrote in a letter to Gertsyk:

Мне [...] кажется, что ничего особенно значительного не происходит. Работают много, очень много, но больше заняты практикой, зализывают раны, устраиваются наново. И в этом очень преуспевают. [...] Люди ходят сытые, одетые, обутые – театры, кино, кафе переполнены. Лет через пять о войне, пожалуй, и совсем забудут.⁸⁰

Gertsyk remarks how faulty these prophecies of Shestov actually were, because ‘лет через пять у власти стал фашизм, и война при дверях’.⁸¹ She notes in her memoirs that ‘зоркий на внутренние события души – ветра времени Лев Исаакович не слышал’.⁸² Shestov did of course eventually see the horrific turn that events were taking and was extremely aggravated by it. In a way he was lucky to die in 1938 – just in time to avoid witnessing the true horrors of Nazism, and in particular the death of his only disciple Benjamin Fondane in gas chambers at Birkenau.

⁷⁷ As Baranova-Shestova comments, Mazzini was an Italian singer who at the time was often referred to in press as ‘the king of tenors’ (see Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 41)

⁷⁸ Shestov’s letter of March 1899 to his wife. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 41.

⁷⁹ Shestov, ‘Дневник мыслей’, p. 235 (entry of 17.10.1919).

⁸⁰ Gertsyk, p. 116. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 345.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 116. Cited in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 102.

⁸² Ibid, p. 161. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 131.

At the time of his *Diary of Thoughts* (*Дневник мыслей*) he was already in his fifties, but was yet to write – in emigration – his most significant philosophical works. It was then that his writings were taking a distinct turn from literature to philosophy. However, in many ways he remained forever faithful to the world of literature which led him to philosophy. Indeed, in his youth he wrote a manifesto of sorts about the crucial role of literature in Russian society – in his story *In the wrong place* he wrote of the hero Mirovich already mentioned above:

Постоянное чтение наших лучших писателей привело его к тому убеждению, что всякое великое общественное дело предварительно обсуждается в литературе и что эта последняя является инициатором всякого нового общественного движения. Он видел, что литература нашего времени не могла выработать ясных и определенных задач. Он ждал того счастливого времени, когда “накануне” перейдет, пройдет и “наступит, наконец, настоящий день”. В том, что этот день наступит, он не сомневался. Нужно только дружно, энергично, безаветно отдаться великому делу служения обществу, т.е. как нужно теоретически – в литературе – выработать программу деятельности. Поэтому дело пока сводится к литературной работе. Всякий человек, чувствующий в себе “душу живую”, должен оставить в стороне все интересы и предаться исключительно общественному делу...⁸³

Yet, Shestov, as it were, broadened typically Russian themes, took them a step further or a step up – to the level of mankind as such. Thus he transformed the traditional Russian attention to the little person into a no less intense attention to a generically tragic person, lost in the dead-ends of existence. This compassion for tragic human fate determined the existential direction of Shestov's philosophy.

He was ultimately a romantic. It sounds paradoxical, for as soon as he matured, he parted for good with any kind of idealism which he deemed deceptive and ultimately destructive. Yet, he was an idealist in his youth and loved French Romanticism (another powerful influence of the epoch), especially Alfred Musset, Baudelaire and Verlaine. ‘Above all there is music, and the rest is literature’, - he liked to repeat in French before he discovered the ‘greatest music’, using Plato's terminology, - philosophy.⁸⁴ The reason he preserved that affinity to Romanticism is because in his philosophical views, as the next chapter will

⁸³ Unpublished story by Lev Shestov ‘He туда попал’. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 13.

⁸⁴ See Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 15.

demonstrate, he was an extremist. Such spiritual extremism is in itself a symptom of a romantic, even if not a conventional one.

In the cultural blend that formed Shestov's sensibility Russian literature together with Shakespeare, Kant, Nietzsche and the Bible eventually came to dominate other influences and gave Shestov, it seems, a certain spiritual inoculation against any failure of taste by creating a unique cultural balance, using the words of John Bayley again. It is, perhaps, this balance that kept Shestov safe from any parochial corporate involvement, whether social, political or philosophical, and helped him to develop a unique world of his own.

Some fundamental works which contributed to this balance can be seen from his letter to a close friend where he gives advice on a reading list as well as on general attitudes.

Хорошо было бы вам Данте прочесть, Гюго, Дюма сына и русских Толстого, Достоевского, Писемского, Гоголя, Тургенева, Белинского, Добролюбова. И затем – историю. Полезно – историю литературы, искусства и общественных движений. [...] ..не бойтесь бездны премудрости. Она не так страшна. [...] Не робейте. [...] ...и не вздумайте подчиниться влиянию того круга, который встретится вам в Париже. [...] Победит вас лишь ваш собственный страх.⁸⁵

Shestov's general recommendations which profess a firm belief in one's own strength and abilities, independence of spirit and not bending to the authority of famous names constitute an interesting and instructive feature of this letter.

Bayley finds a manifestation of Shestov's cultural balance in his remarkable sanity and common sense, and attributes its origin to Shestov's multiple identity as a Jew, a Russian and a European.⁸⁶ In a similar vein Louis Shein essentially describes Shestov as psychologically Russian, but thematically European.⁸⁷ He sees Shestov as a product of Russian culture in some respects, but in others not fitting at all into the milieu of which he was a product.

⁸⁵ Shestov's letter to V. G. Malakhieva-Mirovich of April 1896. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, pp. 24-25.

⁸⁶ Bayley, 'Idealism and Its Critic', p. 1.

⁸⁷ Shein, p. 12.

We wish to add to the above that the specifics not only of space – whether Russian or generally European, – but also of the time played, in our view, an important role in producing the phenomenon of Shestov with the remarkable cultural balance that he indeed had. Because, returning to Brodsky's words again, it was an age when nothing stood between man and his thoughts about himself.

While the time itself provided a rich blend of intellectual influences (or in many cases, if you like, anti-influences) which shaped Shestov in his youth, he ultimately made his very personal choices and re-emerged from the usual youthful idealism, although - as one would expect - a nihilist, but not a conventional one. For the nihilism of those years was intimately connected to the rise of secularism. In contrast, Shestov's nihilism consisted of, as it were, negating the existing nihilism, in fighting secularism at its roots. His first non-idealistic book (which was his second book chronologically) already proclaimed the urgent need to search for God.

Any epoch with all its dominant currents requires not only its heroes, so to speak, but also anti-heroes - those who will go against the conventional wisdom of the time to produce something qualitatively new. Resisting the forthcoming age of faithlessness with the reign of scientific knowledge at its head, Shestov was profoundly anti-modern and yet he forestalled or even originated certain trends which ultimately formed the texture of modernity – existentialism, surrealism and postmodernism with its psychoanalytical orientation.

Unlike the majority of his friends and compatriots Shestov did not stop in awe of Tiutchev's lines:

Умом Россию не понять,
Аршином общим не измерить.

У ней особенная статья.

В Россию можно только верить.⁸⁸

He did not fall into the opposite extreme either – of Chaadaev's total disillusionment with Russia, bordering on rejection, when in his *First Philosophical Letter* Chaadaev said that 'мы жили и продолжаем жить лишь для того, чтобы послужить каким-то важным уроком для отдаленных поколений, которые сумеют его понять; ныне же мы, во всяком случае, составляем пробел в нравственном миропорядке'.⁸⁹ For Shestov a blind faith in the country that Tiutchev promoted was replaced by a blind faith in the omnipotent God for whom he constantly searched.

He was born, it seems, happily cosmopolitan (and in that manifestly European) and, as the underlying material for his philosophy, was ultimately interested in what we would now call comparative cultural studies – literary and philosophical. This national impartiality of Shestov had little to do with his Jewishness, although it is tempting to say that he could never feel fully Russian and was ultimately without a motherland. It is, however, not true – as we argued in the previous section Shestov's confessional choice was ambivalent, while his deep affinity to Russian literature was unquestionable. The extracts from his youthful stories given above are deeply symbolic in this respect as they show with a remarkable power how young Shestov, through the mouth of his hero, was swearing an oath to the undying 'task of the Russian intelligentsia'. Moreover, although frequently spending time abroad, Shestov never intended to leave Russia for good, and in 1914 he finally moved with his family to Moscow in the hope of settling there forever. If it had not been for the tragedy of the Bolshevik revolution, he would surely have stayed.

It is instructive to compare Shestov's allegiance to the Russian cause on the one hand and his perfect understanding of Russia's historical position and its confused attitude to Western

⁸⁸ Fedor Tiutchev, 'Умом Россию не понять...' in *Стихотворения*, ed. K. Pigarev (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1945), p. 261.

⁸⁹ P. Ia. Chaadaev, '1829-1831, Lettres sur la philosophie de l'histoire. Lettre Premiere' in *Сочинения и письма П. Я. Чаадаева*, ed. M. Gershenzon (reprint of the edition: Moscow 1913-1914) (Oxford: Mouette Press, 1972), p. 85.

values on the other. In his book on Turgenev – in a passage which later became part of *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness* – Shestov wrote with brilliant irony:

Культурность - наследственный дар, и сразу привить ее себе почти никогда не удается. [...] Мы [...] в короткое время огромными дозами проглотили то, что европейцы принимали в течение столетий. [...] Стоило русскому человеку хоть немного подышать воздухом Европы, и у него начинала кружиться голова. Он истолковывал по-своему, как и полагалось дикарю, все, что ему приходилось видеть и слышать об успехах западной культуры. [...] И чем несбыточней были его грезы, тем охотнее он принимал их за действительность. Как разочаровался западник Герцен в Европе, когда ему пришлось много лет подряд прожить за границей! И ведь он, несмотря на всю остроту своего ума, нисколько не подозревал, что Европа менее всего повинна в его разочаровании. Европа давным-давно забыла о чудесах: она дальше идеалов не шла; это у нас в России до сих пор продолжают смешивать чудеса с идеалами. [...] Ведь наоборот: именно оттого, что в Европе перестали верить в чудеса и поняли, что вся человеческая задача сводится к устройению на земле, там начали изобретать идеалы и идеи.⁹⁰

This demonstrates the breadth of Shestov's intellectual vision as well as the fact that his Russian patriotism was indeed profound, because ironic criticism is a much more authentic feature of true love than blind adoration. This healthy attitude is akin to that of the best Russian cultural figures who, being exposed to Western values, were not afraid of issuing the most offensive ironic remarks about their country. Amongst them there were Pushkin with his famous 'Черт догадал меня родиться в России с душою и с талантом!'⁹¹ and Blok's *Skythians* (*Скифы*): 'Да, скифы - мы! Да, азиаты - мы, С раскосыми и жадными очами!'.⁹² In this poem Blok expressed with piercing perceptiveness the ambivalence and torment of Russia's attitude to the West and to its own place in history, but unlike Shestov's ironic tone, Blok's poetic voice is tragic:

Россия - Сфинкс! Ликуя и скорбя,
И обливаясь черной кровью,
Она глядит, глядит, глядит в тебя
И с ненавистью, и с любовью!⁹³

⁹⁰ Lev Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, pp. 29-30.

⁹¹ A. S. Pushkin, from the letter to his wife of 18.05.1836 in A. S. Pushkin, *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах* (Moscow: 'ТЕРРА'-'TERRA', 1997), vol. 10, p. 272.

⁹² A. Blok, 'Скифы' in *Стихотворения, поэмы, театр*, vol. II, p. 196.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 197.

Although born a Jew under the Russian autocracy, Shestov nevertheless had the benefit of an all-round education and was exposed to all the contemporary cultural trends as well as the vast philosophical and literary heritage of preceding generations. His cultural openness, sensitivity and inquisitive mind contributed to his main distinguishing feature of becoming profoundly international. He approached Russian literature with the extreme passion of Russian psychological irrationalism and at the same time with the shrewd European utilitarian attention to ideas as such. In his comparative cultural analysis not only did he take burning questions from the hands of Russian writers as well as from the thinkers of all times and peoples, but he also transposed them across and beyond narrow national boundaries – to a superior plane of existential problems intrinsic to man *per se*.

Chapter 2. Shestov's philosophical credo as part of his literary discourse

Although the study of Shestov as a philosopher per se lies outside the scope of this thesis, his philosophy is central to his whole life and creative heritage and therefore cannot be avoided in our explorations. However, what this study will try to avoid is a technical and narrowly specialised exposition of his philosophical views and their analysis which constitutes the main body of existing Shestov studies. On the contrary, it will attempt to present his philosophy as viewed first and foremost from a literary rather than a philosophical standpoint and only in so far as it is necessary for the study of him from a literary perspective.

The only exception to this approach will be given in section 2.3, where we shall expose from a purely scientific (more precisely – mathematical) point of view some technical errors in Shestov's reasoning (especially relevant given that he did have a mathematical background). Such a treatment appears to be entirely novel, as hitherto either philosophers in their polemics with Shestov have provided a critique of his philosophical discourse and techniques, or artists have commented on his writings from their perspective. The approach of natural science has never been applied to the foundations of Shestov's thought.¹

2.1 Faith and reason. Systematic critique of speculative philosophy.

Before starting a discussion of Shestov's philosophical ideas it is first necessary to point out the profound distinction between his very definition of what constitutes philosophy and that of more conventional philosophers.

It is crucial to understand that Shestov, like Kierkegaard whom he discovered rather late in life, saw the source of philosophy not in curiosity or astonishment, but in despair. Shestov's view on what philosophy as such is about is aptly summarised by Louis Shein as follows: 'the task of philosophy consists in escaping from the power of rational thinking and in

¹ A brief discussion on this topic, by a professor emeritus of mathematics, appeared recently, while the current dissertation was being written. See, Ricardo Nirenberg, '2x2=5' in *The Tragic Discourse. Shestov's and Fondane's Existential Thought*, ed. R. Fotiade (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 47-54.

finding in oneself the audacity (only despair gives man such audacity) to seek the truth in that which all have become accustomed to consider as paradoxical and absurd';² philosophy is 'what is most important'³ and the result of 'magnanimous despair'⁴ rather than speculation and reasoning. Moreover, instead of clarifying world phenomena and unravelling their inner logic and driving force, a true philosophy in Shestov's eyes should on the contrary demonstrate to man that even those things in the universe that seem perfectly obvious are in fact completely enigmatic and mysterious. Philosophers must, Shestov wrote, 'освобождаться и других освобождать от власти понятий, своей определенностью убивающих тайну. Ведь истоки, начала, корни бытия - не в том, что обнаружено, а в том, что скрыто: Deus est Deus absconditus (Бог есть скрытый Бог)'.⁵

Clearly, this extreme view contradicts conventional teachings. It is perhaps best exemplified by a much more traditional (in the West especially) – and very lucidly expressed – perception given by Bertrand Russell in the introduction to his *History of Western Philosophy*:

Philosophy [...] is something intermediate between theology and science. Like theology it consists of speculations on matters to which definite knowledge has, so far, been unascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to authority, whether that of tradition or that of revelation. All definite knowledge [...] belongs to science; all dogma as to what surpasses definite knowledge belongs to theology. But between theology and science there is No Man's Land, exposed to attack from both sides; this No Man's Land is philosophy [...] The conceptions of life and the world which we call 'philosophical' are a product of two factors: one, inherited religious and ethical conceptions; the other, the sort of investigation which may be called 'scientific' [...] Individual philosophers have differed widely in regard to the proportions in which these two factors entered into their systems, but it is the presence of both, in some degree, that characterises philosophy.⁶

On this scale Shestov certainly takes an extreme stand, for his sort of philosophical investigation is primarily by revelation rather than speculation. At least so he himself

² Shein, p. 13.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Lev Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим* (Moscow: Folio, 2001), p. 371.

⁶ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961), p. 13.

asserts. In fact, Shestov openly says that philosophy is not a science, but an art. ‘Философия с логикой не должна иметь ничего общего’, he proclaims, ‘философия есть искусство, стремящееся прорваться сквозь логическую цепь умозаключений и выносящее человека в безбрежное море фантазии, фантастического, где все одинаково возможно и невозможно’.⁷ Perhaps for that reason almost every scholar who has attempted to analyse Shestov's works has pointed out the difficulty of a systematic study of him. The main objection is that Shestov is deliberately asystematic – instead of constructing a philosophical system of his own he fights against virtually all existing systems. His style is notably literary, which, despite rendering him one of the most readable philosophers, obstructs understanding by being enriched with multiple aphorisms and sophisticated irony. His personified approach to the thinkers he was interested in only complicates matters further, because it mixes together the authors' existential experience and their ideas. Still, the biggest objection of all put forward by Shestov scholars is his *idée fixe* – the power of a single idea that came to dominate all his works. As Czeslaw Milosz wrote, ‘Shestov hammers at one theme again and again, and after a while we learn that it will emerge inevitably in every essay; we also know that when the theme emerges, his voice will change in tone and sustain with its usual sarcasm the inevitable conclusion. His voice when he enters an argument is that of a priest angry at the sight of holy vessels being desecrated’.⁸ This main idea lies in juxtaposing Athens and Jerusalem: reason and faith.

Shestov was a rebel and laid his very own path in philosophy. He did not have the benefit of a philosophical university education and took pride in it, for it saved him, he claimed to Fondane, from the narrow-mindedness of a doctrinal academic approach. ‘It is only because I did not study philosophy at university that I preserved freedom of spirit’,⁹ Shestov said. Thus he was able to start from scratch and reinvent the wheel. And the wheel he reinvented was not at all like a conventional one.

⁷ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, II, p. 28.

⁸ Milosz, p. 102.

⁹ Fondane, p. 88.

According to Shestov's own words one of his first teachers in philosophy was Shakespeare. Reading Shakespearean tragedies was for Shestov an overwhelming experience, and when later he discovered a book by George Brandes with a critical study of Shakespeare he was infuriated by its cold rational approach which exposed, in Shestov's eyes, the author's total indifference to the agony of the human predicament. Brandes wrote about Shakespeare, Shestov thought, being virtually unaffected by his deeply disturbing tragedies. 'His reading was superficial, it skimmed on the surface of things',¹⁰ Shestov said to Fondane, and added metaphorically, as was already quoted in the previous chapter,¹¹ that Shakespeare, clearly, did not disturb Brandes's sleep. Shestov's indignation found its form of expression in his first book *Shakespeare and his critic Brandes* with the epigraph taken from Nietzsche: 'I hate all idle readers'.

This book was the first and only book by Shestov written from an idealistic and dogmatic standpoint. Yet, it is important to linger over it because without understanding Shestov's point of departure one cannot appreciate either the transformation of his philosophical convictions, or his ultimate conclusions. Another important reason is that despite the apparent abyss (noted by most Shestov scholars) between this book and subsequent ones the grains of Shestov's thought in its eventual form can already be found there. Interestingly, this observation is shared by A. Valevicus who says in his monograph on Shestov: 'Even though the style, tone and content are completely different from anything else which he was to later write, in many ways the entire Shestov in all his audacity is already in evidence and, retrospectively, we can distinguish certain themes which were to become leitmotifs in all his future works'.¹²

In his first book Shestov displayed his belief in the general good (what we would now call an abstract humanism) and in the rationally justifiable design of the universe which has purpose and meaning. Despite the genre of literary criticism this was a clear beginning of Shestov's philosophical search, for in this book he showed his deep concern with the

¹⁰ Fondane, p. 85.

¹¹ See Section 1.2.

¹² Valevicus, p. 11.

fundamental questions of human existence. ‘Шестов’, writes Ivanov-Razumnik, ‘[...] с ужасом остановился перед фантомом *Случая*, обесмысливающего человеческую жизнь. [...] Целые годы искал он ответа на этот мучивший его вопрос о бессмысленности жизни, о случайности ее’, Razumnik continues. ‘Ему казалось сначала, что этот вопрос можно решить в сторону признания смысла жизни, низвержения призрачного Случая и замены его “разумной необходимостью”’: такой ответ нашел он в творчестве Шекспира’.¹³ Indeed, Shestov asserts, inspired by the writings of Shakespeare:

Там, где для нас хаос, случай, бессмысленная борьба мертвой, равнодушной, но бесконечно могучей силы с живым, чувствующим, но немощным человеком (т.е. там, где для нас область нелепого трагизма), – там поэт видит осмысленный процесс духовного развития. Под видимыми всем людям муками он открывает невидимую никому задачу жизни,¹⁴

In fact, by assigning an idealistic value and meaning to life with all its tragedies Shestov at the time was essentially advocating the Kantian point of view of total predetermination being an *a priori* law of nature. He denied the accidental nature of life and tragedy by investing them with a deep moral meaning. ‘Шекспир возвещает великий закон осмысленности явлений нравственного мира’, Shestov wrote; ‘случая нет, если трагедия Лира не оказалась случаем’.¹⁵ Everything has sense which we often fail to see, which we simply cannot yet explain – this is Shestov's basic stance in his first book. According to Razumnik there is a dichotomy in the question about the meaning of life: either there is no meaning and our life is accidental, or there is no accident and so there is meaning to life. ‘Шестов’, Razumnik asserts, ‘начал со второго ответа и пришел к первому’.¹⁶

Indeed, already then, when searching passionately for meaning in life to the extent of advocating tragedy, Shestov in fact was trying to overcome his own growing scepticism with respect to this idealistic system of beliefs. As we quoted in Chapter 1 Shestov told

¹³ Ivanov-Razumnik, pp. 168-170.

¹⁴ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 183.

¹⁶ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 171.

Fondane that in his first book he was speaking from a moral perspective which he abandoned shortly after; but even then, this perspective was pushed to such limits that it was fairly obvious that the frame was going to crack soon enough. Shestov had thus taken the usual path of Belinsky, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and so many others – as he himself came to demonstrate in his later writings – who also started with idealism, which ultimately developed into complete disillusionment, leading them to seek different answers.

However, although Shestov's first book was his final, desperate and ultimately unsuccessful attempt at self-persuasion about the sense and meaning of existence, what is remarkable about it, and already then clearly manifested, is his original approach to philosophical problems – an approach which we would call psychological and distinctly anthropocentric. Along the lines of the well-established traditions of Russian literature Shestov placed a human being in the centre of his investigations since he was preoccupied by the enigma of human life, the nature of suffering, tragedy and injustice. Shestov's insights were achieved first and foremost through the psychological analysis of the literary heroes that he conducted. Thus, for example, Shestov traces the tragedy of Hamlet to his distorted psychology: his one-sided inner composition which manifests itself in his reflective and contemplative nature at the expense of his under-developed psychological make-up (the failure to engage actively in reality), of his withdrawal from real life. Similarly, Shestov draws a psychological profile of Brutus from *Julius Caesar*, exposing him as a representative of ethical individualism (in Ivanov-Razumnik's classification),¹⁷ of the unity between living and thinking, of feelings equipped with reasoning.

Moreover, Shestov already then begins to interlink the personal search of the writer (in this case Shakespeare) with the spiritual quest and psychological evolution of his heroes. This tendency will only strengthen as Shestov matures as a writer and moves to his purely philosophical works. In the Introduction to the first of such works – *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness* – where his clear philosophical orientation is finally refined, he treats philosophers first of all as human beings rather than bearers of certain philosophical ideas. In the same light Shestov views the philosophical outcome of their contemplation – as a

¹⁷ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 181.

result of their existential experience more than (or at least equally as) the result of their abstract philosophical speculations. 'Мне заметят', he writes, 'что когда возбуждаются философские вопросы, всякие лирические отступления несвоевременны. [...] Это было бы справедливо, если бы философы [...] состояли из одних идей, а не из нервов и мускулов... [...] Философ знает усталость, которая какой угодно конец предпочитает продолжительному скитанию'.¹⁸

It is worth noting in this connection that Shestov was elected to the Moscow Society of Psychology as early as 1915 while still in Russia. He was, of course, a contemporary of Freud and undoubtedly found the ground-breaking teaching of the latter interesting. Notably, Shestov himself never applied Freudian techniques in his psychological analysis of literary characters and their creators, yet some scholars talk about Shestov's approach as laying the foundations for psychoanalysis in literary scholarship. For instance, Blagova and Emelianov assert, 'Мы полагаем возможным рассматривать Шестова как предтечу психоаналитически ориентированного литературоведения, сделав, правда, необходимые оговорки'.¹⁹ Thus the authors speak of Shestov's interest in the personal tragedy of the writers under his study, but emphasise the extreme respectfulness that Shestov showed towards them. In Part II we shall have the opportunity to view Shestov's approach in the context of formal psychoanalytical theory when dealing with Shestov's treatment of individual writers. Moreover, in Chapter 7, on Chekhov, a comparison will be drawn between Shestov's and Freud's approach to existence. In this context Shestov's friendship with Dr Max Eitingon – Freud's first formal student – will be discussed. In emigration Shestov became good friends with Eitingon – a distinguished psychoanalyst who trained Fania – Shestov's sister – in psychoanalysis. '[...] с ЭЙТИНГОНОМ мы больше беседуем о самых общих вопросах психоанализа – и Oedipus-Komplexus в наших разговорах уходит на последний план',²⁰ Shestov wrote to Fania in 1922 about one of his many encounters with Eitingon. Interestingly, Fania eventually became an extremely successful psychoanalyst and in Palestine (Israel), where she spent many years (from 1939

¹⁸ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁹ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 118.

²⁰ Shestov's letter to Fania Lovtskii of 10 Nov. 1922, cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 243.

until 1956), was one of the most active members of the Psychoanalytical Society of Israel and created a strong school of students.²¹

With his distinctly psychological approach to literature and through the latter to philosophy Shestov seems to have broken new ground. Later, especially with the rise of psychoanalysis, such a method of literary study was no longer a novelty, although it was largely rooted in applying Freudian theories. In a way an echo of a more Shestovian approach can be seen in the popular book *Accentuated Personalities* by Karl Leonhard where the characters of world classical literature are used to display and examine human psychological abnormalities and innate patterns. However, in that book this approach is a thing in itself, whereas Shestov applied it to a much more profound and ambitious task with far-reaching consequences – that of contemplating major philosophical problems.

In fact, as will also be demonstrated in Part II, Shestov can be considered as a precursor not only of the psychoanalytical trend in literary science, but also of the ‘narrative psychology’ approach. The latter is a modern concept which emerged in the framework of post-modernism and came to occupy an important place within contemporary psychology, dealing predominantly with narratives of the Self. As Anna Bull writes, ‘narrative research is considered especially important when the object of analysis is personal experience and personal identity’.²² This is particularly relevant in the case of Shestov’s approach to literature and its authors, and helps to map Shestov’s place within a broader framework of existentialism. Indeed, the distinctly Shestovian phenomenon of placing the main emphasis on existential experience, manifested already in his first book, laid the foundations for later labelling his entire philosophy existential.

Apart from the clear existential orientation there is another remarkable feature of Shestov's book on Shakespeare which also displays the continuity of his thought and is, in fact,

²¹ See more on it in Baranova-Shestova, II, p. 301.

²² A. Cento Bull, forthcoming, ‘Political violence, stragismo and “civil war”’: an analysis of the self-narratives of neofascist protagonists’ in *Imagining Terrorism: The rhetoric and representation of political violence in Italy, 1969-2006*, eds. P. Antonello and A. O'Leary (London and Leeds: Legenda).

closely related to its existential dimension. In our view this feature lies in the fact that despite the obvious idealism of *Shakespeare and his critic Brandes* – an idealism which Shestov later completely abandoned – it nevertheless contains the origins of what grew to become his main *idée fixe*. Indeed, in this book he raised the question of science encroaching upon the domain of art and attempting to lay hold of the issues which describe the inner life of man:

Человек науки, учёный, по своему воспитанию, по своим привычкам, по всему складу своей души вышел из тиши своего кабинета и положил свою руку на жизнь. Это, несомненно, величайший факт из новейшей истории. Наука и её двигатели уже не хотят только служить жизни, подчиня ей внешний мир – они ищут перекроить жизнь сообразно тому идеалу, который они нашли там, в этом внешнем мире, где многого, что есть в нашей человеческой жизни, – нет, но где царит безмятежный покой ровного существования. Там цели нет, там смысла нет, там нет чувства восторга, там нет холода отчаяния – всего этого и не нужно. Всё это следует вырвать из груди человека, чтобы возвысить его “до природы”. Человеку науки это было проще всего. Он оттого и стал учёным, что меньше всего знал и ценил те именно человеческие чувства, которых “в природе” – сколько ни ищи – никогда не найдёшь.²³

Thus already at that time Shestov started the juxtaposition of science and art which, if we look at it this way, later became the juxtaposition between reason and faith. However, the evolution of the former into the latter was gradual. Moreover, taking a literary approach we would assert that the central conflict of Shestov's philosophy – that between faith and reason – has at its roots, as the underlying cause, the conflict between art and science. According to Shestov those are the two opposites which are impossible to reconcile, and which Western philosophy nevertheless has forever tried to reconcile – on the plane of faith and reason – in a rather futile fashion.

‘Всё XIX-ое столетие представляется Л. Шестову заполненным борьбой протестующих индивидуалистов художников – Байрона, Мюссе, Гейне – с торжествующими свою победу мыслителями в роде Тэна’,²⁴ wrote Ivanov-Razumnik. He then generalized this observation to the statement which captures the core of the existential outlook: that the subjective is forever juxtaposed by Shestov to the objective:

²³ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 11.

²⁴ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 199.

‘объективное, общеобязательное противопоставляется субъективному’.²⁵ Indeed, right from the start Shestov focused on the idea that there are things in the phenomenon of a human being which do not lend themselves to scientific analysis – precisely because they are so individual, private and subjective that they escape generalization and hence lie outside the domain of science. However, science in its steady advance and with a depressing self-assurance claims omnipotence in the human world – if not today, then tomorrow and therefore the very foundations of such science have to be questioned, Shestov says. The objective is trying to oppress the subjective, and human reason instead of standing up for every living soul, on the contrary validates this oppression. Therefore, Shestov concluded, human knowledge and reason must have something deeply wrong at their very roots. By what right does Hellenistic philosophy, hand in hand with its direct heir – modern European thought, – Shestov asks, regard man as no more than another link in the evolutionary chain, as if sealing his tragic destiny with rationalist approval? Necessity celebrated by reason Shestov met with a definite indignation and rebellion. He therefore did no less than to provide a fundamental critique of the whole history of Western philosophy.

The most illuminating expression of the quintessence and roots of Shestov's rebellious thought is given by Czeslaw Milosz in the following beautiful lines:

What does a creature that calls itself “I” want for itself? It wants to be. Quite a demand! Early in life it begins to discover, however, that its demand is perhaps excessive. Objects behave in their own impassive manner and show a lack of concern for the central importance of “I” [...] The “I” is invaded by Necessity from the inside as well, but always feels it as an alien force. Nevertheless the “I” must accept the inevitable order of the world. The wisdom of centuries consists precisely in advising acquiescence and resignation. [...] Shestov simply refuses to play this game of chess, however, and overturns the table with a kick. For why should the “I” accept “wisdom”, which obviously violates its most intense desire? Why respect “the immutable laws”? Whence comes the certainty that what is presumably impossible is really impossible? And is a philosophy preoccupied with man in general of any use to a certain man who lives only once in space and time? Isn't there something horrible in Spinoza's advice to philosophers “Not to laugh, not to weep, not to hate, but to understand”? On the contrary, says Shestov, a man should shout, scream, laugh, jeer, protest. In the Bible, Job wailed and screamed to the indignation of his wise friends.²⁶

²⁵ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 199.

²⁶ Milosz, pp. 103-104.

Shestov chose a distinctly anti-rational approach by refusing to surrender to this eternal necessity which seems to reign undividedly in the universe and which came to be worshipped by 'secular' philosophy, by men of Reason. Shestov, in contrast to the latter, in a very artistic, irrationalist rather than scientific way, juxtaposed temporal, but passionate existence to soulless objective reality, and centred his philosophy around man's suffering.

Having started with advocating tragedy in the name of some higher truth Shestov soon ran into a dead end and realised that the answers provided by the idealistic outlook are by no means satisfactory. His personal discovery of Nietzsche had a shattering impact on him and sealed his realisation of how illusory are the consolations offered to a suffering individual by the general good and morality. Shestov's further steps along this route soon led him to another existential discovery that 'самой характерной для человека чертой является боязнь правды'.²⁷ Shestov sensed the huge extent to which man is prepared to go in order to shield himself from the horrors of reality, in order to create for himself a would-be stable, secure and comfortable environment. By comfort we mean here spiritual, mental comfort which is not to be confused with a banal materialist one. This comfort has been conveniently offered to man by his rationalist approach to the world, or, in short, by reason.

'Нам покажется', he writes, that 'истины - и первые и последние - рано или поздно будут нами добыты и нами постигнуты с такой же ясностью и отчетливостью, с какой мы постигли уже многое множество средних истин. Что теологический и метафизический периоды истории остались далеко за нами и мы живем под знаком положительной науки, ее же царствованию нет и не будет конца!'.²⁸ However, Shestov exclaims, we are still living 'окруженные бесконечным множеством тайн. [...] То, что мы считаем истиной, что мы добываем нашим мышлением, оказывается в каком-то смысле несоизмеримым не только с внешним миром, в который нас окунули с рождения, но и с нашими собственными внутренними переживаниями'.²⁹ And despite the enormous advances of natural sciences, Shestov states, "туман" первозданной тайны

²⁷ Lev Shestov, *Начала и концы*. Предисловие in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, p. 181.

²⁸ Lev Shestov, *На весах Иова* (Moscow: Folio, 2001), p. 184.

²⁹ Lev Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим* (Moscow: Folio, 2001), p. 26.

не рассеялся. Скорее, еще более сгустился'.³⁰ For Shestov mysteries are everywhere, even in things that seem perfectly straightforward; but the human mind tends to shriek away from them. However, there comes a time in everybody's life when we encounter tragedy, death, solitude and despair. This is the moment of truth according to Shestov, because only then a human being is free from all bonds and duties, and thus can think in a most uninhibited and penetrating way.

когда человеку грозит неминуемая гибель, когда пред ним раскрывается пропасть, когда уходит последняя надежда, с него внезапно снимаются все его тягостные обязанности в отношении к людям, человечеству, к будущему, цивилизации, прогрессу и т. д., и взамен всего этого предъясняется упрощенный вопрос об его одинокой, ничтожной, незаметной личности,³¹

Shestov says. It is then that man really starts seeking ultimate answers to the burning questions of existence, it is then that true philosophy is born. Thus, according to Shestov, true philosophy is the philosophy of tragedy. Everything else is just an attempt to go the opposite way – to escape from reality, to calm, stupefy and comfort the human spirit – in other words, to lull it to sleep rather than to awaken it to the intense and painful search for true answers. This was the case with Shestov's passionate philosophising and that is why Berdiaev observed that 'Shestov was philosophising with all his being' ('философствровал всем своим существом') and philosophy was for him 'a matter of life and death' ('делом жизни и смерти').³² In a similar vein, although decades later, David Gascoyne described Shestov's activity as 'actual spiritual activity'³³ consisting of an 'undivided truth-seeking'.³⁴

We note that, interestingly, this lonely and intense quest for the truth and the way of extracting it – by revelation rather than speculation – always attracted artists, perhaps because it is in itself reminiscent of the process of artistic creativity, and in our view this is no coincidence. This comparison will become clear in the next chapter where we shall

³⁰ Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим* (Moscow: Folio, 2001), p. 27.

³¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, pp. 396-397.

³² Nikolai Berdiaev, 'Основная идея философии Льва Шестова' in Lev Shestov, *Умозрение и откровение* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1964), pp. 5-9 (p. 5).

³³ Gascoyne, p. 128.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 131.

focus more closely on Shestov's proximity to art. Here, however, we shall restrict ourselves to a quotation from Boris de Schloezer which illuminates this point further, even if in a rather aphoristic way:

Anyone who absorbs Shestov's ideas, acknowledges the force of his criticism, and tries to follow him, will find himself alone, as Shestov himself is alone since he broke with the common world. ...In spite of our almost-certainty that the revolt will come to nothing, [...] many of us find something extraordinarily attractive in Shestov's thought: once we have known its influence, we can never go back on it even though we may part company with Shestov. [...] Though still enslaved by reality, one is no longer a consenting slave. [...] Because the hope of salvation, the hope of a miracle is alive in one's heart.³⁵

Now, if we trace the mental path of Shestov through his works taken in chronological order, we can see that having started with juxtaposing artists and thinkers in his first book, Shestov went on to juxtapose philosophy and preaching in his second book: *Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching*, and the tragic and the ordinary in the third: *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy*. The profound rift between Shestov's first book and the subsequent ones marked a drastic turn in his convictions. This turn was celebrated by Shestov in his fourth book which could have served as his ideological manifesto if not for the paradox that in it he consciously declared the renunciation of all 'sensible', 'rational' ideologies. Hence the title: *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness*.

Bernard Martin noted that this book

already adumbrates a number of the chief characteristics of existentialist thought. It contains not only a vigorous attack on the speculative metaphysics of the neo-Kantian and Hegelian idealist variety that dominated European academic philosophy at the time but also a radical challenge to the pretensions of scientific positivism and its basic assumptions, namely, the principle of unalterable regularity in the sequence of natural phenomena and the idea of causal necessity that is supposed to govern them. Shestov further denied the value of autonomous ethics and passionately insisted on the need for subjectivity and inwardness in the search for truth.³⁶

³⁵ Boris de Schloezer, 'Léon Chestov', *The Adelphi*, 5 (3) December (1932), 157-162 (p. 160).

³⁶ Bernard Martin, 'The life and thought of Lev Shestov', Introduction to Lev Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem*, trans. Bernard Martin, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966), pp. 11- 44 (p. 19).

These, in fact, firmly remained the principal features of Shestov's thought. The two books which followed (*Beginnings and Ends* and *Great Vigils*) only continued and furthered his outlook.

Thus Shestov's failure to convince himself in a habitually shared way that morality and good can overcome Chance in human life as well as all the horrors of existence ended his initial idealistic perception of the world and landed him in total disillusionment. Already then amid the nihilistic phase that naturally ensued, Shestov recognised the need for a positive stance. He ended his second book – the one which marked his rebirth as a thinker – with an essentially religious message: ‘Нужно искать того, что *выше* сострадания, *выше* добра. Нужно искать Бога’.³⁷ However, it is only in his next book – on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche – that his new philosophy was taking a definite shape. It was then further formed and perfected in *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness* where Shestov largely parted with the genre of literary criticism and chose a purely philosophical orientation. From then on his thought was gradually refining itself by entering the same struggle against reason over and over again; and the counter-balance to reason – outweighing and overcoming it – Shestov found in faith (which he labelled a second dimension of thought) – an unquestioning faith in the omnipotent God. This principal motif of setting reason and faith (Athens and Jerusalem) against one another only to argue the superiority of the latter over the former provides the basis for virtually all the major works of Shestov written in emigration: *Sola Fide*, *Potestas Clavium*, *On Job's Scales*, *Kierkegaard and Existential Philosophy* and finally his fundamental (and last) work: *Athens and Jerusalem*. In it Shestov summarised the life-long achievements of his thought. In particular he wrote: ‘Мудрость человеческая есть безумие пред Господом, и мудрейший из людей был, как это согласно прозрели столь непохожие друг на друга Ницше и Киркегард, величайшим грешником. Все, что не от веры, есть грех’.³⁸

Thus Shestov's main concepts included faith, reason, truth and freedom as well as tragedy and death. His principal aim was to liberate mankind from universal necessity and bring it

³⁷ Shestov, *Толстой и Ницше*, p. 316.

³⁸ Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим*, p. 25.

to the state of infinite possibility. To this end he called upon human beings to awaken from the hypnosis of self-evident truths, from the enchantments and promises induced by Reason which the Hellenistic and later the whole of Western philosophy embraced. His struggle was to overcome reason, to fight against the restricted nature of the human Mind. The alternative that he suggested was faith – another dimension of thought which originates in the Scriptures and is achieved by revelation. Therefore Shestov's philosophy is normally branded irrationalist. Moreover, unlike other representatives of irrationalism in Russian philosophy, such as Skovoroda, Khomiakov, Golubinsky and others, Shestov produced the most shrewd criticism of the sources of rationalism ('проницательный анализ основных предпосылок рационализма'), in the words of Vasili Zenkovsky, and experienced and communicated with an extraordinary force the supernatural origins of faith ('инобытие веры').³⁹

In the sections that follow we shall discuss in more detail first of all Shestov's attempts to overcome the power of Mind and secondly the theological aspect of his thought, which according to some scholars like Zenkovsky, is central to Shestov's philosophy. In fact Zenkovsky goes as far as to suggest that Shestov's thought is decisively theocentric, rather than anthropocentric.⁴⁰ In our view the roots of what Zenkovsky perceives as Shestov's theocentrism – his preoccupation with the Deity and the origins of faith – lie precisely in Shestov's anthropocentrism, in his concentration on the tragic human predicament and in his attempts to liberate man by finding the true God from whom man became separated by knowledge. Thus at best Shestov's philosophy is a combination of theocentric and anthropocentric approaches.

Zenkovsky also asserts that Shestov's philosophy cannot be squeezed into the narrow frame of existentialism, for his fundamental themes spread far beyond the latter.⁴¹ However, from our perspective – when we interpret Shestov's main conflict of faith and reason as originating from that between art and science (the individual and the general) and associate

³⁹ Zenkovskii, II, p. 376.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 366.

⁴¹ Zenkovskii, II, p. 366.

his 'method by revelation' with the generally artistic (where the subjective is set against the objective) – his thought certainly falls under the label of existentialism. In Shestov's mature stage it evolves into biblical existentialism, and it is the latter that the concluding section of this chapter deals with.

2.2. The struggle against the Mind by means of the mind. Overcoming the self-evident.

We have already explained that for Shestov a fundamental task of philosophy was to demonstrate the existence of mystery in the seemingly obvious, instead of – on the contrary – clarifying and explaining that which seems mysterious. The latter function – of killing mystery – Shestov assigned to science in a rather derogatory fashion. It is interesting to compare this stance of Shestov with the following statement by the distinguished Russian literary scholar Iurii Lotman:

Наука начинается с того, что мы, вглядываясь в привычное и, казалось бы, понятное, неожиданно открываем в нем странное и необъяснимое. Возникает вопрос, ответом на который и призвана явиться та или иная концепция. Исходным пунктом изучения стиха является сознание парадоксальности поэзии как таковой. Если бы существование поэзии не было бесспорно установленным фактом, можно было бы с достаточной степенью убедительности показать, что её не может быть.⁴²

Thus both agree, in a rather unusual way to some, that the enigma of existence is locked in that which appears clear and straightforward. However, what for Shestov is the task of philosophy – a certain wake-up call for humanity to abandon the framework of standard reasoning – for Lotman is a call for and the origin of scientific inquiry. Philosophy, according to Shestov, should alert us to mystery and lead us ultimately beyond rational speculation - to revelation, to the beginning of faith. According to Lotman, this mystery is a challenge to be taken on by science – the commonly shared view against which Shestov struggled all his life. Yet Lotman's words about poetry could have been repeated by Shestov, only he would have generalised them to the phenomena of life and death in their entirety. In the last section we quoted Shestov's statement that we live surrounded by an

⁴² Iurii Lotman, *О поэтах и поэзии (Анализ поэтического текста, статьи, исследования, заметки)* (St Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 1996), p. 45.

endless multitude of mysteries. 'Но как ни загадочны окружающие бытие тайны', he continues, 'самое загадочное и тревожное, что тайна вообще существует, что мы как бы окончательно и навсегда отрезаны от истоков и начал жизни'.⁴³ From this perspective Shestov inadvertently equated poetry and existence in that both are of a paradoxical nature, and this may actually carry a deep meaning and be more than accidental. Indeed, for him both were paradoxical, mysterious and beautiful, and the roots of both were forever concealed from us as humans. We will argue in the next chapter that Shestov's whole approach to the universe was of a poetic nature. It is precisely in paradoxical concepts that Shestov suggested that the truth should be sought, and the way to this search was supposed to be irrational.

'Никогда разум не в силах был определить зло и добро или даже отделить зло от добра хотя бы приблизительно; напротив, всегда жалко и позорно смешивал; наука же давала разрешения кулачные'.⁴⁴ These words of Stavrogin addressed to Shatov in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* Shestov cherished as revealing the helpless nature of the human Mind. He believed that it is Dostoevsky, not Kant, who has provided the real critique of pure reason, and enthusiastically shared this fundamental stance of Dostoevsky. He also claimed that this novel demonstrates 'во что превращается человеческая жизнь, оторванная знанием от ее творца'.⁴⁵

In this section we propose to navigate through Shestov's complex relationship with Mind and disentangle his attitudes in their evolution, separating the wheat from the chaff.

In short, Shestov's attempts were directed at exposing the inability of Mind to resolve the questions that matter most to mankind. He undertook to demonstrate the crucial limitations of reason and, moreover, the poison of its power and the harm of its self-assurance. Shestov

⁴³ Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Fedor Dostoevskii, *Бесы* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1982), vol. 10, p. 199. Cited in Lev Shestov, *О "перерождении убеждений" у Достоевского in Умозрение и откровение* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1964), p. 193.

⁴⁵ Shestov, *О "перерождении убеждений" у Достоевского*, p. 194.

emphasised how deceptive our perception of the universe really is and how easily we fall prey to the dictates of knowledge:

Колдун, ведьма, дьявол – это только нечто новое, но понятное, не противоречащее очевидности. Вертящаяся же земля, неподвижное солнце, фиктивное небо и т. п. – все это ведь верх бессмыслицы для ребенка. И тем не менее это – истина, он знает это наверное и с этой неправдоподобной истиной он живет целые годы. Разве такое насилие над детским умом может не изуродовать его познавательные способности? Разве вера в смысл бессмыслицы не становится его второй природой?⁴⁶

As we explained earlier, Shestov started by juxtaposing creative writers and scholarly thinkers, in short – art and science. From these two sources he derived related concepts which can be all generalized as the rational on one hand and the irrational on the other, but, interestingly, they were from his point of view always in contradiction with each other. For Shestov at the roots of his juxtaposition there lay a deep ancient conflict and throughout his entire writing career he never supposed that these concepts could exist in parallel, let alone coexist in some sort of fruitful, even symbiotic, collaboration. From Shestov's perspective it was always 'either, or'. He wrote about this yet again in his final work *Athens and Jerusalem*: “Афины и Иерусалим”, “религиозная философия” - выражения, почти равнозначащие и покрывающие друг друга и, вместе с тем, равно загадочные и раздражающие своей внутренней противоречивостью современную мысль. Не правильнее ли поставить дилемму: Афины либо Иерусалим, религия либо философия?⁴⁷ For Shestov,

Религиозная философия не есть разыскание предвечно существующего, неизменного строя и порядка бытия, не есть оглядка (*Besinnung*), не есть тоже постижение различия между добром и злом, обманно сулящее успокоение измученному человечеству. Религиозная философия есть рождающееся в безмерных напряжениях, через отврат от знания, через веру, преодоление ложного страха пред ничем не ограниченной волей Творца, страха, внушенного искусителем нашему праотцу и переданного нам всем. [...] Иначе говоря, она есть великая и последняя борьба за первозданную свободу и скрытое в свободе божественное “добро зело”, расцепившееся после падения на наше немощное добро и наше всеуничтожающее зло.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 438.

⁴⁷ Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 24.

Thus, Shestov's fundamental stance, which was mentioned earlier, is that 'все, что не от веры, есть грех'. Hence the strict juxtaposition of faith and reason. 'Наш разум, повторю, опорочил в наших глазах веру', Shestov crucially insists; 'он "распознал" в ней незаконное притязание человека подчинить своим желаниям истину и отнял у нас драгоценнейший дар неба, державное право участвовать в творческом fiat (да будет), втолковав и расплющив наше мышление в плоскости окаменевшего est (есть)'.⁴⁹

This intolerance attributed by Shestov to both domains – the rational and the irrational – with respect to each other also reveals, in our view, some deep underlying intellectual extremism of Shestov – or, if you like, some fundamental naïveté of his outlook. For it is ultimately rooted in his struggle against the scientific approach which demonstrates, in fact, that he misconstrued the concept of science as such. Indeed, in his interest first and foremost in the individual, subjective and particular he denied science its very nature of generalisation. In his 'Дневник мыслей' Shestov wrote

Разве можно поклониться законам? Ведь законы мертвы — человек же прежде и после всего живое существо. И, если кто кому кланяться должен, то не человек законам, а законы человеку. Оно так и есть отчасти. В общественной жизни законы создаются для человека, даже суббота, как сказано в Писании, для человека. Но наука этого не признает. Идеал ученого человека — свести все качественные различия к количественным. [...] И если бы, наконец, науке удалось избавиться от всех остатков, которые до сих пор не вмещались в формулы, она бы праздновала свою окончательную победу. [...] Как случилось, что наука создала себе такой идеал? Откуда ее вечная и непримиримая вражда ко всему одушевленному?⁵⁰

In our view, this basic misconception of the tasks, methods and nature of science played a substantial role in determining the way Shestov's philosophy evolved.

If initially art and science, as we mentioned above, were for Shestov simply embodiments of two opposite domains, then subsequently the exact content of both of them underwent a gradual evolution. Largely due to the above misconception, already in Shestov's second and third books (on Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky) what was concealed under the name of

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Shestov, 'Дневник мыслей' (entry of 22.11.19), pp. 248-249.

science acquired a different meaning: it involved all rational empirical knowledge which took hold of humanity. Everything which constituted human understanding of the universe, including the laws of nature and the rules they imposed on human behaviour, was classified by Shestov as suffocating self-evident truths bordering on vulgarity and having a philistine nature. In other words human reason became synonymous with what Dostoevsky's term of *всемство* (translated by Andrius Valevicius as 'omnitude') represents (common truths stretching down to low, down-to-earth aspirations shared by the mediocre majority). This identification is, of course, unjustifiable and, at the very least, surprising. However, Shestov is not concerned about providing justification. He is primarily occupied with giving evidence for the prosecution of Mind, as Balakhovsky rightly observes in his article.⁵¹ Balakhovsky also makes the very interesting observation that once we add to Shestov's use of Mind the adjective 'standard', everything suddenly starts making sense.⁵² Indeed, what Shestov really means seems to be the standard, conventional ways of thinking which are indeed characteristic of that mediocre majority that he, like Dostoevsky, refers to as *всемство*. At the time it was this way of thinking or rather this outlook on life that Shestov really attacked, while assigning its vices to the human mind *per se*. However, this utilitarian way of thinking is, in fact, diametrically opposed to the creative flight and daring of scientific thought. Yet, over time the image of the enemy in Shestov's philosophy becomes refined and from a rather wild blend of science and rationalistic, philistine convictions there emerges pure Reason.

Interestingly, Shestov with his affinity for polarisation is not seduced by the rather Nietzschean path that opens up at this point – the juxtaposition to this implicitly mediocre majority called *всемство* of some creative minority who, by contrast, are interested in the eternal questions, a spiritual search, and so on. Shestov, while accepting in principle this division between people does not mind the existence of the 'standard' majority, does not denigrate their values and does not necessarily acknowledge, let alone celebrate, the superiority of the implicitly sophisticated minority. 'Не нужно [...], чтобы существовало убеждение, что способность исключительно отдаваться высшим вопросам науки и

⁵¹ Balakhovskii, p. 43.

⁵² Ibid, p.46.

искусства выгодно отличает человека',⁵³ he writes in his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*. Assessing mankind in this way and inducing inequality of this kind does not interest him. It is not in social boundaries that his interest lies. He is preoccupied by the boundaries within the human psyche as such, by the limitations of reason, by the life of the soul which is generally called spirituality. He has his own – very different – agenda and his incentive seems pure and noble. He truly wants to liberate humanity from its burdensome rationalistic chains, and ideas of the superiority of some over others are completely alien to Shestov. In this he differs substantially from Nietzsche whom he infinitely respected as a very profound thinker.

Once the root of all evil was traced by Shestov to the human mind as such, he began a relentless search through the whole intellectual history of mankind to find more and more evidence against the gloomy and restrictive power of reason and to disavow the adherents of the rational school as well as to find his own associates – those who, like Shestov, rebelled against the self-evident. Thus this crusade, although conducted in a very persuasive, coherent and eloquent way, is difficult to regard as a fair analysis. It is more a one-way street for Shestov, a case for the prosecution only, where he strives with ultimate audacity towards the answer that awaits him all along, while he claims to be genuinely searching for truth. Indeed, he himself undoubtedly perceived his lonely struggle as an infinite and terrifying search for the ultimate answers, especially difficult given that Shestov essentially fought against the achievements of Western civilization of which he was himself a product. Zenkovsky wrote: 'после торжественных "похорон" рационализма в одной книге, он снова возвращается в следующей книге к критике рационализма, как бы ожившего за это время. Но все это объясняется тем, что разрушив в себе один "слой" рационалистических положений, Шестов натывается в себе же на новый, более глубокий слой того же рационализма'.⁵⁴

Curiously, Zenkovsky essentially repeated Shestov's misconception of science, as he said: 'Шестов чувствовал всю правду Откровения, и его не пугали мелкие завоевания

⁵³ Shestov, *Толстой и Ницше*, p. 299.

⁵⁴ Zen'kovskii, II, p. 367.

критицизма в отношении Священного Писания, как не импонировали ему все так называемые “завоевания” современной науки’.⁵⁵ Zenkovsky wrote with joyful enthusiasm about Shestov's struggle against rationalism and stressed that one of Shestov's achievements was in disclosing that “автономия разума” (“трансцендентализм”) неизбежно превращается в тиранию разума’.⁵⁶ He clearly embraced the fact that Shestov's philosophical foundations lay in religious consciousness and mystical ethics and that Shestov managed to shoot in passing ‘метко и удачно по самым, казалось бы, бесспорным, но “чудовищно-нелепым” утверждениям современного знания’.⁵⁷ The question thus arises, which we pose in passing: was it not the case that everybody interested in philosophy in general and Shestov's philosophy in particular who did not actually come from a scientific background was persuaded by Shestov's elaboration and inclined to share his conclusions? It might have been precisely that unfamiliarity with and unawareness of scientific methods and goals which might have allowed one to follow Shestov on his path of anti-scientism.

Shestov's rather unscrupulous treatment of the concept of mind demonstrates that to prove his extraordinary point he engages in those very blind generalizations of which he himself violently accuses science. Indeed, he groups together under the label of Mind things which are totally unrelated to each other, such as philistine ideology and scientific inquiry. On the whole he himself uses the only means available to man in any intellectual dispute – logical arguments, that is to say that very Mind against which his attacks are directed. This is obviously the most fundamental contradiction in his entire philosophy, which was pointed out to him multiple times. However, he never seemed to take this seriously and essentially avoided any polemics. In particular, he famously replied to Berdiaev: ‘Что правда, то правда. Поймал. Только зачем ловить было? И разве так книги читают? По прочтении книги нужно забыть не только все слова, но и все мысли автора, и только помнить его лицо’.⁵⁸ Berdiaev, however, made the very pointed observation that Shestov ‘боролся против тирании разума, против власти познания, изгнавшего человека из

⁵⁵ Zen'kovskii, II, p. 377.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lev Shestov, *Похвала глупости* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, p. 238.

рая, на территории самого познания, прибегая к орудиям самого разума'.⁵⁹ Bernard Martin noted this paradoxical strategy of defeating mind by means of the mind: 'His polemics against scientific knowledge and reason, as even the most superficial reading of his work reveals, are themselves peculiarly lucid and rational'.⁶⁰ Milosz commented: 'Paradoxically he waged his war as an anti-rationalist using rational argument as his weapon'.⁶¹

There was clearly something idiosyncratic in the outright war against reason that Shestov waged single-handed and which became his mission in life. He knew that and did not expect any understanding or serious following. The following words that Shestov said to A. Z. Shteinberg in a conversation about the origin of his pen-name, clearly had a broader implication for the reception of his thought in general: 'После моей смерти пусть говорят и пишут, кому что угодно. Но ни за что не хочу прослыть сумасшедшим при жизни'.⁶² Shestov believed that humanity would eventually – possibly in the very distant future – discover for itself what became his personal truths. Meanwhile, however, the Job's scales on which individual human grief outweighs the sand of the seas 'кажутся философам XX-го столетия верхом нелепости',⁶³ he wrote in his correspondence.

Thus over time Shestov's attacks against science became (rather illogically) directed against any standard reasoning and eventually grew to encompass any rational form of perception. When ultimately he pronounced Mind (or Reason) as the main enemy, his juxtaposition between art and science was transformed into that between speculation and revelation – or between Reason and Faith (Athens and Jerusalem).

The evolution of the domain of art into that of faith was also gradual and signified Shestov's transition from a purely nihilistic stance to a positive one which eventually became dominant and, arguably, the most valuable aspect of his whole philosophy.

⁵⁹ Berdiaev, 'Основная идея философии Льва Шестова', p. 8.

⁶⁰ Martin, p. 37.

⁶¹ Milosz, p. 118.

⁶² Aaron Shteinberg, *Друзья моих ранних лет (1911-1928)* (Paris: Sintaksis, 1991), p. 258.

⁶³ From Shestov's letter of 19.10.1926 to Max Eitingon. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 357.

Notably, it was also inseparable from his struggle against mind – as in the siphon phenomenon: the more he went away from the rational the closer he approached the irrational. Indeed, Shestov traced the origins of the unbearable poison which penetrated human life (and rendered it finite and tragic) to original sin – i.e. to acquiring knowledge and thus losing the primordial freedom and happiness granted to humans by God. Thus he searched for the Truth in the Bible and assigned the primary significance to the story of the Fall. As Milosz writes, ‘Shestov doesn't hesitate to speak of man before he tasted from the tree of knowledge of good and evil as possessing omniscience and absolute freedom. What, then, was the Fall? A choice of an inferior faculty with its passion for a *distinguo* and for general ideas, with pairs of opposites: good, evil; true, untrue; possible, impossible. Man renounced faith in order to gain knowledge. Shestov names his enemy: Reason. He even says the fruits of the forbidden tree could just as well be called synthetic judgments *a priori*’.⁶⁴ The last section of this chapter will look more closely at Shestov's treatment of faith and at the biblical aspects of his philosophy.

Faith for Shestov grew out of the ‘irrational remainder’ – all the inexplicable aspirations of the soul. Right from the start everything subjective, poetic and spiritual Shestov ascribed to the domain of art and artists. These encompassed the creative and rebellious aspects of life which intrinsically refused to submit to objective necessity. And since Shestov passionately searched for a way of overcoming the stone wall of the impossible, at the foot of which, he thought, human reason bowed its head, he eventually arrived at the only other alternative – religious faith.

The opening paragraph of *Athens and Jerusalem*, which we quoted in parts above, delivers the most alarming truth which hits the heart of the matter: that the main mystery – that about the sources and beginnings of life – is unattainable for humans.

Из всего, чему мы являемся свидетелями на земле, это явно самое нелепое и бессмысленное, самое страшное, почти противоестественное, неотразимо наводящее на мысль, что либо в самом мироздании не все благополучно, либо наши подходы к истине и предъявляемые к ней требования поражены в самом корне каким-то пороком. Как бы мы ни определяли истину,

⁶⁴ Milosz, p. 107.

мы никогда не можем отречься от декартовских *clare et distincte* (ясность и отчетливость). А тут вечная тайна, вечная непроницаемость, словно еще до сотворения мира кто-то раз навсегда решил закрыть доступ человеку к тому, что для него нужнее и важнее всего.⁶⁵

These words of Shestov, put together with an earlier quote – ‘то, [...] что мы добываем нашим мышлением, оказывается [...] несоизмеримым [...] с внешним миром, в который нас окунули с рождения’,⁶⁶ point to his firm conviction that the very nature of the human mind, *par excellence*, is flawed, unreliable and incapable of giving final answers to the most important questions of existence. In a certain sense, being ‘forever separated from the sources and beginnings of life’ captures all the tragedy of the human predicament and seals off the intrinsic incapability for humans of going beyond the designated area, as it were given from above, of what is possible to attain by knowledge and what is not. The scope of questions which lie outside human reach people cannot, by definition, be conclusive about. They are therefore faced with a very personal choice of dealing with these sort of questions. Some turn away from them altogether, others believe in some superior power in the Universe – whether called God, or Nature, or some supernatural force (this is only a matter of terminology) or do not believe. The latter, like the former, may have their own model of Creation, of life and death, but the point remains that these sorts of questions are beyond answering, because any conjecture ultimately runs into a mystery which is impossible to prove or refute, which is, *par excellence*, beyond human power. For this reason religious faith, as well as faithlessness, do not lend themselves to proper disputes based on any logical arguments. As in matters of personal preference, polemics are really out of place here. In other words, there are phenomena in our universe which constitute the material for scientific inquiry and can be studied and in principle be ‘understood’; but there are also questions, the answers to which may indeed be forever remote from man, that is to say there are not (and in principle cannot be) any means at man's disposal for answering them. They represent the domain of faith.

Thus reason, organised into science, has its own domain where it can operate and extract objective knowledge about the universe. On the other hand there is a domain of the

⁶⁵ Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

subjective, individual and private which cannot be generalised and therefore lies outside the scope of scientific inquiry. It is responsible for the irrational, it lends itself exclusively to faith and can only be addressed by art and not by science.

In our opinion – and this is one of our principal claims – Shestov's main role and significance was that he pointed out the existence of the boundary between the kingdom of reason and that of faith; he protected as it were the domain of art, or the subjective, from the encroachments of science, or the objective. If his attempts to disavow Mind as such seem absurd, they suddenly gain full sense when viewed as attempts to point to the limitations of the latter and to draw the line around questions which do not, in principle, lend themselves to rational explanations. His main philosophical achievements lie on the plane of the Divine where he exposed the total inadequacy of the application of reason to questions of religious faith and thus provided a critique of theology.

Thus Shestov, in our opinion, can be viewed as a regulator of the boundaries between Athens and Jerusalem, using his own terminology. It is in this sense, we think, that one should interpret the words of the poet Viacheslav Ivanov addressed to Shestov on his seventieth birthday. 'Если строить культуру с Вами нельзя, то нельзя строить ее и без Вас, без Вашего голоса, предостерегающего от омертвения и от духовной гордости',⁶⁷ wrote Ivanov; 'Вы похожи на ворона с мертвой и живой водой'.⁶⁸ These words, in our opinion, can be taken as an epigraph to the whole creative heritage of Shestov, as the summary of the ultimate value of his philosophy.

In the light of the above, various purely philosophical (in the technical sense of the word) arguments concerning Shestov's philosophy appear misplaced. Indeed, any discussion on matters which are beyond any rational proof are by definition vacuous. For example, along these lines, Galtseva's analysis of Shestov's philosophical claims which is described in the article by Taras Zakydalsky and enthusiastically supported by the latter, seems flawed to us. Galtseva essentially claims that if God can undo the past then human achievements, not

⁶⁷ Letter of 10 Febr. 1936. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 146.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

just failures, will be nullified. In Zakydalsky's account, 'if salvation consists in undoing the past, then not only the horrors of the past but also the moral victories, by which at least some individuals overcame tragedy and gave meaning to their lives, will be revoked. This salvation is even more oppressive to the individual than the self-renunciation proposed by the rationalist tradition'.⁶⁹ However, since the action, as it were, takes place in the domain of the irrational then anything is possible and no rational argument really applies. Therefore Shestov could answer this criticism, say, in the following way: God is the omnipotent one for whom all things are possible, therefore when mending the past He will leave human achievements untouched, but only repair the damage done. Such examples could be continued endlessly, but one is enough, in our view, to show the demagogical nature of such polemics altogether.

There is, however, something else to add to our discussion above. The conflict between subjective and objective, art and science, reason and faith, if and when it exists, manifests, if you like, 'the tragic split between ethics and aesthetics' that mankind once underwent.⁷⁰ At least at the level of mind and soul, of rational and irrational beginnings in a human being, no antagonism is necessary – on the contrary, harmony is desirable and, in fact, possible, as some of the best examples that mankind has produced show. Equally on the plane of art and science it could be argued that these two domains are harmoniously and inseparably united in the phenomenon of genius. Truly great scientists as well as artists always exemplify how scientific and artistic perceptions of the universe co-exist in symbiosis, which can be labelled as ultimate creativity in general. However, interestingly, the words of Fazil Iskander, a contemporary Russian writer, can be interpreted as pointing to some fundamental truth concealed in the main aspirations of Shestov's philosophy: 'Цель человечества – хороший человек. И другой цели нет и быть не может. [...] Ум без нравственности неразумен, но нравственность разумна и без ума'.⁷¹ Thus, in a sense (albeit a rather figurative sense) he establishes a certain superiority of soul over mind, or the subjective and irrational over the objective and rational, of faith over reason or

⁶⁹ Rephrase of Gal'tseva, p. 113 in Zakydalskii, p.159.

⁷⁰ The quote is from Fazil' Iskander's novella 'Поэт', published in *Сюжет существования* (Moscow: Podkova, 1999), where this issue is discussed (pp. 143-144).

⁷¹ Fazil' Iskander, 'Понемногу о многом', *Новый мир*, No 10, 2000, p. 122.

Jerusalem over Athens. This very much reflects the claim about the truth of which Shestov tried to persuade humanity throughout his life.

2.3. The iron laws of Necessity. $2 \times 2 = 5$ and other 'errors'.

Years after Shestov's death various scholars maintained that the time for his ideas had not yet come. 'Лев Шестов – это будущее, и в очень малой степени – настоящее', wrote one of the editors of the journal *Grani*, N. B. Tarasova, in her letter to Shestov's daughter Natalie, in 1960.⁷² It was her response to being sent an article by German Lovtsky 'Лев Шестов по моим воспоминаниям'. 'Когда г-н Ловцкий упоминает о непонимании современников, то это вполне закономерно. Слишком Ваш отец шагнул вперед',⁷³ Tarasova concluded. Marc Yolis from Buenos Aires, who translated Shestov's works for the local Jewish philosophical journal *Davke* and organised the placement of Shestov's manuscripts in the Jewish Scientific Institute of Buenos Aires, called Shestov a deep thinker 'к которому мыслящий мир вернется через еще столетия'.⁷⁴ Yolis maintained that Shestov's writings 'будут служить путеводной звездой в непроходимых дебрях таинства бытия'.⁷⁵ He believed that assessing Shestov's contribution is a matter for future generations – 'к трудам его лежит вечный путь, который не зарастет травой забвения'.⁷⁶

Shestov himself believed that his ideas indeed belonged to the future when they would finally be appreciated and their truth confirmed. As was mentioned, he did not expect twentieth century thought to understand them, let alone to share them. The way he envisaged a suitable place for his ideas was that they would turn out to be part of some major all-encompassing teaching (or, rather, a revelation) which is still to dawn over mankind, akin to the way in which Newton's physics inscribed itself into Einstein's.

⁷² The letter (of 18.05.60) is cited in Baranova-Shestova, II, p. 222.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ From Yolis's letter to Natalia Baranova-Shestova of 20.12.55. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, II, p. 237.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

However, in the case of Newton's and Einstein's theories, as in other examples of this kind, such as, say, Euclidian and Lobachevsky's geometries, the former fits into the latter as its limiting case. In a similar way we can say that our planet is a plane rather than an ellipsoid if we are looking at a sufficiently small area of it. This simply means that in the case of such a small sample it is indeed best approximated by the area of a plane than a sphere. This does not run into contradiction with the fact that the whole planet is elliptic. Thus, when speeds in Einstein's physics approach a relatively low boundary Newton's physics applies. However, a different model results from and is determined by a different set of axioms. Whether such a model can exist in some reality is another question.

Shestov was aware of the existence of axioms that describe our universe or rather our current model of it. It is precisely those fundamental postulates and their corollaries that Shestov seemed to rebel against, because for him they were both only the representation and validation of the stone wall of necessity – the wall which stands in the way of human freedom.

Thus Shestov's rebellion, somewhat like that of Don Quixote, was directed against the eternal and indifferent force that seems to govern the Universe, or in other words against the laws of nature. He could not tolerate the fact that man is forever trapped, helpless in the power of that force, while the latter is a law in itself. The power of reason and the autonomous ethics which comes as a result only endorse that force and impose restrictions on humankind which soulless necessity seems free from (or rather it is indifferent to their existence). Thus, for example, says Shestov, the human being is not permitted to kill, but thunder is: 'Грому – можно убивать, а человеку – нельзя. Засухе можно обрекать на голод огромный край, а человека мы называем *безбожным*, если он не подаст хлеба голодному! Должно ли быть такое противоречие?'⁷⁷ Shestov exclaims. In general, man is completely exposed to these blind forces of nature and the fundamental injustice of this slavery is something he refused to accept. A way forward that Shestov saw was, as has been pointed out before, in the sphere of the irrational, in the domain of faith.

⁷⁷ Shestov, *Добро в учении гр.Толстого и Ницше*, pp. 307-308.

He cherished Dostoevsky's Underground Man who also refused to accept that necessity despite all the obvious omnipotence of it. 'Какая каменная стена? Ну, разумеется, законы природы, выводы естественных наук, математика . Уж как докажут тебе, например, что от обезьяны произошел, так уж и нечего морщиться, принимай как есть. [...] нечего делать-то, потому дважды два – математика'.⁷⁸

However, in our opinion, if Shestov attempted to fight against Reason by means of reason (in the absence of any other means available to man) he should have, at least, known the enemy better. His fundamental misconception of science which was discussed in the previous section landed him in the middle of the enemy's side of the battlefield where he could not really feel competent. In other words, not only did he appeal to formal logic in order to fight against it, but his appeal was also flawed. This section will expose some of Shestov's logical errors which confirm his lack of familiarity with the natural sciences, especially mathematics, despite the fact that Shestov did have some mathematical background. Indeed, as was mentioned in Chapter 1, he originally enrolled to read mathematics at Moscow university. Subsequently he transferred to the Faculty of Law, but within the latter he specialised in economics which again belongs more to the domain of the sciences than to the humanities. Nevertheless his treatment of logical concepts appears somewhat weak. Or, speaking more precisely, he falls victim to the same misconceptions as any non-specialist would (and most of his fellow philosophers indeed have been rather foreign to the domain of precise science). The difference is, however, that they did not attack the latter; they conducted their battles on a different plane, whereas Shestov targeted science quite consciously. Hence the demands on him in this respect should be higher, and he certainly falls short of fulfilling them.

As follows from the quotation given above, Shestov, expecting his philosophy to belong to the future, believed that it would turn out to be embedded, in some sense, in a broader – comprehensive – theory, be a limiting case of it. Yet, since the domain he operated within was really that of the arts rather than the sciences, no logical constructions were appropriate

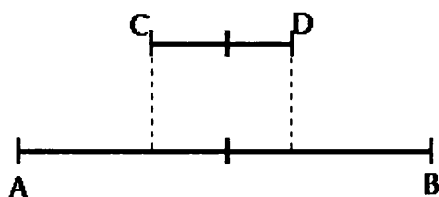
⁷⁸ F. M. Dostoevsky, *Записки из подполья* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 5, p. 105.

for it. Moreover, he himself defied and denied any theories *per se*. In general to struggle against logic by its own means is not a fair struggle and is rather reminiscent of a cat trying to catch its own tail. Therefore Shestov's arguments can only be taken figuratively, not literally; and his whole philosophy, in order to free itself from contradictions, to stop being an oxymoron, should be viewed as indeed belonging to art, not to science (and should therefore be read appropriately). To confirm that this is indeed the case is the purpose of the exposure of some basic faults in Shestov's mathematical education, if not logical errors *per se*, that we are undertaking in this section.

In the first case it is necessary to explain one straightforward mistake that Shestov makes when issuing his accusations against science in general and reason in particular. It is important to understand that essentially Shestov took the design of the universe as a personal insult, or rather what had become of this design since it was violated by original sin, by acquiring knowledge. In a way he regarded the existing laws of nature that govern the universe as his personal enemies with Reason being their faithful servant. They simply represented a stone wall of necessity which repelled him. Shestov listed these laws, called them by names which for him became common names. One of these, for example, which we shall discuss below, was a generalised label for any mathematical 'self-evident' truth: that '2 times 2 is four'. Another rule, hateful in its unshakability, was for Shestov that 'a whole is always larger than any of its parts'. Translated into precise mathematical language this statement would read: 'a set is always larger than any of its proper subsets' where a proper subset is that which is neither the whole set nor the empty set. It seems natural to an outsider to mathematics, like Shestov, while it is actually false.

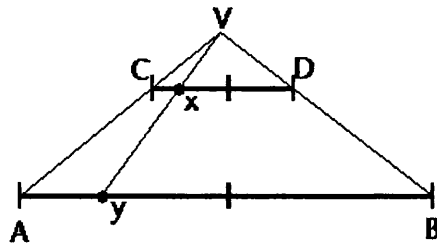
A counter-example which refutes this statement can be constructed as follows. As a set a segment of a straight line is taken. Let us label its end points as A and B and refer to the segment as AB. We can then take a subset of it, for instance a segment (of any length smaller than AB) symmetric with respect to the midpoint of AB. Let us call its endpoints C and D and refer to this shorter segment as CD. Now we clearly have the set up situation described in the statement above: we have indeed a set – AB – and its subset – CD. For visual reasons let us now raise CD above AB, as shown on Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1



Let us now join together points A and C as well as points B and D, and continue the two lines until they meet. The point of their intersection we shall call V. Thus we have drawn a triangle AVB with a segment CD contained inside it, as our diagram 2 shows. This construction will help us to establish that in this case the set AB and its subset CD consist of an equal number of points and therefore the subset is not strictly smaller than the set. To verify this we shall use a method similar to that when we need to establish that the number of guests in a room is the same as the number of chairs – we simply sit them down and see that no spare chairs or spare (i.e. standing) people remain. In our geometric case we shall ‘sit down’ every point from CD on every point from AB, as it were. More precisely, we associate with every point from CD a point from AB in the following way: take an arbitrary point X of CD and join together V and X, and then continue the line until you get to the intersection with AB. This point at the intersection (let us call it Y) will be the one associated with X. Now, from this geometric construction it is clear that two different points of CD will have two different points of AB associated with them, because the rays that start at V and go through a pair of points on CD will take them even further apart, as it were, when they come to AB. On the other hand, any point Y from AB will have a point X from CD with which it is associated. To find this point X simply reverse the procedure and join together Y and V – the intersection of this segment with CD will give us the required X (see Diagram 2).

Diagram 2



Thus we have associated with every point of the subset CD a point of the whole set AB in such a way that different points are associated with different points and no points of AB remain uninvolved. This means that we have found a one-to-one correspondence between the points of the set and its subset. Therefore they have the same number of points in them and to say that the subset CD is strictly smaller than the whole set AB is wrong. This proves that the general statement which Shestov believed to be a universal truth – that a whole is always larger than its parts – is also false.

Thus, as this example only confirms in a particular case, Shestov's vision of Reason was essentially blurred. Because of this shortsightedness the strict borderline that he drew between reason and faith with his uncompromising allegiance to the latter did not define the two camps well enough, as he perceived and portrayed them. In this binary oversimplified division Shestov overlooked, for instance, the fact that what he regarded as the opposite camp may, in fact, have had his allies in it. Similarly he himself tirelessly exposed the adherents of reason within the camp of Faith – all those who tried to explain the inexplicable, to reconcile the two. While Shestov could disregard the latter as traitors to the true faith, scientists could hardly be classified by him as traitors to reason and secret knights of faith. He was simply unaware of the complicated divisions within science and hence within reason. Moreover, it seems as if, once he was convinced that reason was the root of all evil, he did not want to give it any benefit of the doubt. Thus this somewhat crude division – Athens versus Jerusalem – did not reflect the true disposition of forces.

This point can be clarified by a particular example which concerns the law of contradiction. One of Shestov's main objections to speculative philosophy was concealed in this law

which is sometimes called the law of the excluded middle. It states that any coherent statement is either true or false and no middle way exists. Shestov knew that the assurance of speculative philosophy and science that what is pronounced impossible is really not possible is due to this hateful law of contradiction which for him constituted the main part of that stone wall that he strove against. However, what he apparently did not know is that everything is not that simple and that mathematics – for Shestov an almost derogatory term – like Mind itself is constantly developing and has a dynamics of its own. He would probably have been most surprised to learn that the beginning of the twentieth century – very much his lifetime – was marked by an emerging school of thought among mathematicians who cast doubt upon this hitherto unshakable law. They were called ‘intuitionists’ and their claim was essentially that of Shestov – how do we know that what is not true is necessarily false? (in Shestov’s language: whence comes the certainty that the impossible is not really possible?). Intuitionists rejected a proof by contradiction. That is to say, if in order to prove that a statement A is true one proves instead that the negation of A is false, it does not yet mean to them that A is indeed true. They only accepted the direct proof – for example, if one talks of the existence of a certain mathematical object one has to construct it rather than to prove that the assumption that this object does not exist leads to a contradiction.

In the light of the above examples the words of a leading contemporary Russian philosopher, A. V. Akhutin, seem particularly relevant. According to the latter the depths of Greek philosophy reveal that

тревожная граница, отделяющая окончательное знание от бесконечного незнания, проходит не между эллинским Разумом и библейской Верой, а в самом сердце этого Разума. На этой-то границе – в средоточии той мифологизированной метафизики, которую, собственно, и имеет в виду Шестов, говоря о царстве Разума, – и рождается философия. [...] Философия подводит мысль к некоему *ничто* мысли и бытия, где еще нет того, что еще только *может быть*. Философия имеет дело не с вечными истинами, а с тем, *как они возможны*, – с *допущениями* вечного бытия. Шестов и сам порою близко подходит к такому пониманию “второго измерения мышления”, но вся эта напряженная парадоксальность философского

мышления немедленно утрачивается, когда распадается на два вполне однозначных полюса – разума и веры.⁷⁹

This split within reason itself, as well as the complicated nature of the evolution of the latter, essentially escape Shestov's attention. In the same way with his contempt towards the unshakable 'axioms' as a reflection of necessity Shestov could not begin to imagine, it seems, that some of them might actually be dropped without changing the system that they determine. This fact was proved in the 1930s by Gödel in the language of formal logic and then developed further by his students.

Under the label of axioms Shestov apparently implied any 'self-evident truth' and an allegorical symbol of those for him was a simple consequence of the Peano axioms of arithmetic which describe the natural numbers. This consequence, which was already mentioned above, states that two times two is four. As early as in his first book Shestov already attacked this symbolic trademark of reason by pointing out the absence of causal connection between the laws of nature (or, as he puts it, the categorical imperative) and the laws of morality. Molière's Don Juan, says Shestov, 'верит только в то, что дважды два – четыре, а дважды четыре – восемь. И отсюда у него никак не выходит, что не нужно лгать'.⁸⁰ In his book *Great Vigils* Shestov adds to his struggle against this hateful arithmetical truth an interesting hypothetical twist borrowed from Mill: 'если бы каждый раз, когда нам приходится брать дважды по два предмета, какое-нибудь божество подсовывало бы еще один предмет, то мы были бы убеждены, что дважды два - не четыре, а пять'.⁸¹ This again shows a simple lack of understanding on Shestov's part of the ways in which science works. He does not suspect that this new reality would not shake the foundations of the natural sciences. Indeed, the reaction of science to this phenomenon, if it ever occurred, would be quite predictable. If this creature inserted a fifth object every single time, then indeed the conclusion would ensue that two times two is indeed five, and this would become a new law, a new necessity, against which Shestov himself would naturally

⁷⁹ A. V. Akhutin, 'Античность в философии Льва Шестова' – an introduction to Lev Shestov, *Лекции по истории греческой философии* (Moscow-Paris: Russky Put'-YMCA-Press, 2001), pp.5-19 (p. 13 and pp. 17-18).

⁸⁰ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 186.

⁸¹ Shestov, *Великие кануны*, p. 286.

soon rebel. However, if this creature did its trick only once in a while then scientists would start investigating the nature of this phenomenon, any pattern in the circumstances of its occurrence, and so on.

Interestingly, even the formal theory of arithmetic has turned out complicated enough to be knowable (regretfully, Shestov could not have known this). This is a consequence of Gödel's theorem mentioned above. In fact, Gödel's achievements amount to something of great significance which is directly relevant to Shestov's quest (and moreover – something that would have been deeply consoling for Shestov). Indeed, for a long time science was hoping that our universe could be described by a finite set of postulates. That is to say, that a finite number of equations (the derivation of which was considered to be only a question of time) could then predict the behaviour of natural phenomena, when supplied with the relevant initial data. However, Gödel put an end to such hopes, for he proved that any system which is sufficiently non-trivial is essentially unknowable.

To be knowable in this context means that a certain set of axioms and rules for manipulating them describes the system fully, i.e. any statement about this system can be deduced from the axioms, using the rules. According to Gödel, however, there always exists a statement that can be added to the axioms determining the given system without changing anything. This simply means that there is always a statement such that neither it itself, nor its negation can be deduced from the given set of axioms using the given rules. Thus the system is unknowable – and this is true of any system which is not completely trivial. On the other hand, even such a relatively straightforward theory as the formal theory of arithmetic is already an example of such a non-trivial system! Furthermore, the systems in the centre of scientific investigations are already incredibly simplified (in order to be made into an object of study possible to handle by the means available to human beings) and represent only a crude approximation to the real life systems. But if even such simplified (deliberately idealised) constructions are unknowable, then (one can ask rhetorically) what can be said about such immensely complicated systems as the human psyche, emotions and behaviour patterns? This information, if it was available to Shestov (and for that matter to Dostoevsky) would have completely eliminated their fears as to the

potential prospects of explaining the cosmos of human relationships by means of natural science.

Still, whether with or without Gödel's theorem in hand, any polemics with Shestov in this respect would most probably be pointless, because in a way Shestov's dispute with science is reminiscent of the story by Vasilii Shukshin entitled 'Срезал' ('Got you!'). It depicts an academic on vacation who comes to visit his home village. A local man with a chip on his shoulder, challenged by the implied intelligence of the visitor, decides to take him on in an intellectual battle. The story masterfully describes this battle in which no proper communication is possible, let alone a real understanding, for the two protagonists talk in different languages despite the fact that both are Russian speakers. Interestingly, the local witnesses of this dispute as well as the initiator of this duel himself remain totally convinced of the defeat of the educated visitor (hence the title of the story). In the same way, it seems, Shestov takes on science, from time to time exclaiming 'Got you!'.

In this vein one can view Shestov's letter to his friend A. M. Lazarev written in response to the latter's complaint that he does not understand Shestov's writings:

Понять можно Пифагорову теорему, менделеевскую периодическую систему, теорию Эйнштейна и даже любое философское построение. Ибо тут задача сводится к тому, чтоб неизвестное привести к известному. Но [...] когда неизвестное хочет отстоять свою независимость и не дается в плен известному – тогда ведь и задача меняется. “Понимание” оказывается ненужным, понять неизвестное тогда равносильно тому, чтобы потерять его. Я полагаю, что даже бесспорные научные объяснения в конце концов не приводят все-таки к пониманию. Считается, что мы “понимаем” воду, когда говорим, что вода есть соединение двух газов, взятых в известных количествах. Но разве, в сущности, это есть “понимание”? Вода, как была, так и осталась непонятной. [...] глухой может отлично постичь теорию звуковых волн, но он никогда не узнает, что такое звук.⁸²

Further in this letter Shestov explains that any substance which we try to incorporate into a causal chain is in fact breaking away from it. Thus, he concludes, Lazarev does not understand his – Shestov's – writings exactly because he tries – wrongly – to place them too into the chain of causal connections.

⁸² The letter (of 22 Sept. 1927) is cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, pp. 349-350.

Clearly, these views of Shestov do not withstand any rational arguments, but equally they are not intended for any rational dispute. If you like, in them Shestov insists on his fundamentally irrational stance, on his rebellion and his role as the *enfant terrible* of philosophy, as Czeslaw Milosz puts it.⁸³ Therefore, as we said above, his whole philosophy should be viewed from an artistic, rather than scientific perspective which, in particular, reinforces once again our literary approach to Shestov. The corpus of other conceptual justifications for this approach will be presented in the next chapter, but the principal reason should now be becoming clear, as a result of the above exposition. The lyricism of Shestov's perception of the world is undeniable and the main value of his position, as far as any speculative, if not specifically scientific approach to him is concerned, lies at the point where his otherwise peculiar anti-scientism turns into a sensitive and passionate defence of art and humanism as well as a refusal to submit to the common world with its suffocating necessity.

2.4. From nihilism to existentialism. Biblical truths. The problem of the Fall

Although the foundations for the religious orientation of Shestov's philosophy were laid even in his early writings, the religious phase as such took a while to prevail. More precisely it was only the second half of Shestov's writing career that can be referred to as biblical existentialism and for which he cleared the grounds during his first – nihilistic – phase. As Bernard Martin notices, 'his rebellion against rationalism and scientism was only [...] a preliminary step. It was a clearing of the way for his bold and fervent affirmation, in the mature and final phase of his life, of the truth of the biblical message'.⁸⁴ This mature phase started when Shestov was in his late forties.

Indeed, although his works, as should become clear from our earlier explanations, are marked by evident continuity and his initial phase of 'literary criticism' already contains much of what characterises his philosophy as a whole, his first explicitly religious book

⁸³ Czeslaw Milosz, 'Борьба с удушьем' in *Иосиф Бродский: труды и дни*, ed. Lev Losev and Petr Vail' (Moscow: Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 1998), pp. 237-247 (p.245).

⁸⁴ Martin, p. 13.

was *Sola Fide* on which Shestov worked in 1913-1914. Natalia Baranova-Shestova writes that 'Шестов выбрал заглавием книги изречение "*Sola Fide*", вероятно, потому, что оно ярко характеризует борьбу молодого Лютера за веру'.⁸⁵ She emphasises the remarkable soul kinship which Shestov felt for Luther during the period of the latter's youth because Luther's spiritual struggle was so close to Shestov's own. This book, Baranova-Shestova suggests, can be regarded in a way as Shestov's spiritual autobiography.⁸⁶ Parts of it were later included into *On Job's Scales* and *Potestas Clavium* where Shestov's religious philosophy was gaining its full momentum. *Kierkegaard and Existential Philosophy* was to follow with the final culmination in Shestov's fundamental work *Athens and Jerusalem*. *Sola Fide* itself was only published posthumously as was *Speculation and Revelation* which deals with the religious philosophy of Vladimir Solov'ev and various other thinkers.

There is still no agreement on what is central for Shestov's philosophy – God or man. As we already mentioned in section 2.1, Vasili Zenkovsky argued that Shestov is in substance a religious thinker and his philosophy is first and foremost theocentric; hence, according to Zenkovsky, labelling it anthropocentric (as for example Viktor Erofeev basically does in his study, insisting that the aspect of Salvationism in Shestov's philosophy is primary, while his religious search is secondary)⁸⁷ is wrong. We think that both trends of thought are of undeniable value. Definitely Shestov sought the Supreme Being, or the Truth, but on the other hand Shestov's principal concern was with the tragic destiny of man, man's lack of freedom which the latter was to regain only through Faith. Thus Shestov's philosophy evolved around both the divine and the earthly and, moreover, inseparably interlinked the two. Indeed, his central theme was that of the relationship between the individual, private and separate on one hand and the universal, general and unified on the other. His fundamental juxtaposition of Athens and Jerusalem can, in fact, be traced to the common source of thought stemming from contemplation on mortality by the ancient Greeks on one hand and the Jews on the other. Indeed, in his lectures on the history of Greek philosophy

⁸⁵ Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 125.

⁸⁶ See Baranova-Shestova, I, pp. 125-126.

⁸⁷ See Erofeev, for example: pp. 157, 162, 172 and especially 178.

Shestov himself points to the proximity between the perception of the private and the general by Anaximander and by the Old Testament:

Анаксимандр считает, что все отдельные вещи *каким-то незаконным способом вырвались из небытия к бытию*. ... Ни отдельные люди, ни животные, ни растения, ни даже неодушевленные предметы не в праве были выходить из лона единой, вечной сущности в этом мире. Не вправе были – и все-таки, пренебрегши изначальным законом, какой-то хитростью все-таки вырвались на свет и за это несут наказание.⁸⁸

Their punishment, Shestov says, is their finiteness, in the case of humans and living beings – their mortality. This is their expiation for the original sin: ‘Я нарочно употребил слово “первородный грех”, ибо для всякого, я думаю, ясно, насколько мысль Анаксимандра близка по существу своему той идее, которая заключена в библейском сказании о грехопадении первого человека’.⁸⁹ Man who disobeyed God, wanting to get out of the bosom on which he was destined to live, was punished by exile and mortality. Shestov emphasises that no borrowing whatsoever was possible between ancient Greeks and Jews, and thus both nations, stunned by the horror of death, posed the same question and gave the same answer.⁹⁰

This is consistent with Shestov's understanding, borrowed from Plato, that the theme of death is central for philosophy as such. He repeatedly discussed this idea – most notably in his fundamental work *Athens and Jerusalem* written in the genre of religious philosophy, where Shestov quotes from Plato's *Phaedo* that ‘дело философии [...] есть [...] упражнение в смерти’ and ‘все истинно отдававшиеся философии ничего другого не делали - только готовились к смерти и умиранию’.⁹¹ In line with this conviction Shestov made one of his central claims that we already mentioned – that true philosophy is born out of despair. Further on this route he emphasised that ‘резко отграничивать задачи философии от задач религии нет ни надобности, ни возможности’.⁹² To exemplify the true closeness between philosophy and religion he compared the first commandment:

⁸⁸ Shestov, *Лекции по истории греческой философии*, p. 66.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 66-67.

⁹¹ Lev Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим*, p. 54.

⁹² Shestov, *Лекции по истории греческой философии*, p. 55.

‘возлюби Господа Бога своего всем сердцем своим и душой’ with, as he put it, the first philosophical commandment: ‘умей оторваться от своих преходящих временных интересов и возлюби всей душой и всем твоим сердцем то, что выше тебя, то, что над тобой, – Вечную Истину’.⁹³

As was already mentioned in Section 2.2, one of Shestov's main and distinctive achievements is a total and thorough exposure of the intrinsic inadequacy of theological science. Shestov persistently argued that reason has no place and no power in the domain of the divine. In other words, since faith, by its very nature, does not submit to rational explanations, such explanations are *a priori* doomed to falsehood. Thus, according to Shestov, theology is imposture of sorts. He accuses it of an attempt to ‘paint over the cracks in existence’ (‘замазать [...] щели бытия’).⁹⁴ Thus Shestov wrote that ‘весь смысл “Теолого-политического Трактата” в том, чтобы вымести из нашего духовного багажа занесенные в него из Писания и ничем не оправданные мысли’.⁹⁵

As Milosz puts it,

According to Shestov, Hellenistic civilization could accept neither the God of the Old Testament nor Christ of the New Testament. It had to adapt the scandalous particularity of a personal God to its general ideas, shaped as they were through speculation. [...] The gnosis, when it absorbed Christian elements, was nothing more than an attempt to trim the Scriptures of their “capriciousness”, of their anti-generality equated with untruth. The heresy of Marcion in the beginning of the second century, inspired by the gnosis, altogether rejects the Jehovah of the Old Testament as an evil demiurge because his *incomprehensible* behavior seems offensive to an enlightened mind. But similar Hellenization of the Scriptures continued throughout the Middle Ages. Where the Scholastics affirmed that God created the universe by making use of some preexisting laws of Nature (two and two make four, the principle of contradiction, and so on, as eternal principles) they in fact put Necessity (universal laws) above the God of Genesis. They paved the way for the modern attitude that calls religion before the tribunal of Reason. The modern mind, Shestov affirms, is completely under the spell of formulas found in their most perfect form in two representative thinkers: Spinoza and Hegel. The latter said: “In philosophy religion receives its justification. Thinking is the absolute judge before whom the content of religion must justify and explain itself”.⁹⁶

⁹³ Shestov, *Лекции по истории греческой философии*, p. 67.

⁹⁴ Shestov, *Памяти великого философа. Эдмунд Гуссерль in Умозрение и откровение*, p. 304.

⁹⁵ Shestov, *Афины и Иерусалим*, p. 15.

⁹⁶ Milosz, p. 107.

For Shestov, on the contrary, if all were explicable man would not need God. Thus, as Zenkovsky writes, Shestov ‘с чрезвычайной настойчивостью все время выдвигает мысль, что рационализация веры, которую так искали в Средние века (“credo ut intelligam”), фактически вылилась в *отвержение* веры и замену ее богословием’.⁹⁷ Zenkovsky sees Shestov's utmost significance in his acute struggle against the system of secularism which constituted a fundamental problem in the development of Russian thought. ‘Творчество Шестова’, Zenkovsky asserts, ‘как бы завершает всю напряженную борьбу русской мысли с секуляризмом. В Шестове мы доходим до высшей точки в этом основном движении русской мысли – и здесь заключается все неоценимое значение его в истории русской философии’.⁹⁸ Intimately interrelated with Shestov's crusade against secularism is his perpetual inner struggle against the system of rationalism, even more significant in the light of his own rationalistic cultural roots. Interestingly, Zenkovsky suggests that it is because of the very personal nature of Shestov's struggle against rationalism that his philosophy acquires the features of existentialism. He points out that Shestov revived the topic, first introduced to Russia by the Slavophiles, of the untruth of rationalism and of its poisons; yet, Shestov understands rationalism in a much deeper and more subtle way than the Slavophiles did and provides an on-going thorough critique of it which ultimately turns into a fundamental critique of Western philosophy as such.⁹⁹

However, Zenkovsky notably concludes that Shestov's irrationalism is secondary to his creativity, whereas his religious world is primary. He sees the kernel of Shestov's thought in his extraordinarily strong and deep perception of the supernatural origins of faith.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, instead of rationalistic constructions of the Graeco-Roman civilisation Shestov develops a religious philosophy entirely based on faith and revelation.

In other words, looking from a literary (existential) perspective, we can say that having started with the eternal questions of existence seen through the moral implications of world

⁹⁷ Zenkovskii, II, p. 370.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 367.

⁹⁹ See Ibid, pp. 366-368.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pp. 376-378.

literature, Shestov rejected reason as an instrument for solving those questions in favour of the irrational concept of faith which he declared (most notably in his *Athens and Jerusalem*) ‘the second dimension of thought’ (‘второе измерение мышления’). The search for God proclaimed in the first book of his mature period (*Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, if we do not count his actual first book – on Shakespeare – written before the revaluation of all values) acquired new depth in the course of his writing career. Having faced the ‘accursed’ questions of the human predicament Shestov tried to search for his own answers and, following Nietzsche, questioned the validity of human morality and ended up attacking autonomous ethics. Along the same lines he followed Dostoevsky in the attempt to see if good has any force and power to save humanity, and moreover, if there is any salvation for the fallen. Spurning the social dimension of these questions, Shestov chose to view them from a religious angle and his search for the omnipotent God of the Bible rather than the sham, decorative god of the philosophers led him to the domain of Biblical existentialism. As Blagova and Emelianov point out in their study,¹⁰¹ Shestov offered an entirely new possibility of interpreting Dostoevsky's world view by suggesting that Dostoevsky juxtaposed the Bible to Western scientific achievements (we note here that this is precisely what Shestov did himself, claiming to have taken this approach from Dostoevsky). According to Shestov, Dostoevsky through Raskolnikov tried to find an interpretation of the Scriptures which does not reject the prayers of a fallen man. Shestov saw in Dostoevsky and shared enthusiastically his attempt to move from ‘religion within the limits of reason’ back to the ‘truth of revelation about the “living God”’: ‘От “религии в пределах разума” [...] он рвется обратно к истине откровения о живом Боге’.¹⁰² It is also in Dostoevsky that Shestov found his very own revolt against the indifferent laws of nature. He especially treasured Dostoevsky's words from *The Idiot* where the reference is to Holbein's painting of the dead Christ:

Природа мерещится при взгляде на эту картину в виде какого-то огромного, неумолимого и немомго зверя, или вернее, гораздо вернее сказать, хоть и странно, - в виде какой-нибудь громадной машины новейшего устройства, которая бессмысленно захватила, раздробила и поглотила в себя, глухо и бесчувственно, великое и бесценное существо - такое существо, которое одно стоило всей природы и всех законов ее, всей земли, которая и

¹⁰¹ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 94.

¹⁰² Shestov, *О ‘перерождении убеждений’ у Достоевского* in *Умозрение и откровение*, p. 185.

создавалась-то, может быть, единственно для одного только появления этого существа! Картиной этою как будто именно выражается это понятие о темной, наглой и бессмысленно-вечной силе, которой все подчинено.¹⁰³

Shestov draws fundamental philosophical conclusions from these sentiments of Dostoevsky which amount to Shestov's all-pervasive theme of the stone wall of necessity, oppressing every living being. It is this theme that lies at the core of his whole philosophy and which initiated his revolt and, as it were, his rebellion to defend the private against the general, the living and temporary against the soulless and eternal. It is this theme that sent him on the stormy search for solutions to such an unbearable human predicament and where he eventually found gnosis at the roots of the problem and faced the insoluble confrontation between the latter on one hand and faith on the other.

The more Shestov was getting convinced that reason is incompatible with faith to the point of killing it, the more he was waging a war on reason and ultimately traced to the roots of its poisonous power to the Biblical original sin. It is in Dostoevskii's *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, where the narrator in his dream visits a happy humanity on an unknown planet, that Shestov saw the story of the Fall with far reaching philosophical implications. In fact, Shestov's interpretation of this story can serve as the point of departure for his whole religious philosophy. As Milosz writes,

for Shestov the story of the Garden of Eden, because of its unfathomable depth and complexity, spoke for the superhuman origin of the whole Scripture. Explanations of the Fall advanced by both theologians and the popular imagination seemed childish to him when compared with chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis. Dostoevsky's intuition enabled him, Shestov felt, to guess at a *metaphysical state* of man before the Fall, not just to visualize a happy Rousseauistic society.¹⁰⁴

Milosz's explanations, which were partially cited before, summarise the turn of Shestov's thought: 'Shestov doesn't hesitate to speak of man before he tasted from the tree of knowledge of good and evil as possessing omniscience and absolute freedom. What, then, was the Fall? A choice of an inferior faculty with its passion for a *distinguo* and for general ideas, with pairs of opposites: good, evil; true, untrue; possible, impossible. Man renounced

¹⁰³ F. Dostoevskii, *Идиот* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 8, p. 339.

¹⁰⁴ Milosz, p. 106.

faith in order to gain knowledge'.¹⁰⁵ Thus in his attempts to trace the roots of the tragic human predicament Shestov found at those roots the fruits of the tree of knowledge. It is interesting to note in this connection that, as Blagova and Emelianov suggest, Dostoevsky's interpretation of original sin in his story of a Ridiculous Man is actually different from the one Shestov derived. Indeed, the writer saw the source of the Fall in lies, they claim, while Shestov saw it in knowledge. However, as Milosz writes, Shestov 'reminds us with relish that Saint Augustine hated the Stoics as much as Dostoevsky hated the liberals; both the Stoics and the liberals recommended a morality of self-sufficing Reason'.¹⁰⁶ Thus having rejected speculative philosophy with its formulae that 'the good is God' and 'Love is God' Shestov insisted that the abstract and general should not be put before the living and particular, that 'God is Love' is the only acceptable way round, and unquestioning faith is the only answer to human hopes and strivings.

In this connection it seems valuable to consider Sidney Monas's suggestion mentioned in the previous chapter of seeing a relation between Shestov's ideas and the Jewish mystical tradition, and to view Shestov's philosophy in the context of Hassidism 'with its primary emphasis on the unique and mystical experience'.¹⁰⁷ While it is not entirely clear whether Hassidism lay at the source of Shestov's ideas and influenced him in the shaping of his philosophy as he grew up (see section 1.2 for our arguments in this respect), we nevertheless acknowledge a certain undeniable proximity between the spirit of Hassidic thought and Shestov's ideas.

The Hassidim, as Monas summarises, put the main emphasis on personal experience and viewed Holy Writ as a symbolic text to be experienced by revelation rather than interpreted by logic and reason. They placed paradox and mystery above rationalistic constructions. Monas describes them as 'dionysiac' and draws a parallel between the Hassidim and the early Christians. In the same way, he claims, 'Shestov believed in the unique, the overwhelming, the ineffable insight' and regarded as 'at best provisional, "preparatory"

¹⁰⁵ Milosz, p. 106.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 107.

¹⁰⁷ Monas, p. viii.

[...] what lends itself to abstraction or to precision of formulation'. Shestov was also fond of paradox and contradictions as the only promising sources from which the truth may emerge.¹⁰⁸

In our view, this evident proximity between the way of experiencing the Universe and searching for the truth between Shestov and the Hassidism in fact captures precisely the existential approach to the world. Indeed, one of the central convictions of the Hassidism is an acknowledgement of the fact that anybody is capable of grasping the mystery of existence and the divine at their own level, by the movement of their own soul, intuitively and instantaneously. Actually, the Hassidim have a fable which captures this belief. In it a boy-shepherd whistles on listening to wise men discussing the mystery of God in a synagogue, and, the fable says, his whistling contains more faith and divine understanding than all their wisdom put together. Interestingly, the significance and unquestionable moral authority of a rabbi acquired later within the Hassidic movement, would have inevitably met a strong protest in Shestov, since it seems to undermine intrinsically the idea of an intense personal quest which can neither be shared with nor facilitated by others.

Thus, if you like, amongst the three forms of cognition: analytical, synthetic and by means of revelation it is the latter that both Shestov's and the Hassidic approach fit into. On the other hand it is this very approach – through intuition and revelation that poetry (as the pinnacle of literature and art in general) adopts and is characterised by. This is to say that the parallel between Shestov and the Hassidim that Monas pointed to is in fact a manifestation of a more general phenomenon which both exemplify (and thus they need not necessarily be interrelated by a causal connection). From this point of view the assertion that Shestov's approach to the world which ultimately shaped his philosophy was adopted from his literary culture and experience carries no less weight than Monas's suggestion that it is the Hassidic movement that might have played a crucial role in forming Shestov's ideas from his childhood. This is probably as much as can be reasonably speculated about the actual sources of Shestov's ideas, and further on we shall focus instead on the implications

¹⁰⁸ See Monas, p. ix.

of our assertion about the literary nature of Shestov's thought. Thus in the next chapter our aim is to advance and justify our literary perspective on Shestov.

As a prelude to that we wish to conclude our present discussion by emphasising the remarkable route of Shestov's thought in the sense of its apparent total unconcern with the topical burning questions of his day, whether of a social or a generally historical nature. It is especially notable given how turbulent those years were and what major political upheavals Shestov's native Russia underwent by which his own destiny was also (and crucially) affected. Semen Frank wrote in this connection: 'I don't know of any contemporary writer, with the exception of course of Tolstoy, who in his interests and searching, would be so independent of the *spirit* of the times, who, in vacuous expanses filled only with his own ideas, thinks so much outside the atmosphere of every new trend, as Lev Shestov does'.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, Shestov followed his own, very original path, was never seduced by the winds of fashion and remained thematically and philosophically distant from the majority of his contemporaries. When reading Shestov it is often impossible to establish the actual time frame of his works and to deduce the actual historical period of his life, for the only chronological markers are concealed in the names of past philosophers, and contemporary socio-political questions are very rarely discussed. In this respect Shestov can be compared to the Russian writer Alexander Grin (a pen-name of Alexander Stepanovich Grinevsky, 1880-1932) whose romantic novels written amidst the brutal reality of the Russian civil war of 1919 are set in some picturesque foreign land within a non-identifiable time scale. In the case of Grin a plausible conjecture is his escapism, a desire to leave behind the unbearable suffering of his country, himself included, and to become transposed to an imaginary universe. Such instances are not uncommon – for example, contemporary Israeli literature certainly has a similar trend of temporal writing in the vein of the European tradition of being preoccupied largely by the private life of an individual. It is, however, hard to avoid the impression, when reading it, that authors are simply (and quite consciously) fleeing from the tiresome and oppressive situation of a permanent war. The effect is, interestingly,

¹⁰⁹ Semen Frank, *Slovo*, (3) 10 Dec, 1908. Cited in Valevicius, p. 2.

dual (if not opposite to the expected one) because the actual Israeli reality, which is being suppressed in such writings, distinctly looms from behind their lines. In other words, its very absence gains a voice of its own which overwhelms the narrative.

In the case of Shestov, however, we think that this suggestion of simple escapism is not correct and the above similarity is external only. In our view, he was genuinely preoccupied first and foremost with the timeless human questions common to all mankind and saw his vocation in trying to solve them within philosophical discourse. His path did not lead him away from suffering into the hiding place of the romantic imagination or to problems of a qualitatively different order of magnitude. In his own eyes he was getting to the bottom of that very suffering, desperately trying to find a cure. In his opinion the Apocalypse of wars and revolutions that the world and most of all his native Russia were witnessing at the beginning of the twentieth century was a direct result of the erroneous foundations of the human world and he allegorically quoted Shakespeare that ‘something is rotten in the state of Denmark’.¹¹⁰ Thus he viewed the tragic history contemporary to him as the tip of a global iceberg of the destiny of mankind and wanted to trace the metaphysical roots of it.

In the turbulent year of 1919 (which Shestov's family spent in Kiev to where they fled from Moscow when life there was becoming increasingly unbearable) he wrote in his diary the entry (which was already cited in the previous chapter, in section 1.3): ‘Никогда так упорно, напряженно и непрерывно не работала мысль, как в эти ужасные, кровавые дни. И никогда — так бесплодно’.¹¹¹ He felt a due concern about Russia’s destiny and shared his country's torment with everyone else. He once even made a diversion from his usual writings and displayed his reaction to the phenomenon of Bolshevism openly and directly by creating the book *What is Russian Bolshevism? (Что такое русский большевизм?)*, perhaps as a belated attempt to issue a warning to the rest of the world. Its publication was undertaken by Shestov's friend E. G. Lundberg, but the book turned out to be so hostile to the Bolshevik regime that Lundberg, who only read the book when it was already in print, ordered nearly all the copies to be destroyed before seeing the light of

¹¹⁰ Quotation is from *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene IV.

¹¹¹ Shestov, ‘Дневник мыслей’, p. 235 (entry of 17 Oct. 1919).

day.¹¹² In 1934 Shestov published another article on the burning issues of the day rather than philosophical matters as such. This article was entitled 'The Menacing Barbarians of Today' and concerned the rise of Nazism. It appeared in the journal *Aryan Path* in August 1934.

In other words, Shestov never turned away from the present, he was simply sent on a long and torturous journey through human history and thought by this very present with its horrific happenings. As in a children's hide-and-seek game, he must have felt that looking together with a crowd is much less productive than setting off on your own quest, however bitter and lonely it may be. And in the process of this journey Shestov inevitably took a 'view from above' on human history and placed modernity in a broader historical and philosophical context. In his letter to Schloezer of September 1938 he wrote:

Конечно, нельзя не чувствовать ужасов, даже не только тех, которые, может быть, нам предстоят, но и тех, которые выносят и выносили в разных странах чужие и столь близкие нам люди. Не только теперь, но и в отдаленные времена. Помните плач Иеремии? И громы Апокалипсиса? Но загадочным образом и пророки и апостолы сквозь ужасы бытия прозревали что-то иное. [...] Точно они предчувствовали, что кошмар "действительности" так же исчезнет, как кошмар сновидения. [...] Разве все эти Сталины, Муссолини, Гитлеры вечны? И разве их "победы" не призрачны? Чем больше они торжествуют, тем более явно обнаруживается (в иной перспективе) их ничтожность.¹¹³

Thus his general concern was broader than a direct preoccupation with modernity and lay at a metaphysical level – which is the same level as that of great works of art which, regardless of their actual themes, invariably reach through to the global and eternal. It is precisely Shestov's proximity to art that the next chapter deals with.

¹¹² For more details of this story see Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 189.

¹¹³ Letter to Boris de Schloezer of 11 Sept. 1938. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, II, pp.187-188.

Chapter 3. Existential perspective and proximity to art. The literary roots of Shestov's ideas.

In this chapter we provide a conceptual justification for taking a literary approach to Shestov's works and explain why such an approach is not only legitimate and productive, but also crucially important for the study of this thinker.

3.1 The philosophy of tragedy as a philosophy of art. The role of aesthetics in Shestov's philosophical search.

One of Shestov's fundamental claims was that philosophy is an art rather than a science. This statement in the case of Shestov's own philosophy, as will be seen in this section, is to a large extent true and, in our opinion, has profound implications for the way in which his thought should be interpreted.

This section will demonstrate and examine the intrinsic proximity between art in general (and especially literature) and Shestov's philosophy of tragedy. In particular an attempt will be made to untangle Shestov's complicated relationship with aesthetics.

Andrius Valevicius points out in his book that Shestov was often regarded by his contemporaries as '*bol'shoi original*' (a man of great originality).¹ Indeed, his insights into every thinker he ever studied were invariably different from the existing perspectives. The next part of the thesis will highlight numerous examples of such original interpretations provided by Shestov. One of the most recurrent amongst them is that of Nietzsche who made an overwhelming impression on Shestov and greatly influenced his writing style as well as his ideas. Shestov's view of Friedrich Nietzsche, as we shall see, significantly diverges from the common perception of the German philosopher summarised, for instance, in Bernard Russell's book. Russell describes Nietzsche's ethics as follows: 'Victors in war, and their descendants, are usually biologically superior to the vanquished. It is therefore

¹ Valevicius, p. 2.

desirable that they should hold all the power, and should manage affairs exclusively in their own interests'.² Russell sees Nietzsche essentially as suffering from an inferiority complex and trying to soothe 'his wounded vanity' by praising cruelty. 'I dislike Nietzsche because he likes the contemplation of pain, because he erects conceit into a duty, because the men whom he most admires are conquerors, whose glory is cleverness in causing men to die',³ Russell writes. As the ultimate argument against Nietzsche's philosophy Russell appeals to the emotions rather than to facts: 'Nietzsche despises universal love; I feel it the motive power to all that I desire as regards the world'.⁴ Thus, the conventional interpretation of Nietzsche's thought ascribes to him a perception of the world which is essentially fascist. However, it may be an open question to what extent this interpretation would meet Nietzsche's own approval.⁵ On the other hand, it is indeed sufficiently easy to see why fascists chose precisely Nietzsche, with his ultimate escape from the horrors of reality to his advocacy of the Superman, as an ideologist of their philosophy. In other words the nature of his teaching fits comfortably with fascist aspirations.

In an analogous way, we assert, the nature of Shestov's philosophy reflects the perception of the universe provided by Art, or, if you like, it is a philosophy of artists. This in particular explains why Shestov, while remaining an isolated and relatively obscure figure, is held in such high esteem first and foremost by writers and poets rather than philosophers *per se*. Indeed, there is a number of singular characteristics of Shestov's philosophy that prove its artistic origin as well as its artistic nature, and justify his own identification of philosophy with art.

As we explained earlier, Shestov believed that true philosophy originates in despair. More precisely, philosophical contemplation is 'the result of a magnanimous despair'. This belief

² Russell, p. 734.

³ Ibid, p. 736.

⁴ Ibid, p. 738.

⁵ The following words of Nietzsche are well known: 'I have to put a fence around my words and my teaching to save them from being invaded by pigs'. Viktor Erofeev when giving this quotation in connection with Shestov (in his article 'Остается одно: произвол...') asks a very appropriate question: 'не ущербно ли в своей основе то учение, которое нуждается в ограде?' (Erofeev, p. 174).

is most probably due, in particular, to Shestov's own personal experience which allowed him to take a glimpse into the realm of tragedy, and what opened up in front of him in that abyss completely overwhelmed him. The image of the individual whose despair reaches unbearable bounds, when 'человек продолжает жить после того, когда он совершенно утратил способность брать от жизни то, в чем мы привыкли видеть ее сущность и смысл'⁶ became the central focus of Shestov's attention. 'Мыслительные способности в таких случаях большей частью утончаются, обостряются, вырастают до колоссальных размеров',⁷ Shestov writes about such a person; 'чуть только пахнуло на него холодом трагедии — он весь преобразился'.⁸

Shestov personally went through a profound transformation of convictions and from then on this breaking point leading to the total re-evaluation of all values that he had learned from Nietzsche captivated his imagination. For Shestov such magnanimous despair became the point of departure for his philosophical quest. Thus, what for many is the aim and end of their reflections – tracing the human predicament to its ultimate breaking point – for Shestov served as the beginning of his philosophical journey. He wanted to explore that metaphysical state when all hopes are lost, when, for a 'hopeless person', 'ставшие недоступными ему мечты молодости начинают казаться ему лживыми, обманчивыми, противоестественными. С ненавистью и ожесточением он вырывает из себя все, во что когда-то верил, что когда-то любил'.⁹ Moreover, Shestov wanted to find rescue, a way out – first of all, apparently, in his personal case: and thus, viewing one's life path as a labyrinth of doomed human attempts to find the way out became Shestov's principal concern, defining his main focus as distinctly existential.

On the other hand, any tragic experience, as Shestov knew himself, separates one irreversibly from the common world. A tragic person 'начинает иначе думать, иначе чувствовать, иначе желать'.¹⁰ It is in this 'domain of tragedy', in this new country where

⁶ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, pp. 187-188.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 327.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

one cannot, *par excellence*, have any companions and is in total solitude that Shestov's philosophy of tragedy starts. In the face of scepticism and pessimism 'человек [...] впервые в жизни испытывает то страшное одиночество, из которого его не в силах вывести ни одно самое преданное и любящее сердце'.¹¹

If we now compare Shestov's preoccupation with the existential tragedy of an individual soul with the main preoccupation of literary creativity as seen through classical world literature, we discover their close resemblance. Indeed, the central focus of any serious work of literature is the inner experience of an individual, the evolution of his or her soul which ultimately amounts to the intrinsic tragedy of the human predicament. In other words, like art itself Shestov's thought is fully concentrated on the tragic fate of the individual. Or, putting it more broadly, Shestov's pioneering existential perspective in philosophy comes closest to a generally artistic perspective.

Furthermore, the sources of art, and notably of literature, also lie predominantly in despair and in a sudden, but inescapable realisation by an individual of his total existential solitude. The quotation from Dovlatov given earlier (in Chapter 1) testifies to that: 'Литературная деятельность – это скорее всего попытка преодолеть собственные комплексы, изжить или ослабить трагизм существования'. In Brodskii's works we find a poetic expression of the same idea; poetic activity becomes a means of resisting existential solitude in the face of soulless eternity (prompted, if you like, by this very eternity):

Холод меня воспитал и вложил перо
В пальцы, чтоб их согреть в горсти.¹²

Thus, not surprisingly, this state of extreme loneliness from which, according to Shestov, the philosophy of tragedy also originates has infinite artistic descriptions.

¹¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 369.

¹² Joseph Brodskii, 'Север крошит металл, но щадит стекло' in *Форма времени. Стихотворения, эссе, пьесы* in two volumes (Minsk: Eridan, 1992), I, p. 311.

Счастлив только тот, кто не понял, что он один,
Как дитя, заблудившееся в лесу¹³

are poetic lines of the contemporary Russian poet Tatiana Voltskaia. E.M. Remarque in his famous novel *Three friends* looks at this sense of isolation from the perspective of a love relationship which, while breaking all conceivable barriers between people, is still incapable of freeing one from the feeling of ultimate loneliness because of the overwhelming temporality of existence which love paradoxically intensifies: 'Обладание само по себе уже утрата. Никогда ничего нельзя удержать, никогда! Никогда нельзя разомкнуть лязгающую цепь времени, никогда беспокойство не превращалось в покой, поиски – в тишину, никогда не прекращалось падение. [...] никогда ничто не остается, ни "я", ни "ты", и уж меньше всего "мы"'.¹⁴

'Не искала ли она в сущности того же, что и я?', the main protagonist asks about a woman who is trying it on with him, introducing by his question the same considerations of existential solitude and the attempt to overcome it through human closeness, 'Спутника, чтобы забыть одиночество жизни, товарища, чтобы как-то преодолеть бессмысленность бытия?'¹⁵

Brodsky puts these thoughts about the ultimate human solitude in the framework of religious faith in his 'Разговор с небожителем', where he writes:

Но даже мысль о – как его! – бессмертьи
Есть мысль об одиночестве, мой друг.¹⁶

Furthermore, it is not just common roots and a common perspective on the world that literature – within art in general – shares with Shestov's philosophy of tragedy. Another

¹³ Tatiana Vol'tskaia, 'Умирая юным, дотягивая до седин...' in *Цикада* (St Petersburg: Feniks, 2002) p. 119.

¹⁴ E.M. Remarque, *Три товарища* in *На Западном фронте без перемен. Возвращение. Три товарища* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1959), p. 619.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 620.

¹⁶ Brodskii, 'Разговор с небожителем' in *Форма времени. Стихотворения, эссе, пьесы*, I, p. 223.

evident parallel of key significance is between the very nature of Shestov's philosophy on the one hand and that of art on the other.

One of the most striking features demonstrating the proximity between the two is Shestov's spiritual extremism, his readiness to defend fiercely the private, individual and finite in the face of the blind impartiality of the general, unified, eternal and necessary. He uses the scales of Job – one of his favourite Biblical characters – to cry out that human suffering outweighs the sand of the seas. In other words, Shestov as it were stands up for individual existence – as does art, which in a certain sense always defends the formula that the private is 'greater' than the general. 'Если искусство чему-то и учит [...] то именно частности человеческого существования',¹⁷ asserts Brodsky in his Nobel lecture and adds that it is this privateness and individuality that is a charm against tautology, the repetition of someone else's life and submission to heralds of historical necessity.

In this connection it is worth pointing out that in his alliance with the private against the general Shestov is sometimes interpreted as a defender of solipsism. For instance, Viktor Erofeev in his brilliant article on Shestov points out that the ineradicable tragedy of human existence deepens not only despair, but also human egoism. The re-evaluation of values entailed by tragedy, he asserts, breaks the equilibrium between the world and the individual. To exemplify this claim Erofeev gives a quotation from Dostoevsky which Shestov particularly treasured: 'Свету ли провалиться, или вот мне чаю не пить? Я скажу, что свету провалиться, а чтоб мне чай всегда пить'.¹⁸ However, Berdiaev in his article on Shestov gives a very different interpretation of this quotation and its significance for Shestov:

Важнее всего установить, что тут речь идет не об обыденном "эгоизме", когда человек свои интересы предпочитает чужим интересам. О нет, обыденный "эгоизм" встречается на каждом шагу и не заключает в себе никакой трагедии, даже часто застраховывается от нее. ... Тут вопрос о "чае" – философский, этический и религиозный, это "проклятый вопрос",

¹⁷ Brodskii, 'Нобелевская Лекция' in *Форма времени. Стихотворения, эссе, пьесы*, II, p. 451.

¹⁸ F.M. Dostoevskii, *Записки из подполья* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1982), vol. 5, p. 174.

провал в подземное царство. [...] Это проблема индивидуальности, основная проблема человеческой жизни, корень всех религий, проблема теодицеи, как ее часто называют.¹⁹

In this particular case we fully side with Berdiaev's perspective in recognising this issue of individuality as the main problem for Shestov, the philosopher. It is also, we repeat, this very problem that occupies a central place in art.

In the same vein it is Shestov's intense and tragic irrationalism that takes him really close to poetry, to a poetic perception of the world. Boris de Schloezer writes:

Shestov's philosophy is the child of indignation. In Shestov's thought we see the reaction of a soul profoundly shocked by reality. Not the familiar indignation of morality, pointing the eternal contrast between what is and what ought to be, and usually leading to the construction of an ideal world; but the revolt of a living creature who will uphold to the last the human desires, hopes and aspirations, who will not be reconciled to the grievous horrors imposed on us by reality, and who claims to lay hold of "the things which are not in our power".²⁰

Thus Shestov quite consciously does not subscribe to the existing world order and contemptuously repudiates the illusory consolations of logic and mind. The same view is notably characteristic of poetry, only at a rather subconscious level. And it is no surprise that a poet by definition is always in solitude, not only because the very nature of creativity is strictly individual, but also because poetry breaks the existing causal connections:

Поэта далеко заводит речь.

[...] путь комет – Поэтов путь.
Развеянные звенья
Причинности – вот связь его!²¹

These are the words of Tsvetaeva from her 'Poets'. Further in the same poem she elaborates:

¹⁹ Berdiaev, 'Трагедия и обыденность' in Lev Shestov, *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), I, pp. 465-491 (p. 476).

²⁰ Boris de Schloezer, 'Leon Chestov', p. 157.

²¹ Marina Tsvetaeva, 'Поэты' in *Собрание сочинений в 7 томах* (Moscow: Ellis Lak, 1994), vol. 2, p. 184.

Он тот, кто смешивает карты,
Обманывает вес и счёт,
Он тот, кто спрашивает с парты,
Кто Канта наголову бьёт [...]

[...] жжя, а не согревая.
Рвя, а не возвращивая – взрыв и взлом –
Твоя стезя, гривастая кривая,
Не предугадана календарём!²²

It is in Tsvetaeva's works, in our view, that the connection between the world of poetry and the ideas of Shestov can be traced most explicitly, because there is a striking proximity between Shestov's rejection of the iron laws of existence and Tsvetaeva's famous lines from her 'Стихи к Чехии':

На Твой безумный мир
Ответ один – отказ²³

Speaking more broadly, we should say that if Tsvetaeva in a certain sense can be regarded as a poetic *alter ego* of the philosopher Shestov,²⁴ poets in general are – not surprisingly – particularly attracted by this almost naive rebellion of his. For the remarkable insubordination of Shestov's thought, his frenzy and passion have the same root as the poetic intensity of emotions, or more precisely an intense way of expressing them.

The last observation is of key significance for our question about Shestov's proximity to art, since it exposes an inevitable link between the ethical side of Shestov's kinship to art and the aesthetic one. Indeed, a way of expressing ideas belongs to the domain of aesthetics while the ideas themselves are rather an ethical phenomenon. The aesthetic aspect plays a vital role in understanding Shestov's philosophical thought – because in art it dominates, in a certain sense, over ethics – in the sense in which form dominates over content. Or at least

²² Tsvetaeva, 'Поэты', vol. 2, p. 184.

²³ Tsvetaeva, 'Стихи к Чехии' in *Собрание сочинений в 7 томах*, vol. 2, p. 360.

²⁴ This line of research on the proximity between Shestov's and Tsvetaeva's creative worlds had to remain largely outside the scope of this thesis. I have summarised some of the results of this study in my conference paper 'Across the World Order: Lev Shestov, Marina Tsvetaeva and Venedikt Erofeev', delivered at the BASEES conference in Cambridge, 2003.

art presumes an inseparable blend of ethics and aesthetics, with the latter having the upper hand.

In Shestov's case this relationship between ethics and aesthetics is much more complex, which reflects the fact that despite the poetic origin of his thought and his attribution of philosophy to art, Shestov himself was much more of a philosophical thinker than an artist. Moreover, in our view there was a certain continuing conflict between the two within him, as will subsequently be demonstrated. We think that it is this conflict that is responsible for a certain paradox in which Shestov's philosophy is steeped: while being of an artistic, even poetic, origin it often shows a certain deafness to aesthetics.

In fact, the words that Donald Rayfield wrote in 1971 about Ivanov-Razumnik can, in our opinion, be applied with a certain accuracy to Shestov too: 'He squeezes his writers like lemons for an attitude to life and throws away the fruit. He does not care to distinguish good and bad writing; he barely touches on his subjects' handling of the word, their aesthetic traditions or the purpose of art. For him, literature is only a more striking form of philosophical tract'.²⁵ John Bayley, indeed, wrote in 1970 that 'great literature for Shestov is [...] a waxwork museum of ideas' and that 'as a critic Shestov wastes no time on style or form or literary device'.²⁶ Although the above claims seemingly imply a total neglect of the aesthetic aspect of literary works, for Shestov an important correction is due: it is only an apparent neglect. In Shestov's case, we think, it is more likely that he ignored aesthetics only superficially, only on the surface of things, while at a deeper level he was enslaved by it just as an artist would have been. This is because to presume otherwise leads us to an unsolvable contradiction with all the undeniable artistic aspects of Shestov's creativity, which will be discussed further below. However, the existence of this deeper level which is very carefully concealed, even from Shestov himself, still remains to be disclosed.

²⁵ P. D. Rayfield, Introduction to Ivanov-Razumnik, *On the Meaning of Life* (Letchworth, England: Bradda Books, 1971), p. vi.

²⁶ Bayley, 'Idealism and Its Critic', p. 6.

Returning to the descriptions above borrowed from Rayfield and Bayley, perhaps a more precise, even if metaphorical, image of Shestov's treatment of aesthetics, which can serve as central for our purposes, is the following one: his perception of the aesthetic aspect of a literary piece is akin to watching a poet reading out a beautiful poem, but with the sound switched off. This is to say that Shestov witnesses all the apparent passion and temperament of this performance and is inflamed by them, but by them alone. He cannot appreciate the beauty of the text, but he can feel compassionate, as it were, to the pathos of it.

This metaphor, in fact, is not entirely precise, because it neglects the fact that Shestov approached literature first of all from a philosophical point of view and so he did listen to the text very carefully, even if with the sole purpose of extracting its ideas. Therefore a more accurate image would be if we suppose that he can hear the sound, but the poetry is read in a language foreign to him and he is supplied with a literal translation only. Thus he is still denied the appreciation of its poetic beauty, although he can follow all the philosophical ideas concealed in the text.

This degree of aesthetic deafness is best exemplified by Shestov's reading of Chekhov which will be explored in Chapter 7 of Part II. The main idea is that Shestov always remained first and foremost a philosopher and in the eternal struggle between the philosopher and the artist in him it is the philosopher who would ultimately win. That is to say that content (or ideas) mattered more to him than aesthetic form (understood in a broad sense), to the point of overshadowing it.

In this connection it is extremely interesting to recall Milosz's conjecture that Shestov's personal drama was 'lacking the talent to become a poet, to approach the mystery of existence more directly than through mere concepts'.²⁷

Nevertheless Milosz essentially follows the same pattern that was suggested above – of placing Shestov truly close to the world of art and notably of poetry. He draws an explicit

²⁷ Milosz, p. 102.

parallel between Lev Shestov and Joseph Brodsky, calling both 'защитники Священного в век безверия'. The next section will return to Milosz's analysis when discussing the role of literature in shaping Shestov's thought.

Another distinct characteristic of Shestov which displays his proximity to art is his tendency towards the edge, facilitated, or even predetermined, by his, as it were, religious temperament. Just as a sportsman searches for the boundaries of human abilities Shestov seeks the limits of moral, inner strength (especially if one understands the world as a huge existential laboratory where, using Brodsky's words, 'человек есть испытатель боли').²⁸ In doing so Shestov never trusts external appearances and submits every thinker to a passionate interrogation. 'Последнюю истину нужно искать в поражениях, в неудачах',²⁹ as Shestov wrote in his essay on Henrik Ibsen.

This tendency of Shestov persists in connection with every other thinker who became an object of his study. Part II will examine Shestov's highly subjective hermeneutic method in his treatment of various Russian writers. Such a method by its very subjectivity suggests another parallel with art, whose methods are also highly subjective due to its very nature.

It is also interesting to note here that the origin of artistic inspiration is often associated with a special, rather abnormal state of mind, to attain which an artist can submit himself to all sorts of potential self-destruction. 'Ненормальность очевидна',³⁰ said Osip Mandel'shtam about the behaviour of a poet in search of inspiration. In the same vein Victor Erofeev (as Andrius Valevicius points out in his book) describes Shestov's philosophy as an illness in which philosophical searching is made easier by 'a forty degree temperature, epileptic fits or something of the sort'.³¹

²⁸ Joseph Brodskii, 'Разговор с небожителем' in *Форма времени. Стихотворения, эссе, пьесы*, I, p. 220.

²⁹ Lev Shestov, *Победы и поражения* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, pp. 394-395.

³⁰ Osip Mandel'shtam, 'О собеседнике' in *Шум времени; воспоминания, статьи и очерки* (St Petersburg: Azbuka, 1999), p. 168.

³¹ Valevicius, p. 46 (reference made to Erofeev, p. 177).

Yet, an apparent discrepancy in Shestov's proximity to art which is concealed in his treatment of aesthetics is still to be disentangled. The fact remains that despite his youthful dream of becoming a writer, the mature Shestov would always be angered by any attempts to be called such and remained indifferent to praise of his literary style. He warned his only disciple Benjamin Fondane, a French poet of Romanian origin, to steer away from any kind of literature when writing a philosophical paper: 'you'll have to grab eloquence and break its neck'.³² Thus, it would seem that he aimed to concentrate fully on the content and to avoid any literariness, any excesses of form; Shestov's preference in his works was apparently above all ethical, despite the artistic nature of his philosophy. Yet, we maintain, there are evident contradictions, into which we run as soon as we trust Shestov's claims about his essential neglect of aesthetics and our own conclusions regarding his treatment of writers like Chekhov.

The first of these is Shestov's extraordinary literary style, which will be discussed in detail in the last section of this chapter. Notably, it reconciles Shestov's ethics and aesthetics by merging them together and gives another proof of the importance of aesthetics for Shestov despite the reduced role that he attributed to it. Interestingly, even Ivanov-Razumnik, who, according to Rayfield, disregarded the aesthetic aspect of literary works, could not help noting about Shestov that 'при чтении книг Л. Шестова чувство эстетической удовлетворенности почти всегда сопровождает работу мысли, а это можно сказать не о многих из современных писателей'.³³ Notably, Ivanov-Razumnik called Shestov's works philosophical and artistic simultaneously.

Sometimes Shestov himself would drop an almost accidental remark that would suddenly give away his true attitude to the importance of aesthetics. One of these remarks we already quoted in Section 2.2. Shestov made it in his paper 'In praise of stupidity' written in response to Berdiaev's criticism of Shestov's logical contradictions. This remark, in our view, rather reinforces our metaphorical image above of Shestov's treatment of aesthetics.

³² Fondane, p. 146. For a fuller quotation (with a reference to Verlaine whose phrase Shestov is using here), see p. 481, footnote 175.

³³ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 165.

‘Что правда, то правда. Поймал. Только зачем ловить было? И разве так книги читают? По прочтении книги нужно забыть не только все слова, но и все мысли автора, и только помнить его лицо’.³⁴ This is simply yet another artistic *pas* on Shestov's part – to emphasise the role of the general lasting impression, of the aftertaste, as it were, of a book and its creator. One too many, it seems, for someone who persistently plays down the aesthetic dimension. Especially given that what we have hitherto witnessed already exposes the artistic roots of Shestov's philosophical writings.

To reiterate: both art and the philosophy of tragedy have common origins – in existential solitude and despair; they both possess a distinct existential focus and use an equally subjective, hermeneutic method; both allegedly spring from an abnormal state of mind, a sort of spiritual ecstasy necessary to achieve their goals; by the same token, the artistic roots of Shestov's writings lie in his spiritual extremism in rebelling against the world order and standing up for individual existence – for the ‘private’ against the ‘general’; finally, they include Shestov's brilliant literary style and his entry into philosophy through literature (the topic of the next section).

Moreover, as John Bayley implies in his article on Shestov, his striving for unquestioning religious faith is akin to art in that the function of the latter is also ‘to affirm that here “all things are possible”’.³⁵ ‘Its function’, - Bayley continues, - ‘is as vital as that of faith itself, is indeed the most graphic possible affirmation of it. Artists, or else they would be silent, believe like the Knights of the Faith in what they are doing’.³⁶

Interestingly, such a merging of artistic values with religious philosophy that we see in Shestov can be found in Russian literature, and the most striking example is Dostoevsky – Shestov's main teacher, as Shestov liked to repeat. This idea will be elaborated in the analysis of Shestov's interpretation of Dostoevsky given in Chapter 6 of Part II.

³⁴ Lev Shestov, *Похвала глупости* in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, p. 238.

³⁵ Bayley, ‘Idealism and Its Critic’, p. 6.

³⁶ Ibid.

In the light of the above we can conclude that Shestov's philosophy which he himself regarded as art rather than science shares with the former its main sources and preoccupations, tasks and goals, methods and vision. Consistent with that, Shestov's preference for ethics over aesthetics does not withstand closer examination. Thus, as discussed above, the evident and profound proximity between an artistic (notably literary, if not purely poetic) perception of the world and Shestov's philosophical perception reveals the utmost significance of a literary approach to him without which our understanding of Shestov will remain dramatically incomplete. Moreover, for Shestov other approaches to the eternal questions of existence, such as, for example, an epistemological or sociological approach, could not exceed in importance his central – existential and metaphysical – approach which was manifestly personal and intense. Such an approach indeed comes closest to a literary one and therefore taking a literary perspective on Shestov is both natural and vital.

In taking such a perspective it seems particularly important and revealing to focus on the actual role that literature itself played in Shestov's philosophical quest. This role turns out to be so substantial that it deserves separate consideration, which will be given in the next section.

3.2 Literary space in lieu of reality.

In her book *Fiction's Overcoat. Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* Edith W. Clowes argues that just as, in Dostoevskii's words, all Russian writers came out from Gogol's 'Overcoat', Russian philosophy emerged from under the overcoat of Russian literature. It arose 'in conversation with narrative fiction, radical journalism, and speculative theology, developing a distinct cultural discourse with its own claim to authority and truth'.³⁷ Historically, in Russia with its invariably oppressive and authoritarian style of political regime, literature came to play a very special role. A writer or a poet was always a 'master of human thought' (властитель дум), not merely a free spirit engaged in an artistic activity of his own. As Evgenii Evtushenko stated, 'поэт в

³⁷ Clowes, from the book cover review.

России – больше, чем поэт'.³⁸ Thus, Russian literature has always served as a locus for spiritual search and as such, in its engagement with the fundamental existential questions, it has intrinsically encompassed philosophy. Therefore we can talk about Russian literature being manifestly philosophical. In the same way Russian philosophy has a distinct literary flavour (which facilitates the widespread Western misapprehension about the virtual non-existence of Russian philosophy altogether). As Zenkovsky writes, Russia has always passionately responded to Western influence to the point and at the cost of delaying the development of Russia's own specific route. However, 'мощь же ее собственного гения впервые проявилась в сфере литературы. [...] За литературой последовали другие формы искусства [...] скоро и философия в России уже нашла свои пути'.³⁹

It appears that the fact of literature and philosophy in Russia being much more intimately interrelated than in the Western tradition played a substantial role in Shestov's spiritual development. As Edith W. Clowes puts it: 'Philosophers in Russia, including Shestov, often built their philosophies from the insights of novelists, dramatists, and poets'.⁴⁰ It seems to us that in Shestov's case this attitude is not only most profoundly marked, but also a much stronger statement is true: Shestov did not just build on the insights of writers, he actually used the literary space as a foundation for his philosophical constructions.

The quotation from Milosz given in the previous section, where he draws a parallel between Shestov and Brodsky in calling both 'defenders of the Sacred in the age of faithlessness' (защитники Священного в век безверия) in a certain sense reinforces this perception of Shestov as coming directly from a literary perspective on the Universe. Because 'Sacred' here has to be understood broadly: not only as Divine in the religious and clerical sense, but as encompassing culture and primarily literature. For it was precisely literature which served for Shestov as a gateway to philosophy (and is one of the crucial characteristics which accounts for his proximity to art). Indeed, Shestov invariably regarded literary characters as bearers of the writer's ideas and at the end of the day saw the source of

³⁸ The title of Evgenii Evtushenko's book (Minsk, Belarus': Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1973).

³⁹ Zen'kovskii, I, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Clowes, p. 134.

Truth in the Bible – the book of books. This doorway to philosophy directly from literature, if not unique, is at least non-standard in the sense that it is a literary space that is treated by Shestov as a space of real life, as a source of philosophical wisdom. And in this we see an exact parallel with artists and especially writers, who are able to put their literary experience above real life experience.

Brodsky often repeated this, claiming that his generation was probably the last to choose culture as the main value. Equally Tsvetaeva wrote that for her life by itself would mean nothing if it did not have its literary expression⁴¹ (or, in other words, an echo was more important for her than the sound which generated it). And since, as Brodsky puts it, ‘в искусстве достижима – благодаря свойствам самого материала – та степень лиризма, физического эквивалента которому в реальном мире не существует. Точно таким же образом не оказывается в реальном мире и эквивалента трагическому в искусстве, которое – трагическое – суть обратная сторона лиризма – или следующая за ним ступень’,⁴² Tsvetaeva was able to find in poetry a different world where intensity and freedom are boundless, where all things are possible – which brings us back to the title of Shestov's book.

This extraordinary degree of the lyrical and the tragic, attainable only in art, may be responsible for Shestov's ideological or philosophical extremism which he may have drawn directly from literature as a reflection of the ‘supernatural’ intensity of the latter. The high tautness of a literary piece where aesthetic demands require an extreme economy of expression leaving no space for anything secondary, unlike in real life, must have had a certain implicit appeal to Shestov with his desire to go straight to the heart of the matter, to leave out everything unimportant and get to the truth. In other words, both literary material itself, being a highly saturated and intensified form of documented human experience, and literature as the most effective means of delivering ideas fitted in best with Shestov's inner demands in his search for philosophical truth.

⁴¹ From a letter of 30 Dec. 1925 to A. Teskova. Cited in *Tsvetaeva. A Pictorial Biography. Цветаева. Фото-биография*, ed. Ellendea Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980), p. 31.

⁴² Iosif Brodskii, ‘Поэт и проза’ in *Сочинения Иосифа Бродского* (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii Fond, 1999), vol. V, p.133.

The effect of this confusion or substitution, as it were, of life by literature, is akin to the generalised phenomenon most frequently exemplified by Pushkin's Tatiana (used as an archetype, as she herself is a literary character): literature has a crucial impact on Tatiana's life and largely determines her destiny by dominating her inner world and creating an idea of the universe which is hardly compatible with existing reality. In other words, literature results in her distorted conception of life, disproportionately based on literary experience rather than real life experience and direct empirical evidence. We find a similar phenomenon in Shestov: his philosophical judgement is biased in that it is based predominantly on the literary universe and originates from it. Similarly to Plato's famous description of a cave and its prisoners as an illustration of the relative and illusory nature of the human concept of truth and perception of the world, Shestov's own treatment of literature is often characterised by the same optical deficiency in that he uses literary reality as a final source of truth about the world rather than a subtle and multi-layered reflection of the latter.

In fact, this phenomenon of essentially confusing between life and literature, and in a certain sense asserting the primacy of the latter over the former, is deeply inherent in Russian cultural tradition. Thus a Dutch scholar Keis Verheil describes the Dutch national idea as embodied (even if in a slightly exaggerated fashion) in the belief that 'когда человек говорит, реальность перестает иметь место'.⁴³ In contrast, Verheil states, the main idea of Russian culture is that 'когда человек молчит, реальность перестает иметь место'.⁴⁴ Along the same lines, Tsvetaeva's claim above that her life gains meaning only through finding its literary expression, is highly resonant (even if in a 'passive' rather than 'active' sense) with what Richard Peace describes as Belinsky's philosophical *credo* – 'I am portrayed therefore I am'.⁴⁵ Peace traces this frame of mind indirectly to Karamzin's *Poor Liza* (1792) in which through "fictionalisation of life" the fiction took on all the

⁴³ Keis Verheil, 'Тишина у Ахматовой' in *Ахматовские чтения. Царственное слово* (Moscow: Nasledie. Institut mirovoi literatury im. A. M. Gor'kogo RAN, 1992), pp. 14-20 (p. 14).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ R. A. Peace, *Russian Literature and the Fictionalisation of Life* (Hull: The University of Hull, 1976), p. 1.

substance and solidity of life itself'.⁴⁶ Literature, Peace asserts further, is a magic mirror which not only reflects life (in a variety of ways), but also projects back. 'A distorted image', which literature mirrors, Peace writes, 'often becomes more powerful than the object itself'⁴⁷ – which brings us back again to Tsvetaeva's situation above, and not surprisingly: for ultimately in Russian literature and Russian reality 'art has more power over life than life has over art'.⁴⁸

Erofeev accuses Shestov of essentially neglecting life as such in his philosophical considerations concentrated entirely on the tragic. 'С большой силой и страстью вскрывая сущность жизненного трагизма', Erofeev writes, 'Шестов, однако, не соотносит его с законами "живой жизни" и забывает о важном моменте: чтобы "спасти" человека, необходимо понять его во всей целостности, иначе вместо "спасения" ему уготована катастрофа'.⁴⁹ Blagova and Emelianov write that Shestov 'forgets' Dostoevskii's philosophical concept of 'living life' and therefore its meaning and significance remain neglected in his interpretation and thus slip into oblivion from the active cultural memory. 'Забывание в данном случае деструктивно', they assert. 'Контекст философии "живая жизнь", смысл заложенных в ней понятий и символов остались неактуализированными, а значит, хотя бы на время и отчасти подверглись угасанию в культурной памяти',⁵⁰ they wrote, using the literary observations of the modern scholar Diane Thomson on the fading of various degrees of cultural memory.⁵¹

The most marked manifestation of Shestov's substitution of literature for real life is comprised in Shestov's treatment of various writers. As Erofeev points out 'Шестову глубоко чужд пафос дистанции по отношению к рассматриваемому им писателю, что в свою очередь связано с известной догматичностью его адогматической

⁴⁶ Peace, *Russian Literature and the Fictionalisation of Life*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Erofeev, p. 188.

⁵⁰ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 115.

⁵¹ See Diane Oening Thomson, *The Brothers Karamazov and The Poetics of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Cited in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 115.

философии'.⁵² Instead of this pathos of distance (пафос дистанции), Erofeev claims, it is 'arbitrariness' ('произвол') which is inherent in Shestov, as the latter himself openly admits. Therefore, Erofeev concludes, the question of reconstructing a genuinely true image of a writer simply does not make sense for Shestov, it is irrelevant for him, because in Shestov's own words 'достоверность никакого отношения к истине не имеет'.⁵³ Thus, Erofeev says, these images of writers under Shestov's pen 'наполнялись смыслом лишь как временные опорные пункты на шестовском пути к "спасению", как вежи его эволюции'.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, as Erofeev also admits, Shestov's declaration of 'arbitrariness' as his choice of methodology is largely there for shock value. However, it is only partly so. As was already explained in Chapter 1, unmasking writers is indeed Shestov's main preoccupation, but his hermeneutic method and his achievements represent a subject for separate analysis that will be provided in Part II in the case studies of different writers.

Having said that, it is worth pursuing a little further Shestov's tendency to be too free with his writers in order to see if it has any deeper underlying basis in Shestov's universe. Yves Bonnefoy's essay on Shestov may hold the key to an attempt to trace the roots of Shestov's 'arbitrariness' manifested in his treatment of writers and their literary creations. It is likely that this 'arbitrariness' (if one is to take it seriously enough) is cognate with freedom in the sense that Shestov, as a critic and philosopher, but ultimately a reader, is free to interpret, just as a writer is free to create. The concept of freedom is one of the central concepts for Shestov, and Bonnefoy in his essay focuses on it and asks whether Shestov was seeking in literature this boundless self-willed divine freedom of the writer which exceeds even the freedom of the Creator.⁵⁵ However, Bonnefoy essentially answers this question negatively, for a writer's freedom is not an imposition of self-will. And, interestingly, – we note – it is precisely the aesthetic feeling of the writer that makes him stay faithful to the tragic truth of life, that does not allow Shakespeare, for example, to rewrite the horrible ending and make Cordelia live.

⁵² Erofeev, p. 171.

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 171-172. The quotation from Shestov is taken from *На весах Иова*, p. 29.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 172.

⁵⁵ Bonnefoy, 'A l'impossible tenu: la liberté de Dieu et celle de l'écrivain dans la pensée de Shestov', pp. 15-16.

In other words, it is the aesthetic feeling, we think, that makes the writer not exceed God in this freedom of creation, but only to approximate Him. Only mediocre writers, like Nahum Tate, says Bonnefoy, wrote happy endings. Thus, we conclude, such a demand of boundless freedom, at least when directed to a writer, is an example of a certain aesthetic failure. Shestov directed it to God, expecting from the latter's omnipotence the ability not only to construct the future, but also to mend the past. Was it simply an act of insanity on Shestov's part? No, says Bonnefoy, because, unlike Shestov, the insane, trapped in their psychosis, are incapable of, or rather indifferent to, love and compassion.⁵⁶

A different perspective will emerge from our further engagement with Erofeev's views on the subject. He sees in Shestov's tendency to treat writers rather freely a conflict with the very demands of the cultural tradition, leading the philosopher to a certain cultural nihilism when he rejoices whenever 'голос живой природы берет верх над наносными культурными привычками'.⁵⁷ For Erofeev this squares up with Shestov's sceptical attitude to the 'value in itself' of literature. 'Сами по себе условности изящной словесности, сплетенные в замысловатый узор, могут быть красивыми, даже великолепными, но они не имеют никакого отношения к реальной действительности и неспособны содействовать ее глубинному осмыслению'.⁵⁸ This is Erofeev's summary of Shestov's attitude which leads the former to call the latter a critic of aestheticism. It is from this stance that Shestov's article on Viacheslav Ivanov is written, Erofeev observes. In order to achieve this unreal perfect beauty ideas should be separated from reality and stop feeding on its juices, Shestov claims in this article, explaining that this is precisely what Ivanov is doing in his writings.

In our opinion, this exposes an inner contradiction of Shestov's philosophy – in that it itself originates more from literature than from reality. In other words, the accusation directed against Ivanov can be with the same force applied to Shestov himself. This seems to be a

⁵⁶ Bonnefoy, 'A l'impossible tenu: la liberté de Dieu et celle de l'écrivain dans la pensée de Chestov', p. 14.

⁵⁷ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 197. Cited in Erofeev, p. 172.

⁵⁸ Erofeev, p. 170.

recurring phenomenon in Shestov – as we shall see from the examples in Part II, he often fights with his own image in the mirror.

To aestheticism, in Erofeev's view, Shestov juxtaposes writers like Chekhov who did feed on real life juices and arrived at despair and hopelessness. Yet, in our opinion, it is exactly the aesthetic aspect that Shestov misses in writers like Chekhov (as we have pointed out in the previous section), thus invalidating this very juxtaposition. Erofeev, however, views this phenomenon differently, finding a contradiction of another kind: it is precisely because such writers draw on real life that they show resistance to Shestov's attempts to assist them in exposing their tendencies. Thus Shestov's activity, Erofeev says, imperceptibly transforms itself into unmasking writers and accusing them of treachery, cowardice and of covering up tragedy altogether.⁵⁹

Erofeev's conclusion is quite drastic and as such surprising. He asserts that Shestov's fatal step was the idea of an individual breaking away from others, of immersing himself into solitude in order to seek salvation and truth. As a result, Erofeev claims, Shestov's philosophy of tragedy alienates him from the real problems of culture and ultimately leads him to a direct confrontation with the latter. 'Шестов единоборствует с культурой как с помехой на пути к истинным проявлениям человеческого духа, не сознавая того, что именно культура является выражением этого духа во всей его противоречивости',⁶⁰ Erofeev writes.

To us such a conclusion appears far too extreme (and we do not even exclude the possibility that such a formulation was Erofeev's compromise in giving in to the demands of Soviet censorship which viewed Shestov as an enemy, 'bourgeois' philosopher). Yet, Erofeev may be right in some restricted sense in that logically Shestov may have run into a formal conflict with culture (this conflict becomes especially visible in Shestov's treatment of Chekhov and thus will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, which is dedicated to

⁵⁹ Erofeev, p. 171.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 187.

the writer). And to us, one of the central problems that this conflict exposes is the problem of communicability reminiscent of Tiutchev's 'мысль изреченная есть ложь'.⁶¹

Indeed, Shestov's struggle against rationalism and its poisons was doomed from the start in that it had no other means of being conducted and communicated except for the means of rational discourse (especially given that he wrote philosophical prose, not poetry). This can explain his assertions made in *Sola Fide* that the truth is incommunicable. And here we agree with Erofeev that as a result Shestov severely limits the value of his own philosophical activity. Thus, in a way, he was condemned to be trapped in a vicious circle. Yet, he knew or rather passionately felt his destination, and therefore he was in a certain sense serving the completeness of his beliefs by essentially neglecting everything that would not fit – an accusation he directed at his opponents like Hegel, Leibnitz or Kant who tried to rationalise the Scriptures by stripping all the miraculous elements from them. In a way it is akin to a real life phenomenon (for instance, inspirational lying) which has some literary flavour: when for the sake of the completeness of an artistic image some inconvenient details simply get brushed away. This is of course extremely anti-scientific – to neglect the truth for the sake of the demands of artistic beauty. However, Shestov, in his disdain of science, would not have had any difficulty in this case, even though his slogan always was to attain the truth whatever the cost. On the other hand, at least at times he himself was capable of acknowledging that 'последних истин [...] не было, нет и никогда не будет. Истин столько, сколько людей на свете'.⁶²

He craved the truth to be what he deemed it to be – in faith, in opposing reason to such an extreme extent, and in turn his extremism essentially predetermined the rather predictable metamorphosis of his adogmatic thinking into dogmatism (which Erofeev does not fail to point out, as we saw in reference 52 given above).

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that in the end for Shestov, as for the Jesuits, in a way, the end justified the means, or rather the means changed the aim – it was

⁶¹ Tiutchev, 'Silentium!' in *Стихотворения*, p. 69.

⁶² Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 129.

no longer The Truth he was seeking, but to persuade mankind of his long-cherished conclusions, achieved through suffering. In a remarkable poem by a contemporary German poet, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, there is a parody on any extreme revolutionaries (notably of the socialist kind): if only people did not exist we would have constructed a perfect world.⁶³ Unfortunately, people always get in the way and spoil everything. In this sense Erofeev has a point that 'living life' which could not be squeezed into any paradigms and would get in the way of Shestov's philosophical constructions prevented him from ultimately creating a coherent system. As soon as one leaves the world of art which is capable of preserving living life's palpitating image, life is lost in dry constructions. In a sense this was Shestov's own claim (that speculative philosophy cannot adequately capture life with all its irrational enigmas), and yet he himself fell into the same trap, for his means and especially forms of communication were not artistic and in the end he tried himself to rationalise the irrational in which he so passionately believed and always stood up for. Thus we have the paradox that literature does not forgive an escape into the non-literary even if this is accomplished with the noble purpose of communicating its achievements. But literature's achievements (artistic-philosophical revelations, that is) can only be successfully communicated through its own means and that is the fundamental metaphysical secret. Thus Dostoevsky could get his philosophy across – straight into human hearts, but Shestov intrinsically could not – what came across was a somewhat distorted reflection of his entangled feelings and beliefs, a continuing struggle of contradictions, a cat trying to catch its own tail. This is an image which is harmonious and makes full sense in art, but not outside it.

As Milosz says when comparing Shestov to Brodsky, 'В борьбе против Необходимости пространства и времени Шестову меньше повезло, поскольку он был всего-навсего философ. Бродский ухватывает – улицу, архитектурную деталь, атмосферу места – и извлекает их из потока времени, из пространства, чтобы сохранить навсегда в кристальных метрах'.⁶⁴ Important in this connection may be the fact that, as Milosz also

⁶³ In Russia this poem is known thanks to the song performed by the distinguished singer of poetry Elena Kamburova (translation by L. Ginzburg, music by V. Dashkevich, 'Если б не люди!').

⁶⁴ Milosz, *Борьба с удушьем*, p. 246.

asserts, Shestov was not mixing genres, he did not write poetic prose, but there is still, we find, a blend, conceived at the very roots of Shestov's thought, of things fundamentally alien to one another. Perhaps in his claim that philosophy is not a science, but an art, he himself actually expressed the nature of this blend – of philosophy (in its speculative form, as inherited from antiquity) and art in the general sense. Thus Shestov himself was in a certain sense a product of this union of things that he deemed impossible to unite – art and science, faith and reason, soul and mind – and yet he tried to persuade us, as well as himself, that they could not possibly ever be united.

Still, this only demonstrates that Shestov's very conflicts and paradoxes were strongly rooted in cultural problems. In our opinion, Erofeev's claim that Shestov ultimately struggled against culture is a definite oversimplification of his ideas. If there is any truth in it, it is a rather formal truth, rather than that concealed in the spirit of Shestov's philosophy. This is because Shestov, who was inflamed originally by literature with its romantic spirit as well as its full concentration on the human predicament, never really left its boundaries and was forever engaged in a conversation with its chief representatives. He parted with idealism and positivism, but preserved the idealistic cast of mind in the sense of his passionate faith in the light at the end of the tunnel, in an omnipotent God, in ultimate freedom, and most of all in the human being.

On the one hand, it seems a somewhat vulgarised interpretation of Shestov to believe that in his exaltation of nature over speculation and reason he actually prefers instinct to cultural baggage. For instance, when Shestov interprets Dostoevskii's 'Dream of a Ridiculous Man' as a vision of Eden in the Golden Age, it is not culture in the form of acquired knowledge and values that he rejects, and it is not the voice of wild and unrestrained nature that he embraces. It is the absolute metaphysical freedom of the uninhibited, innocent human spirit at the stage preceding the discovery of good and evil. However, on the other hand, Erofeev's claims do seem to have certain foundations that merit a close examination, which will be provided in Chapter 7.

As for Shestov's 'solipsism', it should be viewed, in our opinion, only as a necessary prerequisite for achieving artistic or philosophical revelation (which in his case equate to each other); as a means of placing the main emphasis on individuality, on 'uncommonness of visage' – which is both the purpose and the source of art and, for that matter, of culture.

Whatever Shestov did, he did from within the very depths of culture, remaining inside its fundamental framework and, moreover, displaying a perfect cultural balance, to use the words of John Bayley again. Essentially using literature as his main point of departure he remained forever its devoted and selfless servant, passionately defending cultural boundaries from the encroachment of scientific method and any other form of rationalisation and automatised. His single and lonely struggle against soulless necessity for the sake of a temporal individual doomed to a tragic fate is a noble crusade of Don Quixote against the windmills, and as such is as admirable as it is moving. He did invariably run into extremes and contradictions, he overwhelmingly misconstrued the concept of science in his accusations against mind and reason, but such was the nature of his fight – it was incompatible with any calm and equilibrium just as life itself is. Any less extremism would apparently have been insufficient to sustain the inner fire. 'He loved only those who, like Pascal, "*cherchent en gémissant*" – who "seek while moaning"',⁶⁵ as Milosz pointed out. Moreover, Shestov's extraordinary revolt against the self-evident is essentially directed against all types of cliché which for an artist are equal to an artistic death, an end. And this gives another meaning to his struggle against death when translated to the plane of art, as if reinforcing Shestov's intrinsic connection to the latter. As Berdiaev wrote, tragedy starts when an individual destiny becomes separated from the destiny of the whole world, which, due to death, always turns out to be the case for everybody.⁶⁶ However, life itself is full of dying: of hopes, of feelings, of strength; death is concealed in any 'end'. In this sense Shestov's struggle against the self-evident can be viewed in a more general context as that against diverse occurrences of death in the stream of life.

⁶⁵ Milosz, p. 105.

⁶⁶ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 475.

To our mind, true insight into Shestov's relationship with culture, which also summarises our elaboration above, was given by Viacheslav Ivanov (and already quoted in Section 2.2) where the latter asserted Shestov's vital, yet ambivalent (even contradictory), cultural role. He compared Shestov with a raven from the Russian fairy-tales who holds the water of life and death. And this image is extremely important to our study and can be regarded as central to the whole thesis. For it highlights the very special cultural role – in the dimension of art – that Shestov played, as it were guarding the human soul against the oppression of mind with its clichés. On one hand he was awakening people to remember 'о высших целях бытия, о своем человеческом достоинстве',⁶⁷ to find their unique individuality and their very own spiritual route. Yet, on the other hand, he was, at the same time, by denying them reason, encouraging and deepening the tragic split between mind and soul, or if you like between ethics and aesthetics. Thus he highlighted the fundamental cultural conflict of contemporary mankind, which will be discussed further in Part II.

Therefore separating Shestov from culture, let alone juxtaposing him to it, is in our view counter-productive. Moreover, as we pointed out before, it is the representatives of culture in its most direct and intense form – artists, such as writers and poets – who valued Shestov most highly. As Boris de Schloezer put it:

Anyone who absorbs Shestov's ideas, acknowledges the force of his criticism, and tries to follow him, will find himself alone, as Shestov himself is alone since he broke with the common world. ...In spite of our almost-certainty that the revolt will come to nothing, ...many of us find something extraordinarily attractive in Shestov's thought: once we have known its influence, we can never go back on it even though we may part company with Shestov. ...Though still enslaved by reality, one is no longer a consenting slave. ...Because the hope of salvation, the hope of a miracle is alive in one's heart.⁶⁸

This essentially can be regarded as Schloezer's response to Erofeev's claims about the implications of Shestov's solipsism and separatism. It does not lead against or away from culture, but instead it immerses us into its full stream, Schloezer implies.

⁶⁷ А. Р. Чехов, *Дама с собачкой* in *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1982), vol. 10, p. 134.

⁶⁸ Schloezer, 'Leon Chestov', p. 162.

Yves Bonnefoy invests Shestov's thought with even more cultural significance: 'This enigma can be explained by returning to its origin: he is a witness of the hope that there is a sense and value to existence. A thought which is certainly more difficult to keep alive and active than the belief in a simple miracle'.⁶⁹ We find similar remarks and recollections from a substantial number of writers, and especially poets.

'Однажды ... к нам приехал поэт Минский', quotes Baranova-Shestova in her book from memoirs by I. Korvin-Khorvatsky:

"Я вам привез нечто замечательное", – сказал Минский [...] "это книга Льва Шестова, философа, отрицающего философию. [...] Шестов ничего не создает! Он с большим мужеством и, нужно сказать, с большим талантом нападает на бедных философов... Шестов не лукавит, он предельно искренен и сам-то владеет словом в совершенстве и обладает разумом обоюдо-отточенным! У Шестова всегда феерверк мыслей, но он пользуется разумом, чтобы побороть разум!" [...] Все стали обсуждать с азартом книгу Шестова... Но больше всех слушал, как замороженный, Боря Пастернак. Он мне шепнул, расширяя свои прекрасные глаза: Тебе не понять этого! А я весь дрожу!⁷⁰

Marina Tsvetaeva, whose intrinsic closeness to Shestov has already been touched upon earlier, called Shestov in a private letter addressed to him, as her 'самая большая человеческая ценность в Париже'.⁷¹ Yves Bonnefoy and David Gascoyne, representing French and English poetic traditions respectively, have both found, judging by their writings on Shestov, that very something 'extraordinarily attractive about Shestov's thought' to which Schloezer was referring in the quotation above. Shestov's only true disciple was again a poet: Benjamin Fondane. We have already extensively quoted Milosz - another poet of stature so obviously attracted by Shestov's thought – who drew a direct parallel between him and Joseph Brodsky. The latter too held Shestov in high regard even though the evidence for this is somewhat scarce. But when it does exist it is rather attractive. For example: 'Я сказал', Octavio Paz recalls about his first conversation with Joseph Brodsky, which took place in the USA soon after the young exiled Russian poet

⁶⁹ Bonnefoy, 'A l'impossible tenu: la liberté de Dieu et celle de l'écrivain dans la pensée de Chestov', p. 17.

⁷⁰ I. Korvin-Khorvatskii, 'Голубой дым', *Russkoe voskresenie*, 23 July 1960, Paris. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, pp. 69-70.

⁷¹ '9 писем М. Цветаевой к Льву Шестову', *Вестник русского христианского движения*, 129 (3) 1979, Paris-New York-Moscow, pp.124-130 (p. 125).

came to settle there, ‘в известной степени вы повторяете мысли русского философа Льва Шестова’. To which Brodsky exclaimed: ‘Вы знаете Шестова? Это замечательно, потому что в этой проклятой стране не с кем поговорить о Шестове’.⁷²

These endearments from the literary world only reflect the fact which we have been trying to illuminate in this section – that Shestov's philosophy originated from literary roots and became fully fledged in symbiosis with literature (despite the conflict of literature and philosophy, of irrational revelation and rational speculation, of excesses and paradoxes that were inevitable on Shestov's chosen route, *par excellence* infested with contradictions). However, he himself viewed his vocation as the ‘great and last struggle’, in the words of Plotinus,⁷³ which is necessary for the soul to undergo in order to break away from the chains of the common world and to achieve the ultimate revelation of truth. It is interesting that this struggle for Shestov meant much more than serving culture as such. Yet, he did accept that the route of this struggle might be intimately connected to the way of invisibly sustaining culture (just as the mythological Atlas supports the sky), as expressed in the following lines from one of Shestov's private letters which seems to us the most appropriate way to close the discussions above:

Культура вещь ценная и нужная. Плохо было бы, если б это значило, что то, из-за чего я боролся и бороться продолжаю, имеет смысл и значение только для культуры. Конечно возможно, относительно меня лично, и такое предположение. Т.е. может быть, что я не делаю настоящего дела. Но если говорить не обо мне одном, а вообще обо всяком человеке, кто (как скажем Плотин, которого Вы называете) знал и принимал “αὐτῶν μεῦστοσ καὶ ἐσχατοσ”⁷⁴ – великую и последнюю борьбу, – то тут можно и должно рассчитывать на иное. Пример – Достоевский. Написал “Записки из подполья” – и не только другие, сам почти что от них отрёкся – но прошло два десятка лет, в чужой стране прочел (да еще в дурном французском переводе) их бездомный странник - услышал, принял в себя и рассказал о них. Я думаю, много было таких примеров. Горит неугасимая лампадка кем-то

⁷² Interview with Oktavio Paz conducted by Michael Ignatiev in *Иосиф Бродский: труды и дни*, ed. Lev Losev and Petr Vail’ (Moscow: Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 1998), pp. 256-258 (p.257).

⁷³ ‘Великая и последняя борьба ожидает души’ – from Plotinus (*Enneads*. I, 6, 7) – is an epigraph to the fourth part (‘О втором измерении мышления’) of Shestov’s *Афины и Иерусалим*. See also the next reference.

⁷⁴ ‘Великая и последняя борьба’, a quotation from Plotinus, was often given by Shestov in his writings to mean the highest effort of the soul which is necessary to free oneself from the laws of empirical reality and to come close to God. Shestov's idea of struggle against ‘the self-evident’ as well as the concept of ‘the second dimension of thought’ are often connected in Shestov with this phrase of Plotinus.

когда-то зажженная, горит и не гаснет – добровольные странники незаметно для других подливают в нее масла.

... Даже те, которые работают для культуры, делают очень ценное и нужное дело. А главное, по-моему: никогда не оглядываться назад и не подсчитывать, что ты сделал. Вы спросите: откуда я взял, что “главное”. Отвечу Вам честно: не знаю, откуда. Может не у одного Сократа, а и у других людей есть свои демоны, которые им подсказывают, что главное и что не главное. Так или иначе, я никогда себя не спрашивал, что выйдет из моих писаний и исканий. Оттого в прежние времена, когда не было внешней нужды и можно было даже не торопиться “продавать рукопись”, я был так равнодушен к судьбам своих книг. Теперь, конечно, обстоятельства изменились – приходится интересоваться “успехом”. Но “вдохновение” и теперь, слава Богу, не нужно продавать – а, стало быть, можно его не оценивать. А стало быть, можно по-прежнему изобретать мифические “весы Иова”, на которых скорбь человеческая перевешивает песок морской. И, если не при жизни, то после смерти они непонятным для нас образом, могут оказаться нужнее всего на свете...⁷⁵

3.3 Analysis of the evolution of Shestov's literary style.

A study of Shestov from a literary perspective would be incomplete without a separate analysis of his literary style. This section will trace the evolution of the latter and see how it has reflected the changes in Shestov's world outlook.

The poet D. S. Mirsky described Shestov's literary style in the following admiring words, as ‘the tidiest, the most elegant, the most concentrated – in short, the most classical prose – in the whole of modern Russian literature’.⁷⁶ Such high praise looks even more stunning in the context of the Silver Age, being a true renaissance of Russian culture which gave rise to a rich variety of new literary talents. Another important feature to be reckoned with here is the background against which Mirsky would have made his assertion – still fresh in people's minds was the period which had just seen the whole immortal pleiad of Russian classical writers – from Pushkin to Chekhov and beyond. Yet, Mirsky's superlative judgment appears to differ from that of others only in scale. In other words, his high estimate is only quantitatively disputable, whereas qualitatively the literary gift of Shestov seems undeniable to virtually any writer or scholar who has ever written about him. In particular, Czeslaw Milosz favourably compares Shestov's style to that of his contemporary Russian fellow philosophers, asserting that they essentially do not withstand the

⁷⁵ From Shestov's unpublished letter to B. de Schloezer of 1 Dec. 1927 – an excerpt from my (with R. Fotiade, eds) book *Unpublished correspondence between Lev Shestov and Boris de Schloezer (a fully annotated edition)*, *Russkii Put'* – YMCA-Press, Moscow-Paris, forthcoming in 2008.

⁷⁶ D. S. Mirsky, *History of Russian Literature*, (New-York: 1964), p. 426.

comparison: 'Let us concede that his severe, unornamented style makes Soloviov sound by contrast verbose if not wooly, and Berdiaev, frequently rhetorical. But Shestov also argues well'.⁷⁷ This account is particularly important given the peculiarity of Russian philosophy that we have already explained, of being to a large extent a product (or, if you like, a by-product) of Russian literature. For, in a way, an impressive literary style would have thus been a prerequisite of Russian philosophical writings, and in this context Milosz's evaluative comparison is particularly revealing. In the same vein even figures who did not pay particular attention to the aesthetic value of intellectual writings, like Ivanov-Razumnik, could not help noticing the high literary merit of Shestov's works, as we mentioned in the previous section. While Shestov's thought, being challenging and provocative, forever evoked disputes, his literary powers remained essentially beyond criticism, to the point that, for instance, the literary critic Aikhenvald claimed that Shestov was wasting his significant literary talent on his philosophical writings.⁷⁸

Indeed, Shestov's style is most lucid, concise, and free from any doctrinal clichés. On the other hand, as Milosz writes: 'The social function of language is ... both to protect and to reveal'.⁷⁹ And in Shestov's case this uninhibited and energetic style of writing, full of irony and aphorisms, perhaps was simply a very effective means to carry forward his subversive ideas. Indeed, Shestov's obsessive and passionate extremism, his rebellious nature in his search for the Ultimate Truth, his trust in faith and suffering rather than Mind and reason made him one of the most daring writers of his time. However, the highly-charged content of Shestov's thoughts demanded an adequate form of expression and, fortunately for him, Shestov was able to satisfy this abstract aesthetic demand. On the other hand, a person capable of such aesthetically talented writing cannot be free from aesthetics: this is a contradiction in terms. Instead, we would assert that in Shestov's creative style we see a manifestation of how his ethics merges with his aesthetics. 'Few writers of any time could match his daring, even insolence, in raising the naughty child's questions which have always had the power to throw philosophers into a panic. For that reason such questions

⁷⁷ Milosz, pp. 110-111.

⁷⁸ See Iuri Aikhenval'd's review in *Русские Ведомости*, (63) March 7, 1905, p. 3. Cited in Clowes, p. 131.

⁷⁹ Milosz, p. 103

have been wrapped in highly professional technical terms and, once placed in a syntactic cocoon, neutralized',⁸⁰ says Milosz. Shestov was not afraid, he had the audacity to challenge the obvious, indisputable, set in stone. He was able to destroy by very simple and clear words that syntactic cocoon, to expose the heart of the matter, to demand the true answer rather than a sophisticated, but in fact just hollow pretence. As Milosz stated, 'He simply did not care whether what he was saying about Plato or Spinoza was against the rules of the game—that is, indecent. It was precisely because of this freedom that his thought was a gift to people who found themselves in desperate situations and knew that syntactic cocoons were of no use any more'.⁸¹

The most frequent characterisations of Shestov's style remark on its humour, full of sarcasm and reserve, as well as on its vigorous energy and high saturation with aphorisms. These more superficial features of Shestov's style are interrelated with the deeper peculiarities of his discourse: the underlying freedom and independence of Shestov's thought as a consequence of his neglect of any type of authority including his own. Thus John Bayley describes Shestov's style as 'humorous, sceptical, unexcited', but nevertheless full of 'great energy' and asserts that Shestov 'is often extremely funny at the expense not only of other philosophical attitudes but also of his own: there are few recent sages with less self-importance'.⁸² These words resonate with those of Milosz who notices that Shestov 'always develops a logical argument in well-balanced sentences which, especially in their original Russian, captivate the reader with their scornful vigour'.⁸³ Milosz remarks on the high register that Shestov's language would invariably ascend to when defending his fundamental philosophical stance: 'His voice when he enters an argument is that of a priest angry at the sight of holy vessels being desecrated'.⁸⁴

The variety of these striking features is summed up in the frequent opinions of Shestov's extreme readability: 'Shestov is almost the only Russian polemicist who is a joy to read

⁸⁰ Milosz, p. 103.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Bayley, 'Idealism and its Critic', p. 5.

⁸³ Milosz, p. 102.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

even in translation',⁸⁵ states Bayley. Milosz takes this statement even further by saying that 'Shestov is probably one of the most readable philosophic essayists of the century'.⁸⁶

On the other hand the first literary exercises of the young Shestov were far from perfection both in style and originality of thought. In this respect they can serve as a very instructive point of departure to be compared with the sophisticated level reached by Shestov in his later writings. At the same time the evolution of Shestov's style in its fully-fledged form in conjunction with the development of his philosophy is another revealing line of study to be pursued below.

If we look again at the passages cited in Section 1.3 as examples of Shestov's early literary exercises, we can see an attempt (whether conscious or subconscious) to impersonate what approximates most closely to Turgenev's type of writing style, especially in terms of the role played by the narrator. Indeed, according to Bakhtin's characterisation of Turgenev's type of narrative when it presents direct speech, it is marked by 'прямым авторским словом, непосредственно выражающим его интенции. [...] Вводя рассказчика', Bakhtin continues, 'Тургенев в большинстве случаев вовсе не стилизует чужой индивидуальной и социальной манеры рассказывания'.⁸⁷ In the examples that Bakhtin gives he claims that the narrator's type of discourse coincides with the type that Turgenev would have used himself if he had been telling the appropriate story. 'Здесь нет установки на социально чужой сказовый тон, на социально чужую манеру видеть и передавать виденное',⁸⁸ Bakhtin says. He also denies this type of narration any orientation towards an individually typical manner. 'Тургеневский сказ полновесно интенционален, и в нем – один голос, непосредственно выражающий авторские интенции',⁸⁹ Bakhtin asserts, and characterises this compositional device as simple. The same technique is also described by B. M. Eikhenbaum, who exposes the purely conditional form that the author's introduction of a narrator may take, as in the case of Turgenev. 'В таких случаях',

⁸⁵ Bayley, 'Idealism and its Critic', p. 5.

⁸⁶ Milosz, p. 102.

⁸⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Проблемы творчества Достоевского* (Moscow: Alkonost, 1994), p. 83.

⁸⁸ Bakhtin, p. 83.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Eikhenbaum explains, ‘рассказчик остается тем же автором, а вступительная мотивировка играет роль простой интродукции’.⁹⁰ In the excerpt from Shestov's early story ‘Не туда попал’ this tendency is self-evident:

Очень рано, когда я был в четвертом классе гимназии, т. е. 13 лет от роду, вкоренилось во мне убеждение, что не писать я не могу и что я непременно стану хорошим писателем... Основной взгляд на литературу у меня установился уже в то время, и я свято, неизменно следовал своим детским верованиям, несмотря на всю суровость пройденной мною ... жизненной школы. Когда мне было 13 лет, я уже много прочел. Не говоря уже о Пушкине, Лермонтове, Гоголе и других наших классиках, я читал тогда уже иностранных писателей – Шекспира, Гете и даже менее крупных – Ауэрбаха, Шпильгагена и т. п. Из русских писателей особенно полюбил я в то время Некрасова. Т.е. любил я и Пушкина, и Лермонтова, ибо я каким-то чудом избежал господствовавшего в то время, даже среди гимназистов, отрицания Пушкина, должно быть потому, что успел прежде полюбить этих писателей, чем познакомиться с отрицательным направлением своих товарищей...⁹¹

Thus we can see quite clearly that Shestov's early literary experiments represented stylistically his obvious orientation towards what Bakhtin calls a ‘single-voiced word’ (‘одноголосое слово’). Like Turgenev, who according to Bakhtin did not like and was incapable of refracting his intentions in the other's discourse, Shestov too apparently could not handle the use of a ‘two-voiced word’ (‘двуголосое слово’).⁹² This resulted in both Turgenev and after him Shestov choosing a narrator from their own social class. Such is indeed the narrator Mirovich from Shestov's early stories who was a pupil of a gymnasium. In the words of Baranova-Shestova, all the heroes of Shestov's stories of the time (there are ten drafts preserved in his archive) were these ‘бедные талантливые юноши-идеалисты, мечтающие о том, чтобы “сказать новое слово и начать новое дело”’.⁹³ This last remark captures the proximity in spirit between Shestov's early writings and the works of Chernyshevsky with his naïve dream of better social structures, fulfilled ideals and improved morals, with the only difference that Chernyshevsky was oriented towards advanced Western Europe while Shestov at the time was closer to the Slavophiles' ideas of Russia's special destiny. Ironically, even Chernyshevsky's fundamental question ‘Что

⁹⁰ В. М. Eikhenbaum, *Литература* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1927), p. 217. Cited in Bakhtin, p. 84, footnote.

⁹¹ From Shestov's unpublished story ‘Не туда попал’. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 14.

⁹² On the types of discourse and their classification see p. 92 of Bakhtin.

⁹³ Baranova-Shestova, I, pp. 11-12.

делать?’ (the title of his most famous book) is present in Shestov's narrative. However, arguably, the vitality and sophistication of literature *per se* are virtually absent from these writings of both Chernyshevsky and the young Shestov. If we look again at the following extract (given in Section 1.3) from Shestov's early story, its imitative, yet enthusiastic tone and idealistic content seem to be balancing on the edge of self-parody:

Он знал Онегина, Печорина, Базарова, Нежданова, как последовательных носителей русской идеи, и требовал от современников стремления к выработке новой идеи, которая была бы для них тем же, чем идеи 20-40-60 и 70 годов были для перечисленных выше представителей литературных типов... Все размышления его сводились в конце концов к определению современного русского интеллигента. Идеалисты сороковых годов, реалисты-шестидесятники имели свое дело и сделали его... **Что теперь нам нужно делать?** (*bold font is mine. O.T.*) Он не мог ни в первые годы юности, ни, как выяснилось впоследствии, и в зрелые годы, ответить на этот вопрос, но он глубоко был убежден в том, что ответ на этот вопрос есть и должен быть, что со временем он его узнает. Он нисколько не сомневался, что людям его времени нужно сказать новое слово и начать новое дело. Необходимо подсчитать оставленное предками наследство, и тогда все станет ясным. России, несомненно, предстоит великая будущность. Она осуществит те великие задачи, перед которыми оказалась бессильна Западная Европа – государства и народы которой пошли быстро по ложной, ведущей к гибели дороге...⁹⁴

Thus the impression one gets reading Shestov's literary experiments of the time and Chernyshevskii's socially subversive oeuvres (which in literary terms were extremely poor) are very similar. Therefore it is not surprising that, as Shestov writes himself in his autobiography, his attempts at writing fiction were doomed to failure: ‘Пробовал я писать повести и рассказы – написал немало, но эти работы не нашли доступа к публике. И я сам и те немногие друзья, которым я показал эти опыты, осудили их’.⁹⁵

We have lingered so extensively over Shestov's early writings because their monological discourse partly survived into his mature style, after he had divested himself of virtually all other elements of these youthful literary experiments. The apparent ‘monologism’ of the fully-fledged Shestov is noted, for example, by Bakhtin,⁹⁶ who ascribes Shestov to the genre of philosophical monologue in his reading of Dostoevsky (a topic for more detailed analysis in Part II). However, it could be argued that the discourse of the mature Shestov is

⁹⁴ Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 14.

⁹⁵ Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 11.

⁹⁶ See Bakhtin, p. 11.

more complex than purely monological and contains within it diverse discursive elements that can be described as other than strictly 'single-voiced'. The features of this complex discourse will be examined below.

First, however, it is interesting to note that Shestov's revolutionary social tendencies (starting from Slavophile and monarchic sympathies in his extreme youth and then changing to the opposite extreme of socialism during his university years) quite quickly came to an end with the emergence of scientific Marxism. 'I've been a revolutionary since the age of eight, much to my father's despair. I haven't ceased to be a revolutionary until much later, when "scientific" socialism, Marxism, emerged',⁹⁷ were Shestov's own words reported by Fondane.

Indeed, Shestov quite quickly broke free from imitative and socially oriented writing and manifested himself as a fresh and original voice focused entirely on the existential and rebelling against scientific discourse with its proclamation of 'self-evident truths'. Blagova and Emelianov in their analysis of Shestov's interpretations of Dostoevsky define (quite correctly in our view) his discourse as that of philosophical essays.⁹⁸ It is reasonable to suppose that Shestov's initial striving to write fiction (whether prosaic or poetic) which fell short of realisation (and according to Milosz may have become Shestov's hidden personal drama) eventually found its way into his original narrative where he merged literature with philosophy more profoundly than any other Russian thinker (and hence his literary style merits study even more than that of others). On the other hand this life-path fitted precisely into the very spirit of the times in Russia, for as Edith Clowes explains 'Russian philosophical modernity has inhabited the edge between mystical, associative, "poetic" thinking and representative, categorizing "scientific" thinking'.⁹⁹ Clowes asserts that 'in the flowering of Russian philosophy around 1900, and beyond into the twentieth century, this conflict led to [...] a rich, compelling scepticism about all absolute categories of truth, logic, essential being, knowledge, and identity that both religious and scientific types of

⁹⁷ Fondane, p. 116.

⁹⁸ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 37.

⁹⁹ Clowes, p. 13.

discourse often have imposed on a complex world'.¹⁰⁰ In Russian philosophy at the time 'these categories become a matter of interpretation and negotiation' with an extensive use of 'the logic of poetic tropes and asystematic genres'.¹⁰¹ In this interplay of opposite approaches Shestov, with his conviction that philosophy is art rather than science, clearly took an extreme stand.

Yet, in finding his very own literary style it appears that the main ground-breaking syntactic and semantic influence on Shestov was that of Nietzsche, as has already been mentioned in earlier chapters. In general, Nietzsche's influence was of the utmost significance in Russia and affected not only Shestov, but representatives of virtually all intellectual groups. Many scholars note the close proximity of Shestov's discourse with that of the German thinker. For example, Valevicius, in his attempt to examine the deeper influences of Nietzsche on Shestov, comments first on the obvious external similarities of both thinkers such as literary style, the form of self-expression as well as Shestov's direct use of Nietzschean terminology at times.¹⁰² Writing in aphorisms is a clear parallel between Shestov and Nietzsche which is most explicitly manifested in Shestov's *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*. Interestingly, Bernard Martin sees in this book Shestov's proximity in style to Kierkegaard rather than Nietzsche, even though Shestov at the time was not at all familiar with Kierkegaard's writings. Martin writes:

Shestov here revealed himself as a keen satirist and polemicist, a master of the ironic style and of the indirect mode of discourse that characterizes much of Kierkegaard's writing. Though at this time Shestov had not even heard of Kierkegaard or of what a few years later came to be called *Existenz-philosophie*, it is interesting to note that *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness* already adumbrates a number of the chief characteristics of existentialist thought.¹⁰³

On the other hand, Blagova and Emelianov in their study develop a productive and suggestive line of Nietzschean influence on Shestov. They trace the beginning of Shestov's genre of philosophical essay-plays to his second book – that on Tolstoy and Nietzsche – which preceded his aforementioned *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* (his fourth book). The

¹⁰⁰ Clowes, p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰² Valevicius, p. 67.

¹⁰³ Martin, p. 19.

researchers presume that after having lived through his own personal crisis around 1895 Shestov turned to this genre as the most suitable for contemplating his own experience. Already in his second book, they explain, he ‘заимствует у Ницше и пафос критики традиционной философии, и технику сценических приемов философских драм’.¹⁰⁴ It is appropriate to note here that Nietzsche's presence is already evident in Shestov's first book where he starts actively mentioning the German philosopher. Yet, the weight of Nietzsche's presence there in comparison to that in Shestov's following books is such that one is inclined to agree with Valevicius in that ‘the effect that Nietzsche had on Shestov was a “delayed reaction”’.¹⁰⁵ Edith Clowes, in pointing out Nietzsche's profound influence on Shestov, especially on his aphoristic style, also lists their differences. Amongst them is Shestov's implicit decision to aim his writings at a broader readership as well as the absence of any intentions to teach anybody anything. Clowes stresses that Shestov's anarchism and nihilism operate strictly within the philosophical field and deal exclusively with the inner, spiritual sphere.¹⁰⁶

While Blagova and Emelianov insist on the chronological consistency of Shestov's genre which they define as the philosophical essay-play, Clowes prefers to distinguish two periods in the development of Shestov's work. ‘His philosophizing emerges from two forms’, she writes, ‘the literary essay and later the aphoristic fragment. With the form of the critical essay Shestov acknowledges the horizon of expectations of educated readers, only to lead them toward philosophical discourse’.¹⁰⁷ She claims that having started with the critical essay Shestov's style then disintegrates into aphoristic fragments.¹⁰⁸ ‘He chooses the aphoristic form as a challenge to systematic philosophy’, Clowes asserts; ‘having realized that logical consistency and a devotion to the Big Idea came at the cost of freedom of thought, Shestov decides to abandon the critical essay’.¹⁰⁹ To us this conclusion appears too extreme, since the only consistent example of purely aphoristic writing was Shestov's rather

¹⁰⁴ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ Valevicius, p. 73.

¹⁰⁶ See Clowes, p. 144, footnote 15.

¹⁰⁷ Clowes, p. 136.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 138.

provocative, yet significant book *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* which had the effect of an exploded bomb and evoked a lot of criticism. This book signified Shestov's explicit turn from literature to philosophy, yet his genre of a literary-philosophical essay survived through to his later works. Thus we agree with Blagova and Emelianov's terminology in their defining Shestov's works as philosophical essay-plays. Moreover, their view that Shestov borrowed this genre from Nietzsche in more than its superficial form seems very convincing.

Indeed, Blagova and Emelianov comment on the unique form which Nietzsche created for his own writings. They quote the contemporary scholar Podoroga who observes that Nietzsche's aphorisms represent complete *mises en scènes* where 'все текстовое пространство захвачено этими неожиданно являющимися сценообразами'.¹¹⁰ Importantly, Blagova and Emelianov emphasise that according to Nietzsche the genre most suitable for a dethronement of the actor-like essence of philosophy is the tragicomedy of masks.¹¹¹ The same key observation in connection to Shestov is made by Valevicius who asserts that Shestov borrowed from Nietzsche this method of 'unmasking' writers because he learned from Nietzsche's example that 'author's words may only be written to mask his inner experiences and have little to do with what he really believes'.¹¹²

In this connection, as Sydney Monas points out, Shestov in his literary essays 'was interested in the experience behind the one the writer writes about', it is the 'relationship between thought and the experience from which it emerged'¹¹³ that was Shestov's focus. 'Because his primary concern was for the quality and texture of experience, and only secondarily and usually ironically for the idea that can or cannot be abstracted from it, he violated literature less than most critics or philosophers',¹¹⁴ Monas wrote. A vital role in this phenomenon should be attributed to Shestov's use of language which is indeed akin to

¹¹⁰ V. Podoroga, *Метафизика ландшафта* (Moscow, 1993), p. 213. Cited in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 42.

¹¹¹ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 42.

¹¹² Valevicius, p. 74.

¹¹³ Monas, p. vii.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. The concluding part of this comment (that Shestov violated literature least) appears quite disputable, as our considerations of Part II should demonstrate.

that of Nietzsche in the sense described by Shestov himself as early as in his first book as 'поразительная философская лирика'¹¹⁵ of rare intensity. Shestov's intention is to awaken the reader by the new type of philosophising. Thus Shestov himself claims in *Great Vigils*: 'Философия должна жить сарказмами, насмешками, тревогой, борьбой, недоумениями, отчаянием, великими надеждами и разрешать себе созерцание и покой только время от времени, для передышки'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Shestov's philosophical language is full of irony and sarcasm as well as contradictions, paradoxes and oxymoron. Clowes describes this style as 'self-consciously figurative' and observes that 'like many other Russian philosophers appropriating poetic tropes for the purposes of speculative thought, he modulates his voice in contrast to the enlightenment tradition of philosophy and empirical science'.¹¹⁷ Indeed, since Shestov rebels against the established forms of speculative philosophy his language quite naturally lives up to this revolt and overturns the existing scientific discourses traditionally used for philosophising. Clowes stresses the particular significance of Shestov's 'use of chronotope, those images of time and space in which philosophizing is embedded'.¹¹⁸ An interesting observation that she makes when talking about Shestov's associative poetic discourse is that he is 'the first Russian philosopher to see this preference in language style – and, by implication, style of thought – as part of a national consciousness'.¹¹⁹ While Europeans started to believe in establishing life on earth, Russians, who were introduced to the achievements of Western civilisation too rapidly and suddenly, still continued to believe in miracles. 'Shestov sees this gap between Russia and Europe in a way that [...] anticipates the predominance of magical and poetic language to the increasingly authoritative modern scientific language of definition by differentiation',¹²⁰ Clowes writes.

Yet, Shestov always felt very acutely that the final truth is uncommunicable. It is achieved only in extreme solitude and is lost in communication. This fundamental inner

¹¹⁵ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ Shestov, *Великие кануны*, p. 296.

¹¹⁷ Clowes, p. 139.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 139.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 147.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 147-148.

contradiction represented a key problem for his philosophical writings and reached its climax in Shestov's most peculiar book *Sola Fide* which remained unpublished up until 1966. As Erofeev suggests, Shestov must have realised himself all the contradictions and inconsistencies of his reasoning in an attempt to defeat reason in this signature work and decided to leave it solely for himself. Shestov 'так никогда и не разрешил сложной проблемы коммуникабельности, однако впоследствии он стремился не обострять ее в той степени, в какой это сделано в *Sola Fide*',¹²¹ Erofeev observes.

However, in our opinion Shestov's style in its fully-fledged form, that is to say starting from his very first book on Shakespeare and Brandes, displays a strong continuity of form. This form evolves and becomes perfected as Shestov turns increasingly to purely philosophical writings from literary ones. Yet, its fundamental characteristics described above stay largely unchanged and it is never difficult to find points of great stylistic similarity between his chronologically distant writings. What is transferred to Shestov's mature style from his early literary experiments is only their monological element. His new discourse is increasingly characterised also by the essayistic genre with the dominant passionate voice of the 'staging director' Shestov (as Blagova and Emelianov label him).¹²² Indeed, he organises the thinkers he writes about in his intense polemical fashion into collisions of ideas while being himself engaged in unmasking them in order to reveal their true existential and philosophical identities. We disagree with Valevicius that the 'heated, polemical tone of *Shakespeare and Brandes* is absent from the next several books that were to follow'.¹²³ In our view, what Bernard Martin calls 'the style of the prophet, not the theologian or religious apologist'¹²⁴ is increasingly inherent in virtually all Shestov's books. While the book on Shakespeare is indeed based on different values and defends a fundamentally different philosophical stance, its language is already recognisably Shestovian. As the following example shows, precisely because of the uniformity of the unmistakably Shestovian sarcastic and passionately involved style it is possible to find passages which stylistically could have occurred on two consecutive pages of the same

¹²¹ Erofeev, p. 181.

¹²² Blagova and Emelianov, p. 43.

¹²³ Valevicius, p. 24.

¹²⁴ Martin, p. 43.

book, while in reality they are taken from two different works by Shestov, one of which is, in fact, his work on Shakespeare:

Но большинство людей отнеслось очень равнодушно к новым идеям. Ни костяная улыбка Вольтера, ни сомнения Гейне, ни бури Байрона не касались их. Идеи принесли им пока лишь некоторые удобства, разрешив снять с себя маску лицемерия, которой прежде приходилось прикрывать маленькие житейские радости.¹²⁵

Более того, не нужно даже, чтобы существовало убеждение, что способность исключительно отдаваться высшим вопросам науки и искусства выгодно отличает человека. Этим предрассудком, к сожалению, столь же распространенным, сколько и ложным, создается множество людей, против своего желания предающихся ненужным им занятиям, читающих скучных для них философов и поэтов и рассуждающих о предметах, до которых им нет дела. Они этим отдают дань общественному мнению, столь возносящему чисто “духовные” интересы. Но ценность этой дани далеко не одинакова для платящих и собирающих ее.¹²⁶

The frequent occurrence of this phenomenon of such close stylistic proximity allows us to affirm that while ideologically and from the point of view of his *Weltanschauung* Shestov's first book is to a large extent different from the following ones, stylistically they are all a smooth continuation of one another and represent a sequence of writings that are systematically becoming perfected.

For a more scrupulous analysis of Shestov's style it is quite important to establish the type of discourse that he predominantly used in his writings. On the surface it appears that Shestov's discourse as an author is despotic – the view expressed by Blagova and Emelianov in their study. ‘Он задает вопросы, но не ждет несогласия читателя’,¹²⁷ they assert. Indeed, as in his youthful experiments, his mature discourse may easily seem unambiguously ‘single-voiced’ and distinctly monological.

Indeed, there are obvious reasons for this point of view. However, in our opinion the situation is more complex. More precisely, we distinguish the evident presence of another – ‘two-voiced’ – discourse in Shestov's narrative. To explain our position we need to look

¹²⁵ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 15.

¹²⁶ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше*, p. 299.

¹²⁷ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 118.

more closely into Bakhtin's classification of stylistically different types of discourse provided in his study of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin offers three types:

I. a 'straight' discourse directly oriented to its object as an expression of the last semantic instance of the speaking subject [Прямое, непосредственно направленное на свой предмет слово, как выражение последней смысловой инстанции говорящего].

II. a discourse of the object (of the portrayed person) [Объектное слово (слово изображенного лица)].

III. a discourse oriented towards the other's word (a two-voiced word) [Слово с установкой на чужое слово (двуголосое слово)].

The third sub-type of the latter type is, by Bakhtin, an 'active type (a reflected word of the other)' [Активный тип (отраженное чужое слово)]. It may include

a) hidden inner polemics [скрытая внутренняя полемика];

b) polemically coloured autobiography and confession [полемически окрашенная автобиография и исповедь];

c) any discourse which takes into account the other's discourse [всякое слово с оглядкой на чужое слово];

d) a replica of dialogue [реплика диалога];

e) hidden dialogue [скрытый диалог].

'Чужое слово воздействует извне', Bakhtin explains; 'возможны разнообразнейшие формы взаимоотношения с чужим словом и различные степени его деформирующего

влияния'.¹²⁸ 'Этот учет отсутствующего собеседника может быть более или менее интенсивен', Bakhtin writes with respect to Dostoevsky's early genre of epistolary novel (such as, for example, *Poor Folk*) which he labels particularly congenial 'для отраженного чужого слова'.¹²⁹ In Dostoevsky, Bakhtin asserts, this phenomenon takes on an extremely intense character.

В своем первом произведении Достоевский вырабатывает столь характерный для всего его творчества речевой стиль, определяемый напряженным предвосхищением чужого слова. Значение этого стиля в его последующем творчестве громадно: важнейшие исповедальные самовысказывания героев проникнуты напряженнейшим отношением к предвосхищаемому чужому слову о них, чужой реакции на их слово о себе. Не только тон и стиль, но и внутренняя смысловая структура этих высказываний определяются предвосхищением чужого слова.¹³⁰

Bakhtin gives a very convincing reconstruction of Makar Devushkin's monologue into a dialogue between him and the other (the absent interlocutor), whose anticipated reaction largely determines Devushkin's narrative.

Now we are ready to present our hypothesis concerning Shestov's type of discourse. In the same vein as described above by Bakhtin, we claim, Shestov in his mature writings as well as using a 'straight' discourse (type I) rendering it distinctly authoritarian, also uses type III in its last sub-type: 'всякое слово с оглядкой на чужое слово'; an inner polemic with which is constantly taking place, predetermining the narration. However, this 'other' is Shestov himself and the heated inner polemics are his polemics with his own deepest feelings and convictions which he is constantly trying to overcome. It is the Western rationalist tradition that is native to Shestov through his whole upbringing and which he forever attempts to destroy within his own psyche that lies at the core of his conflict with himself. Thus, like Bakhtin's reconstruction of Devushkin's monologue as a dialogue, we can rewrite Shestov's narrative as his polemic with that side of his own self that forever resists being persuaded by Shestov's irrationalist arguments.

¹²⁸ Bakhtin, p. 92.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 98.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 99.

For example, we can extend the following monologue from the introduction to *On Job's Scales*¹³¹ represented below by Shestov's lines, to a dialogue by introducing Shestov's 'other self' (the voice of reason) in the following way:

Shestov: Из ныне живущих никто даже и не подозревает, что правдивый Спиноза вовсе не был так правдив, как это принято думать. Он говорил, и часто говорил, совсем не то, что думал.

The Other: Но правда хотя бы, что он не считал свою философию лучшей? Или думаете, он лукавил?

Shestov: Неправда, что философию свою он считал не лучшей, а только истинной.

The Other: Но по крайней мере должно быть правдой, что, создавая ее, он не плакал, не смеялся, не проклинал, а только прислушивался к тому, что ему говорил разум? Или этому Вы тоже не верите?

Shestov: Неправда тоже, что, создавая ее, он не плакал, не смеялся, не проклинал, а только прислушивался к тому, что ему говорил разум, т. е. тот ко всему безразличный - потому что не живой - судья, который провозгласил, что сумма углов в треугольнике равняется двум прямым.

The Other: Но почему я должен Вам верить? Какие у Вас, собственно, основания?

Shestov: Если не верите мне - прочтите "Tractatus de emendatione intellectus" или хоть вступительные слова к этому трактату. Тогда вы будете знать, что Спиноза, как некогда Фалес, провалился в пропасть и что из глубины пропасти он взывал к Господу.

¹³¹ See pp. 18-19 of Shestov, *На весах Иова*.

The Other: Да, я читал трактат, но это меня не убеждает в Вашей правоте! Спиноза пишет и рассуждает о Боге, уме и страстях как равнодушный геометр, а не как страстный писатель. Он ищет понимания, а не сочувствия!

Shestov: Неправда тоже, что он трактовал о Боге, уме, о человеческих страстях, как трактуют о линиях и плоскостях, и что он, как и тот судья, которого он навязал людям, был равнодушен и к добру и к злу, и к хорошему и к дурному, и к прекрасному и к безобразному, и только добивался “понимания”.

The Other: Тогда зачем, скажите на милость, он пользовался математическим языком, если он был столь страстен внутри, как Вы утверждаете?!

Shestov: Математические ризы, в которые он облачал свою мысль, были взяты им “напрокат”, чтобы придать побольше тяжеловесности своему изложению - ведь люди отождествляют так охотно тяжеловесность с значительностью.

We can carry on in the same fashion, but hopefully the above reconstruction is a sufficient illustration of our point and demonstrates the clear presence of the above type of discourse (the one which is constantly aware of the other's).

Moreover, the other two sub-types of type III are also present in Shestov's narrative: the one-directional two-voiced type which includes stylisation and a story told by a narrator, and the multi-directional two-voiced type which includes parody of all sorts. Blagova and Emelianov explicitly single out the characteristics of these types of discourse in Shestov's style of his earlier years (even if they do not refer to Bakhtin's classification as such). Indeed, his discourse at the stage of literary criticism rather than philosophical writings *per se* included numerous elements of parody and orientation towards oral narratives. Notably, according to Bakhtin, these elements as they decrease in objectivity tend to merge different voices, that is to say they tend towards type I, which, as we observed at the start, is the main and clearly evident type of Shestov's narrative voice.

However, we agree with Blagova's and Emelianov's view concerning the evolution of Shestov's style towards the stage of Biblical existentialism, which superseded his periods of literary criticism as well as the partly nihilistic and anarchistic phases of his aphoristic writings. More precisely, we agree that 'в последний период творчества изменился и дискурс Шестова. Хотя его дискурс остался по-прежнему ориентированным на устную речь, но в нем меньше пародийных элементов, меньше сарказмов и проклятий. Тон стал более выдержанным, больше места занимают философские рассуждения, факты из истории философии'.¹³² Indeed, as Shestov's life experience expanded to involve the immensely difficult years of revolution and civil war, followed by his emigration when he had to start from scratch, his outlook gained a certain gentleness and as it were lost its sharp uncompromising edge. These developments found their way into Shestov's writings, extending his philosophical vision and making his discourse shift towards deeper metaphors and more memorable images as opposed to polemical aphoristic fragments. For example Shestov's image of Dostoevskii as being endowed with a double vision by the angel of death in *Overcoming the Self-evident* was so memorable that it has easily become classical.

To conclude our analysis of Shestov's literary style we would like to emphasise the intimate relationship between, on the one hand, the content of Shestov's ideas, the purity of his existential revolt against universal necessity, and, on the other hand, his chosen style of writing (considered in its evolution). Indeed, right from the start in the fully-fledged style of his first book Shestov's narrative reflected his passionate involvement with the ultimate questions of existence. His monological tendency persevered from his youthful attempts at writing fiction, marked by an imitative style both semantically and syntactically, into his mature style of writing philosophical essays, while becoming enriched with an indirect mode of discourse. It acquired aphoristic fragments, elements of irony, sarcasm and parody and was oriented towards oral speech. Paradox, contradictions and oxymoron also became its chief characteristics.

¹³² Blagova and Emelianov, p. 115.

As Shestov's world view was shifting towards tolerance, so did his literary discourse. At the same time his style gained a certain monumentality in that his *ad hoc* aphoristic fragments turned into more memorable and deeply thought through metaphors. Shestov's apparently authoritarian discourse while being largely the direct single-voiced discourse of type I (using Bakhtin's classification) was in fact interwoven with the two-voiced discourse of type III with its orientation towards the discourse of 'the other' whether one-directional or multi-directional, as well as the active sub-type (the reflected discourse of 'the other'). Shestov's narrative voice thus oscillated between single-voiced unambiguous direct discourse and the 'two-voiced' discourse which takes account of the discourse of 'the other'. The gravitational tendency towards the latter can be increasingly observed, in our view, in Shestov's later writings and reflects, in our opinion, his intrinsic inner conflict – a continuous struggle against his own deeply embedded rationalism. As Erofeev wittily wrote, 'выставив разум за дверь, Шестов не заметил, как тот проворно влез в окно и вновь стал хозяином положения, тем самым поставив под сомнение весь смысл шестовской концепции'.¹³³ Similarly, we have already quoted Zenkovsky who talked about a 'strange phenomenon': 'после торжественных "похорон" рационализма в одной книге, он [Шестов] снова возвращается в следующей книге к критике рационализма, как бы ожившего за это время'.¹³⁴

As Clowes writes,

Shestov legitimized an alternative "anti-philosophical" tradition. He devised fresh and challenging forms of philosophical writing that intrigued readers and piqued their curiosity. Finally, he turned the hierarchy of discourses, in which scientific empiricism was accepted as the "truest" and most authoritative form of writing, upside down, devaluing traditionally authoritative uses of language and re-legitimizing traditionally "weak", non-authoritative ones.¹³⁵

Finally, it is interesting to note the suggestion of Blagova and Emelianov that Shestov should be regarded as 'предтеча психоаналитически ориентированного

¹³³ Erofeev, p. 180.

¹³⁴ Zenkovskii, II, p. 367.

¹³⁵ Clowes, p. 134.

литературоведения'.¹³⁶ More precisely, they conjecture that he 'предвосхитил постмодернистскую тенденцию литературоведения'¹³⁷ by taking a great interest in the personal tragedy of his 'heroes' (various thinkers of various times). In doing so, they stress, Shestov's interest was of a purely spiritual, existential nature, far from having anything to do with cheap sensational exposures.¹³⁸ The latter observation was mentioned earlier by other scholars (for example by Milosz in 'Shestov or The Purity of Despair'), and we have already touched upon it in the previous chapters.

¹³⁶ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 118.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Part II

Close readings of Shestov's texts on classical Russian writers.

Chapter 4. Shestov and Pushkin. Before the philosophy of tragedy: the idealistic phase.

In Part I we have described and conceptually analysed a consistent set of characteristics that mark and justify our general literary approach to Shestov. In Part II these rather abstract characteristics will be invested with concrete meaning through a case study of each of the classical Russian writers under Shestov's consideration. Thus in this chapter we shall examine the existing material concerning Shestov's treatment of Pushkin in the framework of the above approach.

4.1. The enigma of Shestov's 'A.S. Pushkin' article.

Interestingly, we begin the study of Shestov's insights into various classical Russian writers with the most unusual of his relevant writings which sharply stands out from the rest of them. This is his article on Pushkin which was found amongst Shestov's papers after his death and was first published only in 1960. This is the only coherent piece that Shestov ever wrote about the poet. However, Pushkin was clearly of high significance to Shestov, for his thought revolved around the poet during Shestov's writing career and the evidence for that is concealed in various scattered references to Pushkin in a variety of Shestov's works. They are invariably brief, but persistent, and it is this recurrence that illuminates Shestov's inner dependence on Pushkin, akin to that of Russian culture as a whole (even though this dependence for Shestov was never as intimate as that on some other Russian classics). Such an interesting distribution of chronologically diverse allusions to Pushkin constitutes very important and productive material for our study, since we can see Shestov's attitude to the poet in its evolution and apply a direct intertextual approach to our explorations.

The first mention of Pushkin can be traced to Shestov's early literary exercises which were cited in Part I. There the poet is listed alongside a large number of other Russian classics and used more as a manifestation of the Russian idea and way of life, as seen by Shestov at the time. Ironically, Shestov's views then, as has been demonstrated in the previous sections, had a distinctly Slavophile and monarchic flavour, while facilitating his highly noble social aspirations. Thus, in a sense, the young Shestov already then displayed an inclination to tendentiousness in the interpretation of literary works and authors by way of making them compatible with his own voice. On the other hand Pushkin, historically, in his extreme literary richness and the determining role that he came to play in Russian culture, has always been a source from which all sorts of conclusions have been drawn to suit all sorts of tastes. For Shestov in his youthful literary attempts the poet was largely a symbol of truth and of good, raised on Shestov's banner to support his idealistic patriotism and high moral aspirations.

As we know by now, Shestov's parting with idealism and positivism was dramatic, and his first book, on Shakespeare and Brandes, as was mentioned previously, can be characterised metaphorically by the words of Ivanov-Razumnik, 'перед окончательным неверием особенно горяча бывает последняя вспышка веры'.¹ His second book – on Tolstoy and Nietzsche – showed the world a substantially re-born author, free from idealistic and dogmatic delusions and equipped instead with a sarcastic, vivid and quickly-paced style. This book, which appeared in early 1900, was basically finished (except for the preface) in 1898. In the spring of the next year – 1899 – Shestov wrote his only article on Pushkin, which, in our view, as was previously mentioned, is highly enigmatic, for it presents a great challenge to chronology and common sense logic. Indeed, this article, written after Shestov's decisive departure from all sorts of ideals, after he had developed a strong disdain for the illusory consolations of morality and abstract good, demonstrates a clear and unequivocal step back to his *Shakespeare and Brandes* phase, and even exceeds the latter book in idealism and positivism.

¹ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 201.

The initial attempt to resolve this mystery is to conjecture that the date on the article is false. However, the first line points unambiguously to April-May of 1899, saying that ‘через месяц без малого - исполняется ровно сто лет со дня рождения Александра Сергеевича Пушкина’.² This means that even if Shestov wrote the article much earlier, he then revised it for Pushkin’s jubilee at the time of the latter. Moreover, what he says there about Tolstoy clearly shows that he had already written his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*. This forces us to conclude that the chronology here is correct and the article was most probably indeed written in 1899 and in any case prepared by Shestov himself for possible publication then. Therefore another important implication of this fact is that Shestov’s struggle against his own idealistic illusions lasted much longer than the gap between his first and second books, and was not chronologically linear. Just like Zenkovsky’s assertion that Shestov returned to his fight against rationalism in every new book of his after he had just buried the latter in the previous one, Shestov’s ‘A. S. Pushkin’ suggests that his idealism had deeper roots than he himself realised.

Below we shall analyse the marked and striking distinctions between this article and Shestov’s other works as well as trace in it the tendencies of ‘Shestov-proper’, as we know him. We will then demonstrate how his treatment of Pushkin evolved and eventually fitted into his usual pattern, thus illuminating the latter by way of contrast.

4.2. Shestov's article and the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* of 1899 in the context of the Pushkin myth and the centenary celebrations.

First of all it is important to consider Shestov’s article on Pushkin in the context of the time, for, in our view, it profoundly reflects the spirit of the epoch through the figure of Russia’s ‘first poet’. As Marcus Ch. Levitt wrote in his article ‘Pushkin in 1899’, ‘На протяжении XIX века вопрос о месте Пушкина в истории русской литературы осваивался основным предметом дискуссий в интеллектуальной среде России; более того – для некоторых критиков имя поэта метонимически замещало саму русскую

² Lev Shestov, *A. С. Пушкин* in *Умозрение и откровение* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1964), p. 331.

культуры'.³ The year 1899 – the centenary of Pushkin's birth – became the culmination of the poet's official acknowledgment and canonisation. Interestingly, in 1987 Iurii Lotman wrote an article about the forthcoming two hundred years of Pushkin, asking what the poet would represent for Russia another century on from 1899. In this paper Lotman looks back over the last almost 200 years at previous Pushkin celebrations, pointing out that they present the key to understanding the spiritual strivings and ideology of any given period in which Pushkin faces respectively yet another rebirth or another death.⁴

From this perspective the poet's centenary in 1899 is a rich source of material, vital for understanding the huge-scale phenomenon of constructing the 'Pushkin myth' in its everlasting dynamics. The year 1899 became without exaggeration the year of Pushkin, when celebrations on a nationwide scale were staged and orchestrated by the government, marking its explicit attempt to appropriate, under the umbrella of Pushkin's canonisation, the Russian intelligentsia, traditionally subversive politically. In this way the government hoped to use culture directly to take ideological control over the large masses of the population who were at the time rapidly becoming literate. As Peshekhonov quotes in his article written at the time, 'Трудно указать на обширном пространстве от Тихого океана до Балтийского моря и от Ледовитого до границ Афганистана такой географический пункт, где бы можно было заподозрить наличие общественной жизни, и где не откликнулись бы на Пушкинский юбилей'.⁵ However, his article was entitled 'Неудавшийся праздник', for he saw behind the officially organised pompous celebrations of Pushkin a philistine and amateur promotion of a distorted and superficial image of the poet which did no good either to his name and heritage or to Russian literature

³ Marcus Ch. Levitt, 'Пушкин в 1899 году', transl. М. В. Kuteeva, in *Современное американское пушкиноведение. Сборник статей*, pp. 21- 41 (p. 21).

⁴ Iurii Lotman, 'Пушкин 1999 года. Каким он будет?', Tallinn, (1) 1987, p. 23. The creation of the Pushkin myth continues to attract considerable scholarly attention. See, for example, Paul Debreczeny, *Social Functions of Literature. Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), where Part Three is explicitly entitled 'The Myth of a Poet'. See also *Пушкин и современная культура*, ed. E. P. Chelyshev (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), and Catriona Kelly, *Russian Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2001).

⁵ A. Peshekhonov, 'Неудавшийся праздник' in Collection of the journal *Русское богатство* (St Petersburg: 1899), p. 385. Cited in Levitt, p. 22.

and culture. This, in a way, can be compared to Pasternak's analysis of Lilia Brik's successful attempt to turn to Stalin for an official canonisation of Maiakovsky, which Pasternak labelled as the poet's 'second death'. These words resonate directly with those of Lotman given above about yet another rebirth or yet another death of Pushkin. However, despite the acutely critical analysis by Peshekhonov, 1899 can nevertheless be viewed as a mixture of the two tendencies, because, as can be expected in such a situation, the official appropriation of the poet evoked a certain opposition which served as a basis for further development of Pushkin's image and studies of him.

Thus, as Levitt states, an issue of *Mir Iskusstva* of May 1899 can be regarded 'и как наиболее откровенное выражение неприятия официального празднования, и как уникальный манифест символистского движения, отражающий множество противоречий и в понимании образа и значения Пушкина у массовой аудитории и в интеллектуальных кругах того времени'.⁶ To us it seems both natural and productive to consider Shestov's article on Pushkin in the context of this issue of the famous literary journal. Indeed, the Symbolists' reception of Pushkin, as Levitt observes, was in tune with the profound changes taking place in literature and society.⁷ At the same time Symbolism was at the forefront of drawing various parallels between modernity and the Pushkin era, making explicit comparisons between the Golden and Silver Age. Thus, the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* which essentially expressed a Symbolist perspective on the poet can serve as a useful reference point and provide an illuminating background for the analysis of Shestov's views on Pushkin at the time.

Furthermore, it would not be altogether unreasonable to conjecture that Shestov was writing his article with a view to publishing it in *Mir Iskusstva* of May that year since by that time he had already become acquainted with some of the contributors to that issue, namely with D. Merezhkovsky and N. Minsky (although he did not yet know the other two, V. Rozanov and F. Sologub, personally), and in a sense he was himself becoming part of the same literary milieu. However, to our knowledge there is no documented evidence of

⁶ Levitt, p. 31.

⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

Shestov's collaboration of any kind with *Mir Iskusstva* as early as 1899. The first written mention of his participation in the journal dates back to 1901 when Shestov accepted the invitation of Diaghilev to write for the journal and, in particular, to produce a review of the first volume of Merezhkovsky's *L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*. Shestov wrote a favourable review for Nos 8-9 of September 1901 of *Mir Iskusstva*. However, his review of the second volume which appeared in the journal in 1903 (Nos 1-2) was much more critical and led to Merezhkovsky's resentment. Yet, there is no reason to suppose that Shestov's relationship with Merezhkovsky in 1899 was in any way sour. On the other hand, his attitude to the poet Minsky was already then rather sceptical as can be seen from Shestov's private letters. Indeed, in one of them Shestov used rather strong derogatory language with respect to Minsky and his literary abilities.⁸ As for Shestov and Rozanov, they had apparently always enjoyed a mutual interest. In 1905 Rozanov responded with an interesting satirical essay 'New Tastes in Philosophy' to Shestov's book *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*, whereas Shestov in 1930 in Paris gave a meaningful talk about Rozanov's philosophical, religious and literary creativity which appeared later that year as an article in the journal *Put'*. However, in 1899 they were not yet acquainted - their first meeting took place only in 1902. As far as Sologub is concerned, in 1909 Shestov dedicated a serious piece, 'The Poetry and Prose of Fedor Sologub', to his literary works which became part of Shestov's sixth book *Great Vigils*. Shestov's subsequent collaboration with *Mir Iskusstva* included the publication of his third book – on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche – in consecutive issues of the journal (Nos 2-9/10) in 1902.

Thus, although we have no tangible grounds to suppose that Shestov's 'Pushkin' was intended for *Mir Iskusstva* of May 1899, there seems to be no particular logical obstacles either to making such a supposition, with the possible exception of the following argument. Shestov's paper fits more with the high spirit of the large-scale mass celebrations of Pushkin's centenary **as they should have been** – understood first and foremost in the framework of culture and separated entirely from the official froth – than it does with the

⁸ See, for example, Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 25, where she cites Shestov's letter of April 1896 to his friend Varvara Grigor'evna Malakhieva-Mirovich, in which Shestov calls Minskii 'жалкий вырождок российской словесности'.

publications of *Mir Iskusstva*. Indeed, Shestov's main focus is on Pushkin as a literary figure and a cultural icon, whereas the authors of the publications in *Mir Iskusstva* invariably discuss the poet in relation to the social context, regarding him as a lost ideal, exploited and thrown to the low crowds – an aspect which Shestov essentially ignores. Thus it is interesting to note that his tendency to neglect the social and political dimension had already manifested itself at that time, in contrast to his youthful literary experiments.

The idea of claiming Pushkin as an elitist spiritual treasure and alienating him from the masses was foreign to Shestov and in any case lay completely outside the scope of his interests. At the same time this was the common Symbolist stance as expressed in *Mir Iskusstva* of May 1899. On the other hand Viacheslav Ivanov, in his collection of 1909 'Following the stars' ('По звездам') in an article dedicated to Pushkin's poem 'The Poet and the Mob' ('Поэт и чернь') advances essentially the opposite view, as he deems Symbolism to be a genuinely democratic trend and does not view its aesthetic demands as subversive in their exclusiveness. He writes: 'истинный символизм должен примирить Поэта и Чернь в большом, всенародном искусстве'.⁹ So, not only did Ivanov reject trying to claim Pushkin from the mob, but on the contrary he basically supported the latter in their opposition. It is significant that in his work on Ivanov written in 1916 Shestov argued strongly against such a point of view, especially coming from a poet. However, this was seventeen years later than Shestov's 'A. S. Pushkin' article, and this issue will be addressed in due course.

Back in 1899, however, Fedor Sologub in the 'Pushkin issue' of *Mir Iskusstva* pointed to the incompatibility between the poet's great name and achievements on the one hand and their availability to a down-to-earth public and unrefined mass consumption on the other. Similar sentiments were native to Merezhkovsky who in his essay 'Pushkin' of 1896 had already spoken against the sweeping wave of democratic barbarism. In 1899 he denounced the old-fashioned views on Pushkin by Spasovich, Solovev and Tolstoy who essentially tried to push the poet "off the boat of modernity", if we use the words of the Futurists who were to emerge on the Russian literary scene a couple of decades later. In general at any

⁹ Viacheslav Ivanov, *По звездам*, (St Petersburg, 1909), p. 41.

given time there was always a literary group or individual who would provoke renewed polemics on Pushkin's place in Russian culture by attempting to discard the poet from the contemporary cultural landscape. In this respect Shestov's views were akin to Merezhkovsky's in their vision of Pushkin's eternal greatness. Shestov too mentioned Tolstoy's opposition to Pushkin only to dismiss it as momentary – as being Tolstoy's tribute to his current preoccupation with preaching. 'Все, что может содействовать целям этой проповеди, он хвалит; все, что вредит им - он порицает'.¹⁰ Indeed, very much along these lines Tolstoy objected to Pushkin's sinful life and death being set as an example to the nation. In reality, Shestov asserted, the novelist's literary roots can be traced back to Pushkin along with those of almost any significant Russian writer.

This important idea, perhaps not yet as widespread as later on, was nevertheless already in the air by 1899, in particular expressed in some sense by Turgenev and Dostoevsky, and was later developed and embraced by generations of critics and writers, both in Russia and abroad. Every now and again, however, it had its opponents, who would challenge Pushkin's crucial influence on and significance to the development of the whole of Russian literature, but these voices never went any further than distinguishing between Pushkin's diverse achievements in order to assign them different degrees of importance. In any case they had been rather lost in the midst of the acknowledgements of Pushkin's grandeur. Thus, for example, A.D.P. Briggs, while arguing against the high merit of Pushkin's prose in a literary and historical sense, nevertheless agrees with the depth of his linguistic achievement. Briggs quotes the famous words of Turgenev that Pushkin 'gave the final form to our language',¹¹ and Henry Gifford expresses the similar idea that 'there can be no doubt that Pushkin blended his genius with that of the Russian language'.¹² Indeed, it is by now set in stone that Pushkin revolutionised the language of his day and gave rise to what modern Russian has largely become. At the same time, Briggs is not fully at home with numerous suggestions which 'corroborate Pushkin's title as the initiator of the modern

¹⁰ Shestov, *A. C. Пушкин*, p. 333.

¹¹ A. D. P. Briggs, *Alexander Pushkin, Eugene Onegin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 3.

¹² Henry Gifford, *The Novel in Russia, From Pushkin to Pasternak* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1964), p. 15.

Russian prose tradition'. 'There is no inconsistency', he writes, 'in accepting this claim while at the same time regretting one of its effects – the sweeping together of linguistic, historical and artistic attributes which has resulted in an exaggeration of the literary merits of Pushkin's stories'.¹³

Yet, contrary to Briggs's objections, the idea of Pushkin being largely the father and the founder of modern Russian literature spiritually as well as linguistically remains in the leading current of critical opinions. Interestingly, the distinction is rarely drawn between Pushkin's poetry and prose, although many influential voices, such as Akhmatova, expressed their deep admiration of Pushkin's neat and allegedly unsurpassed prose which equates to poetry in its concise, laconic features. Yet, it is predominantly Pushkin's poetry that is implicitly referred to when talking about his undeniable impact on the future generations of writers. Thus, Joseph Brodsky wrote about Pushkin and the poets known as the Pushkin Pleiad that 'Russian poetry of the nineteenth century – of its first half especially – should be read if only because it gives you an idea of what gave birth to that century's Russian psychological novel'.¹⁴

These very sentiments, only restricted to Pushkin alone, can be found in Shestov's article, written almost a century earlier. 'Пушкин у нас был', Shestov exclaims, 'и от него осталось великое наследие, которое уже никакими силами не может быть вырвано у нас. Это наследие – вся русская литература'.¹⁵ Shestov claims that thanks to Pushkin the very literary landscape has changed because its gravitational centre has swung from Western Europe to Russia. If before we would turn to the West for literature, now it is the West which turns to us, its recent pupils, with surprise and almost in disbelief, Shestov claims, in order to listen in 'с жадной радостью [...] к новым словам, раздающимся в русской литературе'.¹⁶ Without hesitation he labels Tolstoy and Dostoevsky 'духовные

¹³ Briggs, p. 216.

¹⁴ Joseph Brodsky, 'Foreword' to *An Age Ago. A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry*, selected, p. xvii.

¹⁵ Shestov, *А. С. Пушкин*, p. 332.

¹⁶ Ibid.

дети Пушкина'.¹⁷ Moreover, with the same enthusiastic force Shestov claims that Pushkin lies at the roots of Tolstoy's deepest thought: 'мы знаем', he writes, 'от кого эта мысль получила начало, мы знаем тот единый, бездонный и глубочайший источник, из которого на веки вечные будут брать начало все течения нашей литературы'.¹⁸ And as if this were not clear enough Shestov further spells it out by saying that 'иностранцы, восхищающиеся теперь Толстым и Достоевским, – в сущности отдают дань Пушкину'.¹⁹

Notably, in the above quotations Shestov displays his usual pattern of focusing on the spiritual, or, as it were ideological, value of Pushkin's works rather than their artistic merits. Yet, he notices as if in passing the acknowledged beauty of Pushkin's writings (again almost automatically referring to his poetry rather than prose) by saying that Pushkin is inaccessible to foreigners because they do not speak Russian and poetry is largely lost in translation. This, as if by default, tribute that he gives to the artistic merits of Pushkin while concentrating instead on the semantics of his writings and their spiritual impact upon his literary successors, once again reinforces Shestov's complex relationship with aesthetics discussed in the previous chapter. Namely, it exemplifies our point about Shestov's demonstration of a conscious ethical preference simultaneously with an explicit tendency toward a rather subconscious aesthetic appreciation.

In his claim that Pushkin lies at the source of all Russian literature Shestov names many more writers than just Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, whom he describes as 'наиболее крупные, талантливые и типические выразители пушкинского духа'.²⁰ However, following them on this list there is, using Shestov's own words, 'еще огромная масса писателей, с большими или меньшими дарованиями'.²¹ They all 'носят на себе печать влияния Пушкина',²² Shestov affirms. To conclude this thought Shestov exclaims that 'все лучшие

¹⁷ Shestov, *A. C. Пушкин*, p. 332.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 333.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*.

русские писатели имели на знамени своем одну вечную надпись *ad majorem gloriam* Пушкина. Так всеобъемлющ был гений нашего великого поэта'.²³ These lines in particular exemplify once again the extremely rhetorical and pathetic element of this article, which are so uncharacteristic of Shestov's usual discourse, as we know it. They illustrate the point made above concerning the relative excess of these expressions in comparison with the style of even the most idealistic of his works – *Shakespeare and Brandes* – the book which for Shestov, as he later told Fondane, was a unique occasion when he 'reached for the sublime'.²⁴

Unfolding his claim of all subsequent writers being in fact heirs of Pushkin, Shestov makes the interesting assertion that none of them actually said more than their great Father-Founder (родоначальник). Yet, what makes them so great, Shestov continues, is that they could keep on the track once shown to them by Pushkin. In these somewhat peculiar words one can see the origins of Shestov's development of a certain flair for paradoxical discourse. However, in this case he explains himself by clarifying the actual common ground which he describes as the general route and unifying pattern set by Pushkin: to teach humanity to be humane.

4.3. The conflict between art and reality in Shestov's *Pushkin*. Gogol as the opposing genius.

The above claim deserves close attention, for it encompasses one of the fundamental ideas of Shestov's article on Pushkin which can be formulated as the conflict between art and reality. On the one hand, Shestov asserts, an artist is supposed to portray life as it is, truthfully, with all its horrors and cruelty. On the other hand, life, as we know, he continues, least of all teaches us to be humane; its law is to promote the strong and to defeat the weak. Thus, the question is, 'как же может поэт, оставаясь верным жизненной правде, сохранить высшие, лучшие порывы своей души? По-видимому, выбора нет и не может быть', Shestov says, 'по-видимому двум богам служить нельзя; нужно или

²³ Shestov, *A. С. Пушкин*, p. 333.

²⁴ Fondane, p. 112.

описать действительность, или уйти в область несбыточных фантазий'.²⁵ Shestov asserts that in the new Western European literature this question still remains unresolved and has produced a clear border-line between the great idealists like Victor Hugo or George Sand, or realists like Flaubert, the Goncourts, Zola and many others. However, this seemingly unresolvable question was posed and solved, according to Shestov, by Russian literature and notably by Pushkin: 'он первый не ушел с дороги, увидев перед собой грозного сфинкса, похравшего уже не одного великого борца за человечество'.²⁶ In short, Shestov sees in Pushkin a harmonious union of idealist and realist, someone who, having encountered real life, can still believe in truth and good. In the rest of his article Shestov is essentially engaged in developing and illustrating this central idea.

In doing so he emphasises how incredibly difficult this tour-de-force must have been for Pushkin and points to various failed attempts of other writers to achieve this union of life and art. In particular Shestov gives the example of Gogol, who, despite his great talent 'спасовал перед непосильной задачей'.²⁷ '“Скучно жить на этом свете, господа”, - воскликнул он, измученный напрасными поисками',²⁸ Shestov writes about Gogol. 'Удивительно ли, что он с таким благоговением глядел на Пушкина. Помните вы его слова? “Пушкин есть явление великое, чрезвычайное” ',²⁹ Shestov quotes. In this connection it is interesting to recall Vasilii Rozanov's article 'Pushkin and Gogol' written in 1891, where he makes a comparison between the two by opposing them to one another. In his as always peculiar and unique manner Rozanov claims that Gogol's genius essentially extinguished that of Pushkin, because they were of two opposite types, one fatal for the existence of the other. Yet, Rozanov says, 'Благодаря образам Пушкина и благодаря новой литературе, которая вся силится восстановить его, поборая Гоголя, и в нашей жизни раньше или позже этот гений погаснет'.³⁰ For Rozanov Gogol's imagination corrupted our souls and filled them with the deepest suffering. 'С Гоголя

²⁵ Fondane, p. 334.

²⁶ Shestov, *А. С. Пушкин*, p. 334.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ V. V. Rozanov, 'Пушкин и Гоголь' in *Несовместимые контрасты жизни. Литературно-эстетические работы разных лет* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1990), p. 232.

именно начинается в нашем обществе *потеря чувства действительности*’, Rozanov claims, ‘равно как от него же идет *начало и отвращения к ней*’.³¹ On the other hand, Pushkin represents a healthy attitude to life, his poetry is the ideal of ‘нормального, здорового развития’.³² For Rozanov ‘Пушкин есть как бы символ жизни: он – весь в движении, и от этого-то так разнообразно его творчество. Все, что живет, – влечет его, и подходя ко всему – он любит его и воплощает’.³³ Rozanov describes Pushkin as a founder of the natural school, always faithful to human nature and human destiny. In contrast to Gogol Rozanov finds in Pushkin no sick imagination or incorrect feeling.

Rozanov’s analysis of Pushkin is in fact very close to that of Shestov, for Rozanov too essentially acknowledges Pushkin’s power of finding harmony between real life and human ideals. He asserts that Pushkin’s poetry not only truthfully depicts life, but also contains instructions on how art should provide a constructive response to the reality depicted. Within it poetry only illuminates and warms up life, but does not distort it. Importantly, it does not create a second imaginative world to which it tries to adjust the first – real – one. ‘Пушкин научает нас чище и благороднее чувствовать’, Rozanov writes, ‘отгоняет в сторону всякий нагар душевный, но он не налагает на нас никакой удушливой формы. И, любя его поэзию, каждый остается *самим собою*’.³⁴ Furthermore, in Rozanov’s essay we can find the same statement that Shestov makes in his article – that Pushkin had shown the way to which future generations of Russian literature are bound to adhere. Only in Rozanov’s case he refers to life rather than literature, while meaning the impact on readers of Pushkin’s creative world, of life as depicted by the poet. Indeed, he says that Pushkin’s poetry has already established those directions following which our life will keep its course without diversions, no matter how much more complicated it may become. This life will preserve the same unity and consistency as well as calm and clarity that Pushkin had found in it.

³¹ Rozanov, ‘Пушкин и Гоголь’, p. 233.

³² Ibid, p. 227.

³³ Ibid, p. 226.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 227.

In his article written for the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* which served as the opening of the journal, Rozanov returned again to the theme of Pushkin and Gogol, only to show once more the opposite nature of the two. In fact he juxtaposed Pushkin not only to Gogol, but also to other Russian classics such as Lermontov, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Rozanov insisted that these writers were slaves to their literary talent which intoxicated them and took over their lives, making them search for the conditions of perfect external solitude necessary for writing. Pushkin, on the other hand, according to Rozanov, belonged first of all to life and loved life and people.³⁵ Gogol, who rushed to St Petersburg to see Pushkin, was indifferently informed by the poet's servant that his master was still asleep, and when Gogol conjectured that this was due to a sleepless night spent writing poetry, the servant said: 'No, he had been playing cards'. The whole article by Rozanov is based on this incident from which he draws far-reaching conclusions about the nature of Pushkin's poetic character, allegedly opposite to the ongoing creative urges and self-sacrificial demands of other classics. Such assertions seem strange at the very least in that they seem to ignore all the existing evidence of Pushkin's intense productivity and the fact that his writings were the result of the most scrupulous, immensely laborious work, consuming both time and effort. In a way Rozanov appears to be making the usual error of confusing the invariable perfect ease of Pushkin's final literary production with the ease of a laid-back attitude, almost laziness, that must therefore be inherent in the producer. However, Pushkin's genius overturns this false logic, and his intensity in writing seems to have equalled his intensity in living his life. And it is not surprising that Vladimir Solovev in his criticism of the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* accused Rozanov of simply neglecting concrete historical facts.

It must also be noted that Rozanov's article substantially differed from the rest of the publications in the Pushkin issue. When eight years earlier, in his article of 1891 discussed above, Rozanov set Gogol and Pushkin against one another, posing the question of whose genius would have a more lasting effect on society, he essentially acknowledged Pushkin as healthy and constructive, but not necessarily stable, and Gogol as corrupting and destructive, although captivating for the modern mind. This time, in 1899, Rozanov in some sense acted more decisively along the lines of Pushkin's adversaries by questioning

³⁵ See V. V. Rozanov, *Заметка о Пушкине, Мир искусства*, 1899, No 13-14.

the poet's relevance to modern literary culture. More precisely, he accused the poet of not being sufficiently romantic and not being able to contribute to contemporary Russia as much as the other classics whom he juxtaposed to Pushkin also in existential terms, as described above. As Marcus Ch. Levitt writes, 'со свойственной ему склонностью к парадоксам философ настаивал на том, что Пушкин был "слишком строг", "серьезен" и "трезв", в то время как названные писатели³⁶ были "опьянены" и потому способны к прорицанию'.³⁷ Rozanov spoke of the current absence of practical demand for Pushkin and concluded that his role now was only to be sanctified and admired from a distance rather than to contribute to the life of society.³⁸ Similar to his assertions described above about Pushkin's creative life, these claims about the poet's 'practical' irrelevance sound equally ungrounded and, as Levitt notes, resonate with the famous statement by Belinsky in 1844 that Pushkin did not respond to the burning questions of the day.

Thus, curiously, both Shestov and Rozanov used Gogol's admiration for Pushkin to draw different conclusions about the poet. Rozanov deemed them equally great, but incompatible in the very character of their genius, while Shestov considered Gogol as looking up to Pushkin, who had won in the battle in which Gogol failed – of reconciling art and reality. In general, Gogol's role in constructing the 'Pushkin myth' was extremely significant. His lines about Pushkin that Shestov partially quoted in his article was taken up by many representatives of Russian culture: they served as an opening in Dostoevsky's famous speech in 1880 as well as in Merezhkovsky's article for *Mir Iskusstva* in 1899. Moreover, these sentiments of Gogol that Pushkin is 'русский человек в конечном его развитии, в каком он, может быть, явится через двести лет'³⁹ in a way prefigured the Nietzschean motives in the reception of Pushkin at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

³⁶ The reference is to the earlier line where Lermontov, Gogol', Dostoevskii and Tolstoi were mentioned.

³⁷ Levitt, p. 31.

³⁸ See Levitt, p. 31.

³⁹ Nikolai Gogol', 'Несколько слов о Пушкине' (1832). Cited in Паперно, p. 44.

4.4. The role of Nietzsche in constructing the Pushkin myth. The struggle between an author and his heroes.

Such motives were particularly strong in the Symbolist movement. Thus, the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva*, by reclaiming Pushkin back from the broad masses, represented an aesthetic opposition front which strove to rescue the poet from the barbarians and to establish a Nietzschean rejection of exoteric plebeian culture, redeeming instead the priority of the esoteric aristocratic culture, using the words of Levitt.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Nietzschean theme of the Superman permeates Andrei Belyi's *Arabeski*, where, as Irina Paperno notices in her article on 'Pushkin in the life of a person of the Silver Age', the image of Pushkin is implicit. In many of his articles, Paperno states, Belyi revives Gogol's themes, formulated in terms of the Russian Schellingean trend, via the new Nietzschean-Symbolist approach.⁴¹ Amongst these themes, which Paperno lists, is the one raised by Shestov in his article as the key one – 'трагического несоответствия идеала и действительности, искусства и жизни'⁴² that was discussed above.

As Paperno writes, 'связь пушкинианства и русского ницшеанства (одного из центральных идеологических течений эпохи) и их взаимная проекция обогатили и подкрепили обе эти культурные парадигмы'.⁴³ Yet, in the Silver Age, it was mainly the Symbolists such as Merezhkovsky, Belyi, Briusov, Blok and others who made and developed this connection, and not Shestov. For our purposes it is very instructive to note that almost immediately after having written his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* and just before starting his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, Shestov made no mention of the German philosopher when writing about Pushkin. This fact is certainly of great significance and should help us understand Shestov's point of departure in his treatment of Pushkin, as reflected in his 'A S. Pushkin' article.

⁴⁰ Levitt, p. 33.

⁴¹ Irina Paperno, 'Пушкин в жизни человека Серебряного века', in *Современное американское пушкиноведение. Сборник статей*, pp. 42- 68 (p. 44).

⁴² Paperno, p. 44.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 43.

In his essay on Shestov entitled 'Tragedy and the Mundane' Berdiaev classifies Shestov's approach to the existential experience of a writer under Shestov's study as projected onto the writer's literary works either as self-denial or self-justification.⁴⁴

Indeed, for Tolstoy Shestov seems to use the latter psychological scheme, whereas for Dostoevsky it is the former. In each case, however, Shestov involved the figure of Nietzsche to create a background against which the Russian writer in question would expose his true nature, no longer shaded by any secondary considerations or masked by various disguises. In other words, Nietzsche taught Shestov to read between the lines, not trusting direct and explicit discourse. In the case of Tolstoy Shestov drew a parallel between him and Nietzsche in that both sought a refuge from tragedy since they were unable to withstand it, and eventually escaped: one into preaching as a form of self-justification, the other into constructing his Superman. On the other hand Dostoevsky, according to Shestov, had long been engaged in self-denial until he realised the useless nature of the humanist ideals that he had once embraced, and came to hate the power of ideas and idealism over human life. In this Shestov sees a direct parallel with Nietzsche who also diligently served the good until fate taught him a cruel lesson and made him see the true and terrible nature of life. Thus, in a sense, in both cases Shestov used Nietzsche to illustrate the deceptive nature of judging writers at face-value and called upon readers to search always for the concealed meaning of their writings and for the authors' breaking point. In the case of Pushkin, however, in contrast to the above, Shestov did not even attempt to seek such a transformation of convictions, to seek the moment at which Pushkin might have undergone a total crisis and emerged a different person with a new set of values and beliefs.

Thus, with writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky Shestov invariably assumed in them a profound dynamics of the same nature – leading to the renunciation of humanist ideals, disillusionment and revelations as a result of trying to overcome existential tragedy. Pushkin, on the other hand, appeared to Shestov at the time of writing his article as a completed motionless image invested with absolute features characteristic rather of a

⁴⁴ Berdiaev, 'Трагедия и обыденность', p. 471.

monument than a person. In other words, Shestov's schematic and restricted perception of Pushkin in 1899 is largely orthogonal to his usual hermeneutic approach to writers through the development of their existential experience which he decoded in their writings. When we say 'largely orthogonal' we mean that there are still certain features of this approach that are akin to Shestov's usual method. These features, in our view, lie on the plane of interpretation of the writer through his heroes.

Indeed, Shestov read from the Underground Man's contemplations, as well as the behaviour and ideas of Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov, Dostoevsky's own doubts and soul-searching. Similarly, he deciphered Tolstoy's heroes such as the seemingly exemplary Levin from *Anna Karenina* or the apparently self-contented Natasha, Pierre or Sonia from *War and Peace*, together with the agonising Ivan Ilich as Tolstoy's personal attempts to resolve the eternal questions of existence. He, as it were, used those characters as deceptive double-pictures in which under the superficial layer there lies concealed and waiting to be exposed the second, true image. This image for Shestov served as a conductor of the writer's true self, as a mirror of his real existential struggle.

On the surface it seems that in the case of Pushkin Shestov abandoned this game, started in *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, and returned to a rather straightforward technique reminiscent more of his *Shakespeare and Brandes*. Indeed, when discussing Pushkin, just as when writing about Shakespeare, Shestov does not interrogate their negative characters in order to extract from the latter classified information about the writers; he does not rub off their colours to discover very different, hidden images. He takes them at face-value, largely within the established critical tradition, and interprets their positive heroes as the direct embodiment of the authors' intentions. On the contrary, when exploring Tolstoy and Dostoevsky Shestov **does not trust** their positive heroes and turns to the negative ones for a hidden key to the writer's soul. Yet, we claim, although the game Shestov plays is indeed different in spirit in the case of Pushkin or Shakespeare on the one hand and Tolstoy, Dostoevsky *et al.* on the other, there is still a common root in this game in the form of the interplay between the characters and the writers. Namely, Shestov perceives a literary work as a battlefield between the author united with his (often pathetic) representatives – his positive characters

– against his negative characters as the enemy army. In this battle Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and others almost invariably failed while Pushkin and Shakespeare won (to be more precise, in the case of Shakespeare the latter, according to Shestov, revealed a new dimension in a negative character which rendered him positive or rather uncovered the hidden and highest meaning of existential tragedy).

It is interesting that even Shestov's terminology unambiguously suggests the above interpretation. Indeed, he exclaims about Pushkin that he 'восторжествовал над своим Онегиным'⁴⁵ and that this victory is 'не фиктивная', that Pushkin 'эту победу [...] не выдумал – он только отметил то, что было на самом деле, что он своими глазами видел в русской жизни'.⁴⁶ It must be said that this difference is quite clearly due to the stage of Shestov's inner development rather than to the writers in question. This is so simply because in his article on Pushkin Shestov explicitly equated Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to Pushkin in their alleged victory over the tragedy of life, thus essentially contradicting his conclusions in *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* which he had just written. Contrary to his accusations, implicit in the book, against Tolstoy for his flight from tragedy to the mundane, Shestov wrote in his Pushkin article that Tolstoy 'не боится трагедии - и прямо глядит ей в глаза'.⁴⁷ Shestov asserts that Tolstoy emerged a victor from his impossible task of portraying the tragic (like the war of 1812) in a way that would not kill all faith and all hope. For him 'художественная задача никогда не определялась чисто эстетическими запросами души',⁴⁸ Shestov claims. Instead, he says, Tolstoy 'брал перо в руки лишь тогда и затем, когда, после упорного и тревожного размышления, он мог осветить для себя и для других загадку жизни'.⁴⁹ Hence Shestov asserts that in Tolstoy 'вы чувствуете великого ученика великого Пушкина'.⁵⁰ Moreover, Shestov makes similar remarks about Dostoevsky – and this is on the verge of writing his *Dostoevsky and*

⁴⁵ Shestov, *A. С. Пушкин*, p. 336.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 338.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 343.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 342.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 343.

Nietzsche, portraying the novelist as engaged in a tormenting battle against the humanist tradition.

4.5. 'A. S. Pushkin' against *Shakespeare and his critic Brandes* as evidence of Shestov's inner development.

Thus it must be emphasised once again that this apparent fluidity of opinions and a clear lack of established views serve as a transparent indication of these views being still in the process of formation. The destiny of Shestov's article on Pushkin is a further testimony to it. Indeed, whether intended for publication in the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* or written regardless and independently of it, simply on the wave of the poet's centenary, Shestov's article was only discovered posthumously and subsequently appeared in the almanac *Vozdushnye Puti* in New York as late as 1960. Given its extremely idealistic tone the most likely scenario seems to be that it was Shestov's own independent decision to leave this work unpublished. Therefore it is quite likely that Shestov's sincere admiration of Pushkin exceeded the force of his new world outlook which prevailed by 1899 and which was unambiguously established in *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*. The fact that he wrote this article at a time when he had divested himself, with near-disgust, of his previous intoxication with ideals and naïve youthful beliefs must testify to the victory of scepticism being still incomplete in Shestov. Yet, never publishing this work and apparently not even showing it to others can be interpreted as another sign of Shestov's inner struggle, with his new convictions ultimately taking the upper hand. Incidentally, another proof of the fact that Shestov's convictions at the time were a result of his own idealism, which was still alive, rather than being due to the nature of the authors under study is that, as we shall see, he later lost his awe of Pushkin, in the sense that he was no longer under the spell of the poet's overpowering positive characters, whom Shestov had regarded as instructive for posterity.

Notably, Shestov's exclamations about Pushkin in his article are very similar to those he made about Shakespeare in his first book. Thus, he proclaims in admiration:

Сила и великое универсальное значение Шекспира именно в том, что в этой беспросветной тьме он нашел путь. Там, где для нас хаос, случай, бессмысленная борьба мертвой, равнодушной, но бесконечно могучей силы с живым, чувствующим, но немощным

человеком (т. е. там, где для нас область нелепого трагизма), – там поэт видит осмысленный процесс духовного развития.⁵¹

Along the same lines he exclaims about Pushkin that

все самые мрачные стороны жизни приковывали его внимание и он с долгим, неустанным терпением вглядывался в них, пока не находил для них нужного объяснения. [...] Какие ужасы только не проходили перед его духовным взором. И тем не менее – он не смутился. Везде, во всем он умел отыскать внутренний, глубокий смысл, точно жизнь решила выдать своему любимцу и избраннику все свои сокровенные тайны.⁵²

Yet, his praise of Shakespeare in his first book sounds stylistically relatively low-key in comparison. Thus, for example, Shestov writes in the opening lines of his article on Pushkin the following phrase: ‘на земле человеческие руки не созидали еще храма, который мог бы сравниться по красоте своей с великой душой Пушкина’.⁵³ In the same vein later on Shestov calls Pushkin’s art Divine⁵⁴ and labels him after Dostoevsky ‘всечеловек’.⁵⁵ In general such expressions are very representative of the stylistic and semantic texture of this article.

As Valevicius concludes in his book analysing Shestov’s *Shakespeare and Brandes*, ‘for Shestov in 1898 there still was an answer to the question of the meaning of life and Shakespeare held it’.⁵⁶ The same, even with more force, can be asserted about Pushkin in the sense of holding the ultimate answer for Shestov in 1899, solely on the basis of Shestov’s article. The difference is, however, that for Shestov in 1899 this was only the sunlit, daytime part of the picture. But, taking an intertextual approach and considering this article in the context of his preceding book on Tolstoy and Nietzsche and the subsequent one on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, we can see that the shadow, hidden, night-time part of the picture was completely opposite, full of tormenting doubts. This observation links very naturally with the analysis by Viktor Erofeev who asserts that Shestov's thought operated

⁵¹ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 177.

⁵² Shestov, *А. С. Пушкин*, p. 338.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 331.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 339.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 343.

⁵⁶ Valevicius, p. 10.

on two levels: a day-time one and a night-time one, i. e. on the level of the mundane and the level of tragedy (to borrow from the title of Berdiaev's article on Shestov), and these two levels were constantly fighting and undermining each other. The mundane was linked with humanism and as such largely represented the human norm, that is to say largely the mediocre, whereas the night vision was tragic and full of forbidden discoveries that contradicted all accepted values.⁵⁷

The very discourses of Shestov's mature works on the one hand and his 'A. S. Pushkin' article on the other are opposite in that in the former he uses an indirect mode of discourse, whereas in the latter it is clearly direct. The typically scornful vigour of Shestov's fully-fledged style is manifested in advance in his Pushkin article by a loud pathos reminiscent more of that inherent in the later hypocritical tradition of socialist realism. Therefore this article is even difficult to read in our time, since from the perspective of modernity any open pathos is hard to take seriously, and it is Shestov's usual irony and shrewd deconstructive analysis that have much more appeal for the modern reader. In fact, if Shestov had written all his works in the style of his 'A. S. Pushkin', he almost certainly would be forgotten by now and would not have left his distinct footprint on Russian thought. It is precisely the opposite type of discourse – critical and rebellious in virtually all its manifestations – by which we know and remember Shestov to the present day and hold him in high regard. In Shestov's time too, largely due to Gogol and his successors such as Saltykov-Shchedrin and the authors of Kozma Prutkov,⁵⁸ and ironically due to Pushkin too, the ironic and subversive tradition was popular and fast developing.

The debate following Dostoevsky's Pushkin speech only highlights these two different trends which were developing in Russian culture and for that matter in world culture too. In a way they are as described by Rozanov in his article about Pushkin and Gogol whom he essentially deems to be representatives respectively of each of these trends, and views the

⁵⁷ Erofeev, pp. 173-174.

⁵⁸ Kozma Prutkov (Козьма Прутков) was a fictional character invented by Aleksei Tolstoi and his cousins: Aleksandr, Aleksei and Vladimir Zhemchuzhnikov. Using Prutkov as an imaginary author they produced a highly satirical account of the bureaucratic and authoritarian Russian regime of the 1850s and 1860s.

two writers and hence the two currents as cancelling one another out in their intrinsic incompatibility and inner opposition.⁵⁹ Continuing Rozanov's rather intuitive division we can extend it as follows. With the due correction that the tradition originated by Pushkin harmoniously united idealism with realism and organically blended romantic and ironic styles, thus falling between two stools, they can be, nevertheless, crudely labelled as direct, serious, idealistic and utopian, and indirect, ironic and anti-utopian respectively. The division in reality is, of course, much more complex, allowing for all sorts of subdivisions and the fluidity of borders. Apart from Pushkin, there is also Dostoevsky whose carnivalesque tradition permeates both trends, spilling over their boundaries, and he is far from being the only example of this kind. Nevertheless, there are writers like Turgenev and Tolstoy who largely belong to the first trend, or those like Saltykov-Shchedrin from the second. On the other hand, Chekhov is again a mixture of ironic undercurrents with waves of open lyricism.

In any case, within this broad classification, the later evolution of these two cultural and literary discourses has been complicated and marked by their alternating division and reunification giving rise to new and rich genres. The anti-utopian tradition eventually evolved into post-modernism, while the utopian has shifted substantially into the same direction of irony bordering on cynicism as a form of despair (to rephrase Joseph Brodsky).⁶⁰ In the light of this it is important to emphasise that, generally speaking, what makes Shestov still readable in our day is the kernel and quintessence of his whole philosophy – his distrust of, and disdain for self-evident truths, as reflected in his ironic and aphoristic style. And this is exactly what his article on Pushkin lacks, being fully composed of the self-evident, of what lies on the surface and fits into the frame of idealism and dogmatism which in turn are currents of the aforementioned utopian trend. The extreme forms of the latter had started to outlive themselves in Shestov's time, then were embraced by the totalitarian ideology to serve its needs, and now, historically, after the overwhelming dominance of hypocrisy both in literary and social terms, are hardly tolerable and thus

⁵⁹ See Rozanov, 'Пушкин и Гоголь', pp. 228-229.

⁶⁰ In his 'Путешествие в Стамбул' Brodskii says, 'Снобизм? Но он лишь форма отчаянья', in *Сочинения Иосифа Бродского*, vol. V, p. 288.

almost completely extinct. What came to succeed these forms, is neo-romanticism which represents a substantial degree of sobriety that has been added to the romantic tradition, thus in a way returning to Pushkin.

In the light of this we can now see why Shestov's *Shakespeare and his critic Brandes*⁶¹ is, as we said above, less idealistic and dogmatic than his 'A. S. Pushkin'. Indeed, although in his *Shakespeare and Brandes* Shestov's ideology was still within the first – utopian – tradition, this way of communicating this ideology was already beginning to take a turn towards Shestov's 'proper' style belonging clearly to the other, anti-utopian trend. On the other hand, his 'A. S. Pushkin' is a step back towards being fully subordinated to this ideology, both semantically and stylistically. Interestingly, there is just one phrase in his whole article on Pushkin which sharply stands out and gives us an example of Shestov's 'true style' – masterfully concise and semantically non-obvious as well as acutely modern. This phrase is given in the context of describing the extraordinary strength of Pushkin's faith in life and reads as follows: 'Иными словами, его вера не нуждается в иллюзии, для которой, в свою очередь, необходимым условием является перспектива'.⁶²

Thus from the point of view of the two opposite literary trends and taking into account this reverse chronology in the context of Shestov's other works, we can conjecture not only that his rapid route from one tradition to the other was not entirely linear, but also that it was profoundly and painfully marked by Shestov's premonitions of the doomed destiny of this serious and idealistic discourse as such, from which he himself originated in literary terms and to which his heart was initially strongly attached. Dostoevsky's speech of 1880 clearly contributed to this struggle, even though it did not change the eventual outcome. Baranova-Shestova also acknowledges the impact of this speech on Shestov's 'Pushkin', saying that it was written under its strong influence. Thus the struggle between the above two literary trends reflected and coincided with Shestov's own existential and ideological struggle and formed that prism through which he later viewed writers and their works.

⁶¹ In the sequel this book will be referred to in short as *Shakespeare and Brandes*.

⁶² Shestov, *A. С. Пушкин*, p. 341.

Our comparison of Shestov's *Shakespeare and Brandes* with his 'Pushkin' can be further supported by the words of Valevicius that in the former work 'in many ways the entire Shestov in all his audacity is already in evidence and, retrospectively, we can distinguish certain themes which were to become leitmotifs in all his future works'.⁶³ This is definitely so, with the conflict between art and science, reason and soul already present, whereas in 'Pushkin' the only elements of Shestov proper are the intensity of his temperament, only in the form of pathos rather than scornful vigour, and his approach to the problem of existential tragedy and its artistic solution. The central conflict for Shestov of mind and soul, reason and faith, art and science is not really present in his 'Pushkin', but already comes on to the scene, if only in a sketchy form, in his first book. The problem of the author and his heroes is also already evident in *Shakespeare and Brandes*, but is only in the embryonic state in 'Pushkin'. The existential approach to the writer crucial for Shestov is virtually non-existent in 'Pushkin', but is apparent in *Shakespeare and Brandes*. Valevicius remarks that the latter 'suffers a little in terms of historical accuracy regarding Shakespeare's life', but emphasises that Shestov only had 'nineteenth-century Shakespearean scholarship to go by'.⁶⁴ This is a very important distinction between the two works, as, for the mature Shestov, relying on a writer's biography was crucial. Moreover, as Valevicius points out, it is probably from Brandes that Shestov learned his person-centred approach.⁶⁵ Yet, obviously Shestov's glorification of Pushkin prevented him from going into any biographical analysis of the poet – a fact which is even more peculiar given that this was the age when, precisely due to Pushkin studies, two critical movements were establishing themselves: biographism and formalism.

4.6. Shestov's method versus biographism and formalism in the case study of Pushkin.

As Paperno points out, the Pushkin myth held him to be the universal model which harmoniously united 'a man and a poet'. One of the first to enter the polemics around this problem was Vladimir Solov'ev, who, as Paperno writes, tried to reject the Pushkin cult and asserted that in fact the figure of Pushkin accommodated the striking contradiction

⁶³ Valevicius, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

between a poetic ideal and everyday reality. Symbolists such as Briusov and Belyi essentially asserted the concept of 'жизнетворчество', insisting on the inevitability of a poet's life merging with and moreover being modelled and shaped by his creativity. As Paperno explains, it was Vladislav Khodasevich who decisively criticised this Symbolist concept and claimed that their theory that life had to be artificially merged with poetry failed miserably since both life and poetry were wrecked as a result.⁶⁶

In a sense Khodasevich juxtaposed Pushkin to the Symbolists in that Pushkin consciously realised the innate connection of his existential tragedy with his poetic personality while the Symbolists were trying to construct and rule their life so that it was inseparable from their poetry. Thus Khodasevich, while criticising the Symbolists' concept of uniting poet and man was in fact himself far from fully splitting the two. At the same time Modest Gofman, as Paperno explains, was decisively promoting such a split when studying the poet. Khodasevich and Gofman were engaged in a heated polemic on this topic, and it is the principle of such a split that according to Khodasevich gave rise to the above movements. Biographism is preoccupied purely by the life path of a writer, while formalism only studies his works. For Khodasevich a clear example of biographism was Veresaev's study of Pushkin which came to the conclusion that there is always a discrepancy between Pushkin the man and Pushkin the poet. Thus Veresaev offered a study of Pushkin based entirely on the evidence of his life and not on his poetry, deeming a concentration on his poetry massively misleading in conventional Pushkin studies. Veresaev called this erroneous approach of treating Pushkin's poetry as evidence of his personality 'вера в догмат об абсолютной автобиографичности Пушкина',⁶⁷ and saw it in Khodasevich. The latter denounced both biographism and formalism as products of the emerging Soviet materialistic tradition which promoted 'любовь к материалам ради материалов'.⁶⁸ Interestingly, Paperno makes a connection between these approaches on the one hand and

⁶⁶ See Paperno, pp. 46-48.

⁶⁷ V. Veresaev, *Пушкин в жизни* (Moscow, 1926), p. 43. Cited in Paperno, p. 49.

⁶⁸ V. Khodasevich, 'Пушкин в жизни (По поводу книги В. В. Вересаева)', *Последние новости* (Paris), (2120) 13.01.1927, p. 3. Cited in Paperno, p. 50.

the christological polemics of the divine and human sides of Christ, of the God-man (Богочеловек) and man-God (Человекобог) on the other.⁶⁹

All these debates are directly relevant to our study of Shestov, since we claim that he found yet another way of looking at the two approaches. Instead of uniting or splitting them Shestov as it were filtered formalism through the sieve of biographism, thus offering an original paradigm of decoding literary works in a new light. Instead of juxtaposing the writer to the man he attempted to peel the man off the writer. Yet, as we pointed out, he was not ready to do it to Pushkin in 1899. However, already in 1903 when writing his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*, Shestov was already doing precisely that. Thus, he submits to doubt the sincerity of Pushkin's line that the supreme judge of his own poetry is the poet himself rather than the reading crowd. 'Может быть, он и чувствовал, как мало может быть доволен своими трудами поэт – но гордость мешала ему признаться в своей слабости, и он пытался лишний раз утешить себя сознанием своего превосходства над толпой. [...] Пушкин был умным человеком и очень глубокой натурой'.⁷⁰ Thus Shestov for the first time after his 'Pushkin' article starts treating the poet in his usual distrustful way, finding discrepancies between Pushkin's claims and his actual beliefs. Notably, Shestov compares Pushkin to Shakespeare, claiming that the latter would never have accepted Pushkin's statement about a poet's satisfaction about his writings. The same Shestov who only five years previously had thought that Shakespeare could pacify and resolve our existential anxiety, now said that 'после *Гамлета* человек может успокоиться только в гробу...'.⁷¹

4.7. Shestov's Pushkin in evolution.

The evolution of Shestov's attitudes can be traced most distinctly when looking at his treatment of Pushkin's Tat'iana. Back in 1899 she, and not Onegin, was for Shestov the central figure of Pushkin's famous work, and she symbolised the moral victory of the ideal over reality. In 1905, in his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*, Shestov still views her as a

⁶⁹ See Paperno, pp. 50-51.

⁷⁰ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 118.

⁷¹ Ibid.

moral paragon, but his sentiments about it are altogether different. Before Pushkin defeated Onegin by introducing Tatiana who was to symbolise the victory of the ideal over reality, but now Tatiana is a keeper of morality because ‘это дело не пристало мужчине’,⁷² as Shestov writes. Men have different functions – they are to fight wars, not to promote peace and humility, as the impostor in *Boris Godunov* explains to Pimen, Shestov observes. But, Shestov continues, when a man comes home he needs to know that his rights are reliably protected, and that is when Tatiana comes on to the scene with her famous ‘я другому отдана и буду век ему верна’.⁷³ This phrase in which, as Shestov claimed in 1899, the quintessence of the whole novel is concealed, at the time unambiguously meant for him that falsehood and immorality ultimately fail in the face of the ideals of good. ‘Татьяна [...] могла бы ошибиться, как ошиблась, когда впервые встретилась с Онегиным, не разгадать Онегина и откликнуться на его призыв. Но Пушкин не мог и не должен был ошибиться’,⁷⁴ Shestov wrote then. Because the task of Pushkin ‘сводилась к тому, чтобы отыскать в жизни, в действительной жизни такой элемент, перед которым бы распалась в прах дерзновенная, но пустая схема искателей духовных приключений Онегиных’.⁷⁵ In 1905 Tatiana's fidelity and high morality are only there to provide an opportunity for a man who is implicitly free to misbehave in any way he likes, since he openly disregards the peaceful appeals of the Christian commandments, to have a hearth of rest and peace. This new perspective clearly shows that Shestov himself over a period as short as five years at most (because in 1904 the *Apotheosis* was finished) had turned drastically away from his idealistic interpretations of Pushkin.

Moreover, in 1904 Shestov no longer sees in Turgenev's female characters the continuation of Pushkin's Tatiana, as he did in 1899. Indeed, back then he wrote that all Turgenev's heroines, ‘это уже давно подмечено – имеют свой прототип в Татьяне Пушкина, и подобно ей являются нравственными судьями и светочами в жизни’.⁷⁶ In the

⁷² Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 72.

⁷³ A.S. Pushkin, *Евгений Онегин* in *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах*, vol. 4, p. 160. Cited in Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Shestov, *А. С. Пушкин*, p. 337.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 342.

Apotheosis of Groundlessness he claims that the critics making such a comparison had been misled by the external resemblance. Instead Shestov emphasises that a heroine in Turgenev's works – in contrast to Pushkin's Tatiana – ‘является судьей и наградой (а иногда и вдохновительницей) победителя-мужчины’.⁷⁷ ‘Разница слишком велика’,⁷⁸ he then exclaims. Thus for Shestov in 1904 Turgenev's female almost instigates a fight, judges the participants and rewards the victor with her own self. Tatiana, on the other hand, is not a judge, but simply an embodiment of reliability, if you like an insurance against infidelity and betrayal, a symbol of a solid home front. Thus, this topic alone shows that Shestov's attitudes between 1899 and 1904 evolved considerably to produce his own independent opinion, cutting across conventional views. In *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* we encounter an independently-minded mature Shestov, sceptical, shrewd and distrustful.

A similar example is Shestov's discussion on Pushkin's Onegin as opposed to Lermontov's Pechorin. This migrates to his next book – on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, but is marked by quite different sentiments, even though the book followed almost immediately after the Pushkin article. This time Shestov concentrates almost entirely on Pechorin; yet, although he largely repeats his claims from the article, under closer scrutiny we can see in them a clear change of attitude or at least a change of focus on Shestov's part, and certainly a drastic change of discourse. Indeed, in 1899 Shestov described *The Hero of Our Time* as ‘апофеоз бездушного эгоизма’, as a victory in our life of ‘грубая, беспощадная сила’.⁷⁹ Shestov claimed that Lermontov could not defeat his hero and so, in order to stay truthful, started to sing praises to him instead, which every victor is entitled to. Pechorin with his mighty abilities and only one fault – his extreme and cold-blooded cruelty – comes on top of the world and thus ‘убивает всякую веру, всякую надежду’,⁸⁰ Shestov concluded in 1899. However, in contrast to that Pushkin did not fall a victim of his Onegin and found the character of Tatiana to defeat him. The meaning of our whole Russian literature, Shestov asserts, is that its heroes are Tatianas rather than Onegins, so ‘у нас побеждает не грубая

⁷⁷ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 72.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Shestov, *А. С. Пушкин*, p. 336.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

самоуверенная, эгоистическая сила, не бессердечная жестокость, а глубокая, хотя тихая и неслышная вера в свое достоинство и в достоинство каждого человека'.⁸¹

Now, in 1901 in the Introduction to his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, Shestov seemingly rehearses the same arguments. He describes Pechorin as a victor in front of whom all other heroes are destroyed. In Lermontov's novel, Shestov exclaims, 'нет даже, как в пушкинском *Онегине*, Татьяны, которая хотя бы раз за все время напомнила герою, что на свете существует нечто более священное, нежели его, Печорина, воля, что есть долг, идея или что-нибудь в таком роде'.⁸² However, already in these lines we can detect a change of perspective in Shestov. Tatiana is no longer glorified, Shestov is no longer interested in asserting Pushkin's overwhelming inner harmony – instead he mentions Tatiana almost in passing, almost dismissively, only as a background against which the figure of Pechorin is better highlighted. What interests Shestov this time is Lermontov's intentions. He no longer emphasises that Lermontov fell victim to his hero. Instead he swings to the other side to show that Pechorin in fact is very dear to Lermontov, that this 'disease' (using Lermontov's own words from his preface to the second edition of the novel), is 'одна из тех болезней, которые автору дороже всякого здоровья'.⁸³ This is Shestov's answer to the question that he himself posed: 'Отчего же у человека, так умевшего открыть и описать болезнь, нет никакого желания лечить ее. И, вообще, отчего предисловие так спокойно, хотя и сильно написано?'.⁸⁴ Shestov implicates Lermontov in a deliberately misleading statement:

“Главное, чтобы болезнь была указана, а как лечить ее – Бог знает”. Эта маленькая ложь, заключающая собою короткое предисловие к длинному роману, чрезвычайно характерна. Вы ее не у одного Лермонтова найдете. Почти у всякого большого поэта, не исключая и Пушкина, от времени до времени, когда описание “болезни” становится слишком соблазнительным, она наскоро, между делом, выбрасывается читателю как дань, от которой не свободны и привилегированнейшие умы.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Shestov, *A. C. Пушкин*, p. 337.

⁸² Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 325.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 324.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 325.

These accusations are part of Shestov's argument to prove his very own point – about the suffocating power of self-evident truths, the violence of accepted ideas, ideologies and ethical norms over ‘рвущимся к свободе человеческим умом’.⁸⁶ Unlike critics, who want to stitch any artistic work with the underlying morality, Shestov asserts, artists strive for freedom from any restrictions whatsoever. In Lermontov's phrase above, that Shestov calls a little lie, he sees the poet's ‘самую задушевную и глубокую мысль [...]: как бы ни было трудно с Печоринскими - он не отдаст их в жертву середине, норме’.⁸⁷ The same reasoning Shestov applies to Pushkin and exemplifies it with Pugachev's tale about an eagle and a raven from the *The Captain's Daughter*, and the answer given by Grinev. A critic wants to cure the disease, Shestov repeats. ‘Он верит или обязан верить в современные идеи – в будущее счастье человечества, в мир на земле, в монизм, в необходимость уничтожения всех орлов, питающихся живым мясом, выражаясь языком Пугачева, ради сохранения воронья, живущего падалью. Орлы и орлиная жизнь, это – “ненормальность”...’.⁸⁸

Thus Shestov's opinions this time are quite opposite to his 1899 ones and represent a different person – both ethically and aesthetically. Not that he is prepared to agree (or indeed to assign such a claim to Lermontov) that Pechorin's cruelty can be forgiven on account of all his other superior qualities – no. Rather, Shestov is now much more interested in emphasising his own issues: freedom from the oppressive power of ideals, from the categories of good and evil and discovering writers' urge for such a freedom in their inner world which bears witness to their existential experience. Shestov now steps decisively – from his disillusionment about getting any positive or consoling answers about the human predicament in classical literature – into the domain of tragedy, where all those ‘которые отвергнуты наукой и моралью’,⁸⁹ all those who dare to think and feel differently, exist. And his main stance now is opposite to the one he held in his youth and which he adhered to in his Pushkin article in 1899. Now, the writer no longer exists for the reader. ‘Наоборот’, Shestov now exclaims,

⁸⁶ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 326.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 328.

читатель существует для писателя. Достоевский и Ницше говорят не затем, чтоб распространить среди людей свои убеждения и просветить ближних. Они сами ищут света, они не верят себе, что то, что им кажется светом, есть точно свет, а не обманчивый блуждающий огонек или, хуже того – галлюцинация их расстроенного воображения. Они зовут к себе читателя, как свидетеля, они от него хотят получить право думать по-своему, надеяться – право существовать. [...] Может быть, большинство читателей не хочет этого знать, но сочинения Достоевского и Ницше заключают в себе не ответ, а вопрос.⁹⁰

This, we think, shows quite clearly that the real Shestov has finally been hatched from his youthful idealism and that now his own perspective is distilled: his work and philosophy are now too about asking questions rather than giving answers.

Having said that, it is worth pointing out that, interestingly, Shestov's understanding of Pechorin and Onegin appears throughout quite one-dimensional. Indeed, he follows more literally than not Belinsky's rather socially, not existentially, oriented arguments about Pechorin being a superfluous person in Russia of the time. Essentially this very label of a 'superfluous person', introduced in these words by Turgenev, has stuck profoundly in Russian literary criticism and has been endlessly applied, in particular in connection to Pechorin. In our view this requires a little more precision because Pechorin is an outsider not so much in social terms as in existential terms. More precisely, a revealing and productive approach to him would be to consider him a victim rather than a victor and tyrant. Indeed, the victims of his cruelty suffer from very human feelings of humiliated love and betrayed trust, while he himself undergoes a much more fundamental suffering – his emotional deficiency, his inability to love, or in other words his inability to be human. Moreover, with his brilliant mental capacities he consciously realises that and there is no worse punishment to him than to be essentially excluded from the human race. This, in our view, most important observation is completely missing in Shestov's analysis of Pechorin. Shestov glides on the surface to see only Pechorin's superficial victories and not his inner emptiness and related torment which renders him the most profound and incurable victim of all.

⁹⁰ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 328.

Onegin, who seems to be of the same kind, is nevertheless very different, for he is ultimately capable of repentance and genuine emotional involvement. No less importantly, Pushkin's ironic style throughout the novel also makes this hero much more light-hearted than Lermontov's hero of our time. This important point also escapes Shestov's attention and he omits to observe that *Eugene Onegin*, unlike Lermontov's novel, is written (and quite deliberately too) in such a way that it does not evoke any pity for the protagonists on the part of the reader. Shestov's inability to pick up all these important clues once again reinforces in particular our point about Shestov's rather under-developed relationship with aesthetics. In a sense Shestov's Pushkin article can be viewed as the climax of his aesthetic lapse due to the extent of its open and unquestioning glorification of the poet. However, in all fairness one must say that such a direct idolisation of Pushkin permeates almost entirely the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva*, and from this perspective Shestov's article would have fitted perfectly into the journal. In fact, in his criticism of this issue Solov'ev blamed its authors precisely for their idolisation of Pushkin (with the exception of Rozanov who, as we mentioned above, was out of step with the others in this respect).

However, Shestov was soon to part forever with such a kind of aesthetic failure. His rather blind glorification of Pushkin in its totality in 1899 gradually sobered up and by 1905 Shestov's Pushkin descended from divine status to an earthly one and acquired some interesting features that are worth discussing. The most distinct of these features is actually not particularly original – it is Pushkin's vibrant love for life, his natural intrinsic ability to go with the wave of life, not resisting, but enjoying it. However, Shestov does add something of his own to this idea: namely, he puts a slightly different – as it were utilitarian – spin on it, turning this ability of Pushkin to another one – of being extremely adaptable.

Thus, writing in the *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* about Pushkin again, Shestov expresses the view that for the poet there was nothing hopelessly bad. Moreover, Shestov said, everything would become useful to him. And in this Shestov saw the mystery of Pushkin's 'inner harmony'⁹¹ which implies in particular that although, as we saw, by 1905 Shestov started applying to Pushkin his usual subversive criteria, he still was essentially in

⁹¹ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 23.

agreement with the general trend of opinions in tune with the Dostoevsky speech, uncritically describing the poet as a unique cultural phenomenon. This trend included in particular the Symbolist representatives from the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* as well as their oppositionists such as Khodasevich.

Going further in the same direction – of looking beyond Pushkin's verve and naturalness to his skill in being psychologically adaptable, Shestov actually implies that Pushkin 'счастьем своим [...] был обязан исключительно тому обстоятельству, что умел в своих стремлениях не переходить за известную черту'.⁹² This means essentially that Pushkin, in Shestov's opinion, was a master of his happy temperament and his *joie de vivre* – that he himself quite consciously controlled his desires. While in itself this claim seems very disputable, it nevertheless demonstrates the familiar pattern of Shestov trying to read (or rather guess) between the lines and his distrust of the obvious and commonly accepted. Interestingly, Shestov then applies, even if fragmentarily, his usual technique and, if we call a spade a spade, talks about Pushkin's mask, implying that the poet had to pretend to be content and superior in order to overcome all the resentments that he was to suffer in life.⁹³

Rather expectedly Shestov persists with a discussion on Pushkin's survival mechanisms. He takes further the above claim of the poet's ability to control his aspirations and fits it into his own assertion of the utilitarian nature of human truths. More precisely, Shestov argues that Pushkin, despite having a powerful and daring mind, convinced himself, akin to the way innocent youngsters tend to do, that there is no contradiction between ideal aspirations and selfish ones. For example, Shestov says, such people manage to persuade themselves that a striving for fame and for useful activity are different words to designate the same thing. Moreover, Shestov believed that Pushkin would not have parted with this conviction even if he had lived to be very old.⁹⁴ Thus Shestov's arguments on the whole translate Pushkin's ability to enjoy life wherever it takes him into his quality of being a very practical and flexible person in psychological terms. This demonstrates again that with time Shestov

⁹² Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 117.

⁹³ See *Ibid*, p. 118.

⁹⁴ See *Ibid*, p. 55.

‘unglorified’ Pushkin and dismantled the commonly accepted romantic perception of the poet which he himself had previously had.

In doing so Shestov would sometimes go too far and his voice would even acquire a cynical ring to it. This, however, was due, in our opinion, to Shestov's general tendency to shock the reader, which can be exemplified by his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*, than to him losing respect for Pushkin. It will not be a mistake to repeat after Natalia Baranova-Shestova that her father preserved a deep and genuine respect for the poet throughout his entire life. Yet, Shestov was capable of uttering the following lines, deliberately free of any sort of awe relating to Pushkin's famous words from his ‘The Poet’:

“Пока не требует поэта к священной жертве Аполлон - из детей ничтожных мира, быть может, всех ничтожней он”. Расскажите обыкновенным языком мысль Пушкина, и получится страничка из невропатологии: все неврастеники обыкновенно переходят от состояния крайней возбужденности - к совершенной прострации. Поэты - тоже: и гордятся этим.⁹⁵

It may even be that precisely due to Pushkin's glory and his huge role for Russian culture in general and Shestov's personal development in particular, such statements helped Shestov to liberate himself from the pressure of Pushkin's name and authority, thus rendering this phenomenon a rather adolescent rebellion against the authority of one's parents.

Yet, in the second part of *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* Shestov elaborates on these lines of Pushkin in a more serious tone and essentially twists them around in order to advance one of his own ideas. As Viktor Erofeev noted, ‘заменив пушкинскую “ничтожность” на самовольную “порочность”, Шестов решительно пересматривает связь гения и злодейства. Эти понятия становятся не просто совместимыми, но гораздо более того – неразлучными.’⁹⁶ Indeed, Shestov confuses vice and insignificance to argue that the

⁹⁵ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 61. Notice that the ‘quotation’ from Pushkin that Shestov cites is imprecise and represents Shestov’s own ‘edited’ version of the original (the correct one reads: ‘Пока не требует поэта // К священной жертве Аполлон, // В заботах суетного света // Он малодушно погружен; // Молчит его святая лира; // Душа вкушает хладный сон, // И меж детей ничтожных мира, // Быть может, всех ничтожней он’).

⁹⁶ Erofeev, p. 166.

gods favour the fallacious and depraved rather than the virtuous, and that the latter find their reward in being content with themselves. In fact, 'добродетель [...] настолько довольна собой, что ни в какой награде не нуждается',⁹⁷ whereas vice is rewarded by Apollo's favours. This faulty reasoning, by the way, replaces Pushkin's words that if you are a poet you are an insignificant person in all your other capacities, by a different idea which is not equivalent and does not follow: that if you are an insignificant person, you will be welcomed in Parnassus (i.e. you will be suited to being an artist of some kind). In mathematics such confusion that can be expected only from a non-professional is known as confusing a statement with its converse. Also, in his attempts to portray artists as invariably depraved, Shestov's profound tendency to 'unmask', to uncover the hidden inner world of a writer, his true self, manifests itself in a rather obvious way. In this connection Shestov's contemplation of the figure of Pushkin in the context of morality deserves consideration.

Essentially Shestov continues his claim about the harmony of Pushkin's personality with the flow of life, of trusting life, as it were. He asserts that Pushkin, as well as Lermontov for that matter, was brave – moreover, they both loved danger. And therefore they loved women and were not afraid of them, Shestov states. 'Они дорогой ценой заплатили за свою смелость', he writes, 'зато жили легко и свободно. Ведь, в сущности, если бы они захотели заглянуть в книгу судеб – они могли бы предотвратить печальную развязку. Но они предпочитали без проверки полагаться на свою счастливую звезду'.⁹⁸ Shestov builds up these observations only to bring us closer to his discussion on the utilitarian nature of morality and idealism. He juxtaposes Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to Pushkin and Lermontov, saying that Tolstoy fell into open moralising precisely because he was hiding from life and its dangers and temptations. According to Shestov Tolstoy's instinct would always stop him at the borderline beyond which his soul would be exposed to vice. 'Если бы не эта сдерживающая способность, он, вероятно, плохо кончил бы, как Пушкин или Лермонтов',⁹⁹ Shestov wrote about Tolstoy. And he continued to say that in return the writer might have uncovered a variety of important mysteries, but this role

⁹⁷ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 92.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 94.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

was to be played by Dostoevsky, who also, according to Shestov, ‘имел очень сложные и запутанные дела с моралью’.¹⁰⁰ Shestov then argues that Dostoevsky with his distorted sense of virtue and vice has nevertheless displayed a great sensitivity which our high morality omitted to teach us. Idealists, Shestov concludes, ‘справедливо опасаются, что до истины не доберешься и завязнешь в грязи. Идеалисты расчетливые люди и вовсе не так глупы, как можно думать, если принимать в соображение только их идеи’.¹⁰¹

Thus Shestov effectively uses the figure of Pushkin precisely to build up the above juxtaposition between him and moralists like Tolstoy in order to advance his own point, derogatory of idealism and its deceptive nature, which turns out to be more utilitarian than idealistic. On the other hand, as we saw above, he blames Pushkin in many respects for the same sin – of adjusting ideal to utilitarian needs. Yet, he never challenges the common assertion that Pushkin was a realist. ‘Хотя у нас не было настоящих теоретиков реализма, но после Пушкина русскому писателю нельзя было слишком далеко уноситься от жизни’,¹⁰² Shestov writes.

An illustration of the considerable spectrum in the evolution of Shestov's attitude to Pushkin is given by a comparison between the awe of the poet displayed in Shestov's article of 1899 and his open reference in *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* in 1905 to Pushkin's dissipated life which Tolstoy, as Shestov mentions, was not prepared to forgive. As shown above, the debate about the schism between Pushkin the man and Pushkin the poet never stopped. The Veresaev-Khodasevich polemics, mentioned earlier, on the acceptability of strict biographism as the basis for Pushkin studies re-emphasise the complexity of Pushkin's personality. What is interesting for us though is that Shestov ultimately seems to have acknowledged all the unflattering facts about Pushkin's life, as he later did with respect to Dostoevsky and others. Moreover, he came to believe, as we demonstrated, that it is precisely great artists that are most prone to vice. To prove this Shestov had to stretch Pushkin's lines from his ‘Poet’ too far, to the point of twisting them. However, we note that

¹⁰⁰ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 94.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 95.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 24.

a bridge of sorts between Pushkin's idea of poets being insignificant outside their direct function of poetic creativity and Shestov's attempts to assign poets necessarily to the camp of the depraved is supplied by Tsvetaeva's famous:

Ибо раз голос тебе, поэт,
Дан – остальное взято.¹⁰³

Yet, despite his accusatory claims, Shestov never really uncovered to its full extent the schism between Pushkin's pen and his soul, although he did so, in our view, with respect to every other writer he wrote about. Thus, in particular, Shestov never set against one another (for what would be his typical analysis) Pushkin's carefree personality and his daring pattern of behaviour in real life with its rather self-centred slant, and his poetic courage which acquired a different dimension of a superior nature. The latter was Shestov's own important idea expressed in 1899 in his 'A. S. Pushkin' – about the courage of an artist in the face of reality. Indeed, Shestov then wrote that 'Пушкин вдохновляется тем, что парализует всех других людей'.¹⁰⁴ He is brave and firm in those moments, Shestov said, when we, like ostriches, hide our head in the sand.

И в этом мужестве перед жизнью – назначение поэта; в этом – источник его вдохновения, в этом тайна его творчества, которое мы, обыкновенные люди, справедливо называем божественным – так далеко он от нас, так недоступен нам. Там, где мы рыдаем, рвем на себе волосы, отчаиваемся – там поэт сохраняет твердость и спокойствие, в вечной надежде, что стучащемуся откроется и ищущий – найдет.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps such was his intrinsic respect for the great Russian poet that even in his mature years when Shestov stepped over any commonly accepted boundaries and took on every world thinker, his awe of Pushkin somehow still did not permit him to apply his usual technique to the poet. Indeed, any attempts to expose Pushkin's inner contradictions, his dramas and crises in Shestov's works are fragmentary and made in passing. On the other hand, it is possible that Pushkin indeed seemed so harmonious to Shestov that he was not

¹⁰³ Tsvetaeva, 'Есть счастливицы и счастливицы' in *Собрание сочинений в 7 томах*, vol. 2, p. 324.

¹⁰⁴ Shestov, *А. С. Пушкин*, p. 339.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

interesting enough as an object of study, because Shestov would draw inspiration first of all from people who lived in suffering, who underwent great inner traumas. So, either Pushkin was not counted by Shestov as one of them, or Shestov was simply afraid to 'push down such a giant'¹⁰⁶ – the words he used, curiously, with respect to Tolstoi, who, according to Shestov, on the contrary was not scared by such a task. Also in this connection it is possible that Rozanov's statement about Pushkin and Gogol being opposing geniuses was very shrewd, in the sense that maybe for Shestov it was the genius of Gogol that really lay closer to his heart. The discourse of sarcasm and disillusionment together with great lyricism, so characteristic of Gogol, might have outweighed for Shestov Pushkin's perfect ease combined with the classical posture of his writings, as well as his mischievous smile invariably overshadowing the narrative and his light irony which extinguishes tragedy. Another contributory factor could have been, as it were, Pushkin's detachment and Gogol's involvement. Thus, Gogol might have been perceived by Shestov as more alive and therefore more inspiring, whereas Pushkin forever maintained about him a touch of monumentality that might have cooled down Shestov's creative enthusiasm.

On the other hand, Shestov's references to Gogol are not abundant either, and he never wrote a piece fully dedicated to the writer, although the allusions to him are more dense and regular throughout Shestov's writing than those to Pushkin. One way or another, Pushkin never occupied the same place in Shestov's writings as did, for example, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Interestingly, when talking about Tolstoy's moralising and the latter's accusations against Pushkin, Shestov draws a direct connection between these sentiments and the novelist's disdain for anything that does not serve a utilitarian purpose. Thus, according to Shestov the formula of art for art's sake is hostile to Tolstoy, but, implicitly, is akin to Pushkin. Therefore Shestov's position on the poet in 1905 was not entirely opposed to that of the contributors to the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* of 1899. Indeed, they were basically reclaiming Pushkin for the aesthetes such as the Russian Symbolists from all kinds of other national cultural movements, and Shestov would probably have only disagreed with them about their possessiveness. Indeed, it must be noted that Shestov

¹⁰⁶ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 93. The original reads: 'У Толстого мораль достаточно сильна, чтобы справиться даже с таким великаном, как Пушкин'.

himself did not belong to aestheticism as a cultural trend and, as Erofeev observes,¹⁰⁷ was critical of the latter, most explicitly in his article ‘Viacheslav Velikolepnyi’ on Viacheslav Ivanov, to which we shall return shortly.

Another article in the ‘Pushkin issue’ – that of Minsky – to a large extent also continued the aspirations of the other contributors. It is interesting that despite the characteristic of being shallow and unworthy that Shestov assigned to Minsky, the latter formulated in his article three of Pushkin’s imperatives which under close scrutiny seem to resonate highly with Shestov’s philosophical views. These imperatives, which in Minsky’s view Pushkin left to Russian literature, were fully recognised and appreciated by the Symbolists alone, Minsky asserts. These three imperatives, according to Minsky are firstly, the juxtaposition of poetry to reason and morality, secondly, the victory of the aesthetic ideal over the ethical, of intuition over mind, and thirdly indifference towards good and evil.¹⁰⁸

Now, for Shestov poetry understood in the sense of the irrational, as a way of exploring the world by means of revelation and stemming from unrestricted spiritual freedom, would indeed be juxtaposed to reason and autonomous ethics which encompasses morality. In his philosophy of tragedy the power of intuition has far more weight than the power of mind which he deems intrinsically limited. However, this is not equivalent for him to the juxtaposition of aesthetics and ethics. Indeed, the question of the aesthetic versus the ethical is a more complex one and was discussed in some detail in Part I, especially with respect to the case of Shestov. On the surface it can be reduced to the previous formula of intuition versus mind, but if we view content as opposed to form, or ideas as opposed to the way of expressing them, as ethical versus aesthetic, then the former for Shestov would prevail over the latter. As for the indifference to good and evil, Shestov largely agreed with the famous Nietzschean formula of being beyond both, and proclaimed the search for God to be a priority which is superior to morality and must be placed indeed above the categories of good and evil. Yet, Shestov never joined the Symbolist movement and never responded to Minsky's article (and just as well, never took the man seriously enough which, by the way,

¹⁰⁷ Erofeev, p. 170.

¹⁰⁸ See Levitt, p. 33.

cannot be said the other way around) and developed his arguments and his philosophy in his own separate and independent way which remained forever isolated from the existing trends.

Apart from his 'A. S. Pushkin' article and references to the poet in *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* and the introduction to his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* Shestov turned to Pushkin again in 1915 in his aphorism 'Motionless stars' and in the aforementioned article of 1916 on Viacheslav Ivanov. In 1927 Shestov wrote an article on Vladimir Solov'ev, 'Speculation and Apocalypsis', where he returned again to the theme of Pushkin. The former two works became part of Shestov's book *Potestas Clavium*. The title of the book is concerned with the power of the Roman clergy to lock and unlock the heavenly gates for the believers, but for Shestov it has a much broader meaning about the power of reason, which any religion and philosophy is enslaved by, to rule over the human soul.

Thus in his article on Ivanov, Shestov perceives in the latter an attempt to place Schiller above Pushkin as being closer to the spirit of Symbolism and sees in it Ivanov's affiliation with the 'типическая шиллеро-кантовская школа, растящая в людях веру в вечные и незыблемые нормы должного'.¹⁰⁹ Shestov follows Ivanov's proclamations that Symbolism gives rise to a myth-creation which, according to Ivanov, represents real art. The latter is universal, Ivanov claims, and belongs to everyone without distinction. This leads to Ivanov's polemics against Pushkin's famous juxtaposition of the poet to the mob. Quite to Shestov's surprise, 'В. Иванов в тяжбе Пушкина с чернью берет сторону этой последней',¹¹⁰ and justifies himself by providing a theoretical basis for his poetics. Shestov accuses Ivanov of a pretension to prophesy about the poetry of the future which should be 'dithyrambic'. In this kind of poetry Ivanov demands from a poet 'врачевания и очищения в искупительном разрешающем восторге'.¹¹¹ Shestov claims that dithyrambic poetry for Ivanov 'является высшим и единственным подлинным родом словесного

¹⁰⁹ Lev Shestov, 'Вячеслав Великолепный' in *Potestas Clavium* (Berlin: Skify, 1923), p. 224.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 225.

искусства'.¹¹² and is constructed to affirm and glorify the creations of Schiller and his type of poetry and world-view. Thus for Shestov it is obvious that Ivanov, as it were, implicitly sacrifices Pushkin 'для того, чтоб открыть путь символистическим поэтам, предвозвещенным ясновидящим Шиллером...'.¹¹³ Shestov finishes his advance in defence of Pushkin by the following brilliantly written passage about the free and unrestrained nature of true poetry:

Вяч. Иванов утверждает, что он знает должное и знает будущее: поэт должен служить Черни, поэт будет служить Черни, и не Пушкин, а Шиллер есть предтеча завтрашнего пророка. А мы ответим: поэт не хочет служить Черни, поэт не будет служить Черни, его песнь свободна как ветер и бесплодна как ветер; поэт ни у кого никогда никаких разрешений не спрашивал и спрашивать не станет – нормы же и императивы существуют только для тех, кто боится всякого окрика и во всех, взявших в руки палку, видит капралов.¹¹⁴

Thus, somewhat ironically, Shestov's position in 1916 was closer to that of *Mir Iskusstva* of 1899 than his own stance that year. Indeed, the authors of the Pushkin issue of *Mir Iskusstva* protested against the poet being given to the mob, while Shestov in contrast to his earlier virtual neglect of this issue, was in 1916 defending the right of the poet to be free from having to serve the mob, or, better still, just to be free. This brings us back to Shestov's arguments in the preface to his *Philosophy of Tragedy* about ideologies being the destiny of the critics, whereas writers, engaged in genuine creativity, are free from any ideologies and tend, in fact, to ask questions rather than to give answers.

Curiously, Shestov's aphorism on Pushkin of 1915, 'Motionless Stars', also revolved around the poem 'Чернь' ('The Mob'). In it Shestov quotes the concluding lines of the poem about the poet's vocation being in sweet sounds and prayers rather than earthly matters. Shestov then argues that Pushkin's sentiments contradicted his everyday reality as reflected in his correspondence and overall biography because his turbulent life was full of mundane worries, petty battles and never-ending financial troubles. Shestov implicitly compares his own life to Pushkin's, especially given that at that time he was burdened by having to be in charge of his father's family business and this occupation, which he found

¹¹² Shestov, 'Вячеслав Великолепный', p. 225.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 226.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 226.

quite hateful, really wore him down and drained him emotionally. He emphasises that real poets work at night precisely because during the day they have to be involved in everyday hassles. And here we can spot again an echo of the pattern observed by Erofeev of the juxtaposition of day and night visions, of the dual nature of the artist. As Baranova-Shestova writes in her biography of Shestov, he returned to this poem of Pushkin several years later, in 1920, when in his notebook he commented on the miracles of transformation which science and philosophy, in his view, neglect to see and talk instead about the natural. Such a miracle for Shestov was the power of poetry to turn the mundane into divine music. Thus again, we can conclude, Shestov used Pushkin to exemplify his own philosophical point.

Equally, in the aphorism itself Shestov highlighted Pushkin's rather subtle observation that poetry must be a bit foolish and interpreted it in terms of Pushkin's understanding of the virtually pointless role of mind. Moreover, Shestov conjectured that the reason for Pushkin's attractiveness to the reader is concealed in his desire to be foolish while the majority attempts, on the contrary, to come across as more intelligent than they really are. Yet, intelligence and reason are of no use, Shestov continues – they did not save Pushkin (whom Shestov calls one of the most intelligent, if not the most intelligent Russian person) from falling victim to a mediocre philistine, Dantès. This phenomenon is inexplicable, Shestov concludes, and turns the argument towards his beloved topic, implicitly referring to the figure of Job for whom weeping, laughing and cursing was better than understanding. 'Есть вещи, которые лучше не объяснять, не понимать',¹¹⁵ he exclaims. Knowledge implies ordinary appetites, it conceals utilitarian demands of certainty and guarantees and is anyway deceptive. The self-assurance of knowledge is disgusting and treacherous, and that is why speculative philosophy *à la longue* becomes unbearable. Philosophy, just like our whole life, must be mad. These are Shestov's sentiments in his aphorism on Pushkin of 1915.

Thus, if in 1899 Shestov was mostly preoccupied by the phenomenon of Pushkin as such and, as it were, submitted himself to the poet, then writing about the poet in 1915 meant

¹¹⁵ Lev Shestov, 'Неподвижные звезды' in *Potestas Clavium*, p. 49.

for Shestov speaking his mind on the philosophical topics that had come to be of the utmost significance to him.

Бедный Пушкин со своими сладкими звуками и молитвами! Он пел и молился, а Дантес прицеливался и, разумеется, подстрелил певца. Разумная философия должна, конечно, взять сторону Дантеса, предпослав, как всегда, своему волеизъявлению легионы благородных слов. Ибо философия, как Дантес, хочет бить наверняка, без промаха, ориентируясь по неподвижным звездам.¹¹⁶

In this rather poetic way Shestov finished his essentially philosophical piece in which Pushkin was more the means for, than the object of, Shestov's contemplation.

Largely the same pattern can be observed in Shestov's treatment of Pushkin in 1927, in his article on Vladimir Solovev. Shestov passionately defends the poet against Solovev's accusations about the incompatibility of Pushkin's poetic genius and his unsatisfactory moral stance as reflected in his life. However, this defence of Pushkin, in fact, represents a larger battlefield where Shestov fights against the speculative philosophy of Solovev which the latter proclaims to be religious.

Solovev argues that Pushkin's destiny was essentially just and well deserved, and therefore we should see in it a touch of the Divine hand rather than call it blind fate. 'Соловьев волен, конечно, думать, что ему угодно. Но почему, по какому праву он свои убеждения приписывает и Высшему Существо? Откуда он знает, что на последнем суде поэтический гений ценится меньше, чем средние и даже высокие добродетели?'.¹¹⁷ Shestov insinuates that if Solovev wanted to be really truthful he should have said that for him virtues were superior to any poetic talents and therefore Pushkin's story instilled in him gladness rather than sadness, at least because it would teach others a moral lesson. But Solovev desired the highest sanction, Shestov insists, – that of reason, good and God Himself. 'И, чтоб добиться желаемого, свой собственный разум, свое

¹¹⁶ Lev Shestov, 'Неподвижные звезды' in *Potestas Clavium*, p. 49.

¹¹⁷ Lev Shestov, 'Умозрение и апокалипсис (религиозная философия Вл. Соловьева)' in *Умозрение и откровение* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1964), p. 33.

понятие о добре, нисколько не колеблясь, ставит на место Бога. И это называет религиозной философией’,¹¹⁸ Shestov concludes with indignation.

In his defence Shestov again draws an admirable portrait of Pushkin, decisively rejecting the attacks of moralists like Vladimir Solovev or Lev Tolstoy against the poet. He writes:

По-видимому, и Соловьева и Толстого больше всего раздражали в Пушкине его поистине царственное, так редко встречающееся у людей доверие к жизни и любовь к мирозданию. В Библии рассказывается, что, создавши человека, Бог благословил его. Когда читаешь Пушкина, иной раз кажется, что вновь до нас доходят слова всеми забытого благословения или, говоря его собственными словами, что “как некий херувим он несколько занес нам песен райских”. Пушкин редко оглядывается назад, проверяет, допрашивает. Он вольно и смело движется, не загадывая о будущем. И не потому, что мало думает: никто из русских писателей не умел так глубоко и напряженно думать, как он, и Соловьев был, конечно, очень далек от истины, когда доказывал, что у Пушкина надо искать красоты, а за “мыслями” идти в иные места. Только пушкинская мысль шла совсем иными путями, чем та мысль, которую ценил Соловьев.¹¹⁹

Thus, as the quoted lines unambiguously illustrate, Shestov remained faithful to his main cause of defending art against science, revelation against speculation, and juxtaposing Pushkin to the Puritan trend was for Shestov an important landmark in this struggle .

These instances basically exhaust the main references to Pushkin in Shestov's writings. Paradoxically, the numerous loose ends from the multitude of opinions on and around Pushkin permanently brewing in Shestov's lifetime, giving rise to all sorts of ideas and literary-philosophical movements, do not seem ever to have been picked up and developed by Shestov. Not the last reason for this must have been because Pushkin's harmony lay outside Shestov's immediate interests (which were first and foremost in tormented souls), in the same way in which people not torn apart by passions remained essentially outside Dostoevsky's concern in his novels. And yet, Shestov stayed, together with the whole of Russia, in awe of Pushkin, who was regarded as part of Russian cultural canon and even a symbol of the Russian ‘super-person’. Still, Shestov's views on Pushkin underwent a considerable evolution within a relatively short time-span which essentially corresponds to

¹¹⁸ Shestov, ‘Умозрение и апокалипсис (религиозная философия Вл. Соловьева)’, p. 33.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

the inner evolution of Shestov himself as he settled into his mature ways and fully established his philosophy of tragedy. Pushkin remained an inseparable part of Shestov's world, but he was more of a deeply respected and cherished elder of a tribe than a family member with whom an intense and heated relationship is inevitable and enduring because they are forever part of you. Such roles for Shestov were played by the figures of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, to whom our following chapters are dedicated.

Chapter 5. Shestov and Tolstoy. The tragic and the ordinary

‘Толстой не дает покоя Шестову’,¹ wrote Berdiaev in his penetrating article. Indeed, the significance of Tolstoy to Shestov is hard to exaggerate, and the frequency and substantiality of Shestov's references to the great Russian novelist is another evidence of that. Shestov wrote in total four large pieces dedicated to Tolstoy, and this does not include an abundance of mentions of Tolstoy in the overwhelming majority of his other writings. As we stressed in the previous chapter, Shestov's second book, written just before his article on Pushkin, was dedicated to Tolstoy and Nietzsche, and marked Shestov's parting with idealism and positivism; yet it was only after the Pushkin article, never published at the time, as a step back before the leap forward, that this divorce became final and irreversible. Such works on Tolstoy as ‘Creating and Destroying Worlds’ in *Great Vigils*, ‘The Last Judgements: Tolstoy's Last Works’ in *On Job's Balances* and ‘Iasnaia Poliana and Astapovo’ were to follow in 1908, 1929 and 1935 respectively and reflected the development of Shestov's views on Tolstoy as well as his general philosophical evolution.

Shestov cherished most in Tolstoy the latter's continuous, intense inner struggle, which may be defined in different ways: as that between his behaviour and principles; his instincts or urges and his beliefs; his ability to grasp details and his striving for a holistic vision instead; his search for truth and his self-justification, or if you like, self-deception – according to Shestov: his philosophy and his preaching. These contradictions can also be described as those between irrationalism and rationalism, between the heavenly and earthly in Tolstoy – which, in turn, can be translated into the conflict between Tolstoy, the writer, and Tolstoy, the man. The two sides of Tolstoy were constantly influencing and reshaping one another and their interaction manifested itself in his works. Tolstoy's intrinsic duality, being a manifestation of his inner contradictions, can also be viewed as hypocrisy until one recognises his underlying suffering and tormenting doubt. Shestov's writings on Tolstoy show a slow transition from the former perception to the latter.

¹ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 472.

If in the case of Pushkin, where there was a lot of debate around this theme of the discrepancy between Pushkin, the artist, and Pushkin, the man, Shestov did not comment on it, in the case of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and others it became his central theme, even though such a debate in their cases was much less evident. Shestov exposed this conflict by penetrating into the above schism, thus illustrating our thesis.

In this chapter we first attempt to show how Shestov's analysis of Tolstoy fits between some radical artistic and rather informal opinions, such as those by Anna Akhmatova, on the one hand and formal psychoanalytic and literary-critical views on the other. We do that first in the case studies of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, and trace the development of Shestov's views on these novels and on their creator. We then move on to see the evolution of Shestov's treatment of Tolstoy more generally and transfer our focus to Shestov's later works, which, interestingly, also concentrate more on Tolstoy's later works. The slant there shifts from being rather literary to becoming more distinctly philosophical and religious. The aim is to reveal how, according to Shestov, the evolution of Tolstoy's world-view developed from his escape from the tragic to the ordinary, from philosophy to preaching and expanded into the religious domain. We show how Tolstoy's struggle is portrayed by Shestov as that between mind and soul, or reason and faith, which, as Shestov demonstrates, received its more developed form in Tolstoy's latest works. Shestov illustrates this struggle through the juxtaposition of brutal force, in figurative terms represented by Nikolai Rostov, and the never-ending spiritual search of Pierre, or, in other words, of the compulsion of reason and the defencelessness of faith, and claims that it was ultimately the latter which won, almost despite Tolstoy's own will.

5.1. The predictability of Shestov's pattern. His first book on Tolstoy – its publication and reception.

As Berdiaev correctly observes, Shestov in his philosophical quest was first and foremost concerned with 'the truth about the person' ('правда о человеке').² And since he

² Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 471.

‘philosophised with all his being’,³ it is not surprising that this search was immensely personal, and mirrored Shestov's own tormenting concerns. The giant figure of Tolstoy, just like that of Shakespeare previously, provided Shestov with the fulcrum for his own outlook and his own struggle, it was only ‘ширма, за которой скрывается Л. Шестов’,⁴ using the words of Ivanov-Razumnik, who also pointed out that ‘людям нашего роста всегда удобно стать под защиту такого великана, как Шекспир’.⁵ The chief meaning of these remarks is that Shestov tested out, or even more precisely, sought confirmation for, his specific paradigm generated from his own existential experience, in the great thinkers he studied. In his treatment of Tolstoy we can explicitly trace the typical pattern that Shestov was to adhere to when writing about virtually any thinker. In fact, Ivanov-Razumnik makes a witty observation concerning the predictability of Shestov's pattern. He claims in relation to Shestov's then forthcoming book on Ibsen that we can see in advance what scheme Shestov will follow because we can extrapolate from what he has already said about Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche.⁶

However, Ivanov-Razumnik does not view this repetition of the same old scheme as something bad because he regards it only as an auxiliary construction, as ‘леса при постройке здания’,⁷ and values in Shestov his passionate obsession with the fundamental questions of the human predicament and the intensity of his thoughts and feelings as well as the perfect form of his delivery.⁸ Yet, with some writers whose inner struggle was particularly close to Shestov's own tragic world this ‘scheme’ became especially apparent.

Thus, as Berdiaev writes, ‘отношение Шестова к Толстому особенно характерно и обнаруживает некоторую “правду” о нем самом’.⁹ Berdiaev sums up this attitude in claiming that Shestov simultaneously loves Tolstoy ‘и ненавидит, и боится, боится, как

³ ‘Философствовал всем своим существом’ – Berdiaev’s phrase about Shestov from his essay ‘Основная идея философии Льва Шестова’ (p. 5), cited in Chapter 2.

⁴ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 198.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p. 229.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, p. 253.

⁹ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 472.

бы Толстой не оказался прав'.¹⁰ He draws a parallel between Shestov the author and Tolstoy, the hero of Shestov's writings, by saying that 'Шестов, по-видимому, тоже отрицает самого себя в своих произведениях [...] За словами Шестова о Толстом открывается его собственная плоть и кровь, он выдает себя'.¹¹ In this chapter we aim to uncover these revelations in the general context of exploring Shestov's treatment of Tolstoy and analysing how the results of Shestov's hermeneutic psychological method woven into his philosophy relate to the major ideas of the existing body of critical literature on Tolstoy.

Shestov's first book on Tolstoy entitled *Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching* was started in March 1897 and finished, except for the preface, in December 1898 in Lausanne. Shestov then brought the manuscript to Russia and went to St. Petersburg where he started looking for a publisher, which proved rather difficult. As Shestov himself wrote,

Журналы отказывались ее печатать. В рукописи она была у Михайловского, Вл. Соловьева, Спасовича, в "Жизни", в "Вопросах Философии и Психологии". Правда, я лично ни с кем из названных лиц и редакций дела не имел. За меня хлопотали знакомые. Но так или иначе – во всех редакциях ответ был один, хотя мотивировки были разные. Где отказывались из-за направления, где из-за "нападков" на Толстого.¹²

Shestov then explains that the reaction of Vladimir Solovev was particularly interesting. 'Совесть мне не позволяет содействовать напечатанию в "Вестнике Европы" такой работы',¹³ Solovev allegedly said to his friend L. A. Sev (the literary figure, translator, philosopher and editor who brought Shestov's manuscript to Solovev), and then added: 'Передайте от меня автору, что я вообще не советую ему печатать эту статью, – он, наверное, впоследствии раскается, если напечатает'.¹⁴

However, Solovev did help Sev to publish the manuscript, even though it was done on credit. The introduction to the book was written by Shestov in July 1899, and in December

¹⁰ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 472.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² From Shestov's autobiography. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 42.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of that year the book finally appeared (dated 1900). It was received favourably, and the rather good reception that it enjoyed essentially opened the road for Shestov with respect to publishing his subsequent works. In particular Mikhailovsky, who initially refused to publish the manuscript in *Русское богатство*, wrote a sympathetic review of it in 1900.¹⁵ He described the book as ‘странная, но интересно и красиво написанная’.¹⁶ Also in the same year *Мир искусства* published a review of the book (written by Pertsov).

It is also worth noting that Shestov sent his book to Tolstoy. Gorky recalls in his memoirs that Tolstoy, unlike Chekhov who expressed his dislike of Shestov's book, was rather sympathetic to it and said that he found it curious.¹⁷ Interestingly, the remarks he made about it go right to the heart of Shestov's approach to Tolstoy in his subsequent writings on him as well as Shestov's understanding of philosophy as a whole. Indeed, Tolstoy talked about ultimate truth in relation to death, essentially dismissing the former in the face of the latter and claiming that a thinking person, including all the philosophers, invariably thinks about his death, no matter what appears to be the subject of his thoughts. Tolstoy then, according to Gorky, started preaching love towards God as the ultimate truth, but did so ‘холодно и устало’.¹⁸ Thus, Shestov's main theme that permeates all his later writings was essentially guessed by Tolstoy's rather passing remark. This theme is summarised in what became Shestov's cherished phrase from Plato's *Phaedo*: ‘для людей это тайна: но все, которые по-настоящему отдавались философии, ничего иного не делали, как готовились к умиранию и смерти’.¹⁹ As we shall see below, Shestov's decoding of Tolstoy is governed first and foremost by this idea applied to Tolstoy's personal case. We note that this idea is somewhat different, although not completely divorced, from Hamlet's ‘кладбищенская философия’,²⁰ using the words of Ivanov-Razumnik, as well as the philosophy of some of Chekhov's heroes, most notably of Ragin from ‘Ward No 6’. The distinction is in the different functions that the imminence of death serves – whether it

¹⁵ This review was published in the issues 2 and 3 (1900) of *Русское богатство*.

¹⁶ See Baranova-Shestova, I, footnote *** on p. 42.

¹⁷ See Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 106.

¹⁸ Maksim Gorkii, *Lev Tolstoy* (Letchworth: Bradda Books, 1966), pp. 58-59. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 106.

¹⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*. Cited in Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 25.

²⁰ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 189.

provides a justification of sorts or creates a productive framework for general contemplation of the human predicament.

We shall now turn to discussing the content of Shestov's first book on Tolstoy as well as Shestov's almost immediate development of this topic in his subsequent book on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. However, before doing so we should note in conclusion to the previous paragraph that some other remarks made by Tolstoy with respect to Shestov were already described in Part I, where we also explained that Shestov visited the great Russian novelist in Iasnaia Poliana in March 1910. Generally speaking, neither Shestov nor Tolstoy were particularly impressed by their interaction even though it was reasonably long (it lasted for one and a half hours). Shestov tried to explain to Tolstoy the nature of Nietzsche's writings as originating in his personal tragedy, but apparently to no avail. Tolstoy, on the other hand, in all probability misconstrued the nature of Shestov himself and recorded in his diary that the latter was uninteresting and a 'literary figure' ('литератор') rather than a philosopher.²¹ For more details on Tolstoy's impressions on Shestov and vice versa we refer the reader to Baranova-Shestova's biography of her father.

5.2. Analysis of Shestov's early views on Tolstoy.

In a way, the gist of Shestov's main claims in his book *Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching* has been summed up already in the preface, where Shestov launches a decisive attack against idealism and its doomed attempts to attain the truth. He effectively asserts that the very essence of idealism is to give consoling answers, to create an illusion of harmony and reasonable necessity. In contrast to that there are writers who are permanently dissatisfied with the false answers given and disturbed by the existing world order. Yet, they are split between their search for truth, no matter how frightening that truth might turn out to be, and their duty to the public who look up to them in the hope of learning from them some great and ultimate wisdom, the answers that the writers in fact do not have. Moreover (and more subtly) this public duty conceals within it the writers' own, personal craving for a way out, for a consoling answer of some sort, and this creates an on-going inner conflict. To such writers Shestov evidently assigns Tolstoy in

²¹ See Baranova-Shestova, pp. 106-108.

the main body of the book, even though his name, unlike that of Belinsky, is not explicitly mentioned in the preface. However, Shestov comes up with the powerful image of a wounded tigress ‘прибежавшей в свое логовище к детенышам. У нее стрела в спине, а она должна кормить своим молоком беспомощные существа, которым дела нет до ее роковой раны’.²² This is to a large extent the image of Tolstoy that Shestov reconstructs in the book – the writer torn by a compromise between what he perceives as his public duty (i.e. his preaching, including preaching to himself, for it equally applies to him as a member of that public craving consolation), and his inner duty (i.e. his philosophy), which does not tolerate any lies, no matter how sweet and resembling the truth.

This juxtaposition between philosophy and preaching was analysed in one of the most interesting and exhaustive studies of Shestov's *Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching*, as well as one of the first, conducted by Ivanov-Razumnik. He saw as the book's main subject Shestov's old preoccupation with the problem of the meaning of life which Shestov had already addressed in his book on Shakespeare. However, this time, as Razumnik observes, Shestov, following his own inner development and thus having rejected idealistic solutions, considered instead the above two routes: the way of preaching and the way of philosophy. Ivanov-Razumnik describes the first one as that of Hamlet – theoretical, ideological, which lies away from real life (‘живая жизнь’) and which essentially is an attempt ‘затушевать шумихой слов гнетущие человека вопросы о смысле бытия’.²³ In the ethical sphere this constitutes the norms and humanistic principles which are then implicitly deemed false. Contrary to that there is the way of philosophy which reflects the desire for a genuine solution. However, this task ultimately proves impossibly difficult, and even such giants as Tolstoy and Nietzsche eventually defect from philosophy to the camp of preaching.

Some seventy years on Andrius Valevicius gave a similar assessment of Shestov's ideas expressed in his book on Tolstoy and Nietzsche. Valevicius observed that in this book in contrast to Shestov's previous one – on Shakespeare – the author reconsidered his old views

²² Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 219.

²³ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 203.

about reasonable necessity, because they were not solving the problems of life and offered no real solution to existential horrors. According to Shestov, as Valevicius pointed out, Tolstoy was making the same error, only his 'idealism' 'was not the Hegelian type of "reason in history", but a desperate clinging to the Good',²⁴ ready to sacrifice everything in order to rid himself of tormenting doubts. This is an important point, already mentioned above, about Tolstoy's drive engendered not only by his genuine striving for ultimate truth, but also by his search for inner harmony and peace, for protection from horrors and doubts. And it is rather to be expected that in his attempts to portray life truthfully Tolstoy arrived at a breaking point. Like Nietzsche he broke down before the horrors of reality, but their escape routes were different. While Nietzsche invented his Superman, Tolstoy 'turned to the Good, to brotherly love and tried to identify them with God'.²⁵

This interpretation by Shestov of Tolstoy is also given in Berdiaev's article on Shestov from which we have already quoted above. However, Berdiaev's emphasis, which is rather akin to the view of Ivanov-Razumnik and more distant from that of Valevicius, is predominantly on the profound similarity between Shestov's own existential experience and his view of Tolstoy. According to Berdiaev, Shestov in his writings 'проклинает "мораль" за то, что она ему мешает жить, давит его своей призрачной властью'.²⁶ Instead Shestov resists with all his strength embarking on Tolstoy's route of hiding behind morality, even though this hiding is a result of an intense inner struggle and search for the meaning of existence. Berdiaev quotes Shestov's words on the abyss that opened up in front of Tolstoy, implying that Shestov himself faced the same abyss and that is why Shestov's descriptions of it are so vivid and passionate. Indeed, Shestov writes with respect to Tolstoy that

перед ним раскрылась пропасть, грозившая поглотить его, он видел торжество смерти на земле, он себя самого видел живым трупом. Охваченный ужасом, он проклял все высшие запросы своей души, стал учиться у посредственности, у середины, у пошлости, верно почувствовав, что только из этих элементов возможно воздвигнуть ту стену, которая, если не навсегда, то хоть надолго скроет от глаз страшную "истину". И он нашел свою "Ding an

²⁴ Valevicius, p. 31.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 32.

²⁶ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 472.

sich” и свои синтетические суждения a priori, то есть узнал, как отделяются от всего проблематического и создаются твердые принципы, по которым можно жить человеку.²⁷

‘Вот страшная правда о Толстом’, Berdiaev concludes. ‘Ведь толстовское христианство есть действительно “идеал устроенного человечества”. Толстовская религия и философия есть отрицание трагического опыта, пережитого самим Толстым, спасение в обыденности от провалов, от ужаса всего проблематического. Какое несоответствие между грандиозностью исканий и той системой успокоения, к которой они привели’,²⁸ Berdiaev exclaims.

Thus he agrees with Shestov's criticisms of Tolstoy and acknowledges the permanent struggle against the latter inside Shestov himself.

As Ivanov-Razumnik explains, Shestov in his book on Tolstoy and Nietzsche attempts to reach to the bottom of their true philosophy, thus taking off the protective covers of their preaching. Shestov draws a parallel between Nietzsche's desperate attempts to hide in the Good and Tolstoy's no less desperate proclamations that Good is God. From the example of Nietzsche's life, Shestov asserts, we are given an extraordinary lesson that Good is not only incapable of saving lives dedicated to it, but can easily exterminate them. This is because a human being, in order to protect himself from personal grief and tormenting questions, tends to shield himself with an ideal and leaps to love his fellow-man, but this is nothing more than self-deception which does not offer any real answer or salvation. As a result life is wasted and irreversibly so. Nietzsche realised that, Shestov asserts, and turned around to face the ‘accursed’ questions, but could not hold on in the end and surrendered to the invention of his Superman. Similarly Tolstoy, after posing his questions and demands ‘to account for every victim of history’, using the famous words of Belinsky, then faced the true horror of Liapin's refuge for the homeless during the Census in Moscow of 1884-1885, and broke down. At this point, Shestov observes, Nietzsche's formula that one should not desire to be a doctor to the mortally ill was accepted by Tolstoy. In his soul he surrendered by separating himself from suffering and torment because he realised the futility of a fight

²⁷ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 363. Cited in Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 472.

²⁸ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 472.

against them, and his formula that Good is God was intrinsically false, for, in fact, he instinctively, out of self-preservation, put life before the Good.

Shestov claims that both Nietzsche and Tolstoy ultimately proclaimed '*amor fati*' – love of fate, acceptance of necessity, therefore viewing the world holistically, with good and evil at once, non-split, effectively standing beyond good and evil. Shestov's original finding was that one's good conscience torments one not only for bad deeds, but for good ones too – for sacrificing one's life to the good instead of living it to the full, according to one's will. And life does not forgive it, Shestov claims, as in the case of Nietzsche – it takes revenge for being thrown away. Shestov denounces autonomous morality for sacrificing a human being for the sake of good and compares it to the phenomenon of Brutus's wife swallowing burning coal. Following Nietzsche, Shestov curses the dictate of the Good which swallows up human life, submits it to itself, subordinates reality to idealism. Thus, Ivanov-Razumnik's analysis of Shestov's exploration of Tolstoy suggests that Shestov saw Tolstoy's humanism only as a mask, as discharging his duty to the norms of morality and using it as a protective curtain, while running away from his own fundamental doubts and extraordinarily demanding questions to take refuge in preaching, in the life of the ordinary and in acknowledging the right to life in everyone. Later on, as we shall see, Shestov took a more compassionate attitude to Tolstoy, increasingly sympathetic to his genuine inner struggle. However, Ivanov-Razumnik chronologically was a witness only to the beginning of Shestov's investigations into Tolstoy's soul.

5.3. Mapping Shestov's approach to Tolstoy: between formal psychoanalysis and Akhmatova's psychological observations.

It is also worth noting that in his extensive analysis of Shestov's book on Shakespeare Ivanov-Razumnik does not make any references to Tolstoy and his influence on Shestov. Berdiaev, on the other hand, in his article remarks in a footnote that Shestov in his book on Shakespeare was still under the strong influence of Tolstoy. Apparently what he means is that Shestov at the time was taking Tolstoy at face value and followed him in his praises to the Good, reasonable necessity and the clear purpose of existence. By contrast, in his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* Shestov had already become engaged in his favourite activity:

reading between the lines and unmasking Tolstoy in accordance with his own 'Shestovian' paradigm by exposing the schism between Tolstoy the man and Tolstoy the writer by means of tracing through Tolstoy's existential experience, if you like by psychoanalysing Tolstoy on the basis of his novels taken as testimonies. Yet, this kind of psychoanalysis, as we are about to show, is very different from the standard Freudian school or any branches and followings of it.

We would say that the main difference is that Shestov's psychological approach operates on the philosophical plane by focusing predominantly on the spiritual drama of an individual, on the evolution of the latter's own existential philosophy, that is not exactly detached from, but rather raised above one's intimate experience in the sense of one's private circumstances rooted in one's childhood and adolescence, the awakening of one's sexuality, one's family relationships, and so on. Whereas a psychoanalyst would prefer to appeal to the Oedipus complex and the subconscious, Shestov speaks of the utilitarian nature of human virtues and explains that the origins of high and noble human aspirations lie in selfish motives and represent a cover-up for self-love.²⁹ In other words, Shestov is operating with different – more abstract – categories, and the physiological or sensual for him is rarely, if at all, connected in a dominating way with the moral and spiritual, whereas in psychoanalysis the roots of the spiritual are almost invariably concealed in the physical, and in any case the two are always considered in combination. However, human psychology is at the core of Shestov's philosophising, just as it is at the core of writings by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and other artists. And it is from this psychological perspective that Shestov considers them.

Moreover, as is clear from Shestov's letter to his friend and relation Sofia Grigor'evna Peti of May 1900, he always felt much more at home with philosophical ideas expressed through artistic means on the psychological plane than with the established methodologies of theoretical philosophers:

У меня все по-старому. Провел последние недели в скучном обществе теоретических философов. Насилу дотягиваю последние страницы. Даже, если уж признаваться, не

²⁹ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, pp. 82-83.

выдержал всей программы – и опять в гостях у Нитше и Достоевского. Это свои люди. С ними поссоришься, разбранишься – но уж не проскучаешь. А без философов нашему брату тоже нельзя: назвался груздем – полезай в кузов. Впрочем, уж не долго с ними возиться. Скоро совсем кончу.³⁰

Furthermore, Shestov clearly believed, and expressed this view more than once in his writings, that ‘русская философская мысль, такая глубокая и такая своеобразная, получила свое выражение именно в художественной литературе’.³¹

On the other hand it is most likely that Shestov's response to conventional psycho-analysis, had he followed its development, would have been as unflattering as his response to theoretical philosophy, because of its attempt to apply a scientific systematic method to the human psyche, to try and squeeze the irrational life of the human soul into the ready-made and *par excellence* limited framework of rational categories and constructs. Of course, his own method lends itself quite easily to a systematic characterisation, yet for Shestov himself it clearly appeared as a fresh, passionate and sincere attempt at a ‘pilgrimage through souls’ (the subtitle of his book) in a spontaneous way with the sole purpose of finding the truth by way of revelation rather than rational speculation.

In the light of the above it is interesting to compare Shestov's approach to Tolstoy, first of all with that of an artist embarked on his or her own personal psychological quest, not subordinated to any specific system or methodology. To this end we shall bring into focus the collection of remarks on Tolstoy made by Anna Akhmatova, whose penetrating analysis was also directed at the writer's psychology in a rather similar way to Shestov's, especially given that both Shestov and Akhmatova attempted to interpret Tolstoy through his writings, and vice versa (or more precisely, Shestov explained Tolstoy via his works, while Akhmatova explained Tolstoy's works via the peculiarities of his character and biography, but both, it seems, met midway).

³⁰ Shestov's letter to S. G. Peti to Paris, of 31 May 1900. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 47.

³¹ Shestov, *Умозрение и откровение*, p. 35.

It would be fair to say that Akhmatova's opinion of Tolstoy stemmed from two essential roots (often interwoven): his intrinsic hypocrisy and his attitude to women. Effectively Akhmatova shared an existing trend of thought, in particular in Western criticism, which perceives Tolstoy not only as a humanist dedicated to serving the good, but also as a sanctimonious egocentric aristocrat, who was nevertheless quite clearly endowed with artistic literary genius. She talked of the 'спертый дух – ханжеский дух Ясной Поляны',³² and recalled with laughter how the literary scholar B. V. Tomashevsky who visited the estate to gather the peasants' recollections of their extraordinary master was repeatedly told stories about Tolstoy's wife Sofia Andreevna rather than the writer himself. When Tomashevsky attempted to direct the conversation back to Tolstoy and asked specifically about him, one of the peasants said: 'Да что о нем вспоминать! Мусорный был старик'.³³ The latter description was often used by Akhmatova as a condescending nickname for Tolstoy whose magnificent literary genius she certainly recognized at the same time. Yet, she never ceased to remember Tolstoy's didactic pretensions, his double nature, the existence of his two diaries – one to show Sofia Andreevna and one for himself,³⁴ and invariably, when speaking of him, displayed 'смесь негодования и восторга'.³⁵

Symbolically speaking, notwithstanding Tolstoy's literary gift Akhmatova was always aware (and never forgiving) of Tolstoy having the finest underwear under the canvas of his peasant-like clothes (a fact which a particularly lucky visitor to Yasnaia Poliana, let in to normally closed rooms and wardrobes, may have a chance of discovering). As E. Lampert writes, 'Gor'ky, who in a few short sketches gave a superb picture of both the massiveness and the infinite convolutions of Tolstoy's character, was right when he said that "from behind the *muzhik's* beard, from behind the crumpled democratic frock there shows through the old Russian *barin*, the magnificent aristocrat..., the creature of blue blood"'.³⁶ Lampert

³² Lidiia Chukovskaia, *Записки об Анне Ахматовой* (St. Petersburg: Zhurnal 'Neva', 1996), I, p. 16.

³³ Ibid, p. 106, footnote.

³⁴ See Ibid, II, p. 110.

³⁵ Chukovskaia, II, p. 50.

³⁶ E. Lampert, 'The body and pressure of time' in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 131.

then adds that ‘whether one goes back to what Tolstoy himself chose to call his “twenty years of vanity and lust” or beyond to the days of agonized self-abasement, he could not subdue his aristocratic temper. His pride was enormous. “I at any rate”, he wrote in 1873, “whatever I do, am always convinced that *du haut de ces pyramides 40 siècles me contemplent* and that the whole world will perish if I come to a halt”’.³⁷ Similar remarks on Tolstoy's incredible pride can be found in Frank Seeley's analysis where he recalls the declaration of young Irtenev from *Adolescence* that whatever a man does is done out of pride.³⁸ Moreover, the definition of pride there is the conviction that one is ‘the best and the most intelligent of men’.³⁹ ‘In this urge’, Seeley writes, ‘to be not merely one of the best and most intelligent, but *the* best and most intelligent of men – we can see one of the main roots of all Tolstoy's philosophizing’.⁴⁰

Shestov too in his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* as well as *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* written at the turn of the century pointed out the underlying ‘vital egoism’ of Tolstoy as ‘the real quality celebrated in the undercurrent’ of both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, as E. B. Greenwood observes.⁴¹ However, it is instructive to note that already in 1907 this obsessive pride merging with vanity, this self-love of Tolstoy was primarily interesting for Shestov in so far as it led to Tolstoy's solipsism in his view of the universe, which Shestov deemed necessary for solving some most profound and immense inner task. And this extraordinary concentration on such an intense search for truth is what Shestov saw and cherished above all in Tolstoy the thinker. In 1907 in his article ‘Penultimate Words’ Shestov, in particular, when talking about Tolstoy, looked through his moralising and subjugating tendencies to discover beneath them Tolstoy's true aspirations to solve the eternal questions of life and death. Shestov wrote:

³⁷ Lampert, ‘The body and pressure of time’, p. 131.

³⁸ Frank Seeley, *Saviour or Superman? Old and New Essays on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1999), p. 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ E. B. Greenwood, ‘Tolstoy and religion’ in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 151.

Толстой прежде всего моралист. Для него сейчас, как и в молодости, власть над людьми дороже всего и кажется обаятельнее всех прочих благ мира. Он все еще продолжает приказывать, требовать и хочет, чтоб ему во что бы то ни стало повиновались. Можно и даже должно, пожалуй, с вниманием и уважением относиться к этой особенности толстовской натуры. Ведь не один Толстой, а многие царственные отшельники мысли до конца своей жизни предъявляли к человечеству безусловные требования подчинения. Сократ в день смерти, за час перед смертью учил, что есть лишь одна истина и именно та, которую он открыл. Платон, будучи глубоким стариком, ездил в Сиракузы насаждать свою мудрость. Вероятно, такое упорство великих людей имеет свое объяснение и свой глубокий смысл. И Толстому, и Сократу, и Платону, и еврейским пророкам, которые в этом отношении, как и во многих других, были очень похожи на учителей мудрости, вероятно, нужно было всецело сосредоточить свои силы на одной огромной внутренней задаче, условием удачного выполнения которой является иллюзия, что весь мир, вся вселенная действует заодно и в унисон с ними. Я уже указывал по поводу Толстого, что в настоящее время он в своем миропонимании находится на границе солипсизма. Толстой и весь мир - равнозначные понятия: без такого временного заблуждения всего его существа (не умственной, головной ошибки: голова знает хорошо, что мир - сам по себе, Толстой - сам по себе) ему пришлось бы отказаться от самого важного своего дела.⁴²

When already in his first book on Tolstoy, eight years earlier, Shestov had pointed to Tolstoy's underlying egoism, he had emphasised the above fundamental feature of Tolstoy – his urge to teach mankind – as being the chief characteristic of the writer's outlook. However, the difference seems to be that in the above quotation Shestov portrays Tolstoy's aspirations to moral and intellectual leadership as a manifestation of his fulfilment of his profound inner task, akin to Socrates who wanted to impose his truth on everyone as the universal truth. In *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, on the other hand, the implication given by Shestov is that Tolstoy was focusing more on trying to convince himself of some deep truth, rather than imposing it on the rest of the world. Not that the latter task escaped him, no, but the former one seemed more urgent and primary. Indeed, Shestov says that already in *Anna Karenina* Tolstoy judges people, but not in the way 'как должен судить беспристрастный, спокойный судья, не ведающий жалости, но не знающий и гнева, а как человек, глубоко и страстно заинтересованный в исходе разбираемого им процесса. Каждая строчка этого замечательного произведения направлена против невидимого, но определенного врага или в защиту невидимого же, но тоже вполне определенного союзника'.⁴³

⁴² Lev Shestov, 'Предпоследние слова' in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, p. 248.

⁴³ Shestov, 'Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь', pp. 221-222.

In a similar way to Shestov (although with a more personal rather than philosophical slant) Akhmatova too stressed Tolstoy's solipsism as his most profound, as well as limiting characteristic. She spoke of his invariable projection of his own life and feelings onto his perception of the world around him and anything he wrote about – in other words, his immensely egocentric personality. ‘Пока он любил Софью Андреевну, она и в Кити, она и в Наташе’,⁴⁴ Akhmatova asserted and emphasised that the initially generous Natasha unrealistically turning stingy in the epilogue can only be explained by the fact that Sofia Andreevna had turned out to be stingy. ‘А когда он разлюбил Софью Андреевну – тогда и “Крейцера Соната”, и вообще чтобы никто никого никогда не любил – никто, никогда! – и чтоб никто ни на ком не смел жениться’,⁴⁵ Akhmatova insisted.

In the same way Akhmatova traced in Tolstoy's novels his contemptuous and patriarchal attitude to women. Thus she radically called *The Kreutzer Sonata* the most superb foolishness that she had ever read, exclaiming that apparently ‘За всю его долгую жизнь ему ни разу и в голову не пришло, что женщина не только жертва, но и участница на 50%’.⁴⁶ Akhmatova considered *Anna Karenina* to be a novel based on ‘физиологической и психологической лжи’,⁴⁷ because Anna is moral and virtuous while living with the husband she does not love, but suddenly becomes promiscuous and flirtatious when she is at last with the man she is in love with. Akhmatova scornfully denounced the main idea ‘этого великого произведения’ as being the following: ‘если женщина разошлась с законным мужем и сошлась с другим мужчиной, она неизбежно становится проституткой’.⁴⁸ It is interesting that Akhmatova's friend, the writer Lidiia Chukovskaia, who gives these accounts of Akhmatova's opinions, was initially in disagreement with them. However, later on when going through some literary documents she came across a chapter not included by Tolstoy in the final version of the novel, which completely confirmed Akhmatova's conjectures about Tolstoy's intentions. ‘Прочитав эту главу, я

⁴⁴ Chukovskaia, II, p. 50.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, II, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Ibid, I, p. 104.

⁴⁸ Ibid, I, p. 16.

поняла, что, хотя Толстой и вычеркнул эти страницы, – А.А. глубоко проникла в его замысел'.⁴⁹

Now, the same novel has evoked completely different, not to say opposite, opinions with respect to the portrayal of women and their situation on the part of some critics. Thus, for example, John Bayley wrote that Tolstoy

almost inadvertently [...] has contributed a powerful demonstration in his novel about the position of women, and the injustice to which society subjects them. [...] Anna is a victim, like all women in her position. [...] And as her story unfolds the question in it seems to be asked with increasing insistence: what social change is necessary to end this kind of suffering, to make it possible for men and women to live together in society, to follow the road of their own passion and desires and live in the way that best suits them?⁵⁰

This, of course, speaks more of Bayley as a reader than of Tolstoy as a writer, but then the same is true with respect to Akhmatova or any other interpreter of literature.

The third – perhaps, intermediate – position is in thinking that Tolstoy ‘really loved Anna Karenina, she was a living person for him. [...] But she was a moral transgressor and had to perish’.⁵¹ This is a stance taken by Valevicius which he apparently assigns to Shestov in analysing the latter's treatment of Tolstoy. Incidentally, Akhmatova too believes that Tolstoy loved Anna Karenina, but only at first, at the beginning of the novel, whereas towards the end he is humiliating her to the point of mocking her dead body: ‘какой-то морг на железной дороге устроил’,⁵² Akhmatova exclaimed. This therefore suggests that Tolstoy's intentions were not so unambiguous – yet, he had to prove a moral point which he placed above everything. As Valevicius writes (again, assigning this analysis to Shestov), ‘for the sake of the Good Tolstoy was ready to sacrifice everything’.⁵³

⁴⁹ Chukovskaia, I, p. 106, footnote.

⁵⁰ John Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy* (England: Northcote House in association with the British Council, 1997), p. 32.

⁵¹ Valevicius, p. 31.

⁵² Chukovskaia, I, p. 105.

⁵³ Valevicius, p. 31.

From our perspective, Shestov's explorations first of all demonstrate once again his field of focus and interest. It again becomes clear that he was far from asking social questions (once he had parted with them in his extreme youth) and rather than exuding compassion for a woman's, and in particular Anna's, fate he traced Tolstoy's intentions to reveal the truth about his convictions and beliefs of a broader, or perhaps more metaphysical, nature than gender roles and social injustice.

Yet, he did comment on specific issues such as Tolstoy's attitude to women. For instance, in his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* written in 1904, Shestov describes it in the following way:

Он признает и понимает еще любовь, которая имеет своей целью основание семьи. Но не больше. Любовь Дон-Жуана кажется ему смертным грехом. Помните рассуждения Левина по поводу падших, но милых созданий и пайка? Левин затыкает глаза и уши, чтоб только не слышать рассказов Стивы Облонского. И негодует, возмущается, забывает даже обязательное для него сострадание к падшим, которых он грубо называет "тварями". С представлением о "вечно женственном" у Толстого неразрывно связана мысль о соблазне, грехе, искушении, о *великой опасности*. А раз опасность, следовательно, прежде всего нужно остерегаться, т. е. по возможности дальше держаться. Но ведь опасность - это дракон, который приставлен ко всему, что бывает важного, значительного, заманчивого на земле.⁵⁴

Shestov claims that Tolstoy was the first in Russian literature who started to be afraid and suspicious of life and started to moralise openly. Temptations appeared fatal to Tolstoy, Shestov concludes, and he stayed intact only because of his innate instinct of self-preservation. Shestov explains Tolstoy's disdain for Pushkin and Lermontov in that they were not afraid of women in particular and danger in general. Thus, Shestov effectively points again at Tolstoy's hypocrisy, and in a way very similar to that of Akhmatova. Indeed, it seems most likely that she would probably have commented in this connection that Tolstoy was simply envious of Pushkin, Lermontov and their like just as so-called 'virtuous' mediocrities are envious of those who step over the commonly accepted moral boundaries because they, the mediocre, want to do this too, but do not dare. Otherwise why would Akhmatova have made the following point about Tolstoy's *Воскресение*: 'В чем корень книги? В том, что сам он, Лев Николаевич, не догадался жениться на

⁵⁴ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 94.

проститутке, упустил своевременно такую возможность...'.⁵⁵ Which, given Tolstoy's moralising attitudes, implies a suppressed desire, rather than simply a missed opportunity. This of course relates to the Tolstoy of mature years, when his moralising began, and he denounced all the promiscuous adventures of his youth, and the suggestion therefore is that although his convictions had changed (or at least he wanted them to have changed), his desires and attitudes had not.

It is interesting that Shestov's own attitude to women was also marked, like that of Tolstoy, by a touch of patriarchy, as can be seen from his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* where he wrote that women's desire to liberate themselves from men's power and women's striving for equality, although fully understandable, is to be regretted since they tend to do it by self-education and ultimately by losing their charming and illogical female attitudes. This clearly demonstrates Shestov's own rather condescending and patronising attitude, even though he had no direct intention of being offensive. It must be added to this that in terms of real life Shestov had always been very supportive and encouraging of his numerous friends, making no distinction between male and female ones. He invariably helped his female friends to achieve their aims in the contemporary male-dominated environment.

However, as we started saying, Shestov's central focus already in his first book on Tolstoy was essentially religious and philosophical, and any comments of a specific nature, psychological, moral or social, were subjugated to a central metaphysical theme, and were raised with the sole purpose of serving that theme. Indeed, Shestov's main claim was that Tolstoy increasingly replaces God by the Good, even though in *Anna Karenina* he does not yet do this to the full extent. Shestov writes:

Все действующие лица “Анны Карениной” разделены на две категории. Одни следуют правилу, правилам и вместе с Левиным идут к благу, к спасению; другие следуют своим желаниям, нарушают правила и, по мере смелости и решимости своих действий, подпадают более или менее жестокому наказанию. [...] Однако, в “Анне Карениной” объем “правил”, почитаемых гр. Толстым за обязательные, еще сравнительно невелик. В эпоху создания этого

⁵⁵ Chukovskaia, II, p. 50.

романа художник дает добру только относительную власть над человеческой жизнью. Более того, служение добру как исключительная и сознательная цель жизни еще отрицается им.⁵⁶

Shestov then continues with examples from *War and Peace* to demonstrate that at the time of the two novels Tolstoy still put life above the good and even considered submitting life to the exclusive service of the good as unnatural. However, Shestov claims that *Anna Karenina* was ‘последняя попытка, сделанная гр. Толстым, чтоб удержаться на прежней почве’, that ‘все то, что наполняло когда-то собою левинское существование - уже не удовлетворяет его, что снова явилась какая-то пустота, что снова недостает той прочности, которая давала ему право смотреть на всех людей сверху вниз и считать, что за него - Бог и против всех его врагов – Бог’.⁵⁷ However, later on the Good for Tolstoy becomes increasingly all-encompassing and shields him from real life. Tolstoy fully sinks into preaching since ‘serving good’ becomes not just a noble burden for him, but a relief from a burden, for it shows him a new and definite light that he desperately needs, Shestov asserts.

Notably, Shestov implies that the idea about following the rules and the inevitable punishment that breaking the rules entails, remains continuously relevant to Tolstoy, for ‘таково уже свойство добра. Кто не за него, тот против него’,⁵⁸ Shestov claims. Thus, in *Anna Karenina* Shestov takes a broader view of interpreting Tolstoy's intentions than Akhmatova does, for in her interpretation there is one fundamental rule, for breaking which Anna is punished, while for Shestov there is a whole system of norms and a range of degrees of breaching them and punishments for it. In this connection what also attracts attention is the difference in interpretations given to the epigraph of the novel.

Shestov says that contrary to the conventional interpretation of this evangelical quotation that the ultimate judgement over people lies with God, Tolstoy takes this task into his own hands. This echoes, in a certain sense, the aforementioned thoughts of Frank Seeley, who claims that Tolstoy ‘is driven to cast down and destroy existing authorities – or to put

⁵⁶ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 223.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 233.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 243.

himself in their place'.⁵⁹ Seeley traces Tolstoy disavowing Napoleon, Shakespeare and finally Christ, ending up in real theomachy: 'God by god goes out discrowned and disanointed'.⁶⁰ Akhmatova too sees the final judgement passing from the hands of God to Tolstoy himself who executes it through the most philistine and hypocritical characters representing high society: 'И подумайте только', Akhmatova exclaims: 'кого же "мусорный старик" избрал орудием Бога? Кто же совершает обещанное в эпитафии отмщение? Высший свет: графиня Лидия Ивановна и шарлатан-проповедник. Ведь именно они доводят Анну до самоубийства'.⁶¹ Contrary to these sentiments, John Bayley speculates that Tolstoy did not 'necessarily feel that Anna would or should suffer punishment in the world's eye, or in God's'.⁶² In fact Bayley conjectures that her suicide might have been committed 'in a momentary fit almost of pique, of "I'll show him"',⁶³ thus putting a totally different spin on the epigraph, as if its implication is that the punishment is that of Anna exercised over Vronsky. Similar ideas, although in a more definite form, can be found in Seeley's essay where he suggests that Anna indeed takes revenge on Vronsky, but in doing so she in fact avenges her own self. More precisely, as Seeley puts it: 'in projecting onto him her own sins, she deflects to him her craving for punishment: he must be punished for his (imagined) guilt. Thus she strikes at herself in him and through him. Till finally, in her despairing last hours, she reaches the point of projecting onto all around her her own self-disgust and self-hatred'.⁶⁴ This is in total contradiction to Bayley's view that Anna 'feels no guilt as such' and only longs for 'her lost son, like an animal deprived of its young'.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Frank Seeley, 'Tolstoy's Philosophy of History' in *Saviour or Superman. Old and New Essays on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1999), p. 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Chukovskaia, I, p. 16.

⁶² Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 34.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 35.

⁶⁴ Frank Seeley, 'The Fate of Anna Karenina' in *Saviour or Superman. Old and New Essays on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*, p. 64.

⁶⁵ Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 35.

5.4. Writing a *philosophical* psychobiography of Tolstoy: Shestov's hermeneutic method versus the formal psychoanalytical school. Shestov as a precursor of 'narrative psychology'.

The strong psychoanalytical flavour of the above claims by Seeley with respect to Anna's actions and feelings is far from being unique in the critical studies of Tolstoy. Having seen Shestov's ideas of Tolstoy in the context of Akhmatova's informal, but shrewd psychological observations of him, we shall now analyse in more detail, as promised above, Shestov's hermeneutic psychological method versus the more formal psychoanalysis of other researchers. The primary issue here is that of the identification of Tolstoy with his characters.

It is perhaps due to Tolstoy's immense creative powers that his heroes always appear so alive that they are perceived by the readers as real people, which makes it easier and in some way even natural to consider them on the same plane as the author who gave life to them. For example, Shestov's contemporary Konstantin Leont'ev was preoccupied by the question, which Donald Fanger found 'astonishingly extraliterary',⁶⁶ of who is more valuable to Russia – Lev Tolstoy himself or his fictional character Vronsky? Leont'ev in his passionate conservatism regarded Vronsky as an exemplary warrior whom Leontiev in his own words preferred from his patriotic point of view not only to Levin, but also to the great novelist Tolstoy himself.⁶⁷ This is obviously an example of taking literary characters more than seriously, and clearly as real people. In such a context Shestov's identification of Tolstoy with his characters does not even seem extreme, because it is not the 'reality' of fictional characters that is central for him (sometimes he even mocks certain positive types as one-dimensional and unrealistic!), but the information about the author encoded into and conveyed through the literary heroes of the latter.

In this respect a literary space constitutes a very specific coded system where on the one hand the writer is indeed represented, but through a huge variety of disguises, while, on the

⁶⁶ Donald Fanger, 'Introduction' to Konstantin Leontiev, *Анализ, стиль и веяние. О романах Гр. Л.Н. Толстого* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1968), p. vii.

⁶⁷ Konstantin Leontiev, *Анализ, стиль и веяние. О романах Гр. Л. Н. Толстого* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1968), p. 3.

other hand, every character is more open to the reader than a real person would be in the space of real life. As Daniel Rancour-Laferrière states, ‘the fictional character of Pierre is even more “real” than a real person is likely to be’,⁶⁸ because ‘most readers are not likely to know even their friends as well as they know the self-revealing Pierre. [...] The stories real people tell about themselves or about other real people are usually not nearly as interesting, as honest, and as detailed as the story Tolstoy tells us about Pierre’.⁶⁹ Rancour-Laferrière then goes on to quote, almost in passing, E. M. Forster’s statement that the creator and the narrator are one.⁷⁰ The latter statement is in itself an entry point to an unending debate and the focus of extensive studies giving rise to a wide range of viewpoints. An alternative opinion we find, for example, in Andrew Wachtel’s article on Tolstoy: ‘the literary work is not a mirror of the author’s life but is, instead, a substitute life in which Tolstoy can try out solutions to his own crisis’.⁷¹ However, Shestov obviously believed that, if carefully read, these tested solutions are instructive enough. In the existing labyrinth of opinions he chose a distinct and quite consistent path, convinced that it is through his characters that the writer reveals himself most clearly, more so than through his officially declared confessions and diaries written on purpose, let alone through biographies of him. ‘Обстоятельных биографий не бывает — я, по крайней мере, не могу назвать ни одной’, Shestov wrote. ‘Обыкновенно в жизнеописаниях нам рассказывают все, кроме того, что важно было бы узнать’.⁷² While proclaiming that life and literature are two different things, he nevertheless insisted that many writers leave enough clues in their literary works to enable us to decipher the ‘authorial’ reality behind it – one just has to be able to read ‘properly’ (‘нужно уметь читать’),⁷³ Shestov suggested.

In this respect Shestov’s project is substantially different from that of Rancour-Laferrière. Indeed, the latter makes the point that the imagined space of the novel is continuous with

⁶⁸ Daniel Rancour-Laferrière, *Tolstoy’s Pierre Bezukhov, A Psychoanalytic Study* (England: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), p. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ E. M. Forster, *The Death Of The Author* (1955 [1927]), 55-56. Cited in Rancour-Laferrière, p. 5, ref. 18).

⁷¹ Andrew Wachtel, ‘History and autobiography in Tolstoy’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tusing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 188.

⁷² Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 186.

⁷³ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 131.

his interior space, as well as that of every appreciative reader. He then affirms that it is because Pierre belongs to the interior lives of countless readers, not only to that of Tolstoy, that Pierre is psychoanalysable at a broader level than the 'very narrow level of the author's psyche'.⁷⁴ Yet, for Shestov, it seems, it is precisely that 'narrow level of the author's psyche' that truly interests him. Instead of composing, like Rancour-Laferrière, a psychobiography of Pierre – a selected fictional character of Tolstoy – Shestov pursues a different task – he composes a psychobiography of Tolstoy himself. Incidentally, Rancour-Laferrière recognises this task as 'significant and fascinating',⁷⁵ but considers it as never undertaken, even though, as he says, 'some psychoanalytic studies of Tolstoy do in fact already exist'.⁷⁶ Rancour-Laferrière produces a lengthy list of the latter, but almost all of them are entirely orthogonal to what Shestov is doing. This is not so much due to their specific terminology and methodology, but because, in the essence of things, they invariably deal with Tolstoy's sexuality and private biography, where privacy concerns primarily physiological and personal aspects of his character rooted in Tolstoy's childhood and youth, and includes such issues as his sadistic tendencies and attitudes, the early loss of his mother, the peculiarities of his upbringing, etc, rather than spiritual and philosophical matters *per se* (as in the case of Shestov's analysis).

One of the main differences lies in the fact that if the former characteristics, such as, for instance, Tolstoy's attitude to women, ever enter Shestov's analysis, they do so invariably as a means of investigating the latter (principal) issues and are never substitutes for them. Thus, for example, in the considerations above we showed how Tolstoy's ambivalent treatment of women, his recognition of love only if it is sealed by the marriage vows as well as his general fear of femininity and his view of it as a danger are regarded by Shestov as leads to be pursued in order to reveal Tolstoy's general pattern of being in general afraid and suspicious of women, femininity and gender relations, and of regarding any of the aspects of the above that do not have an obvious practical meaning as potentially fatal temptations. At the same time psychoanalytical studies of Tolstoy tend to assign the

⁷⁴ Rancour-Laferrière, p. 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

novelist's ambivalence towards women and his inability to reconcile a woman's role as a mother with her also being a sexual creature to Tolstoy's own early loss of his mother (who died when he was two).

In other words, to speak more generally – just before embarking on concrete illustrations of these general claims – what Shestov does can perhaps be called writing a **philosophical** (or, if you like, spiritual) psychobiography of Tolstoy (or, for that matter, of any other writer). This is because he is interested primarily in the writer's philosophical convictions and beliefs and their evolution, but through the latter's individual inner growth traced via his literary works and most notably documented in his characters. The level at which Shestov operates differs, as we mentioned above, from contemporary psychoanalytical methods, and is instead more akin to Tolstoy's own method of Russian nineteenth-century psychological realism. What Rancour-Laferrière says about Tolstoy, he would have undoubtedly said about Shestov's attempts at analysing Tolstoy: 'he is a "psychologist", yes, but he is rather half-baked as a psychoanalyst'.⁷⁷ This is because of the issues and insights that appear to Rancour-Laferrière as abandoned mid-way, but in fact they simply lie outside Shestov's interests. Curiously, having agreed with the depth and subtlety of Tolstoy's psychological analysis, Rancour-Laferrière objects to endowing Tolstoy scholars with these characteristics. 'Tolstoy is the "psychologist", not the Tolstoy scholar',⁷⁸ he claims. This makes one wonder if he is at all familiar with Shestov's writings on Tolstoy.

One has to emphasise that the identification of Pierre with Tolstoy himself that Rancour-Laferrière, by his own admission, occasionally makes is quite different from that of Shestov. The former occurs as an unavoidable consequence of psychoanalytic observations on Tolstoy while psychoanalysing Pierre. Thus, for example, he draws a parallel between the significance of Tolstoy's famous 'ant brothers' and Pierre's Masonic 'brothers'.⁷⁹ At the same time Rancour-Laferrière is very aware of the multitude of similarities between Tolstoy and his creation. He does not deny that 'the principal prototype for Pierre seems to

⁷⁷ Rancour-Laferrière, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

have been Tolstoy himself'.⁸⁰ He gives examples of the evident parallels between them, such as Tolstoy's and Pierre's youthful experiences in Petersburg, the similarities in their family life and their overall quest for philosophical and spiritual truth, as well as Pierre's attempts to improve the lot of his peasants which parallel Tolstoy's endeavours on his estate in Iasnaja Poliana.⁸¹ Yet, it is not Rancour-Laferrière's aim to highlight these similarities since it is Pierre, not Tolstoy that constitutes his main focus. On the other hand Shestov identifies Tolstoy with Pierre Bezukhov only to reveal the existential truth about Tolstoy. Thus, as we shall see later, Shestov compares Pierre's spiritual evolution and his extraordinary experience of the whole world breaking down in his soul and then resurrecting itself again with those of Tolstoy. In other words, while Rancour-Laferrière goes from Tolstoy to Pierre, Shestov's quest unfolds in the opposite direction: from Pierre to Tolstoy.

Amongst the psychoanalytic studies of Tolstoy that Rancour-Laferrière mentions, perhaps the only exception which bears any approximation to Shestov's type of exploration is the study by Heinz Kohut who draws a contrast between the two sides of Tolstoy's personality: the guilty and the tragic.⁸² He assigns didacticism to the guilty man in Tolstoy, and the more creative and non-moralising passages to the tragic one.⁸³ This, in a certain sense, is reminiscent of the view that Tolstoy's inner conflict was rooted in his never-ending attempts to harmonise his behaviour with his principles. This view is expressed in particular by Frank Seeley who calls this struggle of Tolstoy's 'desperate and largely unavailing'.⁸⁴ Yet, the type of analysis that Kohut provides is different again from Shestov's, for his conclusions are reached by general contemplation rather than an explicit effort to unmask the writer by decoding his behaviour and double-guessing the motivations of his heroes.

⁸⁰ Rancour-Laferrière, p. 8.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Heinz Kohut, *The Search for the Self. Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut: 1950–1978* (vols. I and II); ed. Paul Ornstein (New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1978), pp. 761-762.

⁸³ See Rancour-Laferrière, ref. 41 on p. 9.

⁸⁴ Seeley, *Tolstoy's Philosophy of History*, p. 9.

To do this careful work composed to a large extent of genuine insights Shestov first of all makes an interesting selection of the characters that will drive his point home, but furthermore, he focuses on those of their actions and ideas that serve his main purpose, and often ignores the multi-dimensional nature of the characters. In other words he superimposes his paradigm on the text to derive exactly what he needs from it. Thus, although exposing the characters in the most unexpected light (and through them their creator Tolstoy), Shestov nevertheless often borders on turning them into simplified schemes by neglecting their depths. This is particularly interesting given Shestov's objections to the scientific method of generalisation which inevitably simplifies things by ignoring their least relevant characteristics. In contrast, what Shestov chooses to ignore is dictated by his own subjective vision rather than the objective demands of the case. Of course, it is necessary in order to make particular points to concentrate selectively on the appropriate manifestations of them and in a sense to neglect the rest. Without this strategy no logical reasoning would be possible. Yet, Shestov on the one hand refused to acknowledge that, and on the other he inadvertently repeated the same pattern himself.

We shall now substantiate our claims and demonstrate the distinctly philosophical slant of Shestov's psychological analysis as opposed to the different emphases, particularly of the psychoanalytic school. Our aim is also to exhibit the evolution of his ideas on Tolstoy in the context of his own philosophical development. In the course of this we shall attempt to analyse his subjective choice of heroes as the writer's representatives, and in particular the above tendency to simplify characters through a tendentious selection.

However, before embarking on this task, we need to address another issue: that Shestov's treatment of Tolstoy, and for that matter any other author, not only resonates with the psychoanalytical approach to literature, but also anticipates the (very modern) 'narrative psychology' approach. The latter occupies an important place within contemporary psychology and 'attributes a central role to language, but more specifically to "stories", in

the process of self-construction'.⁸⁵ It 'thus considers narratives as fundamental for understanding individuals' lives and constructions of meaning',⁸⁶ and 'is considered especially important when the object of analysis is personal experience and personal identity'.⁸⁷ It is therefore normally applied to self-narratives such as 'autobiographies, memoirs, personal and life histories, even interviews' which, as Freeman explains, constitute 'texts of lives, literary artifacts that generally seek to recount in some fashion what these lives were like'.⁸⁸ Hence 'in "narrating the self", people make sense of their lived experience, construct and convey meanings, and also construct their own individual [...] identities'.⁸⁹

In other words, narrative psychology attempts to decode (i.e. deconstruct and reassemble in a more 'authentic' way) a self-myth inherent in self-narratives. This is, however, precisely what Shestov tries to do in his analysis of literary works. Thus he essentially treats fictional literature as a self-narrative of the author, as if it were a 'coded autobiography' or memoir of sorts. In this respect the above quotation from Andrew Wachtel's article on Tolstoy, which claims that in his fictional writings he creates 'a substitute life in which Tolstoy can try out solutions to his own crisis', is of high relevance. For, as Freeman writes, 'narratives [...] rather than being the mere fictions they are sometimes assumed to be, might instead be in the service of attaining exactly those forms of truth that are unavailable in the flux of the immediate'.⁹⁰ In other words, this 'substitute life' could in fact be a reappraisal by the writer of past reality, which, with time, gains a new meaning and new inner resolution to past events. Moreover, if in the genres of direct self-narrative such as autobiographies and memoirs, authors 'tend to be prescriptive, presenting one's own life as an example of a moral code in action',⁹¹ in fictional works the author, by hiding behind a hero, can

⁸⁵ M. Freeman, *Re-writing the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). Cited in Bull, forthcoming, 'Political violence, stragismo and "civil war": an analysis of the self-narratives of neofascist protagonists'.

⁸⁶ Bull, forthcoming, 'Political violence, stragismo and "civil war"'.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ M. Freeman, *Re-writing the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 7. Cited in Bull.

⁸⁹ Bull, forthcoming, 'Political violence, stragismo and "civil war"'.

⁹⁰ Freeman, p. 224. Cited in Bull.

⁹¹ Bull, forthcoming, 'Political violence, stragismo and "civil war"'.

deliberately violate any moral codes and free himself of all ethical bonds. This is the view Shestov took with regard to the literary works under his study, and that is why he was interested above all in this fictional genre rather than in autobiographies, diaries or memoirs *per se*. In other words, while ‘what we might call the moral space of self-interpretation, and thus the space of autobiographical memory itself, remains very much circumscribed’,⁹² a piece of fiction does not carry with it any moral obligations on the part of the author who can reveal himself through his negative characters without any fear of being ‘caught’, of being ‘personally accused’.

Furthermore, what is of utmost importance in the link between Shestov’s approach and narrative psychology is that the latter, as Anna Bull explains, ‘is applied mainly to the study of illness narratives, which often deal with personal traumas, focussing on significant moments of change in the life of an individual. [...] Such moments tend to be seen as the beginning of a new journey in one’s life, and are often narrated as part of a “conversion genre” which presents numerous points of contact with a religious conversion’.⁹³ As a result, Bull writes, ‘our understanding of what constitutes “the truth” can change dramatically’.⁹⁴ She then quotes M. L. Crossley to point out that we thus revisit our ‘conceptions of selfhood and its ultimate connection with issues of morality, “rightness” and “goodness”’.⁹⁵ The conclusion is that ‘in doing so, we create new narratives that help us make sense of life after the trauma’.⁹⁶

This coincides almost precisely with what Shestov does to the writers under his study. As was explained earlier and will be demonstrated in the rest of the thesis, Shestov searches for

⁹² M. Freeman and J. Brockmeier, ‘Narrative integrity: Autobiographical identity and the meaning of the “good life”’ in *Narrative and Identity. Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, eds. J. Brockmeier and D. Carbaugh (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 85-86. Cited in Bull, forthcoming, ‘Political violence, stragismo and “civil war”’.

⁹³ A. Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and The Politics of Non-Reconciliation* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, forthcoming in 2007).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ M. L. Crossley, ‘Formulating Narrative Psychology: The Limitations of Contemporary Social Constructionalism’, *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 13, No 2, 2003, pp. 287-300 (p. 297). Cited in Bull, *Italian Neofascism*, forthcoming.

⁹⁶ Bull, *Italian Neofascism*, forthcoming.

a breaking point in their life, for a central crisis – or, in other words, for a defining trauma. Having lived through a traumatic experience himself, he then embarks on a journey through the souls of great thinkers to find in their lives the same trauma-caused re-birth of personality and re-evaluation of old convictions and values, i.e. precisely the above case of revisiting our old conceptions of selfhood in connection to morality. It is this new journey (starting with Nietzsche after – according to Shestov – his realisation of his hopeless condition and continuing in the case of others), on which the doomed person sets off, that most interests Shestov. The old ideals of ‘good’ are no longer of any use, and a new reality opens up which needs urgent assimilation. Hence Shestov, by reading classical literary works as self-narratives, as attempts to create a self-myth, in a way constructs an alternative myth of the writers’ lives being centred around a major trauma. The original conclusions that he salvages from such a treatment often shed an unexpected light on the conventional interpretations of these writers, and add a useful new dimension to understanding their works, as will be shown in this and following chapters.

It is also worth pointing out that while narrative psychology seems to be largely based on a discursive analysis, on paying attention to the linguistic, syntactical and structural properties of a story, Shestov’s approach is less focused on these aspects of the text and examines more the direct content of the heroes interchanges and authorial comments, looking for a hidden meaning, as we shall continuously see. In particular, it is characters’ actions and behaviour that he compares and contrasts with their verbal communication. In this Shestov displays more of a blend between narrative psychology and a psychoanalytic approach, with the ultimate outcome being, as we are about to see, in deriving a philosophical (even anthropological) meaning from the interpretation of the author’s experience as reflected in the latter’s literary works.

5.5. The tragic and the ordinary. Tolstoy's fear of the Underground.

We shall focus first of all on Shestov's treatment of the two major novels of Tolstoy: *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, which were most significant for Shestov already in his early explorations of Tolstoy. In contrast to Kohut's analysis of the emanations of the tragic as opposed to the guilty in Tolstoy, Shestov spoke of the tragic and the ordinary as being the

two poles between which Tolstoy drifted, and illustrates it above all via the epic of *War and Peace*. More precisely, Shestov focuses on the epilogue to the novel, and considers all the married couples, but with the main emphasis on the Rostovs. As Bayley observes, Shestov refers sardonically to Princess Mary and Nicholas Rostov as the true heroes of *War and Peace*.⁹⁷ Indeed, Shestov writes: ‘посмотрите, какое глубокое уважение питает гр. Толстой к Ростову. “Долго, - рассказывает он нам, - после его (Николая) смерти в народе хранилась набожная память о его управлении”. Набожная память! Долго хранилась! Пересмотрите все, что писал гр. Толстой: ни об одном из своих героев он не говорил с таким чувством благодарности и умиления’.⁹⁸ Why was Tolstoy so fond of Rostov, Shestov asks; and answers that it is because of Rostov's extraordinary ordinariness. He writes:

Ростов знал, как жить, и был потому всегда тверд. Во всю же свою писательскую деятельность гр. Толстой ничего так не ценил, как определенное знание и твердость, ибо у себя не находил ни того, ни другого. Он мог только подражать Ростову и, само собою разумеется, был принужден расточать хвалу своему высокому образцу. Эта “набожная память”, как и весь эпилог к “Войне и миру” - дерзкий, сознательно дерзкий вызов, брошенный гр. Толстым всем образованным людям, всей, если хотите, *совести* нашего времени.⁹⁹

Shestov claims that Tolstoy knew very well what he was doing and that the meaning of the epilogue can be expressed as Tolstoy's open worship of Rostov as opposed to Pushkin and Shakespeare whom he, also openly, rejected. (Here, by the way, it is worth noting that we are witnessing the same ‘Leontiev’ phenomenon again – of regarding literary heroes alongside real people (writers); the ‘natural ease’ of it implicitly indicates the degree to which for Shestov characters and their creators merged together.) If before Tolstoy juxtaposed to Pushkin and Shakespeare the whole of the Russian people (the simple folk, the *narod*), in *War and Peace* he chose Rostov instead – the embodiment of ordinariness, of ‘чистейшая материя, косность, неподвижность’,¹⁰⁰ using Shestov's words. As for Princess Maria, Shestov reveals her hypocrisy hidden under the façade of high and lofty

⁹⁷ Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 27.

⁹⁸ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, pp. 364-365.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 365.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

morality. 'Разумеется [...], он прав'¹⁰¹ – Shestov cites her talking to Rostov about Pierre and his tormenting questions concerning the suffering of others and one's duty towards them. 'Это "разумеется" великолепно!',¹⁰² Shestov exclaims, and then continues the quote where Maria reminds Nikolai of their other duties – to their children, to the family. Rostov is consoled and moves on to petty subjects, which seems too abrupt a change to Maria. Yet, she does not voice her frustration for the sake of keeping their marital union and peace intact. In this Shestov finds the most extreme hypocrisy and emphasises that Tolstoy makes this 'leap over the abyss' quite deliberately and remains 'as usual clear, peaceful and transparent': 'Толстой и виду не подает, что понимает, через какую пропасть он только что перескочил. Он по обыкновению ясен, светел, прозрачен'.¹⁰³

Tolstoy thus reaches a double goal, Shestov asserts, to speak the truth, but to make sure that this truth is by no means subversive of the foundations of life. After all, it was one of Shestov's own central points concerning *War and Peace*, that the novel first and foremost celebrates life, and that at the time of writing Tolstoy had put life above the Good. However, this was Shestov's position in his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, but already a couple of years later, in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, Shestov moves on by reformulating Tolstoy's escape from the horrors of life into preaching as a somewhat stronger statement of Tolstoy's attempt 'to hide in the mediocre'. In Tolstoy, Shestov asserts, 'мы имеем единственный пример гениального человека, во что бы то ни стало стремящегося сравниться с посредственностью, самому стать посредственностью'.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Shestov implies that in the Rostovs Tolstoy smuggles in and seemingly 'innocently' celebrates the triumph of the mediocre, philistine and conservative – of all those who will uphold to the last their selfish beliefs, but cover them with high and noble words, thus reconciling reality with ideals. In this, for Shestov, Tolstoy's attempts to melt in with the ordinary get fulfilled, and at the same time his aforementioned ideology centred on the ubiquitous and omnipotent power of life still perseveres. For Shestov the former tendency (towards the ordinary from the tragic) is far more important than the latter (the celebration of life at whatever cost), or,

¹⁰¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 366.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 360.

more precisely, he sees them as merging in Tolstoy: in order to remain on board, in the full stream of life rather than in the terrifying 'underground', the writer is prepared to become a mediocrity. And the Rostovs for Shestov symbolise first of all that former tendency, and it is the manifestations of it that Shestov highlights in his study.

At the same time, if we look, in contrast, at Gary Saul Morson's analysis of the novel, we find that it is the latter tendency which comes to the forefront, and that he too characterises the Rostovs as the main heroes of the novel, only unlike Shestov he does it quite seriously, without any irony. Morson writes: 'If by the hero of a novel we mean the character who best embodies its values and lessons, then Rostov, not Andrei or Pierre, is the hero of *War and Peace*; and it testifies to Tolstoy's genius that he can make such a thoroughly ordinary, indeed mediocre, character both heroic and supremely interesting. By the same token, the book's heroine is Princess Marya, who more than anyone can perceive the value, in fact the sanctity, of each ordinary moment. The marriage of Marya and Nikolai, more than Pierre's and Natasha's, defines the book's central point and establishes its happy ending'.¹⁰⁵ Thus both Morson and Shestov are selective in their analysis and highlight different sides of the Rostovs that serve their respective goals. Morson wants to demonstrate Tolstoy's extraordinary literary craftsmanship and his ability to celebrate life, while Shestov, following his own agenda, derives conclusions about Tolstoy's hidden aspirations and conflicts. Yet, Morson, as it were, gives the Rostovs a chance, while Shestov's verdict on them is more characteristically categorical. For Morson, as for Shestov, the ordinariness of Nikolai Rostov is indisputable. Yet, if Morson sees in its portrayal the genius of Tolstoy to make the mediocre seem heroic, Shestov derives from it Tolstoy's own striving to equal the mediocre. Similarly, Morson sees in Maria first of all her ability to live every moment to the full, while Shestov reveals her underlying hypocrisy.

This hypocrisy Shestov in a sense assigns to Tolstoy himself as a manifestation of the writer's eternal struggle against the subversive power of the tragic, of the underground and its 'psychology'. Shestov focuses predominantly on Tolstoy's extraordinary ability

¹⁰⁵ Gary Saul Morson, 'War and Peace' in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tusing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 76.

seemingly to overcome the tragic in his literature, but at the same time demonstrates the partial and deceptive nature of this victory, because for Shestov Tolstoy's fate was to be forever haunted by the tragic till the end. According to Shestov, Tolstoy's entire literary work, if not his entire life, was defined by his struggle against 'underground' thoughts, against the tragic hopelessness of existence. 'Его [...] писательская деятельность - одно непрерывное стремление так или иначе - силой, хитростью, обманом - победить упорного врага, подрывающего в самых основах возможность счастливого и светлого существования'.¹⁰⁶ This statement manifests in particular the specific philosophical strand in Shestov's psychoanalysis of the writer.

In contrast to this vision of Tolstoy, there has always existed an overwhelming opposite trend which has viewed Tolstoy as a humanist never compelled to defect to the camp of complete disillusionment and nihilism. Thus Henry Gifford writes quite radically that 'Tolstoy never for a moment enrolled in the army of the underground. He belongs to the moral tradition which in modern eyes may seem part of the "idyll" that replaces reality'.¹⁰⁷ Even in the *Death of Ivan Ilich*, the story that Shestov came to discuss in his later writings on Tolstoy, Gifford sees the ultimate victory of hope over nihilism, 'a confidence in right feeling and in the sense of human responsibility'.¹⁰⁸

However strong and numerous the defenders of the above stance on Tolstoy may be, one has to admit that Shestov's arguments have their undeniable force. Shestov illustrates his point by showing how Tolstoy's heroes amazingly manage to reconcile ideals with reality by accepting the latter, but not stopping to respect the former. Shestov penetratingly observes that the impression from this phenomenon should have been like that from the famous formula of Dostoevsky's Underground Man: 'Миру ли провалиться или мне чаю не пить', however it is not so. Shestov demonstrates that Tolstoy 'везде, где только может, напоминает нам, что для лучших людей 12-го года несчастья России значили меньше, чем их собственные, личные огорчения. Но при этих напоминаниях он умеет

¹⁰⁶ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 354.

¹⁰⁷ Henry Gifford, *Tolstoy* (Oxford-Toronto-Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

сохранить необыкновенную на вид ясность души, точно ничего особенного не произошло, точно и в самом деле разум и совесть могут спокойно глядеть на проявление такого чудовищного эгоизма'.¹⁰⁹ Shestov quotes the descriptions of this in the case of Princess Maria and points to the striking proximity of her stance to that of the Underground Man, because in the essence of their content her words embody the same sentiment: 'России ли погибнуть, или мне чаю не пить? Я скажу - пусть себе гибнет Россия, а чтоб мне чай был'.¹¹⁰ Yet, Shestov notices, the impression is not at all like that because of the entirely different form that Maria's words take. In other words, this is because Tolstoy takes great care to dress up people's egoism as completely natural, harmless and, moreover, compatible with high ideals and noble principles. We wish to note here also, that Shestov, although right in principle, is still stretching or twisting the nature of the case somewhat, because the Underground Man demands his tea *for himself* whereas Maria is worried about her family (in that particular instance about her brother), which is a mitigating circumstance to some extent, altering the character of her 'guilt'.

In contrast to that, if we look instead at John Bayley's elaborations, we notice that the same elements are seen in a somewhat different light, even though it is precisely Shestov's analysis that he contemplates. Bayley's summary of the latter is as follows: 'In a brilliant exposition of the hidden politics of *War and Peace* the Russian-Jewish philosopher Shestov has shown how subtly equivocal is Tolstoy's own position as the book nears its end'.¹¹¹ Bayley then explains that position as the conflict between our sacrificial and endless striving to resolve what is right and good on the one hand, and our possessive desire to cling to our own little domain of our family and possessions on the other. In other words, Bayley expresses very nearly the idea that Shestov so concisely formulated as a conflict between the tragic and the ordinary in Tolstoy, but carries on to reach a somewhat different conclusion (or rather to highlight a different side of the problem). And this highlights in particular the fact of the multi-dimensional nature of truth by demonstrating that the human striving for a heroic, noble stance may not necessarily be regarded as inevitably tragic, and

¹⁰⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 355.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 26.

equally human personal aspirations as invariably ordinary. Instead, for Bayley the conflict of Tolstoy lies between the writer's deepest instincts on the one hand and his reasoning conscience and intelligence on the other. 'Tolstoy's own spiritual future is thus explicitly foreshadowed in *War and Peace*. His art could, in a sense, solve the tormenting problem which the pilgrimage of his life could not, for *War and Peace* leaves the problem unresolved, in the full aesthetic harmony of its close',¹¹² Bayley writes.

What we can see from this is that Bayley's emphasis, just like that of Kohut described above, was more at the level of morality and psychology, while Shestov's was indeed philosophical, with, if you like, an existential spin. As Berdiaev pointed out, it was essentially a question of theodicy, because Shestov pursued above all Tolstoy's search for truth, his attempts to answer the eternal questions of the meaning of life, of faith and reason, of the place of the individual in the universe. That is why, as we have now shown, Shestov dug up from beneath the surface of Tolstoy's narrative, as manifestations of this tormenting quest, his fear of the underground, of the tragic, and his attempted escape to the ordinary.

Shestov's vision of Tolstoy at the time of Shestov's first book on him was an attempt first and foremost to reveal this underlying struggle in Tolstoy, resulting in him shifting from philosophy to preaching and hiding behind the Good. At the same time Shestov admired Tolstoy's ability to celebrate life in all its manifestations, to immerse himself in its full flow, and it is in this ability of Tolstoy, in his deep interest in life and people that Shestov then saw his significance as a philosopher: 'вся творческая деятельность его была вызвана потребностью понять жизнь, т. е. той именно потребностью, которая вызвала к существованию философию'.¹¹³ He explained that the right to be called a philosopher is not defined by a technical preoccupation with specific questions such as space and time, monism and dualism, and gnoseological theory in general, because 'собственно же философия должна начинаться там, где возникают вопросы о месте и назначении

¹¹² Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 27.

¹¹³ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 255.

человека в мире, о его правах и роли во вселенной'.¹¹⁴ Ivanov-Razumnik supports this claim by Shestov about the causes and function of philosophy and interprets the latter as an attempt to understand and justify life, to explain the significance of evil in the world, and to find the meaning of life. 'Где возникают эти вопросы, там начинается философия, в каких бы формах она ни проявлялась: в форме ли философского трактата, или критической статьи, или трагедии и романа',¹¹⁵ Ivanov-Razumnik writes.

Perhaps Shestov's own passionate desire at the time was to equal Tolstoy in this ability to turn to life in its fullness and glory and to be able to cope with its horrors. As Erofeev points out, the essence of Shestov's contemplation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* at the time is that the latter when creating the novel lived in full harmony with the secret laws of life and managed 'во всем [...] увидеть руку Провидения';¹¹⁶ he did not teach life, but learned from it. At the end of the book Shestov, using Nietzsche as an example, summons the reader to go beyond or above the suffering and the Good – in search of God. Shestov claims that this is because Nietzsche had shown him the way. Erofeev essentially adds to this that such a call was made by Shestov because Tolstoy could see the divine hand in everything and thus had set the example.¹¹⁷ Indeed, Shestov did say that Tolstoy in *War and Peace*, having demanded an answer from fate for every human life, came to the conclusion that this answer should be sought elsewhere, 'выше, вне нас'.¹¹⁸

Already in Shestov's next book – *The Philosophy of Tragedy* – that came out only three years after his *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, Shestov appeared to be no longer trying to find in his own self Tolstoy's gift of celebrating life, but not yet to have found any religious answer, from 'above and beyond us' either. Instead tragedy seemed to have taken the upper hand in Shestov's own search for the meaning of life and for human salvation. Shestov's portrait of Tolstoy was even more radicalised by further shifting the focus from Tolstoy's knowledge

¹¹⁴ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 255.

¹¹⁵ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 166.

¹¹⁶ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 262. Cited in Erofeev, p. 167.

¹¹⁷ See Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 256.

of life's secrets to his continuing inner compromise and escape to the ordinary. This is how Shestov described Tolstoy in the preface to his *Philosophy of Tragedy*:

Как ненавистен, как противен был ему весь строй современной мысли! Еще с молодых лет он ко всему, к чему наука говорила "да", говорил "нет", не останавливаясь даже перед опасностью сказать нелепость. [...] А между тем, он кончил тем, что в главном принял все, чему учит наука, и так же держится "положительных" идеалов, как и большинство реформаторов в Европе. Его христианство есть идеал устроенного человечества. От искусства он требует проповеди добрых чувств, от науки - советов мужику. Он не понимает, зачем поэты тоскуют и стремятся выразить тончайшие оттенки своих настроений, ему кажутся странными эти беспокойные искатели, шатающиеся по северному полюсу или проводящие бессонные ночи в наблюдении звездного неба. Зачем все эти стремления к неизвестному, неизведанному? Все это бесполезно, значит - ненормально. Страшный призрак "ненормальности" все время давил и давит этот колоссальный ум и заставляет его мириться с посредственностью, в себе самом искать посредственности.¹¹⁹

Tolstoy was afraid of insanity as the most probable result of his intense inner search, of his interrogations of life, and therefore 'вернулся к положительным идеалам',¹²⁰ Shestov concludes.

More than thirty years later, in 1935, in his last work on Tolstoy, Shestov repeated the idea of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* being a hymn to life, a justification of the human apotheosis in the universe, but only to show how Tolstoy's views over time became transformed and how he kept increasingly failing in his obstinate self-deception. Shestov asserted that at the time of *War and Peace* Tolstoy believed essentially in the power of brute force ruling the world – the force that Rostov (with Arakcheev looming over him) embodied.¹²¹ Bezukhov, on the other hand, represented only the force of his own conscience. He could not resurrect his faith after having witnessed a brutal execution of the prisoners; his world collapsed, even if this collapse turned out to be only temporary. Shestov draws a direct parallel between the juxtaposition of Rostov and Pierre on the one hand and Tolstoy's inner conflict on the other. He sees Tolstoy as standing behind Rostov at the time of *War and Peace*, and behind Pierre at the time of the *Confession*. As he wrote in 1935,

¹¹⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 327.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Count Aleksei Andreevich Arakcheev (1769-1834) was a general and statesman whose name came to symbolise for Russians brute force and a military-type autocracy.

...разве принудительное начало, олицетворившееся в Ростове, в силу того, что оно одно только и может обеспечить стройность, порядок и гармонию бытия, не требует и не заслуживает набожного отношения к себе? Оно, оно одно только достойно быть предметом нашего благоговейного почитания. Когда Толстой кончал "Войну и Мир", он, как будто не мог и не хотел иначе думать. Но, ведь, он мог и не рассказывать о том, что он думал: надобности в этом не было и никто не заставлял его это делать. И все же он сказал – и сказал с такой умышленной, вызывающей резкостью – словно подготавливая читателя к тому, что через полтора десятка лет ему суждено было возвестить в "Исповеди".¹²²

And it is then, Shestov affirms, that the Rostov-Arakhchev type of justification of the world based on their readiness to exterminate any resistance on their path had become for Tolstoy a 'disgusting blasphemy' ('отвратительным кощунством'), and, 'точно обезумев, он бросается к Св. Писанию, к Евангелию, ища там спасения от душившего его кошмара'.¹²³

5.6. Reading Tolstoy through his heroes. Interpretations of Levin.

Thus, in a sense, throughout *War and Peace* Shestov saw Tolstoy as a dialectical merging of Rostov and Pierre, which is not a standard critical opinion. Tolstoy is very rarely identified with Rostov, but very frequently parallels are drawn between him and Pierre and to some extent between him and Andrei Bolkonsky. Having said that, it is interesting to point out that, for example, W. Gareth Jones is convinced that Nikolai Rostov is as much an emanation of Tolstoy's own self as Prince Andrei and Pierre,¹²⁴ and, curiously, has translated Rostov's belief that a lie is a necessary attribute of life into Tolstoy's attitude to writing fiction. On the other hand, Shestov himself, as we shall see later, also came openly to identify Tolstoy with Pierre, but in 1900 he did not yet spell it out and was less free with direct identifications.

However, in *Anna Karenina* Shestov focused most of all on the character of Levin, regarding him and essentially him alone as the writer's mirror-image. Thus Shestov moved to a more subtle picture by transferring, as it were, Tolstoy's inner struggle from two

¹²² Shestov, 'Ясная Поляна и Астапово' in *Умозрение и откровение*, pp. 163-164.

¹²³ Ibid, p. 165.

¹²⁴ W. Gareth Jones, 'A man speaking to men: the narratives of *War and Peace*' in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 66.

conflicting heroes in *War and Peace* to one hero in *Anna Karenina*. This again does not exactly coincide with the existing critical opinions, because often Tolstoy is seen in more than just one central character of the novel – for example parallels are drawn between Tolstoy and Koznyshev or Tolstoy and Vronsky. Thus Bayley speaks of Vronsky as ‘the kind of man he [Tolstoy] himself might once have been’.¹²⁵ In a more sophisticated fashion, Tolstoy is perceived in a variety of characters through the interplay of episodes displaying them from different angles. For example, Judith M. Armstrong sees in ‘Koznyshev's relinquishing of Varenka’ Tolstoy's ‘last gesture of homage to the image of purity and abstention’ and claims that although it is a minor episode, it is ‘as liberating as a confession’ because it clears the way for another character – Levin – by releasing him ‘from his single-minded dedication to the family ideal’ and thus allowing him ‘to become the mouthpiece for the other preoccupations of his creator’.¹²⁶

Armstrong's perspective is distinctly psychoanalytical. As Rancour-Laferrière identifies, she employs in her study orthodox Freudian analysis as well as psychoanalytic criticism.¹²⁷ Therefore for our purposes it is particularly instructive to compare Armstrong's conclusions with those of Shestov, especially when her focus is identical to that of the philosopher – for instance, in the case of the character of Levin.

For Shestov, as we mentioned, Levin is the direct embodiment of Tolstoy himself, his *alter ego*, as Shestov states, and explains that even Levin's surname is derived from Tolstoy's first name (Lev).¹²⁸ In him Shestov sees an open manifestation of Tolstoy's hypocritical attempts to escape into preaching and unravels constant discrepancies in the character of Levin which demonstrate for Shestov Tolstoy's losing battle against his own genuine philosophy. In other words, Shestov uses Levin to unmask Tolstoy and to reveal the doomed nature of the writer's preaching. Shestov finds Levin unconvincing precisely because he expresses a false ideal, Tolstoy's attempts to fool himself. Shestov notices how Tolstoy describes Levin's inner evolution as a development from his futile and personally

¹²⁵ Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 28.

¹²⁶ Judith M. Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina* (England: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 46.

¹²⁷ See Rancour-Laferrière, p. 17.

¹²⁸ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 225.

unsatisfying attempts to live for the common good to his subsequent more satisfactory 'life for himself'. Shestov decodes this development as a direct statement by Levin that 'сознательное служение добру – есть ненужная ложь'.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, it is Levin whose life has 'несомненный смысл добра',¹³⁰ and even if Tolstoy depicts all his shortcomings very vividly, good is still on his side, and on his side alone. By this Tolstoy provides himself, according to Shestov, with a sense of inner firmness and security, he justifies his inner moral stance and the sense of direction in his own life. Yet, Shestov affirms that this sense is only deceptive, it will not last. He sees Levin's image as steeped in hypocrisy. Having made his position clear in *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, Shestov then reaffirms it in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*. There he writes openly that 'чем больше его [Tolstoy's] Левин замыкается в узкую сферу своих личных интересов, тем "наглее" [...] становится он в восхвалении добра'.¹³¹ Shestov then focuses on what he finds most revealing with respect to Tolstoy – Levin's behaviour regarding his wedding in particular and his marriage in general.

Вдумайтесь только хорошенько в жизнь Левина и вы убедитесь, что не только лгал он добру, когда выражал ему свою глубокую признательность, но обманывал и "счастье", когда уверял себя и Кити, что он счастлив. Все – неправда, от первого до последнего слова. Левин никогда не был счастлив - ни тогда, когда он был женихом Кити, ни тогда, когда он на ней женился. Он только притворялся счастливым,¹³²

Shestov says categorically. Amongst Shestov's reasons are Kitty's total incompatibility with Levin, and the improbability of the latter falling in love with such 'божья коровка',¹³³ as Shestov calls her, implying Kitty's rather narrow-minded outlook, her limited philistine aspirations and interests, at least in comparison with Levin's. Shestov claims further that family life is not a suitable atmosphere for a man like Levin, and that he comes across in those family scenes as somebody who is resolute to do exactly what happy people in love do in identical circumstances. Levin's feverish happiness on the eve of his wedding, his high anxiety during Kitty's pregnancy, his ridiculous and uncivilised scene of jealousy

¹²⁹ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 225.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 226.

¹³¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 357.

¹³² Ibid, p. 358.

¹³³ Ibid.

when Veselovsky comes to visit, all this, Shestov says, evokes in Levin a feeling of joy that he is capable of being like everyone else. Marriage for Levin was proof that he was no worse than other people, Shestov claims. That is why Levin answered an innocent question ‘Вы женаты, я слышал?’ with a feeling of ‘proud joy’ (‘с гордым удовольствием’).¹³⁴ ‘С гордым удовольствием! Чем тут гордиться?’ – Shestov asks; ‘what is there to be proud about, it is not a big achievement to get married’, (‘человек женился, заслуга не из больших’),¹³⁵ he continues.

For Shestov this reveals the hidden truth about Levin's aspirations to have firm ground under his feet, to equal the common world where to be married is the established foundation of a proper life path. Shestov asserts that Levin was as alien to the good as he was far from happiness; yet it was Tolstoy's task to portray Levin as both good and happy, to attach him to ordinary life. Levin should stand firmly on his feet, should be firmly planted in the earth, so that no storm can overturn him. This was what Tolstoy intended for Levin, because it was Tolstoy's own deepest aspiration, Shestov says, not to enter into the category of the underground people, of all those fallen and buried alive.¹³⁶ This is the way in which Shestov, making subtle psychological observations and deductions with respect to the character of Levin, substantiates his criticism that Tolstoy's Good is only an artificial shield.

On the other hand, Judith M. Armstrong uses her psychological insights into Levin's behaviour and feelings to derive conclusions about Tolstoy which are very different from Shestov's. First of all, her identification of Tolstoy with Levin is not as unambiguous as in Shestov's case. Interestingly, it is precisely in those moments before the wedding which Shestov perceives as false (betraying Levin's attempts to imitate happiness) that Armstrong sees as betraying Tolstoy's separation from the character of Levin. She explains this ‘clear and new separation of writer from hero’ by the fact that ‘here not Tolstoy's *unconscious*, but his only too cynical *conscious* is operative. Brilliantly capable of *retelling* the emotions

¹³⁴ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, pp. 358-359.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 359.

¹³⁶ See *Ibid*, p. 359.

of his own courtship of Sonya Behrs, he cannot totally approve them and hence does not fail to ironise his recreation of them in Levin'.¹³⁷

Thus both Shestov and Armstrong sense Tolstoy's sarcasm in the same episodes, but interpret it in different ways – according to their different agendas. Armstrong reveals Tolstoy's ambivalent, if not directly sceptical and disillusioned, attitude to marriage which for her serves as evidence of his personal experience and psychological evolution, the roots of which are largely concealed in the early loss of his mother. It is in the light of this major factor that Armstrong views Tolstoy's biography. Shestov, on the other hand, interprets Tolstoy's personal experience reflected in the novel in the broader context of Tolstoy's philosophical and moral stance. In a way it is paradoxical that despite his existential approach his perspective is, as it were, more socially than personally oriented with respect to Tolstoy, unlike that of Armstrong. However, under closer scrutiny it is not that surprising because while Armstrong wants to find out the truth about Tolstoy for the sake of research, Shestov is seeking a personal answer. He searches for the meaning of life, he craves the way to salvation – for himself and for mankind. That is why his investigation is invariably biased and free with interpretations – because for him it is, at least spiritually, a matter of life and death, rather than mere research.

These differences are further manifested in the interpretation of the following events of the novel. After Levin and Kitty have returned home following Nikolai's death, as Armstrong points out, 'the Levin *persona* undergoes a significant and obvious split'.¹³⁸ Armstrong explains that 'it is as if Tolstoy is now dissatisfied with the hitherto constant identification of himself with Levin, and wishes to project his dilemma on to two separate horns'.¹³⁹ She identifies the latter as launching Levin upon the path of family happiness while burdening him with the commitment of a wife, soon to be a mother. Tolstoy's own marital experience, by the time quite ambiguous, comes across visibly in his portrayal of Levin's family life which acquires some evident signs of disquiet. Armstrong quotes Marianna Torgovnick

¹³⁷ Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, pp. 39-40.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

who points to 'lack of communication' becoming 'a way of life for Kitty and her husband'.¹⁴⁰ Interestingly, just like Shestov Torgovnick highlights the incompatibility of Levin with his absorption in his philosophical search and Kitty, whose horizons are limited to domesticity. Armstrong states that at this point family life has become 'an ambivalent concept, both retained as the shining ideal, and subverted not just by its own petty betrayals, but by the subtle inclusion of another, contradictory ideal',¹⁴¹ which she sees as carefully concealed in the character of Koznyshev.

Armstrong explains that 'Tolstoy's twin but incompatible ideals are split between the two brothers, with Levin choosing the path of family happiness, and Koznyshev a "spiritual" life, befitting his "pure and lofty" nature'.¹⁴² Armstrong senses in Tolstoy 'a nostalgia for purity'¹⁴³ and essentially admits that all Levin's declarations of happiness are thus undermined.¹⁴⁴ This brings us back to Shestov's disbelief regarding Levin's happiness, even though Shestov is led to this conclusion through a different argument. For Armstrong it is basically a conflict between Tolstoy's intellectual and personal aspirations, while for Shestov it is a completely philosophical conflict in Tolstoy reflecting his desire to equal the mediocre. Moreover, Koznyshev for Armstrong is as representative of Tolstoy's inner world as Levin is, while Shestov quite clearly separates this character from the author. He claims that Koznyshev is simply an object of severe judgement for Tolstoy because he represents a pillar of the high society contemporary to Tolstoy. 'Его увлечения - есть только модная подражательность. Его душевная работа - поверхностная деятельность ума, которая тем меньше значит, чем полнее и последовательнее она выражается. Итог его жизни - никому не нужная книга, остроумные разговоры в гостиных и бесполезное участие в различных частных и общественных учреждениях',¹⁴⁵ Shestov claims.

¹⁴⁰ Marianna Torgovnik, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 73. Cited in Armstrong, p. 44.

¹⁴¹ Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 44.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 222.

Another instructive difference is Armstrong's interpretation of Levin's anxiety preceding his marriage. She traces its roots to Tolstoy's deep psychological peculiarities resulting from the early loss of his mother. According to Freudian theory Tolstoy had bypassed the Oedipal stage, and 'similarly Levin can also be surmised to have failed to resolve the Oedipal triangle of desire for the mother and prohibition by the father',¹⁴⁶ Armstrong writes. She states that 'having therefore retained into adult life a sublimated desire for the mother, and having felt punished at least once for entertaining the thought of a rival love, the composite Tolstoy-Olenin-Levin cannot make another attempt to establish a supplanter (Kitty) and thus effect the final separation from the mother without hesitation or profound side-effects'.¹⁴⁷

To add to the given examples which illustrate a fundamental difference of perspective in the case of Shestov's 'psycho-philosophical' approach and Armstrong's psychoanalytical one, it is useful to look at the epigraph that she gives to her chapter on Levin: 'Interpretation lays claim to an approximation of the truth. [...] the value of this approximation [...] does not lie in analysing the author, but rather in seeking to discover what underlies the text's effect on the potential reader...'.¹⁴⁸ For Shestov it is almost entirely the opposite: he is not really troubled by the text's effect on the reader, save for his own self, but he is interested precisely in uncovering the author's intentions, whether conscious or unconscious. In fact, in the case of Shestov's treatment of Tolstoy, we encounter his general pattern of striving to unravel the true existential path of the writer as if to compare it with his own, to see the writer's struggle with the 'eternal' questions. Shestov needs to see how the writer managed to deal with these questions, what his way is of reconciling himself with reality. And since despite their divine creative genius writers are still people, Shestov invariably runs into a contradiction between, on the one hand, the heights of their work, the harmony concealed there – not so much within the heroes as within the mastery of the text, – and, on the other hand, their solely human nature that

¹⁴⁶ Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ André Green, 'The Double and the Absent' in *Psychoanalysis, Creativity and Literature: a French-American Inquiry*, ed. Alan Roland (New-York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 298. Cited in Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 22.

Shestov is so eagerly prepared to expose. His drive and enthusiasm on the path of unmasking are in fact engendered by the desperate hope of a polemicist who attacks his opponent the more viciously the more he wants to be defeated and persuaded that the latter, unlike himself, does hold the magic key. As a result it is precisely the schism between the pen and the soul which we described in Part I that Shestov actually uncovers.

It is also worth noting that Armstrong, following André Green, personifies the text and takes into account both the text's articulations as well as its silences. Behind the sublimated loss of the author we find in the text also 'the text's anxiety and loss about something which inhabits the text's space and emerges from it'.¹⁴⁹ In other words, according to Green and Armstrong we find not only the author's unconscious, but also the text's unconscious. In contrast to that a more orthodox psychoanalyst, such as, for instance, Rancour-Laferrière, strongly objects to the personification of inanimate objects such as texts. 'To my knowledge', he writes, 'texts do not desire, or postulate, or know, or assert, or tell stories. Rather, persons do these things. Pierre Bezukhov, for example, does these things, or Lev Tolstoy – but not Tolstoy's text'.¹⁵⁰ Rancour-Laferrière then refers to his earlier work of 1979 which provides a critique of structuralism and quasi-semiotics.¹⁵¹ Having said that, Armstrong recognises that in order to decode the causes of the effects of the text on the reader one may be taken outside the text, which means, in particular, to the life of the author.¹⁵² Thus, essentially, she recognises a place for both the structuralist and biographical approach that we talked about in the previous chapter – a mixture which, as was mentioned, Shestov adheres to, even if in his own fashion. To add to our explanations in the previous chapter, we emphasise that for Shestov the author's intentions are concealed not so much in the text as in the heroes, although he often tends to take into account the narrative itself as well as the narrator. The latter technique is, of course, more conventional than a direct identification of the author with his heroes. Thus Shestov does not reject the existing critical technique or replace it with his own, but rather he builds on it and expands it, even if this expansion often takes a distorted form.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 284. Cited in Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁵⁰ Rancour-Laferrière, pp. 10-11, endnote 1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁵² See Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 23.

To exemplify the above point let us look at Shestov's explanations of the lines about the sacred memory that people kept of Rostov for many years after his death. He interprets it as Tolstoy's own admiration of his hero and draws far-reaching conclusions from this, as we have already demonstrated. On the other hand this can be interpreted as Tolstoy's depiction of the moral and mental state of the *narod*, of peasants, of the simple people, and may reflect their rather 'slave' mentality and possibly a primitive form of patriotism. To what extent this is the view of Tolstoy himself is a different question – an issue which Shestov handles too freely and essentially brushes over in terms of substantiating his claims about Tolstoy being fully behind his hero, Rostov. Basically, Shestov's interpretation of the narrative and narrator is tied up with the author's personal stance. Yet, the assertions quoted above by Gary Saul Morson that Tolstoy managed to portray the mediocre Rostov as a heroic figure ring true, and must indeed be telling us something about Tolstoy's own stance through his attitude to his hero. Furthermore, to what extent Tolstoy is true to reality in these depictions is a question in itself, for, although he was often praised for his great precision in portraying real life there were also alternative voices which accused him of imprecision and substitution. Thus Akhmatova stressed that his descriptions of the high society of 1812 are in fact false and constitute a portrayal (and this time a very precise one) of the high society contemporary to Tolstoy himself. Akhmatova said:

Высшее общество менялось менее всего, но все-таки оно менялось. При Александре, например, оно было гораздо образованнее, чем потом. Наташа – если бы он написал ее в соответствии с временем – должна была бы знать пушкинские стихи, Пьер должен был бы привезти в Лысые Горы известие о ссылке Пушкина. И, разумеется, никаких пеленок: женщины александровского времени занимались чтением, музыкой, светскими беседами на литературные темы и сами детей не нянчили. Это Софья Андреевна погрузилась в пеленки, потому и Наташа.¹⁵³

5.7. Literary ways of portraying reality. Shestov's silences. The problem of communicability.

In this connection it is unavoidable to ask the question about the extent to which Tolstoy was a realist – how precise was he in his depictions of reality, how true to it did he stay?

¹⁵³ Chukovskaia, II, pp. 50-51.

Shestov, it seems, contrasts realism and moralism and asserts that Tolstoy's art is born purely out of his need to resolve tormenting questions, and therefore it is fully sensible to ask why the Good takes Levin's side rather than Anna's or other heroes'. In other words, the injustice of life, which for a realist (a naturalist, as Shestov puts it) would go without saying and any questions in this respect would be meaningless, for a moralist such as Tolstoy has an undoubted meaning. Unlike Tolstoy, a true realist does not quote the Gospels and does not talk about vengeance, Shestov says, and emphasises Tolstoy's explicit tendency to judge.¹⁵⁴ 'Он не описывает жизнь, а допрашивает ее, требует от нее ответа',¹⁵⁵ Shestov writes. On the other hand, Saburov, who like many other critics drew a parallel between the character of Pierre and Tolstoy himself, stresses that at Borodino Pierre is an *alter ego* of Tolstoy, and 'in contrast to Andrei Bolkonsky, he asserts nothing. He only observes and questions'.¹⁵⁶ The issue becomes even more complicated if we recall the statement above by W. Gareth Jones that Tolstoy is to be found equally behind Pierre, Rostov and Bolkonsky. Of course, *War and Peace*, written earlier than *Anna Karenina*, might still have been free from the moralising and judging tendency described by Shestov, but in fact the latter sees very little difference between the two novels in terms of the outlook of their creator, and talks constantly about 'Толстой времени "Войны и Мира" и "Анны Карениной"'.¹⁵⁷

To resolve this issue of Tolstoy's simultaneous accommodation of realism and moralism we need to raise another – closely related – question of sincerity in literature. For Shestov this problem was an important one, since he was troubled by the frequent discrepancy between a writer's own personal ideology and the ideology that the writer was promoting in his books. In other words, Shestov passionately objected to a writer's hypocrisy born out of the latter's desire to stay loyal to commonly accepted ideals, whatever his own personal moral stance and behaviour might have been. This, of course, is fully consistent with Shestov's tendency to identify a writer with his heroes and leads directly to unmasking the writer.

¹⁵⁴ See Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 226.

¹⁵⁵ Shestov, *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ A. A. Saburov, *'Война и мир' Л. Н. Толстого: проблематика и поэтика* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1959), pp. 181, 187. Cited in Rancour-Laferrière, p. 8, endnote 40.

¹⁵⁷ Shestov, *Добро в учении графа Толстого и Ницше: философия и проповедь*, p. 242.

Since Shestov contrasted the ideals of a writer with those of his heroes, in the case of positive heroes this evoked, not surprisingly, Shestov's distrust and in the case of negative ones it led to condemnation. As Erofeev observes,

Ставя щекотливую проблему искренности в литературе, Шестов больше внимания уделяет свойствам человеческой природы, нежели природе литературы. Между тем месть самой литературы за писательскую неискренность достаточно эффективна для того, чтобы не допустить торжества фальшивых и выспренных “истин”. Лукавящий художник совершенно беззащитен перед гневом муз; паралич таланта наступает в таком случае почти фатально. И если известное количество “идеалов” сохраняется в литературе, как пишет сам Шестов, “с незапамятных времен”, то не благодаря хитростям контрабанды, но благодаря своей достоверности.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, Tolstoy, being a great artist, is forced as it were to stay truthful to real life phenomena regardless of where his moral judgement actually takes him. As a result Tolstoy unites two contradictory processes: (according to Shestov) he tends to punish ‘naughty’ heroes and reward those who carry forward his own ideology, but at the same time he, as it were, accepts the unacceptable, because the latter has its place in reality. In other words he plays the divine (rather in the Old Testament sense) role as a creator of his novels, but at the same time he, thanks to his genius, cannot but stay within the natural constraints imposed on him by reality. This is, to a large extent, what Yves Bonnefoy wrote in his essay on Shestov about writers' rather ambivalent liberty. Bonnefoy suggested that Shestov sought in literature the boundless divine freedom which in fact is only limited due to the inner laws of literary craft, of its need to remain genuine.¹⁵⁹

Thus Tolstoy, even with his strong moralising streak, could not distort real life precisely because he was too good a writer. In particular he had to ‘accept’ what from the standpoint of morality would seem unacceptable in human behaviour and relationships, but constitutes nevertheless the canvas of real life. For example, he depicts the coexistence of Anna's true love for Vronsky and her inability to trust him with her deepest concern – that about her son – which altogether undermines the value of this relationship. For Shestov, on the other

¹⁵⁸ Erofeev, pp. 165-166.

¹⁵⁹ See Bonnefoy, ‘A l'impossible tenu: la liberté de Dieu et celle de l'écrivain dans la pensée de Chestov’.

hand, the unacceptable apparently remained unacceptable until the end. He, it often seems, could not forgive Tolstoy his contradictions, he wanted consistency, he wanted a clear answer. And this only characterises Shestov, paradoxically, despite his endless struggle against idealism, as an immortal idealist. Shestov's passionate striving for salvation, towards the truth, was clearly marked by absolutism, extremism and in a certain sense by a distinct dogmatism, and these are a testimony to nothing other than the same undefeatable idealism.

The roots of this phenomenon grew from Shestov's obstinate craving for an answer to his own quest about life – of how to accommodate the unacceptable in our existence, how to accept all its horrors and injustice and yet to remain sane, to retain meaning in life. He sought an answer in Tolstoy, as if forgetting that it is only the latter's art which may be divine and perfect, but not the writer himself. More precisely, Shestov did not forget this – on the contrary he knew this only too well and was constantly repeating that writers are only human beings, but this repetition had some desperate ring to it, it sounded as if he was angered by this fact and dug up writers' life with a restless passion as if in the hope that he was still missing something vital, that the writer was after all different from an ordinary mortal and would in the end reveal to him some deep secrets. In the end Shestov imposed his own life path and torment on Tolstoy, as well as on every other author he studied, as if to test how the latter managed to cope with the same existential experience.

Interestingly, Shestov in his works on Tolstoy essentially disregards Tolstoy's first writings, and does not attempt any deciphering of the images of Irtenev or Olenin from *Юность* and *Казак*, who are most often identified with Tolstoy himself. A possible reason for this could be that a work which is too explicitly autobiographical did not evoke in Shestov a sufficient degree of interest, because he believed that real secrets are always carefully hidden and what is presented as too obvious a truth cannot be really truthful. It is people's missions in life, the roles which they play and the images of themselves which they create and try so hard to maintain that prevent them from being really truthful (even with themselves, let alone the outside world). 'Все люди, чтобы спасти свое дело, принуждены скрывать многое – быть может, самое важное и значительное для

них',¹⁶⁰ Shestov suggested. In this connection he would certainly have agreed with Judith Armstrong that one has to attend in a text to its silences as well as to its voices. Silence was always meaningful for Shestov. Moreover, the question of the potential non-communicability of truth was for him a fundamental one. This is most distinctly manifested in his philosophical book *Sola Fide* which remained unpublished during his lifetime. As we have already mentioned in Part I, Section 3.2, Erofeev claims that Shestov actually never resolved this complicated problem, but that he essentially remained convinced that truth is lost in communication. It is because of this, Erofeev writes, that Shestov believed that total solitude was the beginning and condition of coming close to the ultimate mystery.¹⁶¹

If we try to attend to Shestov's own silences, we discover that one of their patterns lies in an area quite distant from pure philosophy, but belongs instead to the domain of human psychology. This pattern is in avoiding any explicit discussion of sexual issues. Interestingly, the same is true with respect to Tolstoy. Thus, as Armstrong observes with respect to *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy skips any discussions of sexual matters. He skates over the honeymoon of Levin and Kitty, calling it 'the most difficult and humiliating time of their lives' and a few months into the marriage he sublimates 'any discussion of the sexual side of Levin's conjugal life to accounts of Kitty's absorption in the organisation of her new house, or to Levin's perseverance with his indoor and outdoor work'.¹⁶² Armstrong suggests that 'for Tolstoy the issue of sexuality within marriage, that is, legal sexuality, was a paradox too difficult to confront; its erasure from the text has to be read as a repression, and one which he gives no evidence of being aware of. Predictably, however, in a situation where the sources of repression go unacknowledged, guilt comes to the fore'.¹⁶³ Armstrong then goes on to explain how Levin feels guilty and projects his sense of guilt upon Kitty.¹⁶⁴ Equally, one notices with respect to Anna and Vronsky the same avoidance of any discussions related to sexual matters. Armstrong traces the roots of Tolstoy's suppressed guilt and regret in this connection to his fear of betraying the image of his dead mother. 'In

¹⁶⁰ Shestov, *Великие кануны*, p. 282.

¹⁶¹ Erofeev, p. 181.

¹⁶² Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 41.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁴ Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 42.

Anna Karenina he contrives, on the whole, to avoid imposing this guilt on the autobiographical 'I', by transferring the alternative path to another character', Armstrong writes, meaning that Levin's marriage goes in parallel with Koznyshev's non-marriage, 'but any readers still unconvinced that such a guilt existed', she continues, 'need only glance at the hostile references to sex and marriage in his diaries and letters to have their doubts roundly dispelled'.¹⁶⁵

In Shestov's biography the incident which most probably equalled Tolstoy's early loss of his mother in terms of irredeemable psychological damage, may have been the birth of Shestov's illegitimate son by a maid in his parents' household, as well as a sequence of unhappy love affairs, with his Orthodox Jewish father being totally against Shestov marrying a gentile. As was mentioned previously, Igor Balakhovsky wrote about 'власть тела, то самое познание собственной наготы, которое Лев Исакович стыдливо прячет под латинским словом "concupiscentia"'.¹⁶⁶ Apparently referring to sexual matters as such, Balakhovsky then continues to say that everyone solves this question for themselves with varying degrees of success, but the problem gets much more complicated when children appear. In the case of Shestov Balakhovsky speaks of a mystery surrounding his private life and connects it to Shestov's profound personal crisis, with the birth of his illegitimate child being at the culmination of it. Balakhovsky suggests that Shestov's *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* was written in the mood of a feast in a time of plague, where on the outside all is well, but inside there are horrors. 'То, что у него есть, ничего уже не стоит' – these words of Shestov about Tolstoy Balakhovsky applies to Shestov himself; 'его жизнь могла бы быть иной, если бы не эти нелепые, безжалостные законы необходимости... Это можно скрывать, но об этом нельзя забыть, тем более, что где-то существует это маленькое и любимое существо...' ¹⁶⁷

Contemplating, or rather making guesses, about the development of the relationship between Shestov and the mother of their son, Balakhovsky asks if it was akin to that of

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁶⁶ Balakhovskii, p. 49.

¹⁶⁷ Balakhovskii, pp. 50-51.

Nekliudov from Tolstoy's *Resurrection* or of Versilov from Dostoevsky's *Raw Youth*, and sees in Shestov's avoidance of either of these heroes (despite his multiple returns to both writers) 'табу и одновременно намек'.¹⁶⁸ Thus both Tolstoy's and Shestov's suppressed sexuality is evident from the 'speaking' silences of their respective texts.

On the other hand Bayley refers to Tolstoy as 'the Seer of the Flesh' and points to the novelist's 'joyful solipsism of the body which is characteristic of so many of his descriptions'.¹⁶⁹ Malcolm Jones also speaks of 'Tolstoy's amazing sensitivity to the physical aspects of human experience',¹⁷⁰ brilliantly highlighted by Merezhkovsky in his classic work on Tolstoy. Yet the writer's shrewd awareness of human physicality gets silenced, it seems, when sexual relations as such are concerned; moreover, such scenes are normally surrounded by guilt. At the same time it is important to point out that the role of non-verbal communication in Tolstoy's writings is difficult to exaggerate and his mastery of depicting the subtle psychology of human interactions reflected in and conducted through the body is essentially unsurpassed. In a sense a lot of Tolstoy's own silences in his texts can be translated into his heroes' opting for silence, or more precisely, into their clear preference for non-verbal communication. In our view Tolstoy's aristocratic social background carries the main weight of responsibility for this phenomenon.

Indeed, Tolstoy was raised with the rules and code of behaviour of the high society contemporary to him. For such a society, being reserved and able to contain your feelings constituted indisputable values and served as a mark of being well bred. In particular, all the hysterics of Dostoevsky's heroes were completely impossible for those of Tolstoy. Instead, they had to keep smiling whatever their inner feelings may have been. In other words insincerity passed as a virtue, and all the hidden politics of human interactions, all the intrigues of high society only promoted its merits. True feelings under this kind of upbringing were to be suppressed and consequently communicated by other – mostly non-

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 50.

¹⁶⁹ Bayley, *Leo Tolstoy*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁰ Malcolm Jones, 'Problems of communication in Anna Karenina' in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 85.

verbal – means. This in our view explains why, as Merezhkovsky rightly noticed, in Tolstoy ‘we hear because we see’, while in Dostoevsky ‘we see because we hear’.¹⁷¹

Dostoevsky, on the other hand, was only a petit bourgeois, not an aristocrat, and for him the above rules did not apply, or, rather, were not an intrinsic part of his nature. Joseph Brodsky in his essay on Dostoevsky quotes Elizaveta Stackenschneider, ‘a fervent admirer of the writer’, who wrote in her diary in 1880:

...but he is a petit bourgeois, yes, a petit bourgeois. Not of the gentry, nor of the clergy, not a merchant, nor an oddball, like an artist or scholar, but precisely a petit bourgeois. And yet this petit bourgeois is the most profound thinker and a writer of genius [...] Now he frequents the houses of the aristocracy and even those of the high nobility, and of course he bears himself with dignity, and yet the petit bourgeois in him trickles through. It can be spotted in certain traits, surfacing in private conversations, but most of all, in his works [...] in his depiction of big capital he will always regard 6,000 rubles as a vast amount of money.¹⁷²

It seems quite probable to us that this social profile of the writer accounts for the ways in which Dostoevsky's heroes manifest their emotions, not being restrained by the same code of behaviour as the heroes of Tolstoy. As a result they are much more free in expressing their feelings and have the liberty to scream and shout their ultimate truths to one another. In other words, their sincerity does not fall victim to manners and their feelings are portrayed in a raw form. Thus in Dostoevsky verbal communications prevail, while in Tolstoy's world of immaculate reserve human interactions are forced more into non-verbal channels.

The issue of human interactions in Tolstoy including both verbal and non-verbal forms is, in particular, discussed by Malcolm Jones in his psychologically penetrating essay ‘Problems of Communication in *Anna Karenina*’, mentioned above. In it Jones takes a rather formalist approach, very different from that of Shestov. Indeed, Jones's concern is not in attempting to probe the inner world of Tolstoy the man, to second-guess his

¹⁷¹ Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, *Tolstoi as Man and Artist* (London, 1902). Cited in R. F. Christian, Introduction to *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 7.

¹⁷² Joseph Brodsky, ‘The Power of Elements’ in *Less Than One. Selected Essays* (England: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 157-158.

intentions, or to analyse his psychology. Instead he studies the means by which Tolstoy the writer operates, and portrays the tragedy of Anna as a tragedy of communication. His interest is in the ways in which 'feelings are transmitted, or alternatively, are not transmitted, between characters'.¹⁷³ Yet, Jones is similar to Shestov in the psychological subtlety of his analysis, even though it targets the characters themselves without reading off them the story of their creator. Jones describes various types of breakdown in communication that occur within the space of the novel. These include errors in transmitting the subtext of a message between parties who have a developed emotional connection with each other, as well as the conscious withholding of information or deliberately narrowing its channel, and conscious deception. Importantly, all this is relevant to one's communication with one's own self, as Jones observes.¹⁷⁴

Largely because of Shestov's focus on the author it appears that for him an individual's communication with himself plays the most important role. After all, his treatment of Tolstoy is focused in particular on the latter's self-justification with its underlying refusal to face the truth which can be considered as a breakdown in the communication of Tolstoy with himself. More subtly, Shestov's understanding of this communication problem involves his ultimate disbelief in the very possibility of an adequate transmission of our deepest feelings and experiences to the outside world. This, as was discussed in Part I, in a sense resonates with Tiutchev's famous lines that 'Мысль изреченная есть ложь'.¹⁷⁵ Of course, for the poet (or, for that matter, a poet) this carries an additional meaning by capturing the main problem of literary creativity – of constantly reaching for a never fully attainable equivalence between his creative aspirations and their verbal expression. Tolstoy, not surprisingly, was also preoccupied with this problem, and, as Armstrong points out, 'complained of his dissatisfaction with the verbal expression of ideas which always appeared to lose their meaning as soon as they were set on paper'.¹⁷⁶ However, Tolstoy did not deny the communicability of ideas as such (precisely because he was an artist), but pointed to the difficulties with which this process is fraught. Thus in his letter to Strakhov

¹⁷³ Jones, 'Problems of communication in *Anna Karenina*', p. 90.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁷⁵ Tiutchev, 'Silentium!', p. 69.

¹⁷⁶ Armstrong, *The Unsaid Anna Karenina*, p. 22.

Tolstoy wrote that 'every idea expressed by itself in words loses its meaning, becomes terribly debased when it is taken alone, out of the linkage in which it is found'.¹⁷⁷ He then suggested that this linkage is based on something other than an idea and that one can express it, but only indirectly, 'with words describing images, actions, situations'.¹⁷⁸ This suggests that, in fact, Tolstoy did believe in the ultimate powers of art to solve the question of communication.

On the other hand, Shestov poses the problem more radically by taking it outside the frame of art and its aspirations. The message of his *Sola Fide* that truth is lost in communication suggests in particular that either our language, or our non-verbal interactions are intrinsically incapable of providing an adequate exchange between people. 'В результате', Erofeev concludes, 'жестко лимитируя пределы человеческого взаимопонимания, Шестов существенно обесценивает свою собственную философскую деятельность'.¹⁷⁹ In a way the route that is looming over Shestov's lonely revelations is akin to that of the hermit monks consciously estranged from the rest of the world for the purposes of intense spiritual activity. This estrangement from communal life is not accidental in the case of Shestov's philosophy because of his essentially inverse understanding of life and death. The question that the mature Shestov often poses, following Euripides, is 'кто знает, – может, жизнь есть смерть, а смерть есть жизнь'.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, as was mentioned earlier, over time Shestov increasingly came to understand philosophy, following Plato's *Phaedo*, as a contemplation of dying and death.

5.8. The theme of death. Shestov's interpretation of Tolstoy's crises.

Thus having started with appreciating in Tolstoy his ability to embrace real life, Shestov subsequently sees the writer as preoccupied chiefly with the question of death, and hence with the problem of faith. Indeed, the fear of death and attempts to deal with it constituted

¹⁷⁷ Tolstoy's letter to N. Strakhov, April, 1876. PSS (the Academy, or Jubilee, in 90 vol-s) 62:269; Cited in Barbara Lonnqvist, 'Anna Karenina' in *The Cambridge Companion to Tolstoy*, ed. Donna Tusing Orwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 81.

¹⁷⁸ Tolstoy's letter to N. Strakhov, April, 1876. PSS (the Academy, or Jubilee, in 90 vol-s) 62:269; Cited in Barbara Lonnqvist, 'Anna Karenina', p. 81.

¹⁷⁹ Erofeev, p. 181.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Shestov's *На весах Иова*, p. 26.

for Tolstoy, especially given his immense pride, a constant source of torment, and to trace his evolution with respect to the subject of death would have been in any case a fascinating project. For Shestov, however, it also took on a very personal slant because of its coincidence with his own philosophical evolution. Indeed, Shestov's interpretation of Tolstoy to a large extent equals his own personal development and reflects the vector of his own inner preoccupations. More precisely, his metaphysical search for the meaning of life and for the path to salvation – the search that sprang from tragedy and despair – was becoming increasingly more formed, especially the more Shestov learned formal philosophy, by his contemplations on death, and signified a distinctly religious stage in his philosophical evolution.

Thus in 1908, when Shestov wrote an article on Tolstoy dedicated to the novelist's eightieth birthday, he considered Tolstoy's entire life through the prism of death and Tolstoy's contemplation of death, and extensively discussed Tolstoy's religious views. Shestov focused on Tolstoy's profound crises, especially the two major ones which occurred shortly before Tolstoy turned thirty and fifty years of age respectively and which were followed by the appearance of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* after the first one, and of his *Confession* and a number of religious-philosophical tracts after the second one. Shestov was particularly interested in the mechanisms of Tolstoy's invariable re-emergence from these crises. Shestov captured the writer's God-like ability to resurrect himself from an inner dead-end and rebuild his inner world as if anew in the title of the article: 'Destroying and Recreating Worlds' ('Разрушающий и создающий миры'). The parallel that Shestov drew was with Pierre's amazing inner death and subsequent resurrection when he was very nearly executed by the French alongside other prisoners, but then arbitrarily pardoned, and following that had an encounter with Platon Karataev. The inner transformation of Pierre from total loss of faith to its complete restoration which took place in a span of just a few hours Shestov compared to the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus. Generally speaking, Shestov's previous view about Tolstoy escaping from the tragic to the ordinary received in this article a more sympathetic as well as a more specific interpretation in terms of Tolstoy's struggle against the horror of death and the revelations of faith in which it resulted.

Shestov asserts that Tolstoy, just like Pierre whom he had created, ‘соприкоснулся с какой-то таинственной силой, которая дает ему державное право законодательствовать — созидать и разрушать миры. Он принимает то, что ему нужно, он отвергает все, что ему мешает, хотя бы это было величайшей ценностью в глазах всего человечества’.¹⁸¹ Shestov sees the source of this independence in despair, which is consistent with his whole understanding of philosophy being born out of despair. ‘Этому самодержавию мысли выучило его [Толстого] отчаяние: отчаяние многому выучивает’,¹⁸² Shestov writes and points out that ‘у Толстого невыносимые муки отчаяния всегда предшествуют всяким переворотам в его душе’.¹⁸³ Yet, Shestov does not abandon his previous stance about Tolstoy's amazing gift for life. He repeats his ideas from *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* about the writer's love for life, but stresses this time that it was evidence of the divine presence in Tolstoy. ‘Если Бог есть жизнь, если присутствие Бога в человеке узнается потому, что в человеке пробуждается сила жизни, то безусловно Бог был в Толстом эпохи “Войны и мира”’.¹⁸⁴ Also, Shestov repeats again his criticism of Tolstoy's egoism, but, although this time he actually spells it out, it lacks the sting of *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* and acquires more of a ring of praise than of irony or sarcasm. ‘Он был “эгоистом”, но эгоистом в лучшем смысле этого слова’,¹⁸⁵ Shestov says about Tolstoy now, and connects this to Tolstoy's ability to love both his family and his country.

Yet, this time Shestov drafts a consistent picture of the life of the eighty-year-old Tolstoy as being a curve of spiritual ups and downs of immense amplitude. Shestov's aim is to demonstrate how the novelist's expressions of sunny and joyful sentiments persistently changed into profound crises of total disbelief and were then followed again by a resurrection to life. Thus the inner transformation of Pierre, whose name Shestov writes almost invariably hyphenated with that of Tolstoy, constitutes the leading thread of

¹⁸¹ Shestov, ‘Разрушающий и созидаящий миры’ in *Сочинения в двух томах* (Tomsk: Vodolei, 1996), II, p. 323.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 319.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 331.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Shestov's article. The main point of these transformations, simply put, reads as follows: the crude power of death and the fear of death can destroy men, but stemming from its very depth there is some mystic and mysterious force, some divine revelation which brings one back to life, which instils faith, and this is what happened to Tolstoy. Its roots are completely irrational, and thus represented for Tolstoy, with his high rationalist demands, an endless inner conflict. In this sense, Shestov views Tolstoy's life, just as he did before, as a continuous struggle. Not only does this struggle represent a clash between reason and faith – which for Shestov himself was becoming the central one and was to be found in every writer, but it also has, in a sense, more ‘applied’ manifestations. Thus, Shestov wrote about Tolstoy's aspirations that ‘он хочет преодолеть и переделать действительность, которую он искренне, от всей души ненавидит, и в борьбе с ней развивает необыкновенную, титаническую мощь и силу’.¹⁸⁶ This, of course, resonates very highly with Shestov's own struggle with reality when understood as necessity.

Shestov declares that Tolstoy's method of fighting against reality (which, of course, refuses to submit) was quite arbitrary. This is yet another parallel to be drawn between Shestov and Tolstoy as Shestov's object of study, if we recall Shestov's arbitrary method of interpretation, which he himself labelled as such. ‘...что помогает ему в его борьбе и исканиях в его великом жизненном деле, то он, не справляясь ни у кого о разрешении, объявляет хорошим, все же, что ему мешает, он столь же произвольно (или, если вам больше нравится, автономно) причисляет к дурному, ложному, притворному, не заслуживающему внимания и интереса’,¹⁸⁷ Shestov writes about Tolstoy. Shestov, through his identification of Tolstoy with Pierre, traces the roots of this arbitrary method to the aforementioned mysterious force that Pierre-Tolstoy feels on his side.

What is important here for Shestov conceptually, as it were, is to state that this irrational foundation for Tolstoy's repeated inner redemptions is real and constitutes his spiritual driving force. In other words, Shestov strives to acknowledge revelation as a legitimate

¹⁸⁶ Shestov, ‘Разрушающий и созидающий миры’, p. 316.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 323.

source of knowledge and to demonstrate that this very phenomenon had occurred in the case of Tolstoy whose rationalism was only superficial, but whose irrational experience had defeated and overpowered it. Shestov refers to William James's book (then recent), *The varieties of religious experience* to emphasise that what Dostoevsky did stealthily in his fiction is now done as part of scientific research – namely, the legitimising of the idea that an abnormal mental state brings one closer to the truth. Shestov derives from Dostoevsky and James the idea that delusions and other revelations of this type which are commonly considered as the fruit of a sick imagination are no less real and instructive than thoughts that occur in a normal state of mind.¹⁸⁸ Now, despair, which for Shestov lies at the origin of philosophy, becomes part of this chain since it is linked to a state of poor mental health, to a delirious and feverish state of mind which serves as the source of invaluable mystical, and ultimately religious, experience. Erofeev comments on the intrinsic contradiction of Shestov's logic here in the following way: 'ненормальность в своей соотнесенности с болезнью и смертью оказывается отказом не только от разума. "Другой мир", обеспечивающий "спасение", познается через как можно большее удаление от жизни (в пределе: смерть), в результате чего "спасение" вместо первоначального примирения с жизнью, каким оно выступало в первой книге Шестова, обращается в разрыв с поюсторонней жизнью'.¹⁸⁹

Having said that, one should, however, note that Shestov, in fact, links life and death irreversibly. Hence his claim that all the best achievements of the human spirit have at their roots the contemplation of death and the horror of death. 'Трудно даже вообразить себе, до чего плоской стала бы жизнь, если бы человеку не дано было предчувствовать свою неминуемую гибель и ужасаться ей', Shestov wrote and applied this to Tolstoy by claiming that 'даже первая половина жизни Толстого получила свою силу и творческое напряжение только потому, что мысль о смерти и гибели доводила его до отчаяния'.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, Shestov asserts that in this sense Tolstoy's second crisis was essentially equal to the first one. More generally, Shestov describes the similar

¹⁸⁸ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, pp. 324-327.

¹⁸⁹ Erofeev, p. 177.

¹⁹⁰ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, pp. 333-334.

characteristics of both crises: the horror of death as their cause, despair as the resulting state of mind, the same means of treatment that Tolstoy chose for himself and, finally, the same way out. The self-treatment that Shestov ascribes to Tolstoy, he calls 'разрывание обезьян',¹⁹¹ since this (according to Heine whom Shestov quotes) was the treatment that a sick lion would employ to cure himself. In Tolstoy's case Shestov sees the 'monkeys' that the novelist attacked in Napoleon as well as military and pedagogical science in the first crisis, and cultivated society, progress, medicine and the Church in the second. It is only the Russian people (*narod*) that were exempt from Tolstoy's wrath, Shestov asserts, but adds that this was not for long either. His faith in the *narod* eventually faded away and gave way to Tolstoy's faith in God-the-Good, Shestov claims.¹⁹² It is Tolstoy's religious sentiments, his faith and general beliefs that attract Shestov's interest most, and it is religion that Shestov sees as constituting for Tolstoy the way out of both of his crises.

5.9. Tolstoy's religiosity. Tolstoy, the writer, and Tolstoy, the man.

Thus, eight years after his first major work on Tolstoy, Shestov was still interested first and foremost in Tolstoy's vision of God, in equating God with the Good. However, this time Shestov's emphasis has somewhat shifted – instead of Tolstoy's underlying hypocrisy as a way of resolving his inner struggle, Shestov's focus now is on the novelist's religiosity and, unlike in *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, where the seeking of God was not filled with any concrete meaning, this time the slant is on Tolstoy's religious sentiments as such and more specifically on his relationship with Christianity. Having emphasised the great significance of revelation and extraordinary, or abnormal, experiences in human life, Shestov draws a parallel between Luther, Tolstoy and Nietzsche, despite the fact that Tolstoy criticised the other two. Shestov claims that Nietzsche, who saw suffering as a constructive, redeeming and perfecting force, must have felt the same as Luther. Shestov quotes Luther's words 'сын Божий умер — это [...] дает мне мужество. Я для себя принимаю эту смерть: в этом истинная сила веры. Ибо Он умер не для того, чтобы оправдать праведников, но чтобы оправдать грешников'.¹⁹³ Shestov assigns deep meaning to Luther's formula which

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 337.

¹⁹² Ibid, p. 334.

¹⁹³ Shestov, *Разрушающий и создающий миры*, p. 328.

he deems paradoxical and believes that this paradox 'стоит на пути всякого, кто не хочет или не может удовлетвориться обыденными представлениями о сущности жизни'.¹⁹⁴

Tolstoy, or more precisely Tolstoy-Pierre, according to Shestov, also experienced this death of God, and only after that was able to find true faith. Shestov with respect to Tolstoy follows James's claims with respect to Luther – namely, that their faith born out of the death of God is the result of their personal experience. It is this experience that Shestov juxtaposes to rational, accepted, 'scientific' experience and claims that the two are irreconcilable. It is also, clearly, the development of Shestov's juxtaposition of the rational and irrational, turning into the beginning of his fundamental juxtaposition of faith and reason, Jerusalem and Athens which attained its full development in the years to come.

In these ideas about Tolstoy's religiosity, about the nature of his crises and inner torments, and his faith stemming from his horror of death, Shestov reveals himself most explicitly. It becomes evident that he is still writing about his own self, or more precisely he is trying to resolve his own inner torments by drawing on the examples of sages like Tolstoy. This becomes clear from the following most explicit lines which we feel compelled to quote fully because of their extreme importance in elucidating Shestov's own inner world:

Теперь, как в свое время Пьер, он утверждает, что уже больше не боится смерти, что он больше не боится ничего в мире. Но если снова придет она, — что будет с Толстым? Узнает ли он ее теперь? Или опять ему покажется, что она является впервые? В самом ли деле он так спокойно встретит ее, или снова всколыхнутся в нем все присмирившие ужасы, снова начнется титаническая нечеловеческая борьба, разрушение и созидание миров? — Не знаю, как смотрят другие, не знаю, что думает сам Толстой, но для меня весь смысл изучения великого земного дела великого русского писателя в этом вопросе. И мне кажется, что каждый раз, когда Толстой соприкасается с матерью смертью, в нем рождаются новые творческие силы. Оттого, вероятно, меня преимущественно влечет к себе Толстой измученный, растерянный, испуганный, изнемогающий, и я более равнодушен к Толстому торжествующему, к Толстому победителю, Толстому учителю. Когда я в сотый раз читаю "Смерть Ивана Ильича", "Крейцерову сонату", "Три смерти" — у меня дух захватывает. Я чувствую, говоря словами Лютера, что Бог взял в руки свой страшный молот-закон, но я также чувствую, что страшный молот — в руках Бога.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 329.

¹⁹⁵ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, p. 335.

Thus the same familiar pattern emerges again: mixing Tolstoy, the great writer, with Tolstoy who is only human gives mixed results – every mortal is controlled by the same unbeatable mechanisms which Shestov is desperately trying to unscrew as if in the hope that what he discovers will be different this time. The impression is that Shestov, disappointed or at least dissatisfied by the outcome, is sinking further into unmasking as if in fear that he may have missed something vital, but all he sees behind Tolstoy, the sage, is Tolstoy who is only human and does not hold any magic answers. But the unmasking has taken place and the man has been dragged from behind the writer, exposing the fascinating schism between them.

Thus in his analysis of Tolstoy's religiosity as well as the writer's general thoughts on the subject Shestov, as expected, exposes Tolstoy's contradictions, putting the main emphasis on the underlying conflict between reason and faith which for Shestov himself is fundamental. Shestov begins his discussion on Tolstoy's new faith and new God after his second crisis by observing that Tolstoy himself turned away from the similarities of both crises because, in order to redeem himself, to build his new world, he needed to reject his old self. Shestov sees in it the urge for destruction and first of all for self-destruction and recalls Dostoevsky who was an expert in questions of self-destruction and believed that the destructive instinct in man is as strong as the constructive one. However, Shestov does not quite trust Tolstoy in his destructive stage, for it was, according to Shestov, only a way of curing himself, 'a lion tearing monkeys apart'. What interests Shestov much more is the constructive element, the new system of beliefs with which Tolstoy re-emerges from his second crisis. Shestov looks into Tolstoy's claim that his new religion will be based on the Gospel and on it alone, and that he will not try to interpret it.¹⁹⁶

Yet, having declared this, Tolstoy does nothing else but try to interpret the Scriptures, Shestov claims. And, in doing so Tolstoy is looking for a faith that would not require to denounce reason, that could be, instead, reconciled with it. For Shestov this, of course, is most important, since, growing sure himself that faith and reason are irreconcilable, Shestov traces the source of Tolstoy's contradictions to this very conflict of faith and

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 336 -341.

reason. Shestov questions the validity of Tolstoy's judgements and this is, if you like, precisely because the man takes the upper hand over the writer – the private in Tolstoy wins over the general. To demonstrate this Shestov quotes Tolstoy saying, even if in retrospect: “Истина всегда была истина, но я не признавал ее, потому что, признав, что дважды два четыре, я уже должен был признать то, что я не хорош. *А чувствовать себя хорошим для меня было важнее и обязательнее, чем дважды два четыре*”.¹⁹⁷ Thus, Shestov concludes, we cannot trust Tolstoy's reasoning if his mind is capable of such compromises. However, he found his paths to salvation, he managed to recreate worlds that had been destroyed. Hence he had within him the inner force capable of doing it, but it could not have been his reason, so it must have been something else, Shestov says, which Tolstoy himself called, driven by reason, just ‘сила жизни’.¹⁹⁸

Shestov then traces Tolstoy's attempts to seek religion, emphasising that it was precisely religion rather than God, and keeps his main focus on exposing the struggle induced in Tolstoy between reason and faith, between his rational voice and his irrational drives. Shestov accuses Tolstoy of trying to reconcile the two and sees in such attempts something broader than Tolstoy's personal characteristics – namely, the spirit of the time which significantly influenced the writer. Shestov portrays this as a paradox in Tolstoy – although he is so antagonistic to and rebellious with respect to many of the social, cultural and scientific trends contemporary to him, Tolstoy follows the most common belief of our epoch, Shestov writes.¹⁹⁹ This belief is in thinking that, basically, religion is determined by modern knowledge. Shestov quotes Tolstoy's definition of religion to demonstrate that the writer has fallen into this widespread trap: ‘Религия есть установленное, согласное с разумом и с современными знаниями отношение человека к вечной жизни, к Богу’.²⁰⁰ Given the relativism of scientific knowledge, Shestov says, Tolstoy's claim that religion should be in agreement with this knowledge appears completely absurd and cannot be taken seriously. Shestov sees the sad and pitiful sign of every epoch in its attempts to define the infinite by means of limited understanding. ‘Толстой дал правильное определение того,

¹⁹⁷ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, p. 341.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 344.

²⁰⁰ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, p. 344.

что принято в образованных кругах называть религией, но эта ученая религия и есть глубочайшее неверие',²⁰¹ Shestov writes.

Shestov's basic message is that Tolstoy's search for faith was poisoned by a compromise that is intrinsically incompatible with faith. Tolstoy was looking to adjust the teaching of Christ to our everyday needs, his vision of Christianity was that of a settled, satisfied humanity which is nothing more than a paradise for the petit bourgeois, Shestov claims. The source of this erroneous vision for Shestov is Tolstoy's attempt to subjugate faith to reason, to reconcile the two. Shestov distinguishes between the revelations of death in Tolstoy on the one hand and his striving for life on the other. The fruits that they bore were very different, and Tolstoy did not have enough strength to follow through the lessons that death taught him – this is what Shestov is essentially telling us. In his own words Shestov expresses these ideas as follows:

...когда Толстой, весь охваченный трепетом ужаса и радости, идет к своей “таинственной книге” и, вопреки тысячелетним традициям и сложившимся “догмам”, находит в ней слова, опрокидывающие весь строй нашей внутренней и внешней жизни, — мы поражаемся его силой и величием. [...] Но, — увы! — человек, даже величайший человек, остается человеком [...]. Надолго вынести вид Бога, навсегда соединиться с бесконечным не дано смертному. Даже то волнение, которое вызывает у человека близость смерти, хотя бы он, как Толстой, дважды прямо взглянул ей в глаза, не может дать сил, нужных для того, чтоб надолго оторваться от земли. На мгновение человек, как кузнечик, взлетит в высоту — и вот он уже снова на своем прежнем месте.²⁰²

He accuses Tolstoy of repeating firm rules and eternal truths prompted by reason. ‘Толстой так именно и поступает с Евангелием’, Shestov asserts; ‘он ищет в этой “таинственной книге” правил жизни’.²⁰³

In Tolstoy's inability to give up life for the revelations of death, to give up reason for faith and its sacrificial demands that require the abandonment of any reasoning Shestov sees the source and quintessence of Tolstoy's religious quest. In Tolstoy in the aftermath of both his crises Shestov observes ‘органическое соединение двух, по-видимому, совершенно

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 346.

²⁰² Ibid, pp. 346-347.

²⁰³ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, p. 347.

несоединимых душ'.²⁰⁴ On one hand he sees in Tolstoy, in the times of his crises, a prophet 'готовый последовать примеру Авраама и даже Иезекииля, готовый сродниться с безумием, вызвать на смертный бой здравый смысл и пренебречь всеми радостями жизни'.²⁰⁵ On the other hand, when common sense persuades Tolstoy to join the ordinary, 'он судорожно держится за разум и учит людей надеяться, что религия есть как раз то, что помогает нам устраивать свою жизнь'.²⁰⁶ Yet, Tolstoy does not succeed in assuring us that the latter is possible, says Shestov, and points to the discrepancy between the answers Tolstoy suggests and the questions that he poses. Despite Tolstoy's constant and steadfast appeal to reason, 'мало можно назвать писателей, которые умели бы так подрывать веру в разум и возможность счастливого устройства на земле, как Толстой',²⁰⁷ Shestov writes. The most precious thing for Shestov is Tolstoy's inner rebellion against reason, and it is in this that Shestov sees the source of Tolstoy's genius. Viktor Erofeev notes that Shestov becomes disappointed when Tolstoy, having re-emerged from a crisis, begins to celebrate life again, because this only proves that he has fallen into a state of metaphysical sleep again. Only the horror of death can reveal the truth, but a human being is not worthy of this truth because he cannot sustain this fear, he goes back to life again, thus forgetting the ultimate mysteries that death has revealed to him. For such a person, that is for Tolstoy after his 'resurrections', "окаменевшие в своем безразличии истины разума" заграждают путь к "спасению", Erofeev writes, 'из чего ясно видно, что критика рационализма в шестовском творчестве подчинена идее "спасения", обусловлена ею, и что гносеологическая проблема для Шестова **вторична**, несмотря на то важное место, которое она занимает в его работах'.²⁰⁸

Yet, Shestov irreversibly linked salvation with gnoseology at the very foundations of his philosophy. Salvation for him lay intrinsically away from the ways of reason, and was only attainable via defeating rationalism. E. B. Greenwood gives a brief analysis of Shestov's treatment of Tolstoy's attitude to religion from the point of view of rationalism versus

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 349.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 350.

²⁰⁸ Erofeev, p. 178.

irrationalism. He connects Shestov to Father Georges Florovsky in their accusations that Tolstoy was a shallow rationalist in matters of religion. Yet, Greenwood acknowledges the evolution of Shestov's attitude to Tolstoy. He points out that at the beginning Shestov saw Tolstoy's worship at the shrine of the Good as hypocritical or at least two-sided because beneath it there lay Tolstoy's vital egoism, and there was very little Christianity in his doctrine. The Tolstoy of the time of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* 'does not wish to persuade men but to intimidate them', 'such a faith does not really exclude absolute atheism, complete unbelief, and it leads inevitably to the desire to destroy [...] to crush others, in the name of a principle',²⁰⁹ Greenwood quotes Shestov. However, Greenwood then points to the ultimate failure even of Shestov, however hard he tried, to divorce moralism, the idea of the Good, from the idea of God. Shestov in his later writings came to view Tolstoy differently from the image of the writer that he created in his early works on Tolstoy, Greenwood asserts. In this later image the unequivocal nature of Tolstoy's dedication to rationalism is questioned, if not altogether overturned. As Greenwood implies, Shestov discovered in the end that 'Tolstoy was not a shallow Enlightenment rationalist remote from the spirit of Christianity after all, but one willing to err with Christ against all reason'.²¹⁰

5.10. Revelations of death. Faith and Reason. Shestov's later works on Tolstoy.

This view of Tolstoy's hidden irrationalism Shestov continued in his subsequent works on Tolstoy. The next most substantial piece appeared twelve years later – in 1920 – already in emigration, in *Современные записки* (Nos 1 and 2), and later became part of Shestov's very significant philosophical book *On Job's Balances* (*На весах Иова*) (Paris, 1929). The essay on Tolstoy is entitled 'The Last Judgement: Tolstoy's Last Works' ('На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого') and is part of the section quite instructively called 'Revelations of Death' ('Откровения смерти'). Valevicius observes that in this work Shestov 'finally recognized the depth of character and the suffering' of Tolstoy,

²⁰⁹ E. B. Greenwood, 'Tolstoy and Religion' in *New Essays on Tolstoy*, ed. Malcolm Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 152. Quotations from Shestov are taken from Lev Shestov, *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, transl. Bernard Martin and Spenser Roberts (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969), pp. 69 and 71-72 respectively.

²¹⁰ E. B. Greenwood, 'Tolstoy and Religion', p. 152.

which 'had been hidden behind the mask of moralizing'.²¹¹ Valevicius contrasts Shestov's understanding of the young and old Tolstoy, as Shestov himself grew much older. To the duplicity of young Tolstoy and his gift and urge to melt in with the common world, 'Aristotle's world', as Shestov now calls it, the latter juxtaposes the lonely world of old Tolstoy whose values are changing as he approaches the ultimate mystery of death. 'In his old age, Tolstoy abandons the "common world" for a world of miserable solitude as he prepares for death, but with the result that he has finally learned that he is right and not they',²¹² Valevicius writes. He quotes the following words that Shestov puts in Tolstoy's mouth: 'They declared that I was subject to fits and other things of the sort, but I was of sane mind. They certified this, but I know that I am mad'.²¹³ Shestov embraced such declarations and stated that 'Толстой всю жизнь чувствовал в своей душе что-то, что выталкивало его из "общего мира"'.²¹⁴ Valevicius observes that 'Shestov in 1929 saw Tolstoy as having perceived the rules of death's game, something given to very few to perceive'.²¹⁵ These rules, Valevicius explains, are in the overturning of old values: 'that which we our life long have considered to be true, suddenly before death, appears false. Death destroys the common world, it is an exit from the common world'.²¹⁶

Thus, as we can see, Shestov in 1929 maintains the same views with respect to the revelations of death that he held back in 1908. But his style becomes more striking with the clarity and simplicity that were brought by experience and conviction. Shestov traces the aforementioned inner force that drove Tolstoy out of the common world, back to his early years. Again, not preoccupied by its empirical causes as adherents of the psychoanalytic approach would, Shestov simply mentions the unusual fits of emotional disturbance that would come over Tolstoy as a child. For Shestov there is an obvious connection between these and the fears of madness of the mature Tolstoy. The latter 'делал величайшие напряжения, чтобы жить "как все" и видеть только то, что не выбивает человека из

²¹¹ Valevicius, p. 34.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid. Valevicius quotes Shestov's 'На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого'.

²¹⁴ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого* in *На весах Иова* (Moscow: Folio, 2001), p. 113.

²¹⁵ Valevicius, p. 34.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

обычной колеи',²¹⁷ Shestov wrote, thus returning to his recurrent theme of Tolstoy's attempts to escape from the tragic to the ordinary. Given this particular spin that Shestov put on Tolstoy, it is not surprising that Shestov pointed to Tolstoy's unfinished story 'Notes of a Madman' as being, in a sense, the key to Tolstoy's whole creativity. At the core of the story there is a fit of sudden inexplicable angst and torment that occurs to a very sane, ordinary and down-to-earth landowner. Shestov identifies this character with the writer himself, but this time, contrary to his usually arbitrary method, Shestov tries to substantiate his claim by quoting from Tolstoy's real letter to his wife. In it Tolstoy described such a fit of madness, as well as some practical details concerning land-trade and even geography which were almost identical to those of the landowner from the story.

Shestov continues to insist that Tolstoy during his life 'учил людей щеголять лицевой стороной жизни и губить правду'.²¹⁸ These regulated well-established foundations of ordinary existence freed Tolstoy from the need to create an alternative world, Shestov says. Thus, essentially, he comes back again to his writing on Tolstoy of 1908 where he had a vision of the latter as destroying and creating worlds throughout his life. Similarly now, Shestov states that the author of the 'Notes of a Madman' was facing the need to reconsider his entire world-view. 'Он увидел, что одно из двух: либо жена и домашние, нападавшие на него за новый образ мысли, были правы и он точно болен и нуждается в лечении, либо весь мир болен и живет в безумии',²¹⁹ Shestov affirmed. He claimed that the 'Notes of a Madman' can be regarded as a summary title to everything written by Tolstoy since the age of fifty. Shestov drew a parallel between Tolstoy's and Gogol's striving beyond the boundaries of the real world to the unknown, and claimed that Tolstoy had taken his title for the 'Notes' from Gogol.

In fact, Shestov's thoughts on Gogol expressed in 'The Last Judgement' as an engine to take forward his ideas on Tolstoy can be inscribed without any alterations into Shestov's leading conviction, as formulated by Euripides, of the reverse roles of life and death, of life

²¹⁷ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 114.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 117.

²¹⁹ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 117.

being nothing more than a long and profound metaphysical sleep. Unusually for him, Shestov denies even Pushkin the full understanding of the significance of Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Pushkin saw this work as a weeping over ignorant, savage and backward Russia, Shestov says, and suggests a broader interpretation of the novel as a vision of the entire world being under the spell of a deep and senseless slumber with people turned into submissive automata, into 'dead souls'. He sees the roots of this slumber, as before, in hypnotising and enslaving reason, in self-evident truth. The above words of Euripides, that Shestov embraced, are this time put into Tolstoy's mouth.

Беспричинные страхи приводят к ни на чем не основанному бесстрашию. Умереть не страшно, страшно - жить нашей бессмысленной, тупой жизнью. Наша жизнь есть смерть, наша смерть - есть жизнь или начало жизни. Вот что говорит окружающим Толстой и вот чего они не понимали и никогда не поймут. Да разве это можно "понять"? Разве сам Толстой это "понимал"?²²⁰

Shestov exclaims.

He reinforces again his own 'misological' conscience by portraying Tolstoy as having followed the voice of reason in order to hold on to sane existence, but ultimately as having renounced reason on the threshold of death. Shestov quotes from Tolstoy's posthumously published play a conversation between Nikolai Ivanovich and a priest where the former insists on the divine nature of reason as the only means of finding the truth. 'Разум один для всех и всегда сам себе равен',²²¹ this is the thought that Tolstoy deemed organically intrinsic to his entire being, Shestov claims, and sees the cause of Tolstoy's horrors and madness in the futility of his attempts to overcome the overwhelming power of reason. In the rest of his article Shestov engages in his customary activity of illustrating the underlying struggle in Tolstoy between his reason together with his conviction of its powerful dominance on the one hand, and his feelings of angst, disturbance and torment stemming from a different source than mind and expressing Tolstoy's deep doubts about the latter's capability of getting to the truth.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 131.

²²¹ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 128.

Importantly, in contrast to 'Destroying and Creating Worlds', in 'The Last Judgement' Shestov's focus is on different – predominantly the last – works of Tolstoy. Shestov discusses at length the following three: 'Father Sergius', 'Death of Ivan Il'ich' and 'Master and Man'. It is interesting to note here that Shestov very rarely mentions 'The Kreutzer Sonata' (in 'The Last Judgement' he does not do so at all) – which may be another piece of evidence to substantiate our conjecture above about Shestov's unease and consequently reluctance to deal with sexual issues. When he does mention this work, as, for example, in *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, he only does it once and in passing – only to say that it was born out of a deep self-contempt, but that the depth of despair there is not comparable to that of really tormented souls (like, in Shestov's analysis, Nietzsche's).²²² The philosophical depth of this novel is undeniable and it should have been both an imperative and a temptation for Shestov to analyse this work on his usual metaphysical and religious plane. However, because of the nature of the novel's themes this would have required Shestov with his inevitable psychological approach to immerse himself into dealing with matters of sexual relations that he clearly did not feel comfortable with. This may serve to confirm our conjecture about the 'wounded' and traumatic personal memories lying at the roots of such matters for Shestov.

Having started with the key importance of 'Notes of a Madman' for understanding all of Tolstoy's last works Shestov moves on to discussing 'Father Sergius'. He first speaks of Tolstoy's distinction from Socrates in that the former knew that he was a sinner and hated his sinful life. He knew the truth about himself that the rest of the world essentially refused to believe, and he craved fame only in order to smash it. One needs real acknowledgement of being a sage only to reject it – this truth, according to Shestov, Tolstoy tells us in his 'Father Sergius'. Shestov identifies Tolstoy with Sergius first in their ability to recognise the erroneous nature of their previous path. 'Когда он [Толстой] подходит к цели, он убеждается, что шел не туда, куда нужно было', Shestov writes and sees in it Tolstoy's 'великий и загадочный дар'.²²³ It is reason that misled Sergius, and implicitly Tolstoy, Shestov declares again. 'Разум обманул, все "труды" пропали даром. Человек после

²²² See Shestov, *Толстой и Ницше*, p. 293.

²²³ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 133.

долгих мучительных скитаний вернулся на то место, с которого вышел'.²²⁴ In his usual way Shestov makes no distinction between the fictional Sergius and the real Tolstoy. 'Насколько то, что я делаю, - для Бога, насколько - для людей?', Shestov quotes Sergius and proceeds to say without any hesitations or side remarks: 'такие мысли преследуют Толстого'.²²⁵

On the other hand, says Shestov, Tolstoy had all the grounds at exactly that moment to be proud of his life and work which were fully dedicated to helping others. Yet, he had those fits of horror tearing his soul apart. Shestov seeks to explain this phenomenon and warns against any simplified explanation (for example, Tolstoy's deliberate humility), and indeed against any rushed answer. Shestov's own answer, however, is rather to be expected. Shestov interprets the existential struggle of Father Sergius against his vanity and vices, his tormenting and futile attempts to live up to his fame, to cope with it while maintaining the purity of his aspirations, as Tolstoy's realisation that his good deeds are in vain, that his soul is not redeemed by them. Shestov then disregards the 'positive' ending to the novella as a tribute that Tolstoy paid to classicism, since he was afraid to rebel openly against reason. What Shestov sees behind the novel is Tolstoy's torment, his loss of orientation and search for truth as if anew, which Shestov once again equates to Tolstoy's attempts to leave the domain of reason, to leave the common world with its commonly accepted values. In particular, Shestov repeats his old point which he learned from Nietzsche's painful experience that good deeds do not lead to salvation.

This illustrates our point about Shestov seeking a way to salvation in the wisdom of literature without realising the secondary character of any ethical implications in art. Thus Shestov's rather 'applied' approach pays off only very partially, leaving aside all the intricate texture of a literary piece which represents an inseparable blend of ethics and aesthetics. In 'The Last Judgement' this is particularly evident because Shestov's viewpoint at this stage had become distinctly philosophical rather than literary. Because of this his paradigm of disavowing reason through revelations of death, into which he inscribes

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 134.

Tolstoy, stands out in an especially transparent way. By adjusting Tolstoy's work to fit into this paradigm Shestov inevitably loses the multi-dimensional nature of Tolstoy's art and ends up with a simplified version of it, perhaps akin to Tolstoy's own, rather scholastic, moralising stories for children. The difference is, though, in Shestov's passion and temperament which illustrate the importance for him of his own life-long struggle against the accepted norms of human life, against the self-evident (and, if we accept the analogy here, this may indeed reveal something, rather along the Shestovian line of accusations, about Tolstoy's attitude to his charitable and educational work).

Shestov's conclusions are formulated throughout the article as distinct echoes of his previous thoughts. Thus he claims that 'разум, сковавший нас своими золотыми цепями, должен смириться. В жизни есть нечто большее, чем разум. Сама жизнь течет из источника высшего, чем разум. Т. е. то, чего разум не постигает, не всегда есть невозможное. И наоборот: там, где разум констатирует необходимость, - связи могут быть разорваны'.²²⁶ Reason is incapable of leading us to the truth, because, as Shestov thinks, 'разум [...] изменил своей природе и так внутренне переродился, что может давать нам только практически полезные положения, помогающие в борьбе за существование'.²²⁷ Interestingly, Shestov affirms that 'истина не выносит общего владения', it cannot be utilised, and quotes Bergson's statement that only great artists free from the power of general common concepts can penetrate into and truthfully portray the inner life of man.²²⁸ Again, as always, Shestov takes what suits him – that artists are free from the power of general concepts. This for him reinforces his own position that the poison lies exactly in those concepts which are generated by reason, and it is against the latter that Shestov then launches his attacks. The artistic means and the individuality of art's very nature seem to remain outside Shestov's concern. And, paradoxically, he intervenes into the beautifully woven world of literary craft with the sole purpose of extracting some general concepts, thus violating the very nature of this world.

²²⁶ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 138.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 141.

²²⁸ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 143.

Science is preoccupied by the general, art is dedicated to the accidental. Once again Shestov denies scientific power in the domain of art, thus specifying the limits of reason. But he falls short of understanding that means other than the artistic break the boundaries and encroach with naked reason into the domain of the irrational. Thus Shestov was right in equating Plotinus with Tolstoy in their interest in the accidental rather than the general, but he forgot that he himself with his philosophical rather than literary devices intrinsically could not extract from Tolstoy's art its 'hidden truth' precisely because this truth could only be told by Tolstoy, the artist, but otherwise, like poetry retold in prose, would lose its magic.

Thus the powerful beauty of 'The Death of Ivan Ilich' is reduced by Shestov to those very statements, to general concepts against which he so strongly argues. Yet, despite the intrinsic contradiction of his task, despite 'fighting against reason on the territory of this very reason', it is vital for Shestov to express his ideas about the deep sleep that constitutes human life and from which only death with its revelations is capable of awakening people. The Good which will count at the Last Judgement is very different from what is commonly accepted as good, Shestov states. 'На "страшном суде", открывшемся Толстому [...], высокие жизненные достижения не смягчают невидимого судии',²²⁹ Shestov writes. 'Смерть перерезывает все невидимые нити, которыми мы связаны на земле с себе подобными существами', he continues, and the absolute solitude 'есть условие и начало преображения человеческой души'.²³⁰

Apart from his philosophical affirmations directed against gnoseological theories and the speculative trend in general, Shestov continues his ongoing thematic line of attracting attention to the fallen, to those beyond redemption. 'Одиночество, оставленность, непроглядная тьма, хаос, невозможность предвидений и полная неизвестность - может *это* принять человек?',²³¹ Shestov asks. He draws a parallel between 'The Death of Ivan Ilich' and another story written by Tolstoy ten years later: 'Master and Man'. 'В

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 153.

²³⁰ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 153.

²³¹ Ibid, p. 155.

обоих рассказах Толстой представляет нам человека сперва в обычных, всем знакомых и всеми принятых условиях существования, и затем, почти внезапно [...] переносит его в то одиночество, полнее которого нет ни на дне морском, ни под землей',²³² Shestov writes. In 'Master and Man', Shestov explains, Tolstoy wanted to force a head-on encounter between death and a full and self-assured life. Indeed, in this story a prosperous, successful self-made tradesman Brekhunov travels with his worker back home, but gets into a snowstorm and dies, while his worker survives against all the odds. It is the mental state and behaviour of the doomed hero which constitute the main gist of the story and on which Shestov's analysis is based.

Having realised the imminence of death Brekhunov suddenly starts worrying about his servant and tries to warm him up. But he soon feels instead of his usual typical strength and power total weakness, but this weakness brings him some special joy, never before experienced. This joy about his weakness, Shestov says, in a man who always rejoiced in nothing but his powers, is 'начало того чуда превращения, вечно загадочного и непонятного, которое на человеческом языке называется смертью'.²³³ Only great joy about his weakness and freedom remained in Brekhunov, Shestov writes. While strength is afraid of death, weakness is not, he remarks further. 'Слабость слышит, что ее зовут куда-то, где она, так долго гонимая и презираемая, найдет себе наконец последнее убежище'.²³⁴ When reason and all that constitutes strength in life is renounced, the great mystery opens up, Shestov states: 'И он пошел, вернее вознесся на своей "слабости", как на крыльях, не зная, куда его принесет, - вознесся в непонятную, страшную для людей последнюю, вечную ночь...'. With these words Shestov finishes his contemplation on the story and says that its ending was prophetic for Tolstoy's own end when 'Льву Николаевичу пришлось окончить свои дни в глухой степи, среди снега, вьюги и метелей'.²³⁵

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid, p. 165.

²³⁴ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 165.

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 166.

Of course the theme of death was present in Tolstoy's earlier works too. He described death's numerous occurrences throughout *War and Peace*, and the fear of death emerges strongly in Levin's obsessions in *Anna Karenina*, as well as, for that matter, in fits of madness – for example, in Anna's last hours. However, it is only in Tolstoy's last works that the question of death and the human consciousness at its threshold becomes the main focus and gains real grandeur and solemn significance, which Shestov unfailingly observed. Importantly, while he deems death as the main cause of Tolstoy's new inner discoveries, Shestov refuses to ascribe the novelist's life-long struggle for answers to the ultimate questions simply to his fear of death. For Shestov this issue has a much more profound depth. Thus Shestov speaks of the whole phenomenon which he calls the pathos of death (пафос смерти) and which he deems the most important and significant of all kinds of 'пафос' known to humans. In his premonitions Shestov goes as far as to call death our mother. In this connection it is illuminating to turn to Erofeev's interpretation of Shestov's treatment of this topic.

Essentially Erofeev in his article on Shestov expressed some sarcasm in relation to the latter's obsession with death. He said that the pathos of death strikes when it is released inadvertently, when it breaks out by itself. If, instead, it is a subject of endless contemplation then it loses its tragic streak and acquires more the features of a farce. However, despite the impression that Erofeev derived from Shestov's works, the latter's actual stance was far from morbid. This becomes particularly evident from Shestov's private correspondence. Thus in 1921, in his rather moving letter to his daughters, Shestov wrote, commenting on his recently published article on Tolstoy's last works, that

даже откровение смерти есть, в последнем счете, искание за видимыми ужасами разложения и конца невидимых начал новой красоты. [...] у Толстого, как у Платона и Плотина, мысль о смерти всегда сопровождалась особенным чувством, чем-то вроде сознания, что впереди ужасы, но за спиною вырастают крылья. Вероятно, в таком роде что-то с гусеницей происходит, когда она прогрызает свой кокон. Оттого и грызет, что крылья выросли. Так что ни Толстого, ни Плотина, ни Платона не следует понимать в том смысле, что они нас зовут забыть о жизни. Конечно, тот, кто знал состояние Ивана Ильича, иначе о многом судит, чем другие. Но от жизни не отворачивается. Скорее научается видеть многое ценное в том, что казалось прежде безразличным. [...] Стало быть, откровение смерти – не есть отрицание

жизни, а наоборот, скорее утверждение – только утверждение не той обычной “мышью беготни”, на которую люди разменивают себя.²³⁶

Thus, perhaps Valevicius was right when he pointed out that Shestov had to grow old himself to appreciate and understand the mature Tolstoy. Valevicius cites the following concluding passage from Shestov's work which, he says, demonstrates Shestov's brilliant insight which came with increased maturity:

Слава о великих делах Толстого еще при жизни его обошла весь мир. И все-таки вскоре после своего 80-летнего юбилея, о котором говорили так много на всех языках всех пяти частей света – такой чести до Толстого не удостоивался никто из смертных, – он бросает все и темной ночью бежит из дому, не зная куда и не зная зачем. Его подвиги, его слава – все опостылело ему, все стало тяжелым, мучительным, невыносимым. Кажется, что дрожащей и нетерпеливой рукой срывает он с себя маститость – и нависшие над впавшими глазами брови, и старческую бороду, все внешние символы мудрости и учительства. Чтоб предстать с легкой или хоть облегченной душой пред последним судьей – ему пришлось забыть и отречься от всего своего великого прошлого. Таково откровение смерти: “там, на земле, все это было важно, здесь же нужно другое”: *φεύγωμεν δη φίλην εἰς πατρίδα... Πατρίς δη ἡμῖν, οὐεντερ ἤλθομεν, καὶ πατήρ ἐκεῖ*. “Бежим в дорогое отечество! Отечество же наше там, откуда мы пришли, там же и отец наш”.²³⁷

Just three years before his own death Shestov paid another tribute to Tolstoy by giving a talk at the meeting of the religious-philosophical society in Paris dedicated to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the novelist's death. In the next year, 1936, this talk was published in the journal *Современные записки*. The title of Shestov's talk was ‘Yasnaia Poliana and Astapovo’ which encompasses both the life and death of the great Russian writer. In Shestov's own words he could not, of course, aspire to capture all the immense topic of Tolstoy and his creativity, but wanted to remind everybody of this great figure and to talk about the struggles that filled Tolstoy's soul and left a clear mark on his works. In this paper Shestov essentially gave a summary of his previous writings on Tolstoy.

This talk is distinguished by the feeling of a return to Shestov's article on Pushkin – more in its lofty and admiring style than its idealistic content. It is free from any attempts at unmasking and any exposure of Tolstoy's duplicity – instead it describes Tolstoy's inner

²³⁶ Shestov's letter to his daughters of 13.04.1921. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 207.

²³⁷ Shestov, *На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого*, p. 166. Cited in English translation in Valevicius, p. 36; (the quotation cited by Shestov is from Plotinus, *Enn. I, vi, 8*).

conflict in a very positive light as being a result of his tremendous inner work and uncompromising striving for the truth. Thus in its spirit it can be assigned to the general humanistic trend in Tolstoy criticism, even though Shestov remained faithful to his earlier observations on the writer. He began by talking again, as in his early works on Tolstoy, of the latter's ability to embrace and celebrate life, as can be seen from *War and Peace*. Shestov described Tolstoy in the words of Pushkin about Mozart that the novelist 'как некий херувим он несколько занес к нам песен райских'²³⁸ and proceeded to talk about Tolstoy's virtuous soul. However, this soul knew all the horrors of existence, Shestov said, but it managed to overcome them, although at the price of the most tormenting inner search. Shestov drew again, as in his 'Destroying and Creating Worlds', on the powerful image of Pierre-Tolstoy with his inner world crumbling irreversibly, but then becoming resurrected in his soul on new and unshakable foundations. The time went out of joint for Pierre-Tolstoy, Shestov says, drawing a parallel between Tolstoy's deepest thoughts and the line of Shakespeare, whom Tolstoy, despite the fact that he did not like the latter, was inadvertently repeating, as Shestov stresses.

How can one regain belief in life and God, how can one resurrect faith? Shestov asks rhetorically. What is to be done? This sacramental Russian question Shestov puts into Tolstoy's mouth. 'Вопрос "что делать?" неотступно стоял пред Толстым в течение всей его земной жизни, и им, только им, определялось и направлялось все его творчество',²³⁹ Shestov claims. He repeats the idea from his early works on Tolstoy that for the latter his literary activity was never art for art's sake, but instead was a result of 'напряженнейшей, почти безумной борьбы с каким-то страшным и беспощадным врагом, власть и присутствие которого он почувял под личиной жизненных соблазнов'.²⁴⁰ Behind Tolstoy's paradisiacal songs there was concealed a titanic and desperate struggle 'с вездесущим противником, которого не только победить, но и увидеть нельзя',²⁴¹ Shestov asserts. Tolstoy's constant and passionate angst taught him to

²³⁸ See Shestov, *Ясная поляна и Астаново* in *Умозрение и откровение* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1964), p. 157.

²³⁹ Shestov, *Ясная поляна и Астаново*, p. 159.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 160-161.

pose questions when no-one else did, and moreover when all were convinced that no answer was in principle possible, Shestov says. In this struggle Shestov saw the great enigma of Tolstoy's creativity and at the same time the clue to understanding Tolstoy. Shestov again, as he did in 'The Last Judgement', compares Tolstoy to Plotinus. He quotes Plotinus's phrase that 'великая и последняя борба предстоит человеческим душам',²⁴² and claims that Tolstoy could have used it as a motto for his literary activity.

Shestov then presents the gist of Tolstoy's own struggle, to a more detailed description of which he had already dedicated his previous works on Tolstoy. *War and Peace* is not a theodicy, not a justification of God in the eyes of man, but a justification of man in his own eyes, Shestov claims. The writer had to convince himself and others that our world and our life are wonderful, that man is omnipotent. In doing so he forced any doubts into the domain of the subconscious, Shestov says. And to do it Tolstoy had to revert to the crude physical force of the Arakcheev-Rostov type in order to extinguish any subversive questions of Pierre and such like. However, this could not last – crude force was not able to sustain the equilibrium, hence Tolstoy's subsequent works, his 'Confession' and his religious-philosophical writings. His spiritual angst overturned his previous values and convictions, and he turned away from crude force which now seemed repulsive to him, towards the Scripture. In his search for faith Tolstoy was ready to embrace any faith as long as it would not demand from him the impossible – to abandon his reason, Shestov states, thus summarising his earlier observations on Tolstoy. Having arrived at his fundamental question – of reason and faith – Shestov transfers the conflict between crude force and genuine attempts to find the truth to the religious plane. How can one justify the teaching of Christ in the eyes of reason? How can one reconcile these irreconcilable entities? Shestov asks again.

Shestov repeats the story of Tolstoy's efforts to reconcile faith with reason, to explain the Scripture by rational means, which, as Shestov asserts, led Tolstoy to total disillusionment and tearing the Scripture apart. Shestov quotes again the memorable conversation of Nikolai Ivanovich and the priest that he quoted in 1920 when writing his 'At the Last

²⁴² Ibid, p. 160.

Judgement'. Reason is the same for everyone and is based on crude force. It cannot explain the mystery of faith. 'Do not resist evil' cannot be reconciled with our rational convictions, norms and beliefs. Tolstoy, Shestov claims, found in himself the audacity to realise this and fled from reason to the mystery of the divine, to the irrational. 'Толстой всегда как бы держал сторону разума с его "рубить" и отрекался от "веры", которая не располагает принудительными способами убеждения, ничем не защищена и защищаться не хочет',²⁴³ Shestov says.

On the other hand all Tolstoy's life tells us otherwise – that nothing was as hateful to him as those 'proved truths' of reason with their compulsion. 'Все духовное существо его рвалось к недоказанной истине, к непотивлению',²⁴⁴ Shestov claims, and recalls the Biblical story of two sons. One said that he would go, but did not go; the other said that he would not go, but went. It is with the latter that Shestov compares Tolstoy in his struggle against God, Scripture, and the irrationalism of faith. Tolstoy's flight from Yasnaia Poliana to Astapovo Shestov compares to the writer's ultimate flight from reason to faith. In Astapovo the main struggle of Tolstoy's life, which took place in Yasnaia Poliana, came to a close: the struggle between the subjugating truth of reason and the free truth of revelation of man, who was created in the image of God. This struggle ended with the victory of the latter truth. This was the main message of Shestov's 1935 paper on Tolstoy.

Thus in 1935 Shestov presented a glorified and holistic vision of Tolstoy as struggling all his life against reason, and having finally defeated it at the threshold of death when he fled from it to the ultimate faith. Shestov's usual scepticism is almost entirely absent from this paper thus prompting a return to Shestov's idealistic youthful phase and at the same time signifying the apotheosis of Shestov's constructive phase. In other words, one can argue that in this last period the two have become linked. Thus, in a sense, Shestov's idealism, colloquially understood, can be viewed as victorious since it seems to have survived his entire career despite the violent war on it waged by Shestov. In the sense of Isaiah Berlin's definition of foxes and hedgehogs given in Berlin's famous essay on Tolstoy, Shestov and

²⁴³ Shestov, *Ясная поляна и Астапово*, pp. 168-169.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.169.

Tolstoy were of an opposite nature, which may to some extent shed light on Shestov's interpretation of the writer. Tolstoy, according to Berlin, was a fox who desperately wanted to be and often pretended to be a hedgehog, while Shestov, who desperately wanted to be a fox – to grasp details and show disdain for holistic systems, was in fact a distinct hedgehog, not only able, but compelled to put the diversity of his subtle and penetrating observations in the service to just one vision and an *idée fixe* – fighting against rationalism and the self-evidence of mind in favour of the irrational revelations of faith.

Chapter 6. Shestov and Dostoevsky. *Between faith and faithlessness*

Continuing Mikhail Bakhtin's statement that Dostoevsky has not yet become Dostoevsky, but is becoming one (Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book, 1961), Robert L. Jackson wrote in his book *Dialogues with Dostoevsky* that 'it is doubtful whether there is another writer in the past one hundred years who has "grown" more dramatically than did Dostoevsky'.¹ Jackson's remark that Dostoevsky's 'becoming is, of course, our own growth; the release of his potential – our own'² is an apt reflection of Shestov's relationship with Dostoevsky, for the figure of the novelist that stands out from Shestov's numerous works on him reflects above all Shestov's own growth, and releases Shestov's own potential. As Blagova and Emelianov point out 'Шестов использовал произведения Достоевского в первую очередь как материал, на котором он выстраивает свою парадигму'.³ He regarded Dostoevsky as his principal teacher and it would not be an exaggeration to say that for Shestov Dostoevsky's presence was both permanent and tangible, as Shestov had been, figuratively speaking, living and writing 'in Dostoevsky's company' throughout his entire creative career. It appears that of all Russian classics Dostoevsky was the one whose influence on Shestov was the most profound, for Dostoevsky had largely shaped Shestov's thought and, together with Nietzsche, set Shestov off on the route which turned him into the thinker that we now know.

Apart from constant turning to Dostoevsky in virtually all his major works, Shestov dedicated to the latter four significant writings. His first book on Dostoevsky was published in 1903 under the title *Достоевский и Ницше. Философия трагедии* [*Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. The Philosophy of Tragedy*]. Then, for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Dostoevsky's death, Shestov wrote an article *Пророческий дар* [*The Gift of Prophecy*] which was published in January 1906 in the journal *Полярная звезда* and later became part of his book *Начала и концы* [*Beginnings and Endings*] (1908). His major work

¹ Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky. The Overwhelming Questions* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 1.

² Ibid.

³ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 114.

Преодоление самоочевидностей [*Overcoming the Self-Evident*] appeared in 1921 and was published in the special issue of *Nouvelle Revue Française* to commemorate Dostoevsky's centenary. This publication rapidly made Shestov's name known to the French intellectual elite and gained him wide respect and acknowledgement. The work later became part of Shestov's book *На весах Иова* [*On Job's Scales*] (1929). In 1937 Shestov was invited to give a series of radio talks on Dostoevsky. They were eventually published as an article in *Cahiers de Radio-Paris* and in *Русские записки*, No 2, under the title *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского* [*On Dostoevsky's 'Transformation of Convictions'*], and later became part of the book *Умозрение и откровение* [*Speculation and Revelation*] (published posthumously in 1964). In this chapter, which consists of two major sections, we shall provide a detailed analysis of Shestov's treatment of Dostoevsky in its evolution, and demonstrate how it fits in with Shestov's existential paradigm and how Dostoevsky helped to shape the latter.

Section I. Reading Dostoevsky in the Nietzschean key

6.I.1. Seeking the answers to tragic questions.

Amongst all Shestov's books his *Достоевский и Ницше. Философия трагедии* was the one republished most often and was translated into eight languages. It first appeared in an article form in the journal *Мир искусства* (Nos 2-9/10, 1902) whose editor then was S. P. Diagilev. He invited Shestov's contribution to the journal after reading his *Толстой и Ницше*. The manuscript of *Достоевский и Ницше* which Shestov sent him in response to the invitation was met with enthusiasm. In general this work was sympathetically received and afterwards Shestov for a long while had no difficulty in finding a publisher for his works. One of the most significant responses to Shestov's *Достоевский и Ницше* was Nikolai Berdiaev's article 'Трагедия и обыденность', mentioned in previous chapters, in which Berdiaev acknowledged the philosophy of tragedy as inseparable from contemporary cultural currents and welcomed its attack on positivism, idealism and philistine principles of existence. At the same time Berdiaev insisted on having a constructive and creative approach to surviving a tragic experience. Shestov, while remaining very good friends with Berdiaev, never really agreed with the latter's constructive criticism.

More precisely, Shestov regarded Berdiaev as lacking in penetrative vision. One of the most famous aphorisms that Shestov used in respect of Dostoevsky, based on the Biblical image, was to endow the writer with a second sight (with spare eyes that the Angel of Death, who is covered in eyes throughout, gave Dostoevsky after having visited him too early, before his time on earth had come to an end). This second sight does not agree with the rest of our senses, Shestov says, and thus produces most peculiar, fantastic visions that seem to border on insanity. Viktor Erofeev argues that this second sight was inherent in Shestov himself,⁴ and it is exactly this vision that Shestov denied Berdiaev, thus explaining the latter's misunderstanding of Shestov's ideas.

However, it is certainly true, and not surprising, that in his book Shestov attacked any kind of positivism and idealism, for such was his philosophical credo, which by that time had taken shape more firmly than at the time of *Толстой и Ницше*. Indeed, unlike then, Shestov no longer attempted any writings reminiscent of his idealistic *Пушкин*. In fact, his first book on Dostoevsky was marked by the same approach and technique as his first book on Tolstoy, and it is only natural that the two (together with Shestov's subsequent work on Chekhov) were united under the same title in their English translations. As in the case of *Толстой и Ницше*, Shestov's paradigm remained largely unchanged. However, it seems as if when writing on Dostoevsky Shestov's philosophical outlook was still exploratory; Shestov was still, and perhaps with an increased fervour, seeking a way to cope with the tragedy of existence, to understand the meaning of life, the way to reconcile, or at least to learn to live, with horrors. Having 'unmasked' Tolstoy in the latter's struggle while on the same route, Shestov called upon Dostoevsky for the same purpose – to assist in resolving Shestov's own quest.

This time the material was much more fertile, for instead of promoting the mediocre and mundane (as in the case of Tolstoy), it openly showed the way to the tragic underground kingdom of Dostoevsky's idiosyncratic characters with the hellish abyss of their 'exposed', fragmented psychology. In other words, while Tolstoy strives for the world of sanity, if not

⁴ Erofeev, p. 153.

beauty, to escape from the tragic to the ordinary, Dostoevsky leaves the impression of moving in the opposite direction: from mundane to tragic, plunging straight into the world of insanity, able to find a dead-end in any consciousness, to the extent of opening up 'subconscious wells of darkness within his readers themselves',⁵ using the words of Richard Peace. It is exactly because tragedy constitutes the metaphysical space of Dostoevsky's novels that it allowed Shestov, who was by that time overwhelmed by the horrors of existence and unable to cope with them by rational means, to enter the realm of tragedy openly, and to start writing its philosophy. Speaking more technically, the self-justification of Dostoevsky, as Berdiaev branded this type of 'unmasking' on Shestov's part,⁶ in a certain way, more obviously lent itself to interpretation than the self-denial of Tolstoy. It is Dostoevsky's most notorious characters that Shestov selected for this interpretation and for identification with the author.

6.I.2. Dostoevsky's resistance to Shestov's methodology. *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: an existential perspective. Critical opinions.*

On the other hand, the problems that arise when interpreting Dostoevsky exceeded by far the solutions that Shestov seemed to find. Given the time of writing his first book on the novelist – in the very early days of Dostoevsky criticism – Shestov had little in the way of secondary sources to rely on, not to mention a lack of developed methodology. The impact of Mikhailovsky, who called Dostoevsky a cruel talent, is clearly felt in Shestov's writing; yet the cruelty of the Dostoevskian world, which Shestov recognised in his first book on the writer (even though he was later to change this perspective somewhat) became an underlying, though not primary, feature of Shestov's analysis, which otherwise remained original. However, it is in the case of Dostoevsky, of all writers, that Shestov's approach suffers most notably. Or, in other words, Dostoevsky, more than any other writer, resists any static or tendentious reading and thus reveals the shortcomings of Shestov's method.

⁵ Richard Peace, 'Introduction' to *Fyodor Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment'. A Casebook*, ed. Richard Peace (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 16.

⁶ See Berdiaev, 'Трагедия и обыденность', p. 471.

The resistance of the Dostoevskian world lies above all in its extreme dynamism. Tolstoy described Dostoevsky as ‘a man who was in his entirety struggle’ (*весь борьба*),⁷ Berdiaev echoed this by saying that ‘everything in him is fiery and dynamic, everything is in movement’.⁸ Philip Rahv, too, spoke of Dostoevsky as ‘the first novelist to have fully accepted and dramatized the principle of uncertainty or indeterminacy in the presentation of character’.⁹ Indeed, if in Tolstoy we find the fluidity of life in tune with his own comparison of the latter to the floating water or clouds that constantly reshape themselves,¹⁰ there is still a great deal of stability in the inner worlds of his characters, their sets of values, and it is an outrage, an event in itself when these norms and stable worlds are transgressed and violated. This is where the story may start, or more often, culminate, whereas in Dostoevsky this is the background, the medium in which the story unfolds. In Dostoevsky the fluidity of Tolstoy penetrates the universe as a whole, residing both within and outside his characters. It is as if this fluidity is inherent in the moral categories themselves. Thus, in fact, it represents more than fluidity and movement– it gives rise to relativity. As such, Dostoevsky's cosmos brings itself extremely close to post-modernism where ‘все точки зрения равноправны’¹¹ – a subject for our detailed analysis below.

On the other hand, Shestov's approach which suffers from the one-sidedness of his philosophical paradigm, or in simpler, and possibly more precise terms, from a certain dogmatism of his adogmatic philosophy, as Erofeev describes it, is defied by Dostoevsky's polyphony. This assertion of Shestov's dogmatism resonates with Berdiaev's criticisms of Shestov's ‘psychological schematism’, his imposition of just one type of emotional

⁷ Lev Tolstoy, *Полное собрание сочинений в 90 томах (Юбилейное издание)* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928-1958), vol. 63, p. 142. Cited (in his transl.) in Jackson, p. 113.

⁸ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Мирозерцание Достоевского* (Paris, 1968), p. 8. Cited (from the English translation: N. Berdyayev, *Dostoevsky*, transl. D. Attwater (London, 1934), p. 12) in Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord* (London: Paul Elek, 1976), p. 18.

⁹ Philip Rahv, ‘Dostoevsky in Crime and Punishment’ in *Dostoevsky. A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Rene Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., USA: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), pp. 16-38 (p. 21).

¹⁰ See, for example, V. Linkov and A. Saakyants, *Лев Толстой. Жизнь и творчество* (Moscow: Russkii Iazyk, 1979), p. 34.

¹¹ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 116.

experience and thus his dependence on the – for him – hateful tendency to monism.¹² Thus commenting on Shestov's *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* Berdiaev wrote: ‘Мне жаль, что “беспочвенность” начала писать свой “Апофеоз”, тут она делается догматической [...] Потерявшая всякую надежду беспочвенность превращается в своеобразную систему успокоения, ведь абсолютный скептицизм так же может убить тревожные искания, как и абсолютный догматизм’.¹³ In a similar way, as we saw earlier, Igor Balakhovsky – Shestov's descendant – suggests that Shestov's existentialism is close to bolshevism (or communism) in its extremism which stems from their common characteristic of revolutionary thinking.¹⁴ Contemplating the roots of a certain truth contained in such claims evokes associations with Shestov's Jewish childhood in the atmosphere of Talmudic studies with their high degree of scholasticism and dogma, as well as the atmosphere of merchandising and accountancy, so hateful for Shestov and yet which provided his constant background and preoccupation for most of his life.

Yet, in the same philosophical terms, despite his own concealed dogmatism, Shestov matches Dostoevsky's philosophical discoveries in various respects because Shestov's existential approach also belongs in many of its aspects to the post-modernist space, as will be demonstrated below. On the other hand, ignoring the aesthetic implications of Dostoevsky's polyphony, Shestov bars for himself entrance to the complex world of Dostoevsky's heroes; and yet, it is, as usual, through them that he aspires to interpret the author. Therefore in the case of Dostoevsky Shestov's interpretation is particularly doomed from the outset. However, perhaps due to the manifold nature of Dostoevsky's narrative there is still a number of ways in which Shestov's analysis provides invaluable insights into Dostoevsky's literary world. It is precisely in the case of Dostoevsky that Shestov declared, as will be elucidated below, his own method as arbitrary (possibly sensing in the case of Dostoevsky's works the particular complexity of the analytical task). And, as we shall see, he stayed faithful to this claim of the arbitrariness of his method, most notably in his first book on Dostoevsky.

¹² Berdiaev, ‘Трагедия и обыденность’, p. 475.

¹³ Ibid, p. 469.

¹⁴ Balakhovskii, p. 68.

However, literature is only a reflection of life, through a complex structure of mirrors and magnifying glasses which grasp first and foremost the metaphysical features of objective reality, and single out its most significant properties – significant for the sake of literary purposes, which are always aesthetic as well as ethical. In this vein Bakhtin's discovery of Dostoevsky's polyphonic poetics can be viewed at the level of ethics and psychology in a variety of essentially equivalent ways. For example, Seeley suggests an interpretation of Dostoevsky's characters as being overwhelmingly split personalities with conflicting sides constantly fighting each other. Shestov's neglect of the aesthetic violates the laws of literature, or rather his attempt to penetrate the literary space only by the means of his predominantly interpretative method (a blend of philosophical and psychological approaches) runs into a serious contradiction with the polyphonic reality that Dostoevsky recreated in his novels. Bakhtin characterised Shestov's approach as distinctly monological and pointed to its failure to provide an adequate reading of Dostoevsky's art. 'Путь философской монологизации – основной путь критической литературы о Достоевском',¹⁵ he wrote. 'По этому пути шли Розанов, Волынский, Мережковский, Шестов и др. [...] Изъятая из событийного взаимодействия сознаний и втиснутая в системно-монологический контекст, хотя бы и самый диалектический, идея неизбежно утрачивает это свое своеобразие и превращается в плохое философское утверждение',¹⁶ Bakhtin asserted.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding Bakhtin's observations, it has to be noted that Shestov made a significant contribution to critical studies of Dostoevsky, which involved in particular, if not predominantly, his philosophical, even if mixed with existential, perspective on the writer. His first book on Dostoevsky laid a foundation for it. What Shestov set out to demonstrate in his book was Dostoevsky's total transformation of convictions, as Shestov saw it, from idealistic beliefs to their complete renunciation, to profound disillusionment with lofty humanistic principles and ideas. As in the case of Tolstoy, Shestov reconstructed the familiar pattern of a life-path that inevitably runs into a breaking point. The

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Проблемы творчества Достоевского* (Moscow: Alkonost, 1994), p. 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

manifestation of it, which signified a complete turn in Dostoevsky's convictions, Shestov saw in *Notes from Underground*. Before that Dostoevsky fervently proclaimed brotherly love and compassion for the fallen. He participated enthusiastically in Belinsky's circle and shared with the latter their aspirations towards social justice and belief in the general moral good. His prosecution, neardeath experience, prison and exile only strengthened him on this path, Shestov claims, even though they opened his eyes to reality viewed at close hand, and rendered his vision more shrewd and precise. Yet, with the abolition of serfdom, when Russia saw the beginning of social improvement, Dostoevsky finally realised that he was indifferent to it, that the inner desires of his own soul were completely orthogonal to any social progress. He came to see that nothing can save an individual from his personal tragedy, and least of all love and compassion which are helpless to bring any real consolation and to show any way out of tragic reality. Thus, Shestov asserts, Dostoevsky turned his back on noble principles, on scientific progress, on any kind of positivism and idealism, which turned out to be vacuous, and proclaimed instead the declaration of rights of an underground man, a tragic individual irreversibly severed from society.

In the opening pages Shestov quotes Dostoevsky's own phrase from his *Diary of a Writer* of 1873, from the article 'One of the modern falsities': 'Мне очень трудно было бы рассказать историю перерождения своих убеждений, тем более, что это, быть может, и не так любопытно'.¹⁷ Yet, Shestov argues, there cannot be in literary history a more fascinating story than the story of the transformation of convictions, and assigns Dostoevsky's dismissive words to the latter's tribute to propriety and modesty. On the other hand, as Blagova and Emelianov point out, Shestov's treatment conceals an accusatory element hinting at Dostoevsky's unwillingness to speak his mind, to be sincere. They overturn this accusation by quoting the rest of Dostoevsky's phrase: '...да и не идет как-то к фельетонной статье'¹⁸ and argue that Dostoevsky openly explained and acknowledged changes in his world-view and his convictions, especially concerning his political and

¹⁷ F. M. Dostoevskii, 'Одна из современных фальшей', *Дневник писателя* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах* (Leningrad, 1972-1986), vol. 21, p. 134. Cited in Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 329.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Cited in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 92.

social views.¹⁹ Indeed, Shestov, as was usual with his technique, gave only that part of the quotation which fitted in with his own intentions. On the other hand, Blagova and Emelianov, in their turn, in some way deliberately misinterpret Shestov who planned no less than to penetrate into Dostoevsky's soul to unravel, in a rather psychoanalytical way, the existential changes in Dostoevsky's consciousness and even sub-conscious which could not in principle be adequately documented simply in the writer's own public confessions, but could only be guessed at through analysis of his literary works, letters, diaries and real deeds, in their entirety. Moreover, Shestov's treatment of literary works in comparison to such self-narratives as diaries and correspondence in a sense takes the upper hand in that he treats the former as 'disguised' self-narratives too, but more sincere and revealing than those which are defined as such. And Shestov's method then becomes reminiscent of the 'narrative psychology' approach, described in the previous chapter. Thus Shestov again, as in the case of Tolstoy, made it his project to recreate Dostoevsky's philosophical psychobiography, as we have decided to call it.

Shestov begins by dividing Dostoevsky's literary activity into two periods: the first runs from *Poor Folk*, 1845, to *Notes from the House of the Dead*, 1862; the second ranges from *Notes from Underground*, 1864, to Dostoevsky's famous 'Pushkin speech', 1880.²⁰ Shestov asserts that idealism permeated Dostoevsky's work throughout the first period including the *House of the Dead* which bears signs of the same humanistic outlook. However, Shestov suggests that Dostoevsky never really fitted in to Belinsky's circle, even when he joined it as a young man. The evidence of this Shestov finds in the novelist's stifled annoyance with his master documented in the *Diary of a Writer* and later in some sarcastic remarks about Belinsky published after the latter's death. As a sensitive youth, Dostoevsky suffered from resentment while in Belinsky's circle, Shestov claims. For he was too faithful and dedicated a pupil, too keen to be taught about the rights of the fallen and wretched and our duty of brotherly love, while Belinsky, Shestov implies, was already a tired, cynical, man, who knew only too well 'сколько опасности кроется во всяком чрезмерно страстном

¹⁹ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 92.

²⁰ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 332.

увлечении идеей'.²¹ He knew, Shestov continues, 'что в глубине идеи таится неразрешимое противоречие, и потому старался держаться ее поверхности'.²² The next phrase that Shestov utters expresses his conviction and the main idea of his philosophical views, which he assigns to Dostoevsky. Moreover, implicitly it is from the latter that Shestov had learned this truth, and, as Shestov then demonstrates, the novelist himself was to arrive at this conclusion after his life had passed its breaking point. This idea, Shestov asserts, describes Belinsky's inner feeling which he could not dare to acknowledge openly: 'естественный порядок вещей смеется над гуманностью, которая, в свою очередь, может лишь покорно опустить голову пред непобедимым врагом'.²³ In other words, humanity, morality, ideals are equally useless and helpless in the face of bare necessity. The private has to submit to the general, and this revelation is impossible to bear, let alone to accept.

Thus, Shestov concludes, it is not surprising that Dostoevsky's path soon parted with that of Belinsky and his circle. However, as Shestov points out, the writer persevered on his route of idealistic faith and never betrayed it – not when he was condemned to death, and not during his Siberian exile. However, after he became a free man again, his only desire was to forget those horrible years. A sweet fantasy of crying over the destiny of Makar Devushkin is one thing,²⁴ but real penal servitude and its memories are quite another. From the latter Dostoevsky wants only to escape. And the only hope that sustained his existence and his faith while in the penal colony was not in his brotherly love towards his fellow-prisoners, but in his understanding that this was temporary and he would still have a normal life. Dostoevsky's philosophy at that time Shestov calls the philosophy of hope.²⁵ But this hope, as one can see, has a distinctly individualistic flavour.

In contrast to Tolstoy's more or less steady view that Dostoevsky was a great thinker, but a lesser artist, Shestov quotes what he calls a common saying, that Dostoevsky is on the

²¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 337.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.

²⁴ The hero of Dostoevsky's first novel *Бедные люди*.

²⁵ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 344.

contrary great as an artist, but weak as a thinker. This was designed, Shestov believes, to invalidate the truth discovered by Dostoevsky in his *Notes from Underground*. This book, Shestov writes,

Это – раздирающий душу вопль ужаса, вырвавшийся у человека, внезапно убедившегося, что он всю свою жизнь лгал, притворялся, когда уверял себя и других, что высшая цель существования, это – служение “последнему человеку”. До сих пор он считал себя отмеченным судьбой, предназначенным для великого дела. Теперь же он внезапно почувствовал, что он ничуть не лучше, чем другие люди, что ему так же мало дела до всяких идей, как и самому обыкновенному смертному. Пусть идеи хоть тысячу раз торжествуют: пусть освобождают крестьян, пусть заводят правые и милостивые суды, пусть уничтожают рекрутчину – у него на душе от этого не становится ни легче, ни веселее.²⁶

From then on, according to Shestov, Dostoevsky waged a war on ideas and ideals, because they, which he had served devotedly all his life, had deceived him. ‘В его душе проснулось нечто стихийное, безобразное и страшное – но такое, с чем совладать было ему не по силам’,²⁷ Shestov claims. Dostoevsky did everything he could, Shestov maintains, to preserve his old faith, but this was no longer possible. His doubts, despite all his hopes, did not vanish. Instead, the senselessness of existence of the ‘last’ man came to the fore in the personal experience of the novelist himself. As Viktor Erofeev writes explaining Shestov’s stance, ‘Мысль об этой “нелепости”, серьезно обесценивающая значение социальной судьбы униженной личности приводит Достоевского к тому, что он “предпочитает до изнеможения колотиться головой об стену, чем успокоиться на гуманном идеале”’,²⁸ Erofeev quotes Shestov. Such an inhuman revolt, Erofeev continues, requires a remarkable strength. The real tragedy of Raskolnikov, according to Shestov, is not in having committed the murder, but in his inability to start a new life, free from the morality of the mundane. Shestov regards the murder as a secondary, almost a fictitious, issue. He refers to it as being an ‘invention, calumny and slander’.²⁹ Shestov then accuses Dostoevsky, whom he identifies fully with Raskolnikov, of the inability to sustain this new truth, this freedom from the mundane morality and the power of ideals. Unable to

²⁶ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 348.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 350.

²⁸ Erofeev, p. 168.

²⁹ In the Russian original: ‘выдумка, поклеп, напраслина’. Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 382.

acknowledge and proclaim this new vision, Dostoevsky returned to the common world with its idealism, and continued to proclaim his old beliefs which were no longer genuine for him. 'Писатель, мечущийся между "правдой" трагедии и "ложью" обыденности, скрывающий свои прозрения как дурную болезнь, заискивающий перед общественным мнением, – жуткий, трагический образ. Таким увидел Шестов Достоевского',³⁰ writes Viktor Erofeev.

Ivanov-Razumnik's account of Shestov's reading of Dostoevsky has the emphases slightly shifted. In his analysis of Shestov's early works he sees in the latter's book on the writer essentially the reformulation of the thoughts expressed in Shestov's previous book (on Tolstoy). Ivanov-Razumnik equates the philosophy of tragedy, that Shestov advances himself and ascribes to Dostoevsky, with the Nietzschean formula of '*amor fati*'. He quotes Shestov's words that Dostoevsky's new conviction was in seeing the task of man not in the high ideals of the good and humanism, but instead in the acceptance of reality with all its horrors: 'В законах природы, в порядке, в науке, в позитивизме и идеализме – залог несчастья, в ужасах жизни – залог будущего. Вот основа философии трагедии: к этому приводят скептицизм и пессимизм...'.³¹ Thus having rejected a sensible, that is to say rationalised reality, Shestov came back to it via a different route – that of acknowledging '*amor fati*', Ivanov-Razumnik claims. On the other hand, he adds, this acknowledgment is accompanied by a refusal to rationalise this sensible reality. Instead of asking questions about causal connections Shestov replaces them by faith: *amor fati*, Ivanov-Razumnik asserts, thus labelling the love of fate, of the inevitable, as faith. This observation is a significant one since it fixes the direction of Shestov's inner motion from reason to pure belief.³²

However, Ivanov-Razumnik also points out that Shestov's *amor fati* coexists with his hatred of the role of the accidental in human life, and thus Shestov's perception of *amor fati* represents love which is very much mixed with hatred: while loving necessity Shestov

³⁰ Erofeev, p. 169.

³¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, pp. 454-455. Cited in Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 214.

³² See Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 216.

never stops hating it at the same time, because it is this very necessity that is represented by the laws of nature which constitute the accidental in human destiny. From this perspective the irreconcilable struggle that the philosophy of tragedy wages on the laws of nature is a continuation of the struggle against the accidental in Shestov's first book (on Shakespeare), Ivanov-Razumnik concludes. He stresses that this philosophy of tragedy sees its main enemy in these natural laws, and only turns against human convictions insofar as they reinforce the power of those laws. That is why such a philosophy is intolerant to any ideology, norm or generalising idea.

The illustration that Shestov gives in connection with Dostoevsky is via a quotation from *King Lear*: “От медведя ты побежишь, но, встретив на пути бушующее море, к пасти зверя пойдешь назад.” Достоевский побежал от действительности, но, встретив на пути идеализм - пошел назад: все ужасы жизни не так страшны, как выдуманные совестью и разумом идеи’,³³ Shestov writes. Thus the philosophy of tragedy fights against the stone wall of mundane morality represented by general ideas. In this struggle Ivanov-Razumnik sees the emotional intensity (‘пафос’) of Shestov's philosophy. At the same time he notes its romantic flavour in its striving beyond the extremes. Ivanov-Razumnik also notices the special significance of solitude which according to Shestov serves as the ultimate condition and source of the philosophy of tragedy.

Andreas Valevicius's analysis of Shestov's perception of Dostoevsky and his works opens on a surprising note, implying that Shestov sees Dostoevsky in the early phase of the latter's career as a mediocre writer. What Valevicius means is that while Dostoevsky in the eyes of Shestov was fooling himself, he was not striking for originality, as Shestov asserts. Valevicius then assigns to Shestov the view of Dostoevsky becoming, with the publication of the *Notes from Underground*, a ‘good writer, i.e. an honest writer’.³⁴ While it is certainly true that Shestov in his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* perceives Dostoevsky as undergoing a struggle of awakening to the truth within himself and in the world, nowhere does he explicitly assess the writer's literary gift in terms of being mediocre or, by contrast, good. In

³³ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 375.

³⁴ Valevicius, p. 37.

fact, at this stage, it seems that Dostoevsky's literary gift as such does not constitute Shestov's concern. His interest is first and foremost philosophical and existential.

Afterwards Valevicius focuses on Shestov's central point – of Dostoevsky's abandonment of ideologies. 'The essence of Dostoevsky's disgust', Valevicius writes explaining Shestov's views, – 'is his limitless hatred for the "idea" – the "idea" being all that which claims any kind of authority over life, that pretends to be able to predict the outcome given the circumstances. [...] Shestov claims that Raskolnikov's crime was not that he broke the law, but that he was incapable of breaking the law – he broke down and confessed'.³⁵ Valevicius emphasises the originality of Shestov's interpretation by juxtaposing it to the more conventional one presented by a contemporary Russian (former Soviet) scholar G. K. Shchenikov, who makes the point that it is through their obsessive ideas that Dostoevsky's heroes come to a state of self-awareness. 'Shestov would argue that Dostoevsky meant exactly the opposite', Valevicius writes, 'only after having abandoned all ideas (and ideals) can one come to any kind of true self-awareness'.³⁶ Moreover, as Valevicius argues, 'according to Shestov, Dostoevsky despised humanism once he had freed himself from it. He despised the "good and the just"'.³⁷ In the case of *Crime and Punishment*, Valevicius describes Shestov's interpretation in similar terms to Erofeev, stressing that in Shestov's opinion the murder is secondary and unimportant. Raskolnikov's real crime 'lies not so much in the fact that he has murdered, but rather in his inability to abandon idealism and begin a new and different life'.³⁸ Thus for Shestov the main message of the novel is not 'thou shall not kill', but 'thou shall not be an idealist',³⁹ Valevicius concludes. This theme of idealism distinguished by Shestov in *Crime and Punishment* curiously borders on a related one – that of rationalism – which is amongst Shestov's central themes. While, as we shall see, Shestov singles it out explicitly in *Notes from Underground*, he never puts quite the same slant on *Crime and Punishment*. The impression is, rather, that he senses it, and is circling around it, without yet being able to crystalise it in his mind as such. Yet, it is a

³⁵ Valevicius, p. 37.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 39.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 38.

³⁹ Ibid.

crucial motif of the novel, for, as Richard Peace writes, Raskolnikov 'tries to believe that [...] he is capable of acting solely according to the dictates of reason', while Dostoevsky reveals 'something else in Raskolnikov's make-up which runs contrary to his rationalism and which gravely undermines it'.⁴⁰

6.1.3. Modelling an archetype of the Dostoevskian hero. Shestov's reading of *Crime and Punishment*: existentialism versus idealism.

Since *Crime and Punishment* plays a significant part in Shestov's analysis of Dostoevsky's ostensible transformation of convictions, his interpretation of the novel merits closer examination which should help us to assess Shestov's main claims on the writer, outlined above. In order to do this, we need to single out some general characteristics of a certain archetype of a Dostoevskian hero.

In doing so we shall abide by the strategy outlined in the introduction, refraining from theoretical approaches which for our purposes may become counter-productive by obscuring rather than elucidating the issue. Instead, we shall try to adopt what Malcolm Jones has described (in relation to Joseph Frank) as a 'refreshingly common-sense view' in order to derive a coherent working model – even if over-generalised and thus inevitably over-simplified - from the 'bewildering critical keleidoscope'.⁴¹

As Malcolm Jones points out, the much explored psychology of Dostoevsky's characters has usually concentrated upon divided individuals.⁴² In particular, 'with Raskolnikov we have an excellent example of the compulsive emotional oscillation between two extremes which we have noted before in Dostoevsky's characters as well as the attempt of the character to distance himself from it'.⁴³ This idea of a split personality forms the basis for Frank Seeley's insights into Dostoevsky's heroes. The 'saviour' complex, which is one of the manifestations of a superiority complex, is inherent in Raskolnikov, as Seeley points

⁴⁰ Peace, *Dostoyevsky. An Examination of the Major Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 34.

⁴¹ Malcolm V. Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin. Readings in Dostoyevsky's Fantastic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. xv.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

out. But the inferiority complex represents the other side of the same coin, and, therefore, the two urges in Raskolnikov's soul are 'excessive pride' and 'excessive humility', as Seeley writes.⁴⁴ This is a recurrent pattern of a Dostoevskian character, with an endless fluctuation within it between the two poles. Thus in Makar Devushkin humility exceeds and suppresses pride, while in Raskolnikov the latter is stronger, but exists under a constant threat of crumbling, thus developing in response a distinct urge to re-establish, intensify and strengthen itself. Normally, in Dostoevsky's universe, a personality split of this kind (as a superiority/inferiority complex) has its roots in constant and over-intense introspection. It is this introspection that facilitates the splitting of a personality into two conflicting sides, thus, in a sense, exposing the demonic power of reason. Moreover, this very conflict, which Richard Peace formulates as that between self-assertion and self-effacement, can be viewed as rational versus irrational,⁴⁵ which brings it directly to the heart of Shestov's problematics.

In this process of destructive over-reasoning a vital role belongs to the degree of what can be called the intelligence of the soul and what is related to Seeley's description of Christian love in Dostoevsky – a phenomenon that comprises three vital ingredients: what Aglaia referred to as the 'primary intelligence' ['главный ум'], as well as true compassion and the absence of egoism.⁴⁶ In our terms the intelligence of the soul is predominantly reflected in compassion from which the other elements follow. The level of it differs significantly from character to character. Thus, for example, in Ivan Karamazov we witness a distinct instability in his 'compassion levels', in his underlying instinctive morality; however, his imagination reveals to him the immense destructive consequences of a real crime for the inner integrity of his personality, for his very sanity. That is when he stops cooperating with Smerdiakov and turns back. Raskolnikov does not possess the required degree of imagination of this kind (or self-awareness) to foresee sufficiently the devastating psychological consequence of his crime of murder. This is directly related to his overwhelming confusion, his volatile personality marked, as Dostoevsky himself wrote in a

⁴⁴ See Frank Seeley, *Saviour or Superman?*, p. 99.

⁴⁵ See Peace, *Dostoyevsky. An Examination of the Major Novels*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ See *Ibid*, p. 91.

letter to Katkov, by an 'inability to concentrate on day-to-day problems and a lack of intellectual stability'.⁴⁷ In other words, as Malcolm Jones comments, 'Raskolnikov is by no means a resolute character. [...] More often than not he simply cannot make up his mind'.⁴⁸

However, Raskolnikov's inadequate moral sense remains central to the issue of the murders, and in this sense his encounter with Sonia is highly significant. For Sonia complements Raskolnikov in that her compassion and selflessness free her from (or are incompatible with) the above complexes and excessive reflection. Bringing them together illuminates the (given earlier, in Part I) laconic formula pronounced by Fazil Iskander: 'Ум без нравственности неразумен, но нравственность разумна и без ума'.⁴⁹ Thus, in our view, amidst the most sophisticated interpretations of the novel and the abundance of methodological approaches, its basic message, which remains in essence deeply humanistic, is encapsulated in the above formula. The fact that Soviet critics persistently saw the novel in this light as opposed to the Western more philosophically or psychologically oriented approaches does not in itself deny its humanistic core. For example, Anna Akhmatova, who can be opposed to the mainstream of the Soviet literary establishment, commented:

Достоевский знал, что убийца теряет способность жить. Раскольников, отняв жизнь у старухи и Лизаветы, сам лишился способности жить. Он не живет, он даже не ест, он только иногда бросается на кровать и спит одетый. А наши современники? Убивали – и жили всласть. Им это было нипочем. Вернутся домой утром – служба-то ночная, утомительная – вот и хочется, чтобы жена в новом халате, дочка с бантом в волосах... Они могут жить.⁵⁰

Now we need to ask how, and why, Shestov refuses to see this. Indeed, he actively denies the novel its humanistic message and reduces the entire work to Dostoevsky's attempts to attack and destroy his own idealism. In particular, as was mentioned above, Shestov views

⁴⁷ Draft letter of Dostoevskii to M. N. Katkov from Wiesbaden, September 1865: *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах. Письма*, I, pp. 418-419. Cited in Jones (his transl.), *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord* (London: Paul Elek, 1976), p. 68.

⁴⁸ Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 70.

⁴⁹ Fazil' Iskander, 'Понемногу о многом', *Новый мир*, No 10, 2000, pp. 116 – 148 (p. 122).

⁵⁰ Chukovskaia, II, p. 335.

the murder as a figure of speech. There was no crime, no blood, he insists.⁵¹ Shestov implies that the murder victim is thus deliberately presented as repugnant and receives no sympathy from the author, readers or other characters of the novel. Also, Dostoevsky's depiction of the crime is dry and detached. All of it is invented only to prove a particular ideological point, Shestov basically asserts. This means that he deliberately looks away from the obviousness of this choice of a victim which is clearly destined to sharpen the central question: can the life of a supposedly worthless creature be sacrificed for the sake of universal happiness? Furthermore, the fact of the second, unintended, murder where the victim is accidental and totally innocent even in Raskolnikov's eyes Shestov takes entirely in his stride and assigns to it no special meaning whatsoever. Thus again Shestov turns away from the obvious moral implications which this element of chance, introduced by Dostoevsky, entails. This refusal to see the obvious on Shestov's part is particularly significant given his central claim that 'кончается для человека тысячелетнее царство "разума и совести"; начинается новая эра – "психологии", которую у нас в России впервые открыл Достоевский'.⁵² Yet, this psychology embedded in the very core of Dostoevsky's novels for Shestov clearly excludes the emotional make up of the heroes. Thus Raskolnikov's personality in its inner evolution is not granted Shestov's attention. Such a crucial aspect of Raskolnikov's character as instability is ignored and the vital question of the hero's morality remains outside the scope of Shestov's concerns. As a result, Raskolnikov's inner torment is viewed as entirely detached from morality and the character is thus reduced for Shestov's purposes to the level of an abstraction.

This is particularly interesting given that Shestov's dismissal normally applies to 'positive' rather than 'negative' characters. Thus he refers to Myshkin as a 'pitiful shadow' and 'cold, anaemic spectre', as 'nothing but idea, i.e., a void'.⁵³ However, Shestov's narrowed and restricted perception of Raskolnikov also turns him into an approximation of a pitiful shadow, of 'nothing but idea'. It is particularly evident in the way Shestov turns away from the obvious clues concerning Raskolnikov's personal history and inner development,

⁵¹ See Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 386.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 352.

⁵³ In the Russian original: 'жалкая тень', 'холодное, бескровное привидение', 'одна идея, т.е. пустота' – in Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 383.

ignoring the question of why such an educated young man has an underdeveloped moral sense and suppressed compassion.

In the case of Raskolnikov we, as readers, are left to reconstruct his past via multiple clues that are scattered throughout the novel pointing to the history of Raskolnikov's atrophy of compassion, or moral sense. They conceal in particular the emotional nucleus of both Raskolnikov's premonitions of the crime as well as his attempts to cope with its consequences, which are projected into the future. These clues are so obvious that Shestov's obliviousness to them reinforces our point above about his deliberate refusal to pay attention, especially given his extreme perceptiveness and sensitivity to subtle psychological subtexts, as we saw in the example of his treatment of Tolstoy. Indeed, the same Shestov, as the previous chapter has demonstrated, had skillfully decoded the hidden politics of *War and Peace*, adjusting the moral to his own ends. Failing to do so in the case of Raskolnikov can only mean that Shestov prefers the hero to be no more than the bearer of a particular idea (or ideas) to be assigned to Dostoevsky himself. Ironically, the central idea is 'do not be an idealist'.

Amongst the clues pointing to Raskolnikov's past, one of the most important is, of course, his dream of the old nag which has received a large variety of interpretations. Multifunctional in terms of the narrative, it gives the reader, in particular, a clear glimpse into Raskolnikov's emotional history, which Shestov refuses to incorporate into his analysis of the hero. Yet, if Shestov, as he claims, is directly concerned with the writer's transformation of convictions and chooses to identify Dostoevsky with Raskolnikov, the formation of the latter's convictions should be of particular interest to him. In this respect the dream is particularly revealing, but Shestov still opts to ignore it. This points to a more general pattern inherent in Shestov – namely that his perception of characters is predominantly static. Indeed, if we look back to Shestov's treatment of Tolstoy, this pattern reveals itself more clearly in that Shestov may follow the emotional evolution of the hero only in those cases when it has explicitly been done by the author, and, more importantly, when this suits Shestov's purposes. Thus in Tolstoy's *Master and Man* Shestov uses the dynamics of the master's character, as depicted by Tolstoy, because it serves Shestov's

ends, as we saw in the previous chapter. Similarly, his analysis of Tolstoy's *Ivan Ilich* is modelled on Tolstoy's portrayal of this character in evolution which again suits Shestov's philosophical aims. However, if the development of a character is such that it goes against Shestov's ideological purposes, as in the case of Raskolnikov, he prefers to view the character as devoid of inner dynamics.

Curiously, in the case of Raskolnikov, the particular aspect of the aforementioned dream which seems crucial in elucidating Raskolnikov's 'formation of convictions' has been overlooked by more than Shestov alone. On the other hand, as Jones writes, 'the main point must not be clouded by excessive ingenuity: all the attitudes and emotions experienced by the characters in the dream are operative within Raskolnikov himself and [...] come into direct conflict with each other'.⁵⁴ Still, in many of these interpretations excessive ingenuity clouds more than the underlying principle. Thus, for example, Philip Rahv identifies the old mare with all life's victims of cruelty, in particular Sonia and Lizaveta, as well as with Raskolnikov himself, seen both as a perpetrator and victim,⁵⁵ but overlooks what seems vital when reading the dream as a recollection of a real incident. Namely, it is the fact that evil triumphed having met no serious resistance.

No-one, and most notably Raskolnikov's father, tried to fight against the cruel deed, and it was only the boy Rodion himself who actively attempted to protect the victim of insensate cruelty. The passivity of the crowd and more crucially of Rodion's father demonstrated to the boy, who was at the time still so obviously endowed with a very strong moral sense, the invincibility of evil and strongly violated his sense of justice. This incident, given the passive behaviour of Raskolnikov's father, conceals a hint as to the probable multiplicity of such occasions, each one of which would have done an irrevocable damage to Raskolnikov's sense of compassion, stifling and undermining it. It may be suggested that in *Dunia*, who had a stronger character, similar occasions set off a feeling of concealed, but firm resistance, while Rodion with his oversensitivity, which is rarely the basis for a strong personality, was defeated. Thus it can be argued that the dream points us to the beginning

⁵⁴ Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 73.

⁵⁵ See Rahv, p. 18.

of a slow process that activated defence mechanisms in the child Raskolnikov through the atrophy of compassion in him, and thus explains the shaken foundations of his moral sense and his overall volatile personality.

This theory may be disputable, but the emotional charge of the dream and its bearing on the narrative refute Shestov's claim that the dry, mechanistic means, devoid of compassion, by which Dostoevsky depicts the murder are designed to turn it into a secondary issue. What we witness instead is that in his subconscious Raskolnikov is still capable of genuine pity and retains a vivid memory of it, but in his conscious state of mind the remnants of his damaged moral sense are being constantly and consciously suppressed by his over-active mind. This conflict is portrayed as a complex conglomerate of emotions that torment Raskolnikov both before, but especially after the murder. Thus there could be no doubts as to the human and realistic nature of Raskolnikov as depicted by Dostoevsky. Yet, in Shestov's eyes his only function is to portray Dostoevsky's own wanderings in the 'deserts of his own soul'.⁵⁶ For Shestov the only emotional content of the figure of Raskolnikov is in the latter's relationships with his central obsessive idea encompassed in his own Napoleonic theory.

As Malcolm Jones argues, 'Raskolnikov exhibits many signs of being a disillusioned idealist' and proceeds to quote from Dostoevsky's notebooks that nihilism is [...] the last stage of idealism'.⁵⁷ This in turn resonates with the famous expression that an unsurpassed cynic is born from a disenchanting idealist. However, cynicism, rephrasing Brodsky, is only a form of despair. In our view Shestov's steadfast denial of the real crime in *Crime and Punishment* should be explained by his need to come to terms with his own existential crisis and with his own disillusionment with his previous ideals. By the time of writing *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* his life had become stable and reasonably happy. Yet, at the spiritual level Shestov, clearly, is still looking for answers, and this search for the routes to salvation still remains the central motive of his quest. Interestingly, in this essential

⁵⁶ In the original Russian: 'его мысль бродила по пустыням собственной души' – in Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 382.

⁵⁷ Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 83.

segregation between the external existential experience of the day and abstract thought Shestov himself resembles a hero of Dostoevsky. Figuratively speaking, Shestov fights on the side of all the disillusioned idealists who, having devotedly served their moral ideals, had eventually come to realise the impotence of the latter. Having experienced tragedy they feel severed from the rest of humanity, and their ability to make their way back is doubtful. However, as in Iskander's description of first love – a dramatic experience which suddenly overwhelms an unprepared soul – it can be compared to the experience of being thrown into water without knowing how to swim. One is then either destroyed or comes on top and learns to swim and to survive. The same Iskander describes the birth of real humour, which, in his view, can only be born from utter despair. 'Я полагаю', Iskander writes, 'чтобы овладеть хорошим юмором, надо дойти до крайнего пессимизма, заглянуть в черную бездну, убедиться, что и там ничего нет, и потихоньку возвращаться обратно. След, оставляемый этим обратным путем, и будет настоящим юмором'.⁵⁸

Iskander's model is useful here because, although Shestov's stance and message seem entirely different, they can be mapped onto this model. Shestov seems in his philosophy of tragedy to stick to those who are drowning, who refuse to learn to swim and essentially prefer to cherish their tragic and severed state, largely because (despite their declarations to the contrary) they do not have enough strength and courage to regain their human face, to search for the road to resurrection. For Shestov the tragedy starts when the old humanistic ideals have proved unable to deliver any help or consolation to the suffering individual. He refuses to see that such a stage of personal development only serves as the inception of a tragic consciousness and, in certain cases at least, prompts the birth of a personality. On the other hand, ideas which are immoral, which are divorced from morality, mark the tragic end of personality and may provoke a real tragedy – not only in personal terms, but, as history had shown, in much wider contexts.

It is the modern world especially that distances itself from the zeal for high ideals, and sobriety and irony take over modern cultural discourse. However, it is the abuse and corruption of these ideals which defiled them in the twentieth century. Yet, moral laws, just

⁵⁸ Fazil' Iskander, *Начало in Сюжет существования* (Moscow: Podkova, 1999), p. 27.

like the laws of nature, continue to govern human life regardless of any abstract thoughts that submit them to doubt. Notably, at the core of Shestov's rebellion is the very necessity of these laws, meaning that human nature as such with its capacity for pity and compassion is rejected. Shestov makes no distinction between the ideals of good on one hand and malicious theories and individuals that disguise themselves behind these ideals. Thus, speaking more generally, by blaming idealism for every sin Shestov fails to notice that it courts danger exactly when it is devoid of morality, and the case of Raskolnikov's idealism only confirms that.

6.I.4. Dostoevsky-Raskolnikov-Nietzsche as a reflection of Shestov's paradigm.

Shestov's perspective in contrast to Robert L. Jackson's on Dostoevsky versus Nietzsche.

In this context the conjecture made by Blagova and Emelianov seems particularly relevant. They draw a parallel between Raskolnikov's theory and that of Nietzsche and conclude that Nietzsche and Raskolnikov had some ideological kinship and that 'мировоззренческий кризис Ницше в какой-то степени соответствует духовному кризису Раскольникова, а не Достоевского',⁵⁹ as Shestov tries to convince us. Indeed Raskolnikov's theory divides people into the ordinary, who should be acquiescent to norms, and the extraordinary, who are their own law and should rule over the ordinary, thus precipitating the Nietzschean Superman. It is worth adding, however, that the above analogy between Raskolnikov and Nietzsche is based on a canonical perception of Nietzsche's Superman as an immoralist. On the other hand, because the interpretation of Nietzsche and his works varies, this issue deserves a further discussion which we shall provide shortly in order to map Shestov's perception of the German thinker more precisely.

The fact that Dostoevsky invented Nietzschean theory before Nietzsche is regarded by Shestov as highly significant and serves to prove that Dostoevsky drew it from his own soul telling us about his own ideas. Here some comments are necessary which both show the insubstantiality of such claims, but also point again to Shestov's desire to squeeze Dostoevsky into Shestov's own paradigm, eliminating all the aspects that would not fit.

⁵⁹ Blagova and Emelianov, pp. 47-48.

David Magarshack in the introduction to his translation of *Crime and Punishment* asserts that the theme in the novel which might be called the ‘Napoleonic complex’ of Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky obtained from Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades* which ‘exercised a strange fascination on him all through his life’.⁶⁰ He quotes the letter Dostoevsky wrote to a friend as late as 1880: ‘In it Pushkin, by a most subtle analysis, has explored the movements of Hermann's soul, all his torments and all his hopes, and, last, but not least, his sudden terrible defeat, as though he had been Hermann himself’.⁶¹ Magarshack then observes that ‘the same is true of Dostoevsky and Raskolnikov’ and notes that ‘the theme of Pushkin's story and Dostoevsky's novel in its final form are practically identical. Both Hermann and Raskolnikov imagine themselves Napoleons, both kill old women for money [...] and in the end both are defeated’.⁶² Thus Magarshack traces the roots of Raskolnikov's theory to Pushkin's Hermann. Of course the latter did not attempt to generalise his own actions and aspirations to endow them on half of mankind, but the distance from imagining oneself Napoleon, with the licence to rule over others, to equipping such an aspiration with an underlying ideology is marginal. Similarly, Viacheslav Ivanov suggests in *The Revolt Against Mother Earth* a close relationship between Pushkin's story and Dostoevsky's novel on various counts, including plot lines and ‘shared mythical conceptions’ that involve ‘the guilt of killing the Parca’ as well as suffering ‘her posthumous revenge’.⁶³

Shestov, on the other hand, does not want to see any genealogy in Dostoevsky's artistic endeavours. Literary work for him at this stage is no more than a convenient (in terms of being able to hide one's personal feelings under a literary guise) form of a writer's open diary. ‘Самые слова “добро” и “зло” уже не существуют’, Shestov says:

⁶⁰ David Magarshack, ‘Introduction’ to Fiodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, transl. David Magarshack (England: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 14.

⁶¹ Dostoevskii's letter of 15 June 1880 to Iu. F. Abaza (see F. M. Dostoevsky, *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 30, p. 192). Cited in David Magarshack, ‘Introduction’ to Fiodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 14.

⁶² David Magarshack, ‘Introduction’ to Fiodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, pp. 14-15.

⁶³ Viacheslav Ivanov, *Dostoevsky* (1932), p. 76. See more on this in Robert Louis Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 263, where the above quotations are cited.

Их заменили выражения “обыкновенность” и “необыкновенность”, причем с первым соединяется представление о пошлости, негодности, ненужности; второе же является синонимом величия. Иначе говоря, Раскольников становится “по ту сторону добра и зла”, и это уже 35 лет тому назад, когда Ницше еще был студентом и мечтал о высоких идеалах. [...] В 60-х годах никому не только в России, но и в Европе ничего подобного и не снилось.⁶⁴

This leads Shestov to the conclusion that Dostoevsky is fighting exclusively with his own self, because ‘мысль Раскольникова столь оригинальна, что решительно никому, кроме его творца, не приходила в голову’ and thus Dostoevsky has no reason to put up a struggle against anyone but himself.⁶⁵

This claim is equally unsubstantiated. A draft of the famous letter that Dostoevsky wrote to Katkov in September 1865 outlining the plot of the forthcoming novel points unambiguously to the contemporary climate which facilitated Dostoevsky's conception of the work. The future hero is described in the letter as ‘a young man, a former student of Petersburg University who is very hard up [...] obsessed with the “half-baked” ideas that are in the air just now because of his general instability’.⁶⁶ Further, when Dostoevsky comments on the nature of Raskolnikov's psychological torment after the murder, he explicitly states that contemporary events demonstrate the clear plausibility of his idea. ‘Certain recent cases have convinced me that my idea is not at all as eccentric as it may sound. It is particularly true in the case of an educated man and even of one who possesses many admirable qualities. [...] In short, I am quite sure that the subject of my novel is justified, to some extent at any rate, by the events that are happening in life today’.⁶⁷ However, the theme referred to in the letter concerned Raskolnikov's emotions of fear and repentance, caused by the crime itself, but did not yet involve the theme of his Napoleonic theory which Dostoevsky introduced at a later stage. Yet, as Magarshack writes, ‘about three days before the description of Raskolnikov's murder was published, the Russian papers carried a news item with the description of an identical murder committed in Moscow by a young student “from nihilist motives”’. Dostoevsky was quick to notice this.

⁶⁴ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 381.

⁶⁵ See *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ David Magarshack, ‘Introduction’ to Fiodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 12.

⁶⁷ From Dostoevskii's letter of September 1865 to M. N. Katkov (see *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 28, pp. 136-137). Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 13.

His friend Strakhov records that he often talked about it, and “was proud of this achievement of his artistic insight”⁶⁸.

These accounts show the flimsy nature of Shestov’s claims to identify Dostoevsky with Raskolnikov in their mental state and inner discoveries. Below we shall return to a discussion on the problem of such identifications within the framework of Shestov’s declared ‘method of arbitrariness’. However, the identification of Dostoevsky with Raskolnikov is for Shestov only one link in the long chain of similar examples that are summoned to illustrate the writer’s transformation of convictions. The nature of this transformation is identical to that of Nietzsche, Shestov asserts, thus drawing together the names of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche in the most decisive and pioneering fashion. He writes in the preface to the book:

Достоевский же не то что сжег – он втоптал в грязь все, чему когда-то поклонялся. Свою прежнюю веру он уже не только ненавидел – он презирал ее. Таких примеров в истории литературы немного. Новейшее время, кроме Достоевского, может назвать только Ницше. С Ницше была точно такая же история. Его разрыв с идеалами и учителями молодости был не менее резким и бурным, а вместе с тем и болезненно мучительным. Достоевский говорит о перерождении своих убеждений, у Ницше идет речь о переоценке всех ценностей. В сущности, оба выражения – лишь разные слова для обозначения одного и того же процесса. Если взять во внимание это обстоятельство, то, пожалуй, теперь не покажется странным, что Ницше имел такое высокое мнение о Достоевском. Вот его подлинные слова: “Достоевский, это – единственный психолог, у которого я мог кое-чему научиться; знакомство с ним я причисляю к прекраснейшим удачам моей жизни”. Ницше признал в Достоевском своего родного человека.⁶⁹

Commenting on the parallel Shestov draws between the two, Blagova and Emelianov emphasise Shestov’s apparently deliberate omission of Nietzsche’s main paradigm – the will for power. They stress Shestov’s lack of attention to Nietzsche’s ethical programme which was so obviously different from that of Dostoevsky, and explain the selective ‘forgetfulness’ on Shestov’s part by his urge to demonstrate the spiritual kinship of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. ‘Под пером ранней работы Шестова Достоевский предстает как человек, который сам бы хотел свободно переступить законы, быть “по ту

⁶⁸ David Magarshack, ‘Introduction’ to Fiodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 331.

сторону добра и зла”, но “воли к власти” в нем не хватило’.⁷⁰ While the latter statement is certainly true, we would question the former: whether Shestov would so obviously see a distinct ethical difference between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. Blagova and Emelianov themselves write further that although ‘враждебность убеждений Ницше христианской вере Достоевского не подлежит сомнению [...] все это было не так ясно и понятно в начале века’.⁷¹ The point is, to our mind, that Shestov's whole emphasis was on the existential suffering of the German philosopher which Shestov perceived, almost despite himself, as deeply moral and ethical even though he himself chose to reason on this subject outside the framework of moral concerns. In a sense this is what his philosophy of tragedy was for – to rise together with Nietzsche and other tragic figures of the disillusioned idealist variety above ethical categories which to Shestov appeared poisoned at their very roots. Shestov was fascinated by the open acknowledgment that morality itself can justify evil, that it is a clear conscience that now took on the business of the latter.⁷² Shestov found this in Dostoevsky (confusing him with his heroes) as well as in Nietzsche, and suggested that Dostoevsky made Nietzsche's daring task of proclaiming these subversive ideas much easier.

In fact, Shestov, in his perception of Dostoevsky as a theoretical apostate of the good, singled out not so much the writer's cruel talent (as did Mikhailovsky), but his ability to penetrate and depict evil with force and verisimilitude. Still, for Shestov, rather than the world of cruelty it is the world of inner solitude, we think, that emerges from Dostoevsky's focus on existential tragedy. As Richard Peace sees it in connection to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, ‘Shestov in rejecting Mikhailovsky's concept of the “cruel talent” merely argued the reverse: *Notes from Underground* marked new awareness in Dostoevsky of the problem of suffering’.⁷³ For Peace Nietzschean themes in Dostoevsky's work as

⁷⁰ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 48.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 50.

⁷² See Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 381.

⁷³ Richard Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground* (Bristol, Bristol Classical Press, 1993), pp. 91-92.

perceived by Shestov were in 'a search for God beyond pity and beyond goodness, a rebellion against the received views of the "herd"'.⁷⁴

In our view, Shestov's implication is that the emerging existential solitude of Dostoevsky's fictional world erases the boundaries between good and evil, between moral norms and the unacceptable. 'Борясь со злом, он [Dostoevsky] выдвигал в его защиту такие аргументы, о которых оно и мечтать никогда не смело. Сама совесть взяла на себя дело зла!...',⁷⁵ Shestov wrote in support of his claim that this struggle is only a pretence, that Dostoevsky is in fact on the other side of the barricades: '...его сочинения напоминают речи тех проповедников, которые, под предлогом борьбы с безнравственностью, рисуют завлекательные картины соблазна...'.⁷⁶ Of course, he was neither the first nor far from the last in spotting in Dostoevsky the ability to be persuasive in the portrayal of evil (much more so than in portraying good). However, Shestov's perception of Dostoevsky borders on that of a secret advocate of evil. Similar arguments in other sources lead, as a rule, to a different implication.

Thus, for example, the following lines by Brodsky on the same theme have a distinctly different ring to them:

Of course, he was a great defender of the "good cause", the cause of Christianity. But come to think of it, there hardly ever was a better devil's advocate. From classicism, he took the principle that before you come forth with your argument, however right or righteous you may feel, you have to list all the arguments of the opposite side. And it is not that in the process of listing them one is being swayed by the opposite side; it is simply that the listing itself is a mightily absorbing process. One may not in the end drift away from one's original stance, but after having exhausted all the arguments on behalf of evil, one utters the creed's dictums with nostalgia rather than with fervor.⁷⁷

Thus a similar verdict when pronounced by Brodsky does not sound as categorical. Moreover, Brodsky connects the above ability of Dostoevsky with the latter's aesthetic

⁷⁴ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 92.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 351.

⁷⁷ Brodsky, 'The Power of the Elements', p.162.

choice and implies the writer's propensity for depth and objectivity rather than a somewhat perverse inclination to evil. Equally interesting is Fazil Iskander's perception:

Нельзя не заметить, что Достоевский с особенным вдохновением и даже личным сладострастием описывает человеческую низость. В сущности, он полемизирует со всей мировой гуманистической мыслью: мол, человек сам по себе хорош, но его портят плохие социальные условия. Без Бога, говорит Достоевский, человек плох или ужасен. Он покоряется воле Бога или живет по личному, чаще всего подлому, своеволию.⁷⁸

Iskander's conclusion then is that 'Достоевский хорошо знал себя, боялся собственного своеволия и всю жизнь посвятил борьбе с человеческим своеволием'.⁷⁹ The first part of this conclusion, in our opinion, resonates highly with Shestov's views on the writer. However, as to Shestov's stand on the final part: that Dostoevsky consciously fought against human 'своеволие' (which is, of course, an essentially humanistic claim), this is a much more open-ended question and goes to the heart of Shestov's views on Dostoevsky to be considered in evolution, as this chapter aims to do.

For Blagova and Emelianov, as we noted above, Shestov in his first book failed to grasp the sharp ethical difference between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky (or, at any rate, did not point to it). Interestingly, Nietzsche himself provided his own comments in relation to Dostoevsky. As was mentioned, Blagova and Emelianov, speaking within the framework of what has become a dominant perception on the German philosopher, emphasise a radical difference between the two and refer to Nietzsche's multiple statements that 'идеи Достоевского, как и вообще идеи гуманистов, являются противоположностью его учению'.⁸⁰ While Nietzsche famously acknowledged that the Russian novelist had taught him something as a psychologist, he confessed at the same time that Dostoevsky went against his deepest instincts.⁸¹ Robert Louis Jackson, whose vision of Nietzsche seems more sympathetic (or less radical), interprets these words as Nietzsche's essential refusal of man's submission to

⁷⁸ Iskander, 'Понемногу о многом', p. 119.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 50.

⁸¹ See, for example, Nietzsche's letter to Georg Brandes of November 20, 1888 in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and transl. Christopher Middleton (Chicago, 1969), p. 327. Cited in Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 20.

any necessity, above all that of his own ineradicable idealism, as opposed to Dostoevsky's humanistic beliefs. Jackson characterises Dostoevsky by 'his profound humanism, his realism, and his craving for an all-reconciling moment in which anguish and anxiety would find some grand resolution and transfiguration'.⁸² Jackson then affirms, while referring more particularly to Versilov's paradisiacal vision, that it is precisely this 'concept of an harmonious, all-reconciling end, this plunging of man back into the womb of dependence and illusion' that 'was repugnant to Nietzsche'.⁸³

In fact, Jackson's perception of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky deserves more attention as a point of reference against which Shestov's interpretation of the two thinkers stand out more clearly. The special importance of understanding Shestov's interpretation of Nietzsche versus Dostoevsky should not be underestimated, because Shestov was one of the first to draw these two names together. Moreover, at the time Dostoevsky's writings were only beginning to make their way to the West and thus a Western reader was not unlikely to perceive him through the eyes of the author of *Philosophy of Tragedy: Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* which had been translated into major European languages. Thus, when Jackson writes, 'the names of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky have constantly been linked in modern European literature and thought',⁸⁴ we should recall that it was Shestov who played a pioneering role in this linkage. A brief comparative analysis that is offered below between Jackson's and Shestov's views on this subject, makes particular sense because of the peculiarity of Jackson's perspective. Indeed, he concentrates on the philosophical aspects of Nietzsche's works, disregarding their socio-political implications. This approach puts both him and Shestov on similar, if not equal, terms, by erasing Jackson's purely chronological advantages over Shestov, who did not live to see Nietzsche's ideas being catastrophically implemented (as a result of being, arguably, misinterpreted).

Jackson states that the central issue that unites Dostoevsky and Nietzsche is the focus of both thinkers on the crisis of nihilism, 'a moral and spiritual crisis in European civilization:

⁸² Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 249.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

the *devaluation of the highest values*'.⁸⁵ Yet, Nietzsche's way out was through 'the creation of new values' and the acceptance of the world 'as it is – that is, as indifferent to values',⁸⁶ Jackson asserts, while Dostoevsky chose 'traditional Christian values'.⁸⁷ He observes that the tradition of translating Nietzsche's philosophical insights into concrete social-historical and even political terms clouds 'his fundamental philosophical concerns' and obscures 'the very real kinship that exists between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky as artist-philosophers and philosopher-artists'.⁸⁸ At the same time he does not deny that Nietzsche himself is to blame for 'neglecting the social and political implications of his thought'.⁸⁹ Of course, for Shestov with his existential perspective and a total lack of concern for social and political issues (in his philosophy, not in his life), this kinship was not obscured. Shestov's personal crisis clearly led him to the urgent need to re-evaluate all values and to dispense with his own idealism. Yet, the latter ultimately proved indispensable despite Shestov's best efforts.

In Nietzsche Shestov must have identified a native soul tormented by very similar concerns. It took him time, though, to peel off the layer of Nietzsche's extravagant and provocative ideas, his explicit affinity for cruelty, in order to see beneath them total despair struggling to overcome existential tragedy. In the same vein Shestov read Dostoevsky, completely distrusting the latter's refuge in humanism and Christian faith. This uncompromising reading of the novelist was soon to change in the wake (or in the process) of Shestov's own shift towards religious faith. However, at the time of *Philosophy of Tragedy* Shestov cherished above all the tragic vision of life by both thinkers as well as their revolt against the established laws and norms which suffocate an individual existence. Thus, Shestov's concerns at the time were least of all aesthetic. Jackson, on the other hand, views both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche as different in form rather than in content, 'the shape they give as artist-philosophers to the dialectic of life as they know it'.⁹⁰ He asserts that 'the secret of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche is that both desperately wanted to create truth: the one in the

⁸⁵ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

affirmation of an unattainable ideal of love and self-sacrifice; the other in the affirmation of a heroic, Promethean conception of human potential'.⁹¹

Already here a sharp contrast can be observed with the perception of Shestov, who refused to take the two figures at a face value and fought against the widely accepted interpretation. For him the above claims represented exactly the common misconception of both thinkers. He would argue that these were the impressions Dostoevsky and Nietzsche wanted to give, false declarations to hide behind, and to be thrown like a bone to a public hungry for expected consolations. Indeed, for Shestov of that period all Dostoevsky really wanted was to tread into the mud his past and his former ideals, especially those of love and self-sacrifice (in fact to do away with ideals altogether) and to rehabilitate the rights of the underground man (which for Shestov was Dostoevsky himself). Shestov liked to repeat the words from Dostoevsky's *Diary of a Writer* that helpless love for humanity can easily turn into hatred towards it.⁹² The same for Shestov was true of Nietzsche, who just like the Underground Man if faced with the dilemma 'что сохранить, воспетые ли им чудеса человеческой культуры или его одинокую, случайную жизнь, [...] принужден будет отказаться от заветнейших идеалов своих и признать, что вся культура, весь мир ничего не стоят, если нельзя спасти одного Ницше'.⁹³

Jackson implies that at the foundation of Dostoevsky's humanism there lies a poetic perception of reality.⁹⁴ Interestingly Jackson too, like Shestov, at some point substitutes for both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky their respective narrators (Zarathustra and the narrator of *The Peasant Marei*) to say that both 'recoil from direct contact with the people; each seeks refuge in poetry: Nietzsche in a poetry of transcendence, an ecstatic ideal of aesthetic individualism; Dostoevsky in a poetics of insight and transfiguration and a poetry of an ecstatic populism'.⁹⁵ Both recoil from man as they find him in everyday reality, Jackson

⁹¹ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 237.

⁹² See, for example, Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, pp. 387-388. The quotation in question is from 'Голословные утверждения' in *Дневник писателя* of November-December 1876 in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 24, p. 49.

⁹³ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 417.

⁹⁴ See Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 240.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 241.

asserts, and are thus respectively sent: Dostoevsky to 'redemption through illusion' and striving for higher spiritual beauty, Nietzsche to create 'man-in-transition' and to make of man and his life 'in the face of an indifferent universe [...] a living art form'.⁹⁶ If in the case of Dostoevsky the 'idea of aesthetic self-creation is a strong, though ultimately ambivalent motif'⁹⁷ and Dostoevsky's quest for form is ultimately brewed on both good and evil in man, Nietzsche's case in this respect Jackson presents as more unambiguous. He focuses on Nietzsche's idea of art being the only thing that can give meaning to existence 'only as an aesthetic phenomenon is existence and the world [...] eternally justified',⁹⁸ and then traces its development to Nietzsche's later writings. 'The core of Nietzsche's aesthetic individualism', he writes, 'rests, perhaps on this belief in self-creation, a belief not in contemporary man but in the greatness of human resources'.⁹⁹

Surely, for Shestov nothing could be more distant from Nietzsche's true nature, as Shestov saw it, than the above claims. For him Nietzsche was an individual tragic man destroyed by cruel fate and desperately trying to resist the insuperable. In all Nietzsche's words Shestov would always discern the underlying and well hidden motif of total despair. Indeed, Nietzsche, Shestov writes, 'подкапывался, [...] подвергал сомнению все великое, высокое и богатое, и единственно затем, чтобы оправдать свою жалкую и бедную жизнь – хотя этот мотив всегда у него необыкновенно тщательно и последовательно скрывается'.¹⁰⁰ And Dostoevsky for Shestov is simply a spiritual twin-brother of Nietzsche, a man with the almost identical inner experiences.

Thus, the fundamental difference in approach between Jackson and Shestov lies in that the former (even though by taking a purely philosophical and artistic perspective rather than a social or political one he differs from a more canonical perception) takes the words of both Nietzsche and Dostoevsky as direct evidence of their thoughts and does not show any

⁹⁶ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 241.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 242.

⁹⁸ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, transl. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1967), p. 15. Cited in Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 241.

⁹⁹ See *Ibid*, pp. 241-242.

¹⁰⁰ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 418.

mistrust. In contrast to that Shestov insists that both thinkers, and Nietzsche especially, should be read first and foremost between the lines. Valevicius in his detailed study of Nietzsche's influence on Shestov, emphasises an important lesson that Shestov learned from the German philosopher: 'that one is not necessarily that which one writes about, or in other words, that an author's words may only be written to mask his inner experiences and have little to do with what he really believes'.¹⁰¹ Thus, Valevicius traces Shestov's general tendency to 'unmask' writers to Nietzsche's influence. He notes further, explaining Shestov's interpretation of Nietzsche, that 'if Nietzsche is not direct and open, it is because he is afraid'.¹⁰²

Ironically, it is also fear of failure that Bertrand Russell has identified in Nietzsche while taking a much more conventional approach to him which essentially puts his philosophy in a historical context. Russell's observation where both characteristics are most visibly present stems from a more narrow theme – of Nietzsche's attitude to women – and is thus also of an existential nature. 'His opinion of women', Russell writes about Nietzsche, '[...] is an objectivation of his own emotion towards them, which is obviously one of fear. "Forget not thy whip" – but nine women out of ten would get the whip away from him, and he knew it, so he kept away from women, and soothed his wounded vanity with unkind remarks'.¹⁰³ More generally, Russell asserts that what Nietzsche stated about Spinoza is applicable with the same force to Nietzsche himself: 'How much of personal timidity and vulnerability does this masquerade of a sickly recluse betray!'.¹⁰⁴ In his turn Valevicius points out that 'too much of Nietzsche's philosophy is a "tug of war" between his idealistic past, his religious upbringing and the "new truths of life" which were being revealed to him in his suffering'.¹⁰⁵ Dostoevsky for Shestov is also profoundly characterised, as we shall have more chances to see later, by his oscillation between different extremes, basically between the urge for faith and the despair of disbelief. Despite the proclaimed *amor fati* Nietzsche in Shestov's eyes accomplished a *tour de force* of putting up a struggle against

¹⁰¹ Valevicius, p. 74.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 78.

¹⁰³ Russell, p. 734.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Valevicius, p. 78.

the unsurmountable obstacles, against necessity and the whole world with its morality and values. In Shestov's own words: 'Весь мир и один человек столкнулись меж собой и оказалось, что это две силы равной величины. [...] Где взял он [Nietzsche] отвагу не то что бороться, а хоть на минуту прямо взглянуть в глаза такому врагу?'.¹⁰⁶ He rejected illusions, just as Dostoevsky did, and faced the horrors of life, head on. This courage is the most precious thing that Shestov found in both thinkers. It should be noted in this connection that, as a rule, when characters do not display enough courage to fight against tragedy (as often happens in Chekhov, for example), Shestov, because of his identification of characters with the author, does not normally notice that the latter by contrast does have enough courage to describe horrors and thus to confront tragedy directly.

The above elucidates the difference between Shestov's existential approach to Nietzsche on the one hand and Jackson's, as it were, artistic one on the other. Jackson's focus is different, it is on the form, on the aesthetic expression; yet, the central point in it is directly connected with Dostoevsky's and Nietzsche's dealings with the same concept – that of illusion. Thus in Jackson's eyes Nietzsche emerges as a seeker of new forms and his attitude to illusion is ambivalent and ultimately hostile, while Dostoevsky on the contrary is hinged on illusion which he perceives both as reality and inner necessity and which is inseparable from his search for form as religious beatitude, as highest unattainable ideal, and yet which stems from man's intrinsically fallible and wicked nature. According to Jackson, if Nietzsche, who asserted that 'the secret motif of artistry is that "the character of existence is to be misunderstood"', ultimately rejected illusion, not willing personally to misunderstand the character of existence, Dostoevsky essentially went the opposite way.¹⁰⁷ 'In contrast to Nietzsche, yet with the same tragic vision of life, Dostoevsky the artist *did not want to remain with earthly truth*', and, rather paradoxically, embraced the triumph of illusion in the face and in full recognition of 'opposite proofs', Jackson affirms.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 423.

¹⁰⁷ See Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 245-246.

Shestov's conclusion about Dostoevsky at that stage is the opposite – that Dostoevsky ever since *Notes from Underground* had decisively parted with illusions. To both Shestov and Jackson the issue of illusion is central, but, in contrast to Jackson, the very concept of illusion for Shestov at the time was ideological rather than pertaining to aesthetics. Perhaps if Shestov had paid any attention to Dostoevsky's aesthetics he would have changed his conclusions somewhat. This did happen, as we shall see, but only years later, already in emigration, when Shestov's own outlook evolved to the phase of Biblical existentialism. However, in 1900 Shestov with his already distinctly existential perspective regarded the works of both thinkers as cryptic texts and engaged with their indirect mode of discourse by deciphering the ideological message which in his eyes grew from the existential experience of the authors. Jackson in his analysis, on the contrary, treats the word of both Dostoevsky and Nietzsche as essentially direct and approaches their writings predominantly via the route of art, linking form to content.

As Blagova and Emelianov note, at the time of his *Philosophy of Tragedy* Shestov 'читает Достоевского через призму идей Ницше'.¹⁰⁹ They observe that Shestov's thesis of the strong spiritual kinship between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche in such a categorical form was never repeated by Shestov in his later writings.¹¹⁰ In their analysis of Shestov's study into Dostoevsky and Nietzsche they refute Shestov's thesis of Dostoevsky's ostensible idealisation of criminals by discerning between Dostoevsky's vision of the latter in his *Notes from the House of the Dead* and Nietzsche's vision, and emphasising that the idea of idealising criminals belongs to the latter and not to the former. However, Shestov, in equating the two assigns this idea to Dostoevsky.¹¹¹ Indeed, Shestov makes such claims by putting words into Dostoevsky's mouth and making the latter seem to have proclaimed that 'Лучшие русские люди живут в каторге'¹¹² and to have worshipped the criminals, at the same time being despised by them. This also correlates with Shestov's perception of Dostoevsky-Raskolnikov, especially the latter's self-torment caused by his discovery that he is not of a 'Napoleonic design', he is not a real criminal who has the guts to kill in a self-

¹⁰⁹ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 49.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 51.

¹¹¹ See Ibid, p. 48.

¹¹² Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 378.

possessed cold-blooded fashion and the strength to live with the consequences. This vision of an extraordinary man as being allowed to commit crime, but more importantly as being capable of it, that Shestov transfers from Raskolnikov to Dostoevsky himself is perceptively commented upon by Frank Seeley. When contemplating Raskolnikov's theory he notes that according to its author extraordinary people always have something new to say and are entitled to transgress the laws 'if their "new word" – i.e. the realisation of their new idea – should require such transgression'.¹¹³ 'This is surely a completely illegitimate correlation', Seeley continues rather wittily: 'in reality most of the lawbreaking and specifically most of the blood-shedding in the world is perpetrated by perfectly ordinary people, who not only have no new word to say but don't even imagine that they have'.¹¹⁴

6.I.5. Notes from Underground and its central place in Shestov's hierarchy. Dostoevsky as the Underground Man.

However important Shestov's perspective on *Crime and Punishment* may be, especially for informing critical opinion on the originality of his approach, for Shestov himself the most significant of Dostoevsky's works was *Notes from Underground* (to which *Crime and Punishment* along with all the other major subsequent novels was regarded by Shestov only as a commentary). As Milosz points out, Shestov was not the first to single out *Notes from Underground* as Dostoevsky's most important work – Rozanov had done it earlier; and, of course, later on the significance of this work was given its due appreciation. Thus nowadays, as Richard Peace points out, '*Notes from Underground* is established in the critical literature as a key work in Dostoevsky's *oeuvre*'.¹¹⁵ Moreover, Peace talks of 'its acclaimed role as a prelude to the major novels', not only thematically, but also structurally,¹¹⁶ thus expanding Shestov's evaluation further.

Shestov treated Dostoevsky's *Notes* as a crucial landmark which reflected a drastic turn in the writer's world-view, the outburst of a spiritual abscess long awaiting to explode. Interpreting the narrator's confession as that of Dostoevsky himself was, of course, the

¹¹³ Seeley, *Saviour or Superman?*, p. 98.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground*, p. v.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

usual approach on Shestov's part, the deployment of his standard technique. However, this time, perhaps somewhat in contrast to the case with Raskolnikov, Shestov had a point. For, as Malcolm Jones writes 'the man from underground expresses in primitive and concentrated form some of Dostoevsky's most important problems and psychological insights. There is no doubt that the author was profoundly familiar with them in his own experience'.¹¹⁷ Yet, Jones, rather naturally, emphasizes also the due distance between Dostoevsky and his hero, by going along with Nietzsche's words that 'Homer would not have created Achilles, nor Goethe Faust, if Homer had been an Achilles or Goethe a Faust'.¹¹⁸

However, Shestov, with his decisive rejection of any 'пафос дистанции' towards the writers under study (a peculiarity which Erofeev emphasizes),¹¹⁹ has completely merged the Underground Man with his creator. On the other hand Shestov was only interested in the metaphysical dimension of this work, even if from an existential perspective. Indeed, as Valevicius writes explaining Shestov's reading of the novel, 'the disturbing reality for Dostoevsky in *Notes from Underground* is not a question of morals, a play-off between egoism and altruism. The essence of Dostoevsky's disgust is his limitless hatred for the "idea" – the "idea" being all that which claims any kind of authority over life that pretends to be able to predict outcome given the circumstances'.¹²⁰ In existential terms Shestov declared that '*Записки из подполья* есть публичное - хотя и не открытое - отречение [by Dostoevsky] от своего прошлого'.¹²¹ The fact of writing *The Insulted and the Injured* [*Униженные и оскорбленные*] at that time does not refute this new vision, Shestov says, and then implies that it was the last leap of faith before the final fall into the abyss – a description we quoted earlier when referring to Shestov's own transformation of convictions. In fact, the very words Shestov uses for describing Dostoevsky are very self-revealing:

¹¹⁷ Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 55.

¹¹⁸ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, transl. Francis Goffling (New York, 1956), p. 235. Cited in Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 55.

¹¹⁹ See Erofeev, p. 171.

¹²⁰ Valevicius, p. 37.

¹²¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 349.

Достоевский пытается продолжать говорить по-старому; почти одновременно с “Записками из подполья” он пишет своих “Униженных и оскорбленных”, в которых усиленно натаскивает на себя идею самоотречения, несмотря на то, что валится под ее тяжестью. Но где взять сил для такого систематического обмана и самообмана? Он уже с трудом выдерживает тон в “Униженных и оскорбленных”. И там есть страницы, в которых прорывается злобещий свет нового откровения.¹²²

We find essentially the same thoughts about Dostoevsky settling scores with his own past in his *Notes from Underground* and humiliating his former beliefs together with his former teacher, Belinsky, in an article written almost a hundred years after Shestov's book on Dostoevsky. Although D. Kopeliovich explains that one cannot identify the Underground Man completely with his creator, as some of Dostoevsky's contemporaries had done, because there always exists an artistic distance, he then affirms that separating them would also be wrong. He then points, in a remarkably analogous way to Shestov, to the technique, inherent in footnotes and prefaces, of declared detachment, which in fact reveals the opposite – an extreme closeness. ‘Автор отделяется от героя, указывает на свою с ним **нетождественность**, но в результате своим нескрываемым интересом и явным пониманием натуры описываемого парадоксалиста лишь подчеркивает существенную близость его к себе, граничащую с двойничеством’.¹²³

Equally, what Shestov had to say about ‘remarks in footnotes’ as well as ‘prefaces’ is that they were invented to conceal the truth, to mislead the reader. Thus he claims that Dostoevsky felt obliged

говорить через своих героев такие вещи, которые и в его сознании, быть может, не отлились бы в столь резкой и определенной форме, если бы они не являлись ему в обманчивом виде суждений и желаний не собственного я, а несуществующего героя романа. В примечании к “Запискам из подполья” вы это чувствуете особенно сильно. Там Достоевский настаивает на том, что “автор записок, как и сами записки, вымышлены”, и что он лишь поставил себе задачей изобразить “одного из представителей доживающего поколения”. Такого рода

¹²² Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 349.

¹²³ D. Kopeliovich, ‘Об еще одном возможном прототипе подпольного человека (Белинский и Достоевский)’ in *Dostoevsky and the Twentieth Century. The Ljubljana Papers*, ed. Malcolm V. Jones (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1993), pp. 101-118 (p. 102).

приемы, конечно, достигают прямо противоположных целей. Читатель с первых же страниц убеждается, что вымышлены не записки и их автор, а объяснительное к ним примечание.¹²⁴

Similarly, Shestov commented on Lermontov's preface to the second edition of his *Hero of Our Time*: “Главное, чтобы болезнь была указана, а как лечить ее – Бог знает”. Эта маленькая ложь, заключающая собою короткое предисловие к длинному роману, чрезвычайно характерна. Вы ее не у одного Лермонтова найдете’.¹²⁵

Kopeliovich then continues the line of the Underground Man being Dostoevsky's twin, and observes that the hero is permeated by ‘мотив “расчета с прошлым”’. А что такое прошлое Достоевского, которое он, по его же признанию, долгие годы не мог преодолеть в себе? Это, конечно, прежде всего Белинский. “... я страстно принял все учение его”. Желание разделаться с этим учением – с его атеизмом, рационализмом, социализмом – вот что выявляется в *Записках из подполья* при внимательном прочтении’.¹²⁶ Kopeliovich also supports his claims by the chronology, observing that this work had been started much before Chernyshevsky's *What is to Be Done?* [*Что делать?*] appeared, and thus it could not have been simply a response to the latter. Thus Kopeliovich, through identification of the Underground Man with Dostoevsky himself, then arrives at the conclusion that it largely conceals the image of Belinsky, metaphysically identified with Dostoevsky's former beliefs, embodying his own past. In particular Kopeliovich quotes the footnote on the first page of the *Notes* where Dostoevsky speaks of his hero as being a representative of the recent past and of the aging generation. In general the whole article is dedicated to providing documentary evidence which allows us to trace in the *Notes* ‘некую полемическую и пародийную линию расчета с прошлым’.¹²⁷

Curiously, Shestov's name is nowhere mentioned by Kopeliovich, although his reading is extremely close to that of Shestov. Indeed, the line of exterminating his own past by Dostoevsky is for Shestov the leading aim of the *Notes*, and the leading theme of Shestov's

¹²⁴ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 330.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 325.

¹²⁶ D. Kopeliovich, p. 102 (the phrase he quotes is from F. M. Dostoevskii, *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 21, p. 12).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

book on the writer. Describing Dostoevsky's growing scepticism, Shestov affirms that serving the Good and ideas is no longer a source of inspiration for Dostoevsky. “Не могу, не могу больше притворяться, не могу жить в этой лжи идей, а другой правды нет у меня; будь, что будет” – вот что говорят эти записки, сколько бы Достоевский ни отрекся от них в примечании’,¹²⁸ Shestov writes.

The pattern here is reminiscent of that in the case of *Crime and Punishment*. There Shestov denied the fact of murder, translating it to the plane of abstraction. The same is true of *Notes from Underground*, where he interprets the narrator's conduct with Liza as Dostoevsky's own conduct towards a now hateful ‘idea’ (mentioned by Valevicius above), the very idea that he had devoted his previous life to. He writes: ‘Не Лизу он здесь выгнал от себя. [...] Ему нужен был образ Лизы лишь затем, чтобы оплевать и втоптать в грязь “идею” [...]. ...над святыней тех людей, от которых он когда-то “страстно принял” новое учение, так безумно и кощунственно ругается теперь Достоевский’.¹²⁹ This was, according to Shestov, the first stage of Dostoevsky's transformation of convictions: ‘исчезла надежда на новую жизнь, о которой столько мечталось в каторге, и вместе с тем погибла вера в учение, казавшееся доселе незыблемым и вечно истинным. Сомнения быть не может: не надежда держалась учением, а наоборот, – учение держалось надеждой’.¹³⁰ From now on, Shestov asserts, Dostoevsky is poisoned by duality – he does not dare to present his new vision openly to the public, so he has lofty ideals in store to feed the readers with, while his true self is tormented by the new and horrible truth, by the truth of the ‘underground’. As we saw above, Shestov describes the *Notes* as a desperate scream of horror by the writer who suddenly realised that all his idealistic past was one big lie; that he is in fact indifferent to lofty ideals and social improvements.

Он принужден сказать себе, что если бы взамен всех этих великих и счастливых событий на Россию обрушилось несчастье, он чувствовал бы себя не хуже, – может быть, даже лучше... Что делать, скажите, что делать человеку, который открыл в себе самом такую безобразную и отвратительную мысль? Особенно писателю, привыкшему думать, что он обязан делиться

¹²⁸ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 349.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 350.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 352.

с читателями всем, что происходит в его душе? Рассказать правду? Выйти на площадь и открыто, всенародно признаться, что вся прежняя жизнь, все прежние слова были ложью, притворством, лицемерием, что в то время, когда он плакал над Макаром Деушкиным, он нимало не думал об этом несчастном и только рисовал картины на утешение себе и публике? И это в сорок лет, когда начинать новую жизнь невозможно, когда разрывать с прошлым - значит заживо похоронить себя...¹³¹

This is, in a condensed form, the gist of Shestov's interpretation of Dostoevsky's new image as it ostensibly emerges from the *Notes*.

The most important message of this work for Shestov, the message that for him outstrips all the other implications of it, is the revolt of the Underground Man against rationalism, idealism and positivism, against the stone wall of the laws of nature, against Necessity. The following words of Jones about the Underground Man not only coincide with Shestov's existentialist perspective on the latter (and consequently on Dostoevsky himself), but also point to the Romantic roots of the Underground Man's perception of the universe. This is significant because in turn it points to the idealistic origins of such a revolt, in which we can easily recognise Shestov's own struggle against his own innate idealism and rationalism (a struggle that he surely identified with in the case of the conglomerate Dostoevsky-Underground Man). Jones writes: 'His rejection of mathematical models of reality is part of the very life-blood of Romanticism, as is also his tendency to assert or assume that the nature of his own personality must be a truer reflection of ultimate reality than any "scientific law". So too is his cult of passion and irrationalism: the revolt against Reason'.¹³²

Of course, for Shestov the struggle against reason had become the main struggle of his life, yet he was never able to achieve the full victory within himself, and found endless examples of the same failure in other thinkers who, he claimed, in the end compromised their convictions and ultimately surrendered to reason. In this connection the insight of Joseph Frank seems particularly relevant. 'The tragedy of the underground man does not arise, as is popularly supposed, because of his rejection of reason. It derives from his

¹³¹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 348.

¹³² Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 60.

acceptance of *all* the implications of “reason” in its then-current Russian incarnation – and particularly those implications which the advocates of reason like Chernyshevsky blithely preferred to overlook or deny’.¹³³ Another reference from Frank that is given in Jones's later book on Dostoevsky continues the same argument: ‘As Frank argues – and at first sight this seemed perverse to many who had seen the Underground Man as the spokesman for existentialist values – the hero is the prisoner of the rationalism and utilitarianism of the 60s. What we actually witness in the course of Part I is a breakdown and reversal of priorities in favour of will and passion’.¹³⁴ This resonates with Shestov's claims, already mentioned above, that after a thousand year reign of reason and conscience a new era had begun (first discovered in Russia by Dostoevsky) – that of psychology.¹³⁵

Blagova and Emelianov note that after Shestov's analysis of *Notes from Underground* ‘уже невозможно было не замечать философско-экзистенциального значения “подполья”’¹³⁶ They single out the merits of Shestov's interpretation in his grasp of Dostoevsky's philosophical discoveries such as the novelist's distrust of the Crystal Palace, his doubts about the tree of knowledge being the same as the tree of life, his creation of a philosophy of penal servitude.¹³⁷ Indeed, Shestov had a say on all the above counts. Thus he wrote:

Прекрасное и высокое в кавычках - не моя выдумка. Это я нашел в “Записках из подполья”. Там все “идеалы” в таком виде представлены. Там и Шиллер, там и гуманность, и поэзия Некрасова, и хрустальное здание, словом все, что когда-то наполняло умилением и восторгом душу Достоевского, - все осыпается градом ядовитейших и собственнейших сарказмов. Идеалы и умиление по поводу их вызывают в нем чувство отвращения и ужаса.¹³⁸

¹³³ Joseph Frank, ‘Nihilism and Notes from Underground’, *Sewanee Review*, 69 (1961) 1-33, p. 4. Cited in Jones, *Dostoyevsky. The Novel of Discord*, p. 61.

¹³⁴ Joseph Frank, ‘Nihilism and Notes from Underground’, p. 1. Cited in Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 64.

¹³⁵ See earlier in the chapter for the original Russian quotation (section ‘Modelling an archetype of Dostoevskyan hero. Shestov's reading of *Crime and Punishment*: existentialism versus idealism’); or see directly: Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 352.

¹³⁶ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 53.

¹³⁷ See *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 351.

Along the same lines he raised the question: ‘Что, если старое предположение, что дерево познания не есть дерево жизни – ложно? Стоит проверить этот предрассудок, наряду с обуславливающей его теорией естественного развития! Оскорбленная во всем святом для нее душа, быть может, найдет в себе силы для новой борьбы...’.¹³⁹

Shestov juxtaposed ordinary philosophy to the new philosophy – of penal servitude, assigning the latter to Dostoevsky: ‘И вот в эти-то минуты, когда он чувствовал себя действительно навеки, навсегда сравненным с последним человеком, в нем зарождались те новые и страшные душевные элементы, которым суждено было впоследствии развиться совсем в иную философию, в настоящую философию каторги, безнадежности, в философию подпольного человека’;¹⁴⁰ and later on: ‘Может быть, чтоб обрести истину, нужно прежде всего освободиться от всякой обыденности? Так что каторга не только не опровергает “убеждений”, но оправдывает их; и настоящая, истинная философия есть философия каторги...’.¹⁴¹

What needs to be added to the above, in our view, is that Shestov clearly sensed the truth of Dostoevsky's forebodings as being extremely relevant to both modernity and the future, and, following Dostoevsky, placed his focus on the aesthetics and discourse of the ‘new era’ (even if inadvertently, while thinking that he was pursuing his own philosophical ends). In this context Viktor Erofeev's words about Shestov's acute presentiment of the aesthetics of existentialism, the predicament of an alienated, disillusioned and tormented individualist,¹⁴² have to be taken, in our opinion, in close connection with Shestov's interpretation and exaltation of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*:

В драме будущего обстановка будет совсем иная, чем в современной драме. Прежде всего будет устранена вся сложность перипетий. У героя есть прошлое – воспоминания, но нет настоящего: ни жены, ни невесты, ни друзей, ни дела. Он один и разговаривает только с самим собой или с воображаемыми слушателями. Живет вдали от людей. Так что сцена будет изображать либо необитаемый остров, либо комнату в большом многолюдном городе, где среди миллионов обывателей можно жить так же, как на необитаемом острове.

¹³⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 352.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

¹⁴² See Erofeev, p. 181.

Отступить назад к людям и общественным идеалам герою нельзя. Значит, нужно идти вперед к одиночеству, абсолютному одиночеству.¹⁴³

These premonitions strike us first of all by their aesthetic aspect, even more surprising given the secondary role of aesthetics in Shestov's discourse of the time. Yet, the aphoristic style of his *Apotheosis*, largely modelled on Nietzsche, has at its core the ironic discourse which for Shestov was a new landmark signifying his further departure from the much more didactic, if not openly dictatorial, ethos of his previous books. In our view it is also the echo of the Underground Man which is quite audible stylistically in Shestov's *Apotheosis* and which marks his kinship to Dostoevsky in the latter's forebodings of both the ethics and aesthetics of the future. Indeed, the Underground Man's disdain for 'all the sublime and the beautiful' was a shrewd prediction by Dostoevsky of the new epoch, introduced by the twentieth century, where these concepts were subjected to such an irrevocable discreditation and profanation, especially in totalitarian political systems, that it provoked a major shift in consciousness towards cynicism 'as a form of despair', and caused the subsequent shift of discourse into all-pervasive irony, marginalising pathos to the point of total oblivion.

Another important aspect in Shestov's treatment of the *Notes*, which in particular constructs his self-defence with respect to the identification of the narrator with the author, is Shestov's conviction of the essential irrelevance of the actual image of the Underground Man, of all his personal characteristics (furthermore, Shestov perceives them as being conceived by Dostoevsky to be deliberately misleading). Indeed, Shestov first stresses the role of a writer's own existential experience as the only possible source of cognition. 'Система притворства может в лучшем случае придать внешне благообразный вид сочинениям писателя, но отнюдь никогда не даст ему необходимого содержания',¹⁴⁴ he writes. But this only serves as a prelude to stating that Dostoevsky's thought is disguised in the image of his Underground Man, deliberately made such an unattractive individual. 'Так у Достоевского мысль подпольного человека прячется под формой обличительной повести: "смотрите, дескать, какие бывают дурные и себялюбивые

¹⁴³ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁴ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 420.

люди, как овладевает иногда эгоизм бедным двуногим животным”¹⁴⁵ Shestov insinuates. Thus for Shestov it makes no difference which precise artistic image is constructed, because for him the only purpose of this construction is to smuggle in the subversive ideas of the author. Also, by pointing to the deliberate dressing up of the hero in clothes alien to the author as a device by the latter to detach himself from the former, Shestov basically forestalls and refutes any arguments that can be put forward against his identification of the two.

6.I.6. The case of intertextuality in Shestov, Dostoevsky and Pushkin. The achievements of Shestov's early work on Dostoevsky.

Thus various personal characteristics of the Underground Man remain completely outside Shestov's concerns, even though, as we have just seen, he clearly notices some of the most obvious of them, at least in order to deploy them in his counter-arguments against possible attacks on his method and conclusions. Interestingly, one of the most important features of the Underground Man – his striving to take refuge in intertextuality, as explained by Jones,¹⁴⁶ is completely ignored by Shestov. Yet, it has a particular relevance to Shestov himself, as it does to Dostoevsky for that matter. Indeed, Jones implies that the Underground Man cannot distinguish between literature and lived experience, moreover literary reality for him has priority over ‘real’ life. While Jones's implications take their specific route in line with his general purpose of redefining Dostoevsky's fantastic realism, we would like to view this phenomenon from a different perspective. Namely, we should recall at this point the Russian phenomenon, understood broadly, of the ‘fictionalization of life’, as Richard Peace labeled it, which was touched upon in Chapter 3. We mentioned there Tsvetaeva's claim made in a private letter that life for her began to gain meaning and value only when transformed into art,¹⁴⁷ thus effectively asserting that the echo was more precious for her than the sound that caused it. This feature, which to an extent is true of any creative genius, ultimately originates in extreme idealism and refers to the romantic tradition. The same was the case for Shestov and for Dostoevsky alike. For both, literary

¹⁴⁵ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 420.

¹⁴⁶ See Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin*, p. 62.

¹⁴⁷ M. Tsvetaeva, from a letter of 30 December 1925 to A. Teskova in Tsvetaeva. *A Pictorial Biography. Цветаева. Фото-биография*, ed. Ellendea Proffer (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980), p. 31.

reality was in a sense more real than actual existence, because it allowed them to attain what remained elusive and unattainable in real life. For Shestov it was precisely literary reality, rather than real life *per se*, that led him to his main activity - philosophising. Also, both might have fought their idealism and their romantic literary roots, but they had never really succeeded, for their very obsession with the eternal questions, with the idea of salvation and truth, placed them in the idealist and romantic camp regardless of the conclusions they might have reached.

Cases of 'intertextuality' understood as the aforementioned 'fictionalization of life' in the sense of a psychological confusion between literature and real life, with attempts to impose the former on the latter, are quite common in fictional works of the nineteenth century, and are permeated with ambivalence. One of the most notable examples, as was noted in Chapter 3, is Pushkin's Tatiana, who, of course, cannot be further away from the Underground Man. Yet, notwithstanding the difference in their existential baggage with Tatiana's consequent liberty from introspection and resentment, with her outward-directed personality, the main distinguishing feature is her ability to forget herself for the sake of the other which the Underground Man does not possess because of his underlying cowardice.

Also, if we define intertextuality as escaping from one discourse to another, from one 'genre of life' into another, from reality to fantasies and dreams, and then back again, eventually losing track of your immediate location, then we have to conclude that to some degree almost all Dostoevsky's characters display this characteristic. The Underground Man intrinsically fails not because he is trapped in intertextuality, but because he is weak, selfishly fainthearted. Tatiana at some point is equally trapped, but finds her way out because she is selflessly strong. At least this is what the canonical view suggests.

However, the dialectic of life is subtler, and (the mature) Shestov would certainly look beyond the self-evident. It is interesting that having parted with his idealism, Shestov allowed himself several almost cynical remarks with respect to Tatiana, but never engaged in a coherent critique. We can use this absence of direct evidence from him as a perfect situation that invites a 'workshop', as it were, for demonstrating Shestov's reasoning in

challenging the canonical. Tatiana's position is stoic, and thus questionable, Shestov's stance would have been, if he had looked at Tatiana again in his mature philosophical period. Milosz's words about Shestov's attitude to stoicism are very revealing in this respect. Indeed, let us recall what he had to say:

the "I" must accept the inevitable order of the world. The wisdom of centuries consists precisely in advising acquiescence and resignation. In simple language, "Grin and bear it"; in more sophisticated language, "*Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*"—"The Fates lead the willing man, they drag the unwilling". Stoicism, whose very essence is to curb the pretence of transitory individual existence in the name of universal order [...], was the final word of Graeco-Roman civilization. But, says Shestov, stoicism has survived under many disguises and is still with us. Shestov simply refuses to play this game of chess, however, and overturns the table with a kick.¹⁴⁸

Indeed, the private should not be put as a defenceless sacrificial donation on to the altar of the general, was Shestov's appeal to mankind. This is not to say that people should live by their caprices (as the Underground Man does), but rather that, in particular, we should not betray our heart's desires in favour of our mind's dictate which is validated by the existing, and often hypocritical morality. Thus, reasoning *a la* Shestov, Tatiana should be viewed as a heroic soldier whose life is wasted by being sacrificed to the general cause in a war which is unjust. Perhaps this is what Shestov meant by his metaphor on idealism comparing it to an oriental despotic state where 'снаружи все блестяще, красиво, вечно; внутри же — ужасы'.¹⁴⁹ This is intensified by an observation that even from the rationalistic perspective of Chernyshevsky's 'rational egoism' [разумный эгоизм] and utilitarian ethics the only person who may benefit from Tatiana's behaviour is her husband, to whom Shestov referred in an unambiguously sarcastic way saying that 'приличная порция "страданий" была бы совсем не бесполезна этому господину, так высоко поднимавшему и нос, и плечи'.¹⁵⁰ Tatiana's integrity and pride might be in tact, but her long-term future is reminiscent at best of Olga's in *Oblomov* in that exemplary, but lifeless Shtolz household. This would be, in our view, Shestov's verdict, especially given (up to the reversal of gender roles) Evgeniia Gertsyk's observation about how enthusiastically Shestov was singling out Ibsen's most intimate theme in that 'страшнее всего, гибельней для человека отказаться от любимой

¹⁴⁸ Milosz, pp. 104-105.

¹⁴⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 369.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 396.

женщины, предать ее ради долга, идеи. От женщины, т.е. от жизни, что глубже смысла жизни'.¹⁵¹

In the context of intertextuality the conclusions are similar. Indeed, it may be thanks to her inner strength, to her selflessness that Tatiana learned to discern literature from reality, but the consequences are still tragic. Resisting her heart's inclinations and opting for the stoic solution advocated by the philistine morality (the type that Shestov rebelled against) she is destined for a gradual descent into total gloom (while, if she continued to dream, perhaps she would never have married her husband whom she did not really love, or maybe she would never have rejected Onegin whom she did love; the latter is, of course, a dangerous 'Anna Karenina's route', but which at least allows one to live by one's heart). In fact, a suggestion can be made here that unless Tatiana learns to escape into an alternative reality again (for example resorts to writing!), her fate might be that of a 'suppressed' Anna Karenina if we imagine the latter as opting for sustaining her stable and quite successful marriage by rejecting Vronsky. Soon enough then she will join the underground, the living dead, as Shestov calls them. So, Tatiana's situation is a deadlock, because if she does not end up 'under a train' she will find herself in the 'underground'. Her imposition of literary conventions upon reality may bear some responsibility for this, because it may have made her more prone to mistakes in real life. But equally this intertextuality may have nothing to do with her tragic predicament, as in the case of Anna Karenina, who does not seem to display any signs of it (and her unhappy marriage could have stemmed from the sheer inexperience of youth). On the other hand, escaping into a dream world may be very constructive, if, for example, it forces one along a creative route and makes one write down one's experiences. Thus 'intertextuality' as such is rather ambivalent, and may be neither a blessing, nor a curse.

This is not to justify the inability to discern between literature and real life, but rather to point to the validity of one reality being informed by the other, and ultimately to the validity of the creative imagination, and, perhaps even more importantly, to the fact that our

¹⁵¹ Gertsyk, pp. 109-110. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 119.

dreams and fantasies are in a sense of equal emotional validity with our real experiences (and in some ways are even more precious).

However, an apologist of the stoic stance could argue, on the other hand, that Tatiana's choice is at least responsible – she consciously opts for personal suffering in order to keep her promise and thus her integrity. This goes back again to Tatiana's boldness and maturity, and points to the Underground Man's cowardice and immaturity. Indeed, his general emotional and mental make-up, with his self-destructively vicious and intense introspection, his inability to cope with the world that overwhelms him, trying and failing constantly to come to terms with himself, mapping his ego in the world and every time ending up in alienation – are distinct characteristics of adolescence. Thus, in a way, the paradoxicalist with all his escape into vice and forty years of life experience behind him, seems to be trapped in the emotional and mental make-up of a teenager. He is frozen at that particular age and incapable of escaping the trap of perceiving the world as centred exclusively around his personality. If only the Underground Man was capable of renouncing his insatiable ego (for the sake of any other creature or cause) his whole world would have opened up and changed completely, even if it was a transient self-discovery. This is, in fact somewhat reminiscent of Seeley's interpretation of Karenin who, as Seeley points out, was unable to abandon the narrow 'framework of habits and conventions'¹⁵² which saved him from his emotional haemophilia, as Seeley puts it. However, only at what was perceived as Anna's deathbed, 'did he yield to the temptation to rise above empty gestures – the temptation to experience, however fleetingly, the fullness of his humanity by taking on himself real suffering and real love'.¹⁵³ This, as Seeley observes, was a 'surrender from weakness, not from strength'.¹⁵⁴ Still, like the Underground Man had he abandoned the shell of his ego, Karenin 'might have treasured for the rest of his life the memory of that finest hour'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Seeley, *Saviour or Superman?*, p. 59.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Thus Dostoevsky's underground hero needs a complete leap to another soul, to break out of himself, but he cannot complete this leap due to his pusillanimity. In drawing this image Dostoevsky, in fact, offered an alternative model of a superfluous man. Indeed, while Pechorin was bold and daring, but incapable of love, a kind of emotional invalid, the Underground Man is, at least potentially, capable of love (even if his perception of it is distorted by the master-slave model), he is in a way yearning for it, but he is afraid to break away from the shell of his ego, and thus, like Pechorin, he is also doomed.

Interestingly, while claiming that Dostoevsky created a bad, selfish character to conceal his own thoughts, Shestov ignores some signs of a special discourse of this character – a discourse which traditionally in Russian culture served as a self-defensive disguise while carrying with it a license to speak the truth. The discourse in question is that of 'holy foolishness' (юродство/шутовство), or 'folly in Christ', and in a sense provides a bridge between the Underground Man's aesthetic and ethical facets. However, as we shall see, in his later work on Dostoevsky written in 1921, Shestov, to all intents and purposes, discerns this discourse (even though he never uses the relevant terminology and does not recognise it as such) in a way that others have largely missed.

In this connection it seems relevant to recall that Dostoevsky allegedly had some intentions of leading the Underground Man to a Christian conclusion. 'Уж было бы лучше совсем не печатать предпоследней главы (самой главной, где самая-то мысль и высказывается), чем печатать её так, как оно есть, то есть с надерганными фразами и противоречия самой себе. Но что делать! Свиньи цензора, там, где я глумился над всем и иногда богохульствовал *для виду* – то пропущено, а где из всего этого я вывел потребность веры и Христа – то запрещено',¹⁵⁶ he wrote to his brother. Yet, this intention is met with scepticism by some critics, who question its plausibility in terms of inner artistic logic. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored. Neither can Dostoevsky's perception of the underground as having nothing holy, i.e. being void of any real moral or spiritual values be ignored. This leads one to conclude that what we are facing here is another

¹⁵⁶ Dostoevskii, *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 5, p. 375.

reflection of Dostoevsky's own oscillations between good and evil, between the sacred and the blasphemous, between faith and faithlessness.

One of the great achievements of Shestov in his first book on Dostoevsky is that he sensed this duality. As Michel Aucouturier writes, 'Shestov sees the essence of Dostoevsky's philosophy in the tormented "transformation of convictions" to which *Notes from Underground* testifies. But the horrible truth discovered through this experience, cannot become the object of cognition. Hence Dostoevsky's duality, whereby "philosophy" shifts into "preaching"'.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, Aucouturier asserts that it is this duality revealed by Shestov that is responsible for the polyphony of Dostoevsky's novels.¹⁵⁸ We shall yet return to this claim when discussing Shestov's philosophical views as informed by Dostoevsky. Here, however, it is worth noting that while polyphony in Bakhtin's sense, i.e. at the level of aesthetics, from the point of view of artistic creation, remained practically unnoticed by Shestov, there were still signs of his dim awareness of the deliberate and magic complexity of Dostoevsky's creative world. Only Shestov translated this rather subconscious awareness of his into a conscious interpretation of Dostoevsky in terms of the writer's conspiracy to conceal his horrible discoveries from others. Thus, for example, he wrote that Dostoevsky's thought 'почти невозможно фиксировать; за ней даже уследить трудно; она скользит и вьется точно угорь и под конец, словно умышленно, пропадает в густом тумане непримиримых противоречий'.¹⁵⁹ At the same time when Dostoevsky's positive heroes were involved, Shestov's distrust towards them was so strong that it overshadowed any other feelings. Thus, as we saw, Shestov dismissed Myshkin as being 'жалкая тень', 'холодное бескровное привидение' and instead of seeing in the latter's ambivalence in love the manifestation of the same duality of Dostoevsky, Shestov saw in it just another piece of evidence against the plausibility of the prince as a 'holy' character. He wrote: 'Да и роль-то его какова! Он стоит между двух женщин и, точно китайский болванчик, кланяется то в одну, то в другую сторону'.¹⁶⁰ However, as Seeley points out 'it is shortsighted or superficial to equate such multiple involvements with the "triangles" of Western

¹⁵⁷ See Aucouturier, p. 86.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 420.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 383.

literature'.¹⁶¹ Instead they reflect the deep inner conflict of Dostoevsky's characters, their perpetual existential split.

Yet, the issue of Myshkin's plausibility, above all as a 'saintly' character, a 'Christ figure', proved to be a focal point for continuing criticism and debate. Thus Harriet Murav singles out a group of critics which finds 'the topic of Prince Myshkin's "sanctity" [...] unsuitable for the novel'.¹⁶² She quotes Konstantin Mochulsky's words that 'sanctity is not a literary theme' and that 'a novel about Christ is impossible',¹⁶³ as well as Michael Holquist's similar ideas that 'Myshkin, as a Christ figure, is a failure' and more generally that 'the genre of the novel cannot accommodate the category of the holy'.¹⁶⁴ A somewhat complementary approach to this one is in asserting that Dostoevsky, having started with an aspiration to create a 'положительно прекрасный человек' as his main hero, ultimately realised the impossibility of such a task and, as the novel progressed, got 'disappointed' in the hero (as reflected, for example, through an increasingly sceptical narrator's voice). In other words, having started with the ambition to depict Christ-like figure, he ended up producing a parody of Christ.¹⁶⁵ However, there exists also a somewhat different approach which views the image of Myshkin as Dostoevsky's triumph, both ethically and aesthetically. Thus Fazil Iskander writes

В жизни бывают особые люди — прекрасная душа и поврежденный мозг. В литературе они отражены в таких великих произведениях, как "Дон Кихот" Сервантеса, "Идиот" Достоевского [...]. В мировой литературе, конечно, немало образов людей нравственных и умных. Но они не производят такого сильного впечатления. Более всего потрясают именно

¹⁶¹ Seeley, *Saviour or Superman?*, p. 89.

¹⁶² Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness. Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique*, (Stanford, California: Standford University Press, 1992), p. 74.

¹⁶³ Konstantin Mochulskii, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, transl. Michael A. Minichan (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 346. Cited in Murav, p. 74.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1986), p. 109. Cited in Murav, p. 74.

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Derek Brower ('The Bible in the Major Novels of Dostoevskii', BASEES Conference, April 2005), who substantiates such a claim by writing that the reading of Myshkin as Christ 'has been undermined by the narrative itself', 'the Christ-likeness has been diluted by alternative readings of him' and 'an image – the Holbein – has emerged that directly challenges his claims to Christlikeness'.

такие люди — с прекрасной душой и поврежденными мозгами, неспособными логизировать личные интересы'.¹⁶⁶

Interestingly Iskander's conclusion then is 'Отсюда страшная догадка: не тормозит ли ум, логизируя наши собственные интересы, нравственное развитие души?'.¹⁶⁷

This observation of the hero's idiocy as providing the grounds for his plausibility as a selfless and utterly moral being is, of course, not a new one. For example, Richard Peace classified 'the prince's "idiocy"' as being, amongst other things, 'a novelistic device which renders virtue more convincing'.¹⁶⁸ Yet, Shestov clearly was not convinced – although had he followed Iskander's route he could have come to the same (for him highly desirable) conclusion of the malicious and self-serving role of human mind. Reading the novel at the time in the Nietzschean key, Shestov focused instead almost entirely on the treacherous nature of idealism in the tragedy of existence.

Yet, with all the tendentiousness of Shestov's treatment of Dostoevsky in his first book on the writer, his insights are undeniable. Apart from spotting Dostoevsky's duality, Shestov rather prophetically drew together the names of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, and perceptively singled out their similarities, their existential concerns, their preoccupation with the concept of the underground in a metaphysical sense. As Blagova and Emelianov write,

ранний Шестов внес значительный вклад в экзистенциальное прочтение Достоевского. "Имеют ли надежды люди, оставленные наукой и моралью?" - эта постановка вопроса является общей и для Достоевского, и для Ницше. Ответ Шестова на данный вопрос предполагает выяснение мировоззренческой позиции Достоевского в отношении таких категорий этики, как смысл жизни, идеалы гуманизма, сострадание, мораль как регулятор

¹⁶⁶ Iskander, 'Понемногу о многом', p. 133. Notice that another example of this kind – of a 'positively beautiful hero', an individual incapable of sharing an immoral or insensitive perspective on the world (and as such making the reader question his sanity) – is, in fact, provided in the literary interpretation of precisely the figure of Christ in the direct sense: Ieshua Ha-Notsri from Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Peace, *Dostoevsky, An Examination of the Major Novels*, p. 67.

поведения и т.д. – В первый период творчества Шестов считал, что Достоевский и Ницше одинаково отвечают на этот вопрос.¹⁶⁹

Blagova and Emelianov also point out that Shestov's emphasis on the spiritual closeness between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche 'сослужил немалую службу для дальнейшего развития науки о Достоевском. После работы Шестова стало очевидно, что дело не в "любви" Достоевского к "волчьим чувствам".¹⁷⁰ Дело в том, что и Достоевскому, и Ницше было свойственно трагическое видение человека'.¹⁷¹ Blagova and Emelianov then make a valid claim, which we shall examine in due course, that Shestov's works on Dostoevsky of the later period written in emigration demonstrate a considerable change of Shestov's views on the writer. It is particularly interesting given that Shestov's approach of reading any writer off his heroes, as we shall see, remained largely intact. Accordingly, Shestov's fundamental concerns sustained themselves throughout his writing career, as did his subjective method. On the other hand due to this extreme subjectivity these were always subject to Shestov's own inner development. Thus, it is his method of deciphering and interpretation that underwent some evolution.

Shestov's own declaration of arbitrariness as the basis of his method at the time was very honest, even if deliberately provocative. Erofeev in his article extends this arbitrariness to Shestov's approach in general, regardless of the chronology. As we shall explain below, Erofeev puts authenticity outside Shestov's concerns. This is to say that Shestov's treatment of writers was dependent chiefly on his own existential paradigm at the time of conducting his analysis. With age, not surprisingly, his own conception of the world developed in a direction opposite to radicalism, and this, rather than some essential conceptual changes or alteration in techniques, is in our view responsible for the evolution of his interpretations.

¹⁶⁹ Blagova and Emelianov, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷⁰ This is a reference to (and a quotation from) Mikhailovskii's book on Dostoevskii – *A Cruel Talent* (*Жестокий талант*).

¹⁷¹ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 51.

6.I.7. 'Arbitrariness' as a method. The limitations of creative freedom. The role of ideas in Dostoevsky from Shestov's perspective.

When writing his *Philosophy of Tragedy* Shestov's main conclusions in his treatment of Dostoevsky, as we have seen, were derived through a rather indiscriminate and uncompromising identification of the writer with his 'underground heroes', tragically severed from the world. Shestov simply substituted a hero for the author in the course of writing, in an unnoticed way, without explanation. The only explanation he would occasionally provide (which is not altogether without validity) is that such a degree of penetration into a distorted psyche can only be achieved through the author's direct personal experience, and that a sharp dissociation from a hero is suspicious and counter-productive. On the other hand, already in the introduction to the book, Shestov, as it were, has given himself license to behave in an arbitrary way, when he declared arbitrariness as his method.

Indeed, in this introduction Shestov first asserts in his book that Dostoevsky has to say 'через своих героев такие вещи, которые и в его сознании, быть может, не отлились бы в столь резкой и определённой форме, если бы они не являлись ему в обманчивом виде суждений и желаний не собственного я, а несуществующего героя романа'.¹⁷² Shestov insists that this is evident in the comments to *Notes from Underground* where Dostoevsky deliberately dissociates himself from the hero of the *Notes*. Moreover, Shestov claims that in order to protect himself from the horrible truth of the underground which Dostoevsky increasingly felt in his own soul, he invented, as a shield of sorts, his 'positive' characters such as Prince Myshkin and Alesha Karamazov. Furthermore, for Shestov Dostoevsky's 'неистовые проповеди'¹⁷³ from his *Diary of a Writer* have the same root – the writer's desire to isolate himself from his Raskolnikovs, Ivans Karamazovs, Kirillovs and other such characters of his novels. 'Всё это лишь новая форма примечания к *Запискам из подполья*',¹⁷⁴ Shestov insists. He points, however, to the difficulty of peeling the real feelings of Dostoevsky off his invented 'ideas', because, as Shestov says,

¹⁷² Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 330.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 330.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 331.

commentary is too closely interwoven with the actual text. Yet, it is possible to point at least to the direction in which such a separation should be conducted, Shestov tells us. And he also explains that all the commonplaces as well as too highly pitched notes are signs of inauthenticity in Dostoevsky's words. 'Возможны, конечно, ошибки в истолковании отдельных мест сочинений Достоевского, даже целых романов. На что же надеяться в таком случае? На критическое чутье?! Но читатель недоволен таким ответом. От него отдает мифологией, старостью, плесенью, ложью – даже *умышленной* ложью. Ну, что ж? Тогда остается одно: произвол'.¹⁷⁵

Viktor Erofeev observes perspicaciously that 'такая методология критического исследования, не лишённая элемента эпатажа, занимает в творчестве Шестова центральное место, повторяясь из книги в книгу, распространяясь на писателей, библейских пророков, отцов Церкви и философов, которые попадают в поле зрения Шестова'.¹⁷⁶ He then asks if Shestov himself believed in the authenticity of the images of writers that he created. 'Очевидно, вопрос о достоверности просто был лишён для него всякого смысла', Erofeev continues and supports his claim by a quotation from Shestov: 'потому что, по его мнению, "достоверность вовсе и не есть предикат истины или, лучше сказать, что достоверность никакого отношения к истине не имеет"'.¹⁷⁷

However, it is evident that when deciphering the writer via his heroes Shestov every time was labouring under the delusion of having penetrated to the writer's very soul, having heard his unspoken words which the latter could only utter under the disguise of the characters that he created. As we mentioned in the previous chapters, this somewhat precarious position raises a number of issues and concerns. The main ones lie not only in the problems of this very approach, including the type of methodology appropriate for analysing the characters, but also in the question of correlation between the writer's creative free will on one hand and objective artistic constraints on the other.

¹⁷⁵ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 331.

¹⁷⁶ Erofeev, p. 172.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. The quotation from Shestov is taken from *На весах Иова*, p. 29.

In the previous chapter we discussed the nature and legitimacy of a psychoanalytical approach to literary characters. This was connected to Rancour-Lafférière's and others' theories of our perception of literary heroes as real people – often more real to us, he suggests, than our friends and colleagues, because the former are more 'open' to us, the readers, in the course of the narrative than the latter in the course of real life. The most substantial problem in this perception seems to lie in the fact that literary heroes rely for the integrity of their image, or for their credibility, on the genius of the author. Indeed, for a mediocre writer a character can be schematised, contradictory and simply implausible, while for a real master a hero, even a secondary one, is conceived as a holistic image, endowed with the tiniest features appropriate to his human character. In fact, once conceived the hero grows in his own right, acquiring those features and becoming as it were independent of his creator, for the inner logic of the character under creation takes over, dictating its own rules and imposing its own demands. Such a process, which in a sense is that of Galateia created by Pygmalion and then stepping out of the stone and beyond his control, was described by Mikhail Bulgakov in his *Театральный роман* (even though there it relates to turning a novel into a play):

...Мне начало казаться по вечерам, что из белой страницы выступает что-то цветное. Присматриваясь, щурясь, я убедился в том, что это картинка. И более того, что картинка эта не плоская, а трехмерная. Как бы коробочка, и в ней сквозь строчки видно: горит свет и движутся в ней те самые фигурки, что описаны в романе. [...] С течением времени камера в книжке зазвучала. Я отчетливо слышал звуки рояля. [...] Зачем же гаснет комнатка, зачем на страницах наступает зимняя ночь над Днепром, зачем выступают лошадиные морды, а над ними лица людей в папах. [...] Вон бежит, задыхаясь, человечек. Сквозь табачный дым я слежу за ним, я напрягаю зрение и вижу: сверкнуло сзади человека, выстрел, он, охнув, падает навзничь, как будто острым ножом его спереди ударили в сердце. Он неподвижно лежит, и от головы растекается черная лужица. А в высоте луна, а вдали цепочкой грустные, красноватые огоньки в селении. [...] ...А как бы фиксировать эти фигурки? Так, чтобы они не ушли уже более никуда? И ночью однажды я решил эту волшебную камеру описать. Как же ее описать? А очень просто. Что видишь, то и пиши, а чего не видишь, писать не следует.¹⁷⁸

This allows us to conclude that a writer, in a certain sense which may seem paradoxical to some, has only a partial power over his creations. Because once conceived and thought through as a human type, turning into a particular character in the literary piece, the heroes

¹⁷⁸ М. А. Bulgakov, *Записки покойника (Театральный роман)* in *Собрание сочинений в 5 томах* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), vol. 4, pp. 434-435.

gain their independent rights which only the writer's intuition can sense to the full and develop, or rather reflect, on paper. In other words, the process becomes reverse – the writer now follows the hero, who has ‘stepped out of stone’, in order to describe him most adequately. Again, here the words of Brodsky are to be recollected that the true poet is characterized by his ability to single out and depict the main metaphysical features of the object, in an unconscious camera-like fashion, almost despite himself.¹⁷⁹

The same must be true of the prose writer creating a character and giving him life: the author feels the metaphysics of the created image in both his external and internal features as well as his reactions to various life situations and interactions with other characters. Metaphorically speaking, the difference between brilliant and lesser writers in terms of character creation is akin to the difference between people who are innate spies and those who are trained, but without having any natural predisposition to it. The former, having learned the main story behind their false persona, start living it out in the full sense, i.e. ‘become’ those invented personalities having completed the schematised image with details at the subconscious level, to the extent of total inner identification with the fictitious individual. Thus their reactions are immediate and natural. Others approach the task logically and can figure out the answers in any given situation, but their reactions are delayed and often unnatural because forced. They act at the level of rationality rather than intuition. Thus a great writer is led by the intuitive insight into the character being created, which runs deeper than the rational construction of such a character.

In this sense the writer's freedom of creation is never limitless, as was discussed in Chapter 3 in connection to Yves Bonnefoy's (a contemporary French poet) essay on Shestov *A l'impossible tenu: la liberté de Dieu et celle de l'écrivain dans la pensée de Chestov*. As was explained, Bonnefoy considers one of Shestov's central concepts – that of freedom – and raises the question if the latter was seeking in literature this boundless self-willed

¹⁷⁹ The precise quotation reads: ‘A good poem, in a sense, is like a photograph that puts its objects' metaphysical features into sharp focus. Accordingly, a good poet is one who does this sort of thing in a camera-like fashion: quite unwittingly, almost in spite of himself’ (Joseph Brodsky, from the foreword to *An Age Ago*, p. xvi).

divine freedom of the writer which exceeds even the freedom of the Creator. This question for Bonnefoy stems from the main aspect of Shestov's philosophy – his search for the omnipotent God – God who can not only compose the future, but also mend the past, as Shestov explains in his book *Potestas Clavium*. However, Bonnefoy's implication is that Shestov effectively mistook an aesthetically flawed imposition of self-will for a writer's creative freedom, and transferred this onto the plane of the Divine.

In the same vein (of the demands of an aesthetic, if not ethical, diktat) 'coexistence and interaction' which are normally characterised as the basis of action of Dostoevsky's characters¹⁸⁰ need no longer be opposed to 'becoming', because the former are rooted in the latter and the relationship between them is that of the visible tip of the iceberg to its invisible foundation. In other words the diktat of the inner logic of a character provides for the extension of its 'visible', i.e. literally presented parts, to the 'invisible' ones that may be only hinted at in the narrative. Such understanding may add to the interpretation of Chekhov's famous phrase that if there is a gun on the wall in the first act it should be shot in the last. In other words, the inner logic of the literary hero, his 'human' unity and integrity, should be consistent and inescapable. Resorting to metaphor again, if two pieces of line on a graph are not visibly joined, the joining line of the readers' imagination within the margins of the accidental, undetermined and left to chance, should nevertheless add up to a continuous draft, not distorting the natural smoothness of forms of the resulting picture.

The relevance of all the above to our main theme is direct. Indeed it goes straight to the heart of Shestov's fundamental misconceptions in approaching literature. In particular it undermines considerably the unconditional identification of the writer with his characters, exactly for the reasons outlined above. The author may indeed inhabit one character or another, as well as project his general world view onto his perception of his heroes, but his inner duty to stay truthful to the reality of life prevents him (and the greater he is, the more so) from bending the characters, who gained their independent existence, to his intellectual will. Thus judging their human merits does not equate to judging his.

¹⁸⁰ See, for example, Seeley, *Saviour or Superman?*, p. 127.

In this sense, if we accept the full reality of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's characters, Frank Seeley's treatment of them provides an example of an immaculate psychological assessment and penetrating analysis. On the other hand, exactly because Seeley's treatment is based entirely on taking the heroes as fully real human beings it is totally reliant on the impeccability of the literary works, for any fault such as inconsistency or randomness that may have occurred therein would have had immediate bearings on Seeley's whole construction derived on the basis of complete genuineness of the relevant characters. Thus even in the case of such supreme masters as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky one will do best by proceeding with caution, taking into account both the fictional literary reality and the author's actual reality.

Indeed, it is hardly arguable that in one way or another the writer's inner world undoubtedly does appear in his creative work, but the degree of this differs significantly from writer to writer (and even from book to book), therefore the traces of such an appearance are to be read off the narrative with extreme care, and never with the definite conviction of ultimate validity. The author may emerge deliberately in a character, or be scattered across a number of them; the writing may be distinctly autobiographical or nothing of the sort; the writer can toy with the idea and then test it against other ideas by investing different characters with these. The ideas may be his own, artificially invented or obsessive, as well as those flying in the air at the time, going into fashion or out of it. In this sense the writer does have the powers of the creator, but in a somewhat restricted and non-arbitrary way, because, as we argued above, these characters soon acquire an independent existence, and even if driven and determined by particular ideas they grow into a complex, but holistic unity.

Related questions were addressed by Bakhtin from the point of view of the poetics of the underlying text and the type of discourse used by the author. Dostoevsky's discourse, he claims, is distinctly non-monological. Therefore, although his characters are often characterised as possessed by an idea, this idea is activated and gains meaning only in dialogue with other ideas and can only be considered within the separate holistic

consciousness of a given hero. 'Мир Достоевского глубоко персоналистичен', Bakhtin writes;

Всякую мысль он воспринимает и изображает как позицию личности. Поэтому даже в пределах отдельных сознаний диалектический или антиномический ряд – лишь абстрактный момент, неразрывно сплетенный с другими моментами цельного конкретного сознания. Через это воплощенное конкретное сознание, в живом голосе цельного человека логический ряд приобщается единству изображаемого события. Мысль, вовлеченная в событие, становится сама событийной и приобретает тот особый характер "идеи-чувства", "идеи-силы", который создает неповторимое своеобразие "идеи" в творческом мире Достоевского.¹⁸¹

These suggestions by Bakhtin naturally lead to the more general issue of the perception or definition of ideas in Dostoevsky's works as seen through his characters. In this connection Seeley argues that the 'idea' of Dostoevsky's heroes is 'a conceptual formulation of a complex of desires or passions which are unacceptable to the dominant self and so are repressed and banished to the unconscious where they form "the nucleus of a second personality"'.¹⁸² In addition Seeley makes an interesting remark that 'the "idea" of the heroes has been misconceived hitherto as essentially intellectual'.¹⁸³ However, perhaps in contrast to the main critical body that Seeley implies, Bakhtin in the above observations does not by any means restrict the ideas of Dostoevsky's heroes to the domain of the intellectual. One of Seeley's most captivating examples where, as he shows, the idea spills far beyond the domain of the intellectual and reflects the profound psychological conflict of two sides of a split personality is that of Nastasia Fillipovna in *The Idiot*. 'Nastasia's "idea"', Seeley writes, 'differs from those of the heroes in remaining only partly conscious and partly verbalised'.¹⁸⁴ However, Seeley deems this difference as one of form rather than function and thus of secondary importance. He maintains that, as in the case of Dostoevsky's male heroes, Nastasia's primary question is 'Who am I?' and argues that to say that she is 'devoured by her "idea" is to say that she is torn apart by the claims of two alternative personalities'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Bakhtin, p. 10.

¹⁸² Seeley, *Saviour or Superman?*, p. 88.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 89.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

The full stop is, perhaps, put by Richard Peace who summarises the rich variety of critical interpretations of ‘the constructional principles which shape and direct the typical Dostoevskian novel’ by saying that ‘it is important to recognize that ideas are the basic material of Dostoevsky’s art, but not ideas that are static, not tenets of received wisdom, nor even challenging ideas inscribed in tablets of stone, as might be the case with a Tolstoy, they are dynamic concepts, constantly shifting, turning into their opposites, subverting received wisdom, and surging ahead in a turbulent process that can have no conclusion’.¹⁸⁶

For Shestov, on the other hand, both ‘ideas’ and ‘ideals’ constitute something that Dostoevsky allegedly is fighting against. It is a hostile entity which he is trying to force out of the door, having invested with it a particular character. Thus, as was partially quoted above, Shestov writes with respect to Liza from the *Notes from Underground*: ‘история с Лизой, конечно, выдумана. Но в том-то и весь ужас записок, что Достоевскому понадобилось хоть мысленно, хоть в фантазии проделать такое безобразие. Не Лизу он здесь выгнал от себя. [...] Ему нужен был образ Лизы лишь затем, чтобы оплевать и втоптать в грязь “идею”, ту самую идею, которой он служил в течение всей своей жизни’.¹⁸⁷ Therefore Shestov allows himself to interpret characters as ideas, as well as to see in them the author himself. For Bakhtin this way of interpreting Dostoevsky has a very restricted validity: ‘Из конкретных и цельных сознаний героев (и самого автора) вылущивались идеологические тезисы’, and this can only result, according to Bakhtin, in ‘a bad philosophical statement’ (‘плохое философское утверждение’).¹⁸⁸ On the other hand, it is not unusual to consider ideas as acting heroes of Dostoevsky’s works, operating on the same plane as the ‘proper’ characters. As Bakhtin says, in Dostoevsky’s novels ‘идея [...] действительно становится почти героиней произведения’.¹⁸⁹ However, Shestov seems to be doing the reverse in considering characters as ideas incarnate rather than ideas as acting characters. This said, he does sometimes make a distinction between a fully-blown character, masterfully depicted (for him, as a rule, such characters are to be

¹⁸⁶ Peace, *Dostoevsky’s Notes from Underground*, p. v.

¹⁸⁷ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 350.

¹⁸⁸ Bakhtin, p. 10.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 52.

found amongst Dostoevsky's 'negative' ones) and a walking idea, a pale shadow – characteristics he sarcastically endows, for example, Myshkin with, as we saw above.

The meeting point of the above interpretations of ideas and their role and depiction in Dostoevsky appears to be in the implied understanding that almost every hero of Dostoevsky is the bearer of an idea. While Bakhtin speaks of an 'idea involved in an event', an 'idea-feeling', an 'idea-force',¹⁹⁰ Seeley views ideas as intellectual and emotional constructs which reflect the deep inner conflict of a split personality. At the same time Peace emphasises 'the multiplicity of secondary characters in the novels' being part of the turbulent process described above – of constant transformation and motion of ideas in Dostoevsky's works.¹⁹¹ For Shestov, on the other hand, ideas are embedded in characters to be disposed of, as it were for an execution, for expulsion from the writer's psyche; in other words with the purpose for the writer of settling scores with his own self. Thus again Shestov conducts a psychoanalysis of the writer using his work as evidence (or, in other words, reading it as a self-narrative within the framework of 'narrative psychology', as discussed earlier), while others analyse the work as such, perceiving it first and foremost as a literary creation in its own right.

6.1.8. *The Gift of Prophecy*: the two-level structure (двухъярусность) of Shestov's thought as a manifestation of his inner struggle.

Curiously perhaps, Dostoevsky's heroes did not play any role in Shestov's next separate work dedicated to the writer, which was written in 1906 for the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Dostoevsky's death. This work, entitled *The Gift of Prophecy* [Пророческий дар], is invariably referred to as weird, because in it Shestov seems to do little else than criticise Dostoevsky's political vision and denounce his claim of prophecy. Blagova and Emelianov go as far as labelling it a lampoon. They assert that in this work Shestov 'описывает Достоевского как неудавшегося пророка, который лгал, чтобы угодить царскому двору'.¹⁹² For our purposes this work, despite its relatively short length, is of

¹⁹⁰ Bakhtin, p. 10.

¹⁹¹ Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground*, p. v.

¹⁹² Blagova and Emelianov, p. 51.

substantial importance, because it is explicitly directed at the schism between Dostoevsky the novelist on the one hand and Dostoevsky, the public figure on the other. Shestov reveals this schism by considering a correlation between the two and providing a severe critique of the latter. As for the reasons underlying this critique, different perspectives can be taken. Thus, Blagova and Emelianov point out that the article is written by Shestov as if in a state of extreme anger, which is responsible in particular for twisting historical facts in order to create out of Dostoevsky an image of a failure who imagined himself a prophet. The cause of this attitude they see in Shestov's inability to forgive Dostoevsky for 'betraying the underground' through maintaining high ideals of the good and of brotherly love while knowing perfectly that the latter is quite impossible.¹⁹³ Indeed, Shestov described Dostoevsky in this work in the following way:

в каторге и подполье, родилась и долго жила великая жажда Бога, там была великая борьба, борьба не на жизнь, а на смерть, там впервые производились те новые и страшные опыты, которые сроднили Достоевского со всем, что есть на земле мятущегося и беспокойного. То, что пишет Достоевский в последние годы своей жизни (не только *Дневник писателя*, но и *Братья Карамазовы*), имеет ценность лишь постольку, поскольку там отражается *прошлое* Достоевского. Нового дальнейшего шага он уже не сделал. Как был, так и остался *накануне* великой истины. Но прежде этого было ему мало, он жаждал дальнейшего, а теперь он не хочет бороться и не умеет объяснить ни себе, ни другим, что собственно с ним происходит. Он продолжает симулировать борьбу — да, сверх того, он как будто бы окончательно победил и требует, чтоб победа была признана общественным мнением. Ему хочется думать, что канун уже прошел, что наступил настоящий день.¹⁹⁴

Blagova's and Emelianov's thoughts on this matter are reminiscent of Viktor Erofeev's analysis of Shestov's work on Tolstoy (*Creating and Destroying Worlds*) that we addressed in the previous chapter. Erofeev quotes Shestov's lines on the revelations that the proximity of death brings and on the human inability to remain at the level of those revelations, that is to say to sustain the level of tragedy. 'На мгновение человек, как кузнечик, взлетит в высоту — и вот он уже снова на своем прежнем месте...',¹⁹⁵ Erofeev quotes Shestov. In *The Gift of Prophecy* Shestov clearly implicates Dostoevsky in the same behaviour pattern, by accusing the writer of opting for Russian Orthodox rhetoric as a shield from tragedy and

¹⁹³ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 52.

¹⁹⁴ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 221.

¹⁹⁵ Shestov, *Разрушающий и созидающий миры*, pp. 346-347. Cited in Erofeev, p. 178.

a comfortable platform for a successful (in the common world sense of the word) existence which Dostoevsky was at last enjoying.

Обращаю еще раз внимание на то далеко не случайное обстоятельство, что проповедь совпала с самым “светлым периодом” его жизни. Прежний бездомный кочевник, бедняк, не знавший, где преклонить голову, обзавелся семьей, собственным домом, даже деньгами (жена прикапливала). Неудачник стал знаменитостью. Каторжник — полноправным гражданином. Подполье, куда еще недавно и навсегда, как можно было думать, загнала его судьба, кажется старой фантазмагорией, никогда не бывшей действительностью,¹⁹⁶ Shestov writes.

However, in connection with *The Gift of Prophecy* Erofeev makes a more subtle observation. He claims that ‘Шестовская мысль существует одновременно на двух уровнях: обыденности и трагедии’.¹⁹⁷ At ‘day time’ Shestov reasons from a humanistic stance which for him is equivalent to the position of the mundane, while ‘at night’ he exercises a different – tragic – sight, Erofeev essentially asserts. Moreover he claims that despite diligent attempts by Shestov to segregate these layers of his thought, they inadvertently start to interact. Erofeev does not develop this interesting idea in full detail, but to us it seems to resonate with his assertion at the beginning of his article (shared by various Shestov scholars) that Shestov himself possessed the second sight with which by Shestov's own metaphor the angel of death endowed Dostoevsky. This additional extraordinary sight in contrast to the ordinary one which agrees with all other senses as well as with the mind, is prone to fantastic, unlawful, hallucinating visions which are in total disaccord with the voice of reason. ‘И тогда начинается борьба между двумя зрением — естественным и неестественным — борьба, исход которой так же кажется проблематичен и таинственен, как и её начало...’,¹⁹⁸ Shestov wrote. Thus, Shestov's own struggle to overcome his innate idealism and rationalism for the sake of the irrational and tragic, to get to the truth, to the roots of things can be regarded as the struggle between his second – tragic – sight, and his first – ordinary one. It is this struggle that must be responsible for the constant intervention of the ‘day’ truths into the ‘night’ truths that Erofeev observes. It is also this struggle that Shestov traces in Dostoevsky in an accusatory

¹⁹⁶ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 221.

¹⁹⁷ Erofeev, p. 173.

¹⁹⁸ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 29.

fashion, blaming the writer for the regular concessions of the fantastic sight to the ordinary one.

Zenkovsky's words that we have quoted earlier capture the same phenomenon of rationalism's tenacity for life in Shestov: '...после торжественных "похорон" рационализма в одной книге, он снова возвращается в следующей книге к критике рационализма, как бы ожившего за это время. ... разрушив в себе один "слой" рационалистических положений, Шестов натывается в себе же на новый, более глубокий слой того же рационализма'.¹⁹⁹ Thus Shestov consciously chose for himself the route of spiritual *tour de force* – to eradicate from his very being those aspects of himself that constitute human nature. In a sense he was ruthlessly applying to himself Chekhov's famous words about 'squeezing the slave out of oneself', only with a different interpretation of what constitutes inner slavery. While Chekhov was referring to the intrinsic vices of human nature causing a loss of dignity and self-respect, for Shestov it was reason, rationalist philosophy and ethics that enslaved mankind. By constructing his philosophy of tragedy, by choosing this gloomy route, Shestov was waging war on his own deepest instincts and emotional attachments, on his comfortable spiritual existence amongst the 'self-evident' truths. As in the case of Lev Tolstoy, who for that reason was dear and close to Shestov, the latter was also caught between his instincts and his convictions, and had resolved to kill his instincts in favour of his convictions.

It is because of this struggle that David Gascoyne insisted on distinguishing between existentialism of the Sartrean variety, understood as 'the post-experimental intellectual exploitation of the experience of existing' and Shestov's existential philosophy – the 'actual spiritual activity' that the latter 'believed to consist in absolutely undivided truth-seeking'.²⁰⁰ Also, that is why Berdiaev could state that 'Лев Шестов был философом, который философствовал всем своим существом, для которого философия была не академической специальностью, а делом жизни и смерти'.²⁰¹ In this context

¹⁹⁹ Zenkovskii, II, p. 367.

²⁰⁰ Gascoyne, pp. 128 and 131.

²⁰¹ Berdiaev, 'Основная идея философии Льва Шестова', p. 5.

Zenkovsky's words that Shestov can be understood only in connection with his constant submission of himself to an inner crucifixion,²⁰² seem particularly relevant.

Thus Erofeev's observation of the 'double-layeredness' of Shestov's thought in some sense can be considered as guidance through Shestov's lampoon on Dostoevsky of 1906. Indeed, in it Shestov openly regards Dostoevsky from the mundane, 'day time' position, and thus criticises him for the reactionary nature of his political stance and predictions. Having first explained the difference between the two approaches in the case of Tolstoy, Shestov thus clears the way to laying blame on Dostoevsky. Indeed, he asks with respect to Tolstoy if the latter's political short-sightedness (Shestov refers to Tolstoy's views concerning revolution and specifically on a Moscow armed rebellion) was not in fact a manifestation of the novelist's spiritual grandeur whereby he saw instead what other mortals were unable to see. 'Что если, спрашиваешь себя, Толстой и Гете оттого не видели революции и не болели ее муками, что они видели нечто иное, может быть, более нужное и важное? Ведь это — люди величайшего духа! Может быть, и в самом деле на небе и земле есть вещи, которые не снились нашей учености?..',²⁰³ Shestov writes. The implication is: Dostoevsky despite all his mistakes regarded as such from the ordinary 'day-time' position, might have perceived through all these something 'necessary and important', invisible to other mortals – as the night-time vision suggests. This 'night-time' possibility justifies the due criticism that his political utopianism (labelled as such from the day-time position) deserves. Shestov thus as it were gives himself a licence to provide all this criticism with vigorous force.

Of course, Blagova's and Emelianov's interpretation of the article as Shestov's revenge, as his unwillingness to forgive Dostoevsky his betrayal of the underground, also has its clear validity. Moreover, the continuation of the same line is clearly present in Shestov's next work on Dostoevsky, written fifteen years later:

²⁰² See Zenkovskii, II, p. 369.

²⁰³ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 220.

Достоевскому, чтобы “действовать”, пришлось подчинить свое второе зрение обычному человеческому зрению, гармонизирующему и со всеми остальными человеческими чувствами и с нашим разумом. Он захотел научить людей, как им нужно жить или, употребляя его выражение, “устроиться с Богом”. Но с Богом “устроиться” еще менее возможно, чем “устроиться” без Бога. Сам Достоевский рассказал нам это в "Великом инквизиторе" [...] сам он в "Великом инквизиторе" так вдохновенно рассказал нам, что люди оттого и ушли от Бога, что Он не захотел озаботиться их земным устройством, не захотел "гарантировать" каприз. И все-таки продолжал проповедовать - превращать потусторонние истины в общеобязательные суждения. [...] Результаты получаются неслыханные. Зажатые в тиски всемства, “исступления” Достоевского становятся “прислужниками” обыденности,²⁰⁴ maintained Shestov.

Even in his first book on Dostoevsky we find the beginning of the same bitterness with respect to Dostoevsky's attempts at prophecy:

Достоевский, как известно, любил пророчествовать. Охотнее всего он предсказывал, что России суждено вернуть Европе забытую там идею всечеловеческого братства. Одним из первых русских людей, приобретших влияние на европейцев, был сам Достоевский. И что же, привилась его проповедь? О ней поговорили, ей даже удивлялись – но ее *забыли*. Первый дар, который Европа с благодарностью приняла от России, была “психология” Достоевского, т. е. подпольный человек, с его разновидностями, Раскольниковыми, Карамазовыми, Кирилловыми. Не правда ли, какая глубокая ирония судьбы?,²⁰⁵ wrote Shestov in his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*.

On the other hand, we wish to suggest further interpretations of Shestov's lampoon, which in a sense complement those of Erofeev and Blagova with Emelianov. For us a hint is evident in this article – especially in view of Shestov's declaration made there that the final truth eludes everyone, no matter what geniuses they are, and even the eternal underground is powerless to open one's eyes to it – that the vital ingredient in Shestov's incentive for his severe criticism might have been his genuine annoyance with the discrepancy between Dostoevsky's power as a writer and his utter powerlessness, to the extent of playing a pitiful reactionary role, as a public figure (or ‘prophet’ in Shestov's terminology). After all, Shestov was forever preoccupied, by his own acknowledgement, by the enigma of human genius: ‘Насколько и в каких областях гений знает и может больше, чем обыкновенные люди?’,²⁰⁶ he wrote in the same *Gift of Prophecy*. In other words, Shestov suddenly gave way to his ‘day-time’ vision, and a catalyst for this bursting through was his

²⁰⁴ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, pp. 107-108.

²⁰⁵ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 332.

²⁰⁶ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 220.

being overwhelmed by the first Russian revolution. ‘Он пугал нас, что в Европе прольются реки крови из-за классовой борьбы, а у нас, благодаря нашей русской всечеловеческой идее, не только мирно разрешатся наши внутренние вопросы, но еще найдется новое, неслыханное доселе слово, которым мы спасем несчастную Европу’, wrote Shestov about Dostoevsky’s predictions and continued:

Прошло четверть века. В Европе пока ничего не случилось. Мы же захлебываемся, буквально захлебываемся в крови. У нас душат не только инородцев, славян и не славян, у нас терзают своего же брата, несчастного, изголодавшегося, ничего не понимающего русского мужика. В Москве, в сердце России, расстреливали женщин, детей и стариков. Где же русский всечеловек, о котором пророчествовал Достоевский в Пушкинской речи? Где любовь, где христианские заповеди? Мы видим одну “государственность”, из-за которой боролись и западные народы — но боролись менее жестокими и антикультурными средствами. России опять придется учиться у Запада, как уже не раз приходилось учиться... И Достоевский гораздо лучше сделал бы, если бы не пытался пророчествовать,²⁰⁷ Shestov concludes.

Thus, while Dostoevsky the writer served, in Erofeev's apt remark, as Shestov's Virgil to lead him through the tragic underground kingdom, he was no pastor for him in the bloody jungle of Russian reality. One can feel Shestov's bitter, almost childish resentment that Dostoevsky's utopian visions of Russians showing Europeans a bloodless way to universal harmony remained utopian, and life, instead, humiliated these predictions by its retrogressive motion. In other words, Shestov's bitterness about the chaos of life, about the lack of orientation in it, is a hidden complaint about Dostoevsky's inability to provide civil guidance, as opposed to the artistic guidance given by his unrivalled literary and philosophical genius. Moreover, while Shestov perceived Dostoevsky's political sentiments as retrograde, his artistic predictions, which turned out to be prophetic, were interpreted by Shestov, as we shall see, in too narrowly a metaphysical sense to be able to help him through the political destinies of Russia and the world. Thus, the incompatibility of Dostoevsky's artistic and political predictions was the most hurtful thing to Shestov, perhaps especially so, because it painfully engaged his two sights (the ‘tragic’ and the ‘ordinary’) simultaneously and the resulting conflict could not be resolved. Indeed, Dostoevsky's reactionary thrusts seem to Shestov's common sense (which normally could

²⁰⁷ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, pp. 223-224.

be suppressed in favour of his 'apotheosis of groundlessness', in his attempts to defeat reason) insulting by the way of contrast with the novelist's extreme intelligence. To put it differently, Shestov was suffering on Dostoevsky's behalf (Шестову было обидно за Достоевского), he felt resentful, his heart bled because of this discrepancy, virtually a disharmony, on the part of his main teacher, and especially in view of Shestov's genuine love for him. In a way this points to what can be labelled as political or social moralism of Shestov. Below we shall discuss the absence in him of 'private' or 'personal' moralism, of the kind that was probably inherent in Strakhov, as Jackson argues.

Part of the above disharmony was also concealed in the implication of the utter powerlessness of literature to influence contemporary reality – another encoded message to be found at the heart of Shestov's satire. This theme of the role of literature in the political life of a state, or a play-off between literary and socio-political forces, goes back to the famous 'poet and tsar' line in the creativity of virtually all major artists. Moreover during the Silver Age the relationship between an individual and society, which opens up in particular to the relationship between an artist and the state, was at the forefront. '...власть, как известно', Shestov wrote in this connection,

никогда серьезно не рассчитывает на поддержку литературы. Она, между прочим, требует, чтоб и музы приносили ей дань, благородно формулируя свои требования словами: благословен союз меча и лиры. Бывало, что музы и не отказывали ей — иногда искренне, иногда потому, что, как писал Гейне, в России железные кандалы особенно неприятно носить ввиду больших морозов. Но, во всяком случае, музам предоставлялось только воспевать меч, а отнюдь не направлять его [...] и вот Достоевский, при всей независимости своей натуры, все же оказался в роли певца русского правительства.²⁰⁸

Joseph Brodsky said in his Nobel lecture: 'The philosophy of the state, its ethics – not to mention its aesthetics – are always "yesterday". Language and literature are always "today", and often – particularly in the case where a political system is orthodox – they may even constitute "tomorrow"'.²⁰⁹ Thus Shestov's association of Dostoevsky with the totalitarian state makes the latter belong to 'yesterday', but as far as Dostoevsky-the novelist is

²⁰⁸ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, pp. 217-218.

²⁰⁹ Joseph Brodsky, 'Uncommon Visage. The Nobel Lecture' (transl. Barry Rubin) in *On Grief and Reason*, p. 48.

concerned, he is 'today' and to a large extent 'tomorrow'. It is this duality, which was different from the schism between the morality of the author as a man and his achievements as an artist that was for Shestov apparently hard to bear. While he could easily enough reconcile himself to the segregated nature of the personal and artistic categories of a writer, he must have felt that political blindness or unscrupulousness (or possibly even worse: insincerity for the sake of personal dividends), which in the end had its cumulative effect in the devastating destinies of nations, was strange and hardly forgivable.

On the other hand, Shestov denied, at any rate in writing, any direct connection between literature and politics in terms of influence of the former on the latter, and thus at least partly rehabilitated Dostoevsky at least in his own (Shestov's, that is) eyes. Indeed, in the end Shestov gives the final say to Dostoevsky the novelist, stating that 'Все, что было у него рассказать, Достоевский рассказал нам в своих романах, которые и теперь, через двадцать пять лет после его смерти, притягивают к себе всех тех, кому нужно выпытывать от жизни ее тайны. А чин пророка, за которым он так гнался, полагая, что имел на него право, был ему совсем не к лицу'.²¹⁰ Thus he acknowledged the decisive primacy of Dostoevsky's role as a writer rather than a 'politician'.

Still, the situation reflected in *The Gift of Prophecy* remains quite reminiscent of that described by Shestov himself in his *Philosophy of Tragedy* with respect to the humanist critic Mikhailovsky (who must have to a large extent informed Shestov's literary taste). There Shestov contemplated the critic's words on the painful schism between Proudhon's high moral ideals and his, as it turned out to be, rather dishonest behaviour in daily life. By putting together these somewhat sad facts of Proudhon's existence Mikhailovsky, by his own words, had to tear something precious out of his heart.²¹¹ 'This is not just a phrase', the critic then added, which caused Shestov to express his great suspicion with respect to the authenticity of Mikhailovsky's sadness. The discovered discrepancy did not sadden Mikhailovsky, Shestov asserts, and therefore he, ashamed of his own calm, hurried to assure us all that it did sadden him. In fact, Shestov claims, the critic was indifferent to

²¹⁰ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 224.

²¹¹ See Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 370.

Proudhon, because no poor behaviour of Proudhon the man could undermine in Mikhailovsky's heart the great idea that Proudhon the thinker was promoting. Proudhon himself does not matter in the view of the great and unshakable idea that lives in Mikhailovsky's heart, Shestov asserts.

However, when writing *The Gift of Prophecy*, distraught and overthrown by the events of 1905, Shestov suddenly finds himself in the same emotional situation, the authenticity of which he denied in the case of Mikhailovsky. It is thus a very rare case of Shestov openly crying for that lost illusion. Normally his cry is deeply suppressed, and, as Zenkovsky says, we only hear a distant echo of his inner crucifixion. In other words, in this strange article Shestov revealed his day-time face, without a tragic mask which became his second skin. His convictions openly faced his instincts, that were felt acutely in the face of real human agony. Thus, Shestov's attacks on Dostoevsky (and in part on Tolstoy) made in *The Gift of Prophecy* and, even if to a much lesser extent, in his next work on Dostoevsky, show unequivocally Shestov's deep involvement in the political and social life of his country and the world, even if the foundations of his philosophy were purely abstract and metaphysical. Thus to speak of Shestov's total lack of concern for political or social issues as does, for instance, Zakydalsky, is not quite right. It can only be done, if at all, in terms of Shestov's philosophical constructions as derived from his writings, and in a sense detached from them, because these writings themselves, when read attentively, constantly show Shestov's deep personal involvement into the historical process. However, this layer of Shestov's thought is normally concealed quite profoundly under the surface.

Later on, of course, after the first Russian revolution, the agony and human suffering 'outside' only intensified, but Shestov did not again allow himself to succumb to his day-time vision so openly and self-indulgently as in *The Gift of Prophecy*, he persevered instead on his chosen path of the philosophy of tragedy, of underground, which led him eventually to the route of biblical existentialism, to the construction of faith. However, *The Gift of Prophecy* was written in the aftermath of his *Aptheosis of Groundlessness*, where he consciously tried to destroy all foundations of the accepted systems and beliefs. A 'healing'

process of constructing on the open ground cleared by his previous nihilism was yet to begin.

In the same light Shestov's somewhat non-standard interpretation of the term 'prophet' given in this article, can be viewed. Indeed, he wrote that '...там именно, где возможно предсказание, чуда нет, ибо возможность предсказания, предугадывания предполагает строгую закономерность'.²¹² Thus, Shestov concludes, a prophet is not someone who is more spiritually gifted, but someone who has subdued himself to the power and laws of necessity, and condemned himself to a mechanical labour of calculations. He gives the example of Bismarck whose predictions came true, as opposed to those of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. So, Shestov finishes his article by saying that unlike Bismarcks – the prophets – Dostoevskys are condemned to an eternal state of 'the day before' (or 'on the eve'), i.e. that of being on the verge of the truth, but never reaching it. Thus, we are led again to the same conclusion that this short article is in many ways significant in revealing, against the background of the first Russian revolution, Shestov's inner bitterness and doubts, which are normally concealed, – in particular his pessimistic view of the final outcome of his own searchings due to the elusive and relative nature of truth (it is significant that in the preceding *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* Shestov already acknowledged the multiplicity of truths). But most of all, as we pointed out at the beginning of our analysis, this work exposes the schism, as seen by Shestov, between Dostoevsky's pen and his soul, the schism that Shestov admitted here in a direct and conscious fashion, but also portrayed in an unusually negative light.

Shestov's tense attention to and steadfast focus on this schism in the case of Dostoevsky were especially evident. Indeed, in the complexity of the character he had very rich material to go by, and, interestingly, as we noted above, some inner contradictions of Dostoevsky were met by Shestov almost with enthusiasm, while others were severely criticised. We have just analysed the latter case (of social or political moralism on Shestov's part) with all its objective and subjective peculiarities, where the conflict was between Dostoevsky's socio-political views and his artistic gift. However, another dimension of Dostoevsky's soul

²¹² Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 216.

– the purely moral one – in its alleged inferiority to the achievements of his pen seems to have fascinated Shestov and to have been fully accepted by him. In our view, this goes back to Pushkin's lines embraced and 'edited' by Shestov about a human weakness being almost a necessary attribute of a great artistic gift. While according to Pushkin this weakness was in the pettiness, the insignificance of a poet when outside his poetic duty, for Shestov this became transformed into vice and almost depravity. Also, this vision of the invariable inner conflict inherent in a creative soul agreed, as time went by, with Shestov's understanding of the tormented personality of any thinker who, as Pascal described it, 'screams, while searching'. Thus Shestov's vision of Dostoevsky which was informed by this schism went from the figure torn between "правдой" трагедии и "ложью" обиденности,²¹³ using Erofeev's words, to the great writer endowed by the heavens with second sight and at the same time the deeply depraved man described by Strakhov in his letter to Tolstoy. The latter vision we find reflected in Shestov's mature work. Namely, in his article on Tolstoy ('На страшном суде. Последние произведения Толстого' ['At the Last Judgement. The latest works by Tolstoy']) which we discussed in the previous chapter and which was followed just a year later by Shestov's major work on Dostoevsky *per se*, written already in emigration, in 1921, and entitled 'Преодоление самоочевидностей. К столетию со дня рождения Ф. М. Достоевского' ['Overcoming the Self-evident. For the one hundredth anniversary of F. M. Dostoevsky's birth'].

6.I.9. Emigration: A shift of attitude. Shestov's article on Dostoevsky for *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Strakhov's letter as a litmus paper for personal beliefs.

This article was Shestov's pass to the world of the French intellectual elite. At the time he had only just settled in Paris, and was virtually unknown to the French writers. Jacques Rivière, who was then the editor-in-chief of the influential *Nouvelle Revue Française*, was preparing an issue dedicated to Dostoevsky's anniversary and asked Boris de Schloezer for advice as to a possible Russian contributor. Schloezer pointed to Shestov thus giving the latter an excellent opportunity to make his name known in his new country of residence. Shestov accepted the offer and produced the article during the four months of 1921 – from June to September. It was published in Russian in *Современные записки* (Nos 8-10, 1921-

²¹³ Erofeev, p. 169.

1922), and appeared (although in a much contracted form), with Schloezer's preface and in his as ever immaculate translation, on 1 February 1922 in *Nouvelle Review Française*. In the same issue there were articles on Dostoevsky by Jacques Rivière and André Gide who were of course well established figures on the French literary scene.

This publication was met with great enthusiasm not only by Gide himself, who sent Shestov an invitation to his own course of lectures on Dostoevsky to be given to a restricted circle, but by various other critics. Sympathetic reviews followed in various newspapers, especially the one by Louis Raymond Lefèvre, 'L'individualisme de Dostoevsky' which appeared in *Le Radical* on 27 February 1922, where the critic called Shestov's article a 'chef d'oeuvre'. Shestov himself wrote about this success in a private letter: 'Статья о Дост. Здесь в Париже во франц. литературных кругах имела очень большой успех. Уже без обиняков признают меня таким же remarquable, как и А. Gide'а (а Gide здесь крупная величина). Сам Gide дал мне статью *Clarté* (это журнал Барбюса), где меня сравнивают с ним'.²¹⁴ Also, importantly, this publication initiated some offers to Shestov from French publishing houses which at the time of him trying to settle in Paris as a new émigré and to provide for his family was very significant.

Although in 1922 it was too early to speak of canonical criticism on Dostoevsky, the principal divides and clashes of opinions in Dostoevsky studies had been to a large extent already formed, both in Russia and in the West. There were distinct divides in perceiving the novelist as a mystical prophet of a new religion on the one hand or, on the other, a reactionary pillar of the Russian monarchy warning against the danger of revolutionary socialism. A particular trend concentrated on his unique degree of psychological penetration and insight, yet with an all-pervasive and almost depraved focus on suffering. A majority of Western critics classified him with distaste as too Russian, singling out the idiosyncratically chaotic and irrationalist nature of his literary world. Still, the mainstream of Dostoevsky studies was nevertheless developing in a humanistic direction, emphasising

²¹⁴ From Shestov's letter of 22 March 1922 to his sister Fania Lovtskii and her husband German. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 233. The article in question is 'Parijanine. Les abîmes de la pensée russe', *Clarté*, 15 March 1922, No 9.

his humanistic and futuristic tendencies and aspirations. Certainly Gide's views on the Russian novelist were of a distinctly humanistic nature. In this respect Shestov provided a clear contrast in perspective, and the title of the aforementioned laudatory review (*Dostoevsky's individualism*) exemplifies it. In the view of these rather diverging perceptions of Dostoevsky it seems productive to consider them in contrast to each other, because it largely reflects (and in a way it gave rise to) two opposing trends in Dostoevsky studies in the West. Therefore below we shall compare and contrast Gide's and Shestov's interpretation of Dostoevsky.

In his article on Tolstoy Shestov quotes Strakhov's unflattering letter on Dostoevsky sent to Tolstoy which was secret at the time, but came into the public domain in 1913. This quotation together with Shestov's commentary serves to illustrate our point made above concerning his rapt attention to the schism between Dostoevsky's writings and his inner world. As Milosz wrote, Shestov 'admired Dostoevsky's philosophical genius without reservation—and accepted as true the disparaging rumors about his personal life, rumors spread mostly by Strakhov'.²¹⁵ In fact, we would go even further and say that Shestov embraced and celebrated this alleged discrepancy. To understand this it is helpful to look at the opposite (and much more common) perception of this particular theme, as found for instance in Robert Louis Jackson. The latter, without dismissing Strakhov's letter as worthless, nevertheless clearly does not want to believe his allegations and challenges them. He acknowledges Dostoevsky's undoubtedly 'difficult, irascible and tortured'²¹⁶ character. Moreover, he provides evidence that Dostoevsky himself was aware and ashamed of it. Yet, this evidence is given only to strengthen the case in defence of Dostoevsky. Indeed, by acknowledging small vices Jackson as it were wins the right to dismiss the central and horrible accusations (like the rape of a child). 'Certainly Strakhov's letter as a whole is marked by deep malice and a desire to strike a wounding blow at Dostoevsky. A personal motive, revenge, cannot be excluded in explaining the particularly vicious character of Strakhov's comments and his peculiarly smug moral posture', Jackson

²¹⁵ Milosz, p. 105.

²¹⁶ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 108.

writes and explains that Strakhov, in all probability, had found in Dostoevsky's archives 'the novelist's devastating portrait of Strakhov as a man and type'.²¹⁷

Shestov, on the other hand, exclaims: 'Не знаю, много ли найдется в литературе документов, по своей ценности равных приведенному письму'.²¹⁸ He singles out Strakhov's concluding phrase where he provides a justification for his decision to conceal the 'horrible truth' about Dostoevsky from the public and to produce a clean and exemplary biography of the writer: 'но пусть эта правда погибнет; будем щеголять одной лицевой стороной жизни, как мы это делаем везде и во всем...'.²¹⁹ Shestov picks up these words without a trace of doubt in their validity and elaborates on their extreme significance.

Не уверен даже, понимал ли Страхов смысл и значение того, в чем он признавался Толстому. В новое время многие утверждали, что ложь ценнее истины. Об этом говорил О. Уайльд, Ницше, даже Пушкин воскликнул: "тьмы низких истин нам дороже нас возвышающий обман". Но все они обращались к читателю, поучали. А Страхов просто и искренне кается, и это придает его словам особую силу и значительность.²²⁰

Jackson emphasises the caution of Tolstoy's response to Strakhov's letter, and the writer's attempt to transfer the focus from Dostoevsky the man to Dostoevsky the novelist. Interestingly, Shestov also transfers the focus here, but in his own way: from the image of Dostoevsky as such to the philosophical and literary question of truth and lies, of the corrupt conventions of utilitarian ethics and morality: 'Вероятно, письмо произвело огромное впечатление на Толстого, который как раз в это время особенно мучительно чувствовал бремя условной лжи и весь был охвачен жаждой очищающей исповеди',²²¹ Shestov writes.

²¹⁷ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 107.

²¹⁸ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 117.

²¹⁹ From Strakhov's letter to Lev Tolstoy of 28 November 1883 (see *Переписка Л. Н. Толстого с Н. Н. Страховым, 1870 – 1894*, vol. 2 of *Толстовский музей*, ed. В. Л. Modzalevskii (St. Petersburg, 1914), p. 308. Cited in Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 117.

²²⁰ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 117.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

Thus Shestov accepts Strakhov's revelations about Dostoevsky as indisputable truth and welcomes them as an illustration of the accepted literary and existential hypocrisy, while Jackson is preoccupied by disavowing them. Jackson sees in Strakhov's sentiments expressed in the letter to Tolstoy a manifestation of the former's strict moralism. It is because of this that 'any disjunction between man and his muse is intolerable and above all reprehensible and unforgivable'²²² for Strakhov, Jackson writes. Jackson thus implies that a moralistic stance does not want to acknowledge or to allow any schism between pen and soul. The moral and aesthetic unity of Dostoevsky the man and his muse proclaimed by Strakhov in his memoir receives in his letter to Tolstoy an explanation of being simply a psychological device deployed by Dostoevsky in his writings to provide himself with a self-justification, Jackson explains. In this respect the case of Mikhailovsky described above demonstrates essentially the same phenomenon – of the critic's resistance to accept the discrepancy between the man and his writings in the case of Proudhon. As we saw then, Mikhailovsky's moralism is condemned by Shestov, rather expectedly, even though he himself later gives way to his own suppressed moralism, his, as it were, moralistic desire, by wanting to unite 'the man with his muse' in the case of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in *The Gift of Prophecy*.

Jackson observes that Strakhov carries his moralistic perspective into the realm of aesthetics. This agrees with and may largely be responsible for Strakhov's identification of Dostoevsky with the novelist's 'worst' characters. For Jackson such identification reflects a 'simplistic view of the creative process, of the relation of an author to his creation'.²²³ Equally, such an identification in Shestov's case (which is consistent with his focus on the philosophical rather than the aesthetic) may also be due to his 'undestroyed' moralism and is an indirect manifestation of it, or more precisely of the play-off between this moralism and Shestov's resistance to it. Furthermore, it may reflect Shestov's desire to kill this very moralism by celebrating the schism between the man and his muse, and thus reading the writer off his negative heroes. This would also explain the difference between Strakhov and Shestov in that for the former the identification of Dostoevsky with his characters carries a

²²² Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 109.

²²³ *Ibid*, p. 108.

negative sign and serves to condemn the writer, while for the latter it has an opposite colouring by being a device to join Dostoevsky to Shestov's own fight against common morality and autonomous ethics. But in both cases it serves to demonstrate the hidden and 'demonic' depths of Dostoevsky's soul.

It must be due to Strakhov's attempt to identify Dostoevsky with his negative characters that his testimony serves for Shestov not only as a welcome revelation of the all-pervasive hypocrisy of literary and social conventions, but also as a confirmation that Shestov is right in his approach, as an approval of his own technique and an acknowledgment of the validity of his own assumptions. In fact, Shestov's unreserved trust in Strakhov's accusations brings to mind the incident, mentioned earlier, of the imprecision of Shestov's quote, pointed out by Blagova and Emelianov. The point there concerned Dostoevsky's phrase from his diary, from the article 'Одна из современных фальшей', of 1873: 'Мне очень трудно было бы рассказать историю перерождения своих убеждений, да это может быть и не так любопытно...'. Shestov truncated it in the middle, having omitted the end of the phrase: 'да и не идет как-то к фельетонной статье', thus creating a somewhat misleading impression of Dostoevsky's actual words, as Blagova and Emelianov proceed to explain. A similar phenomenon can be observed here, in Shestov's treatment of Strakhov's letter. Shestov interprets this case to his own ends. Analogously, Jackson chooses to believe essentially what he wants to believe, even though, unlike Shestov, he does bother to substantiate his claim, but his grounds are shaky *par excellence*. Indeed, in cases like these one can go on speculation alone, for, although it can be argued in a more or less persuasive way, it can never have a hard and fast proof and is ultimately a question of one's personal faith – whether Dostoevsky was capable of raping a child, and to what extent in general his vices spread. Any thoughts on the subject constitute at best a well-informed guess, but the issue remains open-ended. Thus both Jackson and Shestov simply see what they want to see, and draw on sources that facilitate their belief.

Indeed, at the time of Shestov, not to mention Jackson's times, there was enough evidence for speculation in both directions, and Shestov was familiar with all sorts of sources about Dostoevsky – definitely with Dostoevsky's correspondence and various biographical

material written about him. Thus, if he wanted to, he could have chosen to take 'Jackson's side' against Strakhov, but he clearly did not. Equally, we note that Jackson chooses to trust a Soviet scholar, V. N. Zakharov,²²⁴ who defends Dostoevsky against the sinister rumours. His research was published in 1978 and was therefore incapable for ideological reasons of promoting any other point of view except the one that rehabilitates the writer's humanistic image appropriated by the late Soviet power, which inscribed Dostoevsky (alongside other classical Russian writers) into the canon of socialist realism. Similarly, Jackson quotes the indignant words of Anna Snitkina, Dostoevsky's wife, concerning the libel contained in Strakhov's letter. Of course, she may well be right in her outrage, but why is she to be trusted more than Strakhov? Is it because she has more integrity and nobility of spirit as a person? But this depends entirely on the point of view. For example, Akhmatova's judgement on Snitkina is extremely negative: '...из этих писем ясно, что Анна Григорьевна была страшна'²²⁵ she says to Chukovskaia on having read Dostoevsky's correspondence. 'Я всегда ненавидела жен великих людей и думала: она лучше. Нет, даже Софья Андреевна лучше. Анна Григорьевна жадна и скупа. Больного человека, с астмой, с падучей, заставляла работать дни и ночи, чтобы "оставить что-нибудь детям". Такая подлость! Он пишет ей: "Пообедал за рубль". Зарабатывал десятки тысяч и не мог пообедать за два рубля!',²²⁶ Akhmatova elaborated.

On the other hand, Strakhov is held in very high regard not only by Rozanov, whose own moral outlook may be regarded as ambivalent, but also by Vasilii Zenkovsky. 'Как и Толстой, Страхов без конца дорожил свободой мысли, по-видимому, разделял с Толстым его свободное отношение к Церкви, но вместе с тем глубоко носил в сердце своем чувство Бога',²²⁷ Zenkovsky wrote about Strakhov. He then proceeds to defend Strakhov from various misapprehensions and misunderstandings that surrounded his work, and assigns them to a certain lack of such characteristics as 'цельность' and 'завершенность' in Strakhov's writings. Notably, Zenkovsky also insists on Strakhov's 'romanticism' which maintains human primacy over dubious scientific achievements, and

²²⁴ see Note 9 in Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 312.

²²⁵ Chukovskaia, II, p. 267.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Zenkovskii, I, p. 471.

which unites him with Dostoevsky in this respect, as Zenkovsky does not fail to notice. Rozanov in his turn asserts that much in Strakhov's work remained unspoken, unexpressed, but that the nucleus of his ponderings lay in the religious problem.²²⁸ Importantly, statements on Strakhov by both Zenkovsky and Rozanov are steeped in deep respect (and, in Rozanov's case, even in admiration). Their words, if Jackson chose to trust them, show Strakhov in a light that is quite incompatible with the expression of any slander (certainly incompatible with the accusation that Jackson issues against Strakhov – of being 'a kind of a moral Tartuffe').²²⁹

Therefore if Jackson argues that Strakhov's letter casts an aspersion on Dostoevsky, it is because he wants this to be the case. Shestov does the same, only from the opposite point of view and without bothering with evidence to support his claim. He wants to believe Strakhov, not only because it endorses his own vision of Dostoevsky through the latter's heroes, and (even more importantly) reveals the hypocrisy of any official literary mission and its underlying philosophical foundations, but also because for Shestov, as we observed above, it fits in with and endorses his philosophical paradigm, his vision of the great thinkers.

Thus, to be a great writer you almost have to be a bad, debauched man, – this seems to be the picture that Shestov wanted to be true. The explanation for this strange desire may lie in the fact that Shestov, following Dostoevsky, hated equilibrium, hated any completion, and strove instead for conflict and contradiction. It is with deep admiration that he wrote about Dostoevsky's propensity to go against the 'obvious' and the commonly accepted, and believed that it is only such a rebellion that may lead us to the truth:

Достоевский знал, что вы можете так дразнить его и будете дразнить, будете смеяться и не захотите его даже сумасшедшим признать – чина пожалееете. И все-таки продолжал рассказ, нагромождая бессмыслицу на бессмыслицу, противоречие на противоречие, которые бы стоили того, чтоб их целиком привести, если бы позволяло место. Кто хочет подойти ближе

²²⁸ See V. Rozanov, 'О борьбе с Западом в связи с литературной деятельностью одного из славянофилов', *Вопросы философии и психологии*, 1890, No 4, pp. 27-61 (p. 31). Cited in Zenkovskii, I, pp. 470-471.

²²⁹ Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, p. 108.

к Достоевскому, тот должен производить особого рода *exercitia spiritualia*: проводить часы, дни, годы в атмосфере взаимно друг друга исключающих самоочевидностей – другого способа нет. Таким, только таким образом можно “увидеть”, что время имеет не одно, а два и более измерений, что “законы” не существуют от вечности, а “даны”, и даны только затем, чтобы проявился “грех”, что спасают не дела, а вера, что смерть Сократа может разбудить окаменелое дважды два четыре, что Бог всегда требует невозможного, что гадкий утенок может превратиться в красавца лебедя, что здесь все начинается и ничего не кончается, что каприз имеет право на гарантии, что фантастическое реальнее естественного, что жизнь есть смерть, а смерть есть жизнь и все прочие “истины”, которые глядят на нас своими странными и страшными глазами со страниц сочинений Достоевского...²³⁰

In the same vein, like Dostoevsky according even to Strakhov, Shestov wanted to prove that vice and virtue go hand in hand, and all is entangled in a human soul, good is inseparable from evil and thus reinforces the mystery of the soul. For Shestov the conflict inherent in any great thinker, and especially in Dostoevsky, serves as a guarantee of their second sight which forces them to escape the self-evident and enter into a struggle for the new reality and true freedom.

We conclude this comparison with a metaphor of sorts. Indeed, to us the metaphysical nucleus of the situation with Jackson's and Shestov's opposite reactions to Strakhov's letter is captured in Jackson's description of two different perceptions of capital punishment (and specifically of public execution) – by Turgenev and by Dostoevsky.²³¹ Jackson, when analysing Turgenev's and Dostoevsky's response to it, stresses that the former turns away from the sight of execution with disgust and shame, while the latter on the contrary looks right at it. Neither approves of it in any way, but for Turgenev the whole thing, including his own involvement as a witness, is unbearable and unacceptable, while for Dostoevsky it contains something vital, something central for human nature and its complexity. In exactly the same way, it appears, for Jackson (and those whose treatment of Strakhov's letter is similar to his) the thought of these accusations being the truth, is unacceptable, while for Shestov it is, on the contrary, necessary, central and vital.

²³⁰ Shestov, *На весах Нова*, pp. 89-90.

²³¹ See Jackson, *Dialogues with Dostoevsky*, Chapter 1, pp. 29-55.

6.I.10. Underground as a metaphysical concept. The evolution of Shestov's views on Dostoevsky.

In his article on Dostoevsky of 1921 Shestov, although he changed his perspective somewhat and no longer accuses Dostoevsky of insincerity, still maintains that a significant transformation of convictions took place. He uses, as we mentioned above, the image of Dostoevsky being endowed with second sight, and the focus shifts to the struggle between the two sights – the ordinary and extraordinary. It is this struggle which now stands at the centre of Shestov's reflections and replaces the conflict between Dostoevsky's discovered truth on the one hand and the lies intended for the public on the other. There are various ways in which Shestov's perception as reflected in this article differs from that of his *Philosophy of Tragedy* written almost twenty years earlier.

An important part in Shestov's analysis of Dostoevsky in 1921 is played by his chief idea in interpreting *Notes from Underground*, that the 'underground' is a metaphysical concept, and is inherent in any active consciousness. Already in *Philosophy of Tragedy* the concept of the underground pertains to psychology, signifies an inner depth, but in 1921 it becomes conceptually formed. “Подполье” – это вовсе не та мизерная конура, куда Достоевский поместил своего героя, и не его одиночество, полнее которого не бывает ни под землей, ни на дне морском, выражаясь языком Толстого’,²³² Shestov affirms. On the contrary for him the underground is Plato's famous cave which distorts our vision of the universe, but where we all are condemned to live and to see in it the only real and the only possible world, that is the world justified by reason. Significantly, Shestov emphasises that the underground for Dostoevsky is not solitude in the sense of isolation and suffering. He stresses that on the contrary Dostoevsky escapes into solitude in order to contemplate, to seek answers, to seek salvation: ‘Наоборот, – это нужно себе всегда повторять – Достоевский ушел в одиночество, чтоб спастись, по крайней мере попытаться спастись, от того подполья (по-платоновски – пещеры), в котором обречены жить “все”’.²³³

²³² Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 39.

²³³ Ibid.

Shestov's article of 1921 contains alongside the powerful image of the Angel of Death covered in eyes who brought Dostoevsky his 'second sight', a no less powerful image of an 'edge of the blue sky behind the fence of a penal colony' ['Край неба, видный даже из-за высокой острожной ограды', 'краешек голубого неба'].²³⁴ While serving his punishment, Dostoevsky lived by hope, Shestov asserts, and was sustained by this small piece of sky which soon enough promised to open up to the full freedom of life outside the colony that was awaiting Dostoevsky. The true and horrible discovery came to the writer, according to Shestov, when he realised, quite a while after his release, that the long-craved freedom did not bring any inner spiritual liberation, that he was still a prisoner, an eternal prisoner of the underground of his own soul, of the 'omnitude' ('всемство') with its oppression in the form of self-evident truths.

Достоевский вдруг "увидел", что небо и каторжные стены, идеалы и кандалы вовсе не противоположное, как хотелось ему, как думалось ему прежде, когда он хотел и думал, как все нормальные люди. Не противоположное, а одинаковое. Нет неба, нигде нет неба, есть только низкий, давящий "горизонт", нет идеалов, возносящих горе, есть только цепи, хотя и невидимые, но связывающие еще более прочно, чем тюремные кандалы. И никакими подвигами, никакими "добрыми делами" не дано человеку спастись из места своего "бессрочного заключения". Обеты "исправиться", которые он давал в каторге, стали казаться ему кощунственными,²³⁵ Shestov writes.

This vision that Shestov assigns to Dostoevsky is strangely reminiscent of Sergei Dovlatov's perception of life conveyed in his *Zona [Prison Camp]* collection. Indeed, when reflecting upon the nature of imprisonment Dovlatov writes, 'По Солженицыну лагерь – это ад. Я же думаю, что ад – это мы сами'.²³⁶ Dovlatov talks further of the features of 'подозрительного сходства между охранниками и заключенными'.²³⁷ Put more broadly, he says, there is a similarity between a prison camp and the free world. 'По обе стороны запретки расстился единый и бездушный мир',²³⁸ Dovlatov writes. Thus Shestov's assertion that commonly perceived opposites are in fact just the same things coincides with Dovlatov's thoughts on human nature and the human predicament. The

²³⁴ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, pp. 30, 32, etc.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 34.

²³⁶ Dovlatov, I, p. 28.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 62.

²³⁸ Dovlatov, I, p. 63.

ideals of the free world are equal to prison chains, and there is no escape because the world is uniformly indifferent, and hell is contained within ourselves – such is the message that can be found in both Dovlatov and Shestov (who reads them off Dostoevsky). Dovlatov claims that in his *Zona* only one ‘banal’ idea is declared – that the world is absurd.²³⁹ Shestov, on the other hand, begins his article by quoting Euripides' rhetorical question: who knows, maybe life is death, and death is life.²⁴⁰ In other words, Shestov too is trying to point to the absurdity of our common existence, to raise the question of the universal slumber that mankind has fallen prey to, in his firmest opinion. Of course, such a wake-up call is the fundamental task of literature, especially Russian literature, always existentially oriented, but also of art in general. Nevertheless, paradoxically, Shestov's reading of Dostoevsky reveals the proximity of the latter's world to Dovlatov's vision, while Dovlatov himself perceived Dostoevsky's perspective on prison as adhering to a humanistic point of view, where a prisoner is invariably regarded as a victim, and a prison guard as an oppressor.

Furthermore, as Valevicius writes, Shestov saw in the *Notes from Underground* Dostoevsky's confession that ‘there is no progress in the world. Neither is there anything that one can do any more to save the world’.²⁴¹ In his turn Dovlatov writes as a result of his prison camp observations, ‘Со времен Аристотеля человеческий мозг не изменился. Тем более не изменилось человеческое сознание. А значит, нет прогресса. Есть – движение, в основе которого лежит неустойчивость’.²⁴² Valevicius then concludes following Shestov that ‘all we can do is to look out for ourselves’²⁴³ and quotes the famous words of the Underground Man preferring his cup of tea to universal happiness. However, Shestov's message is not that of egoism, it is that of the oppressive power of ‘всемство’, of the ready and prescribed solutions by which mankind lives, having turned them into dead dogmas. He too, like Dovlatov, starts counting from Aristotle, but perceives the latter as

²³⁹ Dovlatov, I, p. 28.

²⁴⁰ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 26.

²⁴¹ Valevicius, p. 37.

²⁴² Dovlatov, I, p. 58.

²⁴³ Valevicius, p. 37.

one of the foundation pillars of speculative philosophy which Shestov holds responsible for validating man's tragic destiny.

Shestov's observation over the fate of mankind is essentially the same as Dovlatov's who said that 'конфликт мечты с действительностью не утихает тысячелетиями'.²⁴⁴ For both this conflict takes place first and foremost in our consciousness. 'Вместо желаемой гармонии на земле царят хаос и беспорядок. Более того, нечто подобное мы обнаружили в собственной душе. Мы жаждем совершенства, а вокруг торжествует пошлость',²⁴⁵ Dovlatov states. For Shestov this is the vision of Dostoevsky through his *Underground Man*, which manifests the novelist's desire to break away from the triviality of the mundane, from the suffocating necessity and to make a daring leap into the abyss of new truths. However, Dovlatov and Shestov then diverge in their philosophical conclusions. While for Dovlatov our predicament points to the arbitrary nature of evil²⁴⁶ and generally of moral categories (a view to which we shall return later on), Shestov is convinced that the core of our fundamental conflict lies in the poison of reason, of rationalist thought which hypnotised humanity and tied it down with the chains of the self-evident. On the other hand, Shestov too acknowledges the relativism of morality and condemns autonomous ethics, but only insofar as they are products of reason created to facilitate its needs.

It is the above chains of the self-evident that characterise the underground for Shestov. Blagova and Emelianov, while observing that Shestov identifies the underground with 'всемство',²⁴⁷ which in turn they explain as conformism, a lack of independent outlook,²⁴⁸ inscribe the concept of the underground with a different meaning. In their understanding, it is 'состояние одиночества человека, неспособность преодолеть индивидуализм, свое отчуждение от других, неспособность к диалогу'.²⁴⁹ Their claim is that Shestov neglects

²⁴⁴ Dovlatov, I, p. 56.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ See Ibid, p. 87.

²⁴⁷ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 77.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 65.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 74.

the aspect of the Underground Man's inferiority complex and hence misinterprets the underground as the shackles of eternal truths and lofty ideals,²⁵⁰ as the world justified by reason.²⁵¹ They insist that, had Shestov recognised Dostoevsky's concept of 'living life' (живая жизнь) and the importance of it for the writer, he would not be able to interpret the underground in the above light. "Подполье" – не "всемство", не "конформизм" и не "власть идей",²⁵² they write decisively. 'По Достоевскому, "подполье" – это экзистенциальная ситуация одиночества, отчуждения, самоизоляции и эгоцентризма',²⁵³ Blagova and Emelianov conclude, and stress that for Dostoevsky the 'underground' was not a desirable state of mind for a human being.

Shestov's refusal to recognise and accept the above perspective is, in our view, by no means accidental. It is simply a manifestation of his general outlook and is inseparable from his principal philosophical paradigm of individualism rooted in the tragic human predicament of existential solitude. Numerous scholarly works on Shestov contain this implicit reproach, incriminating him for a lack of collective spirit, as if not realising that this was a direct consequence of Shestov's central stance. Thus Sidney Monas writes that Shestov lacks 'some articulate notion of awareness of the importance in *Russian* literature at least of spiritual community among men'.²⁵⁴ Monas observes, that 'if the traditional social community fails in Russian literature, the quest for spiritual community, for the single body of mankind, is one of its most powerfully expressed themes'.²⁵⁵ Such sentiments, of course, are not to be restricted to Russian culture alone. Thus the words of John Donne, used by Hemingway as an epigraph to his novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, express this striving for human unity and mutual responsibility. Similarly, Anton Chekhov constantly revisits this motif by stressing famously that behind the door of every happy individual there should stand a man with a little hammer to remind him by knocking of the existence of all the miserable souls. Also, for that matter, Dostoevsky can be viewed in the

²⁵⁰ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 74.

²⁵¹ Ibid, p. 79.

²⁵² Ibid, p. 77.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Monas, p. xxii.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. xxiii

same light. For instance, as Rene Wellek points out, Dostoevsky's 'tremendous stress on the substantial unity of mankind is a version of Franciscan Christianity that conceives of man and nature – and even animals and birds – as ultimately united in love and universal forgiveness'.²⁵⁶

However, Shestov with his focus on the strictly individual nature of suffering represents a trend of thought which was to evolve rapidly in the twentieth century and which is diametrically opposed to the above fundamental approach. The origins of this trend in a very broad sense are attributed to Nietzsche, and, as Erofeev suggests, for Shestov too 'идея решительного разрыва человека с "другими", погружения его в одиночество как в единственно подлинную среду для исследования его сущности и поисков путей к "спасению"'²⁵⁷ was a fatal step prompted by Nietzsche. The echo of Shestov's 'Nietzschean' premonitions can be heard throughout the literature of the twentieth century. The theme of ultimate existential solitude as the inescapable human predicament has become a commonplace in our age. During Shestov's lifetime, however, it was far from being so widespread, and the fact that it lies at the core of Shestov's philosophical ponderings can be viewed as a mark of his originality.

Consequently, the idea of individualism in Shestov's mind constantly pertains to Dostoevsky's world outlook. Although in 1921 he no longer explicitly links Dostoevsky with Nietzsche, ideologically they still remain united in Shestov's interpretation, to the extent of largely influencing Western perceptions of the Russian novelist. Also, viewing Dostoevsky as a fighter against positivism, rationalism and idealism remains at the core of Shestov's interpretation. However, a close reading of *Overcoming the Self-evident* reveals a variety of changes in Shestov's treatment of the writer. To see the evolution in Shestov's attitudes to Dostoevsky it is instructive to compare his analysis of the same episodes which he used both in *Overcoming the Self-Evident* and twenty years earlier in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*. Of course, such recycling of the same themes points to their significance in Shestov's eyes. Thus, in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* Shestov describes the scene of Ippolit

²⁵⁶ Rene Wellek, 'Introduction' to *Dostoevsky. A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 7.

²⁵⁷ Erofeev, p. 187.

asking Myshkin a fundamental question: 'What in your opinion is the most virtuous way for me to die?'. To which Myshkin says in a quiet voice: 'Go past us and forgive us our happiness'. For Shestov this episode is an abomination, and clearly touches upon his most painful spots. In 1901 Shestov sees in it Dostoevsky's inability (especially in contrast to Tolstoy) to gloss over the 'accursed' questions of existence, to calm down the readers, but first and foremost Dostoevsky's own disquiet and anxiety. Shestov believes that Dostoevsky truly wants to find an answer to the horrifying questions, while Tolstoy is simply convinced that the answer does not exist and hence separates himself from reality by a fence of fiction. Dostoevsky, on the contrary, in his existential quest, challenges his own convictions: 'Кажется, будто Достоевскому, по старой привычке подпольного человека, вдруг неудержимо захотелось показать язык своей собственной мудрости',²⁵⁸ Shestov writes. He claims that Dostoevsky, by arranging this encounter between Myshkin and Ippolit simply wanted to mock his hero (the prince, that is).²⁵⁹ Also, this episode fits very well with the epigraph by Baudelaire chosen by Shestov to his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*: '...Aimes-tu les damnés? Dis moi, connais-tu l'irrémissible?' This points to Shestov's main preoccupation at the time – the question of salvation, of the meaning of life, of the fate of all those forsaken by God, in short, – the problematic of existential tragedy.

In 1921 Shestov again describes this encounter, but now his whole discourse is different, it has acquired new features that reflect Shestov's own inner development as well as his much perfected literary skill. The impression created is that Shestov is now speaking from the same point, but elevated to a significantly higher coil of the spiral. Indeed, this time he draws an explicit parallel between Ippolit's confession and the Book of Job which, Shestov claims, served as the model for the former. Shestov now reproduces fully the description of Holbein's painting of the dead Christ that Ippolit talks about. This description acquires a great philosophical significance in Dostoevsky's text that Shestov now eagerly focuses on and interprets in the Biblical context of Job's scales. 'В этих словах', Shestov writes,

²⁵⁸ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 360.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

вылилась самая глубокая, самая заветная и вместе с тем самая трепетная и тревожная мысль Достоевского. В который уже раз стоит он, забыв и себя, и все на свете, пред чашами страшных весов: на одной огромная, безмерно тяжелая природа с ее принципами и законами, глухая, слепая, немая; на другую он бросает свое невесомое, ничем не защищенное и не охраненное τὸ τιμιώτατον²⁶⁰ и с затаенным дыханием ждет: какая перетянет.²⁶¹

In this opposition between the general, impartial, soulless on the one hand and the private, individual, volatile on the other, which essentially is a precursor of Shestov's chief juxtaposition of speculation and revelation, of reason and faith, Shestov stresses Dostoevsky's preference, or trust, being with Ippolit rather than Myshkin, even though it is the latter, not the former, whom Dostoevsky invests with a positive mission. Shestov's dismissal of Myshkin is now more sophisticated than it was in 1901. This time he does not call him names (like a 'pale shadow') or questions his plausibility. Instead Shestov points to Myshkin's lack of daring, consistent with his humility and, interestingly, he also points to his recognition of his own value and virtue, thus suggesting that those are not entirely selfless. On the contrary, Shestov asserts, for Ippolit, as a true underground character, all is lost and hence there are no restraints – a situation that allows him a subversive doubt about the laws of the common world as well as the laws of nature. 'Какому суду тут дело?', Shestov quotes Ippolit's questions, 'Кому нужно, чтоб я был не только приговорен, но и благонаравно выдержал срок приговора? Неужели, в самом деле, кому-нибудь нужно? [...] для чего потребовалось смирение мое? Неужто нельзя меня просто съесть, не требуя от меня похвал тому, что меня съело?'.²⁶² Shestov insists that these daring questions are of the kind that even Kant did not dare to ask, and which were posed in the whole history of human thought by extremely few individuals, such as Nietzsche, and before him Luther, St. Augustine and apostle Paul who drew them from the teaching of the prophet Isaiah and from the Biblical original sin.²⁶³

Myshkin's answer to Ippolit's desperate and daring question on the most virtuous way to die ('go past us and forgive us our happiness') Shestov still describes as totally inadequate and still sees in it a proof of the basic artificiality of this character and the underlying

²⁶⁰ 'Самое важное' (from Plotinus's definition of philosophy, ancient Greek)

²⁶¹ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, pp. 81-82.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

compromise with popular opinion and common morality on the part of Dostoevsky. All that Myshkin achieves is to stay within the law of the commonly accepted truth, to preserve the equilibrium that in Shestov's view simply takes the side of indifferent natural forces and validates human suffering. Moreover, Shestov accuses Myshkin of expecting, in exchange for his obedience to the 'universal law', some moral reward, some divine right to kill not just the human body (as Raskolnikov permitted himself to do following Napoleon), but also the human soul. The fact that this is Dostoevsky's much adored positive hero who displays such behaviour points for Shestov to the prevalence in the writer of that extraordinary second sight that forced him to speak the truth even at the expense of polluting the virtuous image of this hero.

Shestov's discourse in *Overcoming the Self-evident* is also changed with respect to the other claim that he made already in 1901. He still asserts that Raskolnikov's crime is purely fictitious, but this time the assertion is posed as a question, thus losing its sharp, dictatorial tone, loosening the categorical diction. 'Он [Раскольников] вправе задать себе вопрос, да точно ли он убил старуху и Елизавету?', Shestov writes, 'И я не думаю, чтобы кто-нибудь из внимательных читателей Достоевского и менее всего сам Достоевский мог бы ответить на этот вопрос утвердительно. Может быть – убил, а может быть, не убил'.²⁶⁴ Shestov then proceeds to state, as in his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, that murder itself is unimportant, and Raskolnikov is 'in all probability' as innocent as Dmitrii Karamazov.²⁶⁵ In *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, as we saw above, this 'probability' does not enter the discussion – 'никакого преступления за ним не было', Shestov insists there, the story with the victims is 'выдумка, поклеп, напраслина'.²⁶⁶ Also, in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* he brings up the name of Ivan rather than Dmitrii, to say that Dostoevsky slandered the former who was not involved in Smerdyakov's business. Thus the subtlety of the case (of 'перехода метафизического раскрепощения Ивана в реальное, "дневное" преступление Смердякова', as Erofeev puts it),²⁶⁷ eludes Shestov here, or rather lies outside his concerns. Although the argument in *Overcoming the Self-evident* is slightly

²⁶⁴ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, pp. 71-72.

²⁶⁵ See *Ibid*, p. 72.

²⁶⁶ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 382.

²⁶⁷ See Erofeev, p. 174.

different, especially in that Shestov stresses the importance of punishment being real in contrast to the murder that cannot be regarded as such, his conclusion twenty years on remains essentially the same. 'Все эти "герои" – плоть от плоти самого Достоевского', he writes in 1901; 'никакого Раскольникова и никакого Карамазова никогда на свете не было [...] Достоевский рассказывал всегда только о себе',²⁶⁸ is Shestov's conclusion in 1921.

However, Shestov's interpretation in 1921 has a different, more solemn, ring to it. Shestov speaks of Dostoevsky's divine caprice, or in other words of the human right for individuality even if it goes against everybody's interests, including his own. This is Shestov's understanding of the Underground Man's comparison between the individual's demand for tea and self-sacrifice for the world's interests. The right to privacy of a human ego that rebels against the dictatorial voice of science, the idea of the private that refuses to submit to the general is referred to by Shestov as the ugly duckling of Dostoevsky's thought. But it is only perceived as such by Dostoevsky's first sight, whereas his second, transcendent sight regards it as a beautiful swan, Shestov claims. 'Много позже, уже незадолго до смерти, когда Достоевский писал в "Дневнике писателя", что у человечества была только одна "идея" - идея бессмертия души, он повторял только слова своего подпольного героя',²⁶⁹ Shestov writes. The same ugly duckling is evident here, he insists, and the beautiful swan is still far away, despite all the major novels having been written. 'Вернее, тут по-прежнему продолжается двойное видение двух органов зрения. Собственными глазами Достоевский видит гадкого утенка, "чужие" глаза свидетельствуют о прекрасном лебедь',²⁷⁰ Shestov comments. From this he builds a bridge again to Dostoevsky's struggle to reconcile both sights, to justify faith in the eyes of reason, and regrets the novelist's concessions and defeats within this struggle which on the other hand, as Shestov observes, reconciled Dostoevsky with the public opinion, with his readers. Thus, what humanist critics interpret as Dostoevsky's Christian values and

²⁶⁸ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 72.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 73.

idealistic aspirations, Shestov regards simply as concessions made to the 'enemy' in the brutal struggle between Dostoevsky's two types of sight.

6.I.11. Shestov's recognition of the 'holy foolishness' discourse in the Underground

Man.

This struggle which is for Shestov best illustrated in *Notes from Underground* occupies the central place in Shestov's analysis of Dostoevsky. Interestingly, Shestov notes the difference in what can be regarded as the aesthetics of the private and the general which becomes evident in the course of this struggle and which has deeper – ethical – implications. Thus in *Overcoming the Self-Evident* he turns again to the implicit incompatibility of the Underground Man's discourse with that of his 'offenders': the 'stone wall' of necessity, 'mathematics' understood as the positivist and rationalist trend in philosophical thought in its encroachment into the world of human spirituality, the world of 'omnitude' ('всемство') with its 'self-evident' laws. The Underground Man does not use their logic and has no intention of complying with it. His arguments, as Shestov stresses, are 'to stick his tongue out, to cock a snook'.²⁷¹ As Blagova and Emelianov observed in this connection, Shestov discerns 'в аргументации подпольного человека жесты юродивого'.²⁷² However, they do not take this idea further thus leaving it at the level of a superficial analogy. Even more peculiar is the fact that in her book *Holy Foolishness. Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* Harriet Murav concentrates mostly on Dostoevsky's major novels and only mentions *Notes from Underground* once and in passing. Her representation of the holy fools as far as the characters go (rather than the narrative itself) does not include the Underground Man.

To our mind, this parallel – of the Underground Man and the holy fool tradition – has deep roots, and it is Shestov, we suggest, who amongst the complexity of discourses of the Underground Man that reflect the complexity of the character, singled out the discourse of a holy fool, even though the terminology was never used. While Blagova and Emelianov picked up the similarity pointed by Shestov as captured mainly in the Underground Man's

²⁷¹ 'язык выставит, кукиш покажет': Ibid, p. 67.

²⁷² Blagova and Emelianov, p. 80.

self-expression, Shestov in fact noticed a more substantial underlying proximity: that between the Underground Man's self-denunciation and the self-abasement of the greatest saints. He noted that all these saints 'считали себя "самыми" - непременно *самыми* - безобразными, гнусными, пошлыми, слабыми, бездарными существами на свете', they were all 'до конца своей жизни [...] в безумном ужасе от своей ничтожности и греховности'.²⁷³ In this respect Murav's definition of holy foolishness highly resonates with the above. Indeed, she states that 'holy foolishness [...] can be stated provisionally as the assumption of madness or folly as an ascetic feat of self-humiliation', and further on: 'what distinguishes the holy fool, from the hagiographer's point of view, is his acceptance of suffering and humiliation, which he deliberately provokes by his (seeming) acts of folly'.²⁷⁴

Shestov states further that 'весь смысл христианства и вся та великая жажда искупления, которая была главным двигателем духовной жизни раннего или позднего средневековья, родились из такого рода прозрений'.²⁷⁵ Thus Shestov claims that *Notes from Underground* can be viewed as a commentary to the writings of famous saints who knew that God's sacrifice of his son was the only way to redeem all the loathsomeness and paltriness of man. As Valevicius observes in a related context,

Shestov interprets *Notes from Underground* as an outcry against a communal conscience. In *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* brutal reason was at stake. Here, in *Job's Balances* [the book into which Shestov's article of 1921 was eventually included], Shestov refined his interpretation. Shestov now sees Dostoevsky attacking the communal conscience, the so-called "omnitude" (*vsemstvo*), the existence of judgements which are universally admitted. The ascetism of medieval monks, for example, was not primarily directed against the flesh as is normally thought, rather, what the monks sought to attack was a spiritual equilibrium that reason considered to be the supreme goal of earthly life. The monks wanted, by their extreme acts, to escape omnitude. It was their way of going against the flow.²⁷⁶

This issue of revolt, of going against the flow is what Shestov treasures most in the Underground Man, and generally in Dostoevsky as a philosophical writer (as Shestov

²⁷³ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 41.

²⁷⁴ Murav, p. 2.

²⁷⁵ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 41.

²⁷⁶ Valevicius, p. 40.

perceives him). This revolt in Dostoevsky's narrative is normally embedded into the discourse of holy foolishness, and the Underground Man is another distinct example of this.

Indeed, As Murav writes, in Karamzin's perception, 'protected by their folly, they [canonized holy fools] appeared briefly on the scene in order to denounce the tyranny and evil of the tsars'.²⁷⁷ Similarly, for Shestov the Underground Man in his folly-like behaviour denounces Reason and Necessity, manifested in the laws of nature, depicted as the 'stone wall' and 'mathematics', and embraced by 'omnitude' ('всемство'). In Murav's definition 'the holy fool is a site of resistance to the "age of positivism and science" (words that Dostoevsky used to characterise his time); the holy fool serves as a sign of humanity's debased state and need for redemption'.²⁷⁸ All this is present in the Underground Man's image, and even if it is difficult to argue that he complies with Murav's other (simplified) description – namely, that 'according to the hagiographer, the business of the holy fool, and that of all the other saints, is to imitate Christ',²⁷⁹ this objection is invalidated by her other remark that 'some of Dostoevsky's holy fools [...] seem not wholly Christian. But all of this is part of the territory of holy foolishness'.²⁸⁰ Also, important in the context of *Notes from Underground* and its main hero is the fact that 'the boundaries between demonic and divine folly were never clearly drawn'.²⁸¹ In this respect the Underground Man's ambiguous moral image, his strivings upwards that are invariably followed by irredeemable falls, and finally his potential appeal to the Christian doctrine in the last chapter that was, by Dostoevsky's own account, removed by the censors, are highly significant.

No less important is the role played by Dostoevsky's text as such, creating the impression that holy foolishness resides in the very foundations of the narrative of the *Notes from Underground*. Murav talks of 'a specific literary procedure that is itself "holy foolish",²⁸² and in this respect *Notes from Underground* represents a distinct example of such a

²⁷⁷ Murav, p. 2.

²⁷⁸ Murav, p. 8.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 15.

²⁸¹ Ibid, p. 171.

²⁸² Ibid.

tradition. Indeed, this work fits perfectly into the following description: ‘the discourse of the holy fool makes the categories and models of the dominant culture problematic and points beyond what is immediately given. [...] The constant shifting of boundaries and violations of expectation make for a text that masks its own meaning and leaves much unsaid, thereby confounding the reader, much like the spectacle performed by the holy fool, which leads his audience astray – hence, the novel as scandal, tempting and misleading’.²⁸³

Thus, the reference to a holy fool in connection to the Underground Man is of undoubted relevance. Although formally the link was named by Blagova and Emelianov rather than Shestov, in fact it was he, not they, who recognised in this character, even if without understanding it himself, the essence of the relevant discourse and its functionality, as well as its aesthetics. This is reminiscent of the situation with Dostoevsky and formal philosophy, as perceived by Shestov: ‘Поразительно, что, не имея никакой научно-философской подготовки, он так верно разглядел, в чем основная, вековая проблема философии’.²⁸⁴ Similarly Shestov, being unfamiliar with the appropriate terms nevertheless shrewdly felt the essence of the Underground Man's proximity to the holy fool tradition. In the same way, as we shall soon see, Shestov foresaw the essence of postmodernism through Dostoevsky's works, without, again, using its terminology.

Blagova and Emelianov emphasise the shift of accents in Shestov's interpretation of Dostoevsky in 1921 in comparison with his book of 1901 on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. Now, they write, ‘Шестов не обвиняет писателя в заведомой лжи, как делал это в ранних работах [...], но он по-прежнему отрицает веру Достоевского в “вечные истины” и “добродетели”’.²⁸⁵ They make the important observation that ‘ранее Шестов обличал Достоевского, теперь выступает как защитник’.²⁸⁶

In our view, the shift in Shestov's discourse that had happened by 1921 was towards a substantial softening of his accusatory tone and towards an overall tolerance that came with

²⁸³ Murav, pp. 13-14.

²⁸⁴ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 45.

²⁸⁵ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 75.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 79.

increased maturity and greater theoretical knowledge. The very register of Shestov's writing has changed, having acquired more epic, sacramental features. It is certainly a loftier style than it was in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* in 1901. It is also a more diverse discourse. As Blagova and Emelianov observe, 'Шестов преподносит философские рассуждения [...], смешивая их с художественными образами, переработанными из античных мифов, Библии, популярного фольклора и одновременно с воспоминаниями, проповедью, научными комментариями, психологическими наблюдениями, физиогномическими характеристиками'.²⁸⁷

However, the assessment of the shift that took place in Shestov's outlook in emigration is not uniform. Although in technical terms Shestov's transition from scepticism to religiosity is not questionable, the nature of these two modes is understood in two opposite ways which are best illustrated by the words of Georgii Fedotov on the one hand and by Viktor Erofeev on the other. The former commented on the change in Shestov's thought from scepticism 'расшатывающего устои идеального мира ради чистой радости разрушения' to 'тревога и даже мука' that started to burst from under Shestov's 'остроумное перо'.²⁸⁸ Erofeev too observes that Shestov's emigration 'примерно совпадает с переходом мыслителя от скептицизма к религиозной философии' and speaks of the emergence of first testimonies by Shestov in his writings about his faith which were absent from his earlier works.²⁸⁹ However, his perception of the underlying inner evolution is entirely different.

Indeed, he regards Shestov's path as going from a collapse to the tragic consciousness (starting from *Tolstoy and Nietzsche*) to gradual resurrection through religious constructs into the realm of faith which, if it did not extinguish his initial torment, at least gave it a constructive and optimistic frame (where the word optimism should be understood in terms of the sheer energy and strength of conviction on Shestov's part for springing to the defence of his faith). Thus, Erofeev claimed that initially 'Бог, который, говоря словами Гейне,

²⁸⁷ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 80.

²⁸⁸ Georgii Fedotov, *Рецензия* на книгу Шестова *На весах Иова* in *Числа* (Paris), Sept-Dec. 1930, pp. 259-263 (p. 260). Cited in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 296.

²⁸⁹ Erofeev, p. 182.

“может помочь” был далеко, в недостижимой дали. Зато “ужасы” были рядом, они окружали Шестова, как безобразные ночные птицы Гойи’.²⁹⁰ They made Shestov scream from pain and despair. ‘От *Философии трагедии* до статьи о Чехове простирается время самых болезненных и громких криков Шестова’,²⁹¹ Erofeev points out. ‘Затем крики слабеют, удары о стену становятся глуше по мере того, как Шестов все более настойчиво сомневается в правах разума на достоверное суждение о смысле мироздания’,²⁹²

Thus, for all the difference with respect to the underlying causes, there seems to be agreement in acknowledging Shestov's shift, after emigrating from Russia, towards Biblical existentialism, towards seeking the ultimate truth in the Holy Writ. As for the above differences, in our opinion Erofeev is undoubtedly closer to the truth by pointing to the genuine torment at the root of Shestov's search which the wit of his pen only camouflages in the same way as a smile sometimes aspires to hide tears. In fact, this sarcastic discourse points to Shestov's inner courage akin to that of any tragic artistic vision, and most notably that of Joseph Brodsky, whose irony was designed to cover despair. The similarity between these two figures, in our view, runs deep, but lies outside the scope of this dissertation, and thus we allow only occasional remarks in this regard.

Summarising the evolution of Shestov's thought, in particular his view of Dostoevsky, we should emphasise that the philosophical dimension in *Overcoming the Self-Evident* is much more distinct and profound than it was twenty years earlier in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*. In 1921 Shestov's implications are much broader – while remaining fundamentally of the same root, they have significantly evolved in nature. If in 1901 they showed an irrationalist approach and a tendency towards philosophy *per se*, in 1921 this tendency turned into the foundation of a system and gained the grounding of broad philosophical knowledge. By then Shestov's systematic critique of the history of speculative philosophy had begun. While his work of 1901 displays Shestov as posing questions and being engaged in a

²⁹⁰ Erofeev, p. 167.

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 177.

²⁹² Ibid.

passionate search for answers, in his article of 1921 he appears to have found the route to the answers and is prepared to fight fiercely to defend his philosophical perspective. This time he analyses the poison of rationalist thought much more systematically than in 1901, and takes it much further – to the central issue of original sin which he interprets in his own way, as we are about to see.

Also, Shestov assigns high significance to multiple diversions in Dostoevsky's novels, to the insertions which on the surface seem only to obscure the main flow of the narrative, but are in fact of the utmost importance. 'Повествование везде пересыпается эпизодическими вставками, столь значительными и глубокими по темам и исполнению, что ими совсем заслоняется главная фабула',²⁹³ Shestov writes. This correlates with his conviction about the true heroes of Dostoevsky's novels. Thus for him, as we saw, a secondary figure such as Ippolit is more significant than Myshkin who is conventionally accepted as the chief character. Moreover, as we noted above, Myshkin for Shestov is not a real character, but simply Dostoevsky's concession to 'omnitude' ('всемство'). Similarly, 'Настоящий герой *Бесов* - это не Верховенский, не Ставрогин, а великий и загадочный молчаливый и столпник Кириллов',²⁹⁴ Shestov claims, describing the latter as "'душа" романа'.²⁹⁵

While Shestov still maintains that *Notes from Underground* is a central work from which stemmed Dostoevsky's major novels, such as *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Devils* (which Shestov addresses once again in 1921), he also introduces into his analysis some short stories which, although they generally escaped critical attention at the time, Shestov regards as no less fundamental than *Notes from Underground*. Indeed, he speaks of *Кроткая* [*The Meek One*] and *Сон смешного человека* [*the Dream of a Ridiculous Man*] as being two links in the same chain.

²⁹³ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 78.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 85.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

However, before attempting to understand Shestov's logic here we wish to point out that, as should now be clear, from a structuralist perspective a change between two works is evident not only discursively, but also thematically, which is directly connected to the development of a philosophical dimension. Indeed, Shestov's assignment of high significance to secondary characters and thematic diversions in Dostoevsky's works can be viewed as evidence of his intuitive attention first and foremost to the sophistication of the writer's philosophical world. For, as Peace writes, these secondary figures 'embody ideas, present opposing philosophical positions to those of the central characters, and yet they themselves are not immune from [...] "double thoughts"'.²⁹⁶ Even more significantly, Shestov's focus on insertions seemingly superfluous to the main narrative, on secondary characters and finally on not so celebrated, less major writings of Dostoevsky signifies a certain reversal of the commonly accepted system in Dostoevsky criticism. This reversal is characteristic of Shestov in his striving to be original and paradoxical as a matter of conviction, to defeat logic. Indeed, he often quotes Pascal: 'qu'on ne nous reproche donc plus le manque de clarté, car nous en faisons profession'²⁹⁷ and Tertullian: 'Crucifixus est Dei filius; non pudet, quia pudendum est. Et mortuus est Dei filius; prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est. Et sepultus resurrexit; cerium est quia impossibile est'.²⁹⁸ This affinity for originality and paradox was most probably not introduced for the sake of it, but rather it emerged within Shestov's main paradigm, out of his hatred for clichés, for commonly accepted major routes. For the latter contradict his fundamental worship of and belief in the private, in the individual revelation, and result in his attempt to distance himself from 'omnitude' (from Dostoevsky's 'всемство'). His constant digging up of obscure names and quotations and bringing them to light, to centre stage, is another piece of evidence of the same pattern. This sailing against the flow and rejection of clichés is, as was mentioned in Chapter 3, another characteristic that signifies Shestov's proximity to the world of art where cliché is equal to artistic death.

²⁹⁶ Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground*, p. v.

²⁹⁷ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*. Cited in Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 287: 'И пусть нас не попрекают неясностью, ибо о ней-то мы и радеем'.

²⁹⁸ Tertullian, *De praescriptione hereticorum*. Cited in Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 322: 'Распят Сын Божий; не стыдно, потому что устыжает. И умер Сын Божий; заслуживает веры тем более, что нелепо. И похороненный воскрес; достоверно, потому что невозможно'.

Section II. Reappraisal. Reading Dostoevsky as a religious philosopher

6.II.1. Shestov's Biblical existentialism as prompted by Dostoevsky. Discovering Kierkegaard. The story of the Fall and its philosophical significance.

It is in this light of fleeing from 'omnitude' ('всемство') that Shestov views both stories by Dostoevsky – *The Meek One* and the *Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. For him these two stories carry the utmost philosophical significance, that we are about to discuss, and allow us to inscribe his thought at the time into Biblical existentialism. In *Overcoming the Self-evident* Shestov quotes passages from *The Meek One* that he also repeats in the introduction, entitled *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky*, to his book on the Danish philosopher (*Kierkegaard and Existential Philosophy*). Shestov writes there: 'Достоевский, как и Киркегард, "выпал из общего" или, как он сам выражается, из "всемства". И вдруг почувствовал, что к всемству нельзя и не нужно возвращаться, что всемство - т. е. то, что все, всегда и везде считают за истину, есть обман, есть страшное наваждение, что от всемства, к которому нас призывает наш разум, пришли на землю все ужасы бытия'.²⁹⁹ The protagonist of *The Meek One*, stricken by his grief, refuses to listen to the judge, rejects any authority over himself and states the fact of human beings' extreme loneliness in the world. Similarly the Ridiculous Man stands out of the crowd in his – for Shestov distinctly underground – philosophy. 'Вы видите, что в 1877 году, т. е. через пятнадцать лет после "Записок из подполья", Достоевский все еще продолжает досказывать недосказанную повесть об отвергнутом всемством человеке',³⁰⁰ Shestov says.

Notably, the ideas expressed in his piece on Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, which was started 12 years after *Overcoming the Self-Evident*, by and large are repetitions of the main ideas of the latter work, only enriched by the parallels with Kierkegaard's thought that Shestov was able to draw after having encountered Kierkegaard's writings in 1929. He only discovered the Danish philosopher at the time, prompted by Husserl. Shestov was struck by

²⁹⁹ Lev Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия (Глас вопиющего в пустыне)* (Moscow: Progress-Gnozis, 1992), p. 21.

³⁰⁰ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 88.

the proximity of Kierkegaard's ideas to his own (this kinship, acutely sensed by Husserl, was the reason the latter recommended Kierkegaard to Shestov). As Milosz wrote, 'It must have been quite a surprise for him to learn that Kierkegaard saw the source of philosophy not in amazement, as did the ancients, but in despair, and that he too opposed Job to Plato and Hegel. Those were Shestov's own most cherished thoughts'.³⁰¹ In Erofeev's words, 'в Киркегоре Шестов увидел своего двойника, хотя борьба "нового зрения" с обыденностью окончилась у Киркегора, как полагает Шестов, тем компромиссом, который, по сути дела, означал поражение "нового зрения"'.³⁰²

Thus, if Kierkegaard in many ways became for Shestov his philosophical brother, then his own contemplation of Kierkegaard's proximity to Dostoevsky in fact reveals (through this indirect connection) Shestov's perception of his own kinship to the Russian novelist. Hence, it is not unreasonable to view the aforementioned introduction as an implicit description of this kinship, since talking about Kierkegaard rather than himself frees Shestov from any ethical and moral obligations, such as considerations of modesty, that any autobiographical writing (in the sense of self-portrayal) would impose. The struggle of faith is 'безумная борьба о возможности. Ибо только возможность открывает путь к спасению... В последнем счете остается одно: для Бога все возможно'³⁰³ – are Kierkegaard's words that Shestov quotes. In these words, in Kierkegaard's belief that 'только тот, чье существо так потрясено, что он становится духом и постигает, что все возможно, только тот подошел к Богу',³⁰⁴ Shestov sees Kierkegaard's (and hence his own) proximity to Dostoevsky. 'Можно, не боясь упрека в преувеличении, назвать Достоевского двойником Киркегарда',³⁰⁵ Shestov writes in *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky*.

Thus, if in 1902 Shestov saw Dostoevsky's spiritual twin in Nietzsche, three decades later it is Kierkegaard that replaces the latter. This is significant as it shows us the direction of Shestov's inner evolution. If in *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* Shestov cherished Dostoevsky's

³⁰¹ Milosz, pp. 108-109.

³⁰² Erofeev, p. 183.

³⁰³ Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, p. 21.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

tragic vision and his revolt subversive of Hegelian philosophy, in the early 1930s he discerns in Dostoevsky, just as in Kierkegaard, a closeness to Job. 'От Гегеля Киркегард ушел к частному мыслителю – Иову. То же сделал и Достоевский',³⁰⁶ Shestov writes in *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky*. Shestov views Dostoevsky's creative writings as variations on the themes of the *Book of Job*, and considers Kierkegaard's creativity in the same vein. Identifying, as we suggested, Kierkegaard with Shestov himself here, we can see that Shestov essentially declares the *Book of Job* to be his own point of departure. Indeed, Job had played a crucial role in Shestov's philosophy, and his book *On Job's Scales* is testimony to it. In Milosz's description, as we saw earlier, Shestov's rebellion against necessity is identical to Job's revolt against God, and if Spinoza's advice to philosophers was 'not to laugh, not to weep, not to hate, but to understand', Job, on the contrary, to Shestov's sheer approval, 'wailed and screamed to the indignation of his wise friends'.³⁰⁷ Erofeev, and after him Blagova and Emelianov link together Shestov's own personal experience of losing his only son in the First World War in 1917 and Job's tragedy of losing his children. Erofeev states that the echo of Shestov's tragedy is distinctly audible in his writings. 'В судьбе Шестова и Иова есть родственные черты. Крик несчастного штабс-капитана Снегирева, теряющего своего Илюшечку: "Не хочу другого мальчика!" можно считать лейтмотивом позднего шестовского творчества',³⁰⁸ Erofeev writes.

However, for Shestov himself this evolution may not have seemed so drastic, because he in many ways aligned together Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. It was their sheer significance – in Shestov's life as well as for human thought in general – that was one of the uniting factors. Erofeev regards the influence of Kierkegaard on Shestov comparable only to that made on him by Nietzsche, although in the latter case it was more a meeting of a pupil with a teacher than of kindred minds, as in the case of Kierkegaard. Another uniting factor is revealed in an important confession by Shestov to Fondane, which confirms our conjectures of the autobiographical nature of his writings about Kierkegaard and his previous books on

³⁰⁶ Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, p. 21.

³⁰⁷ Milosz, p. 105.

³⁰⁸ Erofeev, p. 184.

Nietzsche: 'It seems to me that to speak truly about Kierkegaard and Nietzsche one should not really speak about them, but simply about oneself',³⁰⁹ Shestov reportedly said. Significantly, he recognised the limitations of both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as stemming from their inferiority complex, their metaphysical impotence, lack of control over their own destinies. Thus in Nietzsche's case it was due to an incurable disease, while in Kierkegaard's case it was the loss of his fiancée Regina Olsen, also because of an illness – sexual impotence. What was important for Shestov, though, is effectively a metaphysical impotence that he saw in their respective tragedies.

What is the most underground about Kierkegaard, and yet something one always grasps about him in the end, is his impotence. Of course he speaks of himself as if he is a great writer. He assures his readers that he will be immortal, but he does this precisely because he feels impotent: otherwise why talk about this at all? [...] It is the same with Nietzsche. It is an impotent man who wrote 'The will to power', and who made the whole world believe – as was his aim! – that Nietzsche was a magnificent engine of power.³¹⁰

But comparing their similar situations Shestov wittily notices the difference in their discourses: 'Nietzsche was in the same situation as Kierkegaard. Nevertheless there were times when he burst into songs. Kierkegaard never sang'.³¹¹

Let us now return to our discussion of *The Meek One* and *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* in Shestov's interpretation, since it is in these stories as well as in other ostensibly minor episodes of major novels that Shestov sees the utmost philosophical significance of Dostoevsky and from which Shestov's own Biblical existentialism stems. In Dostoevsky's radical departure from the universally accepted truths that Shestov discovered in these works he reveals their continuity with the *Notes from Underground*. Thus, as we mentioned above, he effectively recognises the Underground Man in the hero of *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. In fact, Shestov assigned to *The Dream* a profound, albeit concealed, religious meaning which we have already described in section 2.4 of Part I. It is connected first and foremost to the Biblical story of original sin which Shestov interprets as the poisoning by knowledge of human beings' hitherto limitless divine freedom. It is clear that

³⁰⁹ Fondane, p. 76.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 72.

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 71.

Shestov views *The Meek One* as posing the question to which the subsequent *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* provides an answer. First Shestov emphasises in *The Meek One* the protagonist's rejection of the authority of common rules embodied in the judge and his attempts to gain power over the protagonist's own will. The latter's grief which follows the suicide of the only creature he truly loved – the Meek One – serves as a catalyst to create and reveal the officer's revolt against necessity symbolised by death itself and the judge who is used almost as its validator. Thus the same familiar paradigm (which can be labelled as 'the revelations of death') which Shestov traces in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, is actualised here: a human revolt initiated by extreme despair which opens one's eyes to the truths beyond those which are commonly accepted.

Sixteen years later in his last work dedicated to Dostoevsky, Shestov quoted again the same words of the officer illustrating his revolt: 'Зачем мрачная косность разбила то, что всего дороже? ...Косность! О природа! Люди на земле одни – вот беда. Есть ли в поле жив человек? – кричит русский богатырь. Кричу и я – не богатырь, и никто не откликается... Все мертво и всюду мертвецы. Одни только люди, а кругом них молчание'.³¹² Only in 1921 Shestov left them to speak for themselves, while in 1937 he provided an explicit commentary in the form of an exclamation as if continuing the aforementioned officer's plea: 'Откуда пришла эта косность, эта безграничная власть смерти над жизнью, как бороться с ней и можно ли с ней бороться?', and concluded by asking almost rhetorically: 'Как Достоевский ответил на этот вопрос?'.³¹³ Thus the question is indeed posed by *The Meek One*, and then answered in *The Dream* which, as Shestov writes in 1937, 'по своей теме является как бы дополнением к Запискам, и в значительной степени поясняет их, раскрывая их внутренний смысл и источник'.³¹⁴

The answer that *The Dream* provides is, according to Shestov, the story of the Fall disguised by Dostoevsky as a fantasy-novella. The hero encounters mankind before the

³¹² Fedor Dostoevskii, *Кроткая* in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 24, p. 35. Cited in Lev Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского* in *Умозрение и откровение*, pp. 186-187.

³¹³ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 187.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

original sin has taken place, and thus he sees people totally happy, uncontaminated by the fruit from the tree of knowledge. These people are free, living in love, in harmony and in unison with nature, and their knowledge is deeper and higher than that offered by our science. The reason for the latter is in that ‘наука ищет объяснить, что такое жизнь, сама стремится сознать ее, чтобы научить других жить’, while for these people – ‘знание их восполнялось и питалось иными проникновениями, чем у нас на земле, и [...] стремления их были тоже иные. Они не стремились к познанию жизни, как мы стремимся познать ее, потому что жизнь их была восполнена’.³¹⁵

These descriptions by Dostoevsky of the people from the Ridiculous Man's dream, illustrate for Shestov the metaphysical state of mankind before the Fall. It is the different nature of their knowledge that attracts Shestov most and which he distinguishes from the reason that rules on Earth and which, in his view, killed human freedom and invoked death. ‘Ни в одной из современных теорий познания вопрос о сущности и назначении научного знания не поставлен с такой глубиной и остротой’,³¹⁶ Shestov writes about Dostoevsky's *Dream*.

Shestov puts the novelist alongside Plato and Plotinus (of whom Dostoevsky knew nothing, Shestov remarks in brackets) who ‘подходили и, поскольку дано смертным, осуществляли поставленную себе Достоевским задачу: отказаться от научного знания, чтобы постичь Истину’.³¹⁷ Shestov is adamant that ‘Истина и научное знание непримиримы. Истина не выносит оков знания, она задыхается в тяжелых объятиях “самоочевидностей”, дающих достоверность нашему знанию’.³¹⁸ He quotes the Ridiculous Man who accuses science of discovering laws and placing the laws of happiness above happiness, who blames science for being didactic, for striving to teach people how to

³¹⁵ Fedor Dostoevskii, *Сон смешного человека* in F. M. Dostoevskii, *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 25, p. 113. Cited in Shestov, *О ‘перерождении убеждений’ у Достоевского*, p. 188.

³¹⁶ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 91.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

live. Whereas, 'Истина над законами, и законы для нее то же, что для Достоевского были когда-то стены тюрьмы и каторжные кандалы',³¹⁹ Shestov claims.

Thus Shestov gives *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* a distinctly Biblical philosophical interpretation and focuses above all on its gnoseological aspect. Interestingly, while Blagova and Emelianov point out that Dostoevsky implies in this story the reason for corruption, which the hero brought to the described Golden Age, being in lies,³²⁰ Shestov insists that it was in the knowledge that the Ridiculous Man gave to that innocent humanity. In fact, the narrative of Dostoevsky is highly ambiguous in this respect and allows for multiple interpretations, almost as if the writer was indeed imitating the narration of the Biblical story with its ambiguous and multi-layered discourse.

Dostoevsky's implications afterwards lead more into the New Testament and refer to crucifixion and the atonement of sins. These are left unexplored by Shestov, which is by itself instructive as it points to a certain shift in his outlook from his previous search for salvation to his more theoretical preoccupations, where his struggle against gnosis, against reason, takes the upper hand. This shift, however, was temporary because the theme of salvation was never absent completely from Shestov's reflections and remained looming behind his fight with reason as an ultimate constructive resolution of this fight which Shestov eventually found in religious faith. Here, however, it is the corruption of mankind by knowledge which Shestov derives from Dostoevsky's *Dream* and on which Shestov's own philosophy rests. While literally Blagova and Emelianov are right in pointing to lies as laying the foundations of the above corruption, Shestov's alliance with Dostoevsky here stays on very firm ground, because this story is one of the most explicit examples of Dostoevsky's derogatory attitude to science and the kind of knowledge acquired through it.

³¹⁹ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 91.

³²⁰ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 96.

‘...Вместе с знанием пришли все земные ужасы, пришла смерть’,³²¹ Shestov comments on Dostoevsky's interpretation of the Fall, as he sees it depicted in the *Dream*. ‘Тут науки одной недостаточно было’, Shestov continues:

вместе с наукой выросла – от того же корня – и “эффика”; мир превратился в замороженное “законами” царство, люди – из свободных существ в безвольных автоматов... И только у некоторых из них в редкие минуты просыпается страшная тоска по настоящей жизни и вместе с этой тоской смутное сознание, что та сила, которая владеет ими и направляет их и которую они обоготворили, есть сила вечного сна, смерти, небытия. Это и есть “анамнезис” Платона, пробуждение Плотина. Это то, что людям дается, но чего люди не могут добыть своими силами, своей заслугой, своими “делами”. Читатель видит, что эту “правду” Достоевский не сам выдумал, не мог сам выдумать’.³²²

However, Shestov's conclusions derived from *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* are much less obvious than just pointing at gnosis as the fruit of the tree of knowledge being at the core of the fundamental and insoluble problems of the human predicament. While interpreting the story in the vein of Biblical existentialism Shestov at the same time returns to his most profound topic – that of the incommunicability of truth. The whole spirit of his work *Overcoming the Self-Evident* lies in his conviction that Dostoevsky's central tragedy was in trying to adjust the discoveries which the novelist made to the ways of existence of the universe where ordinary vision reigns. Extra-ordinary experience collapses under any attempt to be translated into common formulae. As Michel Aucouturier writes, ‘the truth revealed by this experience cannot become the object of knowledge’.³²³ Shestov views the end of *The Dream* as a metaphorical illustration of the tragedy of its author. The Ridiculous Man rejects his previous suicidal ideas and decides instead to go and preach the truth that was revealed to him. This combination of words for Shestov is an oxymoron, because, as we explained in the previous chapter for Shestov ‘truth is lost in communication’.

‘Великие древние мудрецы оставили нам завет: про Бога нельзя сказать, что он существует. Ибо сказавший: “Бог существует” – теряет Бога’³²⁴ – this is the most fundamental message that Shestov is trying to convey. ‘Проповедовать истину! Иду

³²¹ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 91.

³²² *Ibid*, p. 92.

³²³ Aucouturier, p. 86.

³²⁴ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 105.

проповедовать истину – т. е. отдаю ее “всемству”, которое, конечно, прежде чем принять ее, потребует, чтоб Она подчинилась закону. Вы понимаете, что это значит?’,³²⁵ Shestov exclaims and carries on to explain that Dostoevsky repeated the mistake of his hero when striving to ‘preach’ the discoveries obtained through his ‘extraordinary’ vision to the kingdom of the ordinary vision.

‘Второй раз, не во сне, а уже наяву, с Достоевским случилось то “ужасное”, о чем он нам только что рассказал. Он предал открывшуюся ему вечную Истину ее злейшему врагу. Во сне он “развратил”, по его словам, безгрешных обитателей рая. Теперь он спешит к людям, чтобы наяву повторить то преступление, которому он так ужаснулся!’,³²⁶ Shestov writes emphatically.

Thus Shestov once again recognises the deadlock which he acknowledged in *Sola Fide* of the truth being virtually impossible to achieve due to its intrinsic elusiveness. The nature of the revelation which brings truth is so intimate that no verbal means of communication are capable of capturing it. Only approximation is possible here, and, the implication remains, it seems, that only silence is close to bearing authentic truth, and only through the way of revelation (that is, either via poetry or via faith,) can one hope to approximate the great mysteries, because any speculative attempt, any rational investigation can only use rational means. This is the way Shestov himself put it in relation to the Fall:

Мы стоим пред величайшей тайной, к которой когда-либо приходилось подходить человеку, – пред тайной грехопадения... И, быть может, читатель согласится, что все внутренние борения и напряжения Достоевского имели только один смысл и единое значение: если не постичь, то хотя бы приобщиться к этой тайне... Ибо постичь и овладеть ею нам не дано, как и не дано овладеть Истиной. По самой своей природе тайна такова, что она не может быть открыта, а Истина постигается нами лишь постольку, поскольку мы не желаем овладеть ею, использовать ее для “исторических” нужд, т. е. в пределах единственного известного нам измерения времени. Как только мы захотим открыть тайну или использовать Истину, т. е. сделать тайну явной, а Истину всеобщей и необходимой – хотя бы нами руководило самое возвышенное, самое благородное стремление разделить свое знание с ближним, облагодетельствовать человеческий род и т. п., – мы мгновенно забываем все, что видели в “выхождении”, в “исступлении”, начинаем видеть, “как все”, и говорим то, что нужно “всем”. Т. е. та логика, которая делает чудо превращения отдельных “беспольных”

³²⁵ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 92.

³²⁶ Ibid.

переживаний в общепольный “опыт” и таким образом создает необходимый для нашего существования прочный и неизменный порядок на земле, эта логика – она же и разум – убивает Тайну и Истину.³²⁷

Shestov turns again to the theme of the Fall in his work *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky* (which serves as a foreword to his aforementioned *Kierkegaard and Existential Philosophy*), which is in fact centred around this theme. He discusses there the fundamental conflict between the private and the general in the way that we have already explained in Part I. This conflict for him is directly related to that between faith and reason, and reveals the striking opposition of opinions between ancient philosophy (notably not just Greek) on one hand and the Bible on the other. If the former considers private existence, in particular human, as a sinful daring which deserves to be punished by death, The Book of Books views God's act of creation as a source, moreover the only one, of the good, Shestov explains.³²⁸ Hegel for him embodies the glorification and validation of the general over the private, a celebration of sorts of the Fall through which knowledge was achieved at the expense of losing salvation. Equally Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky for Shestov symbolise the struggle of the private against the general, of faith against reason. In this respect the stance of art, and notably poetry, is particularly close to that which Shestov discovers in Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. The best expression of this stance can be found in Joseph Brodsky's essay ‘In Praise of Boredom’.

Brodsky quotes the words of the German poet, Peter Hühel: ‘Помни обо мне, – шепчет пыль’, and then explains to his young audiences:

Ничто не может быть дальше от душевного распорядка любого из вас, юные и дерзкие, чем настроение, выраженное в этом двустишии немецкого поэта Питера Хухеля, ныне покойного. Я процитировал его не потому, что хотел заронить в вас влечение к вещам малым – семенам и растениям, песчинкам или москитам – малым, но многочисленным. Я привел эти строчки, потому что они мне нравятся, потому что я узнаю в них себя и коли на то пошло, любой живой организм, который будет стерт с наличествующей поверхности. “Помни обо мне”, – говорит пыль. И слышится здесь намек на то, что, если мы узнаем о самих себе от времени, вероятно, время, в свою очередь, может узнать что-то от нас. Что бы это могло быть? Уступая ему по значимости, мы превосходим его в чуткости. Вот что означает – быть незначительными. Если требуется парализующая волю скука, чтобы внушить это, тогда да

³²⁷ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 93.

³²⁸ See Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, pp. 7-9.

здравствует скука. Вы незначительны, потому что вы конечны. Однако, чем вещь конечней, тем больше она заряжена жизнью, эмоциями, радостью, страхами, состраданием. Ибо бесконечность не особенно оживленна, не особенно эмоциональна. Ваша скука, по крайней мере, говорит вам об этом. Поскольку ваша скука есть скука бесконечности.³²⁹

Brodsky then concludes that ‘страсть есть привилегия незначительного’, hence his advice (very Shestovian in spirit) to his young listeners: ‘Поэтому старайтесь оставаться страстными, оставьте хладнокровие созвездиям’.³³⁰

Shestov's intensity in dealing with this topic is no lesser than that of Brodsky. Shestov stresses that just like Belinsky with his demand for an account for every victim of history (this excerpt from Belinsky's famous letter to Gogol permeates many of Shestov's writings), Dostoevsky also cannot be reconciled to the reign of universal necessity. He too, as Shestov writes, demands ‘отчет о каждой жертве случайности и истории – т. е. о том, что, в принципе, для умозрительной философии не заслуживает, как сотворенное и конечное, никакого внимания и чему никто в мире, как это твердо знает умозрительная философия, помочь не может’.³³¹

These ideas of the eternal (and losing) battle of the private against the general as stemming from original sin, that Shestov derives in particular from Dostoevsky's *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* as well as from *Notes from Underground*, he expresses more directly in *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky* than when discussing this topic in *Overcoming the Self-Evident*. Especially Shestov speaks more explicitly than anywhere else on the event of the Fall itself. Indeed, he asserts that in his *Dream* Dostoevsky

с нестерпимой для наших глаз отчетливостью, открывает смысл того “будете знающими”, которым библейский змей соблазнил нашего праотца и продолжает всех нас соблазнять и донныне. Разум наш, как говорит Кант, жадно стремится ко всеобщности и необходимости, - Достоевский, вдохновляемый Писанием, напрягает все свои силы, чтобы вырваться из власти знания. Как и Киркегард, он отчаянно борется с умозрительной истиной и с человеческой диалектикой, сводящей “откровение” к познанию.³³²

³²⁹ Iosif Brodskii, ‘Похвала скуке’, transl. E. Kasatkina, in *Сочинения Иосифа Бродского*, vol. 6, pp. 90-91.

³³⁰ Brodskii, ‘Похвала скуке’, pp. 90-91.

³³¹ Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, p. 22.

³³² Ibid, p. 21.

Shestov then quotes again one of his favourite pieces from Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* which illustrates for Shestov the writer's total resolution never to surrender to the omnipotent power of necessity, but even more importantly for Shestov – it signifies that it is gnosis with its generalising powers, issuing validation to the general against the private, that lies at the roots of this necessity for Dostoevsky. Indeed, in the words of the Underground Man about the stone wall being ‘laws of nature, conclusions of natural science, mathematics’ Shestov sees Dostoevsky's understanding, which equals that of Kant and Hegel, of ‘смысл и значение тех всеобщих и необходимых суждений, той принудительной, принуждающей истины, к которой зовет человека его разум’.³³³ However, Shestov stresses, instead of submitting to this necessity Dostoevsky, just like Kierkegaard, becomes profoundly disturbed. He rejects the omnipotence of reason and rebels against its self-evident truths. The question thus raised by Dostoevsky about the origin of these truths and their unlimited power over mankind by far exceeds for Shestov Kant's critique of pure reason. The answer to this fundamental question cannot exist, Shestov says, or ‘more precisely’, as he corrects himself, ‘ответ на него есть лишь один: власть каменных стен, власть дважды два четыре или, выражаясь философским языком, власть вечных самоочевидных истин над человеком, хотя она представляется нам лежащей в самой основе бытия и потому непреодолимой, есть все же власть призрачная’.³³⁴

This, in Shestov's opinion, returns us directly to the Biblical story of original sin, because, “Каменные стены” и “дважды два четыре” – есть только конкретное выражение того, что заключалось в словах искушителя: будете знающими’.³³⁵ Hence Milosz's summary of Shestov's understanding of the Fall, that we have already quoted in Section 2.2 of Part I: ‘What, then, was the Fall? A choice of an inferior faculty with its passion for a *distinguo* and for general ideas, with pairs of opposites: good, evil; true, untrue; possible, impossible. Man renounced faith in order to gain knowledge. Shestov names his enemy:

³³³ Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, p. 22.

³³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 23.

³³⁵ *Ibid*.

Reason. He even says the fruits of the forbidden tree could just as well be called synthetic judgments *a priori*'.³³⁶ Indeed, Shestov claims that Dostoevsky and Kierkegaard alike realised clearly that 'Знание не привело человека к свободе, как мы привыкли думать и как то провозглашает умозрительная философия, знание закрепило нас, отдало на "поток и разграбление" вечным истинам'.³³⁷ This idea of lost freedom and acquired knowledge that did not save or liberate humanity, which is central for Shestov, he found in both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. It is human fear of God that throws us into the hands of reason, Shestov claims, and it is this that constitutes our immense and horrible fall. In Shestov's own words the fall is described as follows:

Грех не в бытии, не в том, что вышло из рук Творца, грех, порок, недостаток в нашем "знании". Первый человек испугался ничем не ограниченной воли Творца, увидел в ней столь страшный для нас "произвол" и стал искать защиты от Бога в познании, которое, как ему внушил искуситель, равняло его с Богом, т. е. ставило его и Бога в равную зависимость от вечных, несотворенных истин, раскрывая единство человеческой и божественной природы. И это "знание" расплющило, раздавило его сознание, вбив его в плоскость ограниченных возможностей, которыми теперь для него определяется и его земная, и его вечная судьба. Так изображает Писание "падение" человека.³³⁸

We should stress here that such fundamental philosophical ideas are invariably linked in Shestov with profound psychological thoughts. Thus as early as *Beginnings and Ends* Shestov claimed that 'самой характерной для человека чертой является боязнь правды',³³⁹ which resonates very closely with the aforementioned fear of God in the implied intrinsic human tendency to escape from freedom to slavery, as it were in man's sensing the limitations of his own psyche. Similarly, in *Overcoming the Self-Evident* Shestov, using Dostoevsky's *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, elaborates on human striving to abandon freedom for the sake of communal worship. 'Люди не то что не свободны, люди больше всего в мире боятся свободы, оттого они и ищут "познания", оттого им нужен "непогрешимый", бесспорный авторитет, т. е. такой, перед которым бы они могли все вместе преклоняться',³⁴⁰ Shestov writes. – 'Свобода и есть ведь тот

³³⁶ Milosz, pp. 106-107.

³³⁷ Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, p. 23.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 24-25.

³³⁹ Shestov, *Начала и концы*, p. 181.

³⁴⁰ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 102.

“каприз”, о котором нам рассказывал подпольный человек, но даже каприз здесь, на земле, хочет, мы помним, себе “гарантий”, не подозревая, что величайшая его привилегия - это возможность обойтись без гарантий’.³⁴¹

In the same vein Shestov finishes this essay by proclaiming that ‘Бога доказывать, искать Его в “истории” нельзя. Бог - воплощенный “каприз”, отвергающий все гарантии. Он вне истории, как и все то, что люди считали своим τὸ πρῶτον [самым главным]’.³⁴² Shestov emphasises once again that the main tragedy of Dostoevsky was his attempt to reconcile that caprice, which his extraordinary vision revealed to him, to the laws and principles by which ‘omnitudo’ (‘всемство’) lives – in other words, to start preaching, to convert the truth of revelation into the truth of speculation. As we have already quoted above, Shestov’s conclusion is unequivocal: ‘Результаты получаются неслыханные. Зажатые в тиски всемирности, “исступления” Достоевского становятся “прислужниками” обыденности’.³⁴³ To exemplify this point Shestov returns again to the portrayal of Dostoevsky's false political prophecies, as he did fifteen years earlier in his essay *The Gift of Prophecy*. However, in his last work on Dostoevsky – *On the “Regeneration of Convictions” in Dostoevsky* – written in 1937, Shestov never mentions this subject again, for the threatening political developments in Europe at the time must have brought home to him some fundamental truth of those of Dostoevsky's political forebodings that were concealed in metaphorical form in his novels rather than stated explicitly in his *Diary of a Writer*.

6.II.2. Shestov's last work on Dostoevsky as a simplification and a summary. The search for God.

In general Shestov's last work on Dostoevsky is marked by the mature and religious outlook continuing Shestov's elaborations on religious faith, but in a different spirit from his *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky*. Indeed, in contrast to the latter, the nature of this last work was largely determined by popular demand, because it was conceived as a course of

³⁴¹ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 104.

³⁴² Ibid, p. 109.

³⁴³ Ibid, p. 108.

five short lectures on Dostoevsky to be given on the French radio by its request. These lectures were read by Shestov's oldest daughter Tatiana who also translated them into French. The excerpts from Dostoevsky were recited by Jacques Copeau who once played Ivan in a theatre performance of *The Brothers Karamazov*. As follows from Fondane's accounts,³⁴⁴ Shestov was rather sceptical about this whole enterprise because of the severe time constraints and due to its somewhat populist character. Nevertheless, he managed to compose, largely as a collage of his previous writings on Dostoevsky, a coherent and holistic piece giving an all-rounded impression of the writer. In it he summarised and in some ways revised all his previous views on the novelist. As Nikolai Losskii wrote about this article of Shestov, which later appeared in print in both Russian (*Русские записки*, No 2, 1937) and in French ('L'oeuvre de Dostoievski', *Cahiers de Radio-Paris*, 15 May 1937), in it 'автор как бы исправляет "ошибки" своей книги *Достоевский и Ницше*, а также других работ'.³⁴⁵

Probably due both to the broadcast nature of this piece as well as to Shestov's own maturity it is marked by a distinct shift toward tolerance in its discourse. In this work Shestov concentrated on Dostoevsky's religious transformation and demonstrated once again the Biblical nature of Dostoevsky's philosophical convictions. As Blagova and Emelianov write, Shestov considers as the main source of Dostoevsky's change of outlook his penal servitude experience superimposed with his study of the Bible. They summarise Shestov's 'new pro-Dostoevsky thesis' as the writer's daring attempt to juxtapose the Bible to the achievements of European science which essentially revised the Bible and substituted for it 'religion in the framework of reason'.³⁴⁶ They see Shestov's new approach to Dostoevsky in his perception of the novelist increasingly as an ideological ally rather than an object of criticism for not being fully true to their common cause, as Shestov saw it.

Indeed, in this work Shestov no longer reproaches Dostoevsky for compromising his second (extraordinary) sight by attempts to subjugate it to the ordinary one, to conform to

³⁴⁴ See Fondane, p. 133. See also Baranova-Shestova, II, p.167.

³⁴⁵ Nikolai Losskii, 'Лев Шестов: (К его семидесятилетию)', *Современные записки*, vol. 61, 1936, pp. 143-146 (p. 143). Cited in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 101.

³⁴⁶ See Blagova and Emelianov, p. 94.

'omnitude' ('всемство'). In this final work the struggle between the two visions is turned into Dostoevsky's inner religious quest. This shift in portrayal is also accompanied by suppressing the sophisticated and at times technical philosophical discourse of Shestov's previous two works on Dostoevsky in favour of a more simplified register and a focus on the religious rather than the philosophical dimension. On the other hand this again points to Shestov's having to target a broader audience. The illustration of the above shift can be seen, for instance, when comparing Shestov's descriptions of *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* in *Overcoming the Self-Evident* in 1921 with that in this latest article of 1937. The same words are used to tell the story, but the omissions characterise a distinct tendency for simplification and clarity. Also, a new name – that of Pascal – enters Shestov's narrative on Dostoevsky to replace his references to Plotinus and others, as we shall discuss below.

An interesting suggestion by Blagova and Emelianov is that Shestov's title for this work which has 'regeneration of convictions' ('перерождение убеждений') placed inside inverted commas thus implies some figurative rather than direct meaning. Indeed, they argue that Shestov means here not a transformation of convictions as such, but rather Dostoevsky's 'religious conversion'. In our opinion, this conjecture, even though it is indeed religious questions that form the underlying substance of the changes in Dostoevsky's world-view, reads too much into Shestov's intentions here. We think that the reason why Shestov used inverted commas in the title was not the indirect meaning of the phrase for him, but simply to emphasise that this was a quotation taken from Dostoevsky's own text. Indeed, we discussed at the beginning of this chapter Shestov's abbreviated quotation (used also in his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*), which, as Blagova and Emelianov aptly pointed out, he had taken out of context. In it Dostoevsky indeed refers to his 'transformation of convictions', and Shestov takes it from there and fills it with his own meaning. We insist on our interpretation because, even though Shestov's last work on Dostoevsky makes up for all the extremes of his previous vision of the writer, it still by and large repeats and recycles Shestov's old ideas on his main teacher (as he called the Russian novelist). To a large extent this work is a compilation of his previous works on the latter, only processed and united in the light of the holistic and solemn image of the writer that Shestov had acquired by then. He renounced his old accusations and portrayed Dostoevsky

as a martyr who was tormented all his life by the question of God. Shestov's overall conclusions are, however, largely reminiscent of his previous perception of the writer, and it is the general tonality of his reflections that is altered by Shestov's own shift towards a religious outlook. His vision of Dostoevsky in 1937 is the result of a life-long inner dialogue with the writer and displays a distinct continuity of his own thought.

Thus, in *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky* Shestov wrote 'Вера есть неизвестное и чуждое умозрительной философии новое измерение мышления, открывающее путь к Творцу всего, что есть в мире, к источнику всех возможностей, к Тому, для кого нет пределов между возможным и невозможным'.³⁴⁷ He then added along the lines of *Overcoming the Self-Evident* the implication of Dostoevsky's inner struggle, but focusing on its successes rather than its defeats and inner betrayals: 'Недаром Киркегард сказал: верить, вопреки разуму, есть мученичество. Недаром сочинения Достоевского полны столь сверхчеловеческого напряжения'.³⁴⁸ Similarly, in his last work on the novelist Shestov placed the main emphasis on the writer's never-ending religious search, which is portrayed as the most painful and tormenting experience, and stems from distinctly existential questions.

Hence, Shestov retells the familiar story, but focuses on the 'irremissible', on all those who are lost for humanity, and drives it towards the distinctly religious conclusions. Thus we become witness again to Dostoevsky's life path described as a philosophical psychobiography. Having started with the humanistic ideals of his teachers, such as Belinsky, and having written the much celebrated *Poor Folk* and subsequent novels, having lived through a near-death experience and penal servitude, Dostoevsky then experienced a profound existential crisis marked by producing *Notes from Underground*, which demonstrated a deep disillusionment with common morality, ethics and positivist scientific trends in general. Dostoevsky is therefore tortured by the question of the impotence of these methods to change human life, to help those who are irredeemable, lost, cut off from humanity, he oscillates between faith and faithlessness, contemplating the eternal questions of the

³⁴⁷ Shestov, *Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия*, p. 25.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Shestov quotes Dostoevsky's writings from his *Diary of a Writer* – which for Shestov continue the novelist's engagement with Belinsky's quests – such as: 'Я утверждаю, что сознание совершенного своего бессилия помочь или принести хоть какую-нибудь пользу или облегчение страдающему человечеству, в то же время при нашем полном убеждении в этом страдании, может даже обратить в сердце вашем любовь к человечеству в ненависть к нему'.³⁴⁹ On the other hand Shestov's text implies that this remark has to be supplemented by another one: 'Без высшей идеи не может существовать ни человек, ни нация. А высшая идея на земле лишь одна (Достоевский подчеркивает слово одна), и именно идея о бессмертии души человеческой, ибо все остальные высшие идеи, которыми может быть жив человек, лишь из одной её вытекают'.³⁵⁰

Yet this idea is perceived by the writer as an elusive entity. In Dostoevsky's novels it is much more a source of inner conflict than of inner harmony. In Shestov's words, 'Все герои "Бесов" – и не только Кириллов и Шатов, но и Ставрогин – в конце концов только повествуют нам о том, как Достоевский, подобно Мите Карамазову, всю жизнь мучился Богом'.³⁵¹ The religious conversion, implied by Blagova and Emelianov, emerges from Shestov's descriptions of Dostoevsky as a never fully completed and painful result of the writer's nightmares in his passionate and intense strivings to find the living God – the God of Abraham and Jacob rather than the god of philosophers. 'От "религии в пределах разума", подменившей незаметно для всех слова Писания "Бог есть любовь" словами "любовь есть Бог", он рвется обратно к истине откровения о живом Боге', Shestov asserts and adds that 'этому научился он от последних, забытых и отверженных всеми людей',³⁵² such as depicted in his own creations, for instance Raskolnikov and Sonia.

³⁴⁹ Dostoevskii, 'Голословные утверждения', vol. 24, p. 49. Cited in Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 181.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 48. Cited in Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 185.

³⁵¹ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 192.

³⁵² Ibid, p. 185.

In fact, Shestov again, reproducing the lines of *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*, equates Dostoevsky's own search with that of the above heroes by stating that 'убийца и распутница искали в вечной книге не то, что в ней ищут просвещенные люди нашего времени, а то, что в ней всегда искал и находил и что превыше всего ценил Достоевский'.³⁵³ By this Shestov means not morality with its lofty ideals, which Raskolnikov tested and rejected as bringing him no relief, but 'то понимание Евангелия, которое не отвергает молитв и надежд одинокого, загубленного человека, под предлогом, что думать о своей личной беде значит придавать слишком большое значение земному, низменному, преходящему'.³⁵⁴

Such a meaning can be indeed found in the Gospel, Shestov states, but only in that Gospel 'которое читает Соня, которое еще не переделано новейшей просвещенной мыслью, превратившей слова откровения "Бог есть любовь" в разумную истину: "любовь есть Бог"'.³⁵⁵ Shestov thus concludes that 'Подобно тому, как Соня и Раскольников, распутница и убийца, ищут своих надежд лишь в воскресении Лазаря, так и Достоевский видел в Писании не проповедь той или иной морали, а залог новой жизни'.³⁵⁶

This understanding of the divine and the same attitude to reason and morality as well as the same religious temperament Shestov found in the works of Pascal, on whom he wrote previously a separate profound piece – *Гетсиманская ночь (The Night of Gethsemane)* – which became part of Shestov's book *On Job's Scales* (the same one where *Overcoming the Self-Evident* appeared too). However, at that time Shestov did not compare Pascal with the Russian novelist, and it is only towards the end of his life that this idea emerged, possibly due in part to practical considerations. Indeed, it might have been prompted by the French cultural affiliations of the expected audience of Shestov's lectures. Yet, despite the possible pragmatic cause for making this association between Dostoevsky and Pascal, it was most convincingly justified by Shestov, who combined the pieces of his previous works on

³⁵³ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 184.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 185.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

Pascal and on Dostoevsky for his comparative characteristics of the two thinkers. Earlier in his career Shestov had made a variety of associations between Dostoevsky and other titans of philosophical thought. If in his youth he had drawn a parallel between Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, and later compared the writer to Kierkegaard, as well as Plotinus, Luther and other ancient and medieval thinkers, in 1937 he asserted and argued for the kinship between Dostoevsky and Pascal, calling the latter ‘spiritually the closest man to Dostoevsky’.³⁵⁷ Their passionate preoccupation with the tragic human predicament and profound disillusionment with ‘scientific’ paths to salvation makes them both particularly dear to Shestov. Indeed, he writes:

И тот и другой, глядя на ужасы мира, теряют доверие к тому, что нам приносит объективное знание. “*Je n’approuve que ceux qui cherchent en gémissant*”, says Pascal [“*I only approve of those who seek with lamentation*”] говорил Паскаль – все разыскания истины Достоевского отмечены великой скорбью человека, прозревшего всю глубину страданий, выпавших на долю людей, променявших откровенную истину на плоды с дерева познания добра и зла. И наша наука и наша высокая мораль – то, в чем мы привыкли видеть надежнейший и вернейший оплот против всех сомнений и искушений, вызывает в них лишь отчаяние. [...] Паскаль, точно вперед отвечая нашему времени, пишет: “*Quand un homme serait persuadé que les proportions des nombres sont des vérités immatérielles, éternelles et dépendantes d’une première vérité en qui elles subsistent, et qu’on appelle Dieu, je ne le trouverai pas beaucoup avancé pour son salut*”. [“*Though a man might be persuaded that the proportions of numbers are immaterial and eternal truths, dependent on a prime truth in which they have their being, and which is called God, yet I think he would not greatly have advanced his salvation*”].³⁵⁸

Thus, Shestov equates Dostoevsky's transformation of convictions to ‘essentially what Pascal called his conversion’,³⁵⁹ and it is this formula, it seems, that accounts for Blagova and Emelianov's suggestion, discussed above, to assign a deeper meaning to Shestov's quotation from Dostoevsky. Yet, as we pointed out above, Shestov speaks more of an inner struggle of Dostoevsky rather than his ultimate conversion. Indeed, the message of Dostoevsky's heroes, Shestov asserts, is that

Религия еще возможна, но Бога нет, Бог невозможен или, вернее, невозможен тот Бог Авраама, Бог Исаака, Бог Иакова, о котором говорится в Писании и которого призывал Паскаль, а возможен лишь бог философов – т.е. наряженное в пышные и торжественные одежды чудовище, раздробляющее и поглощающее все, что есть в мире и не остановившееся

³⁵⁷ See Shestov, *O ‘перерождении убеждений’ у Достоевского*, p. 190.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 191-192.

³⁵⁹ See *Ibid*, p. 192

пред тем, чтоб раздробить и проглотить даже то существо, которое одно было более ценно, чем все мироздание.³⁶⁰

Shestov's conclusion is, thus, that 'При мысли о том, что на престоле Бога воссядет это чудовище и будет для всех, как Бог – это, ведь, основная мысль Апокалипсиса, откровения Св. Ионна, – Достоевский испытывает те припадки безысходного, неудержимого отчаяния, которые являются, по-видимому, условием рождения великих, последних постижений и того необычайного душевного подъёма сил, который такими постижениями предполагается'.³⁶¹

Thus, as we can see, the same ideas of the private versus the general, of faith versus reason are evoked by Shestov in his latest work on Dostoevsky with renewed force. However, his voice is no longer feverish from doubt and inner torment, in contrast it is full of profound and almost peaceful conviction, it follows Dostoevsky in his journey towards God with joy rather than fear and dismay. Shestov refers to the familiar excerpts from Dostoevsky's works: to *Notes from Underground*, to Ippolit's confession in *The Idiot*, to *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* and to *The Meek One*, only to reinforce the vision of Dostoevsky's struggle against universal necessity. He then turns to *The Devils* and to *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* in *The Brothers Karamazov* to give the final message of human passions senselessly suffocating without any links to the living God, only to be overturned by the divine source of love and strength that the latter is still capable of providing. Thus, Shestov ascribes to Dostoevsky revelations of religious faith, even if fragmented or momentary, as the latter's ultimate answer to all the tormenting questions of existence.

Summarising *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, Shestov recollects the way in which 'Бог Писания отвечает на величайшую хулу на него' in order to be able to say:

И вот, когда Достоевскому открывается эта великая, непостижимая для нашего эвклидова ума истина, в нём происходит то загадочное преобразование, которое он назвал перерождением своих убеждений. Не любовь есть Бог, а Бог есть любовь. Не немощная, бессильная любовь, которая может лишь обливаться слезами над затравленным собаками

³⁶⁰ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 193.

³⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 193-194.

мальчиком, над бьющей себя кулачком в грудь девочкой, замученной своими собственными родителями, над несчастным Ипполитом, осужденным без вины на смерть, а любовь того, кто мир сотворил и воле которого все покорны. В такие минуты Достоевский преодолевает и “дважды два четыре” и “каменные стены”, и “законы природы”, и то страшное чудовище, которое проглотило все, что было в мире самого ценного – в такие минуты он пишет “Мальчика у Христа на елке” – его ответ на страшный и как бы не допускающий никакого ответа вопрос Белинского. Любовь, за которой стоит всемогущий Бог, уже никогда не обратится в ненависть. Ибо Бог защитит и успокоит тех, кто не нашел защиты и успокоения ни у людей, ни у человеческой мудрости. Чтоб обрести эту истину, Достоевский прошел сам и провёл нас всех через те ужасы, которые изображены в его сочинениях.³⁶²

With these powerful accords supported by equally powerful fragments from Dostoevsky himself, whose writings are again compared with the Book of Job in their elevated intensity,³⁶³ Shestov finishes his last work on the writer. In our view, Shestov's mature philosophical vision is accompanied in this work by a substantial evolution of his relationship with aesthetics which ultimately allowed him to create his image of Dostoevsky. Shestov with time came to appreciate the aesthetic aspect of Dostoevsky's writings. Having drawn the main ideas of his religious philosophy from the writer, Shestov eventually acknowledged the force of Dostoevsky's aesthetics too. Thus in 1937 he already speaks of Dostoevsky's voice which ‘все растет и крепнет и достигает неслыханной силы. Иной раз кажется,’ Shestov continues, ‘что слышишь не слова Достоевского, а один из несравненных псалмов царя Давида’.³⁶⁴

6.II.3. Two perspectives on Dostoevsky: Shestov and Gide.

The aesthetic aspect also plays a significant role in the analysis of Dostoevsky by André Gide who in some ways precipitated Bakhtin's, then forthcoming, ground-breaking insights into the artistic world of Dostoevsky. On the other hand, Gide's vision of the writer as first and foremost a humanist provides a certain counter-balance to Shestov's views and is thus particularly useful for our study. In a sense the principal differences of approach to Dostoevsky's works are captured in the statement of Joseph Brodsky which expresses the differences in the nature of Western (primarily Anglophone) and Russian poetry, or in an even broader sense – culture. ‘Это, грубо говоря, разные типы отношения к миру’,

³⁶² Shestov, *О ‘перерождении убеждений’ у Достоевского*, p. 195.

³⁶³ See *Ibid*, p. 192.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 196

Brodsky notes, 'рациональный и синтетический'.³⁶⁵ While Gide analyses specific aspects, Shestov displays a holistic approach, being interested in Dostoevsky's outlook on life in its entirety and thus reconstructing the story of the transformation of Dostoevsky's convictions. However, the reason for that does not necessarily stem from literary traditions, but rather from the fact that both thinkers found in Dostoevsky exactly what they were looking for. Although in this particular case what deserves attention above all is the fact that similar observations yield in Gide and Shestov, as a rule, quite unrelated conclusions.

As we mentioned before, Gide was one of the first Western critics to address the subject of Dostoevsky. He began his notes before the First World War, but was forced by circumstances to put them aside until 1922 – the centenary of Dostoevsky's birth. He delivered his thoughts in the form of lectures in early 1922 and in February of that year, a special issue of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* appeared, dedicated to Dostoevsky's jubilee, where Gide's article on Dostoevsky was published as well as Shestov's *Overcoming the Self-Evident*. André Gide, who was by then already one of the most influential figures in French literature, noticed and appreciated Shestov's contribution. The chronology itself frees us from assumptions of any mutual influences between Gide and Shestov in their views on Dostoevsky. Even though Shestov had by that time written his large monograph on Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, it was not yet translated from the original Russian, and one can be certain that Gide had not read it by 1922.

However, Gide had read a lot of Dostoevsky, as translations were emerging – in all the Western European languages accessible to him – German, English and French. And he was, without question, taken by it, to the extent that he started popularising the Russian novelist to an European readership, and laid the foundations of modern research on Dostoevsky. It is possible that a significant role in the high esteem in which Gide held Dostoevsky was played by Gide's intellectual tolerance.

What delighted Gide in Dostoevsky's writings above all, rather unexpectedly for the Western European mind, can be called irrationality, chaos and horror. However, Gide

³⁶⁵ Brodskii's phrase reported in Volkov, *Диалоги с Иосифом Бродским*, p. 198.

himself interpreted this as the full concentration of a human being on his inner life. According to Gide it is precisely the relationships of a human being with his or her self, and his or her God, rather than the more conventional, for Western literature, relationship with society, that present the quintessence of Dostoevsky's works. And, to his credit, he intuitively felt that anthropocentrism was the main principle of Russian philosophical thought, which using Zenkovsky's words, 'сказывается в том, насколько всюду доминирует (даже в отвлечённых проблемах) моральная установка: здесь лежит один из самых действенных и творческих истоков русского философствования'.³⁶⁶

However, what for Gide came as a series of discoveries and revelations, was absent for Shestov, who, for all his Western European intellectual orientation, had nevertheless been brought up in Russian culture with its Judaeo-Christian baggage combined with Slavonic idiosyncrasy. Thus the irrationalism of Russian literature became for Shestov a somewhat intrinsic feature of his character which explains why what for Gide was the achievement of penetrating a foreign culture, for Shestov simply served as a point of departure.

Thus Gide wrote with surprise: 'A certain category of problems – heart-searchings, passions, and associations seems to be the province of the moralist and the theologian, and a novelist has no call to burden himself with them'.³⁶⁷ But clearly both Gide and Shestov in their own ways recognised Dostoevsky's philosophical gift interwoven into the craft of a writer – the novelist for both disguised the philosopher. Rather anticipating Bakhtin's revolutionary study of Dostoevsky's poetics Gide recognised the deep personalisation of Dostoevsky's world³⁶⁸ and emphasised the role of ideas presented through particular personalities. 'The miracle Dostoevsky accomplished consists in this', Gide wrote: 'each of his characters [...] lives by virtue of his own personality, and these intimately personal beings [...] are introduced to us in all their puzzling complexity. The wonder of it is that the problems are lived over by each of his characters, or rather let us say the problems exist at the expense of his characters: problems which conflict, struggle, and assume human guise

³⁶⁶ Zenkovskii, p. 18.

³⁶⁷ André Gide, *Dostoevsky* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 15-16.

³⁶⁸ A precise quote from Bakhtin was given earlier in the chapter, or see directly Bakhtin, p. 10.

to perish or triumph before our eyes'.³⁶⁹ Gide also grasped the eternal, never-ending movement of Dostoevsky's world. 'His principal characters are always in course of formation', he wrote, 'never quite emerging from the shadows [...] In Dostoevsky's books, as in a Rembrandt portrait, the shadows are the essential... With him there is no attempt to straighten or simplify lines; he is at his happiest in the complex; he fosters it'.³⁷⁰

This idea about a psychological complexity which covers up the abyss of human consciousness underlies Gide's whole analysis of Dostoevsky. For him Dostoevsky is a writer based on the contrasts of human nature. 'So often in Dostoevsky one particular feeling is suddenly supplanted [...] by its direct opposite! We can find example after example of it',³⁷¹ writes Gide. And in developing this thought he comes a long way – reaching what essentially is his meeting point with Shestov: 'Dostoevsky [...] lost himself in each of the characters of his books, and, for this reason, it is in them that he can be found again',³⁷² Gide asserts. 'I know no writer richer in contradictions and inconsistencies than Dostoevsky'.³⁷³

For Shestov, of course, this conclusion that it is precisely through his characters that Dostoevsky continuously expresses himself and argues with himself is the central premise. Perhaps for Gide such an interpretation of Dostoevsky – through his heroes – was essential also for the reason that he appreciated this writer so much specifically in the artistic genre, but not through his journalistic work or correspondence. 'The same man who is so uncompromising and so tenacious where his own work is concerned [...] writes his correspondence anyhow [...] Perhaps we have never yet had an example of a literary man's letters so badly written, by that I mean written with so little regard for style',³⁷⁴ Gide says, not without surprise.

³⁶⁹ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 16.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 105-106

³⁷¹ Ibid, p. 90.

³⁷² Ibid, p. 55.

³⁷³ Ibid, p. 56.

³⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 22 and p. 21.

However, this perception of Dostoevsky through his literary heroes serves as the first, but not the only, organising principle for both thinkers. Before they head off in their different directions, Shestov and Gide construct quite a consistent range of views on Dostoevsky which is best described by the following words of André Gide:

...if I seek to know what part mind plays in Dostoevsky's novels, I realize that its power is demonic. His most dangerous characters are the strongest intellectually, and not only do I maintain that the mind and the will of Dostoevsky's characters are active solely for evil, but that, when urged and guided towards good, the virtue to which they attain is rotten with pride and leads to destruction. Dostoevsky's heroes inherit the Kingdom of God only by the denial of mind and will and the surrender of personality'.³⁷⁵

This idea of the hostile role of reason in Dostoevsky is, obviously, native for Shestov, but beyond that his path parts from that of the Frenchman.

It is interesting that Shestov is not bested by Gide in terms of psychological shrewdness. Shestov's treatment of Dostoevsky exemplifies the uniqueness of his vision which lies in the fact that often using an artistic perspective he makes discoveries of a purely philosophical character. Indeed, Shestov's summary of Dostoevsky is, as we saw, that 'фактически он во всем, что писал, только и делал, что рассказывал о перерождении своих убеждений. И именно в этом и заключается весь интерес его писаний – и для него и для нас'.³⁷⁶ As we have shown above, in unravelling this story of the transformation of Dostoevsky's convictions Shestov, using the roads of morality and psychology, comes to the sources of philosophical questions of the Biblical story of original sin, universal necessity and the commonplaces of reason.

In the case of Gide the situation is qualitatively different. For him the psychology and morality of Dostoevsky's heroes are not the method, as for Shestov, but the final destination of his research. 'I can distinguish in the characters of Dostoevsky's novels three strata or regions',³⁷⁷ Gide writes. – 'First the intellectual, remote from the soul and whence proceed the worst temptations. Therein dwells [...] the treacherous demonic element. [...] the second

³⁷⁵ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 95.

³⁷⁶ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 173.

³⁷⁷ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 120.

region is the region of passion, ravaged and desolated by storms; but tragic though the happenings be that these storms determine, the very soul of Dostoevsky's characters is scarcely affected. There is a region deeper still, where passion exists not. This is the region that resurrection [...], re-birth, in Christ's words, enables us to reach [...].³⁷⁸ We recall that Gide finds the secret of true happiness as perceived by Dostoevsky in the full renunciation of self, of personal demands: '...the mysterious essence of Dostoevsky's philosophy and of Christian ethics too; the divine secret of happiness. The individual triumphs by renunciation of his individuality. He who lives his life, cherishing personality, shall lose it: but he who surrenders it shall gain the fullness of life eternal, not in the future, but in the present made one with eternity. Resurrection in the fullness of life, forgetful of all individual happiness. – Oh! perfect restoration!'.³⁷⁹

Gide returns to this idea on numerous occasions, illustrating it by various extracts from Dostoevsky's works. The elder Zosima and young Alesha, Prince Myshkin and the wandering peasant Makar Dolgoruky – they all serve as a confirmation for him that the highest happiness and virtue are in self-sacrifice and self-renunciation. 'I repeat that even though he clearly formulates the problem of the *superman* which insidiously reappears in each of his works, we witness the glorious vindication of none but Gospel truths. Dostoevsky perceives and imagines salvation only in the individual renunciation of self. [...] it is not according to the positive or negative quality of their virtue that one can *hierarchize* his characters', continues Gide,

not according to their goodness of heart, but by their degree of pride. [...] by an inversion which I make bold to describe as inspired by the New Testament, the most abject characters are nearer the Kingdom of Heaven than the noblest. To such a degree is Dostoevsky's work dominated by these profound truths. "*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.*" – "*For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.* On the one hand, denial and surrender of the self; on the other, affirmation of the personality, the *will to power*, an exaggerated loftiness of sentiment. And take due note of this fact; in Dostoevsky's novels, the *will to power* leads inevitably to ruin."³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 120.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 137-138.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 92-93.

Such are the conclusions of Gide which, as one can see, are quite opposite to those of Shestov, who perceived the above positive characters as artificial creations and pale shadows invented by Dostoevsky only as a concession to public opinion. In contrast, Shestov saw the true Dostoevsky in those heroes whom Gide castigated for their pride, demonic mind and will to power. One could say that Gide's are the predictable conclusions of a moralist and humanist. Possibly his Western upbringing plays a role in it too, for he never ceases to admire the humility of the Russian soul, invariably juxtaposing Russian irrationality to Western rationality and logic. Giving one of Dostoevsky's letters as an example Gide writes:

Towards the end – drunk with the humility he used to intoxicate the heroes of his novels, that uncanny humility of the Russian, which may be Christ-like, [...] and which the Western mind will never fully understand since it reckons self-respect a virtue – towards the end, he asks, “Why should they deny me? I make no demands. I am but a humble petitioner!..”. Western readers will protest in face of such humility and contrition’.³⁸¹

Gide comments, ‘Our literature, too often tinged with Castilian pride, has so thoroughly taught us to see nobility of character in the non-forgiveness of injury and insult’.³⁸² Gide passionately defends Dostoevsky from the attacks of French conservatism:

Conservative and nationalist, deigning to see no more than what is chaotic in Dostoevsky, conclude he can be of no service whatsoever to us. To which my reply is that their opposition seems to do great hurt to the genius of France. By our unwillingness to accept anything foreign unless it reflects our system and logic, our whole likeness, in short, we err most grievously. [...] My opinion of intellectual protectionism I have often voiced. I believe it presents a great peril; on the other hand, any essay in intellectual denationalization involves a risk no less considerable. I am merely expressing what was Dostoevsky's finding likewise. There never was author more Russian in the strictest sense of the word and withal so universally European. Because it is essentially Russian, his humanity is all-embracing and touches each one of us personally.³⁸³

It is interesting, however, that talking about the religious roots of Dostoevsky, Gide, as well as Shestov for that matter, sees his deep connection with the Scriptures: ‘Dostoevsky abhors all churches, the Church of Rome in particular. He claims his right to accept Christ's

³⁸¹ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 37.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

teaching directly from the Scriptures, and from them alone'.³⁸⁴ Thus both Shestov and Gide coincide, so it seems, in their observations about the nature of the religious in Dostoevsky and the demonic role that he assigns to reason. In particular, Gide gives multiple examples of contradictions between mind and actions in Dostoevsky's heroes – examples which, as in the case of Shestov that we discussed in the beginning of the chapter, resonate directly with Shakespeare's words:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.³⁸⁵

Gide quotes Dostoevsky's correspondence where the writer attacks positivism: 'In the new humanity, the aesthetic idea lacks clarity. The moral basis of society, held fast by positivism, not only gives no results, but cannot define itself, for it is lost in cloudy aspirations and ideals'.³⁸⁶

And yet, there is a gulf between the conclusions of Shestov and Gide – first and foremost in what concerns the role played by humility in Dostoevsky's novels: Gide sees in it the key to the hierarchy of all Dostoevsky's heroes without exception as well as the highest virtue, and observes that the most 'saintly' of Dostoevsky's characters have this feature. Shestov on the other hand regards them as *lubok* (cheap block prints), in particular because, quoting Milosz, 'To Shestov peace of mind was suspect, for the earth we live on does not predispose us to it'.³⁸⁷ Shestov writes about Dostoevsky:

Ему самому страшно было думать, что "подполье", которое он так ярко обрисовывал, было не нечто ему совсем чуждое, а свое собственное, родное. Он сам пугался открывшихся ему ужасов и напрягал все силы души своей, чтоб закрыться от них хоть чем-нибудь, хоть первыми попавшимися идеалами. Таким образом и создались фигуры князя Мышкина и Алеши Карамазова'.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁴ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 139.

³⁸⁵ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by George Rylands (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 113.

³⁸⁶ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, p. 43.

³⁸⁷ Milosz, p. 105.

³⁸⁸ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 330.

Moreover, humility in principle is hateful for Shestov, and he is convinced that the mature Dostoevsky also repudiated humility with indignation and mocked it:

...смирение, проповедуемое тем, для кого все действительное разумно, и вызвало то дерзновенное восклицание Достоевского, которое я уже не раз приводил: “пусть лучше провалится мир, а чтобы мне чай был”. Ибо наше смирение есть смирение перед глухой и бесчувственной природой: может ли быть что-нибудь отвратительней и позорней этого? Но наибольший гнев, раздражение и презрение вызывает в Достоевском готовность всемирства [...] преклониться перед силой, перед “каменной стеной”.³⁸⁹

‘For Shestov, universal Necessity was a scandal’,³⁹⁰ writes Milosz and quotes the words of Dostoevsky, that we gave above, from the ‘Confession’ by Ippolit in *The Idiot* which refer to the painting ‘Dead Christ’ by Holbein. Shestov particularly treasured these lines, for he heard in them an echo of his own indignation at the cruel and unbreakable world order. As Milosz puts it, in these words of Dostoevsky the horror of universal necessity is best illustrated.³⁹¹

Now it becomes clear why Gide's admiration of Shestov's treatment of Dostoevsky was not reciprocal, but met with Shestov's scepticism with respect to Gide's thoughts on the writer. Shestov's disciple, the French poet Benjamin Fondane, recalls in his memoirs on Shestov how the latter described his conversation with Gide:

He's one of the most intelligent men I've ever met; he is extremely perceptive; there is nothing you can hide from him. At the time his book on Dostoevsky had just come out. We were at Pontigny. One day he asked me what I thought of his book. So, I told him that it was very well written, etc. He understood at once, and changed the subject. Since then he never talked to me again.³⁹²

In this story, amongst other things, one can see clearly Shestov's tendency towards irony and subtext. Although in this case, as we are now able to deduce, any mutual understanding was in principle impossible – as in a conversation of the deaf with the blind – the approaches of Shestov and Gide to Dostoevsky were too different. For they belonged to two opposite camps: traditional Gide spoke on Dostoevsky's behalf from the side of

³⁸⁹ Shestov, *О ‘перерождении убеждений’ у Достоевского*, p. 190.

³⁹⁰ Milosz, p. 115.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² Fondane, p. 77.

Christian morality, that very 'religion framed by reason' against which Shestov rebelled. Thus each of them had his own Dostoevsky.

6.II.4. Between faith and faithlessness. The fluidity of good and evil.

We shall conclude this chapter, using Shestov's words, 'не потому, что тема исчерпана, а потому, что статья разрослась'.³⁹³ However, before closing we shall return to the question of Dostoevsky's religiosity. This will be followed by a discussion of both Shestov's and Dostoevsky's relevance to modernity. The former topic – of Dostoevsky's relation to religion – is indeed vast. All sorts of theories have been assigned to Dostoevsky, almost all existing religions have been found in him. Shestov, as we saw, firmly connects him with the Gospels, but not with the product of speculative philosophy, and remarks on 'такими мучительными сомнениями была обуреваема душа самого Достоевского',³⁹⁴ and how at times he was forced to acknowledge that 'религия еще возможна, но Бога нет, Бог невозможен или, вернее, невозможен тот Бог Авраама, Бог Исаака, Бог Иакова, о котором говорится в Писании'.³⁹⁵ Gide in turn sees in Dostoevsky an attempt to fill in the chasm between Christianity and Buddhism, Asian mentality. 'I know no author at once more Christian and less Catholic in spirit', Gide writes, 'Dostoevsky leads us, we may take it, if not to anarchy, to a sort of Buddhism, or at least *quietism* [...] away from Rome'.³⁹⁶

In his article 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', Malcolm Jones attempts to gather together and reconcile diverse points of view on the religious in Dostoevsky. One of the conclusions that he reaches reflects in particular the points of contact of Gide and Shestov. While acknowledging that the reason for a vast diversity of existing interpretations of the religious in Dostoevsky lies in the fact that he indeed 'gave a comprehensive picture of the varieties of religious experience in the Russia of his day', Jones also asserts that 'Dostoevsky's distinctiveness' is not in that, but in the fact that 'he personally experienced that perilous threshold between the most pious

³⁹³ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 105.

³⁹⁴ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 193.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 139-140.

unquestioning faith and the bleakest unbelief' and 'repeatedly dramatised it in his fiction'.³⁹⁷

This in many ways reflects Shestov's perception of the writer, for Shestov's vision of Dostoevsky's oscillations between the truth of revelation delivered to him through his second – extraordinary – vision on one hand and the speculative thought of 'omnitude' ('всемство') consistent with Dostoevsky's first – ordinary – vision on the other hand, can be equated to Dostoevsky's tormenting suspension between religious belief and disbelief. Indeed, in Dostoevsky's works his struggle between faith and faithlessness persistently bursts out. In Shestov's book *On Job's Scales* we find a continuation of this idea where Shestov assigns to Dostoevsky himself what the writer famously expressed through the lips of Ivan Karamazov: 'Достоевский [...] полагал [...], что если нет загробной жизни, то невозможно, даже бессмысленно быть добродетельным'.³⁹⁸ At the end of the day it is this struggle which is responsible for all the contradictions and antagonisms which André Gide finds everywhere in Dostoevsky. This captivating struggle between good and evil, Christ and Antichrist, which stem from the soul of the author himself, provides as it were such an intense pulse to Dostoevsky's novels.

However, perhaps the most striking idea (which did not escape the attention of either Gide or Shestov) is the idea of how volatile and fast-changing human emotions and concepts, if not the moral categories themselves, are. More precisely, Shestov, as we have seen, is distrustful of morality and ethics born of reason, of speculative philosophy, to serve its needs. Thus Shestov's God, who as he himself thinks he took over from Dostoevsky, stands beyond good and evil. 'The good is not God. We must seek that which is higher than the good. We must seek God', - Milosz quotes from Shestov's early work and clarifies this point:

Which means that the despair that seizes us when we are faced with the Absurd leads us beyond good and evil to an act of faith. There is nothing impossible for God and for those who truly believe

³⁹⁷ Malcolm Jones, 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, vol. 37, 2003, p. 52.

³⁹⁸ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 243.

in Him. An absurd affirmation, for who ever saw a mountain moved by prayer? But do we have a choice? The fruits of the tree of knowledge bring only death. It should be noted that Shestov was not a preacher; he tried only to present a dilemma in all its acuteness. More definitely he was neither a moralist nor a theologian.³⁹⁹

Gide on the other hand talks directly about the interchange of opposite feelings in Dostoevsky's heroes, and of his tendency to rebel against his own theories as soon as they are formulated:

His ideas are practically never absolute, remaining relative always to the characters expressing them. I shall press the point even further and assert their relativity not merely to these characters, but to a specific moment in the lives of these characters. The ideas are, as it were, the product of a special and transitory state of his *dramatis personae*, and relative they remain, subservient to and conditioned by the particular fact or action which determines them or by which they are determined.⁴⁰⁰

This echoes in a certain sense Richard Peace's description of 'that contradictory convertibility of conviction so typical of the thought processes of the *underground man*' which is also inherent, as Peace notes, in many of Dostoevsky's characters, especially secondary ones.⁴⁰¹

Perhaps this unconsoling note can be viewed as, in its own way, a reconciling one for these two very different points of view on Dostoevsky (or, if you like, points of philosophical origin): humanist and moralizing, and irrationalist and existential. However, this rather sad note can be transformed into harmony by an unexpected aesthetic framing coming from our age. Indeed, it emerges from under the pen of Sergei Dovlatov as a certain (inadvertent) bow to Dostoevsky from the twentieth century – to a former convict from a Soviet soldier who served as a guard in a prison camp. After all they are separated only by time and barbed wire – concepts which are negligible in comparison with immortal thoughts on human nature. Dovlatov writes:

...Может быть дело в том, что зло произвольно, что его определяют место и время. А если говорить шире – общие тенденции исторического момента. Зло определяется конъюнктурой,

³⁹⁹ Milosz, p. 109.

⁴⁰⁰ Gide, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁰¹ Peace, *Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground*, p. v.

спросом, функцией его носителя. Кроме того, фактором случайности. Неудачным стечением обстоятельств. И даже – плохим эстетическим вкусом. ...Разумеется, зло не может существовать в качестве идейного принципа. Природа добра более тяготеет к широковещательной огласке. Тем не менее в обоих случаях действуют произвольные факторы. Поэтому меня смешит любая категорическая нравственная установка. Человек добр!.. Человек подл!.. Человек человеку – друг, товарищ и брат... Человек человеку – волк... И так далее. Человек человеку... как бы это получше выразиться – табула раса. Иначе говоря – всё, что угодно. В зависимости от стечения обстоятельств. Человек способен на всё – дурное и хорошее. Мне грустно, что это так. Поэтому дай нам Бог стойкости и мужества. А ещё лучше – обстоятельств времени и места, располагающих к добру...⁴⁰²

6.II.5. Post-modernist discourse. Shestov's and Dostoevsky's relevance to modernity.

Our final discussion will be on Shestov's relevance to modernity which has a lot in common with that of Dostoevsky and in many ways is inspired by the latter. Interestingly, it is precisely Shestov's concern with the individual rather than the social which allowed him to foresee the global cultural landscape of the future and which captured a rather post-modernist approach. As Blagova and Emelianov wrote, 'Шестов тонко прочувствовал процесс культурной динамики перехода в новое состояние эпохи, близкой постмодернизму, где принцип релятивности является основным и все точки зрения равноправны'.⁴⁰³ Similarly, Shestov's scepticism, adogmatism and his rather Nietzschean rejection of the accepted hierarchy of values are also similar to post-modernist concepts. In the same vein the post-modernist tendency of contemporary culture towards cynicism, if the latter is regarded as a form of despair, resonates with Shestov's forebodings.

It is then only natural that, as Viktor Erofeev observes, Shestov managed to foresee the aesthetics of existentialism and described a play of the future where the hero is completely alienated from others whether he is on a desert island or, which is the same thing, is trapped in his room in the middle of a multi-million megalopolis.⁴⁰⁴ The theme of alienation, which is very Dostoevskian by nature, has become dominant in contemporary literature and culture. In the late 1960s Sidney Monas wrote that Shestov's 'emphasis on the severed state [...] brings him very close to the concerns of modern literature, to the Sartre of *Nausea* and

⁴⁰² Dvlatov, *Зона* in *Собрание прозы в трех томах*, vol. I, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁰³ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 116.

⁴⁰⁴ See Erofeev, pp. 180-181

Huis clos, to Beckett, to the Camus of *The Outsider*'.⁴⁰⁵ In a sense these can be viewed as precursors of post-modernism. It is in Dostoevsky as well as in Nietzsche that Shestov had ample material to build on with respect to the themes of individualism and alienation stretching into the future. The clearest manifestation can be found in Dostoevsky's gloomy predictions of the feverish, disoriented and destructive state of mankind depicted in Raskolnikov's dream:

Появились какие-то новые трихины, существа микроскопические, вселявшиеся в тела людей. Но эти существа были духи, одаренные умом и волей. Люди, принявшие их в себя, становились тотчас же бесноватыми и сумасшедшими. Но никогда, никогда люди не считали себя так умными и непоколебимыми в истине, как считали зараженные. Никогда не считали непоколебимее своих приговоров, своих научных выводов, своих нравственных убеждений и верований. Целые селения, целые города и народы заражались и сумасшестввовали. Все были в тревоге и не понимали друг друга, всякий думал, что в нем в одном и заключается истина, и мучился, глядя на других, бил себя в грудь, плакал и ломал себе руки. Не знали, кого и как судить, не могли согласиться, что считать злом, что добром. Не знали, кого обвинять, кого оправдывать. Люди убивали друг друга в какой-то бессмысленной злобе.⁴⁰⁶

'Апокалиптические предчувствия Достоевского, зашифрованные в этом сне, парадоксально сбываются наяву в эру глобализации, в эпоху войны с терроризмом',⁴⁰⁷ wrote Blagova and Emelianov, and pointed to Shestov's strong sense of identification with Dostoevsky's concerns and especially to Shestov's drawing a parallel between Dostoevsky and existentialist philosophers such as Nietzsche, Pascal and Kierkegaard.

Another aspect of post-modernism is a loss not only of sincerity and truth, but, as it were, of the very notions of them, when 'the self ultimately "vanishes fully into the state of relatedness. One ceases to believe in a self independent of the relations in which he or she is embedded"'.⁴⁰⁸ As Gergen writes further, 'if one is multiply populated, harboring myriad

⁴⁰⁵ Monas, p. xxii

⁴⁰⁶ Dostoevskii, *Преступление и наказание*, Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах (Leningrad: Nauka, 1972-1986), vol. 6, pp. 419-420.

⁴⁰⁷ Blagova and Emelianov, p. 117.

⁴⁰⁸ Kenneth Gergen, *Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 17. Cited in A. Cento Bull, forthcoming, 'Political violence, stragismo and "civil war": an analysis of the self-narratives of neofascist protagonists'.

voices from culture and history, there is no expression that stands as true. And for the postmodern, words do not “reflect” or “picture” states of mind. Words are not mirrors or pictures but integral parts of ongoing interchange’.⁴⁰⁹ This description of what Gergen calls a ‘saturated self’ resonates very strongly with the polyphonic world of Dostoevsky’s heroes, thus reinforcing the point of the writer’s intrinsic involvement with the post-modern. On the other hand the concept of a ‘saturated self’ is an extreme implication of social constructionism which informs narrative approaches to research.⁴¹⁰ Within these approaches, as Bull writes drawing on the works of Crossley and Freeman, ‘what was needed was “a different kind of psychology – one which retained the ability of appreciating the linguistic and discursive structuring of ‘self’ and ‘experience’, but one which also maintained a sense of the essentially personal, coherent and ‘real’ nature of individual subjectivity”’.⁴¹¹ As Freeman sees it, one has to ‘maintain and embrace this primacy of word *without losing world in the process*’.⁴¹² From this point of view Shestov’s treatment of Dostoevsky in the vein of ‘narrative psychology’ should seem as most appropriate, except that the degree of being ‘a saturated self’ for Dostoevsky’s heroes is such that the resulting complexity of his fictional world resists entirely being treated as self-narrative. Yet, as we have shown, certain one-dimensional spaces within the writer’s multi-dimensional cosmos do seem to lend themselves to Shestov’s ‘narrative psychology’ approach, which clearly anticipated its modern forms.

Equally pertaining to modernity is Shestov's connection with the absurd. As Czeslaw Milosz aptly points out, Shestov wanted to highlight the absurdity of human existence concealed by reason. And it is not surprising, Milosz says, that Albert Camus in his *Myth of Sisyphus* mentions first of all Kierkegaard and Shestov as protagonists of paradox and absurdity.⁴¹³ Indeed, Shestov felt, following Dostoevsky, that reason and the advances of

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 38.

⁴¹⁰ See Bull, forthcoming, ‘Political violence, stragismo and “civil war”’.

⁴¹¹ Bull, forthcoming, ‘Political violence, stragismo and “civil war”’, citing M. L. Crossley, ‘Formulating Narrative Psychology: The Limitations of Contemporary Social Constructionalism’, *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 13, No 2, 2003, p. 289.

⁴¹² M. Freeman, *Re-writing the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 16. Cited in Bull, forthcoming, ‘Political violence, stragismo and “civil war”’.

⁴¹³ Milosz, p. 107

the human mind are unable to help man in his existential suffering. This schism between scientific advances and our inner world continues to become frighteningly large and today poses a real threat for the survival of humanity. It is this schism that Shestov's premonitions were about. He treasured the words of Shatov from Dostoevsky's *The Devils*: 'Никогда разум не в силах был определить зло и добро, или даже отделить зло от добра, хотя бы приблизительно; напротив, всегда позорно и жалко смешивал; наука же давала разрешения кулачные'.⁴¹⁴

Following Dostoevsky, Shestov mocked any pretence of science to solve the problems of human spirituality. We have demonstrated above how Dostoevsky says in *The Brothers Karamazov* through the lips of Mitia who is telling Alesha about the real discovery of a contemporary of Dostoevsky's, the physiologist Claude Bernard, that little tails of nerves in the brain are the cause of his ability to think, and not his living soul and the fact that he is created in the divine image and likeness. Shestov repeated such mockery starting from his very first book where he described as a major fact of modern history the phenomenon of a scientist having left his study in order to claim authority over life in all its aspects.⁴¹⁵

In a similar sense if we view globalism as a phenomenon whereby technological progress is used to shield the purely utilitarian interests of a minority and to facilitate their high standard of living at the expense of others, in particular neglecting individual needs, then we can assert that Shestov's warnings against the encroachment of technocracy with its neglect of the individual, of technological advance validated by soulless rationalism, were also a precursor of anti-globalism. Shestov, following Dostoevsky, was constantly warning mankind against the dangerously self-assured power of reason, saying that 'a soulless force' acquired through science a power over people. N. V. Motroshilova sees the main message of Shestov and Dostoevsky in claiming that 'если разум, наука, опредмечивающая их техника будут оторваны от постоянной проверки действенным судом нравственной совести человека и человечества, то они способны стать

⁴¹⁴ Dostoevskii, *Бесы* in *Полное собрание сочинений в 30 томах*, vol. 10, p. 199.

⁴¹⁵ The appropriate quotation in the original Russian was already given in Chapter 2 (or see directly: Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 11).

огромным злом'.⁴¹⁶ 'Не такая ли "равнодушная сила" властвует сегодня над всеми нами, пользуясь раскрытыми наукой и разумом тайнами атомного ядра?',⁴¹⁷ Motroshilova asks in her article on Shestov. 'И разве не оказалась причастной к этой трагедии современного человечества слепая вера в якобы самостоятельное и в себе благое "шествие" научного разума?',⁴¹⁸ she continues. Motroshilova emphasises the relevance of this dangerous cult of science and reason especially in the case of Russia, because in contrast to the West where an anti-science movement had an opportunity to make its voice heard, in Russia any criticism of scientific reason was regarded as politically subversive. This concealed an attempt of the political and administrative system to subjugate science and philosophy to its aims. Motroshilova stresses that, as is clear today, in the epoch of the most powerful advance of reason and science, 'разуму и науке не удалось сдержать завышенных обещаний крайних рационалистов, сциентистов всех времен и народов – сделать человечество благополучным и счастливым, не знающим страданий и трагедий, держащим в своих руках нити универсального господства над миром, его тайнами, загадками'.⁴¹⁹

In an existential sense, the central conflict exposed by Shestov, which by and large he has derived from Dostoevsky's writings, – between the private and the general, between individuality and 'всемство' understood in a broad sense, between man's irrational inner world and the rational means offered by reason to deal with it – can also be regarded as underlying for such characteristics of contemporary society as consumerism and addictions of all kinds including drugs, virtual reality and popular culture. For they are manifestations of a lack of individuality in the face of sweeping forces that represent by-products of scientific progress and suppress personality. Moreover, the emptiness and helplessness inflicted by man's realisation of his tragic fate and existential solitude cannot be solved by rationalist scientific methods. Such problems have to be combated by means of art, or aesthetics, for it is the latter which is responsible for everyone's 'uncommonness of visage'.

⁴¹⁶ N. V. Motroshilova, 'Парабола жизненной судьбы Льва Шестова', *Вопросы философии*, No 1, Moscow, 1989, pp. 135-136.

⁴¹⁷ Motroshilova, 'Парабола жизненной судьбы Льва Шестова', p. 135.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid, p. 136

To quote Brodsky again, our 'aesthetic choice is always individual, and aesthetic sensation is always private. Any new aesthetic reality renders the person experiencing it even more private, and this privateness, which sometimes acquires the form of literary (or some other) taste, may in itself turn out to be if not a guarantee then a form of defence against enslaving'.⁴²⁰

In our view Shestov's whole philosophy, when viewed from an artistic perspective, highlights this fundamental problem of the enigmatic and supernatural character of the human psyche insubordinate to rational means, and passionately protects the irrational from the rational. At the same time, when viewed more literally, it offers unquestioning faith as the only solution to man's tragedy. Shestov claimed that Dostoevsky's *The Devils* demonstrated 'во что превращается человеческая жизнь, оторванная знанием от ее Творца'.⁴²¹ In broader terms, as Yves Bonnefoy wrote, 'Shestov is a witness of the hope that there is sense and value to existence. The thought which is certainly more difficult to keep alive and active than a belief in a simple miracle'.⁴²² And it is no accident that Milosz drew a parallel between Shestov the philosopher and Brodsky the poet, calling both defenders of the sacred in an age of faithlessness. This reinforces the timely and modern nature of Shestov's philosophy today, because the chasm mentioned by Brodsky between man and his thoughts about himself (in the sense of his preoccupation with existential questions) is becoming with time ever wider and more irremediable.

6.II.6. The religious in Dostoevsky within and beyond his times. Apophatic theology, minimal religiosity and the Hassidic tradition of Shestov's childhood.

However, this process is dual because simultaneously with an undeniable spiritual decline rooted in newly found Russian capitalism within the country's motion to join the free world, there is a rise of re-born religiosity in Russia today, which deserves close attention and which, in many ways, leads us back to Dostoevsky's religious world. That is why in our

⁴²⁰ Joseph Brodsky, 'Uncommon Visage. The Nobel Lecture', p. 49.

⁴²¹ Shestov, *О 'перерождении убеждений' у Достоевского*, p. 194

⁴²² Bonnefoy, 'A l'impossible tenu: la liberté de Dieu et celle de l'écrivain dans la pensée de Chestov', pp. 16-17.

analysis below we shall refer to Malcolm Jones's article 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World'.⁴²³

In it Jones draws on Ninian Smart's book *The World's Religions*.⁴²⁴ Amongst the seven dimensions of religion that Smart provides in his book it is the *practical and ritual dimension* together with the *narrative or mythic* one which, in our view, by and large dominate the other dimensions in modern Russian Orthodoxy. They serve as an umbrella for the *experiential and emotional* dimension first of all together with the *ethical and legal* one, and to a lesser extent for the *doctrinal and philosophical* dimension as well as the *social and institutional*. The other strong dimension is the *material* one, whereby religion is embodied in material objects such as icons, buildings and works of art. This dimension, in the Russian context, is incorporated, in a certain sense, in the first two dimensions above.

Religious rituals, the Russian Orthodox Service and Liturgy indeed are, and have been historically, the leading components of Russian religiosity. At the same time the mystical tradition of the Eastern Church is well known. From a certain perspective one can trace its roots in apophatic theology which is 'a way towards mystical union with a God who is incomprehensible to us',⁴²⁵ as Malcolm Jones writes paraphrasing Vladimir Lossky. Jones explains that apophatic is

negative theology which leads us ultimately to total ignorance. God is beyond existence, so to approach him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to him, that is to say, all that exists. By progressively setting aside all that can be known, one may draw near to the Unknown in the darkness of ignorance, wherein He who is beyond all created things has his dwelling. The mysteries of theology are finally laid bare in a darkness of silence beyond the light of created things.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Malcolm Jones, 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, vol. 37, 2003, pp. 41-53.

⁴²⁴ Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁴²⁵ See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clarke and Co Ltd, 1957), pp. 25-28. Cited (paraphrased) in Jones, 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', p. 47.

⁴²⁶ Jones, 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', p. 47.

Thus, paradoxically, the experience of the divine presence is only possible by a way of total ignorance. On the other hand, 'theology must be not so much a quest for positive notions about the divine being as an experience that surpasses all understanding'.⁴²⁷

This description of apophatic theology as a way towards mystical union with an incomprehensible God in the dark silence of total ignorance and as an experience which surpasses all understanding is strikingly close to Shestov's emphasis on revelation rather than speculation, and on faith being the second dimension of thought that does not lend itself to any rational understanding. In turn the roots of Shestov's religious philosophy lie, as Sidney Monas suspects, in the Hassidic tradition. Indeed, Monas elaborates, 'like the Hassidim, Shestov believed in the unique, the overwhelming, the ineffable insight. What can be thought through or reasoned out, what lends itself to abstraction or to precision or formulation is at best provisional, 'preparatory'. [...] Like the Hassidim, Shestov cultivated a respect for mystery that survived the most intense rationalist training',⁴²⁸ Monas wrote. As he explains, 'The Hassidic movement [...] went very much against the grain of established [...] Jewish thought which tended to be rationalist in its approach to the world and allegorical in its interpretations of Holy Writ'.⁴²⁹ He highlights the Hassidic emphasis on revelation, on the experience of the divine presence which is invariably instantaneous and intuitive. There seems to be a difference, however, between apophatic theology and Shestov's, as well as Hassidic, perception of the divine. It lies in the fact that although 'apophatic theology will never be abstract, working through concepts', it still appeals to the human mind by being 'contemplative, raising the mind to those realities that pass all understanding',⁴³⁰ while in Shestov's outlook mind, reason, speculation are orthogonal to faith and essentially have no place in religious consciousness which exists by way of revelation alone.

⁴²⁷ See Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 38. Cited in Jones, 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', p. 47.

⁴²⁸ Monas, p. ix

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. xiii

⁴³⁰ See Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, p. 38. Cited in Jones, 'Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky's Fictional World', p. 47.

On the other hand, as Jones explains, the apophatic tradition is closely related to deconstructive nihilism, because ‘the silence at the core of apophatic religion may be interpreted or experienced either as fullness or as an absence, as glorious plentitude or as desolate abyss’.⁴³¹ Jones thus concludes that nihilism and faith should be regarded as opposites that converge rather than as separate poles. He then gives another expression of this idea suggested by Mikhail Epstein that ‘apophaticism is a liminal phenomenon through which faith crosses into atheism, while atheism itself reveals the unconscious of faith’.⁴³² ‘This fateful proximity, at a vanishing point beyond the horizon, of belief and unbelief’⁴³³ Jones observes in Dostoevsky’s personal experience reflected also in his novels, and which, we add, Shestov, of course, was very aware of. Jones writes that unsurprisingly this experience is often associated with epilepsy, but emphasises also that illness for Dostoevsky ‘could be the privileged gateway to higher spiritual awareness’.⁴³⁴ Similarly, Shestov wrote that ‘Эпилептики и сумасшедшие, может быть, знают такие вещи, о которых нормальные люди не имеют даже отдаленного предчувствия’⁴³⁵ and that a delirious mental state may simplify our search for truth.⁴³⁶ Further, Jones describes this experience of Dostoevsky as oscillation between total despair and hope. ‘This threshold experience has its roots in a mystical experience’ which was most intensely felt in Dostoevsky’s epileptic fits, Jones writes, and was described by the novelist as the most ecstatic joy, the extreme peak of harmony, beauty, peace and completeness; ‘an ecstatic and prayerful fusion in the highest synthesis of life, in which he understands the saying that time shall be no more’.⁴³⁷ This resonates with the Hassidic tradition, the followers of which, contrary to rationalism, ‘emphasized experience, *personal* experience, rapture,

⁴³¹ Jones, ‘Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky’s Fictional World’, p. 47.

⁴³² Mikhail Epstein, ‘From Apophatic Theology to “Minimal Religion”’, in Mikhail N. Epstein, A. Genis and Slobodanka M. Vladiv-Glover, eds, *Russian Post-Modernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture* (New-York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), p. 355. Cited in Jones, ‘Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky’s Fictional World’, p. 47.

⁴³³ Jones, ‘Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky’s Fictional World’, p. 47.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Lev Shestov, *Великие кануны* in *Сочинения в двух томах*, II, p. 293.

⁴³⁶ See Ibid, p. 296.

⁴³⁷ Jones, ‘Modelling the Religious Dimension of Dostoevsky’s Fictional World’, p. 48.

ecstasy – they were ‘dionysiac’ and not so different perhaps from the early Christians’,⁴³⁸ as Monas writes.

However, the apophatic tradition taken to the extreme leads to atheism, but both remain interconnected, as Jones explains in his article. Referring to the modern religious developments in Russia, Jones gives an account of M. Epstein's vision of it, in which the long suppression of theology has played a major role. Epstein introduces the term of ‘minimal’ religion which comprises a vague sense of the divine and results from the spiritual vacuum of the Soviet era. However, the tendencies of post-Soviet Russia include not only minimal religion, but also a return to the pre-atheist stage as well as neo-paganism, together with the blend of the latter with the former. This blend is characterised in particular by mystic and superstitious beliefs which are particularly prevalent in contemporary Russia. The process of people awakening to religion from a state of suppressed religiosity is interwoven with their interest in the supernatural and a rather pagan belief in simple miracles. In fact, these elements of paganism and mysticism are not exclusively due to the instilled atheism of the Soviet period, but to a large extent have historically always been present in Russia and have differentiated it from the West. This spirit was captured by Shestov, who was, as we mentioned earlier, by origin and education a product of both Eastern and Western culture, in the following lines (partially quoted in Chapter 1):

Европа давным-давно забыла о чудесах: она дальше идеалов не шла; это у нас в России до сих пор продолжают смешивать чудеса с идеалами, как будто бы эти два ничего общего меж собой не имеющие понятия, были совершенно однозначными. Ведь наоборот: именно оттого, что в Европе перестали верить в чудеса и поняли, что вся человеческая задача сводится к устройению на земле, там начали изобретать идеалы и идеи. А русский человек вылез из своего медвежьего угла и отправился в Европу за живой и мертвой водой, ковром-самолетом, семимильными сапогами и т. п. вещами, полагая в своей наивности, что железные дороги и электричество – это только начало, ясно доказывающее, что старая няня никогда не говорила неправды в своих сказках... И как раз это случилось в то время, когда Европа навсегда покончила с астрологией и алхимией и вышла на путь положительных изысканий, приведших к химии и астрономии.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Monas, p. viii.

⁴³⁹ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, pp. 29-30.

Thus we can summarise our elaboration above by concluding that apophatic theology, which Jones closely connects with Dostoevsky's religiosity, can be seen as underlying Russian modern *minimal religiosity* and at the same time resonating with the Hassidic sentiments of the nineteenth century that in turn bear the roots of Shestov's philosophy and in a sense define his struggle against speculative trend in theology, to free faith from any dogma. Simultaneously, the nature of the Russian mystical tradition captured by Shestov at the dawn of the last century in the most penetrating fashion, is deeply encoded into the core of religious developments in contemporary Russia with a strong presence of neo-paganism and mysticism.

More generally, on the religious plane Shestov offers mankind a radical faith as the only way to salvation. As Valevicius writes, 'as a solution to the crisis of today, to the multiplicity of discourses, Shestov gives us nothing but faith as the solution'.⁴⁴⁰ However, Shestov remains silent regarding either the form or the content of this faith. Similarly to the parallels we have drawn above between Shestov's philosophy and post-modernism, Valevicius too sees in Shestov's religious thought a direct post-modernist connection, because, just as in Shestov's philosophy of tragedy man is vulnerable in the face of eternal necessity, in post-modernism he is also no longer at the centre of truth; instead man is an accident of creation, insignificant, mortal and pitiful. And the ecological crisis has only contributed to the above point, Valevicius notes. He emphasises that for Shestov faith is 'exactly that which strips us of our usual balance, which breaks and smashes our experience into infinitely small pieces, which takes away from us our joy, sleep, rules, convictions and firmness'.⁴⁴¹ Thus, Valevicius demonstrates how Shestov's 'frenzied restoration attempts, interrogations about the validity of our understanding, the hermeneutic approach'⁴⁴² prove futile and it is only the extreme leap of faith that is powerful and can lead to salvation mankind which is suffocated, according to Shestov's premonitions, by the spiritual void and

⁴⁴⁰ Andrius Valevicius, "Celui qui édifie et détruit des mondes": Léon Chestov et le post-modernisme à partir d'une lecture de Tolstoï' in *Léon Chestov, Un philosophe pas comme les autres?*, p. 140.

⁴⁴¹ Valevicius, "Celui qui édifie et détruit des mondes": Léon Chestov et le post-modernisme à partir d'une lecture de Tolstoï', p. 139.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p. 139.

absurdity that result from the dominance of rational thinking and self-evident truths. On the other hand, this leap of faith in the form of a constant striving towards unattainable Christian ideals is equally pertinent to Dostoevsky.

Furthermore, with Shestov's existential approach breaking, very much in the spirit of Dostoevsky's novels, the divisions between the social, cultural and religious, Shestov with his adogmatic thinking summons humanity to learn to live in uncertainty and to think independently. As Zakydalsky writes, 'More and more Russian intellectuals are coming to realize that the roots of their country's tragic history lie in dogmatism, suppression of individuality, and intolerance of doubt. Learning to live in uncertainty may be necessary today for the very survival of society, and there is no finer teacher of this than Shestov'.⁴⁴³ The same can be said about Dostoevsky's literary creations which with time do not lose their acute modernity and which lie behind most of Shestov's writings as a constant source of inspiration.

⁴⁴³ Zakydalskii, 'Lev Shestov and the Revival of Religious Thought in Russia', p. 164.

Chapter 7. Shestov and Chekhov. A conflict of ethics and aesthetics

While Shestov's affinity for Pushkin in a sense symbolised his love for and affiliation with Russian literature as a whole, and the influence of Tolstoy, and especially Dostoevsky, was extremely profound and to a large extent shaped his philosophy, Shestov's encounter with Chekhov was much more modest in comparison. Shestov dedicated to the latter only one significant piece – the article entitled 'Creation out of the Void' ('Творчество из ничего') – and numerous aphorisms in his preceding work – *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* (*Апофеоз беспочвенности*). Otherwise references to Chekhov are only scantily scattered throughout Shestov's writings. Yet, it is this relatively brief exposure of views which is of the utmost importance for understanding Shestov's relationship with art and notably literature, because it encapsulates his fundamental stance on the concepts of ethics and aesthetics, the analysis of which lies at the core of our study. It is our task in this chapter to elucidate this stance of Shestov and to explore its consequences for his creative work as a whole. In doing so we shall take issue with some of the interpretations of Shestov's main article on Chekhov and argue that the portrait Shestov drew was by and large a self-portrait. More importantly, we shall examine Shestov's treatment of literature in general as stemming from his treatment of Chekhov.

7.1. The theme of hopelessness. Looking for a kindred spirit in Chekhov's 'mirroring text'.

Shestov's article 'Creation out of the Void' was in some sense conceived in his preceding book *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*, and both works were produced in close sequence: the article was written in 1904 and published the following year in the March issue of *Voprosy zhizni* (*Вопросы жизни*),¹ while *Apotheosis* appeared in January 1905, published by *Obschestvennaja pol'za* (*Общественная польза*).² The book was written in a deliberately fragmented and subversive fashion – as a collection of challenging aphorisms – evidently in order to break away from imposed literary and broader – philosophical, ethical and even aesthetic – conventions. Nietzsche's rebellious influence is acutely felt, both in its content

¹ See Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 77.

² See Ibid, p. 69.

and form. As Shestov announced himself, in this work he wanted to do away with the ‘all-uniting idea’. As he wrote in the preface, ‘самое обременительное и тягостное в книге - это общая идея. Ее нужно всячески вытравлять’.³ In his view it is for the sake of this general idea and of consistency that ‘free thought’ is normally sacrificed.⁴ He rebelled against this pattern and proclaimed groundlessness, a revolt against any established intellectual dogma. That is why the subtitle of the book reads *An Attempt at Adogmatic Thinking (Опыт адогматического мышления)*.

As Ivanov-Razumnik points out, the book was originally intended to have the title *Turgenev and Chekhov*.⁵ However, Shestov's plans had changed – both for internal and external reasons. His decision to deconstruct the existing materials and to reassemble them in a different way so as to escape coherence and consistency for the sake of inner liberation are explained in the preface to *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* which he ended up writing instead. An urgent call to attend to his sick father in Kiev in October 1903 forced Shestov out of his creative refuge in Switzerland and the interruption this entailed may have contributed to the change of his original plans. Still, in *Apotheosis* numerous aphorisms are dedicated to both Turgenev and Chekhov. Shestov's book on Turgenev remained unfinished and the existing materials were published as a complete piece only in 1982 by *Ardis* under the title *Turgenev*. It is in the next chapter of this dissertation that we examine Shestov's treatment of Turgenev. Other preparatory materials formed a part of the subsequent article on Chekhov. In fact a close relationship between *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* and *Creation out of the Void* is expressed by Shestov in his letter of April 1905 to his sister Fania where he says that in his article on Chekhov ‘связнее и проще передано содержание *Апофеоза беспочвенности*’.⁶

In 1905, when Shestov's article on Chekhov appeared in print, Shestov was still, figuratively speaking, in his ‘literary period’, even though the vector of his evolution was distinctly directed from literature to philosophy. However, his more profound theological,

³ Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 5.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁵ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 229.

⁶ Shestov's letter of 14 April 1905 to his sister Fania Lovtskii. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 80.

religious and philosophical self-education was yet to take place and to result ultimately in his most significant and purely philosophical writings. At the time of Shestov's article on Chekhov these could not yet be conceived.

Shestov's deep interest in Chekhov started when the writer was still alive. Shestov recognised Chekhov's immense literary talent and clearly distinguished him from other authors. In particular, as Andrei Stepanov writes, Chekhov was the only Russian writer whom Shestov regarded as telling the truth of his own free will rather than being forced into it by the 'idea'.⁷ In his letter of 1902 Shestov wrote to his wife about Chekhov: 'единственный из русских писателей (кроме Толстого), с которым мне действительно ужасно хотелось бы познакомиться'.⁸ He conceived of writing a critical essay on Chekhov and asked Diaghilev to convey his intention to the latter and to request from him a chronological list of his writings. Chekhov fulfilled the request and supplied the list to Diaghilev in December 1901. However, he did not live to see the manuscript which was completed only three years later. Thus one can only guess what Chekhov's reaction to Shestov's article might have been. In all probability it would hardly have been sympathetic given Chekhov's rather sardonic attitude to critics and also taking into account that he disliked Shestov's book on Tolstoy. On the other hand, Chekhov expressed a sympathetic attitude to Veniamin Albov's critical review of his works,⁹ which, in Stepanov's view is closely related in some of its messages to Shestov's article on Chekhov.¹⁰ However, as we shall argue below, the ideas of Albov that Chekhov liked are most probably those where Albov departs from Shestov.

The principal idea of Shestov's article is already expressed at the outset in Shestov's laconic style: 'Чехов', he writes, 'был певцом безнадежности. Упорно, уныло, однообразно в

⁷ Andrei Stepanov, 'Антон Чехов как зеркало русской критики' in *А. П. Чехов: Pro et Contra. Творчество А. П. Чехова в русской мысли конца XIX – начала XX в. (1887-1914), Anthology*, ed. I. N. Sukhikh, A. D. Stepanov (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo Gumanitarnogo Instituta, 2002), p. 1001.

⁸ Shestov's letter of 05 December 1902 to his wife. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 53.

⁹ V. P. Albov, 'Два момента в развитии творчества Антона Павловича Чехова', first published in *Мир Божий* in 1903, no 1, pp. 84-115.

¹⁰ See Andrei Stepanov, 'Антон Чехов как зеркало русской критики', p. 1001

течение всей своей почти 25-летней литературной деятельности Чехов только одно и делал: теми или иными способами убивал человеческие надежды. В этом, на мой взгляд, сущность его творчества'.¹¹ Subsequently, during the whole article, Shestov circles over this thesis of hopelessness as if gathering new strength, only to swoop down on the same place. What seems to be remarkable here rather than the actual merits of the case or what precisely Shestov finds in Chekhov's works (and what he overlooks), or the challenging controversy of his opinions, is the impression that Shestov interacts with himself rather than with Chekhov, tearing at his own shadow, at the route which effectively was the road of Shestov's own philosophy. Whether he recognised this himself or not, for Shestov with his profoundly psychological approach and tragic vision labelling Chekhov a singer of hopelessness concealed within it a proclamation of his great affinity with the writer whose main focus was also on human psychology and the tragic dead-ends of existence. However, the frequent assertion that Shestov assigned his own ideas to the writers under study becomes especially visible in the case of Chekhov, possibly because Chekhov was, in the words of Andrei Stepanov, a perfect mirror that reflected the opinions of those looking in it.¹²

On the other hand, indeed, it was not too difficult for Shestov to find a kindred spirit in Chekhov. As we know, Shestov's primary focus has always been on the tragic fate of the individual and his point of departure in any philosophical search came to lie in hopelessness and despair, and philosophical truth for him was achievable only through extreme loneliness – 'то страшное одиночество, из которого [...] не в силах вывести ни одно самое преданное и любящее сердце',¹³ using his own words. Moreover, as was explained in the previous chapters, his favourite quotation was from Plato's *Phaedo* that philosophy is nothing but the contemplation of dying and death. Thus, Chekhov's lonely heroes whose will to live on is broken represented for Shestov perfect material to fit into his paradigm. Behind them for Shestov there stood Chekhov himself and it is in reaching to the latter's existential experience exposed predominantly through the 'revelations of death' that

¹¹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 185.

¹² Andrei Stepanov, 'Антон Чехов как зеркало русской критики', p. 976.

¹³ Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 369.

Shestov saw the central task of literary interpretation. That is why Chekhov's *A Dreary Story* (*Скучная история*) that resonates with Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilich* (*Смерть Ивана Ильича*, which, we recall, was of extreme importance to Shestov in his study of the mature Tolstoy) plays a defining role in Shestov's analysis of Chekhov. As usual, Shestov searches in the thoughts of the dying professor for Chekhov's own ideas and wants to see the effect of tragedy on the hero as well as on his creator.

More generally, in the case of Chekhov, as in those that we saw above, Shestov's study of literary works turns into a pilgrimage through the soul of the writer, trying to reveal his hidden but invariably present crises and breaking points, the outcome of which in Shestov's eyes was to give rise through such a catharsis to total transformations of convictions. Shestov implies that, as the works of Tolstoy, such as the *Death of Ivan Ilich*, and of Chekhov, such as *A Dreary Story*, show, tragic experience makes everyone equal by annihilating what constituted previous success or comfort and transfers man into a different spiritual reality. A mediocre person, just like a sophisticated one, when 'чуть только пахнуло на него холодом трагедии — он весь преобразился'.¹⁴ In this context Shestov stresses that 'у разбитого человека обыкновенно отнимается все, кроме способности сознавать и чувствовать свое положение. Если угодно — мыслительные способности в таких случаях большей частью утончаются, обостряются, вырастают до колоссальных размеров'.¹⁵ Thus Shestov's main preoccupation in the case of Chekhov becomes, just as in the cases of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, to follow the writer into the domain of tragedy and to see which discoveries this brings back.

In this respect Shestov considers Tolstoy's influence on Chekhov to be of crucial significance because it gave the latter, who was still young, a protective shield of authority behind which Chekhov could express the same subversive ideas which Tolstoy 'smuggled through' in his last works. 'Если бы Толстой не проложил пути, если бы Толстой своим примером не показал, что в литературе разрешается говорить правду, говорить что

¹⁴ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 188.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

угодно, Чехову пришлось бы, может быть, долго бороться с собой, прежде чем он решился бы на публичную исповедь, хотя бы в форме рассказов',¹⁶ Shestov writes.

Thus in the case of Chekhov Shestov's usual pattern by and large stays unbroken. The idea of hopelessness lies at the heart of Shestov's analysis of Chekhov's creativity and, like a boomerang, comes back to Shestov's own world-view. Rather predictably, Shestov looks for its sources in Chekhov's personal drama, in the little corners of Chekhov's life hidden from biographers. Thus he writes, '*Иванов и Скучная история* представляются мне вещами, носящими наиболее автобиографический характер. В них почти каждая строчка рыдает — и трудно предположить, чтобы так рыдать мог человек, только глядя на чужое горе. И видно, что горе новое, нежданное, точно с неба свалившееся. Оно есть, оно всегда будет, а что с ним делать — неизвестно'.¹⁷ Shestov's central claim is that 'Чехов надорвался': 'В *Иванове* главный герой сравнивает себя с надорвавшимся рабочим', Shestov says and elaborates further:

Я думаю, что мы не ошибемся, если приложим это сравнение и к автору драмы. [...] И вот [...] нет прежнего Чехова, веселого и радостного, нет смешных рассказов для *Будильника*, а есть угрюмый, хмурый человек, "преступник", пугающий своими словами даже опытных и бывалых людей. [...] Он постоянно *точно в засаде сидит*, высматривая и подстерегая человеческие надежды. И будьте спокойны за него: ни одной из них он не просмотрит, ни одна из них не избежит своей участи. Искусство, наука, любовь, вдохновение, идеалы, будущее — переберите все слова, которыми современное и прошлое человечество утешало или развлекало себя — стоит Чехову к ним прикоснуться, и они мгновенно блекнут, вянут и умирают. И сам Чехов на наших глазах блекнул, вянул и умирал — не умирало в нем только его удивительное искусство одним прикосновением, даже дыханием, взглядом убивать все, чем живут и гордятся люди.¹⁸

Thus, 'в руках Чехова все умирало'¹⁹ becomes Shestov's categorical verdict.

7.2. A portrait or a self-portrait? A close reading of Shestov's article.

However, the implication of a crucial breakdown essentially conceals Shestov's own self-perception, with a major crisis being implicitly at the centre of one's destiny and having a

¹⁶ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 188.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 187.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 186.

¹⁹ Ibid.

defining role for shaping one's mind set. So much so that Shestov, as Simon Karlinsky somewhat effortlessly exposed, distorted the facts of Chekhov's biography. 'With no access to Chekhov's letters, with little knowledge of his biography, Shestov postulated a traumatic event in Chekhov's life which occurred between the completion of *Steppe* and the writing of his next two works which Shestov claimed were autobiographical: *Ivanov* and *A Dreary Story*',²⁰ Karlinsky writes. Furthermore, 'Shestov believed that *Ward No 6* was Chekhov's temporary concession to the humanistic ideals of the Russian literary tradition from which Chekhov then slid back to his usual despair in his next work, *The Duel*',²¹ Karlinsky explains. 'The chronology is as wrong as the interpretations',²² he then comments. Indeed, as he explains, '*Steppe* (January 1888) was written after *Ivanov* (October 1887), not before it; *A Dreary Story* (July-August 1889) was written simultaneously with one of Chekhov's most affirmative works, the comedy *The Wood Demon*. This makes a shambles of the trauma of 1888-89',²³ Karlinsky concludes. 'The writing of the *Duel* did not follow that of *Ward No 6*, but preceded it by one year', he elaborates further, and affirms that 'a number of stories on gloomy themes were written before *Ivanov*' and Chekhov in fact 'went on writing humorous stories after the publication of that play'.²⁴ It is worth pointing out in this context, however, that Shestov's own experience reflects the somewhat peculiar chronology of his personal traumas and their impact on his works. Indeed, as we pointed out in Chapter 4, his idealistic *Pushkin* was written (even if it remained unpublished) between his fully anti-idealistic books *Tolstoy and Nietzsche* and *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche*.

Karlinsky's strong and essentially irrefutable arguments are directed against the trend of critical thought that admired Shestov's article on Chekhov. For Karlinsky it remains 'a derivative piece of writing that deliberately distorted both Chekhov's texts and his biography' and 'combined Mikhailovsky's *On Fathers and Sons and Mr Chekhov* with Zinaida Gippius's *On Trivia*'.²⁵ Karlinsky traces the former influence in Shestov's

²⁰ Simon Karlinsky, 'Russian Anti-Chekhovians', *Russian Literature*, (15) 1984, p. 189.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

treatment of *A Dreary Story* as 'Chekhov's most self-revealing work' and the latter in the idea that 'Chekhov "assassinated human hope"'.²⁶

As Erofeev stated in the quotation that we gave in the previous chapter, the question of the authenticity of a writer's image was for Shestov essentially devoid of meaning. Hence the frequent exaggeration up to the complete distortion of reality in his critical essays. Thus trying to adjust Chekhov to Shestov's own personal ends he interprets the writer in the familiar light of tragedy. While attributing to Chekhov's pen a description of extreme and hopeless situations, it is in essence the tragic predicament of Job, so dear to Shestov and taken so personally by him, that he assigned to Chekhov's characters. Indeed, Shestov basically insists that the only route for salvation suggested by Chekhov is essentially the route of Job and the route of the ancient prophets: to scream and wail, to beat your head against the wall.²⁷ This phrase and its variations – of beating your head against the wall – became a leitmotif of Shestov's entire essay and was presented as 'the only solution Chekhov ever had to offer to life's problems',²⁸ as Karlinsky points out.

He also notices in this connection that Shestov again violated the truth by introducing two quotations from an entirely different story, *The Neighbours (Cocedu)*, and used them out of context to compose, in his usual way, a new, alternative, reality.²⁹ Shestov's implication in using the image of Job in relation to Chekhov is that this was Chekhov's own way of rebelling, which Shestov clearly shared, as his own writings consistently demonstrate. Thus in his work on Chekhov Shestov is trying to show that the writer's enemies are the same as Shestov's own, and therefore, as always, Shestov gets very personally involved in trying to uncover Chekhov's means of struggle. In Shestov's view, as we shall argue shortly, Chekhov fought against idealism by great disdain, but materialism did not leave the latter any other method of fighting except this radical resistance of screaming and beating against the wall.

²⁶ Karlinsky, 'Russian Anti-Chekhovians', pp. 188-189.

²⁷ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 210.

²⁸ Karlinsky, p. 189.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 189-190.

Furthermore, very much like Shestov himself in fact, Chekhov, in the latter's view, is inspired by desperate people, by wailing Jobs. 'Пока человек пристроен к какому-нибудь делу, пока человек имеет хоть что-нибудь впереди себя — Чехов к нему совершенно равнодушен', Shestov states; 'Если и описывает его, то обыкновенно наскоро и в небрежно ироническом тоне. А вот когда он запутается, да так запутается, что никакими средствами его не выпутаешь — тогда Чехов начинает оживляться. Тогда у него являются краски, энергия, подъем творческих сил, вдохновение'.³⁰ It is precisely here where the equality sign lies – the perpetual interest of both thinkers in the deadlocks of human existence, in the agony of a living creature in the mouse-trap of necessity, in the claws of inexorable destiny. However, Shestov describes Chekhov's rapt attention to the truth in a strangely unmasking, almost brutal manner, as if it were not Shestov himself who ultimately dedicated his life to the unending search for truth; who himself, like Job, yelled and cried, while realizing and even being resigned to the fact that his voice remained a voice crying in the wilderness.

A striking similarity can be observed between the above conjectures by Shestov regarding Chekhov and some thoughts on Shestov himself from an article by Igor Balakhovsky – Shestov's great-nephew – *Proof by absurdity (Доказательство от абсурда)*. In it the author mentions certain turbulent biographical events from Shestov's youth. We have already given substantial extracts from this article in Section 1.2 of Part I, so here we shall confine ourselves to just a short quotation and brief reiteration. Balakhovsky speaks of the abduction of Lelia Shvartsman (the future Lev Shestov), either real or staged by the boy himself, at the age of twelve, by an unknown political group who held him at ransom, but in vain. His tough, self-made merchant Jewish father refused to pay and the boy was returned home unharmed a few months later. This was Shestov's first exposure to the horrors of the world which might have scarred him for life. He then underwent a profound personal crisis and had an illegitimate son who was brought up separately. He did re-emerge from his crisis, but apparently the inner change was irreversible. More subtly, as Balakhovsky writes, 'люди впадают в депрессию не потому, что для этого есть

³⁰ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 193.

внешняя причина, а потому, что таково их внутреннее, эндогенное устройство. И если Шестов тратит столько сил, чтобы смывая толстый грим, показывать, что философия многих великих людей это философия отчаянья, то только потому, что он сам принадлежит к этой же породе и даже как-то гордится этим'.³¹

Thus the suggestion is clear: in describing the gloom of 'overstressed' Chekhov, Shestov in fact is looking at his own image in the mirror, or rather beyond the looking-glass, in that domain of tragedy which (in his own words) 'люди идут лишь поневоле'.³² A related conjecture was expressed by Boris de Schloezer whose multifaceted closeness to Shestov gives his ideas an additional weight. In his introduction to Shestov's book *L'homme pris au piège: Pouchkine, Tolstoï, Tchekhov* he considers exactly this extreme interest of both thinkers in the overstressed person and regards it as a continuation of their own personal crises, a turning point in their ideologies which, as he believes, clearly took place in the case of both Chekhov and Shestov. 'In fact there is nothing in common between the naive idealism and moralism of Shestov's *Pushkin* and his passionate interrogations addressed to Tolstoy', Schloezer writes; 'A natural question arises which cannot be ignored', he says later, 'how precise is Shestov's interpretation of Chekhov, isn't this portrait in fact a self-portrait?'.³³

To appreciate Schloezer's point, we must look in more detail at Shestov's interpretation of Chekhov advanced in his article of 1905. It became part of Shestov's book *Beginnings and Ends (Начала и концы)* which continued in spirit his previous works, especially those on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche and was marked by Shestov's distinct attack on positivism and idealism. It is certainly his own inextricable scepticism with respect to the idealistic system of beliefs that Shestov readily assigns to Chekhov. In doing so he equates Chekhov's experience with his own in terms of having taken the usual path of Belinsky, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and so many others – as Shestov came to demonstrate in his later writings – who too started with idealism only to grow ultimately to a complete

³¹ Balakhovskii, p. 50.

³² Shestov, *Достоевский и Ницше*, p. 327.

³³ Schloezer, 'Preface' to Leon Chestov, *L'Homme pris au piège: Pouchkine, Tolstoï, Tchekhov* (Paris: Plon, 1966), pp. 11-12.

disillusionment and to seek different answers. According to Ivanov-Razumnik there is a dichotomy in the question about the meaning of life: either there is no meaning and our life is accidental, or there is no accident and so there is meaning to life. 'Шестов', Ivanov-Razumnik asserts, 'начал со второго ответа и пришел к первому'.³⁴ Chance reigns on earth, and equally – in Chekhov's writings. It is the power of the accidental in which the main originality of Chekhov lies, Shestov asserts. To exemplify this point he focuses on the play *The Seagull* (*Чайка*), where, as he writes

наперекор всем литературным принципам, основой действия является не логическое развитие страстей, не неизбежная связь между предыдущим и последующим, а голый, демонстративно ничем не прикрытый случай. Читая драму, иной раз кажется, что перед тобой номер газеты с бесконечным рядом faits divers, нагроможденных друг на друга без всякого порядка и заранее обдуманного плана. Во всем и везде царит самодержавный случай, на этот раз дерзко бросающий вызов всем мировоззрениям.³⁵

Interestingly, Shestov was not alone in singling out these features of Chekhov's writings. Chance and a lack of causal connections were attributed to Chekhov, largely disapprovingly, by the majority of critics at the time. Thus, for instance, such different critics as Merezhkovsky, Pertsov, Mikhailovsky, Volynsky, Liatsky and Nevedomsky all reproached Chekhov for the ubiquitousness of the accidental in his works, as Stepanov observes in his overview.³⁶ 'Итог подводит Долинин в 1914 году', Stepanov writes and quotes the latter:

Коренной его дефект, слабость синтеза, сказывается порою очень сильно в том ли, что внимание читателя с самого начала разбивается по двум или нескольким сюжетам, в случайном ли эпизоде, мало связанном с ходом событий, в какой-нибудь фигуре, вдруг откуда-то вынырнувшей и на время заслоняющей все поле зрения, или, наконец, в ненужном ярком штрихе, в лишней торчащей частности.³⁷

The difference of Shestov's view in this respect was in the implication that the accidentality of Chekhov's literary world was something to be praised rather than denounced. As Shestov believed, chance reigns on earth, and only the accidental deserves close attention

³⁴ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 171.

³⁵ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 189.

³⁶ Stepanov, p. 983.

³⁷ A. S. Dolinin, 'О Чехове (Путник-созерцатель)', first published in *Заветы*, (7) 1914, part II, pp. 64-102. Cited in Stepanov, pp. 983-984.

(hence Shestov's animosity to what he perceived as the natural sciences' obsession with the regular rather than the irregular, with rules rather than exceptions). Thus Chekhov's writings for Shestov were more true to reality than any results of scientific knowledge derived by way of generalisations.

If the power of the accidental in Chekhov's works as well as his causal lapses were widely acknowledged, Shestov's implication about Chekhov's hatred for all 'conceptions' was not something universally shared. A substantial number of critics perceived in the writer a continuous quest for ideals and ideas, and attempted in various ways to single out his underlying philosophy. For example, I. Dzhonson (a pen name of the critic I. V. Ivanov) believed in the strong presence of ideals in Chekhov's world-view. In Dzhonson's opinion all Chekhov's writing career was a continuous search for the truth and meaning of life. It is exactly 'страстная и святая "жажда правды"'³⁸ that guided the writer, Dzhonson asserts. Similarly, A. S. Dolinin wrote that Chekhov 'искал "общей идеи", "бога живого человека"'³⁹. Equally, Sergei Bulgakov asserted that all Chekhov's creativity is dedicated to 'искание правды, Бога, души, смысла жизни'.⁴⁰ Iu. I. Aikhenvald in his turn drew a strikingly tender portrait of Chekhov the artist who 'заветно мечтал о бессмертном отдыхе человечества'.⁴¹

Shestov's essentially opposite stance is noted by Valevicius in his study of the latter. 'As with Dostoevsky, so too does Shestov understand Chekhov to be rebelling against the "idea"',⁴² he observes. Similarly Sidney Monas notices that what Shestov 'loved about Chekhov was precisely the absence of any violating idea, any general conception - indeed, the shrinking into absurdity, the ironic exposure of all general ideas, especially ideas of society, human behaviour, and morality, the withering of idealistic self-delusion'.⁴³ Indeed, 'мировоззрения и идеи', Shestov states in his article, 'к которым очень многие

³⁸ I. Dzhonson, 'В поисках за правдой и смыслом жизни' in *А. П. Чехов: Pro et Contra*, p. 424.

³⁹ A. S. Dolinin, 'О Чехове (Путник-созерцатель)' in *А. П. Чехов: Pro et Contra*, p. 960.

⁴⁰ S. Bulgakov, 'Чехов как мыслитель. Публичная лекция' in *А. П. Чехов: Pro et Contra*, p. 542.

⁴¹ Iu. I. Aikhenvald, 'Чехов' in *А. П. Чехов: Pro et Contra*, p. 752.

⁴² Valevicius, p. 45.

⁴³ Monas, p. xix.

относятся довольно равнодушно — в сущности, другого отношения эти невинные вещи и не заслуживают — становятся для Чехова предметом тяжелой, неумолимой и беспощадной ненависти'.⁴⁴ Shestov demonstrates through his usual ironic and indirect discourse what he perceives as Chekhov's opposition to scientific speculative philosophy. He quotes the old professor Nikolai Stepanovich from *A Dreary Story* contemplating his imminent departure to another world, and emphasises the fact that in the scientist's gloomy and desperate thoughts, the soul suddenly gains the indisputable upper hand over the mind or reason. Identifying, in his familiar manner, the hero with the author, Shestov summarises:

Ум снова, в противоположность тому, что было раньше, почтительно выталкивается за дверь, и его права передаются “душе”, темному, неясному стремлению, которому Чехов теперь, когда он стоит пред роковой чертой, отделяющей человека от вечной тайны, инстинктивно доверяет больше, чем светлому, ясному сознанию, наперед предопределяющему даже замогильные перспективы. Научная философия возмутится? Чехов подкапывается под незыблемейшие ее устои?⁴⁵

Shestov claimed that ‘даже у Толстого, тоже не слишком ценившего философские системы, вы не встречаете такого рода резко выраженного отвращения ко всякого рода мировоззрениям и идеям, как у Чехова’.⁴⁶ Just as in Shestov himself, ‘идеализм во всех видах, явный и тайный, вызывал в Чехове чувство невыносимой горечи’.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the following lines by Shestov about Chekhov are applicable without any change to Shestov himself, for they express, as was mentioned above, the essence of Shestov's outlook:

Есть в мире какая-то непобедимая сила, давящая и уродующая человека — это ясно до осязаемости. Малейшая неосторожность, и самый великий, как и самый малый, становится ее жертвой. Обманывать себя можно только до тех пор, пока знаешь о ней только понаслышке. Но кто однажды побывал в железных лапах необходимости, тот навсегда утратил вкус к идеалистическим самообольщениям.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 196.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 189.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 206.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Yet, Shestov's choice of words resembles more an attack on Chekhov and his *Dreary Story*, although this attack is in fact directed against 'всемство', conventional public opinion which in Shestov's eyes Chekhov rebelled against in this story within the framework of a broader rebellion – against philosophical trends of the positivist and idealistic variety. Deciphering Shestov's ironic, if not totally sardonic indirect discourse, one can see that Shestov really approves of what he sees as Chekhov's anti-idealistic stance:

Представьте себе картину: лысый, безобразный старик, с трясущимися руками, с искривленным ртом, с высохшей шеей, с обезумевшими от страха глазами, валяется, как зверь на земле, и вопит, вопит, вопит!.. Чего ему нужно?! Он прожил длинную, интересную жизнь, теперь осталось бы только красиво закончить ее, возможно тихо, спокойно и торжественно распроставшись с земным существованием. Но он рвет и мечет, призывает к суду чуть ли не всю вселенную и судорожно цепляется за оставшиеся ему дни. А Чехов? Что делает Чехов? Вместо того, чтобы равнодушно пройти мимо, он берет сторону чудовищного уродца, он посвящает десятки страниц его "душевному переживанию" и постепенно доводит читателя до того, что вместо естественного и законного чувства негодования в его сердце зарождаются ненужные и опасные симпатии к разлагающемуся и гниющему существованию. Ведь *помочь* профессору нельзя — это знает всякий. А если нельзя помочь, то, стало быть, нужно забыть: это прописная истина. Какая польза, какой смысл может быть в бесконечном расписывании, — гр. Толстой сказал бы "размазывании", — невыносимых мук агонии, неизбежно приводящей к смерти?⁴⁹

Furthermore, Shestov makes (one could say: in the impetuosity of his narration) some claims that are even more anti-humane (when talking about the same hero of Chekhov– the old professor Nikolai Stepanovich) which again are, in fact, implicitly directed against the 'eternal morality', as Shestov calls it, considering the latter as an offspring of reason – of speculative philosophy and the rationalist system of beliefs. And just as he would assign to a writer his heroes' views, Shestov assigns some anti-human sentiments to the 'eternal morality':

Поглядеть со стороны на такого уродца, и в сердце самого доброго и сострадательного человека невольно шевельнется жестокая мысль: поскорее добить, уничтожить эту жалкую и отвратительную гадину, или, если нельзя в силу существующих законов прибегнуть к такой решительной мере — то по крайней мере припрятать его подальше от человеческих глаз, куда-нибудь в тюрьму, в больницу, в сумасшедший дом: приемы борьбы, разрешаемые не только законодательством, но, если не ошибаюсь, и вечной моралью.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 192.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Thus in his philosophical attack against 'ideas' and in particular against autonomous ethics Shestov assigns to the latter concept the sort of Freudian currents of thought according to which the dominant aspect of each person is animal, carefully hidden under the make-up of manners, education and other social but purely cosmetic tricks. This core of human behaviour, Shestov implies, is simply a corollary of the utilitarian function which idealism conceals within itself, and Chekhov, according to Shestov, knew it only too well. To some extent it would be fair to say in this respect that Shestov's encounter with Chekhov, whom Shestov perceived as his twin in the writer's fearless adogmatic thinking, evoked in him feelings so strong that they were capable of throwing even basic humaneness into the polemic fire. In other words, such disavowing of basic humaneness was a deliberate step on Shestov's part deployed to emphasise how detached from real life the 'eternal morality' in fact is.

There are two important implications that follow from the above interpretation of Chekhov by Shestov. One points to a hidden, but close proximity between the consequences of Shestov's philosophy and Freudian theories which at the time were still to emerge. The other concerns a confusion between what Shestov interprets as Chekhov's hatred for the 'idea' or 'conception' and what in our view is the writer's disdain for any kind of hypocrisy. We shall address these two issues in sequence.

7.3. Freud, Shestov and positivist philosophy: proximity to the enemy.

As Viktor Erofeev observes, 'салвационализм Шестова в своей максималистской основе приходит в противоречие с требованиями культурной традиции, тем самым приводя философа к определенному культурному нигилизму'.⁵¹ Erofeev stresses importantly that 'пафос М. Гершензона как оппонента Вяч. Иванова по "Переписке из двух углов" в рассмотрении культуры в качестве "системы тончайших принуждений" весьма родствен Шестову, который приходит в восторг всякий раз, когда "голос живой природы берет верх над наносными культурными привычками"'.⁵² Georgii Adamovich in his article 'Viacheslav Ivanov and Lev Shestov' goes even further, asserting

⁵¹ Erofeev, p. 172.

⁵² Ibid.

that in this polemical correspondence with Gershenzon Ivanov was really speaking over the head of the latter to Shestov.⁵³ Thus essentially Shestov seeks to celebrate what, if taken to its logical extreme, in Freudian language would be a victory of the id over the super-ego. Indeed, Freud's concept of the super-ego – the entity which contains internalised norms, morality and taboos, can be interpreted as implying the forced nature of cultural and social norms which are only accepted by humans in order to make their co-existence possible. In other words, the corollary of both Freud's theory and Shestov's attacks on rationalism is an assertion of the purely utilitarian nature of human morality. By the same token, Shestov's assertions, most notably in connection with Chekhov, of the flimsy character of human cultural habits that disintegrate fast in the face of a serious crisis such as illness and death, are also evidence of his proximity to Freudian perceptions, to a vision of man as grown straight from the animal kingdom.

In this connection it is instructive to compare Shestov's view of Chekhov with that of Albov, since they have, as we already briefly mentioned, a clear resemblance, but only up to a certain point. Indeed, Albov singles out at the initial stage of Chekhov's search for the meaning and purpose of life the writer's rather disillusioned portrayal of humans as being a continuation of fauna. He gives a long list of examples where such epithets are used by Chekhov to describe people as a toad, hamster, lizard, little bird, sheep, or viper.

Это совершенно цельные, звериные фигуры, иногда более ловкие, умные и жестокие, чем те зверьки, которых они напоминают. Они воруют, убивают, лукавят, дышат ненавистью и злобой, они способны на все, и в их душе, ограниченной инстинктами, не возникает даже вопроса, зачем они так делают и вообще зачем они живут, как подобный вопрос не может возникнуть, например, у собаки. Они стоят ниже этой границы, которая, с точки зрения г-на Чехова, отделяет человеческое, осмысленное, разумное от животного, бесцельного, бессмысленного,⁵⁴

Albov writes. He then asserts that other heroes of Chekhov can rise above this watershed, although they do so only temporarily.⁵⁵

⁵³ See Georgii Adamovich, 'Вячеслав Иванов и Лев Шестов' in *Одиночество и свобода* (New-York: Izdatel'stvo imeni Chekhova, 1955), pp. 253-254.

⁵⁴ Albov, p. 376.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 377.

Albov's central claim concerning that initial period of Chekhov's literary creativity is the writer's vision of the incredible instability and ephemeral character of the cultural side of human nature. This is strikingly similar to Shestov's perception of the universe and of the way he viewed Chekhov. Indeed, the following words of Albov which describe Chekhov's perception of mankind could have easily been written by Shestov for they reflect exactly the views that the latter was trying to promote in connection not only with Chekhov, but with every thinker he ever studied (it is also significant that these words of Albov refer to Chekhov's *Dreary Story* – which is a cornerstone in Shestov's analysis of the writer): 'Как этот культурный налет быстро сползает с человека, под влиянием таких ничтожных обстоятельств, как болезнь, страх смерти и т. п., и какая дрянная животная подкладка обнажается даже под таким цветком жизни, как старый профессор. [...] Какое вообще животное этот человек, животное жалкое, беспомощное, потерянное среди безграничного, непонятного мира'.⁵⁶

However, afterwards Albov's views on Chekhov drastically depart from those of Shestov. Indeed, Albov sees a substantial evolution of Chekhov's world-view, he observes 'новый и очень важный перелом'⁵⁷ in Chekhov's creativity. This is a change from seeing culture as a thin coating on the essentially animal foundation of a human being to discovering that this cultural dimension constitutes, in fact, the nucleus of personality and the nucleus of life. 'С г-ном Чеховым случилась любопытная метаморфоза. То, что раньше, очевидно, представлялось ему существующим на поверхности жизни как неустойчивый налет на чисто животной основе, теперь очутилось в самом низу, в глубоких тайниках жизни, и именно как ее непреходящая реальность', Albov concludes and adds that 'И именно с этого времени его талант приобретает более общее значение'.⁵⁸

Shestov, on the contrary, does not acknowledge any such evolution. The only transformation of convictions that he sees in Chekhov, and for that matter in everybody

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 387.

⁵⁷ Albov, p. 389.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 402.

else, starting, undoubtedly, with his own self, is that from idealistic illusions to tragic revelations. Perhaps any turn that Shestov can recognise is that from, as it were, the better to the worse. Or, more precisely, from naïve unawareness to real tragedy, while in Chekhov, according to Albov, the change was essentially from sceptical and painful disbelief to faith. Of course, later on, in his phase of Biblical existentialism, Shestov himself would undergo such a transformation – from disbelief and horrors to faith, or rather to a desperate and never-ending attempt to find it. However, at the time of writing his piece on Chekhov this transformation had not yet taken place, and Shestov paced in despair together with Chekhov's characters in front of the impenetrable wall of tragic reality trying, in his usual way, to salvage some constructive answers from the writer and his heroes.

Thus at the time the above perception of man as essentially wild, but forced into cultural norms by practical necessity ultimately characterised Shestov's own vision which he also recognised in Chekhov (as did Albov, but only in a very restricted sense as a transient phase in Chekhov's literary career). On the other hand, in B. M. Eikhenbaum's opinion, Chekhov displays a distinct animosity to everything primary and spontaneous (i.e. precisely to those phenomena which Shestov labels as the 'voice of nature') as opposed to culture which the writer was in awe of, as Eikhenbaum asserts.⁵⁹ He traces the source of this divide in what he deems to be Chekhov's belief in the transitory and derivative nature of the abyss between prose and poetry, reality and the ideal. '...замечательно, что разрыв этот между прозой и поэзией для Чехова – не основной, не метафизический, не такой, как у Достоевского. [...] Для Чехова этот разрыв – не от века, не от субстанции, он временный, производный. Отсюда – преклонение перед культурой и враждебное отношение ко всему стихийному, изначальному',⁶⁰ Eikhenbaum writes.

Thus the perception of a human being which for Shestov obviously signifies his proximity to Chekhov, in Eikhenbaum's eyes would be their point of drastic departure. Although Shestov sarcastically accuses eternal morality of such a perception and uses it to expose the utilitarian roots of the latter, his own idea of mankind is in fact of little difference, precisely

⁵⁹ B. M. Eikhenbaum, 'О Чехове' in *А. И. Чехов: Pro et Contra*, p. 964.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

because of his insistence on total freedom which ultimately runs into a conflict with culture. Such a perception is, of course, also a pointer to Darwinism, and thus to the usual contradiction of Shestov's philosophy where his very struggle conceals within it the seeds of revolt which grow to turn it into its opposite and to bring Shestov into the enemy's camp.

Thus, in this paradoxical way, the above considerations of Shestov's proximity to Freud link Shestov's extremely anti-positivist stance to the opposite – materialistic – position. While we think that it is a rather natural corollary of Shestov's theories, in his treatment of Chekhov it becomes particularly evident. In a way, Chekhov due to his immense tolerance and pluralistic discourse inadvertently facilitates the disclosure of Shestov's rather extreme stance and authoritarian style. Below we shall elaborate the latter point further, but here it seems appropriate to quote Simon Karlinsky who noticed the general property of Chekhov's writings essentially to become a litmus paper of sorts that reveals the hidden tendencies of those whose world view suffers from monologism: 'What is surprising is the way Shestov and other sophisticated metaphysicians of the Symbolist era were led by their fear and mistrust of Chekhov's pluralism to form ideological alliances with the materialists and utilitarians of the earlier generation',⁶¹ Karlinsky writes.

Similarly to the way that Shestov ends up in the opposite camp, Nietzsche's philosophical constructions signifying the crisis of nihilism bring him very close to Freud – a proximity which was frequently noted. In very basic terms, at the core of both Freud's and Nietzsche's theories there lies a perception of the human being as an essentially cruel, self-serving and instinct-driven animal, whatever attitude these thinkers themselves might have adopted to such a state of affairs. In similar terms, as we have just observed, Shestov's struggle against ideologies and ideals as well as against crude materialism being a consequence of positivism, lands him, ironically, in his protest against necessity understood too broadly, very close to this very materialism.

‘Подвергнув активному штурму “законы природы”, Шестов не менее решительно осаждаёт законы культуры, видя её сущность в стремлении к “законченности”, к

⁶¹ Karlinsky, p. 190.

“синтезу”, к “пределу”, позволяющим европейцу устроиться в жизни с известным комфортом, но не имеющим никакого отношения к истине’,⁶² Erofeev writes. He then points out Shestov's juxtaposition of European ‘lie’ to the truth of Russian lack of cultural tradition and subsequent boldness of Russian literature. However, as Erofeev notices further,

справедливо отмечая сложный и противоречивый характер духовного общения России с Европой, Шестов игнорирует то, что бескорыстные поиски истины, предпринятые русским искусством, контрастируют с невольной “корыстностью” его собственной концепции, стремящейся освободиться от культурной и природной “ограниченности” для того, чтобы можно было произнести: “В мире нет ничего невозможного”.⁶³

This declaration in Shestov's case should be clearly distinguished from Nietzsche's implied ‘all is permitted’, because of the salvation-seeking nature of the former's philosophy. Also, we have to point in this connection to the important, and as it were discursive, difference between Nietzsche and Shestov, as well as between Freud and Chekhov. Indeed, stemming from Shestov's existential despair as a primary cause, finding salvation is his purpose, which ultimately comes to play the leading role in his philosophy. In Nietzsche's case, on the other hand, the impression is that his insoluble existential tragedy overshadowed any real search for a solution, thus pointing to the dominance of the cause over the purpose. In other words, to capture the roots of Shestov's philosophical activity the question ‘what for?’ is more appropriate, while for Nietzsche, especially if we accept Shestov's non-standard interpretation of him, it is the question ‘Why?’. Chekhov's work, on the other hand, is an artistic attempt to understand life and as such is free from any applied considerations. Similarly, in the case of Freud, it is too, predominantly, an attempt at understanding, but also followed by ensuing applications, such as curing mental illness.

Interestingly, Shestov's attitude to Freud's teaching when the latter did emerge and take shape can be described as positive, but quite distant. This may be at least in part connected to the abstraction of Shestov's thought, which grows from the specifically philosophical

⁶² Erofeev, p. 176.

⁶³ Ibid. The phrase ‘В мире нет ничего невозможного’ is a quotation from Shestov, *Апофеоз беспочвенности*, p. 140.

nature of his investigations, which in turn is linked to his engagement predominantly with the human spirit rather than the body. As we mentioned previously, Shestov seems to go silent over the issues of human sexuality and his silence is of significance. The lines of Igor Balakhovskiy that we quoted in the chapter on Tolstoy in our view are relevant here. Balakhovskiy speaks of ‘власть тела, то самое познание собственной наготы, которое Лев Исакович стыдливо прячет под латинским словом “concupiscentia”’.⁶⁴ Balakhovskiy then connects Shestov’s implicit shame and unease in dealing with sexual problems with the latter’s personal experience, the concealed upheavals and crises of his personal life.

Shestov's own descriptions of his attitude to Freud can be found in his private letters of the 1920s, some fifteen years after his article on Chekhov (a piece which reveals, as we argued, a hidden proximity between Shestov's and Freud's perceptions of man). In this correspondence Shestov talks of his friend and unequivocal supporter Dr Max Eitingon, a Russian-Jewish Berliner, who was the first psychiatrist to undertake analytic training under Freud. Eitingon was also a member of the ‘Committee’ and Freud's long-term close friend and a founder of the Psychoanalytic Institute in Berlin and later in Palestine. Shestov's acquaintance with him took place because of Shestov's sister Fania Lovtsky who was learning to be a psychoanalyst and became Eitingon's student. She was later closely involved in shaping the psychoanalytical movement in Palestine where she later lived. As follows from Shestov's letters to Fania of 1922 it is not the study of the libido and Freud's theories of sexuality that were at the core of the Shestov-Eitingon intellectual kinship. Indeed, as Shestov wrote, ‘с ЭЙТИНГОНОМ мы больше беседуем о самых общих вопросах психоанализа – и Oedipus-Komplexus в наших разговорах уходит на последний план’.⁶⁵

While Shestov's approach was reminiscent of Freud's similar technique devoted to the psychoanalysis of the author, using the literary text as evidence, Shestov's concerns were

⁶⁴ Balakhovskii, p. 49.

⁶⁵ Shestov’s letter of 10 November 1922 to his sister Fania Lovtskii. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 243.

invariably of a spiritual rather than a psycho-sexual nature. In his letter to Fania of 10 November 1922 Shestov describes how he suggested to Eitingon that ‘жаль, что Фрейд стал врачом – не философом, ибо, если бы у него не было специальных задач, связанных с медициной, его смелость и наблюдательность могли бы привести к очень интересным открытиям’.⁶⁶ To this Eitingon replied that if Freud knew Shestov he would regret similarly that the latter was not a doctor. ‘Но я думаю, что я ближе к истине’,⁶⁷ Shestov concluded.

For us it was important to discover the connection between Shestov and Freud at the fundamental level, as we did above, – in that both perceived man's relations to culture as rather forced, feeble and secondary, although in the case of Freud this conclusion is explicit, while in Shestov's case it is implied. Also for both of them this phenomenon follows from their respective conceptions of man and the human predicament, or in other words from their very philosophies. At the same time at a more superficial, or if you like a more obvious level, the link between Shestov's philosophical search and Freud's pioneering ideas is more visible. Indeed, Shestov's ground-breaking ideas laid foundations for the psychoanalytic as well as ‘narrative psychology’ trends in literary scholarship. As we demonstrated earlier, what Shestov invariably did when interpreting works of literature is to reconstruct a philosophical psycho-biography of the thinker under study. We have argued that effectively he always uncovered the schism between the writer's unconscious feelings and the ideas that the latter consciously advanced as an artist (in the form of what Shestov basically perceived to be a self-narrative).

In other words, Shestov's main focus was on unmasking the thinkers under study through treating their fictional works as their narrations of themselves, and exposing the conflicting discourses of their psyche. It is this which can be viewed as intrinsically relevant to proper psychoanalytic activity, as Freud and Eitingon understood it. This can explain in particular why Eitingon found Shestov's writings fascinating and became Shestov's deep admirer and

⁶⁶ Shestov's letter of 10 November 1922 to his sister Fania Lovtskii. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 243.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

life-long friend and supporter. In a sense both explored the correlation between the conscious and the subconscious, only in different domains: Shestov - in the domain of philosophy by literary means, Eitingon and Freud - in the domain of real life through the methodology of theoretical medicine.

On the other hand, Shestov's understanding of the 'voice of nature' versus 'cultural habits' is not, of course, the same as Freud's. For Shestov it was important to capture the metaphysical state of mankind before the Fall, prior to what he viewed as the destruction caused by acquiring reason. The illustration of this state of humanity Shestov saw in Dostoevsky's *Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (*Сон смешного человека*), as was discussed in the previous chapter. Thus he conceived civilisation as poisoned at its roots by rationalism, and struggled to see the human spirit liberated, totally free from all bonds, in particular those introduced by abstract conceptions. In this we can see again Shestov's proximity to poetry, and notably to Tsvetaeva, whose writings constituted 'фронтальную семантическую атаку на позиции, занимаемые в нашем сознании абстрактными категориями',⁶⁸ as Brodsky put it. At the same time the aforementioned paradox of Shestov's philosophy is exposed here in the fact that with all the abstraction of his thought it is precisely the abstract concepts of our world-view and of our mental processes themselves that he tried to defeat. This is another way of saying that Shestov's struggle against reason took place on the very territory and by the means of this very reason, as Berdiaev famously noted. For Freud, on the other hand, it was fundamental to view man largely as a creature defined by his primary instincts and determined by his sexual drives, and Freud's theory became naturally linked with medical science which points in particular to the very concrete nature of this theory.

Interestingly, Chekhov too, being a doctor, was very concrete as a writer as well. Shestov's thought, as we have just noted, was, on the contrary, extremely abstract, and yet it is abstraction that he fought against, or more precisely, the abstract conceptions that in his eyes enslaved mankind. However, Andrei Stepanov observes that there is a way in which

⁶⁸ Brodskii, 'Поэт и проза' in *Бродский о Цветаевой* (Moscow: Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 1997), p. 72.

‘предельно абстрактный Шестов смыкается с предельно конкретным Чеховым’,⁶⁹ and the meeting point that Stepanov singles out is the acknowledgement by both of the multiplicity of truths. As Stepanov puts it, both Chekhov and Shestov: ‘будто стремятся на как можно более широком материале выразить не столько рациональное “мировоззрение”, сколько иррациональное мироощущение, допускающее множество “правд”’.⁷⁰ Stepanov explains Shestov’s stance ‘что величайшим заблуждением человечества до сих пор была презумпция единственности истины. [...] Он [Shestov] утверждал множественность истин – метафизических и эмпирических’,⁷¹ Stepanov continues. ‘И эти истины открываются только отдельным индивидуальностям – людям в их личной ипостаси. “Истин столько же сколько людей на свете”’,⁷² Stepanov quotes from Shestov’s *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*.

Moreover, these individual truths are perceived by Shestov in his treatment of Chekhov through the latter’s heroes and then catastrophically united into one that fits into Shestov’s paradigm. Thus, Robert Louis Jackson notes that ‘one of the weakest links in Shestov’s approach is his almost total identification of Chekhov with the Chekhovian hero and mood’.⁷³ In Chekhov’s artistic world these truths are again delivered through individual heroes, as it were on the aesthetic plane of the narrative. This, in a sense, resonates with Dostoevsky’s literary universe where ideas gain meaning and substance only by being carried out (or embodied) by individual characters. Also, this assertion of the multiplicity of truths, as we mentioned in the previous chapter in connection to Dostoevsky and Shestov, brings Chekhov as well very close to post-modernism, where ‘все точки зрения равноправны’.⁷⁴

In more specifically literary rather than general cultural and philosophical terms this tendency of both Shestov and Chekhov to assert the diversity of equally valid viewpoints

⁶⁹ Stepanov, p. 1006.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 1005-1006.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 1006.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Robert Louis Jackson, ‘Introduction: Perspectives on Chekhov’ in *Chekhov, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. L. Jackson (New York: Eaglewood Cliffs, 1967), p. 9.

⁷⁴ This criterion of post-modernism is stated in Blagova and Emelianov, p. 116.

can be connected to romanticism (which preceded and was then superimposed on realism) which was a step forward from classicism. Indeed, classicism that thrived in the era of the French revolution proclaimed that everybody was equal before God and the people, whereas romanticism actually asserted that everybody was also very different (but nevertheless might be equally right in their beliefs and convictions). Of course, the standard position is that Chekhov was much more of a realist than a romantic. However, it is also widely acknowledged that he painted realism with completely new colours which various schools then claimed to be their own (thus the Symbolists saw Chekhov as one of their predecessors; equally he was labelled an impressionist, and this list can be continued). One thing remains unquestionable – both Shestov and Chekhov grew up and became writers during the century which witnessed the transition from the romantic to the realistic tradition, and thus both could not be free from the former.

Returning to the above discussion on the intrinsic contradictions of Shestov's philosophising as manifested in his reading of Chekhov, the obvious point is that the acknowledgement of the multiplicity of truths runs into conflict with Shestov's dictatorial discourse. Hence, ironically, Shestov's monological tendency unites these multiple truths derived from Chekhov's heroes to fit into his rather one-sided philosophical paradigm. Thus, in our view, Stepanov's shrewd observation nevertheless suffers from a too direct, if not altogether superficial, approach to Shestov which takes the latter's proclamations at face value. This once again points to the impossibility of reading Shestov without having a literary perspective in mind first and foremost. Indeed, by putting together Shestov's explicit statements and the implicit meaning of his words derived from his indirect discourse, from his very style, one can obtain a clear picture. That is why also an intertextual approach that reveals the points of sustained importance, together with a biographical reading which helps to elucidate those points, is necessary methodologically. The case of Chekhov reveals this most explicitly because of the aforementioned mirroring effect that it has on any attempts at critical interpretation. Thus, after proclaiming that there are as many truths on earth as there are people, Shestov then affirmed in his subsequent book that it was necessary to break away from any sort of truths altogether: 'нужно найти

способ вырваться из власти всякого рода истин'; 'в эту сторону и гнули факиры',⁷⁵ he adds. Therefore, for him it is again the irrational which he sees as a way forward rather than any rational conceptions which he views as the personal enemy of mankind and strives to destroy.

Passionate, even if impotent protest in the face of cold eternity as an attempt to find a way out, and cold rationalisation as an alternative – these are the features of Chekhov's writings which Shestov clearly sensed and singled out, because for him they were of crucial (essentially personal) importance. Thus the 'dreary story' of the professor Nikolai Stepanovich must have embodied for Shestov the central conflict of his whole philosophy – that of revelation and speculation, and ultimately, of faith and reason, even though at the time his philosophy as such was not yet formed. Seeing Chekhov as struggling against the invincible force of necessity, against the power of the accidental, against idealism and materialism as offspring of the same rationalist system of beliefs – this is the reading of Chekhov that Shestov chose, and put across with his usual extreme assertiveness (which Karlinsky refers to as the latter's 'power of persuasion and his argumentative energy').⁷⁶

The latter point is crucial in trying to unravel Shestov's interpretation of Chekhov. The importance of Shestov's authoritarian discourse becomes evident when traced from his style to the content of his ideas. Indeed, as usual Shestov imposes on Chekhov his own vertical 'author-hero' hierarchy, that is to say that the author 'inhabits' the hero, as it were, from above, taking on both creative and governing functions. Chekhov, on the other hand, displays in his writings a distinctly horizontal arrangement between the author, his heroes and, for that matter, the reader – all are located on the same plane, at equal heights. Indeed, Chekhov's writings demonstrate a profoundly democratic vision, free from any kind of didacticism or impositions. In Chekhov's literary world the author speaks from a position of equality rather than dominance and his voice, if and when it is at all audible, is just another one in the chorus of his heroes who essentially appear to be free from any authorial

⁷⁵ Shestov, 'Предпоследние слова' in *Начала и концы*, p. 272.

⁷⁶ Karlinsky, p. 188.

guidance. As James Wood wrote, Chekhov's characters 'act like free consciousnesses, and not as owned literary characters', they 'forget to be Chekhov's characters'.⁷⁷

Thus, forcing Chekhov's pluralism, just like Dostoevsky's polyphony, into Shestov's own monological world is bound to cause distortion. Therefore it is not surprising that Erofeev talks of Shestov's 'spiritual terrorism' of sorts which he distinguishes in Shestov's propensity to inscribe the process of overcoming the laws of 'humanness' into a symbolic act of approximating the tragic.⁷⁸ Similarly, Balakhovsky compares Shestov's ideology, by labelling it extreme, to Bolshevism translated to the verbal or metaphysical plane only.⁷⁹ Furthermore, if we recall here that, as Joseph Brodsky wrote, 'both the German and the Russian versions of socialism sprang from the same late-nineteenth-century philosophical root, which used the shelves of the British Museum for the fuel and Darwinian thought for a model',⁸⁰ we obtain through Shestov's inadvertent (since consciously he was extremely opposed to it), or even metaphysical, proximity to socialism, his *de facto* return to Darwinism – a teaching whose consequences for human spirituality Shestov together with Dostoevsky so passionately hated and despised.

All this is extremely significant, as it brings us back to the same intrinsic and thus inextricable contradiction of Shestov's philosophy that we described above: his struggle carrying within it the grains of self-destruction. We perceive this paradox, or if you like the fundamental contradiction of Shestov's thought as being essentially a contradiction between its content and its form. Indeed, largely because of the extreme form that it acquires, Shestov's central struggle for liberation from rationalism and idealism, as we saw, tends to become counter-productive, i.e. his anti-rationalism and anti-idealism ultimately turn into their opposites, which leads Shestov directly to the enemy camp. While in a sense this phenomenon of Shestov's philosophy ironically illustrates the Hegelian principle of the unity and struggle of opposites, it is not this principle itself that is significant for our

⁷⁷ James Wood, *The Broken Estate. Essays on Literature and Belief* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1999), p. 87.

⁷⁸ Erofeev, p. 173.

⁷⁹ Balakhovskii, p. 68.

⁸⁰ Brodsky, 'Profile of Clio' in *On Grief and Reason*, p. 130.

purposes, but rather the aforementioned conflict between content and form. The concrete embodiment of this contradiction will be discussed shortly in direct relation to Shestov's treatment of Chekhov's work. More precisely, as we shall demonstrate, it is Shestov's neglect of the aesthetics of Chekhov's writings (or in other words, focusing on the content and ignoring the form) which causes a certain distortion of Shestov's vision of the writer.

7.4. Ideologies, 'lofty words', and the difference between them.

We shall now look more attentively into Shestov's claim about Chekhov's hatred of 'the idea' – the implied rejection of all conceptions which Shestov assigns to him. 'Чем дольше живет Чехов, тем больше ослабевает над ним власть высоких слов — вопреки собственному разуму и сознательной воле. Под конец он совершенно эмансипируется от всякого рода идей и даже теряет представление о связи жизненных событий',⁸¹ Shestov writes in his article. Thus in two consecutive sentences he speaks of 'lofty words' and 'ideas of every kind' as being equivalent concepts. However, rather than being identical they are complementary, or more precisely, ideas are traditionally accompanied by lofty rhetoric. In other words, the cause of this confusion, as we see it, lies in the phenomenon of hypocrisy which for Chekhov was especially important and constantly present in his writings. As James Wood observes, 'His father, Pavel, may be seen as the original of all Chekhov's great portraits of hypocrites. Pavel was a grocer, but he failed at everything he touched except religious devotion'.⁸² Wood notes also in connection to Pavel's habitual flogging of his children that he was 'exceptionally cruel' and 'horribly pious'.⁸³ Thus, Wood comments, 'Chekhov would become a writer who did not believe in God, hated physical cruelty, fought every sign of "splendour" on the page, and filled his fiction with hypocrites. The ghost of Pavel can be found everywhere in Chekhov'.⁸⁴

Indeed, his Varvara and the priest from *In the Ravine* (*В овраге*), his Father Christopher from *Steppe* (*Стень*) and his *Countess* (*Графиня*) as well as endless examples of other

⁸¹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 189.

⁸² Wood, p. 78.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

heroes are the hidden embodiment and the necessary part of evil in the world. As Albov wrote, using Chekhov's own phrase, Varvara in essence provides a defence for evil, serves as a 'protective valve in a machine': 'Варвара вполне обрисовывается перед нами, не скажу, как оправдание зла — это слишком много, — а как его защита, как "предохранительный клапан в машине"'.⁸⁵ So do other of Chekhov's hypocrites who by their very existence and by their preaching seem to validate and seal off the horrible injustice of the world. Chekhov's disdain for hypocrisy is all-pervasive and it alone already puts him next to Dostoevsky in their anticipation of the next century. As Andrei Bitov observed, '...чем станет XX век для России — он [Чехов] чувствовал кожей, как та японская рыбка, что предсказывает землетрясения'.⁸⁶ Indeed, if in the Russian society contemporary to Chekhov hypocrisy was intensified in particular by the emerging bourgeois morality facilitated by fast urbanisation, but could still be felt as something alien and shameful, in Soviet Russia it acquired a new scale having become effectively the only official way of life. The hypocritical rhetoric which covered the immense schism between thoughts, words and deeds totally discredited the values it proclaimed, as we already mentioned. Idealistic pathos was no longer trusted, and cynicism penetrated all layers of the life of society. In Chekhov's time this was not yet on such a massive scale endorsed at every level, but Russian social backwardness and its recent history of virtual slavery facilitated a national inferiority complex which gave rise to all sorts of authoritarian discourses in the cultural sphere too.

Brodsky in his essay 'On Tyranny' describes new tyrants as associated largely with the new level of cruelty and hypocrisy they introduced. 'Some are more keen on cruelty, others on hypocrisy',⁸⁷ he writes. Brodsky also mentions that the easiest and fastest way to dictatorship is through becoming a family tyrant. Chekhov, no matter to what extent we connect this, following Wood, to his particular personal history of a tyrannical family experience, was, evidently, particularly sensitive both to cruelty and to the discrepancy

⁸⁵ Albov, p. 397.

⁸⁶ Andrei Bitov, 'Мой дедушка Чехов и прадедушка Пушкин' in *Четырежды Чехов* (Moscow: Emergency Exit, 2004), p. 11.

⁸⁷ Brodsky, 'On Tyranny' in *Less Than One*, p. 114.

between words and actions, and his very poetics consequently resists tyranny of every breed.

However, we assert that what Shestov correctly observed as Chekhov's intolerance of high rhetoric should not be confused with the writer's hatred for ideas *per se*. Thus, in our opinion, when Shestov talks of Chekhov's 'emancipation from ideas', he falls victim to the confusion between these ideas and their discrediting by lofty discourse. In other words, it is not ideals as such that Chekhov despises, but rather the hypocritical emotionalism of idealism and the philistine values that loom behind it. As, for example, Aikhenvald writes, 'пошлость ... заставляет людей употреблять одни и те же фразы и прибаутки, из которых вынуты понятия; она заставляет тяжело переворачивать в уме одни и те же выдохшиеся идеи, и все цветы жизни, весь сад ее она претворяет в нечто искусственное, бумажное, бездыханное'.⁸⁸

As to Chekhov's relationship with ideals, this topic attracted a lot of critical attention and controversy, for the same reason that the authorial voice in Chekhov's writings is so hard to discern. As Wood writes, 'more completely than any writer before him Chekhov became his characters'⁸⁹ (but not in the sense that Shestov means – that Chekhov is self-revealing; rather in the sense of a brilliant actor who has the ability to penetrate another's soul and to convey it to the audience). However, many conflicting critical voices essentially agree that Chekhov oscillated between, or existed on the verge of horrible reality and the unattainable ideal. The difference in these opinions is largely in the discussion of Chekhov's bias towards either of these two entities, and in the attempts to pin down chronologically the dynamics of his longing for the ideal.

Thus, Aikhenvald talks of Chekhov's distinct tendency to focus on a memory, on its beauty which is profoundly connected to the light sadness of the unattainable ideal: 'никогда не покидало его это платоновское воспоминание, эта светлая печаль о далекой сфере

⁸⁸ Aikhenvald, p. 735.

⁸⁹ Wood, p. 83.

идеала',⁹⁰ Aikhenvald writes on Chekhov in connection with his story *Красавицы* (*Beauties*). He explains Chekhov's transition from light humorous anecdotes to serious and tragic stories by the depth of Chekhov's spirituality. 'Глубокому духу скоро открывается внутреннее сродство между смешным и скорбным, и Чехов только повиновался своей стихийной глубине',⁹¹ Aikhenvald explains, and adds that 'несоответствие между идеей и ее проявлением в одинаковой степени может быть последним источником как смешного, так и трагического'.⁹²

V. M. Eikhenbaum in his early criticism on Chekhov views the same phenomenon in a different light by pointing to what in his opinion is an unsurmountable abyss between reality and the ideal, the prose of life and the poetry of fantasy. 'Жизнь, "такая, какая она есть", - проза. Поэзия и красота - "где-то". Эти области у Чехова разобщены',⁹³ Eikhenbaum asserts. 'В его художестве все "плотское" совершенно откололось от "духовного", поэзия - от прозы, мечта - от действительности',⁹⁴ he writes about Chekhov. Moreover, Eikhenbaum sees the main driving force of Chekhov's creativity in trying to penetrate the spheres of the trivial, abased, horrible, only in order to be pushed up ever more powerfully into the domain of dreams. In this for Eikhenbaum lies the main alcohol of Chekhov's artistic creativity.⁹⁵ Consequently he views Chekhov as no more than an epigone of realism: 'настоящий толстовский реализм завершал в Чехове свой круг',⁹⁶ Eikhenbaum asserts.

This discrepancy between the prose of life and the poetry of an ideal also constitutes one of the central thematic preoccupations for Shestov. In fact in his case this is equivalent to the discrepancy between reality and art, or the pen and the soul which we see as Shestov's fundamental concern. However, unlike Eikhenbaum we do not support this view of Chekhov as drastically divorcing reality and fantasy, prose and poetry, or for that matter as

⁹⁰ Aikhenval'd, p. 724.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 723.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Eikhenbaum, p. 964.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 968.

⁹⁵ Eikhenbaum, p. 965.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 968.

being an epigone of realism. In our opinion Chekhov imbued realism with lyricism (understood in the sense of a very profound penetration into and a steadfast focus on one's inner life) to such an extent that it has changed the very nature of realism as hitherto perceived and marked a distinct step forward in the development of literary genres. Curiously, Eikhenbaum's claim that Chekhov basically hated reality and longed for the ideal, and thus succumbed to the world of fantasy is opposed to Shestov's claim that Chekhov hated ideals and ideologies of any kind, being a sober and disillusioned realist.

On the other hand, Albov, as we saw, distinguishes two distinct periods in Chekhov's creativity. At first the writer was shocked and distressed by the victory of evil over the ideals of truth and justice, but later on discovered that the latter concepts are quite real and can, in fact, provide a firm foundation for human existence. Chekhov, as Albov writes, 'склонен теперь смотреть на действительность как на нечто неустойчивое, обманчивое, иллюзорное. Он именно ищет корней жизни, идеальных основ высшей реальности, чем эта грубая внешняя оболочка жизни'.⁹⁷ Thus, apparently, Albov, unlike Eikhenbaum, insists not on a sharp divide, but instead on a certain clear dialectics or correlation that Chekhov distinguishes between the real and ideal worlds. In fact even separating them into two worlds would mean misinterpreting Albov, who talks instead of the ideal being rooted inseparably in the real. Moreover, essentially like Eikhenbaum, asserting Chekhov's profound need for a dream (i.e. for an ideal), Albov comes to a totally different conclusion from Eikhenbaum. Instead of separating ideals from reality Albov insists on the former being the driving force behind Chekhov's ultimate reconsideration of his whole world-view and discovering the deeper – idealistic – roots of things. 'Эта потребность в мечте необыкновенно сильна у писателя, неискоренима [...] она заставила его изменить взгляд на жизнь, окрылила его и перевернула все вверх дном в его взглядах на жизнь'.⁹⁸

Thus, unlike Albov, both Shestov and Eikhenbaum imply that ideals for Chekhov

⁹⁷ Albov, p. 402.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 389.

were clearly distinguished from reality, only they assign, as it were, opposite signs to this phenomenon: for Shestov Chekhov's treatment of ideals was negative (hatred, disdain), for Eikhenbaum – positive (intoxication, longing). However, various critics, and most notably Vladimir Kataev, corrected Shestov's claim that Chekhov was killing human hopes and ideals, and suggested that hopes in this context should be replaced by illusions. Indeed, Chekhov was distinctly free from illusions and freed his readership from them as well, to the extent of having a very sobering effect on the reader. Albov apparently viewed this as Chekhov's initial disillusionment with bitter and unconsoling reality and his simultaneous, even if deeply suppressed, longing for the transcendent illusion ('потребность в возвышающем душу обмане').⁹⁹ For Albov, it seems, these illusions were equivalent to daydreams, to lofty human aspirations, and he emphasised Chekhov's tendency to disavow such dreams, and yet to maintain their importance. "Изображая пустоту и бессилие мечты, обнажая жизнь, он понимает вместе с тем, что эта обнаженная жизнь, жизнь без мечты, "необыкновенно скучна, бесцветна и убога" (*Поцелуй*)", Albov wrote.¹⁰⁰

Importantly, as Albov noted, these illusions reappear later in Chekhov's work, only this time they emerge in the form of ideals, but having changed their substance, as it were. To discover that unknown, 'то, о чем люди тоскуют, найти в самой жизни элементы правды, справедливости, красоты, свободы – с этих пор и становится главной задачей г-на Чехова',¹⁰¹ Albov writes, and views Chekhov's first attempts in this direction, such as *My Life* (*Моя жизнь*) or *The Peasants* (*Мужики*), as not yet sufficiently successful (although he stresses the superiority of the latter story over the former). However, in such subsequent stories as *In The Ravine* (*В овраге*), *The Lady with the Lap-dog* (*Дама с собачкой*), *Concerning Love* (*О любви*) and various others Albov distinguishes Chekhov's growing mastery on this new path.

While Albov talked about the clear development of Chekhov's writings due to the corresponding transformation of his views, Sergei Bulgakov insisted on Chekhov's

⁹⁹ Albov, p. 388.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 389.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 394.

fundamentally humanistic stance throughout his writing career, and connected this in spirit to Christian values: ‘Чехову близка была краеугольная идея христианской морали, являющаяся истинным этическим фундаментом всяческого демократизма’.¹⁰² In the same vein Bulgakov labels Chekhov a ‘singer of universal grief’ (‘певец мировой скорби’).¹⁰³ In contrast to these views Shestov radically insists on Chekhov's disdain for all conceptions and regards his whole creative work as a struggle against idealism (very much like Shestov's own struggle) rather than (what to our mind would be much more appropriate) against hypocrisy that uses idealism as a shield.

This struggle against idealism that Shestov assigns to Chekhov very possibly originates in the distinctly rebellious elements of Chekhov's art. Indeed, Chekhov's principal drive is that for freedom, for a liberation of the human spirit from the bonds of the philistine, mundane mentality of hypocrisy and self-deception. As such it resonates highly with Shestov's own drive for human salvation which he perceived as a boundless freedom too, only for him the concept of freedom had a different meaning. For Shestov freedom is much more abstract than for Chekhov, it is a freedom from all conceptions, freedom to attain the allegedly impossible, it is a leap into faith. In particular, this philosophical striving of Shestov includes liberation from utilitarian morality which in Chekhov's case turns into an almost equivalent struggle against social and personal hypocrisy. Thus, it is clear that although Chekhov's understanding of freedom in its concreteness and its ethical nature was substantially different from Shestov's abstract and irrationalistic one, Shestov easily singled out in Chekhov's ponderings the elements native to him (or rather he was able easily to interpret those elements in his own light). In other words, it is the very concept of freedom that was crucial for the two.

Indeed, as Susan Sontag affirms, Chekhov's whole *oeuvre* is a dream of freedom, and the same, we add, can be said about Shestov. Even though, as Bernard Martin notices, at the time of the *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* (i.e. of the time of his article on Chekhov too) ‘Shestov was merely beginning his struggle against the ideas dominating European thought

¹⁰² Bulgakov, p. 552.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

which he felt had to be overcome in order to provide room for what was later to be the chief burden of his positive message'; it is 'the possibility of the restoration of human freedom through religious faith' which Martin places at the centre of this message together with 'the reality of the living God of the Bible'.¹⁰⁴ Chekhov's concept of freedom, though, is not specifically religious in nature. It is 'an absolute freedom [...] the freedom from violence and lies', as Wood writes, quoting Chekhov, and notices the frequency of 'the open fields' at the edge of a village in Chekhov's works. Because for Chekhov, as Wood explains, freedom is 'a neutral saturate', it is more than political or material liberty, it is rather 'like air or light'.¹⁰⁵ For abstract Shestov freedom is understood, as it were, more metaphysically. It is what God originally endowed man with, and it is what rationalism destroyed, thus subjecting man to universal necessity. Absolute freedom for Shestov is in overcoming this necessity of existential horrors, it is essentially in the domain beyond the rational and beyond the natural. For concrete Chekhov, on the contrary, it is certainly to be found within the boundaries imposed by natural law on human life, it stems from our individual inner freedoms which have to be restored by humanity itself. Thus, in a way, both Chekhov and Shestov would agree that the source of man's liberation is in 'remembering our divine image' (using Gurov's phrase from Chekhov's *Lady with the Lapdog*), even though they would differ in the interpretation of this phrase.

Interestingly, for both Chekhov and Shestov their leap for freedom incorporated as an integral, even if an implicit part, the notion of creative freedom. Thus Chekhov wrote in his notebooks: 'если хочешь стать оптимистом и понять жизнь, то перестань верить тому, что говорят и пишут, а наблюдай сам и вникай'.¹⁰⁶ At the same time Shestov, as Andrei Belyi observed, 'утверждает свободу творчества: все – сфера творчества: философия, логика, искусство, религия; прав тот, кто творит, и творя, побеждает'.¹⁰⁷ However, one of the most important aspects of both Chekhov's and Shestov's understanding of freedom lies on the existential plane. This is what Shestov almost unconsciously discerned in

¹⁰⁴ Martin, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Wood, p. 86.

¹⁰⁶ From Chekhov's Notebooks in *А. П. Чехов, Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983), vol. 17, p. 169.

¹⁰⁷ Andrei Belyi, *Арабески* (Moscow, 1911), p. 484.

Chekhov's literary works and translated into his own philosophical formulae engaged with human reason and faith. More precisely, it is the captivating feature of Chekhov which is very well formulated by James Wood: 'In Chekhov's world, our inner lives run at their own speed'.¹⁰⁸ For Shestov this inner space which is invaded by necessity of all sorts also remains sacred and Chekhov's ability to focus first and foremost on existential liberation from one's own inner slavery is what Shestov must have found very resonant with his own philosophical search.

On the other hand, however, in defining Chekhov's enemies Shestov rather dresses them up as his own, that is to say as rationalistic ideas and conceptions. In other words, as we argued above, Shestov replaces Chekhov's fight against illusions by that against ideals. Thus it is again in Shestov's fundamental interpretation of ideals as shackles and hence in waging a war on them that the general confusion actually originates. Because if one's considerations are based on a feeling of love for a human being rather than on misanthropy (and in Shestov's case due to the salvationist character of his philosophy it is certainly the former rather than the latter which applies), then it is precisely in the ideal where the highest freedom of the human spirit is concealed. Chekhov clearly was aware of this, certainly consciously in the last period of his writing career. Hence his constant striving for the unattainable ideal as an act of spiritual liberation, despite his extremely sober stance with respect to reality. Shestov, on the contrary, and quite paradoxically, while desperately seeking the universe where all things are possible, denied the ideal any liberating qualities but ultimately strove instead for something much broader than a system of ideals, namely – for a religious faith. Perhaps the grain of this fundamental difference lies again in Chekhov's very concrete and Shestov's very abstract nature respectively. Indeed, for Chekhov a human ideal embodies as much as there can be to aspire to spiritually in this life (and he knows no other), while for Shestov the ideal is only an impediment which stands as a deceptive consolation on the way to real salvation – to be sought beyond the rational.

¹⁰⁸ Wood, p. 87.

7.5. 'Aesthetism' versus 'Creation out of the void'. Revolt and cruelty.

However, regardless of the above confusion of ideals with illusions, as well as of 'the idea' with the accompanying hypocritical rhetoric, it is the very ability of Chekhov to portray reality as it is, without dressing it up with illusory idealistic consolations that was especially dear to Shestov. In contrast to Viacheslav Ivanov's works whose ideas, using Shestov's words, were radically torn away from reality and instilled with their own independent life, because they did not feed 'on the juices coming from real life', Chekhov's writings depicted reality with great precision, in all its tragic hopelessness. No wonder then that Shestov 'found himself in perfect harmony with the writer who, more than any other, both expressed and typified the "violet hour" of Russian culture',¹⁰⁹ wrote Sidney Monas. But the roots of this harmony ran deeper than depicting tragedy in a manner stripped of all illusions – for Shestov they went straight to the heart of his philosophical problems.

As Viktor Erofeev notes, to Ivanov's aesthetism and 'в более широком плане всей "литературе" Шестов противопоставил концепцию "творчества из ничего"',¹¹⁰ because this, according to Shestov, was the destiny of Chekhov's characters. They were tragic, 'underground' people, 'living dead', who had found themselves in desperate situations and lost their balance due to extreme unbearable strain, but who continued to exist as if by inertia. As was already mentioned, Shestov observed that Chekhov's central focus and main interest was in the description of boundary situations, 'из которых нет и абсолютно не может быть никакого выхода',¹¹¹ a description of overstressed people, of people for whom there is nothing else left but to 'упасть на пол, кричать и биться головой об пол'.¹¹² Shestov elaborated on this concept of creation from the void in the following lines:

Нормальный человек, если он даже метафизик самого крайнего, заоблачного толка, всегда пригоняет свои теории к нуждам минуты; он разрушает лишь затем, чтобы потом вновь строить из прежнего материала. Оттого у него никогда не бывает недостатка в материале. Покорный основному человеческому закону, уже давно отмеченному и сформулированному

¹⁰⁹ Monas, p. xix.

¹¹⁰ Erofeev, p. 170.

¹¹¹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 189.

¹¹² *Ibid*, p. 190.

мудрецами, он ограничивается и довольствуется скромной ролью искателя форм. Из железа, которое он находит в природе готовым, он выковывает меч или плуг, копьё или серп. Мысль творить из ничего едва ли даже приходит ему в голову. Чеховские же герои, люди ненормальные par excellence, поставлены в противоестественную, а потому страшную необходимость творить из ничего.¹¹³

Sidney Monas adds yet another angle to Shestov's choice of the title for his article on Chekhov: 'Steeped as he was in Cabalist and Neoplatonist literature, he could only have meant to attribute something godlike, something akin to divinity, to Chekhov's melancholy poetry',¹¹⁴ Monas wrote. However, the main reason for this concept of creation from the void was that Shestov saw the real and only hero of Chekhov as a hopeless person who has nothing left to do in life, who brings a contagious destruction wherever he goes. He has nothing, he has to create everything from the void and this creation is the only thing, according to Shestov, that can evoke Chekhov's inspiration. 'Когда он обобрал своего героя до последней нитки' he 'начинает чувствовать нечто вроде удовлетворения',¹¹⁵ Shestov believed. But does this task – to create from the void – not go beyond the limits of human strength, of human rights, Shestov asks, and adds that even Chekhov himself would not have been able to answer this question. In fact, Shestov asserts that those who do have a ready answer without hesitation had never really come near such a question, or for that matter any 'ultimate questions' of existence. Because – and this is Shestov's important and recurrent theme – hesitation is a necessary element in the reasoning of a person brought to face with fatal tasks. In *Dreary Story* the old professor has nothing better to offer to his dearest person, young Katia, who feels desperately lost, than to utter 'I don't know'.

Ramona Fotiade argues in her book on Shestov that 'the ambivalent meaning of this answer can be understood', according to Shestov, 'in view of Baudelaire's similar remark: "Résigne-toi, mon coeur, dors ton sommeil de brute"'.¹¹⁶ Fotiade affirms that 'what man discovers in the confrontation with death is not mere resignation (in the sense of a passive

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 197.

¹¹⁴ Monas, p. xix.

¹¹⁵ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 201.

¹¹⁶ Ramona Fotiade, *Conceptions of the Absurd. From Surrealism to the Existential Thought of Chekhov and Fondane* (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, 2001), p. 77.

acknowledgement of “eternal”, rational truths), but resignation mixed with revolt’.¹¹⁷ She then observes that this moment of revolt ‘points to the biblical story of Job whose significance provided a constant source of inspiration [...] for Shestov’.¹¹⁸ She explains that ‘Job’s revolt paradoxically emerges from utter powerlessness and despair’ and similarly ‘his “inhuman”, one-to-one communication with God is established not through speculative reasoning, but through a revolt that destroys reason and re-discovers faith as the “creation” of meaning and truth *ex-nihilo*’.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Milosz points to Shestov’s idea of revolt in the face of necessity lying at the core of his entire philosophy. ‘Shestov fumed against Greek wisdom which led to stoical resignation. He even reproached Nietzsche, whom he esteemed, with *amor fati*, a final blessing given to fate’.¹²⁰ Indeed, the following words by Shestov confirm his perception of Chekhov’s alleged ambivalence as a hidden revolt. Shestov first repeats that ‘Ежедневный, ежечасный, даже ежеминутный опыт убеждает нас, что одинокий слабый человек, сталкиваясь с законами природы, постоянно должен приспособляться и уступать, уступать, уступать’.¹²¹ He then proceeds to quote again the epigraph he chose for this article ‘*Rèsigne-toi, mon coeur, dors ton sommeil de brute*’ and explains that ‘иных слов мы не найдем пред лицом картин, развернувшихся в чеховских произведениях’.¹²² However, Shestov explains that ‘Покорность внешняя, а под ней затаенная, тяжелая, злобная ненависть к неведомому врагу. Сон, забвение только кажущиеся — ибо разве спит, разве забывается человек, который свой сон называет *sommeil de brute*?’.¹²³

Yet, this notion of revolt is absent from the interpretation of Shestov’s article by Ivanov-Razumnik. He only sees in the quoted lines of Baudelaire a call for humble resignation, an attempt ‘полюбить свою бедную, больную, нелепую жизнь’.¹²⁴ In other words he finds in it a confirmation of Shestov’s current outlook on life, where Shestov, following

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 77.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 79.

¹¹⁹ Fotiade, p. 79.

¹²⁰ Milosz, pp. 116-117.

¹²¹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 207.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid, pp. 207-208.

¹²⁴ Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 221.

Nietzsche, adopted the latter's formula of '*amor fati*'. While Milosz, as we have just seen, decisively disagrees with such an interpretation, according to Razumnik this formula appeared to Shestov much more helpful for dealing with the horrors of existence. The alternative, as Razumnik sees it, was in Shestov's attempt to justify the existence of these horrors by appealing to the concepts of high morality and ideals. 'Но если все это так, если последний закон на земле – одиночество и последнее слово философии трагедии – безнадежность', Ivanov-Razumnik exclaims,

если все нормы, все "a priori" и императивы потерпели крушение; если мы не можем, таким образом, избежать подполья, – то каким же путем сможем мы избежать принятия следующего вывода подпольного человека: "...на деле мне надо знаешь чего? Чтоб вы провалились, вот чего. Мне надо спокойствия. Да я за то, чтоб меня не беспокоили, весь свет за копейку продам. Свету ли провалиться или мне чаю не пить? Я скажу, что свету провалиться, а чтоб мне чай всегда пить".¹²⁵

Thus Ivanov-Razumnik sees the main law of Shestov's philosophy of tragedy in absolute egoism. Similarly, Viktor Erofeev insists that Shestov's tragic outlook, for which the adequate form of perception is 'beating your head against the wall', intensifies not only despair, but also egoism. Erofeev explains that the balance between a tragic person and the world is broken, the former puts himself above the latter, hence the morality of tragedy is characterised by moving from humanism to cruelty, Erofeev concludes. However, he then notes that the idea of cruelty is in fact alien to Shestov and can be attributed to the excesses of Shestov's struggle against idealism and positivism.¹²⁶

We consider that these views somewhat miss the point. In contrast to them, as we saw in the previous chapters, Berdiaev claimed that the meaning of the Underground Man's demands is in the problem of individuality, of the juxtaposition between the private and the general. Ordinary egoism, according to Berdiaev, can adjust its needs to the world only too easily; it is free of tragedy and even insured against it. Instead Berdiaev found the question 'about tea' to be 'философский, этический и религиозный, это – "проклятый вопрос",

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Erofeev, pp. 172-173.

провал в подземное царство. [...] Это [...] основная проблема человеческой жизни, [...] проблема теодицеи, как ее часто называют',¹²⁷ he wrote.

Nevertheless, Erofeev's idea above prompts an interesting observation of the underlying mercilessness of Chekhov's hopeless heroes, or in other words, of mercilessness stemming from extreme solitude, involuntarily exuded by the tragic person, severed from the world. However, their mercilessness is derived from their very hopelessness and is directed above all to themselves. In fact, Chekhov's characters overwhelmingly lack an egocentric streak and prefer to suffer in silence without making a drama out of their utter crisis. Such are the heroes of 'About Love' ('О любви'), 'House with an Attic' ('Дом с мезонином'), 'A Name Day' ('Именины'), 'Wife' ('Супруга'), not to mention 'Lady with the Lap-dog' ('Дама с собачкой') (which is exceptionally full of hope), and many others that seem to have completely escaped Shestov's attention. Chekhov himself followed this pattern of civilized behaviour. As Andrei Bitov writes, 'Чудо явления мирового культурного уровня в одном русском человеке (Пушкин) равносильно чуду явления цивилизованности в русском интеллигенте в первом поколении (Чехов). Благородство и достоинство. Честь и стыд. Сиречь культура. Типично русская пропасть между художественной культурой и цивилизацией была преодолена лишь в этих двух культурных героях'.¹²⁸

Interestingly, Shestov's rather radical tendency to identify the writer with his heroes proves in the case of Chekhov analogous to what used to be done to the writer by Western literary criticism. That is to say, creating 'the durable cliché of the morose, despondent Chekhov', reducing his writings 'to gloom and twilight',¹²⁹ using Karlinsky's words. Karlinsky equally criticises the Soviet school which used to draw the 'equally shortsighted image of the politically correct proto-Bolshevik Chekhov'.¹³⁰ As Bitov writes in this respect, 'Советская власть воздвигла всем классикам памятники, создав в прошлом такое

¹²⁷ Berdiaev, 'Трагедия и обыденность', p. 476.

¹²⁸ Bitov, p. 9.

¹²⁹ Karlinsky, p. 183.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

чугунное политбюро русской литературы'.¹³¹ He also observes that 'Советское литературоведение теоретически смешало автора и героя'.¹³² In our view, however, if a parallel can at all be drawn between Chekhov's heroes and their creator it should align Chekhov not with those overstressed characters who have lost their will to live, but on the contrary with those who exemplify a hidden heroism, a humble modesty covered up by irony. In other words, by those of numerous Chekhov heroes who present a combination of being declass  by origin and aristocratic in spirit. As Bitov writes, his own attempt to repeat Chekhov's journey to Sakhalin was considered extreme even now. 'Как же тогда квалифицировать чеховское путешествие?', he reasonably asks; and answers: 'Подвиг. Чехов бы никогда такого слова о себе не употребил'.¹³³ In this respect the words from Chekhov's obituary to Przhevalsky that Bitov quotes are particularly instructive: 'В наше большое время, когда европейскими обществами обуяли лень, скука жизни и неверие, когда в странной взаимной комбинации царят нелюбовь к жизни и страх смерти, когда даже лучшие люди сидят сложа руки, оправдывая свои лень и свой разврат отсутствием определенной цели в жизни, подвижники нужны как солнце'.¹³⁴ This, in fact, reveals Chekhov's own stance which normally remains carefully hidden in his fictional writings. This stance is strikingly reminiscent of that held by Ivan Dmitrich from *Ward No 6 (Палата номер 6)*, a story that was essentially brushed aside by Shestov and almost deliberately, it seems, misinterpreted.

Indeed, as Shestov wrote, 'у Чехова был момент, когда он решился во что бы то ни стало покинуть занятую им позицию и повернуть назад. Плодом такого решения была *Палата No 6*'.¹³⁵ In this story, Shestov asserts, Chekhov backtracked from the conclusions he reached in *Dreary Story* and *Ivanov*. Indeed, says Shestov, when the doctor Ragin's destiny is swung around, 'в нем является жажда борьбы, протеста. Правда, он тут же умирает, но идея все-таки торжествует. Критика могла считать себя вполне

¹³¹ Bitov, p. 10.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Bitov, p. 12.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

¹³⁵ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 203.

удовлетворенной — Чехов открыто покался и отрекся от теории непротивления'.¹³⁶ Now, Shestov does not really focus on the figure of Ivan Dmitrich, while it is the latter who proclaims exactly the sentiments that encapsulate Shestov's own philosophy. Indeed, in response to the preaching of stoic behaviour and proclaiming the unlimited power of reason which allows one to concentrate on one's inner life and in consequence to achieve detachment from external reality, thus proving the latter to have no power over a thinking individual, Ivan Dmitrich passionately replies:

Бог создал меня из теплой крови и нервов, да-с! А органическая ткань, если она жизнеспособна, должна реагировать на всякое раздражение. И я реагирую! На боль я отвечаю криком и слезами, на подлость — негодованием, на мерзость — отвращением. По-моему, это, собственно, и называется жизнью. Чем ниже организм, тем он менее чувствителен и тем слабее отвечает на раздражение, и чем выше, тем он восприимчивее и энергичнее реагирует на действительность. Как не знать этого? Доктор, а не знает таких пустяков! Чтобы презирать страдание, быть всегда довольным и ничему не удивляться, нужно дойти вот до этакого состояния, — и Иван Дмитрич указал на толстого, заплывшего жиром мужика, — или же закалить себя страданиями до такой степени, чтобы потерять всякую чувствительность к ним, то есть, другими словами, перестать жить.¹³⁷

These arguments are exactly those with which Shestov's philosophical affiliation is eloquently expressed by Czeslaw Milosz: 'is a philosophy preoccupied with *ho anthropos*, with man in general, of any use to *fis anthropos*, a certain man who lives only once in space and time? Isn't there something horrible in Spinoza's advice to philosophers? "*Non ridere, non lugere, neque detestare, sed intelligere*"—"Not to laugh, not to weep, not to hate, but to understand"? On the contrary, says Shestov, a man should shout, scream, laugh, jeer, protest. In the Bible, Job wailed and screamed to the indignation of his wise friends'.¹³⁸ In this context Milosz asserts that Shestov particularly treasured the ideas of Kierkegaard who 'too opposed Job to Plato and Hegel'.¹³⁹ Clearly, Ivan Dmitrich's revolt against inactivity and indifference that have been validated by the rhetoric of stoicism is identical to Shestov's own rebellion against universal necessity invading every individual. In Milosz's words explaining Shestov's stance:

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 204.

¹³⁷ А. Р. Chekhov, 'Палата номер 6' in *А. П. Чехов, Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983), vol. 8, p. 101.

¹³⁸ Milosz, p. 105.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 108.

the “I” must accept the inevitable order of the world. The wisdom of centuries consists precisely in advising acquiescence and resignation. In simple language, “Grin and bear it”; in more sophisticated language, “*Fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*”—“The Fates lead the willing man, they drag the unwilling”. Stoicism, whose very essence is to curb the shameful pretense of transitory individual existence in the name of universal order (or, if you prefer, Nature), was the final word of Graeco-Roman civilization. But, says Shestov, stoicism has survived under many disguises and is still with us.¹⁴⁰

Dr Ragin's response to Ivan Dmitrich which reflects Ragin's general philosophy, so typical, as Shestov's notices, of Chekhov's characters is demagogical in nature. It is a call for ‘comprehension of life’ (‘к уразумению жизни’),¹⁴¹ for conquering necessity by thought alone and developing resistance to external irritants by strengthening the inner self. Ragin quotes Marcus Aurelius's words that “‘Боль есть живое представление о боли: сделай усилие воли, чтоб изменить это представление, откинь его, перестань жаловаться, и боль исчезнет’”. Это справедливо. Мудрец или попросту мыслящий, вдумчивый человек отличается именно тем, что презирает страдание; он всегда доволен и ничему не удивляется’.¹⁴² It is interesting that Shestov's own reference to Marcus Aurelius in *Overcoming the Self-Evident* implicates the latter in ultimately submitting to necessity despite his striving for freedom:

Почти все наиболее мучительно искавшие и жаждавшие свободы люди, верующие и неверующие, с каким-то неслыханно мрачным вдохновением восславляли "необходимость". Лучшее сочинение Лютера, "De servo arbitrio", направлено против Эразма Роттердамского, всячески старавшегося отстоять хоть малую долю свободы человека. Плотин изображал нашу жизнь как представление марионеток или актеров, почти автоматически исполняющих заранее приготовленные для них роли. Марк Аврелий говорил о том же.¹⁴³

Thus, Ragin in *Ward No 6* preaches resignation to necessity and explains every injustice by pure accidentality, struggle against which is obviously pointless. Gromov on the contrary believes in rebellion and distinguishes superior life forms by their ability to suffer. In fact, the principal dialogue between Ragin and Gromov embodies the nucleus of Shestov's debate with Hegelian philosophy. Indeed, as Bernard Martin summarises, amongst

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 104-105.

¹⁴¹ A. P. Chekhov, ‘Палата номер 6’, vol. 8, p. 101.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 103.

Shestov's 'own passionately held convictions' there were above all his 'rejection of Hegelian idealism as mere word-play of no ultimate significance to the living individual; the insistence that man's salvation lies in subjective, rationally ungrounded faith rather than in objective, verifiable knowledge; the awareness that the root of sin is in man's obsession with acquiring knowledge through the exercise of reason and through empirical procedures'.¹⁴⁴ Essentially the same beliefs are those defended by the subjective and passionate Gromov (who hates Diogenes, sees Christ as a tormented suffering being rather than a wise, omnipotent God and comes close in his stance to the wailing Job), against rational Ragin who chooses to be pacified by the fruits of speculative philosophy. Yet, the polemics between Ragin and Gromov are not, in contrast to some of Shestov's sentiments taken from Dostoevsky, centred around the inability of science and of rationalism in general ultimately to explain the universe and man. Instead its emphasis is first and foremost, still much in the spirit of Shestov's central claims, on the self-evident truths that reason supplies, on the harmful (in its dormant effect), utilitarian role of the constructions of a rationalist petit bourgeois variety, on the conflict between soul and mind, subjective and objective.

Curiously, Shestov ignores this striking resemblance of the dialogue between the main protagonists of the story to his own life-long dialogue with speculative philosophy. Instead of identifying Ragin with *всемство*, with the stoics' rhetoric and idealistic consolations, in brief – with the 'philosophy of resignation' and non-resistance, Shestov views him as a distinctly 'negative' character because of his extreme weakness – a typical hero of Chekhov – and only notices that this time this hopeless hero is given up to public opinion that does not want to see hopelessness triumph.¹⁴⁵

Thus, ironically, being constantly on the alert for any victory of idealism, so that a decisive resistance could be put forward whenever necessary, Shestov here misses the stance (that Gromov is invested with) which is so akin to his own. Moreover, the situation is even more ironic because when this stance eventually triumphs in Dr Ragin's revolt, which does not

¹⁴⁴ Martin, p. 25.

¹⁴⁵ See Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 204.

escape Shestov's attention, then instead of giving Chekhov credit Shestov sees in it the writer's concession to idealism. This reinforces once again the fundamental paradox of Shestov's thought which, like a cat catching its tail, cannot be satisfied by being acknowledged true because it would mean a victory of the idea and thus would be self-defeating.

However, in our view Shestov sensed correctly that *Ward No 6* is a somewhat exceptional work of Chekhov, even if Shestov misidentified the reason. Indeed, in this story Chekhov set up, in the figure of Gromov, an open and direct opposition to the voice of resignation and inactivity which constitutes the philosophy of most of his heroes. Normally the devastating results of this philosophy, so masterfully portrayed by Chekhov, are left to speak for themselves. The inter-textual approach to Chekhov's writings reveals that for him the problem of inactivity inherent in the Russian intelligentsia of his generation and its prevalent apocalyptic mood of resignation, was particularly painful and particularly personal, for he was able to view it both from inside, by being a member of the intelligentsia of the first generation, and from outside since he was a newcomer from a lower social class. Chekhov's private letters testify to his ambivalent attitude to the Russian intelligentsia and his bitter feelings regarding its sick state. Chekhov's words from his letter to Suvorin also elucidate his personal experience, demonstrating at the same time the breadth of his social awareness: 'что писатели-дворяне брали у природы даром, то разночинцы покупают ценою молодости'.¹⁴⁶

In fact, the image of Gromov to some extent is a manifestation of this statement of Chekhov. Gromov was beaten by his father as a child, then after his father's death he encountered hardship as a student, and had to earn his bread by intense labour. His personal philosophy is not simply derived from learned books, but is a result of his painful existential experience. Ragin, on the other hand, as Gromov aptly observes, is healthy, well-off and got everything he has essentially for free. 'Росли вы под крылышком отца и

¹⁴⁶ From Chekhov's letter to Suvorin of 7 Jan. 1889 in *А. П. Чехов, Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974-1983), vol. 3, p. 133. Cited in Aikhenval'd, p. 772.

учились на его счет, а потом сразу захватили синекуру',¹⁴⁷ Gromov says to Ragin reproachfully. However, in his letter to Suvorin Chekhov meant predominantly the inner freedom of an individual, and in the case of Gromov and Ragin the situation is somewhat reversed – Ragin, who is supposed to be morally superior by virtue of his very breed, is in fact, in his criminal lazy indifference, much inferior to the tormented and passionate character of Gromov.

Furthermore, considered against the background of Chekhov's obituary to Przhevalsky quoted above, the character of Gromov comes to symbolise to a large extent Chekhov's own beliefs: 'говорит он о человеческой подлости, о насилии, попирающем правду, о прекрасной жизни, какая со временем будет на земле, об оконных решетках, напоминающих ему каждую минуту о тупости и жестокости насильников'.¹⁴⁸ It is this wake-up call for humanity instead of, as suggested by Shestov, his singing of hopelessness that constitutes, in our view, the core of Chekhov's creativity. Ironically, it is also what Shestov shares with Chekhov, and it is this great hope for the redemption of man, in overcoming the power of necessity (even though the latter is embodied differently for the two of them), where Shestov and Chekhov have, as it were, their metaphysical meeting point, which results, somewhat paradoxically, from their common interest in the dead-ends of life.

7.6. Nietzschean motifs in Chekhov: unravelling hidden parallels. The concepts of strength and rebellion. Akhmatova and Shestov as 'Russian anti-Chekhovians'.

This predominantly negative interpretation of the inner weakness of many of Chekhov's heroes and the ascription to the writer of a certain delight and enthusiasm in depicting tragedy point to Shestov's reading of Chekhov taking place still in the Nietzschean key. Even though Shestov hardly mentions Nietzsche in his analysis of Chekhov the distinct shadow of his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* is still felt in this work. Thus Shestov quotes Mikhailovsky for whom Chekhov is characterised by unkind, almost evil sparks in his eyes ('недобрые огоньки'), and draws a distinct parallel between Dostoevsky and Chekhov by

¹⁴⁷ Chekhov, 'Палата номер 6', vol. 8, p. 102.

¹⁴⁸ Chekhov, 'Палата номер 6', vol. 8, p. 75.

deeming Mikhailovsky's labelling of the former (кладоискатель) applicable to the latter. Shestov then transfers the implicit accusation against Dostoevsky of his unhealthy interest in the dead to Chekhov with equal force and essentially almost calls Chekhov a cruel talent too. This echo of Nietzsche, understood this time perhaps in a more conventional rather than specifically Shestovian way, is especially audible in Shestov's descriptions of Chekhov's strong and ostensibly positive characters such as von Koren in *The Duel*.

‘Фон-Корен, как видно по фамилии, из немцев, стало быть, нарочито здоровый и нормальный, чистый человек, потомок гончаровского Штольца, прямая противоположность Лаевскому, в свою очередь состоящему в близком родстве со стариком Обломовым’,¹⁴⁹ Shestov writes, but makes an important distinction:

Но у Гончарова противопоставление Обломову Штольца имело совсем иной характер и смысл, чем у Чехова. [...] Добродушный увалень Обломов выродился в отвратительную и страшную гадину. А чистый Штолец жив и остался в своих потомках чистым! Только с новыми Обломовыми он уже иначе разговаривает. Фон-Корен называет Лаевского негодяем и мерзавцем и требует к нему применения самых строгих кар. [...] Одно из двух: либо нормальный фон-Корен, либо вырожденец декадент Лаевский. Причем вся внешняя, материальная сила на стороне фон-Корена, конечно. Он всегда прав, всегда побеждает, всегда торжествует и в поступках своих и в теориях.¹⁵⁰

However, there is, as usual in Shestov, a twist here. He sees von Koren as an embodiment of necessity, of that blind and ubiquitous force that subjugates everything to its will: ‘чистый, последовательный материализм, который проповедует фон-Корен, наиболее полно выражает нашу зависимость от стихийных сил природы’.¹⁵¹ Thus, von Koren is not a positive hero as such, but necessity incarnate, an enemy of sorts. Yet, here Shestov stops short of any humanistic conclusions, and steers instead into his familiar philosophical pattern. ‘Любопытная вещь: Чехов — непримиримый враг всякого рода философии’, he writes; ‘Ни одно из действующих лиц в его произведениях не философствует, а если философствует, то обыкновенно неудачно, смешно, слабо, неубедительно. Исключение представляет фон-Корен, типический представитель позитивно-

¹⁴⁹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 205-206.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 206.

материалистического направления. Его слова дышат силой, убеждением. В них есть даже пафос и максимум логической последовательности'.¹⁵² However, Shestov implies that Chekhov almost deliberately, as if out of masochistic drive, makes von Koren so strong and invincible: 'Фон-Корен говорит, точно молотом бьет, и каждый его удар попадает не в Лаевского, а в Чехова, в самые больные места его. Он дает Корену все больше и больше сил, он сам подставляет себя под его удары. Зачем? Почему? А вот подите же! Может быть, жила в Чехове тайная надежда, что самоистязание для него единственный путь к новой жизни?'.¹⁵³

Importantly, Shestov suggests that for Chekhov, putting up with crude materialism was less offensive than to accept humanising idealism: 'ему легче было выслушивать беспощадные угрозы прямолинейного материализма, чем принимать худосочные утешения гуманизирующего идеализма'.¹⁵⁴ However, Chekhov was afraid to insult the positivist idealism that was fully dominant in the literature of the time, Shestov claims; and thus the writer had to finish off the story in a conventional, uncontroversial way – another concession on Chekhov's part, Shestov implies.¹⁵⁵ Thus the rather Nietzschean strength of von Koren is interpreted by Shestov essentially in a negative key, as a manifestation of necessity in the universe against which there is no antidote.

This implicit and quite ambiguous parallel with Nietzsche and Chekhov's rather ambivalent deference to strength which stems from Shestov's reading becomes explicit and unambiguous in the study of Chekhov by Donald Rayfield. Indeed, he sees in such heroes as von Koren the direct influence of the German philosopher on Chekhov in the most direct sense. Rayfield describes Chekhov's 'deference to strength' being 'part of his hard core'. He gives what for him are examples of this deference in Chekhov's biography and writes that in Chekhov's work 'this love of strength is attenuated, but it is undoubtedly there in the Nietzschean von Koren of *The Duel*, in the railway engineer of *My Life*, in Lopakhin of the *Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov by no means intended us to deplore these characters', Rayfield

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid, pp. 206-207.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 206.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 207.

affirms.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, what for Rayfield exemplifies Chekhov's affiliation with strength, such as for instance the writer's friendship with Suvorin 'the Beaverbrook or Hearst of Tsarist Russia'¹⁵⁷ is viewed in a rather different light by James Wood. For the latter Suvorin is far from representing a paragon of strength – on the contrary it is Chekhov who is stronger and offers moral guidance to Suvorin, becomes 'Suvorin's kidney, extracting the businessman's poisons — his anti-Semitism [...], his artistic conservatism, his wariness of the slightest political radicalism',¹⁵⁸ to use Wood's metaphor.

Rayfield's interpretation is in outright conflict with that given by Kornei Chukovsky who on the contrary insists on Chekhov's personal affiliation with his weak characters and argues that it is strength rather than weakness which Chekhov found deplorable. Notably, Shestov describes many of Chekhov's heroes as being of materialist orientation, but with a tinge of hidden idealism according to the canon of the 60s. 'Таких Чехов держит в черном теле и высмеивает',¹⁵⁹ Shestov writes and then explains this by Chekhov's extreme animosity towards idealism in any form. However, for Chukovsky the situation is directly opposite: he sees Chekhov's materialists, that is to say his strong characters like von Koren, as being acceptable by the author only because and insofar as they do carry within them that grain of hidden idealism. In other words it is their weakness not their strength that Chekhov admired, according to Chukovsky, and moreover it is for their weakness that the writer was able to 'put up with' or to 'forgive' their strength. Indeed, Chukovsky writes:

Чеховский гений так и не сумел благословить нежной своей поэзией это твердое, уверенное, целесообразное начало жизни – лопахинское. И для примирения с этим началом, – которое, казалось бы, должно так обрадовать все это обезумевшее от тоски чеховское царство, - понадобилось придать ему черты прямо противоположные, в корень его отрицающие. Для примирения с уверенной, целесообразной силой, поэт придал ей какую-то долю неуверенности, бесцельности, незнания. Силу ему удалось полюбить только в минуту ее слабости.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov. A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Drama* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1999), p. xiii.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Wood, p. 79.

¹⁵⁹ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 206.

¹⁶⁰ Kornei Chukovskii, 'А. Чехов' in *А. П. Чехов. Pro et Contra*, p. 845.

Not in the same way, but with the same result, as it were, did Sergei Bulgakov comment on Chekhov's attitude to strength, and notably on Chekhov and Nietzsche. For him Chekhov was preoccupied by the mediocre, by the weak, and thus immersed in human grief. Nietzsche, on the contrary, focused on the strongest representatives of mankind. 'Ясно, как мало отзвука могла найти в душе Чехова мысль о "гордом и трагически-прекрасном" человеке, вообще культ натурального, действительного человека, которым незаметно подменяется первоначально все-таки идеальный сверхчеловек', Bulgakov writes; 'вся художественная деятельность Чехова является красноречивым и достаточным ответом на эту проповедь самодовольства, самовлюбленности, говоря прямо, филистерства',¹⁶¹ he concludes, thus displaying an understanding of Nietzsche which is diametrically opposite to Shestov's. Bulgakov's conclusion is therefore that Chekhov and Nietzsche are related in exactly the same way as 'огонь и вода или жар и лед, взаимно исключая друг друга'.¹⁶²

Chukovsky's article on Chekhov, which appeared only three years after Shestov's, radically differs in interpretation from the latter. We do not know if Shestov was familiar with it, but what we do know is that Chukovsky certainly did not read Shestov's article at the time. He first encountered it decades later and the idea behind the strong reaction that it evoked in him provides the backbone for our own conclusions concerning Shestov's treatment of Chekhov, as will be shown below.

First, however, we would like to reflect further on Shestov's attitude to the concepts of rebellion and resistance in the case study of Chekhov's works. If we take Ivanov-Razumnik's point above rather than Fotiade's, that in Chekhov's broken heroes Shestov found no revolt, but a mere hopelessness and resignation, then it appears that despite the leitmotif of Shestov's own works being in the rebellion of the individual against the general, in Chekhov (whom Shestov, as usual, equated to his heroes) Shestov refused to recognise this approach of an artist to the drama of life as valid (an approach which pays attention

¹⁶¹ Bulgakov, p. 552.

¹⁶² Ibid.

first of all to exactly those unhappy people that are always unhappy in their own separate fashion, and not to the happy who are happy in the same way). In this sense, despite his distinctly existential approach, the price of those little tragedies which fill an individual existence, a concrete human life, remained unappreciated by Shestov.

In this context the word 'rebellion' may be crucial, because what might have irritated Shestov and grated upon him, either explicitly or implicitly, with his ideological extremism was precisely the inability of Chekhov's heroes to act, their absolute failure in everything that concerned rebellion. Shestov's lack of compromise and rebellious nature can be traced to his youth when his doctoral thesis on law remained undefended due to its being too radically left-wing, and then to his persistent affairs with gentile women against his father's will, which led through a sequence of crises of eventual submission to the ultimate revolt in a secret marriage to a Russian Orthodox woman. Equally, throughout his career Shestov would not give an inch of ground in his fight against rationalism and especially the rationalist approach to faith, although this resistance is more subtle and deep, for it is a manifestation of his fight against his own nature. However, Shestov's extremism which in many ways, as was discussed previously, brings him close to poetry and art in general, can also be viewed in cultural terms as a certain impediment, as was shown earlier in connection with Shestov's proximity to Freud.

This was the consequence of Shestov's uncompromising search for human salvation, for freedom from necessity. It is therefore not surprising that the concept of rebellion was one of the central concepts for Shestov, and could have played a decisive role in his understanding of Chekhov. Here, it seems, a most interesting analogy can be drawn with the judgements on Chekhov by Anna Akhmatova recorded in numerous sources, in particular by Lidia Chukovskaia in her *Notes*. Each time when this topic is touched upon Akhmatova talks about Chekhov abruptly and harshly, invariably evoking bitterness in Chukovskaia for whom Chekhov was a favourite writer. The reasons that Akhmatova gives when explaining her dislike of Chekhov are strangely reminiscent of Shestov's statements on Chekhov – the air of hopelessness which permeates the writer's works, his heroes' complete feebleness and inability to act. Notice that the same strangely naïve identification

of Chekhov with his characters takes place. To which Chukovskaia reasonably objects: ‘Но у Чехова-то хватило мужества написать ‘Припадок’, ‘В овраге’, ‘Мужики’ и хватило гениальности преобразить горе человеческое в гармонию.’¹⁶³

So it turns out, paradoxical though it may seem, that these extremely independent and active personalities, disdaining conventional norms – Akhmatova and Shestov – were so blinded by the inner weakness and inability to act of Chekhov's heroes that they could not see the wood for the trees. Maybe in the case of Akhmatova it was the subconscious outrage of a strong person, degraded to a state of permanent grief by the cruel era, when seeing people (in this case invented) over whom the power of external circumstances is basically absent and it is they who condemn themselves to capital punishment. Whatever the case, Chukovskaia, submitted to the same inhuman conditions by the same terrible times, cannot imagine her life without Chekhov's books: ‘Помните?’, she asks Akhmatova, ‘вы однажды мне сказали, что не скучаете по морю, потому что оно всегда при вас, возле вас, с вами? Ну вот, мне не требуется перечитывать Чехова, потому что он всегда со мной’.¹⁶⁴

Moreover, Chukovskaia sees in Akhmatova's dislike of Chekhov a manifestation not of a personal taste, but of something rather parochial – that of the Acmeists:

акмеисты ... хотели сбросить Чехова с корабля современности, как, например, футуристы – Пушкина и Толстого. ... Гумилеву, Ахматовой и Мандельштаму, пока они были новой школой какого-то нового искусства, требовалось для чего-то отвергать Чехова, противопоставлять Толстого Достоевскому и так далее. Теперь уже трудно понять для чего. Школы-то проходят, а Чехов остается – как, впрочем, и Мандельштам, и Ахматова, и Гумилев, и Маяковский.¹⁶⁵

Andrei Bitov writes in this respect that ‘Отсутствие пафоса, патетики, обнаженной идеи — даже мысль утаена в столь ясном изложении, что может и мыслью не показаться, пока не вырастешь настолько, чтобы ее воспринять. Оттого про Пушкина надо нетерпеливо провозгласить, что он устарел (от Писарева до Маяковского, вплоть до

¹⁶³ Chukovskaia, II, p. 434.

¹⁶⁴ Chukovskaia, II, p. 533.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, II, pp. 433-434.

сегодняшних поползновений), а про Чехова — что он нуден, сер, принижен и т.п. (от его современников, через Ахматову, до Бродского)'.¹⁶⁶ Thus, Bitov implies that many Chekhov readers, including even Akhmatova and Brodsky, were not able to discern Chekhov's subtle wisdom. It is probably fairer to say that they were 'unwilling' rather than 'unable'. This is especially true of Brodsky, who can be compared with Chekhov in many ways, including their treatment of time, their creative courage in the face of eternity revealed to the utmost in their sobering intonation.

Akhmatova's intrinsic proximity to Chekhov is even more noticeable. It is interesting to point out in this connection that in many ways Akhmatova's poetry is close to Chekhov's prose, and extreme sobriety together with the elusive nature of their marked inner freedom and independence, their emphasis on private liberties and personal mystery certainly form their common denominator. In fact there is a sufficient number of scholarly opinions that suggest that Akhmatova's dislike of Chekhov stemmed in a sense from their excessively close proximity. Thus L. A. Davtian talks of the kinship between their artistic worlds. Davtian observes such a common feature of Akhmatova's poetry and Chekhov's prose as elevating a mundane detail into a lofty poetic symbol. On the other hand, as Davtian notices, Akhmatova's often unexpected observations which put into one psychological field very distant concepts are akin to Chekhov's affinity to the random and absurd.¹⁶⁷

M. A. Sheikina essentially suggests that it is Akhmatova's belonging to the spirit of the Silver Age with its tendency to myth-creation, to the surreal, to art that is larger than life that hindered her appreciation of Chekhov. A lyrical heroine of Akhmatova did not want to recognise her prince in Chekhovian images, opting to wait for somebody distant and unknown, Sheikina explains.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, although Akhmatova's early letters were compared in style and manner with those of Chekhov's heroines, the two writers'

¹⁶⁶ Bitov, p. 9.

¹⁶⁷ L. A. Davtian, 'Мотивы чеховской драматургии в стихотворении А. А. Ахматовой "За озером луна остановилась"' in *Чеховиана. Чехов и 'серебряный век'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), ed. M. Goriacheva, pp. 137-138.

¹⁶⁸ M. A. Sheikina, 'Чехов, К. Гамсун и А. Ахматова ("Чайка" в контексте "серебряного века")' in *Чеховиана. Чехов и 'серебряный век'*, pp. 127, 132.

apparently different understanding of the nature and scope of art resulted in what Naiman described as sharing a common language, but having a different tonality.¹⁶⁹ Also, A. P. Kuzicheva effectively connects both Akhmatova and Chekhov with the moods of the beginning of the twentieth century with their theme of both hope and the need for spiritual redemption.¹⁷⁰ Thus, as a consequence of such multiple similarities between Akhmatova's and Chekhov's poetics, Simon Karlinsky even labels Akhmatova's manifest dislike for Chekhov 'almost willfully capricious'.¹⁷¹ He himself draws a close parallel between 'the lyrical persona of her [Akhmatova's] poetry' and 'such Chekhovian heroines as Masha in *Three Sisters*, Anna Akimovna in *A Woman's Kingdom* and Anna Sergeevna in *The Lady with the Lap-Dog*'.¹⁷²

Curiously, unlike Akhmatova or Brodsky who could be named as Chekhov's spiritual kin, even if in disguise, Shestov is not one of the same variety. This is because despite Shestov's and Chekhov's common interest in spiritual decline and tragic existential tests, the vector of their aspirations remains different. For Chekhov is indeed sober and free from illusion, while Shestov in his passionate rebellion against idealism remains idealist and romantic. In other words, Chekhov in his sobriety is free in the spirit, Shestov – in the letter, however strong their mutual hope for human salvation might be.

7.7. Getting to the core: wider implications of a theoretical conflict. Lev Shestov and Kornei Chukovsky as two poles of understanding Chekhov.

In connection with Shestov's treatment of Chekhov Viktor Erofeev raises an important issue. As he shrewdly observes, realist writers like Chekhov, whose work (unlike that of Viacheslav Ivanov and his group) feed on the juices of real life, 'оказывают "сопротивление" самому сотворчеству Шестова, его помощи в обнажении их "тенденции". В результате подобного "сопротивления" шестовское сотворчество

¹⁶⁹ A. G. Naiman, *Рассказы об Анне Ахматовой* (Moscow, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1989), p. 41. Cited in Davtian, p. 127.

¹⁷⁰ A. P. Kuzicheva, 'Отзвук "лопнувшей струны" в поэзии "серебряного века"' in *Чеховиана. Чехов и 'серебряный век'*, p. 147.

¹⁷¹ Karlinsky, p. 195.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

трансформируется, незаметно принимая характер разоблачительства', Erofeev claims.

He writes:

В сокрытии трагедии оказывается повинна не только “литература”. Шестов подозревает самих писателей в малодушии, лицемерии, предательстве, “повороте назад” [...]. Основной смысл разоблачительства определяется тем, что Шестову глубоко чужд пафос дистанции по отношению к рассматриваемому им писателю, что в свою очередь связано с известной догматичностью его “адогматической” философии.¹⁷³

This is due to Shestov's affirmation of a certain monism in his perception of tragedy, despite all his disdain for monism, Erofeev explains. And he adds that the above ‘пафос дистанции’ in Shestov's methodology gives way to the ‘arbitrariness’ that Shestov himself once proclaimed as his literary-critical method. As a result the image of the writer gets distorted beyond recognition, Erofeev concludes.

We see such a distortion in Shestov's perception of Chekhov as taking place first of all on the plane of aesthetics. Thus, returning to Kornei Chukovsky's views on Chekhov's *oeuvre*, – he was, notably, outraged by Shestov's article on Chekhov and expressed it in the following terms in his letter to his New York correspondent: ‘Сейчас у вас в США вышла книга Льва Шестова, где есть его статья о Чехове “Творчество из ничего”. Я прочел ее с негодованием. Терпеть не могу резонеров, которые хотят решать вопросы об искусстве вне эстетики, ничего не понимая в искусстве’.¹⁷⁴ It is possible that a deep meaning is concealed in this remark of Kornei Chukovsky, and even more so – a key to the understanding of Shestov's thoughts about Chekhov, for Shestov all his life remained first of all a philosopher, and in the constant inner struggle between philosopher and artist it is the former who invariably won.

As we explained in Part I, despite the dream of his youth to become a writer, in his mature years Shestov rejected any attempts to be called such and remained indifferent to the generous praise of his style and artistic talent. He persuaded his only disciple – the poet

¹⁷³ Erofeev, p. 171.

¹⁷⁴ Quotation from Chukovskii's letter is given in L. Rzhnevskii, ‘Загадочная корреспондентка Корнея Чуковского’, *Новый журнал*, No 123, June 1976. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 98.

Benjamin Fondane – in his philosophical work to steer clear of any form of ‘literature’: ‘You must write concisely, a purely philosophical article. No ‘literature’; this is going to be difficult. But you’ll have to grab eloquence and break its neck, you know’,¹⁷⁵ Shestov instructed Fondane. Similarly, in literary works which, as a matter of fact, brought him to philosophy, he was primarily interested in the latter, preferring bare ideas to the artistic value of the work. This means that an idea as such was dearer to Shestov than, using Chukovsky’s word, ‘aesthetics’.

This brings us back to our important discussion in Section 3.1 of Part I on the role of aesthetics for Shestov and his complex relationship with the latter. It is in the case of Chekhov that this becomes particularly visible. We need to recall here our suggestion that for an artist, which is what a writer or a poet is above all, form is inseparable from content and even, in a certain sense, prevails over it, if by form one understands the dictates of language. For a philosopher, on the other hand, it is the idea or even the concept which carries weight. In the same way for Shestov, with all the splendour of his style, the most important thing was the philosophical conception.

Hence Shestov is primarily concerned not with the artist Chekhov, not with literature as such, but with its philosophical aspect, at the centre of which he sees Chekhov’s revolt against speculative philosophy, a revolt so akin to that of Shestov himself.

This could possibly be explained by a certain paradoxical poetic deafness of Shestov, his skating over the surface, where as a result he remains deceived. It is paradoxical because while drawing his ideas from, essentially, pure poetry – from classical Russian literature, – and moreover, while inspiring poets with them, it is as if Shestov himself is insensitive to the full beauty of the original, and rather approaches it from an applied (read – philosophical) point of view. This is even more amazing given that in his first book *Shakespeare and his Critic Brandes* he himself speaks precisely from the position of an

¹⁷⁵ Fondane, p. 146. The French original reads: ‘Il faudra écrire serré, un article purement philosophique; ça sera difficile; pas de littérature; il faudra prendre l’éloquence et lui tordre le cou, vous savez’ (which has a reference to Verlaine’s famous line: ‘Prends l’éloquence et tord-lui le cou’).

artist rather than a thinker and in any case rigorously distinguishes the border that separates poetry from the world of raw ideas. Moreover, he clearly feels that poetry, understood in the broad sense, is an alloy of artistic form and one's perspective on the world:

Очевидно, Барцелотти был несправедлив к Тэну, когда утверждал, что в нем художник 'дополняет и исправляет' мыслителя. Наоборот, в Тэне мыслитель потому только и получил такое резко выраженное проявление, что не встретил протеста в художнике. Вообще, не дело типического человека 'дополнять и исправлять', т. е. замазывать естественные трещины системы. Тэн красноречив и потому считается художником. Но это – большое недоразумение. Весь пафос его, весь пыл его увлечения складывается пред алтарем того бога, которому никогда ни один художник не молился. Он говорит о красоте, а вы чувствуете, что он поет гимн 'причине и следствию'; да он и не скрывает этого...¹⁷⁶

However, already then, in his 'idealistic' period, the thinker in Shestov was already ousting the artist in a certain sense – in his early literary experiments Shestov spoke through the lips of his hero (as we saw in Chapter 1): 'Вся поэзия представлялась мне тогда апофеозом правды, точнее добра... Я всегда думал, что жизнь есть не что иное, как постоянное стремление этого "добра" к победе над злом и что носители идеи добра постоянно увеличиваются в своем числе и победа их есть только вопрос времени'.¹⁷⁷

Curiously, Shestov's views remained steadfast to the end of his life – as can be seen from his letter to Schloezer of 4 January 1933 (Schloezer had then just published his book on Gogol). Shestov continues with considerable conviction to draw a borderline between form and content, as if trying quite consciously to separate one from the other and undoubtedly taking the side of content:

А что люди интересуются больше или даже исключительно литературной стороной в книге, и не вдумываются в ее содержание, то ведь это старая история: не нам первым и не нам последним приходится испытывать это. Временами кажется даже, что в каком-то смысле так этому и быть полагается. Ведь огромное большинство людей и Библией зачитываются только потому, что она очень хорошо написана. И ведь, точно, кому охота так перестраивать свое мышление, чтоб Библия могла стать источником истины.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁷ Unpublished story by Lev Shestov *He туда nonan*. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ From Shestov's letter of 4 Jan. 1933 to Boris Schloezer. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, II, p. 113.

Speaking more generally, the problem represented by Shestov's separation of ethics from aesthetics when analysing works of art can be elucidated by the following lines of Joseph Brodsky. Art, he says, is 'средство передвижения, ландшафт, мелькающий в окне, – а не передвижения этого цель',¹⁷⁹ its origins are distinctly non-utilitarian, and hence any 'conceptual' considerations in it are secondary. And thus, any 'applied' approach to art is bound to be distorting. Equally relevant here is Milosz's conjecture, also previously mentioned, of Shestov's personal drama lying in his lack of poetic talent, hence his inability 'to approach the mystery of existence more directly than through mere concepts'.¹⁸⁰

In this light it is instructive to compare Shestov's understanding of Chekhov with that of the writer Fazil Iskander who is, unlike Shestov, not a writing philosopher, but on the contrary – a philosophising writer. In his tale *Поэт* Iskander states through the voice of his main hero that 'Байрон внешне героичен, но внутренне прост и однообразен. Чехов внешне прост, но внутренне многообразен и скрыто героичен'.¹⁸¹ This is an extremely interesting remark in the context of Shestov's essentially opposite understanding of Chekhov and Byron: Chekhov is no more than a singer of hopelessness, an overstressed person professing surrender to destiny, whereas Byron is a true poet, 'неукротимая натура',¹⁸² for whom 'бешеные порывы',¹⁸³ are characteristic.

Curiously, a somewhat similar comparison between Chekhov and Byron was suggested decades earlier – by Sergei Bulgakov, even though Iskander seems to have gone further along the same road, thus reaching deeper conclusions. 'Чехов и Байрон, оба певцы мировой скорби, скорби о человеке, оказываются в художественном и философском трактовании человека антиподами: одного занимали исключительно судьбы сверхчеловека, высших экземпляров человеческой природы, другого – духовный мир

¹⁷⁹ Brodskii, 'Об одном стихотворении' in *Сочинения Иосифа Бродского*, vol. 5 (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii Fond, 1999), p. 146.

¹⁸⁰ Milosz, p. 103.

¹⁸¹ Iskander, 'Поэт', p. 130.

¹⁸² Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 15.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

посредственности, неспособной даже стать вполне человеком’, Bulgakov wrote in 1904.¹⁸⁴

Thus, Shestov displays in this case some fundamental misapprehension of the nature of artistic creation, intensified or facilitated by Chekhov's technique of elusiveness, of deliberate withdrawal from his own stories. In fact, why in Chekhov it is especially important to deal with the ethical and the aesthetic in their entirety represents a separate topic in its own right, which we are yet to address. However, we wish to make the point here that in contrast to Shestov's usual reading between the lines he seems to remain deceived by the face value of Chekhov's writings. As Sergei Bulgakov remarked on the critical reception of Chekhov's writings: ‘то, отчего он болел, чем он был сам отравлен, считали предметом его проповеди, сливая автора с его героями, и создавалось и крепло это тяжелое недоразумение...’.¹⁸⁵

In this light Chukovsky's outrage seems a natural reaction to Shestov's radical article that does not dive in to reach under the impenetrable surface of Chekhov's writings. This reaction becomes particularly clear against the background of Chukovsky's own interpretation of Chekhov which was expressed in his article ‘A. Chekhov’ of 1908 – only a few years later than Shestov's paper, as was stated earlier.

As we have already mentioned, Chekhov appeared to Chukovsky as a writer who juxtaposed clear, determined and self-assured strength to the dream-like uncertainty of human gentleness which can ultimately be deemed weakness. Moreover, he placed Chekhov on the side of the weak and found the highest tragedy of Chekhov's plays in the inevitable victory of the strong over the weak. ‘В его драмах вечная роковая борьба этих двух начал, роковой исход этой борьбы, в них внутреннее движение к неизбежному – к вечной победе Лопухина над дядей Ваней’, Chukovsky comments and adds: ‘Победа Лопухина над дядей Ваней – это всегда какая-то позорная победа. Интимная правда, красота этой правды, поэзия этой правды, – всегда у Гаева, у Иванова, у портного

¹⁸⁴ Bulgakov, ‘Чехов как мыслитель’, p. 552.

¹⁸⁵ Bulgakov, p. 544.

Меркулова, у “бедного, бедного” дяди Вани, у трех сестер’.¹⁸⁶ For Chukovsky Chekhov’s cosmos is extremely hostile to any kind of firm sense of purpose; instead it unites all things beautiful and tender with purposelessness and emotional disorientation.¹⁸⁷

This singing of praises to purposelessness that Chukovsky assigns to Chekhov he explains on a rather unexpected sociological plane. It is with the formation of towns, with industrialisation, that Chukovsky connects Chekhov’s choice of sympathies and antipathies. The new morality that the town had brought into Russian cultural history was philistine in nature. ‘Господин превратился в хозяина, в городского собственника, в мещанина. С его приходом дворянская, помещичья, “рыцарская честь заменилась бухгалтерскою честностью”’ and parks turned into vegetable gardens.¹⁸⁸ For Chukovsky Chekhov with his disdain for the world of purpose is the writer subversive of this new utilitarian epoch which started back in the 1880s. However, this social meaning of Chekhov’s works is for Chukovsky rather secondary, while the stunning lyricism, the gentle poetics of his literary talent are primary.

Thus both Chukovsky and Shestov essentially see Chekhov's main character as a weak person, but the emotional colouring of this vision is entirely opposed. For Chukovsky Chekhov was an ally, friend and supporter, if not perhaps even an admirer of a lost person, while Shestov implied that Chekhov took delight, like a hunter or a practitioner of black magic, in proving the ultimate hopelessness of existence and observed ‘unkind sparks’ flashing in Chekhov's eyes whenever the latter saw another one of his characters trapped and lost. For Chukovsky Chekhov despised ‘уверенную целесообразную силу’,¹⁸⁹ ‘это твердое, уверенное целесообразное начало жизни’¹⁹⁰ and found its inevitable victory disgraceful. One of many definitions of a member of the intelligentsia is a person consumed by doubt. According to Chukovsky Chekhov's sympathies were with those permeated by

¹⁸⁶ Chukovskii, ‘А. Чехов’, p. 847.

¹⁸⁷ Chukovskii, ‘А. Чехов’, p. 848.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 850. The quotation Chukovskii gives is from ‘Недоконченные беседы’ by Saltykov-Shchedrin (see M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, *Собр. соч. в 20 т.* (Moscow, 1972), vol. 15, p. 241).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 845.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

doubt, those with a blurred sense of direction. Thus for Chukovsky at the ethical level it was Chekhov's warmth and mercy to the fallen that he singled out as central, and at the social level it was Chekhov's resistance to the fast advancing philistine and petit-bourgeois values. Shestov, on the contrary, assigned to Chekhov no mercy whatsoever and perceived him as an enemy of ideologies, as a man who was emancipated from the 'idea', much to Shestov's delight. However, Chukovsky's stance on Chekhov's disdain towards crude force, towards self-assured strength coincides in essence with Shestov's. He interprets such force as an embodiment of universal necessity and thus assigns to Chekhov (just as in Shestov's own case) a steadfast hatred of the latter.

Chukovsky's conclusions were derived predominantly from the emotional effect that Chekhov had on his readers – in this case on Chukovsky himself. He referred to Chekhov's writings as 'эти лунные колдующие создания, которые дал нам стыдливо-гениальный художник'.¹⁹¹ Thus for him the very poetics of Chekhov suggested the ensuing ethical interpretation. The difficulty is, however, that Chekhov's art mirrors the critic or reader looking at it, as we mentioned before referring to Stepanov's observation in his article on Chekhov. Hence, for Shestov this looking glass reflected exactly what Shestov expected to find – essentially Shestov's own image, the image of his own philosophical ideas. The paradox of Chekhov's poetics is, though, that it is not the complexity which may be difficult to disentangle, but on the contrary its apparent extreme simplicity and clarity that may lead to confusion by hiding meaning, by not producing any explicit moral. Hence, it is difficult to argue one way or another what the author's stance really is. Equally it is easy to dismiss any interpretations that do not suit a particular model.

This is of course facilitated and intensified by Chekhov's conviction that the writer's job is merely to report, hence his authorial voice is deliberately concealed if not altogether absent from his writings. More precisely the author's stance gets absorbed by the narrative itself; it settles, as it were, into the very poetics of Chekhov's works. Thus Bitov commenting on the enigma of Chekhov emphasises the primacy of artistic values over ethical openness: 'Итак, что думал Чехов — неизвестно. И во что верил. Все это сдержанно, все это на

¹⁹¹ Chukovskii, 'А. Чехов', p. 851.

поводке художественной задачи'.¹⁹² In the same vein Chukovsky contemplates Chekhov's reserve along the lines of his poetics: 'для эстетики Чехова художественная откровенность просто невыносима'.¹⁹³

That is why (and here we appear to be in full agreement with Chukovsky's views) any attempt to separate ethics from aesthetics in the case of Chekhov leads to total disintegration. As in poetry translation, using Brodsky's words, 'form is noble [...] It is the vessel in which meaning is cast. They need each other and sanctify each other reciprocally – it is an association of soul and body. Break the vessel and liquid will leak out'.¹⁹⁴ In other words, the fact that Chekhov's ethics and aesthetics are truly inseparable can be explained by the phenomenon already discussed above – the distinctly poetic origin of Chekhov's prose. Indeed, in poetry 'фонетика и семантика за малыми исключениями тождественны'.¹⁹⁵ Remarkably, Chekhov as it were patched the gap between Russian prose and poetry by effectively saturating the former with the latter. Moreover, Chekhov, unlike Turgenev, did it in actual fact rather than in theory. By the time that Chekhov emerged into the literary scene Russian prose which effectively grew out of Russian poetry to begin with, matured and became divorced from its poetic origin. Following Pushkin's 'novel in verse' and Gogol's 'poem in prose' the development of these two genres was largely in the direction of divergence. Thus hardly anybody got further from poetry in his prose than Lev Tolstoy.

However, Chekhov appeared to be turning this process backwards; and those fundamental shortcomings that realist criticism accused him of – namely: accidentality, the absence of a thematic hierarchy and causal connections, are in fact the most essential features of poetry (this was recognised fully only in the twentieth century). '...Путь комет – Поэтов путь. // Развешенные звенья // Причинности – вот связь его! ... // Он тот, кто смешивает карты,

¹⁹² Bitov, from a newspaper version of the ultimate book chapter; published in *Новая газета* 12 July 2004. Bitov rephrased this in the book (see therein p. 14).

¹⁹³ Chukovskii, 'А. Чехов', p. 845.

¹⁹⁴ Joseph Brodsky, 'On Some Problems in the Translation of Poetry', *New York Review of Books*, 7 February 1974.

¹⁹⁵ Brodskii, 'Поэт и проза', p. 138.

// Обманывает вес и счёт, // Он тот, кто спрашивает с парты, // Кто Канта наголову бьёт...’,¹⁹⁶ Tsvetaeva says in her *Поэты* (as we saw in Chapter 3 in connection with proximity of Shestov’s philosophy to poetry). In the same vein, Czeslaw Milosz writes about Brodsky’s poetry: ‘Он ухватывает улицу, архитектурную деталь, атмосферу места – и извлекает их из потока времени, из пространства, чтобы сохранить навсегда в кристальных метрах’.¹⁹⁷

Thus, Chekhov, with his distinctly poetic prose where a passionate defence of human privacy is interwoven with a modesty-driven understanding of literary craft, is concealed entirely in the elusive beauty of the subtext. It is exactly for this reason that looking in Chekhov’s works for open philosophical didacticism would be an obvious mistake. However, Shestov does precisely this, by ascribing to Chekhov as his life stance that sacramental ‘I don’t know’ that Nikolai Stepanovich from *Dreary Story* is invested with. At the same time, in a rather paradoxical way, Shestov claims that numerous critics of a positivist variety ‘заживо хоронят чеховских героев на своих идеалистических кладбищах, именуемых мировоззрениями’, while ‘сам же Чехов от “разрешения вопроса” воздерживается’,¹⁹⁸ and his only answer is the above ‘I do not know’.

Interestingly, in contrast to Kornei Chukovsky, Bunin held Shestov’s article on Chekhov in very high regard, to the point of referring to it as ‘одна из самых лучших статей о нем [Чехове]’.¹⁹⁹ The same remark was repeated half a century later by Sidney Monas in his foreword to an English republication of Shestov’s article. It is instructive that Bunin ascribed to Shestov’s pen an epithet which the latter in fact never used in his article, namely, he called Chekhov ‘беспощаднейшим талантом’.²⁰⁰ This in fact suggests that Bunin also hid behind the pillars of content, or, if you like, ethics, trampling on aesthetics. This is especially true since Bunin’s own stories are characterised, in our view, by a

¹⁹⁶ Tsvetaeva, ‘Поэты’, vol. 2, p. 184.

¹⁹⁷ Milosz, ‘Борьба с удушьем’, p. 246.

¹⁹⁸ Shestov, *Творчество из ничего*, p. 209.

¹⁹⁹ Ivan Bunin, *Собрание сочинений в 10 томах* (Berlin: Petropolis, 1934-1936), vol. 10, p. 226.

Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 97.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

distinctive touch of coldness, and thus for him reading Chekhov in a somewhat Nietzschean key seems natural and even to be expected. For, in contrast to Chekhov, Bunin takes a somewhat superior position with respect to his own narrative, as it were elevates himself spiritually from it and from his own heroes, thus displaying a considerable degree of detachment. Without going into any detailed comparative analysis (which has to remain outside the current thesis) we would nevertheless like to suggest that there is a substantial difference between what is conventionally perceived as Chekhov's detachment (which is often described misleadingly as coldness and mercilessness) and Bunin's. The nucleus of this difference lies, in our opinion, in Chekhov's democratic stance which manifests itself through the author locating himself on exactly the same plane as his characters. As a result Chekhov's narrative can be characterised by extreme objectivity, which was indeed Chekhov's openly declared goal. To achieve this objectivity the author exposes and uses detail as a hidden gateway into human psychology, thus penetrating into the depth of the soul by stripping it of any self-delusions and pretence.

7.8. Where is the real Chekhov? A continuing debate.

Notably, Bunin's and Shestov's 'merciless' vision of Chekhov has survived to this day. Indeed, Andrei Stepanov, who is a contemporary Chekhov scholar, clearly approves of Shestov's drastic and merciless interpretation of the writer, implying that it served Chekhov right. Indeed, in his article on Shestov's treatment of Chekhov Stepanov notes that while many critics, regardless of their point of departure, ultimately arrived at pointing to Chekhov's compassion and underlying humanistic idea, for Shestov, by contrast, any such conclusions in relation to Chekhov's writings were completely absent. 'У Шестова же ни о какой жалости нет ни слова',²⁰¹ Stepanov writes.

However, as Albov writes, 'Про него [Чехова] можно сказать то же, что студент Васильев говорит про себя. "Он обладает тонким, великолепным чутьем к боли вообще" (*Принадок*), а стало быть и ко всему тому, что может причинять боль, страдание. [...] Как он внимателен к человеку, к его доброму имени, даже тогда, когда

²⁰¹ Stepanov, p. 1001.

это у него отнято'.²⁰² When Chekhov invents his doomed heroes he is not mocking them, he is suffering for them, Albov claims – 'он страдает душой за них, что у них нет ни Бога, ни совести, ни законов; ему грустно и больно за эти бесследно гибнущие мечты'.²⁰³ Otherwise, as Albov argues, Chekhov could not have created such works of literature at all. The parallels such as the hero of *My Life* makes – between a slaughter house, his conversation with the mayor and the action of Doctor Blagovo 'мог сделать только автор, который сам чуток к боли вообще, к страданию',²⁰⁴ Albov asserts.

In fact, we would go as far as to assert that the concept of 'cold blood' is hostile to Chekhov's inner self. As the quotation given above from Chekhov's obituary to Przhevalsky testifies, Chekhov believed passionately in outstanding and selfless human deeds, in positive and daring action rather than disintegrating spiritual slumber and demagogical philosophising of any variety. However, his own feelings had always been carefully concealed, 'чтобы читатель не заметил',²⁰⁵ as Chekhov himself proclaimed. In other words, it was his deliberate and considered literary tactics. As he wrote in his private letters to Lidia Avilova: 'Когда изображаете горемык и бесталанных и хотите разжалобить читателя, то старайтесь быть холоднее – это дает чужому горю как бы фон, на котором оно вырисовывается рельефнее. ...Чем объективнее, тем сильнее выходит впечатление'.²⁰⁶ Thus Chekhov quite intentionally, as it were, cooled down his narrative for the sake of objectivity, and gave the readers, as a matter of principle, full freedom to make their own judgements. In reality, however, as Kornei Chukovsky convincingly argues in his book on the writer produced in 1967,²⁰⁷ Chekhov was full of *joie de vivre*, of passionate thirst for life and was, unlike the majority of his heroes, never idle.

Even Albov, who, unlike Chukovsky, did not have the advantage of knowing Chekhov's biography and personality, thus commented on Chekhov's apparent authorial calm: 'Но это

²⁰² Albov, p. 388.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ From Chekhov's letter of 29 April 1892 to Lidia Avilova in A. P. Chekhov, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем*, vol. 5, p. 58

²⁰⁶ From Chekhov's letter of 19 March and 29 April 1892 to Lidia Avilova, Ibid., p. 26 and p. 58.

²⁰⁷ Kornei Chukovskii, *О Чехове* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1967).

спокойствие – просто сдержанность воспитанного человека, за которой скрывается натура, глубоко чувствующая, тоскующая, страстно чего-то ищущая’.²⁰⁸ Albov argues that Chekhov’s subjectivity becomes particularly evident, for example, in his descriptions of nature. ‘Стоит только взять его почти любое описание природы, которая смеется, плачет, тоскует, томится, чтобы составить о нем представление как о писателе глубоко субъективном’,²⁰⁹ Albov writes. It is therefore tempting to suggest that the model for Chekhov’s creative self before his feelings and thoughts get sieved through the severe and demanding filter of his artistic as well as existential principles, is Ivan Dmitrich from *Ward No 6*, with his passionate defence of life and sensitivity against death and stoicism, of the private and temporal against the general and eternal. In this stance and largely in this alone Shestov, in our view, is truly close to Chekhov, and it is at this point where Chekhov can indeed be labelled Shestov’s spiritual twin, considerably more so than, as Shestov himself might have thought, because of their breaking points, the transformations of their convictions or their near-death situations and experience.

However, our point of view remains controversial inasmuch as we perceive Chekhov as a passionate writer. Associating him with the ‘cold blood’ that he wrote about continues to be as common a trend nowadays as in Chekhov’s times. Back then E. A. Liatsky in his article of 1904 quite characteristically juxtaposed Chekhov to ‘great Russian writers’ such as Gogol, Dostoevsky and Garshin who were capable, he wrote, of investing human tragedy with profound artistic revelations and yet portraying the deep torment of a truly living creature, while Chekhov, Liatsky asserted, was merely ‘наблюдательный и вдумчивый врач, тонкий исследователь и уже затем – художник’.²¹⁰ Liatsky quotes defenders of both trends of thought with respect to Chekhov. On the one hand, he mentions those (like, for example, Obolensky) who saw Chekhov as a writer full of love and pity for everything on earth. On the other hand, he notes that loving everything and everybody is equivalent to loving no-one and quotes those (like, for example, Volzhsky) who claimed that an all-pervasive loving pity often turns into moral indifference.

²⁰⁸ Albov, p. 370.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ E. A. Liatskii, ‘А. П. Чехов и его рассказы’ in *А. П. Чехов: Pro et Contra*, p. 453.

Liatsky also effectively joins those who viewed Chekhov as too impartial, unable to suffer for mankind. Thus he clearly supports the above claim, hence going even further than those who accused Chekhov of coldness; indeed, he accuses the writer of being too moderate, of steering away from extremes, from any kind of passion of his own. For Liatsky this moderation of Chekhov results not in the writer's balanced approach, but in his alleged indifference. Thus, instructively, Liatsky approves of the applicability of the following quote from the Holy Scripture to Chekhov: 'Знаю твои цели, что ни холоден ты, ни горяч. О, если бы ты был или холоден или горяч. Но так как ты тепловат и ни горяч, ни холоден, - извергну тебя из уст моих'.²¹¹ This quotation best exemplifies the view of Chekhov as belonging to writers of the 'cold blood' variety, understood as the triumph of indifference and reserve. Importantly, denying any considerations of mercy, pity, compassion or warmth in interpreting Chekhov's art continues to be one of the main existing angles of view on Chekhov, with the other being that of seeing the writer as largely continuing the Russian humanistic literary tradition.

By the same token Shestov's treatment of Chekhov continues to be analysed essentially in conflicting directions. Thus Stepanov who does not go down the path of Albov (i.e. of viewing Chekhov as a compassionate humanist) makes a clear juxtaposition between Albov's and Shestov's perspectives on the writer. It is exactly that part of Shestov's analysis of Chekhov when he had parted from Albov which for Stepanov is worth considering. Continuing the line of Bunin in his assessment of the writer, Stepanov essentially asserts that Shestov penetrated into the very nucleus of Chekhov's art. However, for Stepanov the essence of Shestov's discovery is not in his principal claim about Chekhov's 'hopelessness', but in various philosophical aspects of Shestov's interpretation. Thus, in particular, Stepanov stresses Chekhov's profound engagement with the 'гносеологическая проблема', which, Stepanov asserts, Shestov, importantly, managed to feel and to identify. This, we add, in a way is not surprising as Shestov can be legitimately labelled a 'гносеологический утопист' himself (see, for instance, L. Kolobaeva, "Право

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 437.

на субъективность”. Алексей Ремизов и Лев Шестов’),²¹² hence problematics of this kind are very familiar to him.

However, Stepanov’s ideas, although valid as theoretical constructions are not, in our view, sustainable ‘in practice’, that is to say when applied within a broader framework than merely conceptual (philosophical) – namely, within a literary one. This phenomenon is perhaps akin to utopian doctrines which, although perfectly valid in theory, turn into failure in reality (Marxism is an obvious example). Similarly, Stepanov’s considerations on the validity of Shestov’s analysis of Chekhov stand to reason as an abstraction, but when applied to literature they reveal an insoluble conflict. The kernel of this conflict lies on the plane of aesthetics where Shestov’s spiritual extremism and the dictatorial tendencies of his discourse display a distinct incompatibility with Chekhov’s extreme tolerance and the feature of ‘praising purposelessness’ so deeply inherent in his art. In other words, the very poetics of Chekhov resists Shestov’s paradigm. Shestov turns Chekhov’s alleged emancipation from ‘the idea’ into a naked principle, thus losing the context by neglecting the aesthetic dimension.

In other words what is lost is that poetic colouring which the above ‘emancipation’ acquires in Chekhov’s art and which in fact transforms its very substance into something almost opposite. For, as we argued above, in Chekhov’s world aesthetics sheds some crucial and unexpected light on matters which can change their very nature. The logic of this is, in fact, somewhat akin to Shestov’s own assertions that the truth is lost in transmission, that ‘про Бога нельзя сказать, что он существует. Ибо сказавший: “Бог существует” - теряет Бога’.²¹³ The above phenomenon is precisely due to the fact that for Chekhov, as for any true artist, content is subjugated to form, the ethical to the aesthetic. With this in mind, Shestov’s misconceptions in his treatment of Chekhov become apparent. More precisely, this approach helps us to see the essential misunderstanding which Shestov got involved in

²¹² Л. Колобаева, “Право на субъективность”. Алексей Ремизов и Лев Шестов’, *Вопросы литературы*, (5) 1994, p. 76.

²¹³ Shestov, *На весах Иова*, p. 105.

by applying to Chekhov purely philosophical approach looking in his literary works for the ideological (or conceptual) rather than artistic truth.

However, Shestov's view of Chekhov with all its controversy and misapprehensions continues to this day to be a source of inspiration for many Chekhov scholars and to stimulate thought, often even in the form of heated debate. Also, notwithstanding our previous argument, there is, as was pointed out above, a clear meeting point between the writer and the philosopher. We see it in the passion of both in their approach to the world which manifests itself in respecting human tragedy, in looking courageously into the gap between reality and the ideal, essentially searching for salvation; in valuing the private more than the general and in the underlying disdain for scholastic philosophy and 'self-evident' truths. Shestov explained to Fondane, as we saw in Chapter 2, that he did not study philosophy at university and this allowed him to keep his freedom of thought.²¹⁴ 'I am often chastised for quoting passages that nobody ever quotes, for uncovering texts that were left ignored. It is just possible that, had I gone through a proper training in philosophy, I too would only cite "authorised" texts', Shestov told Fondane.²¹⁵ Pretty much in the same vein Chekhov simply exclaimed, 'К черту философию великих мира сего!',²¹⁶ and summoned one, as was quoted earlier, to be independently-minded, to trust only one's own observations of life.

Stepanov finds somewhat different words for describing basically the same meeting point: 'В этой отчаянной надежде на осуществление невозможного и заключено самое глубокое родство писателя и философа',²¹⁷ he writes. What remains to add to the above as another testimony of its validity as well as a final chord, is Husserl's description of Shestov's life long mission, which is so applicable to Chekhov too, as an attempt 'найти для себя и для всех Божий мир, в котором можно по-настоящему жить и умереть'.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ See Fondane, p. 88.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Chekhov, from his letter of 8 Sept. 1891 to A. S. Suvorin in *Полное собрание сочинений и писем*, vol. 4, p. 270.

²¹⁷ Stepanov, p. 1006.

²¹⁸ Edmond Husserl's letter to Shestov of 3.07.1929. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, II, p. 33.

Chapter 8. Shestov and Turgenev. *The grounds for groundlessness*

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, Shestov's approach to Chekhov testifies first and foremost to the underlying conflict between ethics and aesthetics in Shestov's treatment of literature, and, more generally, elucidates Shestov's complex relationship with aesthetics. Shestov's writings on Turgenev are no less significant, inasmuch as they illustrate Shestov's fundamental struggle against European rationalism and Western idealism in general, and in a sense reveal the quintessence of his artistic philosophy with all its broad implications. In the case of Turgenev – a Russian Westerniser – it is particularly tempting for Shestov to illustrate his own, passionately defended paradigm of an existential path leading from rational thought and unpolluted idealistic beliefs to total disillusionment and subsequent irrationalism. From this point of view there could be no better way to finish our discussion of Shestov's philosophical and aesthetic treatment of classical Russian literature (and of the general proximity of Shestov's thought to art and literature) than analysing his views on Turgenev and their underlying philosophical and artistic meaning. In this respect we have to take issue with Andrius Valevicius, who, having first stated rather hastily that Shestov was preparing a book on Turgenev between 1908 and 1910 (the correct date is, in fact, 1903), then proceeds to claim that 'the book deals more with questions of literary criticism and with the person of Turgenev himself rather than with questions of a philosophical importance'.¹ In our view the book indeed deals with the above issues – however, through Shestov's treatment of them the very core of his philosophical stance becomes clear. In fact a stronger statement is true – that the questions of literary criticism and Turgenev's personality only serve as a springboard for the underlying philosophical struggle of Shestov himself.

8.1. Turgenev's duality. *Weltanschauung* as an escape from groundlessness.

As was mentioned earlier, Shestov's work on Turgenev was in a sense a by-product of his writing of *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*. As Erofeev notes, Shestov was evidently going to

¹ Valevicius, p. 50.

write a 'normal' book dedicated to Turgenev,² and in fact had completed half of it, but then grew tired and wary of such a state of affairs.³ He deconstructed the half-erected building and turned to paradoxical aphorism in order to defeat all consistency and coherence to achieve the resulting triumph of free thought. 'Внешнее оформление материала требовало, чтобы в жертву последовательности была принесена "свободная мысль"'. Не только случайное соседство придавало мысли несвойственный ей оттенок, но даже "невинные союзы" оказывались для Шестова "беспощадными тиранами",⁴ Erofeev writes, quoting Shestov's own explanations from his introduction to the *Apotheosis*.

However, before Shestov changed his mind about the general plan for his new book and switched to a more avant-gardist form – that of aphorism, clearly borrowed from Nietzsche, he had written the first part in a conventional style. This unfinished manuscript which was found in Shestov's archive consisted of 146 densely handwritten pages, was dated 31.07.1903 and had the title *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*. The title and two epigraphs from the front page of the manuscript were later used by Shestov for his subsequent book, while this particular piece remained unpublished during Shestov's lifetime. Much of it was included, though, by Shestov in the first part of his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* published in January 1905. Three other pieces appeared as journal articles in 1961 and 1978. However, the book as a whole was published by Ardis only in 1982 under the title *Turgenev*. Apparently, Shestov wrote most of the materials which constitute this book in Switzerland between July and October 1903. In October that year he was urgently summoned to Kiev to attend to his sick father. There, in Kiev, as Baranova-Shestova speculates, he probably resumed working on the book before finally realising that his original plan had to be drastically revised and abandoning his coherently written work on Turgenev for the sake of the discrete-aphoristical narrative of *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* in its present form.⁵

² According to Ivanov-Razumnik's version it was going to be a book on both Turgenev and Chekhov (see Ivanov-Razumnik, p. 229)

³ See Erofeev, p. 175.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 65.

Yet, it is significant that this title was originally planned for Shestov's work on Turgenev. For the **general idea** of the book (a very concept which became hateful for Shestov during his work on the manuscript and forced him to redesign the whole structure) is indeed a demonstration through the case study of Turgenev how untrustworthy any firm ground in fact is, how illusory and unreliable our life's foundations are (in the form of our morality and ethics, let alone the issue of our physical fragility). In brief, he wished to show how any existential evolution is a road from the rational illusion of having firm ground under one's feet to the inevitable realisation of one's ultimate groundlessness and, consequently, of the need for a leap into the irrational.

Indeed, Shestov begins his reflections with the description of Turgenev as an heir of Pushkin in continuing the realistic tradition initiated by the latter. Yet, a true portrayal of reality with all its horrors is too disturbing to be welcome, Shestov insinuates, and this is where a 'Weltanschauung' (мировоззрение, world outlook) comes to the rescue. Its role in literature, Shestov asserts, is to be a magic wand of sorts: 'с его помощью все что угодно может обратиться во все что угодно'.⁶ At the same time it is akin to a sieve which 'пропускает только воду и песок, а все сколько-нибудь крупное и значительное задерживает'.⁷ Shestov tells us that Turgenev's world outlook was modelled solely on the last word of European culture with its enlightenment, positivist philosophy and scientific belief. 'Тургенев был образованнейшим, культурнейшим из русских писателей. Почти всю жизнь свою он провел за границей и впитал в себя все, что могло дать западное просвещение. [...] Он глубоко верил, что только знание, т.е. европейская наука может открыть человеку глаза на жизнь и объяснить ему все, требующее объяснения',⁸ Shestov explains. According to him Turgenev's outlook resulted in the conviction that every tragedy is followed by a farce, and that this is what Turgenev's own creativity demonstrates to us. By saying this Shestov evidently means that any profound

⁶ Shestov, *Тургенев* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), p. 10.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

questions of existence are reduced by Turgenev, using his *Weltanschauung*, to a clear and pacifying moral dogma, to a logical corollary of the all-explaining European philosophy.

As an example Shestov offers Turgenev's article 'Tropman's Execution'. Having pointed out the extreme power of this piece, Shestov then observes that the feeling of groundlessness which Turgenev experienced watching the execution – 'земля тихо поплыла под ногами' – led him to rush back to firm ground. By this he means that Turgenev was ultimately unable to face the insoluble questions of existence, like the one which Tropman's execution presented him with, and escaped under the shield of his ideological dogmas. Remarkably, it is in the conclusion of the article where Turgenev argues for the abolition of capital punishment (or at least of the accessibility of the process to the general public) which Shestov perceives as the writer's cowardly surrender: 'Снова гора родила мышь! После трагедии дается водевиль, мировоззрение вступает в свои права и почва возвращается под ноги'.⁹ Thus, interestingly, the socially and morally grounded rhetoric, part of Turgenev's stand as a public figure promoting the progress of European civilisation, does not deserve Shestov's trust, while the writer's descriptions of his own existential experience when watching the execution are met by Shestov not only with unreserved trust, but also with admiration.

This really goes back to the very profound question of the interplay between the selfish and selfless sides of the human ego, as well as to artistic and documentary discourse. The former problem in fact borders on something fundamental for Shestov's whole philosophy even though he may not voice it as such. Indeed, what he emphasises here is of everlasting importance to him: the undeniable value of existential experience against the pointlessness (or rather shameful and insincerity) of any attempts to wrap it up as socially useful. For anything useful has, by definition, utilitarian roots and grows, in Shestov's eyes, from our fear, from our instinct of self-preservation. The latter is *par excellence* of an immoral origin. Quoting Dovlatov 'таково любое действие, в основе которого лежит защитная реакция'.¹⁰ Thus, putting it simply, Shestov cannot fully accept Turgenev's sincerity in

⁹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 13.

¹⁰ Dovlatov, I, p. 42.

defending the humanist ideals, for our morality, he argues, grows from purely utilitarian roots. In other words, virtually any seemingly selfless, especially nobly presented act is suspicious by definition.

The other issue – of different discourses – is also highly relevant to our general discussion on Shestov because it returns us to the crucial question of his relationship with aesthetics. Indeed, it suggests implicitly that despite Shestov's repeated claims that beautiful form prevents one from seeing the real content behind it, he in fact is captivated by artistic descriptions and left untouched by documentary-type conclusions. On the other hand, it may serve to prove that artistic mastery is indeed a consequence of the depth of existential experience behind it, while the plainly and dully expressed ideological conclusion is more artificial. It is impossible to distinguish between the cause and the consequence here – whether Shestov intuitively trusts the powerful narrative, sensing real feeling behind it, and remains unconcerned with the relative coldness of the epilogue, or whether he takes a logical approach and spurns the ideological (rational) conclusion in favour of the passionate (irrational) description that precedes it for his own philosophical reasons. In fact both may be true, for, in a way, Shestov may be right in implicitly asserting that real poetic artistry can only grow out of real feeling, of true existential suffering. Thus the question of discursive differences is in fact closely related to the previous question of the relationship between our selfish and selfless drives, for it suggests that any considerations of an ultimately utilitarian nature (no matter how noble they sound), i.e. those which grow from rational thought rather than irrational feeling, are betrayed by the form they ultimately acquire. In other words, the artist's sincerity is always of a poignant form, whereas any other form can be viewed as an artistic failure, thus hiding a possible lack of profound feeling. (Of course, we note in parenthesis, this argument gains validity only inasmuch as the rational and irrational can be separated from each other – as they were in Shestov's eyes).

All this, in fact, is a recurrence (which emerges sooner rather than later) of Shestov's usual theme of the proximity between idealism and utilitarianism which is a manifestation of his central struggle against the traps and falsities of rational thinking. Turgenev is not alone in

his misconceived belief in rationalism and idealism, Shestov asserts. 'Его устами говорит вся европейская цивилизация',¹¹ whose primary concern, Shestov argues, is to install comfort, to pacify any disturbing thoughts. 'Словом "польза" объясняются какие угодно ужасы и даже преступления'.¹² Shestov elaborates on the virtual symbiosis of idealism and utilitarianism throughout his book in order to disavow the former, as one would expect of him, and we are yet to return to his analysis below. However, inscribing Turgenev's personal case into a broader philosophical picture of the times, Shestov explains that Turgenev was quick to get intoxicated by the preaching of European philosophical thought. Because he was 'мягким, "гуманным" человеком и несомненным идеалистом: в молодости он даже прошел школу Гегеля'.¹³ It is Hegel who taught Turgenev the huge importance of a full and complete, rounded 'Weltanschauung'. This Westernised approach to life was a distinct characteristic of Turgenev and as such singled him out from the majority of great Russian writers. It put him in direct opposition, if not altogether creating a personal animosity, with such Russian classics as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Yet, at the same time, Shestov implies that Turgenev could never fully abandon his Russian roots, he could not quite defeat his deepest nature, and as such he represented for Shestov a fascinating case study (as well as one that was very convenient for his purposes).

Moreover, we believe that this fundamental conflict between Western rational thought and a Russian wild irrationalist search for final answers is too close to home for Shestov with the ongoing inner struggle between his education and cultural habits on one hand and his subversive, passionate ideas and tormenting doubts on the other. Thus in Turgenev Shestov must have found a perfect case of idealism and rationalism confronting their opposites with the latter ultimately taking the upper hand (i.e. irrational drives replacing speculative constructions). At least this was Shestov's vision of Turgenev, his interpretation of this seemingly European acculturated thinker who in fact concealed within, as Shestov argues, a seed of doubt and disbelief which eventually grew to destroy his comfortable Western Weltanschauung. This is the main theme of Shestov's *Turgenev* and the entire book in fact

¹¹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 13.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

consists of more detailed variations. Thus, once again, Shestov inscribes the writer into his own existential paradigm, trying to prove that in the struggle between 'life' and 'idea' (i.e. soul and mind) it is life which ultimately wins. Thus his book on Turgenev directly anticipates his more mature and purely philosophical works such as *On Job's Scales* and, even more, *Athens and Jerusalem*.

It is highly unlikely that at the time of writing about Turgenev, i.e. only twenty years after the writer's death, Shestov was familiar with Turgenev's detailed biography, as those were still early days. Even more curious then is Shestov's perceptive understanding of the writer as being essentially torn between his, as it were, enthusiastic convinced 'Westernism' on the one hand and his wild and passionate 'Russianness' on the other. For these two poles reflect quite a dramatic divide between Turgenev's paternal and maternal inheritance. As Frank Seeley puts it, Ivan Turgenev's parents were 'an ill assorted couple' – with the father being impoverished, handsome and thirteen years junior to his wife, who was wealthy, but 'without looks or graces'.¹⁴ Moreover, the father's side 'belonged to the ancient nobility', while the mother's ancestors 'were undistinguished country gentry'.¹⁵ Also, most importantly in our view, 'the opposition of background was matched by an opposition of temperament: the colonel – cool, reserved, controlled (though capable of flashes of rage on occasion) and masterful; his wife – possessive, tyrannical, passionate in the dark and violent tradition of her family'.¹⁶

The implications which Shestov draws from Turgenev's work, which will unfold gradually in this chapter as they do in his book, of Turgenev's actual duality, his inner schism between the cultured, indoctrinated and reserved on the one hand, and the wild, passionate and unmeasured on the other bear the clear imprint of the two influences that young Ivan was undergoing. Notably, he openly, or consciously, resisted the latter and opted for the former, but this is only true if one takes things at face value. Shestov's suspicion of Turgenev's perpetual, even if often concealed, longing for the irrational, of his manifestly

¹⁴ Frank Friedeberg Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

European rationalistic layer being just a thin coating covering his disturbed and passionate soul which eventually led him, according to Shestov, to grow tired of his Western speculative habits, rings much more true than is conventionally supposed.

Of course, in his usual way Shestov is keen to discuss Turgenev the man, incorporating as much biographical data as was known to him into his investigation of Turgenev through the writer's literary work. Still, at best it remains an informed guess, but even more valuable for that, when we think of its actual plausibility. Of course, the 'final truth' in such matters always remains a matter of opinion. However, Shestov's voice is definitely not alone, and echoes some much later (even modern) criticism which, to some extent, goes against the grain. Thus Richard Peace speaks, in a similar way to Shestov, of a 'strange dichotomy of western blandness and a certain Russian darkness' which is 'reflected in his [Turgenev's] writing'.¹⁷ He points out that 'to his foreign friends, Turgenev was seen as a fairly bland, easy going liberal, who was, perhaps rather too gentle. [...] but fellow Russian writers saw another side of his character'.¹⁸ Peace mentions the fact that Turgenev managed to quarrel with virtually every Russian writer. 'It is remarkable that such an apparently "soft", liberal man abroad, should have provoked such hostility at home',¹⁹ Peace writes. Just like Shestov, Peace sees 'a darker side to Turgenev's talent' in contrast to the conventional view of Turgenev's *oeuvre* as 'concerned with love in the idyllic setting of a country estate, where the civilized values are those of the Russian gentry'.²⁰ Peace traces Dostoevskian motives in some of Turgenev's writings and comments that for Turgenev 'love itself has its dark side'.²¹ These darker elements he connects first of all to Turgenev's personal youthful experience, depicted in *Первая любовь* (*First Love*, 1860), which resonates with Shestov's intense attention to the existential roots of the literary experience.

¹⁷ Richard Peace, 'Ivan Turgenev', entry in *The (on-line) Literary Encyclopedia*, 8 Sep. 2004. The Literary Dictionary Company. Accessed 23 February 2007. URL: <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=4475>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

In a similar way, subversive to the more canonical image of Turgenev, Frank Seeley creates a portrait of the writer which in a certain sense also parallels Shestov's unconventional approach in its focus on Turgenev's intrinsic duality. But if Shestov's reasoning is based on Turgenev's characters and their voices and exchanges, Seeley's absorbs into it also, as an integral part, Turgenev's somewhat ambivalent attitude to nature. 'Turgenev is unique among his peers in his personal love-hate relationship with nature',²² Seeley writes revealingly, explaining Turgenev's perception of nature as both Great Mother and creator on the one hand and a cruel, ruthless and indifferent destroyer on the other. 'Within the frame of two-faced nature Turgenev's personages live their little day – or wrestle with the problem of how to live – or try to live but fail. [...] The basic duality of nature is reflected in every major aspect of human life, including the author's apprehension of it',²³ Seeley notes and explains, in a way which highly resonates with Shestov's, the dichotomy of Turgenev's realistic approach on the one hand and his poetic approach on the other, and his vision of philosophy as a form of art rather than science. Thus both Seeley and Shestov perceive Turgenev's inner duality (even if somewhat differently understood) as fundamental to his whole being (and subsequently to his entire *oeuvre*), and both ultimately share the vision of this duality as springing from the conflict between mind and soul.

8.2. Western versus Russian as juxtaposition of mind and soul. Turgenev as a counter-balance to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

Curiously, at the time Shestov translates this unambiguous juxtaposition between mind and soul, rational and irrational (which later became fundamental for his entire philosophy) to a national plane – more precisely, to the juxtaposition between Western civilisation and Russian 'wildness'. He begins this by arguing that Turgenev, whose delicate soul was enchanted by the sweet tunes of Western philosophy and who remained almost up until his death a convinced Westerniser still could not quite become fully European.²⁴ Having made a point of this being a reflection of the writer's central conflict, which is found by Shestov

²² Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 331.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 15.

everywhere in Turgenev's literary work, he then proceeds to quote a proverb national in flavour. 'На нём оправдалась старинная пословица – поскреби русского, найдешь татарина',²⁵ Shestov writes about Turgenev.

Ironically, this is supposed to mean that under the thin coating of civilisation there is a wild spirit concealed, and the roles are then altered: Russian comes to be read as European, i.e. indoctrinated by Western philosophical ideas, while Tatar is read as Russian, i.e. wild, free of educational, cultural habits. However, for Shestov this risqué labelling does not carry any negative meaning. Instead he can be suspected here of being on the side of the Slavophiles against the Westernisers, only with his own meaning given to both groups. Namely, it is not political or even social implications that are his concerns. In those terms his unambiguously critical attitude to the Slavophiles was expressed most directly in his *Gift of Prophecy* (on Dostoevsky's conservative political views, discussed in Chapter 6). There Shestov condemned the Slavophiles' radical nationalism and reduced their whole achievement to the ability to translate 'без посторонней помощи [...] с немецкого и французского "Russland, Russland über alles"'.²⁶ So, instead, his concerns here are, as usual, of a philosophical and existential nature. He is far from assigning to Russia some chosen destiny. Perhaps being a Jew by birth also inoculated him from such considerations. Thus, it is not Russia's special role that is at stake here, it is rather the poison of rationalism, the harm of the enslaving role of any ideology which comes from the West and inscribes itself into the hitherto essentially blank page of Russian philosophical thought that Shestov is preoccupied with. Consequently he views Russia's relative backwardness as its strength in that it has not been spoiled by any dogma and thus is open to independent thought. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Shestov's taking pleasure if not pride in the fact that he received no formal philosophical education and hence can philosophise with the advantage of free vision, in an unconstrained fashion.

Such considerations, by having a somewhat utopian flavour, in fact bring Shestov quite close to the general spirit of the time – of the Silver Age period of Russian culture with its

²⁵ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 16.

²⁶ Shestov, *Пророческий дар*, p. 217.

general atmosphere of utopia. Indeed, as Sergei Averintsev aptly pointed out, ‘если существует общий знаменатель, под который можно не без основания подвести и символизм, и футуризм, и общественную реальность послереволюционной России, то знаменателем этим будет умонастроение утопии в самых различных вариантах – философско-антропологическом, эстетическом, этическом, лингвистическом, политическом’.²⁷ Averintsev emphasises that ‘речь идет не о социальной утопии как жанре интеллектуальной деятельности, а именно об умонастроении, об атмосфере’.²⁸

Shestov then develops his ‘national’ juxtaposition by giving a brilliant comparative analysis (which was already quoted in Chapter 1) of European cultural and scientific advances against Russian attempts to swallow progress rapidly without a slow Western evolutionary development. As a result Russia was poisoned by such a drastic leap and hugely misinterpreted European achievements by trying to interpret perfectly rational advances as pure magic, full of the supernatural and miraculous, Shestov argues. Russian subsequent disappointment with the West is no fault of the latter, he asserts. For Russians read into the words of European progress what they wanted to be the case rather than what actually was the case. Europe invented ideals and ideas precisely because it had stopped believing in miracles and realised that the task of humans is in achieving better arrangements here, on earth. In Russia, however, ideals had been forever confused with miracles, Shestov writes.²⁹ Yet, this carries a positive message for him.

Indeed, he connects Russian freedom (i.e. being free from what he perceives as European cultural dogmas) to the fearless character of Russian literature. Erofeev sees in this a certain inner contradiction of Shestov’s stance.

Справедливо отмечая сложный и противоречивый характер духовного общения России с Европой, Шестов игнорирует то, что бескорыстные поиски истины, предпринятые русским искусством, контрастируют с невольной “корыстностью” его собственной концепции,

²⁷ Sergei Averintsev, ‘Судьба и весть Осипа Мандельштама’ in Осип Мандельштам, *Сочинения: в двух томах* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), vol. I: *Стихотворения*, p. 23.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 16-17.

стремящейся освободиться от культурной и природной “ограниченности” для того, чтобы можно было произнести: “В мире нет ничего невозможного”.³⁰

In other words, Erofeev perceives Shestov’s bias towards ‘uncultured’ Russian literature against established European thought as growing from Shestov’s search for salvation, for a way out from existential horrors. This is indeed a recurrence of Shestov’s eternal theme: instead of providing real answers Western speculative philosophy comes up only with deceptive consolations which serve as a gauge that smothers free enquiry, stops a natural scream in the face of the tragic human predicament.

By the same token Shestov implies throughout his writings that it is ultimately human fear that stands in the way of the truth. As we saw, already in his *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* he declared that the most fundamental human feature is a fear of truth. Thus, Shestov believes, humanity shuts itself from the real mysteries and enigmas of life by this protective cover of comforting lies, for reality is too damaging for the human psyche to cope with. Hence, in his view the true giants are those writers and thinkers who dared to look beyond culturally imposed restrictions and beliefs and to challenge common truths. Western culture stifled by its rational philosophy could not do it, but Russian writers such as Pushkin, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky could. Thus in his juxtaposition of Russia and the West Shestov contrasts the above Russian classics with Turgenev, who could not dare to step over accepted boundaries, who voluntarily confined himself to the narrow cell of European philosophical teachings and did not even attempt to break away almost until his death. In other words, while Tolstoy and Dostoevsky burst out of any cultural, philosophical boundaries into the unknown and irrational with all its horrors, Turgenev diligently and obediently grazed on the fields of comfortable European theories. This is the image of the writer that Shestov paints. To Turgenev, he writes, ‘Толстой и Достоевский казались слишком фантастическими, слишком самонадеянными в их дерзком, ни на чем по-видимому не основанном желании вырваться из власти господствовавших на Западе, под именем несомненных истин, идей’.³¹ Furthermore, Shestov claims that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky played the part of Turgenev’s conscience with its function to disturb and

³⁰ Erofeev, p. 176.

³¹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 19.

trouble: 'Мне кажется, что Толстой и Достоевский были, если можно так выразиться, совестью Тургенева, своими первобытными сомнениями они не раз нарушали покой европейской убежденности Тургенева'.³² At the same time, Shestov notes, Turgenev played a similar role for them because he 'своей насыщенностью европейским образованием немало смущал Достоевского и Толстого и был, в этом смысле, их совестью. Они, без всякого сомнения, завидовали уравновешенности, которая имела за собой такой оплот, как вся европейская цивилизация'.³³

8.3. Turgenev's existential portrait. Shestov's theme of the revelations of death.

However, in this opposition in which Shestov quite clearly takes the side of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky with their fearless daring against Turgenev's complacent and enthusiastic apprenticeship, he by no means denies Turgenev's goodwill, neither does he blame the writer for hypocrisy, but he does essentially imply Turgenev's short-sightedness and his resulting self-delusion. Shestov constantly repeats the point that Turgenev did not suffer enough, did not undergo any excruciating torment and thus was not sufficiently perceptive, but instead was happy to hold on to European (ultimately deceptive) rules. Because for Shestov, we recall, any true philosophy is born only out of extreme despair and it is tragic experience alone that can open our eyes to the ultimate truth. 'Видно, он еще недостаточно надломился',³⁴ Shestov writes and explains that

приглаженная, понятная, естественная жизнь казалась ему не то, чтобы очень прекрасной, хорошей, во всяком случае отнюдь не нищенски бедной, [...] а так, не слишком хорошей и не слишком дурной, существовать все-таки можно было. И даже, кроме того, можно было при случае эту жизнь оправдывать и даже восхвалять. К этому Тургенев считал себя обязанным и свою обязанность он исполнял со своей обычной добросовестностью.³⁵

Not without an ironic twist, this is particularly interesting in relation to Pauline Viardot's description of Turgenev as 'the saddest of men'³⁶ and given that Shestov was fully aware

³² Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 71.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ See Letter 1190 of 14 Mar. 1862 to Countess E. E. Lambert (in I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1980-1982). Cited in Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 30.

that Turgenev's personal life, perhaps as a consequence of his rather sad childhood, was far from happy. Shestov commented on this that 'личная жизнь его очень уж грустно складывалась и не давала ему полного удовлетворения'.³⁷ Yet this only reinforces for Shestov the statement of the insufficiency of Turgenev's suffering: 'кажется, будто бы он никогда не дышал полной грудью, хотя с другой стороны — ему по-видимому никогда не приходилось задыхаться',³⁸ Shestov writes. At the same time Frank Seeley when depicting Turgenev's personality talks of 'deep melancholy' which 'imbues both his [Turgenev's] work and his life from early on, fed openly and directly by his fear of death and his sense of the precariousness of life, and, less consciously, by a sense of unworthiness or guilt'.³⁹ Turgenev's propensity for depression and hypochondria is also well known. Yet, for Shestov this is the case of a personality (or of a life) of mostly 'insufficient' suffering. Perhaps a misapprehension here is concealed in judging personal suffering not by its internal intensity (often concealed from outside gazes — the more reserved the person is, the higher the sense of integrity s/he possesses), but by its external manifestations (for instance, through literary work). Turgenev, may well have been precisely the type of discreet personality for whom any loud outpouring of his soul was simply unacceptable.

For, thinking of his extreme idealism (the very vice that Shestov incriminates him for), one gets a sense of the particular torment caused by the discrepancy between such high ideals and actual reality. Thus Turgenev's life-long passion for Pauline Viardot easily inscribes into a perfectionist, maximalist type of personality that needs a perfect idol, a constant object of worship, the perpetual deity incarnate. Not surprising then is the fact that Seeley writes that for Turgenev Viardot was a kind of goddess.⁴⁰ One also wonders if this tendency (this need for worship) was not a consequence of Turgenev's tyrannical mother whose obsessive presence leaves a negative space which demands to be filled by its positive double who would rule no less powerfully over Turgenev's emotions. Thus the rebellious incident of 1850, when Turgenev in all intents and purposes commissioned by Pauline

³⁷ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 30.

⁴⁰ See Ibid, p. 13.

rebelled against his mother in order to liberate himself from her power financially, looks not like a genuine revolt, but as if there had been a change of female power in his life.

However, his existential portrait appears indeed to be very suitable to enter the frame of Shestov's quest and in fact points to the roots of the latter. For it poses the question of whether idealists are indeed enslaved by the ideal, by the need for an object of worship which ultimately restricts their spiritual freedom. Or does the ideal, on the contrary, liberate them from the chains of the mundane and meaningless into the higher realms of human spirituality? It is quite clear that this is one of those dialectical issues of existence where both antitheses are true, and the judgement in every individual case depends entirely on the world-view of the subject. However, Shestov is clearly convinced that this is not a matter of taste, and this forces him to undermine the whole pillar of Western thought by unambiguously asserting the enslaving function of idealism, especially as far as existing 'European' morality is concerned.

Yet, as Andreas Valevicius correctly observes in his book on Shestov, a distinction has to be made when defining Shestov in relation to idealism, between idealism in the philosophical, 'Hegelian' sense and the outlook of a person who has ideals. Indeed, it is quite clear that Shestov's struggle originated from idealism in the above 'Turgenevan' sense, which is the frame of mind that sees the world and life as 'none other than the continuous striving of the good to vanquish evil' and believes that 'people who bear the idea of the good are constantly growing in number and their conquering evil is only a question of time' ['жизнь есть не что иное, как постоянное стремление [...] добра к победе над злом'; 'носители идеи добра постоянно увеличиваются в своем числе и победа их есть только вопрос времени'],⁴¹ as young Shestov stated in his attempt at creative writing. However, abandoning this type of idealism later in life in his 'total re-evaluation of all values' did not change the nucleus of his personality and his passion for a better world and human liberation from misery and death. The issue was only in what for him constituted the source of human tragedy and how to defeat it, but the main idea of

⁴¹ Excerpts from Shestov's youthful stories, cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 14. English translations are cited in Valevicius, p. 134.

salvation for mankind (which is a purely idealistic concept) stayed intact and was inscribed well into an idealistic world view. Thus rebelling against the ways people live, reason and believe was for Shestov only a battle against the means rather than the cause. The nature of his own beliefs remained humanistic throughout, and its extreme form only reinforces their essentially idealistic flavour (as we pointed out before).

Thus, in a sense, Shestov must have seen in Turgenev his own youthful example with the difference that while he himself changed his convictions later on (and irreversibly so, as he believed) Turgenev remained faithful to them almost until the end. The reality was, though, as we shall demonstrate, that on one hand Shestov's idealism in many ways remained irrevocable (impossible to uproot), and on the other that Turgenev was much more ambivalent than Shestov suggests.

Thus Shestov's assertions that Turgenev insufficiently suffered are based on the fact that the writer remained consistently idealistic, while Shestov implies that the only road that extreme suffering may take is through rejecting high ideals and lofty rhetoric. The latter can indeed be abandoned as superfluous in desperate times; however, the nature of human ideals is much more resilient and profound than the verbal framing they may take (possibly acquiring an inescapable tinge of hypocrisy). The examples of those who died for an Idea can serve as proof. At the same time, for many, an idealistic system of beliefs is indeed a convenient shelter to hide from the chaos of existence and the terror of death. It is against the utilitarian and hypocritical nature of the latter that Shestov rebelled. In the same way behind Turgenev's humanistic proclamations he ultimately distinguished, if we decipher his implicit logic, simple human fear as the only real root. In other words, Shestov suspected Turgenev of existential cowardice and, somewhat paradoxically, of insufficient belief. Paradoxically, because according to Shestov this belief was not sustainable in the face of death (at the very least because any ideological construction collapses in tragic circumstances).

Thus Shestov's implication is that Turgenev, not capable of facing reality as it is (even if without realising this to the full), took on the rationalistic beliefs which basically freed him

from the need to cope with horrors. This is exactly what the description of Tropman's execution implies for Shestov – Turgenev is incapable of coping with the ground drifting from under his feet, and therefore rushes back to the idealistic conclusions that his European convictions readily provide him with (i.e. he demands a change of legislation and talks of civil rights, social obligations and other issues which are, in Shestov's view, designed only to brush over the tragic questions). That is why a farce, he says, follows a tragedy. As we saw in the previous chapter, Dostoevsky's reaction to an execution that he is witnessing is the exact opposite of Turgenev's – instead of turning away at the crucial moment he peers right into the scene, thus representing an essentially opposite way of dealing with reality. For Shestov this opposition is unambiguous and represents respectively the two aforementioned types of perception: Russian versus European, daring versus cautious, life versus the idea of life.

Yet, to say unequivocally that Turgenev was of a cowardly nature and afraid of life (as well as death) would not be entirely fair. For being afraid is one side of the coin, the other is the actual efforts to conquer one's own fears. For one thing he was not a religious believer in the direct sense of the word. As Seeley writes, 'although he professes [...] to keep an open mind as regards the existence of God, he had certainly closed it to the possibility of a personal afterlife'.⁴² This means that Turgenev could not afford intellectually this particular refuge from existential horrors (which by itself may be a sign of honesty and bravery), for a true belief, if it can be attained, is a way out of such fears. But if this, as can be argued, is not a matter of choice, examples of his personal boldness are; and it is in this vein that Seeley describes Turgenev's ultimate struggle with death: 'in his last long years of hopeless pain he faced it as bravely as his own Bazarov'.⁴³ Regardless of what he must have felt in the depth of his soul, he was capable of writing then to Dr L. B. Bertenson that he was calm and courageous: 'я совершенно спокойно смотрю черту в глаза [...] Но повторяю, нисколько не унываю'.⁴⁴ Similarly, he would risk entailing serious consequences when escaping from his confinement on his estate (ordered by the emperor for Turgenev's

⁴² Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 330.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Letter 6079 to Dr L. B. Bertenson of 3 Jan. 1883 (in I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах*). Cited in Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 338.

publication in Moscow, despite its ban in St Petersburg, of the obituary to Gogol) to see Pauline Viardot on her last visit to Russian capitals (thus rising to what he believed to be the heights of love and devotion).

Generally, it is the (at least attempted) consistency of his words and actions which points to the genuine depth and strength of his beliefs. Yet, without contradiction, Shestov's sense of the volatile nature of Turgenev's emotional strengths and of his resulting tendency towards a firm basis for his convictions seems perceptive enough. Turgenev's indisputable sense of worthlessness and personal insecurity may stem from the same root – a tyrannical and passionate mother who feverishly loved Ivan and singled him out of her sons as her favourite. It is almost a commonplace in psychology that such a background is extremely unhealthy, leading to those very features in a child – feelings of insecurity and guilt. Ivan Turgenev was obviously a very sensitive boy who suffered quite a lonely childhood. As Seeley puts it, 'how he hungered for his father's affection we read in *First Love*; how ready he was to pour out his heart to anyone who showed feeling for him appears touchingly in the five letters – the only ones to survive from his childhood'.⁴⁵ Seeley also points out that Turgenev's mother is often blamed for 'breaking her son's spirit' and causing his notorious weakness of will.⁴⁶ Yet, Seeley warns against making too much of this, for 'Turgenev's self-denigration on this score tends to be couched in hyperbolic terms'.⁴⁷

Turgenev's fear of life should therefore be interpreted more as his over-sensitive awareness and apprehension of the precariousness of life (mentioned earlier), resulting in his need and longing for emotional support. However, due precisely to this profound insecurity which largely explains his extreme idealism, Shestov's persistent insinuations that accuse Turgenev of cautiousness which borders on cowardice are not without merit. Yet, it is equally clear that Turgenev did everything he could to live up to his convictions and to exercise courage whenever at all possible, and that it is his convictions which help him to exude this courage. In fact, when Shestov claims that lofty ideals are ultimately useless, one

⁴⁵ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

can argue that Turgenev's life shows, on the contrary, how they helped him to float on the surface of existence, without drowning him completely in depression and inactivity, how they provided him with a constant guiding star whose distant light forever beckoned him to struggle on.

In other words, one could argue that high ideals are useful first and foremost for those who are too subtle and thus weak, and who consequently need ideological crutches to survive. And these crutches do help them through, whether deceitfully or not (which is an open-ended question anyway). Thus one way to a symbolic interpretation of Shestov's spiritual activity is to portray him as an honest doctor who may actually damage the sick through his very honesty by telling them about their hopeless situation. Of course, he offers his own way to salvation that he deems the only one acceptable, but his ideas are not necessarily shared. In other words, Shestov as it were stands next to Pushkin, who utters the words 'ТЪМЫ НИЗКИХ ИСТИН НАМ ДОРОЖЕ НАС ВОЗВЫШАЮЩИЙ ОБМАН'⁴⁸ and tries to explain that on the contrary deception will remain deception no matter how lofty, and thus is to be abandoned. He does not believe in this particular (idealistic) deception's rescuing properties, and with the persistence and force of an extremist wants the whole of mankind to choose another way instead. That is why, one feels, Igor Balakhovsky, as we saw in Chapter 7, compared Shestov to the Bolsheviks (even if in virtual terms only) – and the famous painting featuring Lenin with an outstretched hand springs to mind – where the future leader prophesies to his mother: 'We shall go another way!'

It is for this reason, one can argue, that Shestov portrays as a fearful weakness what can be interpreted as Turgenev's ultimate inner strength: as it were, the obstinate bravery of his last years when he upheld his ideal to the last. Thus when describing Turgenev's last years, that is to say the time when for Shestov, by definition, one parts with any pretence in the face of death and realises that there is nothing to lose any more because the game (of life) is over anyway, Shestov still blames the writer for sticking to his old speculative constructions, for being afraid of giving up his old ideals, as this would prove the beliefs of his whole life wrong and futile. 'Вот что значит сила привычки! На смертном одре

⁴⁸ A. S. Pushkin, 'Герой' in *Полное собрание сочинений в 10 томах*, vol. 2, p. 251.

Тургенев, измученный жизнью и уже надломленный болезнью, все еще продолжает защищать старые “посылки”⁴⁹ Shestov comments on Turgenev’s reaction to Tolstoy’s *Confession*. ‘О каких “посылках” говорит Тургенев мы не знаем, но не странно ли, что измученный, надломленный человек, дни которого почти сочтены, боится нигилизма!’, Shestov exclaims and elaborates: ‘Т. е. боится, что правдивое и смелое слово подорвет доверие к тому “мировоззрению”, которое он, Тургенев, проводил так много лет, что это смелое слово приведет к мрачному отрицанию вместо веселого утверждения!’⁵⁰

But Shestov’s ultimate aim in his book is to demonstrate that Turgenev’s clinging to the old convictions eventually gave way when he finally realised their sheer inability to help him in his hopeless predicament. Thus Shestov’s usual pattern reveals itself in his *Turgenev* with distinct clarity. He suggests that when one is on a tragic threshold one abandons one’s tamed and comforting rationalism as no longer helpful and consoling and leaps to the irrational, whether it be religious faith or just a general search for the miraculous. However, what Shestov seems to be ignoring here is the crucial fact that Turgenev had not a short-lived, but a ‘life-long terror of death’,⁵¹ as Seeley puts it, deriving as an explanation for it the writer’s total disbelief in a personal afterlife. ‘Hence the underlying melancholy’ and ‘hence the elegiac note [...] at the root of his celebration of beauty’,⁵² as Seeley writes.

Importantly, this observation of Turgenev’s permanent rather than transient (late in life) fear of death undermines Shestov’s whole construction. Thus those new motifs that Shestov discerns in Turgenev’s late works must be due to some other reasons rather than his actual approaching death (even though his fears might have intensified with it). In fact Turgenev’s last years spent next to Pauline – the love of his life – could be called happy. For Pauline and her children clearly became his greatest interest and preoccupation. Everything else, including his travels to Russia and socialising with Flaubert and his milieu, even including his creative writing, took a second place. These considerations can be taken as evidence

⁴⁹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 35.

⁵¹ See Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 330.

⁵² *Ibid*.

that, as is often the case, Shestov's observations, although of a perceptive and original nature and not without clear merit, are still observations not so much about Turgenev and his writings as about Shestov's own world-view and philosophical convictions, and Turgenev here is used predominantly as a springboard for the latter.

Thus, the above supposition which is fundamental for Shestov – that only the revelations of death make us see things in their true light and beyond our everyday restrictive boundaries (whereas speculative philosophy is unable to help us there and thus its whole validity has to be questioned) is a recurrence of Shestov's most sustained theme. We have already seen it in Shestov's mature writings on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (dealt with in the previous chapters). Also the same leitmotif of the 'revelations of death', as was also discussed earlier, is already distinctly audible in Shestov's treatment of Chekhov reflected in his article on the writer as well as in his *Apotheosis of Groundlessness*. However, it is only in *Turgenev* where this critique of speculative Western thought appears, perhaps for the first time in Shestov's writing career, in a coherent and consistent presentation, as a formed and purposeful argument. Thus, it is to Shestov's *Turgenev* that the distinct beginning of his struggle against speculative philosophy can be dated, essentially anticipating Shestov's purely philosophical writings. In other words, it is in his *Turgenev* where the philosophical implications of the 'revelations of death' in terms of the above critique of Western speculative philosophy are consistently discussed (by contrast with his article on Chekhov where they are not yet conceptualised).

8.4. Turgenev and Chekhov as fear and fearlessness. Turgenev's ambivalence in relation to *Westernism*.

On the other hand, as Ivanov-Razumnik claims, Shestov's original plan was a book on both Turgenev and Chekhov. This looks very plausible given that in the resulting *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* a significant number of aphorisms are dedicated to both Chekhov and Turgenev. Moreover, the epigraph from Baudelaire 'Résigne-toi, mon coeur, d'ers ton sommeil de brute', which was ultimately used for Shestov's article on Chekhov appeared first as an epigraph to the materials which came to constitute the unfinished manuscript on Turgenev. At the same time the implied juxtaposition of the two writers arising from

Shestov's reflections is very clear. Indeed, according to Shestov, Turgenev was completely in the power of a *Weltanschauung* and instead of exercising independent thought he used the ready-made answers of European speculative philosophy, while Chekhov was extremely independent in his writings and despised any kind of ideology or Idea.

Interestingly, Chekhov's lines from his *Notebooks*, which were quoted in the previous chapter, could not have been known to Shestov at the time of his writing the article on Chekhov: 'Если хочешь стать оптимистом и понять жизнь, то перестань верить тому, что говорят и пишут, а наблюдай сам и вникай'.⁵³ These lines indeed confirm Shestov's conclusion about Chekhov's disdain for any borrowed wisdom and ready-made answers, while in Turgenev's case these are precisely the vices of which he essentially accuses the writer. On the other hand, we note that Shestov failed to grasp Chekhov's optimism in relation to life, and on the contrary assigned to the latter an extremely pessimistic image. Yet, as Shestov's intention to apply the same epigraph to both writers suggests, he saw no real difference between Chekhov's lack of definite answers and Turgenev's explicitly didactic stance, perhaps because he did not believe in the sincerity of this didacticism and viewed it as only a transient delusion in Turgenev's personal evolution. Or, more precisely, this didacticism was for Shestov only a camouflage designed to conceal, just the same, the absence of a real answer. Turgenev is unable, Shestov claims, to say openly and honestly: I do not know, because this would mean 'обречь себя на все последствия безутешности — исключаящей возможность какого бы то ни было мирозерцания — этого Тургенев не хочет и не смеет сделать пред лицом европейской науки, однажды и навсегда отвергнувшей всякого рода незаконченности'.⁵⁴ Thus Shestov's implication is that Turgenev, full of devotion to the European model of life and thought, is not capable of acknowledging his existential bankruptcy, his lack of definite answers, unlike Chekhov who, being free of illusions, does it with an unshaking pen, when his old professor in the face of death utters his epic 'I don't know'.⁵⁵

⁵³ From Chekhov's *Notebooks* in *Полное собрание сочинений и писем*, vol. 4, p. 270.

⁵⁴ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 128.

⁵⁵ See A. P. Chekhov, 'Скучная история'.

All this said, the main uniting thread between the two writers for Shestov (as the very title of *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* suggests, let alone its content), must have been the idea of the ultimate groundlessness of European ideology, including its morality and ethics, of its uselessness in the face of tragedy and death. In other words, it is the revelations of death which were to provide the common ground for Shestov's treatment of both Chekhov and Turgenev. While the former was capable and inclined to cope with the truth, the latter was not. Chekhov with all his sobriety looked straight into the eye of tragedy, while Turgenev, as Shestov insists, hid behind illusion, having erected a sandcastle of ideas which he conveniently borrowed from the West. Thus Shestov, not only in philosophical terms, but in literary terms too, despite labelling Turgenev a realist, in fact regards him as much more of an idealist, as opposed to Chekhov. This stance in a sense echoes that of Frank Seeley who argues that, contrary to the conventional view, Turgenev was not a proper realist because he was at the same time a romantic. As Seeley claims, Turgenev 'may be said to represent an interesting combination: a realist at heart or (perhaps better) in intuition, he is a fantast intellectually'.⁵⁶ For Seeley 'Turgenev's intellectual fantasy is projected into many of his stories in the guise of illusions on which the personages wreck themselves or others'.⁵⁷ For Shestov, however, with his tendency to equate the writer with his characters, it is Turgenev himself who is wrecked by the 'European illusion' of harmony.

This, in fact, points back to Turgenev's duality, which, as we saw, was noted, even if differently understood, by both Seeley and Shestov. This duality for both clearly serves as an important source of explanations of Turgenev's *oeuvre*. For Seeley the result of it is that Turgenev's work 'is steeped in antinomies and paradoxes, both psychological and philosophic' and that 'Turgenev's surface harmony and transparency are likely to prove as deceptive as nature's: they quite often overlay themes of many-layered richness'.⁵⁸ Shestov, on the other hand, implies that the conflict between realism and idealism was slowly eating Turgenev from within, that his self-imposed ideology was putting an unbearable restraint on his innately wild soul, thereby stifling his whole life and work: 'И в самом деле в

⁵⁶ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

произведениях Тургенева замечается наряду с трезвой, вышколенной мыслью, стремящейся к отчетливым и ясным суждениям, какая-то непонятная, совсем не европейская тоска и неудовлетворенность'.⁵⁹

This remark squares up with Seeley's observation that

Turgenev is obviously so much more *reasonable* than Tolstoy and Dostoevsky that readers are apt to take the intellectual components of his work at face value. They should be warned by his own admission in 1869: "Whenever I am not dealing with images, I become quite confused and am at a loss how to proceed. I always feel as if one could equally well assert the opposite of all I am saying".⁶⁰

It appears that Seeley is right in his warning and that Shestov makes exactly this mistake – of falling whole-heartedly for Turgenev's apparent 'reasonableness' (even though he does acknowledge another, different, side to Turgenev) and, obviously, of looking for its roots in the West.

In fact Shestov does not deny that all Russian writers looked West for some final answers, only their perception and interpretations of those answers differed widely. Hegel managed to unite everything into a complete well-rounded system, Shestov explains, which provided uneducated Russia with rich food for thought. However, the Hegelian Absolute was the spitting image of a Russian magician 'который все может, только не все еще хочет', and thus it 'будто бы открывал тот бесконечный простор, о котором мечтали засидевшиеся на одном месте Ильи-Муромцы'.⁶¹

Yet, Turgenev was seduced above all by the external arrangements of Europe, Shestov claims;⁶² especially when viewed against Russian 'ignorance, serfdom, poverty, stupid inactivity, helplessness and irresponsibility of a multimillion population'.⁶³ He thus was in favour of a slow gradual advance, unlike writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky who

⁵⁹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 22.

⁶⁰ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 20.

⁶² See *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 19.

seemed too impatient and unrestrained to him. 'Прежде чем спрашивать у Европы ее последнее слово, нужно разобрать ее первые слова, нужно пройти тот же путь "прогресса", который прошла она, нужно стать европейцами',⁶⁴ Shestov explains Turgenev's stance. He also stresses Turgenev's alleged doubt as to the effectiveness of this path: 'Он знал, что это нелегко, была в нем и боязнь, что последнее слово обманет его, но другого выхода он не видел'.⁶⁵ Hence Shestov's interpretation of Turgenev's whole *oeuvre* which we described above as that of suppressed inner conflict, of European convictions struggling with the writer's innately Russian qualities: 'Вероятно эта необходимость "постепенно" двигаться вперед, необходимость, мучительно стеснявшая его, в конце концов, порывистую, неприрученную и беспокойную натуру, некультурную, доверяющую снам, и наложила отпечаток тайной грусти на все его произведения'.⁶⁶

In this one can see that through his vision of Turgenev's inner duality which Shestov inscribes into the 'Western Europe versus Russia' conflict, he clearly intercepted a certain ambivalence in Turgenev's attitudes to the West and to his homeland. While being a 'convinced Westerniser' Turgenev was never to become as it were a real Westerner, for his ties with Russia as a writer and man were too strong to let him go and 'be converted' into the Western tradition fully and irrevocably. At best he was a double conductor of cultural values between Russia and the West and could observe and note their respective differences, in both their strengths and weaknesses. It is no coincidence therefore that, as Natalia Volodina writes about Turgenev's characters, 'they valued the uniqueness of their own country and their relationship to Russia was the most important and closest one for them'.⁶⁷ She emphasises that Turgenev 'was not a simple "Western" man, but a European in the broad sense of the word when it denotes not only a geographic point or a place of

⁶⁴ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Natalia Volodina, 'Ivan Turgenev's Characters as Russian Europeans; the Spiritual Experience of the Past', abstract in ICCEES VII World Congress *Europe – Our Common Home?*, Abstracts, Editors: Thomas Bremer, Heike Dörrenbächer, Inken Dose, German Association for East European Studies, 2005, p. 455.

living, but also a certain way of thinking and type of behaviour'.⁶⁸ Hence Volodina is essentially in accord with Shestov in so far as the aforementioned 'external arrangements of Europe' are concerned. She writes that "Europe-ism" for Turgenev is first of all a man's civil liberty, assurance of his rights as a personality and self-respect'.⁶⁹ However, importantly, she also notes that 'if the social rights of a person can be maintained only by the state, then everything else is a result of his own development'.⁷⁰

It seems that what Shestov is trying to prove is that it is essentially impossible to achieve this inner development of a true European while being yourself flesh and blood of Russian culture, but significantly more importantly he questions the very benefits and desirability of such an achievement. Shestov wants to prove using Turgenev as a perfect example that European values do not actually supply the writer with any solutions or relieve his own fate. Moreover, Shestov basically asserts that this very Russianness which, as Shestov implies, is concealed deeply in Turgenev, is an antidote of sorts against the deceptions of European philosophy. Interestingly though, while Shestov, in his usual way, seeks to divide (Europe and Russia, speculation and revelation, etc.), Turgenev in both his life and work seeks to unite, to achieve enhancement, if not perfection, through reconciliation. Thus, as Volodina aptly points out, Turgenev 'явно искал героя, котрый мог бы быть подлинно русским европейцем'.⁷¹ She stresses that this was by and large an 'искомый идеал личности, понять и воссоздать котрый стремились как русская литература, так и русская наука, религиозная философия, общественная мысль'.⁷² However, as Volodina concludes, such a character is absent from Turgenev's writings. 'Однако такого персонажа в его творчестве нет',⁷³ she writes, explaining that Turgenev's 'heroes who

⁶⁸ Volodina, 'Ivan Turgenev's Characters as Russian Europeans; the Spiritual Experience of the Past', p. 455.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Natalia Volodina, 'Русский европеец в творчестве И. С. Тургенева' in *Динамические модели пространственно-временной картины мира в русской литературе* (Vologda: Rus', 2006), p.

12.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

are interested in this or that area of European life did not become Western men' and 'their extended visits to Europe did not necessarily make them Europeans'.⁷⁴

This, it appears, can hardly be accidental, and must reflect not only Turgenev's profound concern with Russia's backwardness, but also his inner observations of his own nature which, while longing in many ways for the West, was also too deeply rooted in Russian soil. In this, it appears, Shestov correctly recognised Turgenev's concerns. Indeed, on the one hand, the writer himself tended to accommodate Europe in his consciousness in all its entirety, as a complete and balanced mentality, and to incorporate European culture into his own. On the other hand, he never denigrated his Russianness while criticising (often severely) the multitude of Russia's weaknesses, and moreover, he saw quite clearly the advantages of both cultures. Indeed, his definite understanding and subtle admiration of his native country as well as a distinct appreciation of Western Europe are highlighted in the following definition of their differences formulated in a conversation with Flaubert and his friends: 'vous êtes des hommes de la loi, de l'honneur; nous... nous sommes des hommes de l'humanité!'.⁷⁵ As Seeley points out, the French 'were struck by "the originality of a superior mind (*esprit*)" and by "his immense and cosmopolitan knowledge",⁷⁶ meaning by "knowledge", knowledge of both books and life'.⁷⁷

Importantly, Turgenev did not promote a mere implantation of Western values onto Russian soil, but hoped for their creative appropriation and integration into Russian culture. As Volodina demonstrates by quoting Potugin in *Smoke* ('по сути единственный герой, которого писатель изображает последовательным западником' and 'подчеркивает близость идей Потугина собственным представлениям')⁷⁸ in his conversation with Litvinov: 'Кто же вас заставляет перенимать зря? Ведь вы чужое берете не потому,

⁷⁴ Volodina, 'Ivan Turgenev's Characters as Russian Europeans; the Spiritual Experience of the Past', p. 455.

⁷⁵ Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, under 5 Mar. 1876. Cited in Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 2 Mar. 1872. Cited in Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 30.

⁷⁸ Volodina, 'Русский европеец в творчестве И. С. Тургенева', pp. 11-12.

что оно чужое, а потому, что оно вам пригодно; стало быть, вы соображаете, вы выбираете'.⁷⁹

Thus in a way Turgenev hoped for a certain cultural convergence (ideas quite akin to those expressed by Andrei Sakharov a century later). Indeed, as Volodina writes,

еще в 1917 известный социолог Питирим Сорокин писал: "...пора ясно и определенно сказать, что спасение не в национальном принципе, а в федерации государств, в сверхгосударственной организации всей Европы, на почве равенства прав всех входящих в нее личностей".⁸⁰ И.С. Тургенев почувствовал и художественно осмыслил эту важную тенденцию общеевропейского развития, осуществление которой, как он полагал, возможно только "на почве общих интересов, сочувствий, общего знания".⁸¹ В этом случае человек, оставаясь гражданином своей страны, оказывается включен в некое единое ментальное пространство, которое может быть обозначено определенной метакатегорией. Одной из них и является статус европейца.⁸²

8.5. Turgenev's complexity in the framework of Shestov's critique of idealism and utilitarianism as intrinsically related.

However, while Turgenev clearly tended to support a certain unity between Russia and the West, Shestov unambiguously separated the two, at least in his descriptions of Turgenev's mentality. When Shestov unites them it is normally to talk about damaging Western influences and/or some parallel currents on Russian soil. Thus in his apprehension of the poisons of Western speculative philosophy Shestov warns against Russian thought going hand in hand with European in certain trends that for Shestov are altogether hostile. Hence, ultimately, his concerns, not surprisingly, rise above any national distinctions to the metaphysical heights of general anthropological and philosophical issues where his enemies become much more abstract. Indeed, continuing his analysis of the Russian reception of Western philosophy, Shestov warns that European metaphysics and positivism are of the same nature:

⁷⁹ I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах* [Collected Works and Correspondence in 30 volumes] (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1980-1982), vol. 7, p. 273. Cited in Volodina, 'Русский европеец в творчестве И. С. Тургенева', p. 12.

⁸⁰ Pitirim Sorokin, *Человек. Цивилизация. Общество* (Moscow, 1992), p. 251. Cited in Volodina, 'Русский европеец в творчестве И. С. Тургенева', p. 13.

⁸¹ I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах*, vol. 10, p. 307. Cited in Volodina, 'Русский европеец в творчестве И. С. Тургенева', p. 13.

⁸² Volodina, 'Русский европеец в творчестве И. С. Тургенева', p. 13.

И тут и там закрытые горизонты, только иначе раскрашенные и разрисованные. Позитивизм любит одноцветную серую краску и простой, ординарный рисунок. Метафизика предпочитает сверкающий, блестящий колорит и словесный узор, она всегда разрисовывает свое полотно под бесконечность. [...] Но полотно ее достаточно прочно, и через него никакими ухищрениями не пробраться за пределы действительности в “иной мир”.⁸³

Equally, for Shestov idealism and utilitarianism are twin brothers despite their apparent animosity. Thus he writes: ‘идеализм и утилитаризм явно презирают и не хотят знать друг друга, а втайне постоянно один другого поддерживают. Когда у утилитаризма иссякают “доводы”, он обращается за громкими словами к идеализму. Когда идеализму нужно отыскивать “принцип всеобщего законодательства” он, нисколько не смущаясь, обращается за помощью к своему врагу’.⁸⁴ By the same token, in Turgenev’s idealistic “belief in the good” which is quite European in nature Shestov sees nothing more than a convenient device to gloss over the tormenting questions of existence. As expected, he unmasks Turgenev’s ‘true nature’, or more precisely true motives, essentially in order to unmask the true nature of European philosophical beliefs. To this end Shestov quotes from the finale to *Дворянское гнездо* (*The Nest of the Gentry*, 1859) when Lavretsky visits the monastery where Liza serves as a nun: ‘Что подумали, что почувствовали оба? Кто узнает? Кто скажет? Есть такие мгновения в жизни, такие чувства... на них можно только указать — и пройти мимо...’.⁸⁵

For Shestov these lines testify unambiguously to Turgenev’s inner weakness, to his propensity for self-delusion, his inability to face the brutal reality of hopelessness. Indeed, having stressed how important for Turgenev was the question of the predicament of someone who had wasted his youth and was suddenly given hope, Shestov then emphasises that Turgenev resolves the issue by simply finding a way to justify such a destiny by noble idealistic words. ‘Не выпало счастья на долю — не беда: исполняй свой долг’,⁸⁶ Shestov mocks Turgenev’s stance. He refuses to appreciate the noble sentiment with which

⁸³ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 20.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах*, vol. 3, p. 397. Cited in Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 48.

⁸⁶ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 47.

Turgenev endows his character and by which he justifies him: ‘он действительно перестал думать о собственном счастье, о своекорыстных целях’.⁸⁷ Shestov sarcastically repeats Turgenev’s words about Lavretsky and Liza: ‘Кто узнает, что почувствовали оба?..’ and exclaims:

Но зачем узнавать?! Нужно только научиться “проходить мимо”, всего, что носит загадочный и проблематический характер! Нужно только уметь носить шоры на глазах — и получится возможность сохранить “веру в добро”. Если бы Лаврецкий побольше всматривался и прислушивался к своим “чувствам” и не забывал такие мгновения, как свою встречу с Лизой в монастыре, — мог ли бы он остаться довольным собой порядочным человеком и забыть о “своекорыстных” целях?⁸⁸

Shestov asks this with clear sarcasm, deliberately missing Turgenev’s point that Lavretsky has learned not to dwell on his own feelings. ‘По наблюдениям Тургенева, в жизни можно и даже должно уметь не видеть и не думать, когда нужно’,⁸⁹ is Shestov’s conclusion.

Thus Shestov sees Turgenev’s treatment of his heroes as an attempt to resolve the insoluble in his own consciousness by providing some metaphysical consolations. However, Shestov as usual cannot be satisfied by such a substitute and it is in this connection that he points anew to the utilitarian roots of ethics through exposing once again the kinship between positivist and metaphysical philosophies. In particular, he writes that

этическое суждение имеет своим источником не обыкновенные утилитарные соображения, а высшую, автономную идею потустороннего, метафизического происхождения. Кант даже дал формулу для автономной нравственности: “Каждое из наших действий должно быть таково, чтобы принцип его мог стать принципом всеобщего законодательства”. На что уже, кажется, “чистый” принцип — без малейшей примеси утилитарных соображений. Но это только кажется. На самом деле, несмотря на свой формализм, этот догмат ничего, кроме охранения общественных нужд, не заключает в себе.⁹⁰

Although Shestov’s sole purpose seems to be to expose the utilitarian nature of both positivist and metaphysical philosophies, and Turgenev only serves to exemplify and

⁸⁷ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 46.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.

reinforce that claim, Shestov's ponderings in fact point to something deeper – namely, to the existential despondency in which these philosophical trends may result. For Shestov Turgenev's lack of daring and his habitual cheerlessness (for example his incapacity for self-mockery which Shestov observes) follow from the writer's lack of profound suffering. But the reason could be the opposite (and this is also implicit in Shestov's notes) – it is because Turgenev feels stifled and suppressed by the strictures of his own idealistic and rationalistic beliefs, because he suffers too much rather than too little that he comes out subdued and sad, as his writings reflect. In other words Shestov implies that Turgenev's very *Weltanschauung* modelled on the Western pattern is responsible for his, as it were, resulting broken spirit.

However, it is open to question whether it is a particular outlook that causes existential frustration, or whether it is the very presence of an outlook imprinted so strongly into one's consciousness that has a stifling effect on the personality. In a sense Shestov's rebellion against any system of beliefs implies just that – the harm of the latter for the human psyche, its impediment to one's freedom. Yet the cause may be misidentified here, for rather than an outlook as such it may be its unbalanced, exaggerated role. In other words, the cause of human misery may lie in the Hamlet-like feature of excessive reflection rather than in the exact nature of this reflection or its very presence. It appears that with Turgenev this may well have been the case. For it is clear that he knew Hamlets, as it were, from inside, hence his whole-hearted enthusiasm for Don Quixotes whom he perceived as the opposite and redeeming type.

Furthermore, it seems that Turgenev was fully aware of his own (as well as the general) limitations concealed in idealism and rationality, so in a way he was on Shestov's side, which the latter failed to realise. Indeed, Shestov claims unambiguously that for Turgenev

главное — уметь ничего для себя не требовать. Если бы все люди согласились жить по этому правилу — на земле водворились бы спокойствие и мир. Спокойствие и мир в наше время ценятся выше всего на свете. И так как то, что в наше время представляется самым ценным, кажется самым ценным вообще, то Тургенев (опять-таки вслед за европейскими

мыслителями, я это особенно подчеркиваю) пришел к тому убеждению, что высшее человеческое качество — это способность к самопожертвованию и отсутствие эгоизма.⁹¹

On the other hand, Judith Armstrong, who duly observes Turgenev's constant preoccupation with the issue of self-denigration (or self-suppression) for the sake of a noble cause and his contemplation of the legitimacy of the dictates of duty in people's lives, comes to an essentially opposite conclusion. Thus she firmly points to 'Turgenev's doubts about the heroics of misguided self-sacrifice' and gives as examples the figures of Kister from 'Breter' ('Бретер', 1847), the Hamlet of 'Hamlet of the Shchigry District' ('Гамлет Щигровского уезда', 1852) and others.⁹² This alone shows, in fact, that Turgenev was not prepared to grant idealism the omnipotence which it takes in Shestov's descriptions of the writer's sensibility.

This is particularly evident in Turgenev's perception of love which often comes close to Dostoevsky's (contrary to Shestov's interpretation where he constantly juxtaposes the two writers, always emphasising Dostoevsky's psychological perceptiveness and daring and Turgenev's cautious and over-cultured attitudes). Indeed, in his story 'Переписка' ('Correspondence', 1856) Turgenev's hero writes 'любовь [...] — болезнь, известное состояние души и тела. [...] В любви нет равенства, нет так называемого свободного соединения душ и прочих идеальностей, придуманных на досуге немецкими профессорами... Нет, в любви одно лицо — раб, а другое — властелин. [...] любовь — цепь, и самая тяжёлая'.⁹³ The mention of German professors here is particularly ironic given how closely, almost literally, it resonates with Shestov's own reflections (the critical theme of a German professor, unexposed to real life, who nevertheless dares to 'put his hand on life',⁹⁴ was started by Shestov as early as his *Shakespeare and His Critic Brandes*).

⁹¹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 79.

⁹² Judith Armstrong, 'Turgenev's novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* (*The Diary of a Superfluous Man*)' in *Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev: 1818-1883-1983*, ed. Patrick Waddington (Wellington: *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1983), pp. 1-19 (pp. 3-4).

⁹³ I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах*, vol 6, p. 190. Cited in English in Armstrong, 'Turgenev's novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* (*The Diary of a Superfluous Man*)', p. 18.

⁹⁴ See Shestov, *Шекспир и его критик Брандес*, p. 11.

Similarly, and even more importantly in terms of demonstrating Turgenev's awareness of fundamental existential contradictions (and, as a by-product of this, his proximity to Shestov) is the fact that he deemed incompatible happiness and reflection. In other words, he knew that rational inquiry inevitably kills the state of existential bliss – the very thought that lies at the core of Shestov's philosophising. Armstrong describes this as 'the philosophical problem at the heart of Turgenev's preoccupations: happiness, with its concomitant loss of self-awareness, almost of identity – the state of the sun-drenched fly – is to him incompatible with simultaneous intellectual self-understanding and objectivity, the prerogative and duty of *homo sapiens*'.⁹⁵

Thus what Shestov seems to overlook in his concentration on the flaws of Turgenev's (and hence Western) thought is the actual proximity of Turgenev's philosophical observations to his own in some fundamental ways. However, they seem to come to different conclusions as a result of these observations: Shestov urges the renunciation of reason in order to achieve again what Adam and Eve once experienced – that state of primordial happiness, free of any knowledge; while Turgenev deems it degrading to lose this ability to know and reflect, despite its sad consequences.

Thus, in a certain sense, idealism and rationalism by providing a firm ground, a banister of sorts, for support and assistance in navigating through a complex universe, at the same time demand in return a price to be paid. In particular, they seem to take away the spontaneity, the ability to enjoy life to the full, and inflict despondency by stealing *joie de vivre* and by stifling joys, by extinguishing the childish capacity for playing games, for being care free. These are indeed all the properties largely absent from Turgenev's writings. Interestingly, Shestov compares Turgenev with Pushkin in this connection, implying that the latter, being free of (or even above) any *Weltanschauung* dared to step over any conceivable boundaries and thus found and derived joy even from hopeless situations. This in Shestov's eyes is connected to Turgenev's general fear of life (or in our terms to his deep awareness of life's

⁹⁵ Armstrong, 'Turgenev's novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka (The Diary of a Superfluous Man)*', p. 9.

precariousness) and, on the contrary, to Pushkin's celebration of life. Shestov's claim is essentially that what used to be a hymn to a *tour de force* (in the case of Pushkin) has now become a mourning song full of fear of real deeds (in the case of Turgenev). To substantiate this Shestov gives the example of Turgenev's poem in prose 'Порог' ('Threshold', 1878) which, actually, could be juxtaposed to Judith Armstrong's remarks on Turgenev's doubt as to the value of a misguided self-sacrifice. For this is a poem glorifying nothing but such a total and complete self-sacrifice where a noble cause is implied, but not even explicitly mentioned:

...прежних гимнов уже нет. Остались только заунывные погребальные песни, как тургеневский "Порог". Сравните его стихотворение с песней председателя из "Пира во время чумы", и вы почувствуете, как мало может дать человеку европейское образование и современное, пропитанное моралистическими идеями мировоззрение. Как мощно, вдохновенно звучат стихи Пушкина: *Есть упоение в бою...* и как серо, тускло, уныло, беспросветно, ненужно в "Пороге" Тургенева.⁹⁶

Yet, this was the case when, according to Shestov, Turgenev, in his old age, facing death, was struggling to recover the ground disappearing from under his feet by trying 'to adjust his old beliefs to his new frightening existence' ('приспособить прежние верования к новым условиям своего страшного существования').⁹⁷ However, speaking of Turgenev's earlier experience, before the morbid threshold opened his eyes to the horrors of existence and to the uselessness of his ideals, as Shestov tries to persuade us, he still emphasises Turgenev's constant despondency, his utter cheerlessness throughout his literary writings. The implicit cause for this, as has been mentioned, lies in the writer's confinement to his *Weltanschauung*. Between life and idea, Shestov asserts, Turgenev opted for the latter, and in this he differed from writers like Pushkin and Tolstoy, who above all celebrated life and trusted life.⁹⁸ Yet, as mentioned above, Shestov turns away from the distinct motives of proximity between his own philosophy and Turgenev's (presumably because this would undermine Shestov's central intention – that of a struggle against the European system of beliefs). This proximity, however, is quite apparent. Indeed, as Armstrong writes, drawing on many critical opinions, Turgenev's 'train of thought had

⁹⁶ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 113-114.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 111.

⁹⁸ See *Ibid*, p. 34.

for long been closer to Schopenhauer's than to Hegel's, the philosopher of his youth, and his rapid adoption of a Schopenhauerian philosophy from the early 1860s on was less a conversion than a recognition of affinity'.⁹⁹ Yet Shestov hardly ever mentions Schopenhauer in relation to Turgenev and certainly not in the above sense. In fact, this particular philosopher does not engage Shestov nearly as much as one would expect, which is quite puzzling. One of the reasons for that, we speculate, could be the simple fact that Schopenhauer was in many ways a precursor of Nietzsche, who, being chronologically and dialectically closer to Shestov, has for the latter overshadowed and replaced his famous predecessor.

Be that as it may, Shestov overlooks Turgenev's affinity to Schopenhauerian motives, despite the fact that they are so akin to his own concerns. Indeed, Turgenev's preoccupations with death, with our doomed fate and its lack of choice, and with the incompatibility of rationalism and existential harmony are all brushed away by Shestov, or, more precisely, configured in such a way as to appear that they emerged only just before the writer's death. Yet, the 'Diary of a Superfluous Man' ('Дневник лишнего человека', 1849) where these themes originate (even though Turgenev then might not yet have been familiar with Schopenhauer) is dated as early as 1850. Instead Shestov claims that Turgenev's writings until very late in his life remained stable, calm and morally instructive, if a little sad. Interestingly, he singles out just one story ('Довольно', 1864) as the one where for the first time, even if momentarily, Turgenev rebels against his European Weltanschauung. Having criticised the overall artistic merits of this work for its lifelessness Shestov nevertheless distinguishes the narrator's assertion that the really terrible thing in life is the fact that there is not anything terrible: 'Не привидения, не фантастические подземные силы страшны; не страшна гофманщина, под каким бы видом она не являлась... страшно то, что нет ничего страшного'.¹⁰⁰ This for Shestov implies that the freedom which education, so much valued by Turgenev, gives one (as the writer maintained) is unsatisfactory, for it takes away a superstitious belief, a hope for magic. 'И

⁹⁹ Armstrong, 'Turgenev's novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka (The Diary of a Superfluous Man)*', p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ I. S. Turgenev, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в 30 томах*, vol 6, p. 433. Cited in Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 24.

вдруг оказывается, что без привидений и ведьм — совсем как у Достоевского — “самая суть жизни мелка, неинтересна и нищенски плоха””,¹⁰¹ Shestov explains

On the other hand, in this story Turgenev joins Chekhov in his disdain for ‘wingless’, trivial life, for philistine values. However, paradoxically, Turgenev who is prone to depression and hypochondria in his constant terrifying awareness of death, speaks in this story of ‘nothing scary’. On the other hand, Chekhov, whose story ‘Страх’ (1892) highlights precisely the terrifying foundations of existence and its frightening nature, implicitly displays in it the writer’s ability to deal with horror, to go to its depth without averting his eyes. This fearlessness, both artistic and existential, is a very characteristic feature of Chekhov, while for Turgenev the man it was instead existential fear that was a common feature, even if it took conflicting forms and he never fully surrendered to it. Thus in the juxtaposition of Chekhov and Turgenev, despite the assertions of the former through the narrator in ‘Страх’ that existence is frightening and of the latter through the narrator in ‘Довольно’ that there is nothing frightening, the opposite seems to be true for the writers themselves. It was Chekhov who was intrinsically heroic, and it was Turgenev whose impulses were to withdraw from uncomfortable existential dramas and who forever tried to vanquish them in his writings and his life with varying degrees of success. At least this is what follows from Shestov’s interpretation and appears to have touched a certain chord. It is also this vision of Turgenev that essentially allowed him to use the writer for justification of his own paradigm whereby he blamed Turgenev’s fearfulness on European education and values.

‘Образование Тургенева, вопреки его собственному мнению, лишило его свободы и потому, отчасти, оригинальности’, Shestov asserts and adds that ‘Если бы Тургенев, вместо того, чтобы склониться перед европейским образованием, осмелился быть самим собой, его учителя, наверное, были бы ему много благодарнее’.¹⁰² Notably, despite the conventional view that Turgenev left behind a detailed description of his epoch with all its ethos and values, Shestov claims that because Turgenev was too objective and

¹⁰¹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 25.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 88.

crucially lacked subjectivity his writings are of much more limited value as chronicles of the time than they could have been. This is because ‘он не доверял себе, он судил о себе с точки зрения якобы “вечной, неизменной, стоящей вне человека истины”, которую вычитал в новейших книгах’,¹⁰³ Shestov explains. However, in Shestov’s deepest conviction ‘Закономерность явлений, всякого рода закономерность вообще, т. е. тот идеал, который выдвигает современная мораль и философия, не вправе называться вечной истиной’.¹⁰⁴ Man’s love of order is a conservative, philistine element of human nature, Shestov believes. Poets, for example, ‘ждут бурю и ценят бурю, т. е. хаос, непрерывную смену неожиданностей, так же, как другие ценят покой’.¹⁰⁵

At a more theoretical level he poses the question: ‘Откуда порядок? Почему порядок, а не хаос? — не беспорядочность!’ and asserts that ‘если бы гипотеза закономерности не приносила с собой столько практических выгод, люди никогда бы, конечно, не соблазнились называть ее неоспоримой аксиомой, не требующей доказательств истиной’.¹⁰⁶ In this respect Shestov juxtaposes ‘wild’ and daring Dostoevsky to cautious Turgenev with his European convictions: ‘ему казалось настоящим безумием хотя бы на минуту сделать предположение, что выработанной на Западе точке зрения может быть противопоставлено, как равноправная истина, воззрение некультурного, стихийного человека, русского писателя Достоевского’.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, if the tendency of a European outlook is to round everything up, Dostoevsky’s writings have the opposite effect of disturbing the very foundations of any settled existence. As Malcolm Jones writes, any attempt to reconcile all the contradictions of Dostoevsky’s text and to instil calm and coherence into it ‘hardly reflects the actual texture of his fictional world, the character of his inner turmoil, or the unsettling narrative techniques that he unleashes upon his reader’.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm Jones, *Dostoevsky and the Dynamics of Religious Experience* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. x.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter (on Chekhov), for Shestov the ultimate truth does not exist, what does exist is a multiplicity of truths – as many as people on earth. In his *Turgenev* he writes again that ‘Истины нет, остается предположить, что истина в переменчивости человеческих вкусов’.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore Shestov insists on groundlessness as the highest prerequisite of proper human existence. For him

Нужно, чтобы сомнение стало самостоятельной, единственной творческой силой. Ибо твердое знание есть условие несовершенного восприятия. Слабый дух неспособен к слишком быстрым непрерывным переменам. [...] Но дух созревший презирает всякого рода подпорки и костыли. Ему надоело пресмыкаться, он отрывается от земли и уходит в простор бесконечности.¹¹⁰

8.6. ‘Avoidance of the problematic’ as traced by Shestov through Turgenev’s theme of superfluosity.

Thus Shestov implies a certain immaturity (in Shestov’s definition) and feebleness of Turgenev’s spirit, unwilling to rise above the rational, constrained by European convictions and firmly tied to the ground. Turgenev’s alleged tendency to close his eyes to problematic issues (if they cannot be satisfactorily explained and made ‘tame’ and smooth by his European dogmas) plays a crucial role in Shestov’s treatment of the writer.

Почти все его повести, рассказы, романы и критические статьи освещены тем же ровным, не слишком правда ярким и чуть-чуть колеблющимся светом. Старайтесь, учил он нас, примириться с жизнью и не ищите тайн, ибо все равно ничего не найдете. Прошлого изменить нельзя, в настоящем тоже многого не сделаешь — возложите все свои надежды на будущее, к подготовке которого должны быть устремлены все ваши силы,

Shestov writes explaining Turgenev’s outlook, and comments rather sarcastically that

люди, как известно, давно уже догадались пользоваться неизвестным будущим для оправдания хорошо известного настоящего и прошлого. И хотя будущее до сих пор никогда еще не оправдывало возлагавшихся на него великих надежд — оно и по сей час пользуется в глазах всех людей безграничным кредитом: давайте ему безбоязненно какие хотите сокровища, оно все вернет сторицей.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Shestov, *Turgenev*, pp. 53-54.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 104-105.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 26.

Shestov then quite skilfully traces to Turgenev's writings and his heroes this alleged tendency of the writer to reconcile with life and avoid the problematic by means of idealism. And a special role in this is assigned by Shestov to the theme of the superfluous man, especially as Turgenev was the first to introduce this term to Russian literature.

‘Лишние люди есть — и сколько еще, а что с ними делать — неизвестно. Остается одно: изобретать по поводу них (sic) мировоззрения’,¹¹² Shestov makes his usual claim, very much in the spirit of his previous assertions from his earlier books on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. The essence of it is that ‘нужно уметь отвлекать мысль от отдельной личности и обращать внимание лишь на общие явления. Для того, чтобы лучше и успешнее достигать этой цели, Европа разработала целый ряд особых приемов, которые объединяются под звучным именем общественно-моральной точки зрения. Метафизики говорят — просто моральной точки зрения’.¹¹³ He uses the example of Rudin to bring this point home. Unless Rudin is hidden away into a *Weltanschauung* and his fate sealed by it, he represents some metaphysical danger: ‘Что, если Рудин, вспоминая свои обиды, повторит вслед за Соломоном Мудрым и гр. Толстым: “суета сует, и всяческая суета”. А то, пожалуй, вроде как подпольный человек у Достоевского, еще худшее придумает’.¹¹⁴

That is why ‘Европа советует быть скромным, так как всякого рода нескромные требования отдельного человека грозят привести к отчаянию или нигилизму’.¹¹⁵ To prevent these immodest claims and their frightening consequences Turgenev, according to Shestov, finds for Rudin ‘a place in the *Weltanschauung*’ (‘местечко в мировоззрении’).¹¹⁶ This is done by justifying Rudin, despite his life which by all accounts had failed, through emphasising his social significance. ‘Он все же был полезен обществу. Он умеет звать людей к лучшему!’, Shestov writes interpreting Turgenev's novel; “даже благоразумный Лежнев, когда-то боявшийся, что Рудин отобьет у него

¹¹² Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 10.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 44.

невесту, под конец отдает ему дань справедливости и вместе с горячим поклонником Рудина Басистовым пьет шампанское за здоровье друга своей отдаленной молодости'.¹¹⁷ This is for Shestov a manifestation of the triumph of idealism.

Самый взыскательный читатель должен быть удовлетворенным: шампанское и похвальные слова о пользе обществу, разве это не утешение, не метафизическое утешение? Да ведь это — целое мировоззрение! И разве этим домашним торжеством не смываются все обиды и унижения, перенесенные Рудиным. Его выталкивали отовсюду и все. Он сам знает, что умел только начинать и дальше благородных порывов никогда не шел, но выпили шампанское и сказали доброе слово. Нужно уметь удовольствоваться идеальным.¹¹⁸

Shestov then describes the standard path which Turgenev had taken as well as many other of his idealistic contemporaries. At the beginning of it there lies Hegel's famous formula that reality is rational ('действительность разумна'). But one quickly starts doubting this claim and tries to escape into idealism, from which, given its unsatisfactory nature, one is quickly expelled into empiricism (which one had rejected and condemned long ago). At the end of the day one is left with nothing but a 'social' point of view, Shestov asserts, and makes further claims of a similarly critical, unmasking nature: 'Если нужно выбирать между личностью и обществом, то, разумеется, общество выше, ибо сумма всегда больше слагаемых. Мы даже не подозреваем, насколько эта банальная предпосылка определяет наше мировоззрение, и еще менее подозреваем, что вся ее прочность основывается на арифметическом положении'.¹¹⁹

In the draft of the notes which Shestov ultimately rejected he puts this idea even more forcefully, having first stated that society expects from a writer some useful and consoling thoughts:

все до сих пор изобретенные "утешения" - вплоть до так называемых метафизических, ничего больше не представляют из себя, как комическую смесь общественных соображений с арифметикой, которая может быть исчерпана в своей сущности следующим принципом: "человек погиб — но это ничего; он погиб за правое дело. Правое дело — т. е. дело полезное обществу рано или поздно восторжествует и тысячи людей будут счастливы несчастьем

¹¹⁷ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 40.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 40-41.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 42.

одного. А тысяча — в этом никто, разумеется, не может сомневаться — больше, чем один”.
Стало быть, жертва оправдана?¹²⁰

These, of course, are considerations in which Shestov merges with Dostoevsky who was profoundly preoccupied by the corollaries to his famous dilemma of whether one child's tear can be sacrificed for the happiness of millions.

In other words, by stressing Turgenev's concerns about the well-being of society, about the social good, Shestov implicitly accuses the writer of neglecting the individual whose significance, by comparison, appears small and pitiful. Therefore, by implication, somewhat paradoxically, despite Turgenev's preoccupation with superfluous people, Shestov interprets the writer's treatment of them in such a way as to make out that, blinded by his European convictions, Turgenev filters superfluousness through his *Weltanschauung* and only uses superfluous people as a device to reinforce the latter.

Another conclusion that can be derived from observing Shestov's interpretation is that unlike Turgenev who is preoccupied by the reasons for superfluousness (including both socio-political and personal conditions which influence character formation) Shestov is concerned only by Turgenev himself in terms of his existential experience seen through his treatment of superfluous people which for Shestov signifies also how society treats them. In the latter theme Shestov is interested first and foremost in society's inability and unwillingness to acknowledge and face tragedy. Interestingly this particular phenomenon largely survives into modernity, especially in the consumer society of the West, thus proving Shestov's profound intuition about those burning and disturbing tendencies which were to last and develop into the twentieth century and beyond. Notably, Chekhov was preoccupied very much by the same questions of society's inadequate and hypocritical treatment of difficult existential issues. The difference is, however, that if in Chekhov Shestov recognised these as deliberate motives introduced consciously by the writer, in his analysis of Turgenev he derives these socially oriented conclusions by himself from observing the writer and 'his behaviour' on the pages of his *oeuvre*. However, more

¹²⁰ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 31.

conventional readings of Turgenev – such as, for example, that by Victor Ripp (quoted, in particular, in Armstrong’s article on the writer) somewhat overturns these insinuations of Shestov, since Ripp argues for the clear social implications of Turgenev’s texts where the writer demonstrates ‘the compromised public morality’.¹²¹ According to him, in Turgenev’s texts there is ‘not only the power of the established order, but the pernicious influence of the evils as well. ...The values of Russia’s public life seem to absorb all, and in consequence the critical impulse continually risks slipping into moral ambiguity’.¹²²

Even more significant is Shestov’s understanding of superfluosity. Very much like Judith Armstrong does (and rather representatively so, one believes) Shestov is ready to seal the fate of such heroes of Turgenev as Hamlet of the Shchigry, Rudin, Chulkaturin and others by that label of superfluosity, readily and beyond any doubt meaning their total existential failure. Thus Armstrong classifies Hamlet’s sense that his life has totally failed as ‘quite accurate’.¹²³ At the same time Shestov describes Rudin’s life as senseless, needless to him,¹²⁴ thus inadvertently joining that very society and that very morality which he so eagerly strives to disavow. For who (speaking in his own terms) has given him the right to classify someone’s life as irreversibly failed (superfluous)? By contrast Frank Seeley demonstrates a much broader and more humane (and what would be important for Shestov, less conventional) approach, asserting that ‘the only existence that justifies despair is that of the man who dies without ever having loved or been loved’ because ultimately ‘love is the justification of life’.¹²⁵ Thus Seeley understands superfluosity as an inability to give oneself – a conviction which reinforces our own point of view on superfluosity elaborated in Chapter 5 on Pushkin when comparing Onegin to Pechorin. We stressed there the emotional disability of sorts that characterises the superfluous man – the combination of

¹²¹ See Armstrong, ‘Turgenev’s novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* (The Diary of a Superfluous Man)’, p. 15.

¹²² Victor Ripp, ‘Turgenev as a social novelist: the problem of the part and the whole’ in *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914*, ed. William Mills Todd III (Stanford, 1978), pp. 237-258. Cited in Armstrong, ‘Turgenev’s novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* (The Diary of a Superfluous Man)’, p. 15.

¹²³ Armstrong, ‘Turgenev’s novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka* (The Diary of a Superfluous Man)’, p. 3.

¹²⁴ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 42.

¹²⁵ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 334.

a gifted nature and a bright mind with the inability to love, to give himself to others. In other words, it is his debilitating and inescapable self-centredness which renders him superfluous (much more so from inside than from outside, i.e. superfluosity is much more a personal than a social construct). As Seeley writes, 'this incapacity is the curse of the superfluous man', 'he is "locked" into himself'.¹²⁶

At the same time Armstrong (whose view in this respect is rather representative, as we pointed out above) understands superfluosity somewhat more superficially, it seems – an inability to find one's 'niche', and more specifically an incapacity to contract a marriage. In a sense Armstrong's interpretation implies the hero's inability to settle in life 'properly', as other people do. This, in fact, has a ring to it of that very morality against which Shestov so passionately rebels. For he insists that the true purpose of European morality and ethics is to brush over problematic issues in order to help a philistine, bourgeois person to settle in life with a certain comfort – this is what *Weltanschauung* is for, Shestov claims. Hence a superfluous man for Shestov is simply a person rejected by such a society, or even better put – it is tragedy incarnate (which manifests itself through a particular existential experience). It is exactly in this sense that Berdiaev understood Shestov by stating that the latter raised the problem of a single personality ('проблема индивидуальности'). 'Это также основная проблема Шестова. Он бросает вызов "добру", потому что оно бессильно, потому что оно не спасает, а губит одинокое, потерявшее надежду, умирающее человеческое существо',¹²⁷ Berdiaev writes. He comments that 'в подполье воцарилась современная культура трагические проблемы жизни' and explains that 'о том, что происходит в глубине, в подземном царстве, о самом интимном и важном, мало говорят на поверхности современной земляной культуры или говорят в слишком уж отвлеченном, обобщенном и сглаженном, для "исторических" целей приспособленном виде'.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 332.

¹²⁷ Berdiaev, *Трагедия и обыденность*, p. 476.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 467.

However, while correctly identifying the tendency of modern society and European morality to deal with tragedy (with tragic, superfluous people) by avoiding and silencing it, Shestov at the same time, as we pointed out above, is least of all interested in understanding either existential or socio-political reasons for superfluosity, and, what is more important, he joins, without realising it, the chorus of this very society with its values and ideas by his unquestioning readiness to label someone superfluous and his life failed. The situation is not so simple though, for he may be doing this in order to expose and ridicule such a treatment of the individual by society and the latter's system of values. This is probably so because at the same time as labelling a superfluous man's life failed Shestov is equally capable of rebelling against the social verdict itself passed on superfluous people, rather than rebelling only against society's attitude to them (i.e. against the latter's convenient avoidance of tragic issues). Thus in connection to Veretev from 'The Calm' ('Затишье', 1856) who is characterised as someone whose fate is doomed (i.e. 'он из тех, из кого "ничего никогда не выходит"') Shestov comments: 'Кажется, нестрашные слова, а ими, как гробовой крышкой, навсегда прихлопывается человек. Это называется этическим суждением, и этим бескровным способом пытки и казни, этой вновь изобретенной гильотины моральной, наше время гордится'.¹²⁹

However, what is unambiguous is that, curiously, Shestov is never preoccupied by Turgenev's treatment of nature which constitutes for the writer one of his most important themes. Yet, it is nature understood as soulless eternity whose indifference towards the human predicament Shestov continuously discusses and whose laws he constantly rebels against. Turgenev's attitude to nature is ambivalent, but the above admission of its cruel lack of concern with respect to an individual life is definitely one side of Turgenev's complex relationship with Nature. Interestingly, not only does Shestov omit this issue from his consideration of the writer, but he seems never to be really concerned with the theme of nature in literature (so notable, for example, in Chekhov), or rather it takes for him (as expected) a very abstract form – as a system of natural laws, as a blind superior will whose purpose is to destroy. The impression is that Shestov is bypassed by the beauty of the world around him as revealed in nature because his principal (and overwhelming) interest is in

¹²⁹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 49.

people, their psychology, their predicament and their ultimate salvation. Even if this is often concealed in his ponderings on deity, in his search for God – this is all happening as it were within his anthropocentric approach (as we mentioned earlier in this dissertation, following Erofeev), and his primary concern is human salvation (eliminating tragedy).

8.7. Decoding Turgenev through his treatment of his characters. Literary types and individual heroes; the private versus the general.

In his treatment of Turgenev Shestov does not betray his usual tendency to drag the writer from behind his heroes, even though in this case, unlike with Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov, he is less inclined to interpret the writer as directly hiding in particular heroes. Rather, Shestov ‘decodes’ Turgenev himself through the treatment that the latter displays with respect to his literary characters, as well as through the authorial voice which in Turgenev is stronger and more explicit or direct than in the writers above. Thus Shestov easily identifies the fact that ‘в “Дыме” Тургенев специально создает фигуру Потугина, чтобы иметь возможность высказывать свои собственные, тайные и явные мысли’.¹³⁰ From Turgenev’s incapacity for self-mockery that Shestov points out, he deduces that the writer’s love of self-denigration is authentic, but only up to a point:

Ему в самом деле нравилось такое занятие. Но эта сладость обращается в горечь, и в невыносимую горечь, как только Тургенев убеждается, что, бичуя себя, он не исправляется, а добивает себя. Рассуждения Лежнева о пользе Рудиных или самого Тургенева о значении Гамлетов в жизни указывают, что Тургенев предавался самобичеванию, но в глубине души все-таки чувствовал себя не последней спицей в колеснице, и даже далеко не последней.¹³¹

Shestov then insinuates that Turgenev stayed away from anything too autobiographical and could easily deal only with those heroes who were sufficiently distant from his own self and his own interests. Thus, for example, Shestov distrusts Turgenev’s claims that the latter engaged in self-denigration in his *Fathers and Sons*. ‘Базарова, как “тип” твердого и решительного человека, Тургенев мог наблюдать только вне себя, а не в себе самом. Все черты этого героя были чужды автору, и он с большим трудом и не всегда верно отгадывал, какие внутренние состояния соответствовали в его герое тем поступкам,

¹³⁰ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 93.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 94.

которые так поражали окружающих’,¹³² Shestov writes, but adds that Turgenev obviously likes his Bazarov. He explains that ‘цельность нигилиста являлась вечным упреком расколотости, раздвоенности собственной природы Тургенева. Но, очевидно, этот упрек не был слишком мучительным. Если бы Тургенев почувствовал, что Базаров его уничтожает, что дилемма поставлена так: либо Тургенев, либо Базаров — он бы, вероятно, не так легко смирился’.¹³³ Using the example of Bazarov Shestov compares Turgenev with Tolstoy to show that the former wanted peace and reconciliation above all:

Тургеневу казалось, что можно дать дорогу Базарову и самому остаться жить. Толстой знал, что эти дела не так делаются. Если бы он был на месте Тургенева — он бы держался с Базаровым иной тактики. Этого героя, который еще ни перед кем не пасовал, нужно было бы дать жизни поизмять хорошенько, и он взвыл бы не хуже Рудина. Но Тургенев хотел мира — во что бы то ни стало. Как красиво умирает у него Базаров...¹³⁴

Thus Shestov demonstrates that in terms of his personal biography and inner integrity Turgenev was not, as it were, afraid of Bazarov, as he was of Rudin, and therefore treated them differently. In other words, Shestov’s claim is that in his attempt to avoid the problematic, Turgenev did not feel the need to ‘conquer’ Bazarov, to sign him off to the *Weltanschauung*, as he did with Rudin. In this connection Shestov makes an important distinction between a literary archetype (depicting a ‘type’, as he calls it) and portraying a ‘living’ individual, a single person. “‘Лишний человек’”, черты которого Тургенев нашел в себе, только “тип” — ну, а о типе, разумеется, много думать нет надобности, не приходится. То ли дело, если говорить не о типе, а о себе самом, о близком человеке даже. Тогда все отношения радикально изменяются, и точка зрения или мирозерцание представляются совсем ненужными вещами’,¹³⁵ Shestov writes. This discussion comes to the fore particularly in connection with Turgenev’s famous essay ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’ which was already referred to earlier.

¹³² Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 95.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Shestov's view is once again far from conventional. He thinks that Turgenev identified himself with Hamlet because of their mutual self-centredness and was therefore sympathetic to the Danish Prince, although he reckoned it best to conceal his sympathies. 'Тургенев, отлично сознававший, что он, так же, как и Гамлет, считает себя центром вселенной, не решился открыто взять сторону датского принца, а предпочел морализировать. И он дошел до того, что в конце концов ему самому стало жаль бедного Гамлета, и он стал для него хлопотать о местечке в "мировоззрении"',¹³⁶ Shestov writes. He then points out that the device which Turgenev uses to achieve the above effect of transferring Hamlet from the real world to the ideal one is rather characteristic and consists exactly of creating 'types'.

In Shestov's own words, 'Тургенев исходит из общепринятой и потому не требующей доказательств предпосылки, что Гамлет — не простой человек, а тип, т.е. нечто абстрактное, не существующее, и что Шекспир, рассказавши нам трагедию Гамлета, хотел только показать на вымышленном примере, к каким печальным последствиям приводит анализ за счет воли'.¹³⁷ Thus Shestov characteristically translates the literary discussion onto a philosophical plane and gets on to his favourite theme – of juxtaposing the private and the general. Normally, though, he accuses science of generalisations which neglect the individual, while art *par excellence* is designed to stand up for a private existence. However, in art Shestov eagerly distinguishes (and brings into the open) certain trends that are prone to generalised analysis. One of them is the above phenomenon of depicting literary archetypes. Interestingly, Shestov ignores it in Chekhov's writings, even though Chekhov created a whole series of such easily recognisable types as 'Thick and Thin' ('Толстый и тонкий'), 'A Man in a Case' ('Человек в футляре'), the 'Chameleon' ('Хамелеон') and others. Yet, Shestov prefers to focus on Chekhov's heroes who are, in his eyes, individual rather than typical or general.

In Turgenev's works, on the contrary, Shestov refuses to see individuals, but focuses on their 'generalising' aspect. This, Shestov claims, was no trouble for Turgenev as

¹³⁶ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 73.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 74.

‘ответственность падала не на него, а на европейскую науку’.¹³⁸ Shestov then develops this claim by blaming Europe for such an approach where the general substitutes for the private, because of the European tendency to make everything smooth and resolved in an all-uniting and all-explaining law. In the same vein Turgenev, according to Shestov,

в героях собственных романов [...] видел только “типы” и был убежден, как и все в Европе убеждены, кажется, до сих пор, что задача художника именно в том и состоит, чтобы изображать “типы”, что художественное произведение должно давать материал для общих выводов, ну, а какие же общие выводы можно сделать по поводу жизни одного человека. И затем, не всегда прилично, морализуя, сообщать действительные, а не абстрактные переживания человека.¹³⁹

Shestov then points out Shakespeare’s greatness, the quintessence of which he sees precisely in the daring of portraying an individual fate rather than toying with general types and general ideas. Once again he rebels against a utilitarian approach to life and literature which sees its task in forestalling and avoiding tragedy rather than understanding it, and a literary work then becomes only an excuse for moralising. ‘Теория “типов” придумана людьми, у которых нет охоты идти вслед за поэтом в ту область вечной тьмы, которая называется трагедией’, Shestov writes and adds that

Прочитавши Гамлета или Лира, они размышляют о том лишь, как бы так устроиться, чтобы в жизни было поменьше или даже совсем не было трагических столкновений, ибо — в этом они нисколько не сомневаются — трагические люди есть люди окончательно погибшие. Единственная польза, которую они могут принести — о пользе никогда у нас не забывают — это своим примером дать урок другим.¹⁴⁰

Thus, we can see once again that Shestov essentially demonstrates his very characteristic revolt not only against European thought, but also against the realistic criticism dominant at the time specifically in Russian literature, and in a certain sense joins the decadent wave which was emerging exactly in opposition to the above critical trend.

In a very similar way to his analysis of Turgenev’s treatment of Rudin Shestov exclaims that “Гамлет” — тип, и только как тип представляет интерес. Как человек — раз он

¹³⁸ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 74.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 75-76.

попал в трагедию, уже не может нас занимать. Нужно прочесть ему снисходительное надгробное слово на тему: *de mortuis aut nihil aut bene*, и забыть о нем, или поместить его в “мировоззрение”, куда сваливается и где догнивает всякий ненужный хлам’.¹⁴¹

However, in contrast to the rather conventional theme that Shestov unfolds in connection to Hamlet he makes a rather unexpected statement when it comes to Don Quixote. Namely, he acknowledges that the latter can indeed be regarded as a type and was in fact created by Cervantes as such. Hence, Shestov concludes, Don Quixote (who is a type) cannot be compared to Hamlet (who is not a type). Yet, Shestov stresses, Turgenev found it possible to regard Don Quixote as a real fighter for the truth and treats the blows received by the latter as perfectly real. In other words, Shestov accuses Turgenev of failing to discern between the private and the general (or between being a unique individual hero and being an archetype) in the case of Hamlet and Don Quixote.

Shestov then quotes Turgenev’s words in order to question his analysis: ‘И вот с одной стороны стоят Гамлеты, мыслящие, сознательные, часто всеобъемлющие, но также часто бесполезные и осужденные за неподвижность, а с другой полубезумные Дон-Кихоты, которые потому только и приносят пользу и подвигают людей, что видят и знают одну лишь точку, часто даже не существующую в том образе, какою они ее видят’.¹⁴² From this Shestov derives his question:

что же, собственно, ценил и порицал Тургенев? Веру в незыблемую истину или общественную пользу? Ведь это чистая случайность, что вера оказалась полезной. Могло быть, и сплошь и рядом бывает, что вера в незыблемую истину оказывается вредной. Как быть тогда? Продолжать ли поддерживать донкихотство или восстать против него со всей энергией, которая растрчивалась на борьбу с гамлетизмом? Тургенев такого вопроса не ставил. В качестве современно образованного человека он считал излишним проверять права пользы. Раз то или иное человеческое свойство идет на пользу людям — нечего больше расспрашивать. Даже “полубезумие” (отчего не просто безумие) оправдывается, если оно дает благотворные результаты.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁴² I. S. Turgenev, ‘Гамлет и Дон Кихот’, vol. 10, p. 443. Cited in Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 80.

¹⁴³ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 80-81.

This in Shestov's view testifies to the purely utilitarian goals of the modern outlook. Anything which is devoid of usefulness for the common good, no matter how noble, lofty, faithful, etc., is rejected by modern thought, Shestov asserts once again.

‘Вера в истину, приводящая к разрушению, безумие, нарушающее мирное течение жизни, даже гениальная мысль, смущающая покой ближних, (например, Толстой и Достоевский), не нашла бы себе защитника в лице Тургенева’, he concludes.¹⁴⁴ In the end Shestov does not see anything else that Turgenev can offer to his readership except to urge for usefulness and positive deeds for the communal good. Shestov again stresses Turgenev's emphasis on the collective rather than on personal benefits which, he claims, constituted for the latter the ultimate truth and the final criterion of human activity.

8.8. More on *Hamlet and Don Quixote* – conflicting interpretations. Questions of literature, philosophy and morality.

Thus what we can see in Shestov's analysis of this essay by Turgenev encompasses a variety of issues. First and foremost of them is that Shestov, as usual, is being extreme in his crusade against utilitarianism, and in consequence in his conclusions. In his typical juxtaposition of the private and the general, he somewhat confuses the individual with the individualistic and the general with the communal. Thus again, as James Wernham aptly and more generally observes, following Berdiaev, Shestov philosophises as the Underground Man.¹⁴⁵ We know by now that Shestov's revolt against science because of its generalisation misconstrues the nature of science, and that he seeks refuge in art where he expects to find individual cases to be sacred and central, hence rebelling against what he deems as the failure to live up to this pattern. However, what apparently escapes his attention is that the individual in art, expressed through an individual language too, always touches a commonly recognisable all-human chord which reverberates through a plentitude of lives and individualities. This is precisely one of the effects of art which causes spiritual catharsis, no matter how momentary or how lasting. In other words art is the perfect ground

¹⁴⁴ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 81.

¹⁴⁵ See James C. S. Wernham, *Two Russian Thinkers: An Essay in Berdyaev and Shestov* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), pp. 57-75 and Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Russian Idea*, transl. R. M. French, Geoffrey Bles (London, 1947), p. 235.

where private meets general, where the two are united. Shestov, however, due to his extremism, cannot unite, but knows only how to divide and oppose. Hence whenever he suspects a tendency to generalise, to create a 'type' instead of a unique individual, he deems that art is betraying its nature.

On the other hand his remark on the impossibility of a proper comparison between Hamlet and Don Quixote, if they are treated faithfully to their respective texts, seems very perceptive. Or rather, they cannot be compared unless both heroes are elevated to another plane where they both become abstractions, archetypes derived from the underlying ideas of their original literary sources – and this is exactly what Turgenev is doing. Comparing them in any other way would be missing the point, for indeed they come from two totally different literary genres – one being a tragedy, the other – an epic comedy. In their literal even if hypothetical encounter, as Shestov rightly points out, a tragic hero meets the idea incarnate. Turgenev therefore, by juxtaposing the two considers them precisely as types, as derived tendencies, as two extremes of human nature, and uses them first and foremost as a springboard for his own considerations of a rather social nature. Surprisingly, Seeley in his analysis of this essay seems to miss the point entirely by accusing Turgenev of serving his own ends through a careless treatment of the underlying texts.

Indeed, on the one hand Seeley understands the essay as being essentially Turgenev's political manifesto where he calls upon Don Quixotes who are needed by contemporary Russian society to lead it forward, instead of motionless Hamlets – superfluous people – who are trapped in their agonising reflection. For Turgenev, Seeley writes, 'Don Quixote is an enthusiast in the service of an idea, and its radiance is all around him. To Don Quixote Turgenev opposes Hamlet: as egoism to devotion, as critical irony to enthusiastic faith, as sceptical intelligence to heart and will'.¹⁴⁶ Thus Seeley implicitly recognises Turgenev's rather applied and symbolic treatment of the two characters. On the other hand, however, Seeley criticises Turgenev's analysis for not being faithful to the original literary sources. Turgenev's interpretation of these two literary characters, he points out, suffers from the writer's selective neglect of certain features in order to suit his own ends. Thus, Seeley

¹⁴⁶ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 162.

claims, Turgenev ignores Don Quixote's madness, his vanity and striving for fame and, most importantly, his destructive tendencies, especially had he succeeded in his exploits. 'While Don Quixote is idealised, Hamlet is disparaged',¹⁴⁷ Seeley writes. He stresses that Turgenev examines Hamlet outside the context of his predicament and ignores Hamlet's capacity for love and devotion while twisting and distorting his other features. Moreover, Seeley observes that Turgenev contradicts not only the texts by Shakespeare and Cervantes, but also himself.

Thus Seeley is predominantly concerned with analysing Turgenev's treatment of the two famous literary works as a literary critic, and finds endless flaws on Turgenev's part, calling his treatment altogether 'cavalier'. For once, it seems, Shestov comes on top specifically in literary criticism by emphasising the pointlessness of a literal comparison between the two heroes. At the same time Shestov's criticism is directed against Turgenev's particular attempt to compare the two, thus failing to recognise that Turgenev was far from treating the two characters literally (and even if Turgenev was not, i.e. if Shestov is right in his reproaches, it would be a bit ridiculous to try and redeem Turgenev's attempt by fulfilling his intention 'more properly', because any literal comparison between the two would be misplaced).

Paradoxically though, Shestov is least of all interested in a fair analysis of Hamlet and Don Quixote from the point of view of literary criticism. Instead, he seeks to see what conclusions about Turgenev and his outlook, modelled on the European world-view, can be salvaged and how they fit into Shestov's paradigm. In other words, while Seeley is focusing first and foremost on Hamlet and Don Quixote themselves, Shestov's focus is ultimately on Turgenev and his existential experience. To be fair though, Seeley does make the point (shared widely) that the characteristics of both types are present in varying degrees in real people and ultimately claims that what Turgenev says about the types 'would be unexceptionable if he were not constantly referring it to Shakespeare's and

¹⁴⁷ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 164.

Cervantes' heroes'.¹⁴⁸ Shestov on the other hand unmasks Turgenev through the latter's underlying conclusions.

In contrast to both Shestov and Seeley, Judith Armstrong takes a more balanced approach to Turgenev's essay. Ironically though, she adds to the conventional interpretation of it (in favour of Don Quixotes who can act as new leaders, much needed in social terms, and against reflective superfluous Hamlets who cannot) a rather Shestovian slant by claiming that 'for Turgenev himself the philosophical strings of the thought contained in the essay were as important as its social implications and applications'.¹⁴⁹ She argues that while being critical of the Hamlets Turgenev feels sympathy towards them – an idea that resonates, even if from another direction, with that of Shestov who points to Turgenev's egotistic understanding of this type by self-identification with Hamlets leading to a subsequent inner, albeit hidden, conviction of their central importance for mankind. Armstrong, on the other hand, points to Hamlets experiencing 'the universal tragedy of existence; their agony without illusion'.¹⁵⁰ 'They know the suffering of the world; and it is their suffering which elevates them above the mob',¹⁵¹ she emphasises. Also, importantly, she notes that in his essay Turgenev consciously expresses abstract extremes in human nature that are never attainable. 'While these two concepts may coexist in the mind of the philosopher, they are not simultaneously compatible, in their absolute form, either in life, or in the "realism" of fiction, where each must exist sequentially',¹⁵² is Armstrong's explanation, which in a way represents the other side of the coin with respect to Seeley's statement that the two archetypes are present in combination in varying degrees in people. Shestov, on the other hand, does not view them in such a light at all, but instead follows Turgenev's own convictions to disavow the writer's social (not to say socialist) point of view.

¹⁴⁸ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 166.

¹⁴⁹ Armstrong, 'Turgenev's novella *Dnevnik lishnego cheloveka (The Diary of a Superfluous Man)*', p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, p. 11.

And yet, after all this bringing Turgenev out into the open, after unmasking the smooth, but unreliable and borrowed nature of his Westernised ideas, Shestov then recalls Turgenev's inner duality, his irrevocably Russian soul and claims that the writer was not after all fully European ('все-таки не был вполне европейцем').¹⁵³ Indeed, 'он, даже пристроив своего героя к какому-нибудь местечку при мировоззрении, всегда чувствовал, что как будто еще не все сделано, и обыкновенно заканчивал свои произведения кратким лирическим отступлением',¹⁵⁴ Shestov writes. Such for Shestov is, for example, the end of *Rudin* where Turgenev, as Shestov sees it, is dissatisfied by merely the idealistic justification of Rudin's failed destiny as supplied by Lezhnev, and deems it necessary to recall God with His divine grace (even though he was himself an unbeliever): 'И да поможет Господь всем бесприютным скитальцам!'.¹⁵⁵ In the same light of detecting some anxious inner unsettledness in Turgenev Shestov views the ending to the *Nest of the Gentry* where the writer, while refraining from psychological explanations, forces the main protagonists to meet again, but to walk past one another.¹⁵⁶ Yet, his European education forced Turgenev to silence the problematic and to make the good triumph, Shestov repeats.

Interestingly, in this connection Shestov talks about the cruelty of the European morality which, in his eyes, demands total obedience, especially from superfluous, unnecessary people – second-class citizens as opposed to those who are in demand by society, who are successful by its standards. 'В жизни есть нужные и ненужные люди' Shestov explains the 'European' point of view, and

ненужные люди обязаны хоть тем оправдать себя, что они охотно и радостно поступают на службу к нужным. Лаврецкий и Лиза свихнулись в жизни. Если они, так или иначе, согласятся принять служебную роль и не только исполнять ее, но гордиться ею, мы пожалеем о них, даже будем хвалить. Если же они не пойдут на это, ну, тогда у нас есть все права презирать и даже преследовать их [...] обидными и уничтожающими словами. [...] Виноватых бьют — этот принцип целиком перешел из традиций некультурного прошлого в современную этику. [...] "виноватых бьют", а они молча целуют карающую руку. И это

¹⁵³ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Cited in Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 45.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, pp. 47-48.

называется справедливостью, ибо при таком порядке казнит будто бы уже не человек, а идея. Идее же все разрешается,¹⁵⁷

Shestov concludes and exemplifies his point by the example of Veretev. ‘Рудина Тургенев еще щадит, как Лаврецкого и Лизу, потому что они верят в добро и подчиняются. Но когда попадаются господа вроде Веретьева (в “Затишье”), о них уже не жалеют, а прямо объявляют: хоть они и даровитые и замечательные люди, но из них “никогда ничего не выходит”’.¹⁵⁸

Shestov’s attack on contemporary ethics and morality with their underlying cruelty reaches its peak in the following striking words where the distinct echo of Nietzsche is audible:

Нравственные люди всегда были самыми неумолимыми деспотами и свою нравственность они употребляли как лучшее и наиболее утонченное оружие в борьбе за то, что они называли своим идеалом. Они не удовлетворялись уже тем, что просто презирали и осуждали своего ближнего, они хотели, чтоб их суждения были всеобщими и обязательными, т.е. чтобы вместе с ними люди восстали на осужденного ими, чтобы даже собственная совесть осужденного была на их стороне. Только тогда они чувствовали себя вполне удовлетворенными и успокаивались. И кроме нравственности ничего в мире не может привести к столь блестящим результатам.¹⁵⁹

This also rather forcefully makes one recall Chekhov again, for Shestov’s struggle against morality and ethics is in fact reminiscent of Chekhov’s struggle against hypocrisy, often disguised as social morality.

8.9. Shestov’s reading of Turgenev’s last works.

Yet, Shestov’s inevitable conclusion is that Turgenev’s European idealism was doomed to failure in the face of real suffering which revealed Turgenev’s deeply hidden and carefully concealed Russianness. According to him, as we discussed above, this suffering came only with the rapprochement of death.

¹⁵⁷ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 28.

In his last works Turgenev, Shestov claims, ‘не хуже графа Толстого подкапывался под “высокие идеи”’.¹⁶⁰ In him, Shestov says,

несмотря на все его образование, как и во всяком русском, под конец жизни все больше и больше сказывался “татарин”, т. е. стихийный человек, для которого цивилизация не успела стать второй природой. Понемногу он становился все равнодушной и равнодушной к ученым теориям и идеям, когда-то представлявшимся самым нужным в жизни. В его лице, измученном долгими страданиями и неудовлетворенностью все заметней, все резче проступают черты, которые когда-то ему удавалось так искусно скрывать под общеевропейским гримом.¹⁶¹

However, it is difficult to argue either for or against Shestov’s claims, for he asserts that these changes in Turgenev’s sensibility were rather subconscious, and consciously the writer did not realise what was happening to him and furthermore that he continued to believe (and to a large extent to act!) as if he was still ‘все тот же “западник”, “постепеновец” каким был в молодые годы. И действительно, в последних его произведениях, даже в последних письмах, мы часто слышим знакомые вытверженные речи’,¹⁶² Shestov asserts.

Thus the claim is that on the outside Turgenev’s behaviour continues to look the same, but on the inside there is turmoil, and everything is now doubted and questioned. In other words, Shestov, somewhat characteristically, does not leave any grounds for a rational dispute as to the validity of his claims, because his whole argument is based on what new insinuations *he thinks* Turgenev is now making, even though Turgenev’s actual words may look the same as before! Thus, Shestov says, the writer produces the novel *Virgin Soil* (*Новь*, 1877) ‘на злободневную — на общественную тему’.¹⁶³ In this novel the question which long since had engaged Turgenev’s interest is being discussed – that of Russian ‘nihilism’. The discussion provided is given ‘с точки зрения общественного значения’,¹⁶⁴ Shestov writes. In the epigraph to the novel (‘Поднимать следует новь не поверхностно скользящей сохой, но глубоко забирающим плугом’) Shestov sees the

¹⁶⁰ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 39.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 97-98.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, p. 98.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

embodiment of Turgenev's views on the social movement that he depicts in his work: 'взгляд человека глубоко убежденного, верующего, что исторические события имеют ясную для людей цель, и что, соответственно, все действия отдельных лиц и общественных групп должны оцениваться с точки зрения их целесообразности'.¹⁶⁵ Shestov then compares (as usual quite perceptively – when it comes to concrete existential and psychological rather than abstract philosophical statements), Turgenev's novel with Dostoevsky's *The Devils* (*Бесы*). Written almost simultaneously with Turgenev's *Ночь*, and also, as Shestov puts it, with the social agenda in mind and a deliberate intention of portraying the younger generation in a caricatured way, Dostoevsky's novel shows, Shestov claims, so much more sensitivity and understanding than Turgenev's ('насколько больше чутья проявил он [Dostoevsky] в "Бесах", чем Тургенев в "Ночи").¹⁶⁶

Shestov then challenges Turgenev's indisputable significance as a portrayer of nihilism and nihilists by comparing him unfavourably to Dostoevsky. 'У Достоевского наши "нигилисты" представлены как бы обьевропейшившимися снаружи сектантами'.¹⁶⁷ They passionately seek answers to the 'accursed' questions and ultimately forget about their original goals, if not altogether contradicting those goals, Shestov explains. 'Достоевский [...] чувствовал и умел передать, что "нигилизм" есть чисто русское явление, только наружно окрашенное западно-европейскими идеями',¹⁶⁸ Shestov claims, asserting a strong irrational element in the phenomenon of nihilism. 'Тургенев же почти не отличал нигилистов от либералов. Ему казалось, что "нигилисты" только одна из общественных партий, добивавшаяся реформ и не умевшая понять, что всякого рода прогресс достигается не бурными революциями, а рядом медленных, постепенных перемен',¹⁶⁹ Shestov writes and adds that our nihilists would carry on their terrible business regardless of the outside conditions and reforms.

¹⁶⁵ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 98-99.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 99.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Returning to the main thrust of Shestov's claim about the changes in Turgenev's outlook in the writer's last years, we notice the same essential groundlessness of Shestov's arguments. He asserts that Turgenev's latest works and even his letters are permeated with mystical horror, and that now the ground is drifting from under his feet in such a way that he cannot stop it no matter how hard he tries. The effect of Tropman's execution on Turgenev could be stifled and averted by considerations of usefulness and future progress, Shestov says, but now all these lofty words do not help any more. One could of course recall here the persistency of Turgenev's terror of death which created an on-going motive for his writings from early on. Equally one could recall his permanent feelings of insecurity, of the unreliability of the world outside which would if not refute, at least dwarf Shestov's claims of drastic changes in the writer. However, Shestov builds up an impenetrable defence by saying that Turgenev's lament is indeed old, but now it gains new and real strength, while in the past he was crying Wolf like the boy from the corresponding tale. This time it is real, but nobody realises it as one has become used to his persistent outcries, Shestov explains.

These claims are further complicated by Shestov's assertion that even when approaching death Turgenev was pulled back to his old convictions and behaviour by his lifelong habits, by his desire to hide his growing feebleness, even if behind an old illusion. In other words, although Turgenev is now suffering to the full extent, losing his faith in progress and social good, his suffering is not explicit and evident from the outside, and is thus taken to be 'literature' only. It is very interesting to note that what Shestov here means by 'literature' implies a pure invention distant from reality, especially the existential reality of the writer.

The realist criticism of Belinsky, Pisarev and others which completely dominated in literature at the time assessed the latter first and foremost in utilitarian terms of social usefulness and moral lessons, of the closeness of a literary piece to reality. Shestov, it seems, to all intents and purposes struggled against such an approach, since drawing moral lessons for the sake of the communal good was very much in line with those European convictions that he rebelled against. In other words, in the utilitarian nature of such an approach he must have seen, as he did in science, the prevalence of the general over the private, the neglect of a particular individual unless his case reinforced some general

theory. Equally, Shestov, as was mentioned in previous chapters (especially the one on Chekhov) condemned the aesthetic trend in literature (for example, Viacheslav Ivanov's *oeuvre*), or, in other words, the approach of 'art for art's sake'. So, literature for him was to portray the (evidently tragic) truth of life from a strictly individual perspective which cannot be generalised rather than to describe that tragedy in an aesthetically enjoyable way in order to lead to a new philosophy (to use his own words of putting it).

This, however, means that curiously, if not paradoxically, Shestov, while in essence opposing the realist criticism of Belinsky *et al.* for its utilitarianism and considerations of the collective good (signifying the preference of the general over the private), was nevertheless looking in literature for the great truth of life, and predominantly through the writer's existential experience which this literature invariably reveals. Yet, at the same time he seems to be defining literature as fantasy *par excellence*, or rather implying that what the general public is prepared to see in literature is anything at all, but not its underlying existential revelations (which for him constitute its greatest and possibly only value). In particular, Shestov may be referring to that aesthetic feeling which is commonly expected from literature, and implying that for him both such 'idle' writings and such 'idle' expectations are somehow bad literary examples. For him the artistic power of the *oeuvre* is secondary, but the revelation of the life of an individual is primary, as long as it does not become generalised, made abstract and ready to be used for the sake of social progress. 'Если автор заинтересовался не типом, а единичным человеком, всего только одним человеком и его судьбой, то какое значение может иметь такое произведение для общества? Оно может оказаться не только полезным, но прямо вредным, приковывая наше внимание к личным нуждам, вместо того, чтобы направлять его на широкие общественные задачи',¹⁷⁰ Shestov writes, referring to what he calls a special aesthetic theory prevalent in the nineteenth century.

This brings us back again to Michel Aucouturier's claim, mentioned in Section 1.1, of Shestov's treatment of literature being reminiscent of the 'Russian tradition of "real criticism" where a work of literature is only an excuse rather than an object of study'.

¹⁷⁰ Shestov, *Тургенев*, pp. 125-126.

Furthermore, Aucouturier correctly states that ‘the reality that interests Shestov is not the outside world, but the inner world of the writer’ and that, importantly for our purposes, Shestov ‘is not trying to explain a literary piece, but seeks in it a confirmation of what the writer has lived through’.¹⁷¹ Yet, despite his claim that creative writing and sober thought are different things Shestov seems able to appreciate the inevitable blend of a thinker with an artist, even if in Shestov himself, as we argued in the previous chapter, the former would invariably subsume the latter. The artist was reflecting life with as much artistic power and faithfulness to reality as he was capable of, while the thinker would subversively (according to Shestov) try to squeeze it all into a procrustean bed of some *Weltanschauung* – or, in Shestov’s words, *Culture*. Thus Shestov writes about Turgenev that on the one hand ‘Тургенев был достаточно образованным человеком, чтобы понимать, где кончается художественное творчество и начинается трезвая мысль’,¹⁷² but on the other that

художник в нем всегда борется с мыслителем и не всегда дает возможность водрузиться общим выводам на слишком видном месте. Иной раз вы дочитали почти до конца повесть или роман, а все еще не знаете, как справится культура с нарисованными художником картинами. Даже кажется, что культура, пожалуй, сочтет за лучшее совсем промолчать. Но она от своих прав редко отказывается; понимает ли она или не понимает происходящее, она все-таки заговорит.¹⁷³

Thus, as Shestov explains, on the one hand Turgenev (presumably by virtue of being an artist as well as a Russian, i.e. an uncultured man deep inside) ‘с особым интересом рисовал трагические столкновения в своих рассказах и никогда не давал им благополучной развязки’.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, ‘Там все герои и героини мечтают о любви, но между любящими почти всегда восстают непреодолимые трудности, внутренние или внешние’.¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, however, Shestov implies that being a thinker at the same time and due to his Western values and desire for the common good, Turgenev ultimately bends reality to the necessary moral conclusion – accusing equally the selfish and the weak

¹⁷¹ Aucouturier, p. 79.

¹⁷² Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 25.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

and promoting moral goodness. To exemplify this point Shestov turns to Maria Nikolaevna and Sanin from *Spring Currents* (*Весенние воды*, 1872). He writes,

Что любопытного и значительного может рассказать культурному человеку “женщина-кентавр”? Нам нужно не вспоминать, а позабыть все наше отдаленное прошлое и приобщиться к европейскому прогрессу, которого Тургенев никогда не забывает, в этом сущность его “образования”. Марья Николаевна осуждена “наукой” под именем атавизма — возврата к прошлому. “Весенние воды” кончаются у него посрамлением Санина, не умевшего побороть соблазн и отдавшегося минутному увлечению.¹⁷⁶

However, Shestov, as he implies, is evidently not deceived by the old motives in Turgenev’s last writings, for he can see through them the real inner regeneration of the writer. In other words, he can distinguish between ‘literature’ and the truth. Thus, Shestov basically implies that although Turgenev appeared (or tried to appear) on the outside pretty much as before, his torment was nevertheless truly horrific, i.e. at last real and total. As we mentioned, this is almost impossible to prove since Shestov essentially implies no substantial change in the manifestations of Turgenev’s new experiences. Yet, ultimately Shestov claims to find the traces of this new inner reality of the writer in his final literary creations. Thus he writes that Turgenev

в последних своих произведениях не только в “Стихотворениях в Прозе”, но и в “Песни торжествующей любви”, в “Кларе Милич”, в рассказе “Отчаянный” — изменяет своим прежним убеждениям — как же не оправдываться, хотя бы старостью и болезнью? До сих пор он неизменно и твердо шел к определенной культурной цели. Теперь у него один мотив: Je vais sans savoir où, J’attends sans savoir quoi [из Ламартина: Я иду, не зная куда, Я жду, не зная чего.].¹⁷⁷

Shestov adds to this that ‘уже с 1878 года, т.е. за пять лет до смерти, Тургенева начинают посещать страшные видения, которые он уже не в силах отогнать обычными приемами’.¹⁷⁸ As the most illuminating example Shestov gives Turgenev’s story ‘Старуха’ (‘The Old Woman’) from his *Senilia* (also known as *Prose Poems – Стихотворения в прозе*) collection. In it the narrator is haunted by an ugly old woman who clearly embodies fading life merged with approaching death. The narrator is doomed,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, pp. 84-85.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 108.

¹⁷⁸ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 109.

he has nowhere to hide from her and ‘мечется как заяц на угонках, из стороны в сторону’.¹⁷⁹

From this obvious doom and gloom Shestov, not unexpectedly and clearly not without reason, concludes that the horror of a fading life is now the central theme in Turgenev’s existence and creativity. However, Shestov’s opinion is at least in part counterbalanced by Seeley’s vision of Turgenev in his final years. He writes: ‘It is not all gloom and hopelessness. While he can write he will not despair’.¹⁸⁰ On the other hand, Seeley too acknowledges the gloomy content of *Senilia* which contains ‘the bitter wisdom gleaned from disappointments, betrayals, denigration; the misery of lonely old age; the horror of approaching death’.¹⁸¹ However, Seeley does not at all see Turgenev as betraying his old convictions and aspirations. He writes about the writer’s renewed bond with the younger generation who ‘in a period of dark repression [...] turned to him as a symbol of humanism and honesty’.¹⁸² For Shestov, on the other hand, the situation is transparent and points to Turgenev’s spiritual rebirth in the light of the ‘revelations of death’:

Центробежные и центростремительные силы, порождающие и уничтожающие Дон-Кихотов и Гамлетов, культурные задачи, вдохновляющие лучших людей, европейская мораль, примиряющая с ужасами жизни — обо всем забыто. Открылась великая тайна жизни, и все прежние убеждения оказались лишними. Нужно наскоро, собственными силами, без посторонней помощи выдумывать “новые убеждения” ... (добывать их)... новыми приемами и методами, ибо старые приемы и методы никуда не годятся,¹⁸³

Shestov writes. It is also interesting to note here that Seeley also connects the story ‘Довольно’, which Shestov, as we saw above, singled out as the one where Turgenev for a moment questions his European convictions, and the tales from *Senilia* where, according to Shestov, Turgenev’s new outlook is evident – under the label of Turgenev’s ‘most subjective works’.¹⁸⁴ This may be a very apt observation which explains the mechanism

¹⁷⁹ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁰ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 317.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 318.

¹⁸³ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁴ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 317.

behind Shestov's selection of them. Indeed, for him only something subjective is worthy of attention and testifies to the individual truth.

So – to continue with Shestov's interpretation of Turgenev's last writings – he argues that they reveal Turgenev's new suspicion that morality has no power over life. One of the best examples to substantiate this claim is for Shestov the story 'A Desperate Character' ('Отчаянный'). In it Shestov sees Turgenev's sudden interest in those sides of life from which he would have hitherto turned away as being unworthy of attention. 'Пятнадцать лет тому назад', Shestov writes referring to the ending of this story,

Тургенев не стал бы затруднять внимания философов, людей занятых и не имеющих ни возможности, ни охоты тревожиться по пустякам — судьбой Миши Полтева, безудержного пьяницы и авантюриста. Его бы рассудил Потугин, предложивши ему назвать двадцать городов Франции. Миша, конечно, не назвал бы и одного, кроме Парижа, и на этом основании был бы признан никуда не годным недорослем из дворян.¹⁸⁵

Now, however, 'Тургенев почти готов преклониться перед неудачником Мишей',¹⁸⁶ Shestov claims, and explains that Turgenev is getting to see a new and mysterious light in the human capacity for self-destruction. In these modern desperate characters he now sees not some specific social ideals, but an eternal angst and dissatisfaction, a desire to rebel altogether against the loftiest ideals. 'Впервые, говорю, за всю долгую свою жизнь, Тургенев позволяет себе отступить от своего европейского мирозерцания и вступить на тот путь, по которому шел столь ненавистный ему кладоискатель Достоевский',¹⁸⁷ Shestov concludes.

He writes of Turgenev's newly acquired indifference to the question of social usefulness, of his new interest in those concepts, phenomena and people which appeared frightening and superfluous before, but now it increasingly seems to him, as Shestov asserts, that it is in them that the real essence of life lies. The last will be the first, Shestov quotes from the Bible and states that now Turgenev is at last asking himself, if all those superfluous people,

¹⁸⁵ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 115.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 116.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*.

essentially useless for society and for themselves, will turn out to be the right ones? However, again Shestov's statements cannot be refuted because on the surface Turgenev carried on behaving as he always did. For "Разум" — то, что он и что все люди считают в себе разумом — продолжал упорно стоять на страже прежних верований; и новые мысли, как это всегда бывает, проходили в душу Тургенева контрабандой, под разными ярлыками, скрывавшими их настоящий смысл'.¹⁸⁸ Thus, Shestov continues, Turgenev criticised Tolstoy for his *Confession* and expressed his disgust with respect to Dostoevsky, calling him a Russian de Sade. To summarise Shestov's claim: *Отчаянный* symbolises a turning point in Turgenev's outlook, his parting with European values which he previously treasured. Instead he is now tending to follow the route shown by Dostoevsky. However, he does not want to believe in this himself and continues to persevere in his mind with his old convictions, even though in his soul he has already parted with his past.

However, what Seeley writes on the subject largely undermines Shestov's assertions. First of all Seeley asserts a certain continuity in Turgenev's writings, thus overturning Shestov's insistence on Turgenev's totally new revelations brought by the desperation of old age. 'Karataev, like *A Desperate Character*', Seeley writes drawing a parallel, 'is a tragedy, and the protagonists of the two sketches, conceived and written thirty-five years apart, reveal a startling affinity'.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, Seeley does underline that 'the self-destructiveness, which in Karataev was no more than a drift, has become a drive in Misha Poltev'¹⁹⁰ — an assertion which gives at least some support to Shestov's claims about the novelty of Turgenev's existential experience as portrayed by his interest in characters such as Poltev. However, Seeley's further claims render Shestov's construction quite shaky, if not altogether redundant.

Indeed, in contrast to Shestov's statements about Poltev's disdain for any ideals and underlying Turgenev's newly-acquired indifference to social usefulness and the common

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 119.

¹⁸⁹ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 320.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

good, Seeley observes that ‘if Misha Poltev is a rebel without a cause, it is not for want of social conscience or moral potential’.¹⁹¹ Having pointed to the ‘clash between education and temperament’ in Poltev as a possible source of his anxiety Seeley then notes that ‘Misha is debarred by his upbringing from thinking, from the use of his mind, and is thus precluded from discovering the way to social service’.¹⁹² However, this unfulfilled drive for being socially useful is clearly present in Misha’s character as Seeley observes, for, importantly, ‘the very thought of the poverty and injustice in Russia makes him feel suicidal’.¹⁹³ Moreover, according to Seeley’s interpretation Poltev is also permeated by religious feeling and ‘it may be the need to hold down that feeling which drives him to more excessive actions than would be called for by his temperament on its own’.¹⁹⁴ Thus the picture that Seeley draws drastically differs from that imagined by Shestov and consequently (by being much more grounded in the text than Shestov’s) leads to a deconstruction of Shestov’s conclusions on the changes in Turgenev’s latest outlook.

8.10. Summary of Shestov’s vision of Turgenev: Pro et Contra. The case of a missed similarity.

More generally, the example of Shestov’s treatment of *A Desperate Character* in a sense crowns a number of similar ones discussed above, demonstrating that, as in the case of Chekhov (explored in the previous chapter), Shestov largely distorts the picture with Turgenev as well, to tailor it to his own ends and to inscribe Turgenev’s case into Shestov’s own philosophical paradigm. In particular, through his unreserved faithfulness to his paradigm he reveals the orthodoxy of his beliefs which testifies to him being forever in essence a great romantic. In the same vein his idealism is ineradicable, for it is forever concealed in his all-pervasive fixed ideas of anti-rationalism and his struggle against speculative philosophy, as well as in his extremely authoritative discourse.

At the same time, to summarise our analysis, we should acknowledge that Shestov in his *Turgenev* is both right and wrong about the writer. He is right in emphasising the role of

¹⁹¹ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 322.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

death, the fear of it and its revelations in Turgenev's life. He is right about the duality of Turgenev's nature concealing within it both European and Russian elements and being torn by it – his constant struggle between rationalism, idealism, a clear system of beliefs and convictions on the one hand, and angst, superstition and a longing for miracles on the other. But Shestov is wrong about the clear contrast between these two sides rather than their interplay and overlap (just as in the case of his own dichotomy between faith and reason). Equally, if not even more importantly, he is also wrong about the eventual shift by Turgenev from one to the other, from the rational to the irrational – in that there was no shift, no major movement to speak of – Turgenev was always like that. His duality was inherent in his personality: his idealism and rationalism formed as integral and permanent a part of him as his subversive longing for the irrational and his lack of faith in the omnipotence of scientific method. He remained an idealist until the very end, even if, with maturity, he parted with some of his former illusions about life and people. Remarkably, as we have demonstrated, Shestov is closer to Turgenev than he is capable of realising, and thus by providing a critical unmasking of the writer he is in fact exposing a great deal of very valuable self-criticism.

Thus, ironically, if in the case of Chekhov Shestov substituted what was very much a self-portrait for the writer's real image and implied that in Chekhov he had met his twin, in the case of Turgenev the situation is opposite: he draws a portrait which, he is sure, is least of all his own, while in fact the resemblance between the real protagonists is quite substantial. Both were permeated by duality and suffered from it – ultimately torn between Western rationalism and deeply rooted idealism on the one hand and the Russian 'wild and superstitious soul' with its search for miracles and its torment with the eternal questions of existence on the other. At the same time, perhaps growing from common Eurasian roots, they were by nature simultaneously distinct romantics and idealists, as well as sceptics and nihilists – an inseparable blend of Hamlet and Don Quixote (only Shestov fought against his idealism, while Turgenev embraced it and held on to it). Both encompassed the ability to present simultaneously the realistic and the fantastic, both shared a transparent and poignant literary style and an artistic appreciation of life, the ability to reason in images. Both viewed philosophy as art rather than science and were sceptical of scientific

fundamentalists. In a way they were knights of faith – Turgenev in the form of love, Shestov – in the form of his religious search which went, in fact, far beyond theology.

Finally, both were in a certain, even if restricted, sense the ‘saddest men’ – Turgenev in his life, Shestov in his steadfast concentration on the tragic human predicament. The difference was largely in the temperaments, it seems: Turgenev was tamed in both literature and life (more in the latter than the former), while Shestov was rather tamed in life, but wild in his philosophical imagination. In fact both rebelled in their different ways against a tyrannical parent (a dictatorial and emotionally unbalanced mother in the case of Turgenev and a dominant, repressive father with his strict Jewish Orthodox rules in the case of Shestov). Equally, both in their respective ways valued human freedom above all, and, interestingly, both were extremely helpful, noble and dignified men in social terms, always ready to assist those in need.

On the other hand, by failing to recognise their proximity Shestov (by somewhat schematising, if not misinterpreting, Turgenev and his *oeuvre*, and bending them, as usual, to serve his own ends) managed to expose brilliantly the dangers of European rationalism and the utilitarian roots of its idealism, the shallow nature of any petty-bourgeois philosophy with its comforting lies and philistine values, as if anticipating the hypocritical and down-to-earth mentality which straddled and used idealism to its own cynical ends and which was to become predominant in the forthcoming century. In a sense through the case study of Turgenev Shestov provided his grounds for choosing groundlessness, i.e. for opting for daring, for liberation from all bonds with its uncertainty, doubt and constant change. This is for Shestov the choice of a mature human spirit which has had enough of crawling, so it leaves the ground and takes off into the infinite: ‘он отрывается от земли и уходит в простор бесконечности. И минутами по крайней мере, нам начинает казаться, что еще несколько мгновений, и нас ничего уже не будет удерживать и осуществится вечная мечта измученного человека — он освободится от тяжести и уйдет в беспредельную высь...’.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Shestov, *Тургенев*, p. 105.

In other words, using Turgenev with his alleged European-Russian, i.e. rational-irrational dichotomy, as a springboard for his own struggle, Shestov launched a most decisive crusade against utilitarianism in all forms, with its hypocrisy and winglessness, in favour of passion and unrestrained spiritual freedom – a struggle which is indeed much closer to art than to speculative philosophy. And it is this struggle that exposes once again Shestov's and Turgenev's proximity in their ultimate quixotry – which is, using Seeley's words, 'a compound of faith and love – as the prime mover in human history and the prime condition of human fulfilment'.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Seeley, *Turgenev. A Reading of his Fiction*, p. 331.

Conclusion

Aesthetic ambivalence.

In this thesis we have argued that the nature of Lev Shestov's philosophy reflects the perception of the universe provided by Art, or, if you like, the philosophy of artists (which in particular sheds some light on the reasons why Shestov, while remaining an isolated and relatively obscure figure, is held in such high esteem first and foremost by writers and poets rather than philosophers *per se*). Our main focus was therefore on Shestov's ambivalent relationship with aesthetics which, in our view, offers the key to the interpretation of his creative legacy from a literary perspective.

Indeed, aesthetics plays such a vital role in understanding Shestov's philosophical thought because in art it dominates, in a certain sense, over ethics – in the sense in which form dominates content. Or at least art presumes an inseparable blend of ethics and aesthetics with the latter having the upper hand. In Shestov's case this relationship is much more complex, which reflects the fact that despite, as it were, the poetic origin of his thought Shestov himself was much more a philosopher than an artist. Moreover, in our view there was a certain on-going conflict in him between the two. It is, as we demonstrated, this conflict that is responsible for a certain paradox with which Shestov's philosophy is permeated: while being of an artistic, even poetic, origin it often shows a certain deafness to aesthetics.

More precisely, Shestov's writings are characterised by an applied approach to art whereby he implicitly attempts to separate ethical considerations from aesthetic ones. The problem represented by such a divide when analysing works of art can be elucidated by the following lines of Joseph Brodsky: 'Искусство [...] – средство передвижения, ландшафт, мелькающий в окне, – а не передвижения этого цель',¹ its origins are distinctly non-utilitarian, and hence any 'conceptual' considerations in it are secondary. And thus, any 'applied' approach to art, i.e. to an activity where any non-aesthetic concerns

¹ Brodskii, 'Об одном стихотворении' in *Сочинения Иосифа Бродского*, vol. 5 (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii Fond, 1999), p. 146.

are secondary, is bound to be distorting, for it ignores the inner laws by which artistic (notably, literary) reality exists. This is, as we argued, what Shestov's treatment of literature suffers from. Equally relevant here is Milosz's conjecture about Shestov's personal drama lying in his lack of poetic talent, which implies his inability 'to approach the mystery of existence more directly than through mere concepts'.²

Yet, Shestov's proximity to art is multi-faceted. It is reflected in his brilliant literary style and his entry into philosophy through literature; in his spiritual extremism in rebelling against the world order and standing up for the individual existence – for the 'private' against the 'general', as does art on the whole, which in a certain sense always defends the formula that the private is 'greater' than the general. On the other hand, as we argued, Shestov's perception of the aesthetic aspect of a literary piece is akin to watching a poet reading out a beautiful poem, but with the sound switched off. This is to say that Shestov is witnessing all the apparent passion and temperament of this performance and is inflamed by them, but them alone. He cannot appreciate the beauty of the text, but he can feel compassionate, as it were, about the pathetic aspect of it. However, this metaphor, in fact, is not entirely precise, because it neglects the fact that Shestov approached literature first of all from a philosophical point of view and thus he did listen to the text very carefully, even if with the sole purpose of extracting its ideas. Therefore a more accurate image would be if we suppose that he can hear the sound, but the poetry is read in a language foreign to him and he is supplied with a literal translation only. Thus he is still denied the appreciation of poetic beauty, although he can follow all the philosophical ideas concealed in the text.

Philosophy in a struggle with itself.

Therefore, in our opinion, the central conflict of Shestov's philosophy is that between ethics and aesthetics, which in turn gives rise to his affinity for paradox and contradiction. Following Erofeev's stance, one can view this conflict as resulting from a struggle between two visions: day-time (ordinary vision) and night-time (tragic vision).³ More generally, given the rebellious nature of Shestov's entire thought which stands deliberately and

² Milosz, p. 103.

³ See Erofeev, pp. 173-174.

provocatively orthogonal to the mainstream philosophies, there is no better way for him to proceed than via the route of absurdities and contradictions, especially since the roots of his philosophy stem from paradox – that of fighting against reason by means of reason. The words of Tertullian about Christ, ‘The Son of God was crucified; this does not bring shame, because it is shameful. And the Son of God died; again this is believable because it is absurd. And having been buried, he rose from the dead; this is certain because it is impossible’,⁴ which Shestov liked so much to repeat, can be used as his own motto semantically, while Pascal’s statement ‘then let people not blame us any more for our lack of clarity, since we practise this deliberately’,⁵ provides as it were a syntactic description of Shestov’s philosophy, reflecting his idea on the best form of philosophical expression.

In following Shestov’s thought through its entangled path paved with contradictions in his irrational and fundamentally artistic struggle against ‘speculation’, we essentially aimed to demonstrate that this struggle is mirrored in the struggle between his text and his subtext. Indeed, what he tries to defeat in the text seems to resurrect itself in the subtext. In other words, Shestov’s philosophical struggle conceals within it the grains of what Shestov rebelled against. Thus we exposed a certain dogmatism of his adogmatic philosophy, idealism hidden in the sheer extremity of his opposition to this very idealism, and his fight against reason on the very territory and by the means of this very reason (to use Berdiaev’s famous phrase).⁶ In the same vein, Shestov’s applied approach to art coexists with the indisputable impact of aesthetics on his philosophical thought.

In other words, Shestov’s statements invariably conceal the seeds of a reversed meaning, for he is storming against his own shadow, as it were rebelling against his own nature. Thus he argues against idealism and rationalism while both constitute his own intrinsic features. Hence, his uncompromising character and the spiritual extremism of his thought, reflected in his rather dictatorial, monological discourse, render his philosophical struggle self-

⁴ Tertullian, *De praescriptione hereticorum*. Cited in Milosz, p. 108.

⁵ Pascal, *Pensées*. Cited in Milosz, p. 103.

⁶ See Berdiaev, ‘Основная идея философии Льва Шестова’, p. 8.

defeating – for his very extremism puts him *a priori* in the camp of idealists, hence ultimately overturning his entire revolt.

This phenomenon of bringing any concept to the extreme where it turns into its dialectic opposite, constitutes Shestov's environment and provides the framework for his philosophy, and it is for this reason that we avoided using a deconstructive method in our analysis – not so much because it would be too easy and too obvious, but because it would be simply counter-productive. Because it is this inner conflict of Shestov's thought – ultimately reflected in that between his text and subtext – the conflict between what he wants to be the case and what really is the case, that constitute his thought, and thus deconstructing it would mean destroying it altogether rather than making any discoveries about its design.

By the same token, if philosophical thought can be divided into cautious and fearless, Shestov's is certainly the latter, and this kind of philosophy is bound to contain the seeds of its own subversion, it is bound to stem from contradiction, almost *par excellence*. Therefore we opted for treating the contradictory nature of Shestov's philosophy as given – almost as a background against which his ideas are unfolding – and saw our task in following his thought through its daring journey.

A major role in the 'self-subversion' of Shestov's philosophy should be attributed to its extreme abstractness. As in the case of Dostoevsky's heroes, whose thought by being often too abstract detaches itself from reality and becomes destructive, Shestov's abstraction leads to a decisive split between all sorts of concepts: rational and irrational, mind and soul, speculation and revelation, reason and faith. As Stepanov writes, contrasting Shestov and Chekhov, Shestov is denied an understanding of the mutual reversibility of the rational and the irrational.⁷ That is to say that rationality or irrationality depends on the point of view on the object, and is therefore subjective. It is above all the dogmatism of Shestov's adogmatic philosophy (observed by Erofeev)⁸ which prevents Shestov from sensing this reversibility,

⁷ Stepanov, p. 1004.

⁸ Erofeev, p. 171.

from understanding that in essence reason and faith (Athens and Jerusalem) need not necessarily be opposed.

Rational and irrational: philosophical application of the poetic metaphor.

Another important point to make on the struggle of Shestov's philosophy against its own self is that his abstraction, his applied approach to art from a philosophical rather than an artistic standpoint basically means that his fight against any Weltanschauung, against any uniting idea, is defeated by the very abstraction of his approach. For it is precisely through details, through particularities, through those very private and liberating points of departure (which Shestov so fiercely defended from the encroachment of general, scientific categories) that art (and notably literature) exists. On the other hand by his applied approach to art Shestov as it were betrayed the private to the general, i.e. acted in a way exactly opposite to his intentions. In this respect Andrei Belyi made a very perceptive remark, essentially implying that in such a treatment of art that would reflect Shestov's intentions only one method is possible – that of art itself rather than that of general philosophising which Shestov exercised, even though he did it in a brilliant literary manner and while declaring philosophy an art. 'Его вера в творчество не может позволить ему пользоваться нормами познания. Почему же он говорит с нами формой суждений? Ведь единственный способ его обращения к нам не доказательство: не может он что-либо доказать. Он может показывать себя, но для этого надо быть пророком, художником',⁹ Belyi wrote.

The same idea is expressed more explicitly and generally (i.e. regardless of Shestov) by Iurii Karabchievsky, who basically assigned philological science (essentially as Shestov philosophical science) to the domain of art: 'Филология – такая странная вещь, что любое высказанное в ней положение может быть заменено на противоположное с той же мерой надежности и достоверности. Как для кого, а для меня лично она убедительна лишь в той степени, в какой сама является литературой'. Along the same lines, although less radically (i.e. giving way to compromise), David Patterson commented on the unity of existential philosophy and literature:

⁹ Belyi, p. 482.

...because Shestov is involved in existential philosophy, he has removed the focus of philosophy from the universal to the individual who must enact the drama of living and dying. Here the individual is in a sense superior to the universal; for Shestov, as well as Dostoevsky, there can be no abstract idea apart from the living individual. [...] Existential philosophy and literature stand in a relationship which is unifying rather than complementary; where existential thought is concerned, the literature assumes the aspects of the philosophy and the philosophy the aspects of literature.¹⁰

Andrei Belyi's objection to Shestov's claims to conduct literary analysis from the position of a philosopher rather than an artist, which resonates with our statements about Shestov's ambivalent relationship with aesthetics, in fact, points deep to the nature of Shestov's philosophising and its fundamental effects. More precisely, the underlying substance of Shestov's reflections can be described as borrowing from art the essentially poetic metaphor of the superiority of the soul over the mind (spontaneity over reflection, faith over reason), of the irrational over the rational, and treating it philosophically (i.e. more scholastically than is suggested by its poetic origin, understanding it almost literally). As before, taking it to the extreme, to its logical conclusion, renders it nearing on absurdity and violates its poetic meaning. Indeed, Saint-Exupery's phrase 'One can see properly only with one's heart. The main things are invisible to the eyes',¹¹ as well as Iskander's 'ум без нравственности неразумен; нравственность же разумна и без ума',¹² offer this idea artistically and anticipate the appropriately artistic rather than applied interpretation of it.

By the same token, Evgenii Vinokurov's lines cited below, although almost precisely mirroring Shestov's philosophical world, express its essence by poetic means and thus keep it alive, while Shestov's treatment of it, by translating it into philosophical formulae, as it were kills the original, does not allow this essential poetic metaphor to get across intact.

Настала
пора спокойствия, размеренности, нормы.
Мир хаоса приобретает стройность.
Я стал архитектонику деревьев
угадывать! Конструкция природы

¹⁰ Patterson, p. 221.

¹¹ In the French original: 'On ne voit bien qu'avec le coeur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux'. Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Le Petit Prince* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 72.

¹² Iskander, 'Понемногу о многом', p. 122.

вдруг стала проступать в предметах.

.....

А по осеннему бульвару,

не видя ни меня

и ни киоска “Молдаввино”

шел юноша. Как он махал руками!

Патетичен

был чуб его взлохмаченный, и брови

взлетали патетично, и казалось –

коль издали смотреть,

не ветер – пафос

то раздувает фолды пиджака!

И мне вдруг стало стыдно,

словно предал я этого парнишку,

словно в чем-то я ниже стал его,

что бесконечно он превзошел меня

и так высоко

в неведенье поднялся надо мною,

что уж не дотянуться до него,¹³

Vinokurov writes, echoing Shestov’s philosophy almost three decades after his death. A concluding comment of Czeslaw Milosz on poetry being an infinitely more supple and effective means for penetrating into the mystery of existence than philosophy is particularly relevant here: ‘В борьбе против Необходимости пространства и времени Шестову меньше повезло, поскольку он был всего-навсего философ. Бродский ухватывает – улицу, архитектурную деталь, атмосферу места – и извлекает их из потока времени, из пространства, чтобы сохранить навсегда в кристальных метрах’.¹⁴

Exposing the schism ‘between pen and soul’. Case-studies of Russian classics.

Perhaps as a result of Shestov’s ‘double vision’, of his aforementioned inner split he strives in his writings to unmask the authors under his study by ‘dragging’ the man from behind the writer. In other words, as we explained, Shestov effectively points to the schism between pen and soul, thus described by Joseph Brodsky: ‘every writing career starts as a personal quest for sainthood, for self-betterment. Sooner or later, and as a rule quite soon, a man discovers that his pen accomplishes a lot more than his soul. This discovery very often creates an unbearable schism within an individual [...] ...this schism is precisely what

¹³ Evgenii Vinokurov, ‘Я ощущаю небом кислый вкус...’ in *Музыка* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1964), pp. 54-55.

¹⁴ Milosz, *Борьба с удушьем*, p. 246.

creates a writer, whose job therefore becomes making his pen catch up with his soul'.¹⁵ In our analysis of this phenomenon we built on Michel Aucouturier's claim that Shestov continued the tradition of Russian 'real criticism' where a work of literature is only an excuse rather than an object of study. We argued that Shestov, by essentially anticipating the psychoanalytic trend as well as the 'narrative psychology' approach in literary scholarship, provided a 'philosophical psycho-biography' of the writer focusing on the latter's existential experience read off his literary heroes and testified to by his narrative, understood effectively as self-narrative. It is in so doing that Shestov, we argued, in fact exposed the eternal schism between the achievements of an author's pen and his soul, or simply put, between the earthly man and the divine artist in him. We thus demonstrated Shestov's intrinsic involvement with the Romantic tradition in literature where the relationship between the two is central and is closely connected to that between the writer and his lyrical hero. At the same time, paradoxically again, his highly subjective psychological and irrationalist approach displays Shestov's drastic departure from the realist critical method prevalent at the time.

On the other hand he cannot be aligned with the then emerging Symbolist movement either, even though there is a certain, even if a somewhat reversed, affinity between their respective tendencies. More precisely, as Khodasevich points out, the Symbolists' fundamental stance was their proclaimed intention to design their own lives as if creating a literary text (*zhiznetvorchestvo*), thus not splitting the man and the writer. Shestov, on the other hand, believed that the writer is defined by the man, and the latter reveals himself through his capacity as the former (that is, his literature is simply a testimony to his existential experience). In other words, the Symbolists believed in the intervention of the writer into the man, while Shestov, on the contrary, saw the man looming behind the writer. Also while Shestov viewed the interplay between life and resulting literature as occurring naturally, without any external efforts, for the Symbolists their 'жизнетворчество' (the relationship between literature and 'resulting life') was an invented principle which they strove to implement (with quite disastrous consequences).

¹⁵ Joseph Brodsky, 'The Power of the Elements' in *Less Than One, Selected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 157-163 (p. 161).

Thus Shestov and the Symbolists, although preoccupied by the same phenomenon of the complex union of the man and the writer, viewed it from two opposite angles. In this connection a much closer analogy can be drawn, quite unexpectedly, between Shestov and Daniil Kharms who shared a similar, as it were mythological, vision of classical Russian writers. Indeed, in their treatment of these writers both Shestov and Kharms displayed a related pattern, when they created a mythological man out of a writer who would then become an independent actor in the drama of life. At the same time Kharms endowed this drama with distinctly caricature and vaudeville-type features, while Shestov had no such intention. However, the effect of his treatment of writers borders by the spirit of it on Kharms's, although this caricature boundary in Shestov's case is never crossed. This near proximity apparently testifies to the danger concealed in Shestov's method of a too intimate, almost familiar ('фамильярный') rapprochement to the personality of the writer under study (a certain lack of 'пафос дистанции', using Erofeev's words).

In other words, an excessive (and often forced) identification of literature and life leads to a vaudeville of sorts, thus highlighting that these two spheres are genuinely distinct and the schism between them is not really bridgeable (i.e. a direct blend of them is misleading). In particular, using Brodsky's words, 'в искусстве достижима – благодаря свойствам самого материала – та степень лиризма, физического эквивалента которому в реальном мире не существует. Точно таким же образом не оказывается в реальном мире и эквивалента трагическому в искусстве, которое – трагическое – суть обратная сторона лиризма – или следующая за ним ступень'.¹⁶ Thus the Symbolists' efforts to create their lives according to literary laws led to farcial results (or at least to tragic ones, which eventually ended in farce).

At the same time Shestov's exposure of the schism between pen and soul was characterised by tendentiousness of a different kind. Namely, he deliberately, it seems, misinterpreted Pushkin's words about the paltriness of the artist, turning the latter more into a villain than

¹⁶ Brodskii, 'Поэт и проза' in *Сочинения Иосифа Бродского* (St Petersburg: Pushkinskii Fond, 1999), vol. V, p.133.

an insignificant individual arbitrarily endowed with literary talent. Somehow he wanted there to be an inverse law of sorts: the greater one's poetic talent the less noble one is as a man. To prove this point Shestov searched hard for vices in the lives of classical writers in order to separate their human ego from their divine gift, and almost rejoiced at dubious discoveries (as in the case of Dostoevsky where Shestov was ready to believe unquestioningly Strakhov's infamous letter to Tolstoy). Perhaps the significance of this for him lay in the belief that there is a certain divine justice in such a peculiar distribution of artistic talent to otherwise unworthy individuals. This resonates highly on the one hand with Tsvetaeva's words

Ибо раз голос тебе, поэт,
Дан, остальное взято,¹⁷

and on the other with Auden's lines about time that forgives poets their sins for their ability to sustain the life of language:

Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and innocent,
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique,

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honours at their feet.¹⁸

It also seems that for Shestov this reinforced the point of extreme importance that God behaves in His unpredictable ways – providing more indirect evidence that for Him everything is possible.

Yet, paradoxically perhaps, in every writer under his study Shestov managed to uncover something new, original and hitherto unobserved. As Adamovich remarks, Shestov's

¹⁷ Tsvetaeva, 'Есть счастливицы и счастливицы', vol. 2, p. 324.

¹⁸ W. H. Auden, 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats (January 1939)' in *The English Auden. Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 242.

insights into the works of Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Chekhov are written 'как бы на полях того, что было о них сказано другими, - отчасти в дополнение, отчасти в опровержение'.¹⁹ However, in Adamovich's estimation 'шестовские догадки и намеки дают порой очень много' and 'узнать от него можно о некоторых русских писателях, - да и не только о русских [...] кое-что очень существенное, при том оставшееся скрытым'.²⁰ A similar opinion is expressed by Schloezer: 'Shestov breaks decisively with the existing [literary-critical] attitudes: as much with those of his predecessors, as with those of his contemporaries. He sets off on his own path, where he is to advance all by himself'.²¹ It is also through his study of individual writers that the change in his philosophical views can be traced. Thus Shestov's idealistic point of departure was embodied in the figure of Pushkin who signified for Shestov, very much along the lines of Dostoevsky's Pushkin speech, the grandeur of Russian literature and culture with all its daring and celebration of life in its intensity.

Shestov's later disillusionment and scepticism did not cancel out his appreciation of Pushkin and the everlasting tradition that the latter originated, of a fearless and joyful facing of reality in literature. It is also from Pushkin that a blend of romanticism and realism settled deep in Shestov's consciousness, as did the profound understanding of moral and philosophical values. While these notes of idealistic and simplified admiration became absent from the writings of the mature Shestov, his affinity with Pushkin as a canonical symbol of Russian culture remained with him for ever and ran through Shestov's works like a uniting thread of common sense, largely informing his concise and transparent literary style and his striving for freedom, for liberating the human spirit from any bonds.

In his treatment of Tolstoy Shestov focused on the writer's intrinsic duality as a manifestation of his inner contradictions which may be defined in different ways: the contradiction between Tolstoy's behaviour and his principles; his instincts or urges and his beliefs; his ability to grasp details and his striving for a holistic vision instead; his search

¹⁹ Adamovich, p. 254.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 254-255.

²¹ Schloezer, 'Preface' to Leon Chestov, *L'homme pris au piege*, p. 10.

for truth and his self-justification, or if you like, self-deception; according to Shestov: between his philosophy and his preaching, which is ultimately the conflict of the irrational and the rational. Shestov recognised in Tolstoy a great thinker who, Shestov believed, tried as hard as he could to become mediocre in order to escape from the tragedy of existence. It is this, according to Shestov, that facilitated Tolstoy's duality which can be viewed as resulting in hypocrisy until one recognises the writer's underlying suffering and tormenting doubt. Shestov's writings on Tolstoy show a slow transition from the former perception to the latter.

Equally, in his treatment of Dostoevsky, whom Shestov regarded as his main teacher, he moved from an uncompromising vision and dictatorial discourse to a much more tolerant and deeply sympathetic interpretation. Shestov managed to uncover in the writer (in what was then a ground-breaking way) distinct Nietzschean themes which eventually became dominant in twentieth-century thought. Thus Shestov through tracing Dostoevsky's intrinsic inner torment embodied in his oscillation between faith and faithlessness initially identified the writer with his Raskolnikov and his Underground Man. Later on Shestov distilled from such an interpretation the problem of theodicy and of individuality, having identified Dostoevsky's concern with the individual in his struggle against the cold and suffocating indifference of the general, and having abandoned accusations about the writer's underlying cruelty and obsession with power. He proclaimed Dostoevsky as the main and most genuine fighter against Reason and its poisons, tracing them to the story of the Fall, as, allegedly, presented in Dostoevsky's writings.

Thus the central conflict which Shestov exposed in Dostoevsky's works and which largely shaped his own philosophical paradigm was that between the private and the general, between individuality and 'всемство' understood in a broad sense, between man's irrational inner world and the rational means offered by reason to deal with it. This is by no means accidental, for Shestov's tragic perspective and generally the vector of his existential investigations were innately akin to Dostoevsky's concerns. Indeed, it appears that the spiritual design of both thinkers was similar in their deep interest in and, to an extent, identification with the pitfalls of the underground consciousness and the tragic split in the

human psyche. Metaphorically speaking, what brings Shestov and Dostoevsky really close together is their propensity to live their spiritual life extremely 'close to the edge'.

Shestov's originality in his approach to Chekhov was manifested in his perception of the writer as, first and foremost, free from illusion of any kind, as having become emancipated from the 'idea', and, as a result, as being a 'singer of hopelessness', whose heroes are stripped from everything and thus have to 'create from the void'. The main shortcoming of this approach, as was demonstrated, lies in Shestov's neglect of the aesthetic dimension which is crucial to Chekhov's art. It is precisely the literary perspective that helps to disclose this essential misunderstanding on Shestov's part which has much broader implications and reveals Shestov's aesthetic ambivalence in more general terms. Chekhov's poetics itself resists such an applied philosophical approach which looks for the ideological (or conceptual) rather than the artistic truth in literary works. On the other hand, as we argued, there is a clear meeting point between the writer and the philosopher – in their intense involvement with the world. This involvement manifests itself in respecting human tragedy, in looking courageously into the gap between reality and the ideal, essentially searching for salvation and in defending the private against the general, and in the underlying disdain for scholastic philosophy and 'self-evident' truths.

However, ironically, in the case of Chekhov Shestov substituted what was very much a self-portrait for the writer's real image and implied that in Chekhov he had met his twin. In the case of Turgenev, on the other hand, the situation is opposite: as was demonstrated, Shestov drew a portrait which, he was sure, was least of all his own, while in fact the resemblance between the real protagonists was quite substantial. Both were permeated by duality and suffered from it – ultimately torn between Western rationalism and deeply-rooted idealism on the one hand and the Russian 'wild and superstitious soul' with its search for miracles and its torment with the eternal questions of existence on the other. The proverb which Shestov applied to Turgenev – 'scratch a Russian and you will find a Tatar', was very much applicable to Shestov himself too. At the same time, perhaps growing from common Eurasian roots, they were by nature simultaneously distinct romantics and

idealists, as well as sceptics and nihilists – an inseparable blend of Hamlet and Don Quixote (only Shestov fought against his idealism, while Turgenev embraced it and held on to it).

On the other hand, by failing to recognise his proximity to Turgenev Shestov managed to expose brilliantly the dangers of European rationalism and the utilitarian roots of its idealism, the shallow nature of any petty-bourgeois philosophy with its comforting lies and philistine values, as if anticipating the hypocritical and down-to-earth mentality which straddled and used idealism to its own cynical ends and which was to grow prevalent in the then forthcoming century. In other words, using Turgenev with his alleged European-Russian, i.e. rational-irrational dichotomy, as a springboard for his own struggle, Shestov launched a most decisive crusade against utilitarianism in all its forms, with its hypocrisy and ‘winglessness’, in favour of passion and unrestrained spiritual freedom – a struggle which is indeed so much closer to art than to speculative philosophy.

Yet, in all these cases Shestov invariably bent the truth, forcing the writers in question to fit his own paradigm. However, even by uncovering something that was not there, through ‘Shestovising’ these writers, he nevertheless, with his unconventional method, spotted some features of those thinkers that had been entirely concealed from previous critics. Ironically, it is in these shrewd and subtle psychological and literary details that Shestov’s talent (as far as the literary side is concerned) shines most, rather than in his often extravagant general philosophical claims. Perhaps this is because the latter belong to the domain of the general and are largely artificial (designed to suit his paradigm) while the former belong to the domain of the personal and show Shestov’s philosophising for all intents and purposes as artistic (thus supporting his treatment of philosophy as an art rather than a science).

However, curiously, for Shestov himself discovering a general pattern was clearly of the most importance, for it was in this that he hoped to uncover the road to salvation, the key to a way of coping with tragedy. Indeed, Shestov's treatment of the thinkers in question can be inscribed into a paradigm that reflects his own existential struggle. Namely, as was previously mentioned, Shestov sought in every author a breaking point in his life

experience, a crisis leading to the total transformation of his convictions. This can be explained by Shestov's own personal crisis of 1895 (resulting in a serious nervous breakdown) which, despite being well documented, remains mysterious and elusive. It roughly coincides in time with the birth of Shestov's illegitimate son, and a sequence of involvements with gentile women. Finally Shestov married one but kept the marriage secret from his parents, most notably from his Jewish Orthodox father, until the latter's death. As we argued, Shestov's entangled identity and complex personal history were highly relevant to his 'philosophy of tragedy'. In particular, we have built on suggestions that connect Shestov's irrationalism to his early exposure to Hasidism and traced a link between the apophatic theology which underlies modern Russian religiosity and the Hasidic tradition which, arguably, influenced Shestov's thought. In this connection we have shown the relevance of his premonitions to the religious developments in contemporary Russia.

While standing on his own, outside any group, in his rather non-partisan attitude to philosophy and culture Shestov's path lay nevertheless, as we explained, at a tangent bordering on many currents of his epoch. Thus, as Blagova and Emelianov observe, Shestov's philosophy of tragedy cannot be correctly understood 'вне идейно-нравственной проблематики Серебряного века, неотъемлемой частью которой является экзистенциальная проблематика пограничных ситуаций между жизнью и смертью'.²² Equally, the utopian flavour of Shestov's philosophising brings him close to the general spirit of the time with, as Averintsev aptly observed, its general atmosphere of utopia.

However, Shestov's utopian philosophising did not annihilate his very practical streak and dependability as an individual. Thus in emigration Shestov continued to be highly active, displaying his readiness for action (to 'agir') in order to support his family, and after having made his entrance into the French intellectual elite, he played to an extent the role of a multiple conductor between cultures, engaging in diverse activities. Thus he taught in the Russian extension of the Sorbonne and joined a Russian academic group organised by émigré professors. He published regularly in the outlets of the Russian émigré press,

²² Blagova and Emelianov, p. 109.

contributing to *Современные записки* (1920-1940) and later to *Версты*, *Путь* and *Русские Записки* and actively participated in the founding of a new literary journal, *Окно*. Shestov's works were also published with celebrated French publishers such as, for example, *Plon* and *Siècle*. He frequently wrote for major French journals such as *Nouvelle Revue Française* and *Mercure de France* and contributed to German philosophical periodicals. Also in Germany Shestov was elected a member of the presidium of the Nietzschean Society and was a member of the Kantian Society. Both in Paris and during his visits to Berlin he had meetings with such well-known Russian cultural figures as Remizov, Belyi, Berdiaev and others, and made friends with such outstanding European philosophers of the time as Martin Buber, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. The implications of these friendships and intellectual engagements paved the way to major developments in European philosophical thought. Thus Shestov can be viewed as a precursor of Sartrean existentialism and a figure of considerable influence in the French reception of the phenomenological movement, which in turn shaped all the major trends in French philosophy of the twentieth century. Thus, as Milosz points out, 'Shestov was an active force in European letters, and his influence reached deeper than one might surmise from the number of copies of his works sold'.²³ For Albert Camus, for example, Shestov was amongst a handful of 'the philosophers most important to the new "man of the absurd"',²⁴ as Milosz reminds us.

Shestov's cultural breadth and erudition are also noted by Louis Shein who writes that 'Shestov was well versed in both Greek and modern philosophy'.²⁵ He also asserts Shestov's cultural diversity by suggesting that 'psychologically Shestov can be best understood only in the context of the Russian intellectual milieu of his time', while 'thematically he must be seen in the context of the Western ideological search for truth'.²⁶ By the same token, drawing on Berdiaev's statement that it is the myth about the end that is more important to Russians than the myth about origins²⁷ (hence the apocalyptic tendencies

²³ Milosz, p. 101.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Shein, p. 12.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Русская идея* (Paris: IMCA-Press, 1946), p. 35.

in Russian culture), one can say that in Shestov, remarkably, the myth about origins is equally important due to his steadfast preoccupation with the concept of Original Sin.

On the other hand, Shestov's multi-cultural contribution co-existed with a certain conflict with culture into which Shestov's philosophical thought runs, as Erofeev penetratingly observes. Indeed, as we have demonstrated, Shestov's rejection of idealism and positivism leads him in his opposition to cultural idealistic and rationalistic 'restraints' on human freedom to Freudian, Darwinist and materialist trends, thus landing him very close to the 'enemy'. Yet, his struggle conducted by a combination of philosophical and literary means, with its artistic origin and nature makes an invaluable contribution to culture by alerting society to the significance of individuality and resisting the spirit of generalisation, hypocrisy and banality. That is why Viacheslav Ivanov addressed to Shestov the following perceptive words, calling him a raven with dead and alive water: 'Вашему единому слову суждено, думается, вечно звучать', Ivanov wrote: 'ибо, если строить культуру с Вами нельзя, то нельзя строить ее и без Вас, без Вашего голоса, предостерегающего от омертвления и от духовной гордости. Вы похожи на ворона с мертвой и живой водой'.²⁸ These words, in our opinion, can be taken as an epigraph to the whole creative legacy of Shestov.

Delineating the borders of reason (protecting art from science).

As we argued, throughout his entire career, in his uncompromising juxtaposition of faith and reason, Shestov effectively protected art from science (or the private from the general). More precisely, Shestov's efforts amounted to delineating the borders of the rational in its encroachment upon the domain of the irrational. It is this interpretation of his thought, we argued, that suddenly renders sensible and understandable his irrational (and thus extravagant and dismissible for many) struggle against Reason. In this connection we showed that Shestov's thought is a precursor not only of existentialism, but also of post-modernism, sharing with the latter its concept of 'broken consciousness', the acknowledgement of a multiplicity of truths and the assignment of equal validity to different standpoints.

²⁸ Viacheslav Ivanov's letter to Shestov of 10 Febr. 1936. Cited in Baranova-Shestova, I, p. 146.

However, we also demonstrated Shestov's essential misconception of science, thus exposing a certain naïveté in his struggle against scientific method. On the other hand, this fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of science, with its inevitable principles of abstraction and generalisation, that Shestov constantly opposed to art, with the latter's emphasis on the individual, is rather typical of his time. For despite a certain tendency to merge different cultural and intellectual activities such as philosophy and literature, art and religion, poetry and science, the scientific and artistic spheres were at the time still considerably more segregated than they are now. Therefore it was extremely rare to combine a profound scientific and artistic background, displaying a proper understanding of both. Hence some fundamental logical errors that crept into Shestov's philosophical analysis which we have exposed in this thesis (and what seems to be essentially novel).

However, perhaps paradoxically again, while both phenomena (of the irrational and rational, at least in the form of art and science) which Shestov perceived to be in conflict – a conflict in which he passionately took sides – were misconstrued by him, the direct head-on encounter that Shestov forced upon them, like the powerful striking of two stones, produced, in his mind at least, a spark from which the flame of his whole philosophy was ignited. On the other hand, at a later stage, when the struggle was transferred to the religious plane and concerned the phenomenon of faith with its highly subjective, fluid and varied definitions, Shestov's misconceptions must have been no longer of the same relevance. Indeed, his struggle then was predominantly centred around stripping faith from any rational elements (from any dogma), and his perception of the former as a second dimension of thought must have become of equal validity to any other existing perception.

Importantly, a great contributory factor in Shestov's misconceptions (with respect to the nature of art where aesthetic concerns are primary and especially of science where generalisation is inevitable and deliberate) was his tendency towards the limits explained at least in part by his very temperament, that Milosz calls 'religious', by his passion in search of the answers to the ultimate questions. Thus he tended to take everything to the extreme, including art and science themselves. As was mentioned earlier in connection to his

relationship to aesthetics, Shestov tried to search, as it were, for the limits of the human spirit. However, at the boundaries, i.e. when taken in excess, things tend to turn into their opposites (for instances, our virtues taken in excess turn into our shortcomings). Thus what for Shestov embodied reason changed its nature: ethical principles became petit-bourgeois utilitarian morality, used to validate and defend philistine values, and science turned into an oppressive dogmatic teaching, an instrument for stifling the individual; and then together, hand in hand, according to Shestov's perception, they marched against the free spirit. Thus instead of dealing with ethics and science Shestov ended up dealing with their excesses, that is to say – their dialectical opposites.

Yet, speaking metaphorically again, Shestov's naïve rebellion against speculative philosophy, against reason as a poison at the core of man's destiny, is akin to that of a Don Quixote who is concentrated fully on the noble mission of a saviour of mankind in his hopeless struggle against the windmills of modern civilisation. Even though Shestov's crusade against rationalism, in his search for the liberation of man from his tragic predicament, is doomed, it carries within it an intoxicating flame, the passion of 'a priest angry at the sight of holy vessels being desecrated',²⁹ as Milosz put it. And such a passion in standing up for the tragic individual is always time-resistant. Therefore some rather striking examples of Shestov's legacy (as interpreted by individual readers of his books) given by Shteinberg in his memoirs come as no surprise: 'Шестову было дано откровение, что нет малых и великих людей, что перед ликом Господним все равны. Моисей этому учил. Иисус из Назарета воскресил это учение. Но только Шестов показал в наше извращенное время, что это значит, назло Спинозе, Марксу и Фрейдю',³⁰ a Russian-speaking admirer of Shestov from Uruguay exclaimed to Shteinberg in 1953, fifteen years after Shestov's death. Another encounter of this kind recalled by Shteinberg was with a young Belgian and took place another ten years on. This young man claimed to have been saved by reading Shestov from his turbulent and debauched life resulting in suicidal attempts. He started reading Shestov by chance, at a time when he

²⁹ Milosz, p. 102.

³⁰ Shteinberg, p. 261.

hated and despised himself and mankind alike. 'Я раскрыл книгу наугад', he told Shteinberg;

...Фразы были простые, мысли тоже несложные ... и вдруг мне захотелось плакать. Стало бесконечно жаль себя и всех людей, и все мироздание, и я вдруг понял, что нельзя никого осуждать, даже самого себя. Этого, конечно, не было в тексте, но как-то исходило от него, как заклинание между строками. Я слышал голос наяву, доносившийся со страниц книги: а ты проснись, а ты не спи, а ты и во сне бодрствуй!³¹

Contemplating these encounters Shteinberg comments that 'невозможно отметить на полях книг Шестова красным карандашом, какие именно афоризмы или изречения его заряжены такой взрывчатой духовностью'. It is the subtext concealed between the lines that opens up 'просвет в иной мир', Shteinberg suggests. His conclusion about Shestov's significance is that the latter was a product of the 'dead time' and a spokesman of decadence, while being at the same time a precursor of the new redemption: 'Шестов – явление безвременья и продукт разложения, но он же и предвестник, и предтеча того, что грядет за веком всечеловеческого кризиса',³² Shteinberg writes.

These recollections reinforce once again the significance of Shestov's penetrating visions and premonitions. Indeed, he anticipated with great precision and intuition the dangerous consequences of Western rationalism (contrasting it with the uncultured Russian belief in miracles and its fearless and wild search for the truth, harmony, beauty and faith). This rationalistic approach eventually became transformed into consumerism, shallow bourgeois values, stifled and suppressed emotions, social hypocrisy and the inability to deal with grief. In a sense Shestov's suspicions of Western rationalism and its implications resonate with Naum Korzhavin's pungent lines at the end of the same century:

Здесь вместо мыслей пустяки.
И тот, как этот.
Здесь даже чувствовать стихи
Есть точный метод.³³

³¹ Shteinberg, p. 263.

³² Ibid, p. 264.

³³ Naum Korzhavin, 'Письмо в Москву' in *Стихи и поэмы* (Moscow: Materik, 2004), pp. 274-275.

Similarly perceptive was Shestov's vision of the man of the future and of the forthcoming spiritual dangers. In Kolobaeva's opinion, while Shestov can be labelled 'гносеологический утопист' he is simultaneously (if one looks deeper) a strikingly sober thinker who shook off many illusions and became to a large extent anti-utopian. Shestov's work, Kolobaeva asserts, was 'значительно своим предупреждающим видением страшных духовных опасностей XX века – насилия умозрительных идей, рационалистического утопизма, губительности равнения личности догматикой идеологии и морали, опасности от недооценки неизменных начал человеческой природы'.³⁴ Thus Motroshilova states the ultimate righteousness of Dostoevsky and Shestov who warned us 'о "равнодушной силе", что – через науку [...] – обретает власть над судьбами мироздания и человека'. She exclaims, 'Не такая ли "равнодушная сила" властвует сегодня над всеми нами, пользуясь раскрытыми наукой и разумом тайнами атомного ядра? И разве не оказалась причастной к этой трагедии современного человечества слепая вера в якобы самостоятельное и в себе благое "шествие" научного разума?'³⁵

At the same time, as Erofeev put it, 'Шестову удалось весьма верно предугадать эстетику экзистенциализма'.³⁶ Moreover, 'шестовская идея об индивидуальной истине, добытой в абсолютном одиночестве, или, что то же, о множественности истин [...] явилась одним из основополагающих моментов "полифонической" эстетики, сыгравшей исключительную роль для развития западного искусства XX века'.³⁷

Of especial importance, testifying to Shestov's lasting significance is his continuing impact on both the artistic and philosophical world, with a particular emphasis on the former. Indeed, despite his tendentiousness, 'admirable monotony' (to use Camus's term) and aesthetic ambivalence Shestov has served as a catalyst of sorts for the inner worlds of

³⁴ Kolobaeva, p. 76.

³⁵ Motroshilova, p. 135.

³⁶ Erofeev, p. 181.

³⁷ Ibid.

prominent contemporary writers such as Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz, Yves Bonnefoy and David Gascoyne – to name just a few. Evidence of Shestov’s continuing relevance lies in the extensive re-publication of his works in contemporary Russia and the on-going scholarly publications and debate on him. At the roots of this, in our view, there lies the fact that his thought defends what is most important for human beings – our ‘irrational remainder’. The latter constitutes the essence of all things alive, all things temporal; it is the nucleus of life, of a private and finite existence. In this approach Shestov coincides almost precisely with Joseph Brodsky, whom Milosz linked with Shestov, calling both ‘defenders of the sacred in the age of faithlessness’. Indeed, the following lines by Brodsky, partially quoted in the Russian translation in Chapter 6, express beautifully the very substance of Shestov’s stance, illuminating in particular the direct relevance of the artistic (notably, literary) approach to his thought that has been undertaken in this dissertation:

“Remember me,” –
Whispers the dust.

[...] I’ve quoted these lines because [...] I recognize in them myself, and for that matter, any living organism to be wiped off from the available surface. “Remember me, whispers the dust”. And one hears in this that if we learn about ourselves from time, perhaps time, in turn, may learn something from us. What would that be? That inferior in significance, we better it in sensitivity.

This is what it means – to be insignificant. [...] You are insignificant because you are finite. Yet the more finite a thing is, the more it is charged with life, emotions, joy, fears, compassion. For infinity is not terribly lively, not terribly emotional. [...] it is the anticipation of that inanimate infinity that accounts for the intensity of human sentiments.[...] This is [...] to suggest [...] that passion is the privilege of the insignificant.

So try to stay passionate, leave your cool to constellations. Passion, above all, is a remedy against boredom. Another one, of course, is pain – physical more so than psychological, passion’s frequent aftermath; although I wish you neither. Still, when you are hurt you know that at least you haven’t been deceived (by your body or by your psyche). By the same token, what’s good about boredom, about anguish and the sense of the meaninglessness of your own, of everything else’s existence, is that it is not a deception.³⁸

³⁸ Joseph Brodsky, ‘In Praise of Boredom’ in *On Grief and Reason* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997), pp. 110-111.

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