

CELEBRATING CREATIVITY

essays in honour of Jostein Børtnes

edited by

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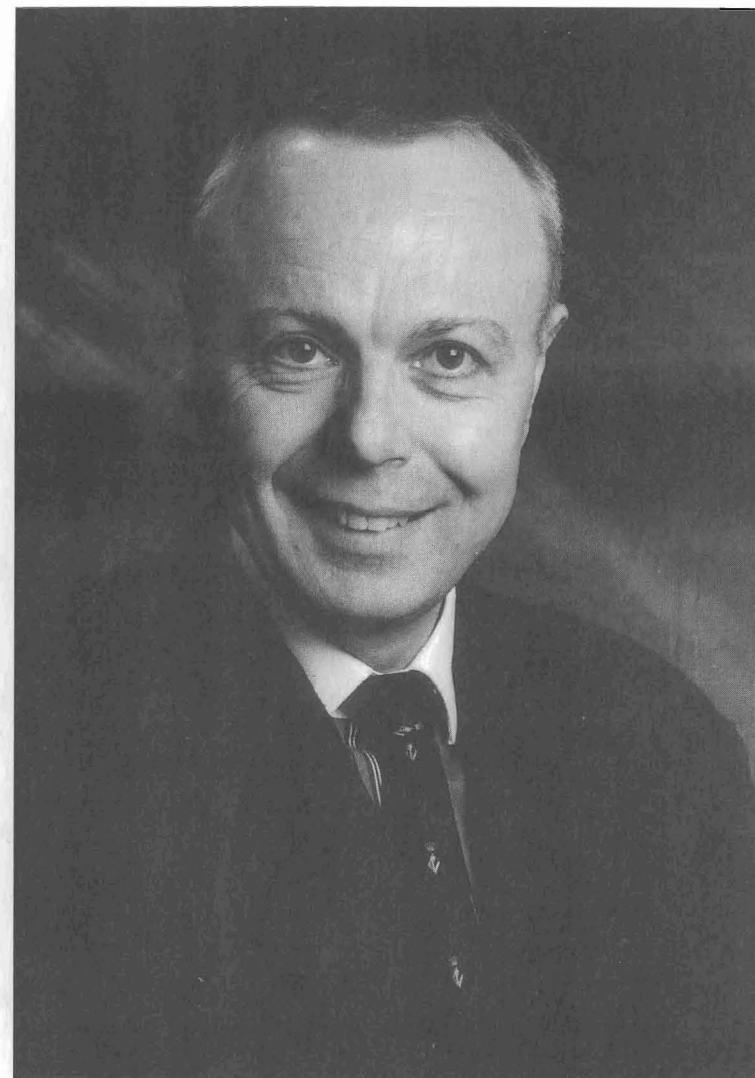
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peal for the memory of the terror to be kept alive.³³ In reverence for the dead and the ill-treated, the horrors must not be forgotten, nor must the cruelty be neutralised through mythologising intellectual patterns. Thus, Akhmatova's Russian Passion story emerges as a profoundly felt protest against a régime which sacrificed millions of innocent people for the "higher" purpose of a "radiant future" – *svetloe budushchee*.

Crucifixion of the Resurrected and the Paschal Archetype of Russian Culture

Ivan Esaulov

THE PRESENT STUDY is an analysis of Sergei Esenin's early poem "It is not the winds that strew the virgin forest..." (Не ветры осыпают пуши...). The poem will be examined not as a fixed link in the chain constituting the poet's creative "journey," nor even as an expression of "poetic Holy Rus' in her peasant hypostasis,"¹ but as those integrally organised "signs" and "symbols" that "step beyond the bounds of the village and of history, since they correspond to the mysterious base underlying the Russian soul, to its archetype, to its *a priori* cosmic essence."² I cite Esenin's poem of 1914 in full:

Не ветры осыпают пуши,
Не листопад златит холмы.
С голубизны незримой кущи
Струятся звездные псалмы.

Я вижу – в просиничном платё,
На легкокрылых облаках,
Идет возлюбленная Мати
С Пречистым Сыном на руках.

33 Akhmatova's focusing on the memorial (*pamiatnik*) motif is part of the poem's intertextual dialogue with Pushkin. Like Pushkin's "Pamiatnik" (1836), Akhmatova's *Requiem* is an accusation addressed to an oppressive régime. The poem's great critical potential prevented it from being published in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era, as well as during the first post-Stalinist thaw. It was published only in 1987, under Gorbachev and the *glasnost* period.

1 Aleksandr I. Mikhailov, 1995, "Sergei Esenin: sud'ba i vera," *Sergeii Esenin: 'Shel Gospod' pytat' liudei v liubvi...*, St Petersburg, p. 17.

2 See Iurii Mamleev, 1990, "V poiskakh Rossii," *Russkii rubezh*, special issue of *Literaturnaia Rossiia*, no. 3.

Она несет для мира снова
Распятъ воскресшего Христа:
“Ходи, мой Сын, живи без крова,
Зорюй и полднюй у куста.”

И в каждом страннике убогом
Я визнавать пойду с тоской,
Не помазуемый ли Богом
Стучит берестяной клюкой.

И может быть, пройду я мимо
И не замечу в тайный час,
Что в елях – крылья херувима,
А под пеньком – голодный Спас.

It is not the wind that strew the virgin forests,
Not the autumn leaves that turn the hills to gold.
From out the blue of impenetrable foliage
The celestial psalms stream forth.

I see – in her bluish drape
On the light-winged clouds
The Beloved Mother walking
With her immaculate Son in her arms.

She carries the risen Christ
To crucify Him again for the world:
“Go, my Son, live without blood,
At dawn and midday by the bush.”

And I shall walk with longing
To acknowledge Him in every wretched wanderer,
For is not God's Anointed
He who knocks with his birch-bark stick.

And perhaps, I shall pass by
And not notice in the secret hour
That in the firs – are the wings of Cherubim
And by the trunk – the starving Saviour.³

3 I am grateful to Ursula Phillips who has provided a translation of Esenin's poems for this essay.

What stands out in the text is, above all, the motif of the *repeated* crucifixion of Christ, which has a defined spiritual subtext. Without providing a scholarly explanation of the type of culture within which this subtext functions, an adequate interpretation of Esenin's poem is hardly feasible. In my view, in this as in many other cases, a treatment of the Orthodox subtext in Russian literature permits the partial disclosure of what are often (for example, in the “historico-literary” and the “mythopoetic” approaches) considered to be the “obscure” meanings of a work.⁴ In the following discussion, I propose to view the Orthodox subtext not from a restricted confessional angle, but as a particular subject of “a literary aesthetics,”⁵ actualising the archetypal system of a given cultural tradition.

Returning to Esenin's poem, we are dealing not with the crucifixion of Christ, but with His new sacrifice, which is, however, a kind of sacrifice that allows the Other (*Drugoi*) – meaning every Other, or the lyric I in particular – to save his soul. Such a salvation is attainable only by endeavouring to perceive clearly the face of Christ in every Other; as will become clear, not in *any* Other, but in the lowest, paltriest, and most persecuted Other:

И в каждом страннике убогом
Я визнавать пойду с тоской,

And I shall walk with longing
To acknowledge Him in *every wretched* wanderer,

From this we recognise a characteristic feature of the Russian Christian mentality: the peculiar love and compassion for convicts, fugitives and paupers; for individuals who, as it were, have performed no works or have no merits pleasing to God. Within this type of culture, the Gospel notion “faith without works is dead” (James 2, 20) remains intact, and yet man is not saved through works alone. Grace cannot be *earned* through the sum of works, it can only be *found*.

Who is this *wretched wanderer* (*странник убогий*)? To a consciousness steeped in folk etymology, these words designate a wandering person, more often than not a religious pilgrim, who is homeless, but accompanied by God, in other words, he is God's wanderer.

Moreover, in the text a communal or corporate (*sobornyi*) world-view, so characteristic of Russian culture, is implicitly revealed. The wretched wanderer is a wanderer because he moves, walks, he *knocks with his birch-bark stick*

4 Cf. Ivan A. Esaulov, 1995, *Kategoriia sobornosti v russkoi literature*, Petrozavodsk.

5 Cf. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 1979, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, Moscow.

(стучит берестяной клюкой). The lyric hero is, however, also walking, his movements being emphasised twofold: *I shall walk . . . To acknowledge Him (Я визнавать пойду)*; *And perhaps, I shall pass by (И, может быть, пройду)*. But the Mother of God also moves; hence this literary image of her differs from her visual representation in icons:

На легкокрылых облаках
Идет возлюбленная Мати

On the light-winged clouds
The Beloved Mother walking

It is here conceptually significant that her very first parting words to Christ are linked to the motif of movement, to the idea of not being static: "Go, my Son, live without blood" ("Ходи, мой Сын, живи без крова"). Thus, we may establish a movement motif which is common to all the characters in this poem. We may observe that the different vectors of this movement must coincide at a certain ideal or *synergetic* point, which, in turn, grants the possibility of communal salvation. The vector demonstrating the movement of the Mother of God points in the direction of the world, of the people: she carries Christ "for the world" – (она несет для мира . . . Христа). In accordance with this established vector, the lyric hero moves with the purpose of meeting every wanderer halfway (that is, of meeting Christ halfway). The greatest danger lies in the potential "non-coincidence" of the road's trajectories at the given ideal point, thus impeding the hoped-for communal Meeting of Grace:

И, может быть, пройду я мимо
И не замечу . . .

And perhaps, I shall pass by
And not notice . . .

Examining the same poem in his unpublished work *The Cosmic Liturgy in Esenin's Lyric Poetry*, Valerii Lepakhin points to the poetic transformation of one of the most important Gospel motifs: whereas in the New Testament Christ is sent by the Father, he is here sent by the Mother. What then does the Mother of God signify to the Orthodox type of culture? She is not so much the *Virgin Mary*, as the *Mother of God (Bogomater')* or even the *Theotokos (Bogoroditsa)* – the one who bore God.

Thus, in Esenin's poem, birth (*Nativity*) and resurrection (*the Paschal mystery*) seem strangely (at first) and intentionally contaminated, the contamination occurring at the boundary between the second and third stanza. From the second stanza, we learn of the *Mother walking/With her immaculate Son in her arms (Мату/С пречистым Сыном на руках)*, meaning the Saviour is here

an *infant* (Immanuel). In the third stanza, however, we recognise that this is the resurrected, that is, the *adult* Christ. Significantly, the border line between the infant and the adult Christ fades in the same manner as does the distinction between the Saviour and the wretched wanderer.

The narrative structure of the text is such that the accentuation is shifted from the Nativity to the Crucifixion (that is, to death), and, subsequently, to the Resurrection. Incidentally, here Iurii Tynianov's concepts of "unity" (*edinstva*) and "closeness" (*tesnota*) in the verse line⁶ appear in such a manner that whereas the new Crucifixion of Jesus is accentuated on the level of *story (fabula)*, His resurrection is accentuated on the level of *plot (siuzhet)*. The second line of the third stanza, that is, the geometrical centre, or the "heart" of the text, is organised so that its final word – the ultimate chord of this poetic event – accentuates not the Crucifixion (which could have occurred with Esenin's earlier variant *Воскресшего Христа распять*), but, on the contrary, shows the position of the Resurrection as a dominant. This process of re-accentuation enables us to contend that in this text, not the Catholic archetype and its Nativity subtext, but the Paschal archetype of Orthodoxy is clearly expressed.⁷

One of the deeper sources which is likely to underlie Esenin's persistent use of the motif of old Russia's death and destruction is, I suggest, a realisation, paradoxically, of this Paschal archetype. The Resurrection is not at all a *second* Birth, or a re-birth, but, quite the opposite, a *salvation* in the form of a transition to a different spiritual dimension, a different condition. But in order to rise from the dead, a partial, gradual amelioration – for example, of Russian secular life – is totally insufficient: the idea of gradualness, or of any continuous development, is rather alien to the Russian cultural mentality.

Alas, according to this artistic logic, permeated by the Paschal archetype of Orthodoxy, the revival of Russia to the elevated position of Holy Rus' is strictly dependent on Russia's total destruction (understood here *not* in the metaphorical sense), since there can be no Resurrection without a death.

In Esenin's poem, this particular feature of the Paschal archetype, that is, the elimination of distance between the Nativity and the Crucifixion, which results in a focusing on the Resurrection, is contained within the narrow bounds of one single but central verse line.

Let us now ask ourselves the following question: what may be the deeper subtext of the insignificance – constantly manifested in Esenin – of the border line between the sinful and the sacred, the profane and the sacral? Suffice it to

6 Cf. Iurii N. Tynianov, 1965, *Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka: stat'i*, Moscow.

7 Cf. Esaulov, 1995.

mention one of many examples, taken from the poem "The wind whistles under the steep fences..." (Свищет ветер под крутым забором...):

Верю я, как ликам чудотворным,
В мой потайный час.
Он придет бродягой подзаборным,
Нерушимый Спас.

I believe, like I believe in the miracle-working icons,
In my secret hour.
He will come like the coarsest tramp,
The inviolable Saviour.

We note that faith in the miracle-working capacity of the icons of Christ is equated with faith in the actual appearance of Christ himself in the person (image) of an indigent tramp. But why do the miracle-working icons depicting Christ – *лика́м чудотворным* – so venerated in Russia, rhyme with the coarsest tramp – *бродягой подзаборным* – becoming almost indiscernible in the process?

As I have mentioned elsewhere,⁸ Iurii Lotman, in convincingly opposing the binary model of Russian culture with the Western European ternary system overlooks, in my view, one single but important element that engenders this wide typological distinction between two images of the world, two different cultural systems of values.⁹ I have in mind here the idea of Purgatory as an independent place (equalling Hell and Paradise) which is significantly absent in the Orthodox type of culture. The point is not the absence as such, but its implications: insofar as there is no special purifying "intermediate" link, the distance between Hell and Paradise, the sinful and the sacred, is radically decreased. Therefore, both *instantaneous* salvation and *instantaneous* perdition are possible: spiritual ascent stands on a par with degradation and fall. Interestingly, such proximity does not signal the destruction of a certain ideal "norm," for it is the norm, and as such, fixed by an Orthodox type of consciousness. Such is the spiritual environment that surrounds man in this earthly world. This may also explain the direct projection of Holy Rus' onto sinful Russia, and, moreover, the paradoxical approximation of *kenosis* to faith in the world-wide mission of Russia and in the Russian Christ.¹⁰

8 See Esaulov, 1995, p. 14, 142-143.

9 Iurii M. Lotman, 1992, *Kul'tura i vzryv*, Moscow.

The intermediate level between "the best of the best" – Christ – and the worst of the worst – the coarsest tramp (*бродяга подзаборный*) – is frequently non-existent. In other words, the coarsest tramp and Christ become one, the difference being one of form, not of essence. Therefore it is so important to perceive the one and only essence behind the accidental and secular *form*. From here it follows that man's greatest sin is least of all the threatening transformation into a homeless wanderer as a result of having lead an unworthy life, but the likelihood, which frightens Esenin's lyric hero, that he may fail to see his Saviour in the wretched wanderer. By the same token, we do not "save" the wanderer, it is he who renders possible our own salvation.

In Esenin's text the notion of communal salvation and death dominant in Russian culture emerges in such a way that failure to recognise Christ in the raving wanderer (*странник*), or tramp (*бродяга*), means not only depriving oneself of personal salvation and perishing in the secret hour (*потайный час*); this act of denial also means that we *crucify* the Saviour Himself for a second time.

We may ask what kind of subtext is contained in the lines of the poem "The wind whistles under the steep fences...":

Но, быть может, в синих ключьях дыма
Тайноводных рек
Я пройду Его с улыбкой пьяной мимо
Не узнав навек.

But perhaps, in blue coils of mist
Of secret river waters
I shall pass Him by with a drunken smile
Forever not recognising Him.

Why is timeless eternity associated here with the decisive event of the lyric hero's earthly life – the secret hour?

An interesting feature of the Church Slavonic Orthodox liturgy, realised in the narrative of Christ's death and resurrection, is the consistent substitution of the present tense for the past. We are here dealing with the so-called *liturgical today* (*nunc*). One of the most profound Christian philosophers, Alexander Schmemmann, explains the substitution as follows:

10 See Jostein Børtnes, 1994, "Russkii kenotizm: k pereotsenke odnogo poniatiia," *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literature XVIII-XX vekov: tsitata, remintsentsiia, motiv, siuzhet, zhanr*, ed. Vladimir N. Zakharov, Petrozavodsk, pp. 61-66.

An overwhelming majority of church-goers probably understand it as a rhetorical metaphor, a poetical "figure of speech" . . . The very concept of celebration implies both an event and the social or corporate reaction to it. A celebration is possible only when people come together and, transcending their natural separation and isolation from one another, react together as one body, as indeed one person to an event . . . And it is this new memory as *power* over time and its brokenness which is the heart of the liturgical celebration, of the liturgical *today* . . . The true *confirmation* comes from celebration, and precisely from those five days on which we witness the beginning of that mortal fight between life and death, and begin not so much to understand as to witness Christ going to put death to death.¹¹

Such a disappearance of the temporal gap between a described event (celebrated by Church tradition) and the description itself means that in a given type of culture, we are not dealing with the *symbolical* interpretation of Christ's life, but with the absolutely *real*, albeit *mystically* understood, idea of participation or "com-plicity" (*so-uchastie*) in the life of the Saviour. Thus, within the bounds of the annual liturgical cycle, Christ dies and rises again not symbolically, but *in reality*. Hence the present, and not past, tense of the liturgy.

In this type of culture, which has grown out of the Paschal invariant, it would seem that not only does man's relationship to Christ determine his life and salvation, but the reverse transhistorical connections are also realised; in a similarly special manner, His life and the meaning of His crucifixion depend on man's attitude to this fact. We are dealing here with a particular poignancy inherent in the communal mystical union between the Saviour and the saved, Christ and the Christians, where the denial of Christ in one's neighbour is analogous to His repeated crucifixion. Thus, in "It is not the winds that strew the virgin forest..." as in many other poems by Esenin,¹² the "recollection" of the Paschal archetype is clearly realised in the subtext.

The Poet as a Young Woman: Anna Akhmatova and her Representation of the Lyric I as Artist

Astrid S. Brokke

Был блаженной моей колыбелью
Темный город у грозной реки.¹

Anna Akhmatova

THE SO-CALLED SILVER AGE in Russian culture is a period during which several major women poets made their appearance on the literary scene. One of these poets was Anna Akhmatova. At the time when her first collections of poems were published, *Evening* (*Вечер*, 1912) and *Rosary* (*Четки*, 1914), she was but one of many "love-poetesses" greeted by literary critics of the time as a new Russian Sappho. In the early twentieth century, however, they could not foresee that in the future Akhmatova was to achieve the status of a classical poet and to be hailed as *the* woman poet in Russia.

Catriona Kelly is right in her extensive history of Russian women's writing to hold that Akhmatova's elevation was not natural and inevitable; it was the result of a process of self-creation and mythologisation.² The problem in question is one of great complexity, and I do not here intend to explore to its full extent the topic of a poet's self-creation and his or her place in the literary canon, but to touch upon a few of the many-faceted aspects of the process of becoming a poet and, to be more specific, of the coming to be of a poet who

11 Alexander Schmemmann, 1974, *Great Lent*, Crestwood, NY, pp. 80-83.

12 See, for example, "The Lord went to test people in their love..." (Шел Господь пытаться людей в любви...).

1 From the poem "Byl blazhennoi moei kolybel'iu..." (*Belaia staia*, 1917); "My blessed cradle was/The dark city on the terrible river." My translation.

2 Catriona Kelly, 1994, *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992*, Oxford, p. 210.