Russian Classical Literature Today
Russian Classical Literature Today: The Challenges/Trials of Messianism and Mass Culture

Edited by

Yordan Lyutskanov, Hristo Manolakev and Radostin Rusev
# Table of Contents

List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................ x

Preface .......................................................................................................................... xi

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

**Part I: The Autonomy of the Literary Field in Russia and the Scholarly Need of Canon, Then and Now**

Chapter One .............................................................................................................. 14  
Dolya or Nedolya: Writers and Literature in a Totalitarian Society and in the Digital Age  
Radostin Rusev

Chapter Two ............................................................................................................. 25  
The Many-Sided Canon: The History of Russian Classical Literature after Perestroika  
Hristo Manolakev

**Part II: Contemplating the Temporal and Spatial Variability and the Multiplicity of the Literary Canon**

Chapter Three ......................................................................................................... 36  
The Russian Literary Canon through the Prism of Contemporaneity  
Tatiana Megrelishvili

Chapter Four ............................................................................................................ 48  
A Foreign Canon for the Russian Classical Literature  
Dagnė Beržaitė

Chapter Five ............................................................................................................ 58  
The Process of Canonisation in Russian Literature in the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Century: Theses for Analysis  
Tomáš Glanc
Part III: Inspecting Literary Canonicity in the Phase(s) of Decomposition and Birth

Chapter Six ......................................................................................................................... 72
The Life of the Canon in the Various Forms of Reference to the Classics by Contemporary Russian Writers
Tatyana Rybalchenko

Chapter Seven ..................................................................................................................... 88
Russian Literature of the Classical Period: Ontological Perspectives
Marina Urtminceva

Chapter Eight ..................................................................................................................... 98
“Secondary Forms” in Contemporary Russian Drama: Strategies of Literary “Recycling”
Olga Bagdasaryan

Chapter Nine ...................................................................................................................... 110
Poet and Citizen: Canon Game in Contemporary Russian Poetry
Nina Barkovskaya

Part IV: Foreign Literary (Re)Canonisation of the Russian Literary Canon(s)

Chapter Ten ....................................................................................................................... 126
Russian Literary Canon in the Intertext of Contemporary Georgian Fiction
Irine Modebadze

Chapter Eleven ................................................................................................................... 137
On the Odessa Steps: Russian Classical and Contemporary Authors as Stepping Stones towards Understanding the New Bulgarian Fiction
Maya Gorcheva

Part V: The Theological Grounds of the Autonomy of the Literary Field in Russia, or of Russian Literature-Centrism

Chapter Twelve .................................................................................................................. 150
The Messianistic Model in Classical Works of Russian Literature
Nikolai Neichev
Chapter Thirteen ........................................................................................................... 163
Russian Literary Culture: Judaic Prosopopoeia, Romantic Shamanism and a Republican Totem
Sergei Panov and Sergei Ivashkin

Chapter Fourteen ....................................................................................................... 173
Vyacheslav Ivanov and the Russian Messianism
Nikita Bystrov

Chapter Fifteen .......................................................................................................... 184
Life in Art: A Messianic Exploit or an Accident (Nikolai Nekrasov’s “Reflections at the Front Door”, Evgenii Evtushenko’s “Reflections at the Back Door”, Andrei Voznesenskii’s “Monologue of Marylin Monroe”, Edvard Radzinskii’s “The End of One Poem”)
Larisa Kislova

Chapter Sixteen ......................................................................................................... 195
The Canon of Confessional Writing and its Modifications
Ludmiła Łucewicz

Chapter Seventeenth ................................................................................................. 205
“A Russia of Xerxes or of Christ?” The Critique of Messianism in the Russian Émigré Community in a Historical-Cultural Perspective: From Vladimir Solov’ëv to Ol’ga Sedakova
Alexander Medvedev

Part VI: (Quasi-)Personalism and Self-Restrained Politico-Theological Claim in (Dis-)Favour of Autonomy

Chapter Eighteen ....................................................................................................... 222
Aleksandr Pushkin in the 1930s: The Official “Canonisation” vs. the Concept of the Poet in the Individual Creative Mind (Marina Tsvetaeva’s Pushkiniana)
Irina Belyakova

Chapter Nineteen ....................................................................................................... 236
The Genius and the Crowd of Peoples: The Day of Russian Culture in the Russian Émigré Newspapers of Bulgaria in 1929–1933
Yordan Lyutskanov
## Table of Contents

Chapter Twenty ........................................................................................................... 251  
Peculiarities of the National Character: Finns, Russians, and Russian Literature in Aleksandr Rogozhkin’s “Finnish” Films  
Elena Pedigo Clark

### Part VII: The “Media-Centric” Challenge to Literature-Centrism

Chapter Twenty-One .................................................................................................... 268  
Screen Adaptation as an Interpretation Field  
Lilia Nemchenko

Chapter Twenty-Two .................................................................................................. 277  
Problems of Interpreting Russian Classics (Ivan Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* in the Screen Version by Avdot’ya Smirnova)  
Ol’ga Cherkezova

Chapter Twenty-Three ............................................................................................... 287  
Cinematographic Projection of Akhmatova’s Text: (Dmitrii Tomashpol’skii’s Film *High moon*)  
Anna Menshchikova

Chapter Twenty-Four ................................................................................................. 296  
The Personality of Dostoevskii in a Postmodernist Context  
Ol’ga Kryukova

Chapter Twenty-Five .................................................................................................. 307  
The Case of *Without a Dowry* versus *Cruel Romance*: Thirty Years Later  
Alexander Panov

Chapter Twenty-Six .................................................................................................... 318  
Tatiana Kruglova

### Part VIII: Literary Scholarship Deliberates its Involvement in the Processes of Hetero-/Autonomisation

Chapter Twenty-Seven ............................................................................................... 332  
Mass Literature as a Problem of Contemporary Russian Education  
Maria Litovskaya
Chapter Twenty-Eight ............................................................................. 343
The Religious Interpretation of Russian Literature: Between Doctrinology and Personology
Dmitry Dolgushin

Conclusion .............................................................................................. 351

Contributors ............................................................................................ 366

Index of Names ....................................................................................... 374
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1: Igor’ Knyazev, Dostoevskii and Tea, 2004; paper, tempera; issued as a postcard by the Literary Memorial Museum “F.M. Dostoevsky”, St. Petersburg; “...Is the world to go to pot, or am I to go without my tea? I say that the world may go to pot for me so long as I always get my tea.” (Dostoevskii, Notes from the Underground) – front cover

Illustration 2: Anatolii Kretov-Dazhd’, Dostoevskii, 2007; paper, mixed technique; from the graphic cycle White Nights – p. xvi
Romanisation of Cyrillic names has turned out to be the most controversial editorial issue in the preparation of this volume for print. The issue goes far beyond editorial accidentals, having a bearing upon, firstly, the politics of translation and its scholarly comprehension and, secondly, one of the central, if randomly surfacing, subjects of interest in the book. At the risk of over-generalising, the problem can be formulated thus. Where does the boundary between the semiotic orders of arbitrary and non-arbitrary signs, and the nominalist and realist ontological orders lie; and are we aware of our boundary-status? In other words, Romanisation of Cyrillic names is an issue of orthography and there could be close connections between this issue of orthography and a variety of (quasi)-religious orthodoxies.

Noting the chaos in this practice has probably become commonplace for prefaces like this; we shall try to detect and acknowledge the (quasi)orthodoxies which motivated our choices.

Romanising a name that needs Romanisation may be backed by a variety of criteria, and (should) be motivated by an unpremeditated or premeditated selective awareness. This could be a general marketing awareness (“the form ‘A’ would contribute to better circulation of the text in an X-speaking milieu than the form ‘B’”); a personal marketing awareness (“‘A’ is the form of my name under which I am known in the milieu from which the most of my supposed readers come”); juridical (“this is how my name is spelled in my passport”); (quasi)aesthetic (“‘A’ looks better in an X-language text than ‘B’”); just personal (“I like ‘A’ and dislike ‘B’”); ideological (with a universalist bias: “‘A’ literally coincides with the corresponding name in the target-language and in other languages”; or a counter-universalist one: “‘B’ represents the idiosyncrasy of the source-language”); scholarly (“we should/may/may not adhere to the principles of shallow/deep/defective orthography”); political (“we should/should not count for the principles of orthography in the target/source language having, besides, in mind the following...”); and so on.

Considering Romanisation as not merely a technical issue, we made a number of choices that underline the non-arbitrary nature of this aspect. First, we maintained the differentiation between transliteration and transfer
into English of foreign names. Next, we decided to follow the system of transliteration (actually Romanisation) which seems to be the most phonetically and phonemically exact, as well as the one most sensitive to cultural plurality, that is, most sensitive to the linguistic peculiarities and orthographic traditions of the source-languages and source-cultures: the so-called scholarly or international standard (ISO/R9). As for the transfer of foreign names, we chose the standard which could indicate a link with the place (country) of publishing, that is, the “British” standard (2979: 1958), in a slightly simplified version (we refrained from using diacriticals for “и”, “э” and “ы”). In transliteration of Georgian names we adhered to ISO 9984.

Western (incl. English) names appearing in transliterated Cyrillic sources are rendered analogically, that is: “Блюм” as “Blum” and not “Bloom” (though in the main text the name appears, of course, as “Bloom”).

Some widespread “international” personal names, such as Alexander, Maria, Maxim etc. have been treated according to the standard, that is, in a way that reflects the variety of national contexts from which their bearers come: for example, “Александр” would indicate a Russian nationality and “Aleksandür”/“Aleksandăr” (BS/ISO) a Bulgarian.

But the names of the contributors to this volume, when introduced as its contributors and not as authors referred to within the text, are Romanised according to their bearers’ personal preferences.

We have allowed for cases of at least partial “naturalisation” – for example, Georges Florovsky (who lived and worked in the USA for most of his career and published in English during that time), Eugene Ostashevsky, Ilya Kaminsky, Julia Kissina. Understanding the fragility of all such differentiations and associations, we have regarded the case of Иосиф Бродский/Joseph Brodsky as of the same kind: a Russian writer who after emigration continued to write in Russian and who was still located in the field of Russian literature (unlike the more ambivalent Vladimir Nabokov, whose names, fortunately, allow more or less straightforward Romanisation) on the one hand, and “a Russian poet and an English essayist” on the other. Also, we decided to retain the form “Чалиапин”.

We refrained from using widely circulating forms like “Fyodor Dostoevsky” and “Leo Tolstoy” not only for the sake of uniformity. Recently, authorship-constructing projects emerged which employed the well-known names of the classics for their own ends. Remakes of classical works, published under the names of “Фёдор Михайлов” (a literary remake of Dostoevskii’s novel The Idiot), “Leo Tolstoy” (a comic entitled “Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy”), “Alex Pushkin” (a comic entitled “The
Queen of Spades by Alex Pushkin”), and Ivan Sergeev (a literary remake of Turgenev’s novel Fathers and Sons), appeared. We consider it necessary to signify the typological difference between the cases of classics and of their re-make(r)s. Whereas the names of Лев Толстой, Фёдор Достоевский and Александр Пушкин underwent a more-or-less normal process of adaptation to the tastes and linguistic habits of American, British, and other species of English-language readers, Leo Tolstoи, Фёдор Михайлов, Alex(.) Pushkin, and the like are consciously designed to gain symbolic and economic capital from the outcomes of that very “normal” century-and-a-half long process of reception (intending gain such capital chiefly at home, but why not abroad as well?). Names like “Alex(.) Pushkin” reflect the double familiarisation, the double commoditisation the (names of the) classics have undergone: both from the standpoint of an average Russian, self-complacent with his or her understanding of English and with international renown of “his” or “her” classical writers; and from the standpoint of an English language publisher or reader who is accustomed to be availed of conveniently transliterated foreign names, and even with a translation of foreign-language references. (The unthinkability of a partially reciprocal case – a Russian-language scholarly book having the English/German/French/Italian titles of the “works cited” Cyrillicised – enhances the strategy of undermining receptive commoditisation and, besides, further justifies our decision to differentiate, letter for letter, between the names of the classical authors and the “names” of the re-makers.)

Introducing non-English titles has been a less controversial issue than Romanisation of names. When the title of a non-English work is first mentioned in the text, it is referred to (as recommended by the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Edition, par. 11.6) in parenthesis, italics/quotation marks and headline-style capitalisation in cases where it has a published English translation, and in parenthesis but neither in italics nor in quotation marks and in sentence-like capitalisation in cases where it has not. For example: “Преступление и наказание (Crime and Punishment)” and “‘Палата № 6’ (‘Ward no.6’)”; but “Две сестры и Кандинский (Two sisters and Kandinskii)” and ““Поэт и гражданин’ (Poet and citizen)”. With regard to cases where we have not been able to ascertain the existence of a published English translation of the work, we have signified translations as non-existent. In subsequent occurrences within the same chapter, all titles appear in English. As for the titles of films, a partially analogical and arbitrary decision was taken: the unavailability of data about a film (even) on the Internet Movie Database has been counted as evidence that the film has had no translation (as is the case with one film
which is devoted a chapter-long survey here). And the titles of periodicals are always only transliterated after their first appearance: “Современные записки (Contemporary notes)” reappears as “Sovremennye zapiski”.

Quotations from non-English (and, as expected, overwhelmingly Russian) literary works are given, as a rule, in new, made for the occasion translations. Previously published translations have been used in cases in which the editors and the author of the corresponding contribution considered them more adequate. The intention has not been to use the most apt or most recent translation, but simply to facilitate understanding and contextualisation. Quotations in the original language are provided according to the author’s judgement. In the reference lists, the transliterations of titles in languages rarer than Russian (for example, Bulgarian) are supplemented with translations in square brackets.

The chapters of this book were all but one originally written in languages other than English. The translations have been checked against their Russian and Bulgarian originals by Yordan Lyutskanov. The translations have been preliminarily edited by Dimitŭr Aleksandrov, Tatiana Rostovtseva, and En’o Stoianov (Enyo Stoyanov). About two-thirds of the manuscript has been further edited and proofread by Ginevra House and about one-third by Elena Pedigo Clark.

In some cases, references to the Russian translations of recent English-language scholarship used by the contributors to this volume and translated back from Russian to English have been retained, against common practise. In this, the editors follow the already hinted-at strategy of not diluting the ruptures in intercultural transfer.

We would like to thank the Institute for Literature of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, for granting a small sum to edit the English language of this book.

We express our gratitude to the Public Library “Stilian Chilingirov” at the town of Shumen for availing us with a gratuitous copy of the image for illustration no. 1, as well as to Mrs. Professor Ol’ga Kryukova for negotiating the inclusion of the images for illustrations 2 and 3 with the images’ right holders.¹

¹ The Preface has been written solely by Yordan Lyutskanov.
Illustration 2: Anatolii Kretov-Dazhd’, Dostoevskii, 2007; paper, mixed technique; from the graphic cycle *White Nights*
INTRODUCTION

This book contributes to an agenda initiated in 2012 in the Russian literature research group based at the Institute for Literature in the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, to try to answer a number of questions related to Russian literature and Russistic scholarship. Within this agenda, a conference exploring some of these questions was held in May 2013, the Russian-language proceedings of which formed a (thematic) issue of Toronto Slavic Quarterly, an academic journal issued by the Chair of Slavic Literatures of the University of Toronto. Translated, and when necessary revised and updated, versions of most of the articles of that volume are re-summoned here. The second part of this introduction (see below) and the conclusion to this volume (see below) re-systematise the scope of questions that were addressed by the conference and in the journal, as well as explicate expectations, theoretical premises, and (dis)contents understated then.

In other words, the present book appears alongside the context of the following list of issues, suggesting responses to some of them:

1. **Literary and literary scholarship canons, their stability.** The Russian literary canon survived. Thanks to what? At what price did it succeed? Did the professional expertise on it have similar success?

2. **Messianism and mass-culture: pressure on literature and on literary studies.** Russian classical literature is exposed to powerful interpretative pressure. Two vectors of pressure seem to us of particular importance today. Literature undergoes trial, on the one hand, on whether it can bear national-religious messianism (or resist the pressure of, presumably, the socio-cultural rearguard) and, on the other hand, whether it can endure adaptations making it comprehensible by the mass consumer (or resist the pressure of, presumably, the socio-cultural avant-garde) or approachable from the perspective of mass-culture studies. Adoption of respective attitudes by the professional experts is probably subdued in favour of at least one pragmatic goal: the survival of academic studies in Russian literature (which appear to be less stable than their subject, “high” literature).

3. **Prehistory.** Generally speaking, the outlined disposition has Soviet and pre-Soviet prehistory.
4. **State, market, (historical) self-awareness as factors of pressure.** We lean to see behind, and besides, the above-mentioned pragmatic motive some more motives whose agent is not practical reason but what might be called historical self-awareness (or self-consciousness):

4. 1. One’s perception is probably being adapted to one’s intuition – presupposition or expectation – of the past. Such an adaptation could be indicative of an attempt, or a complex, of catching-up-with one’s own past, of restoring the ties with it.

4. 2. An adaptation of perception to a presupposed present or future probably also takes place. Thus an anxiety-of-being-out-of-date complex becomes visible.

4. 3. In both cases, what could be suspected to be heteronomy is set in motion, though not by political power (at least not directly).

4. 4. In short, we can contemplate the motives of scholarly activity as rooted in a historical self-consciousness that is detached from the actual agendas of the market and state.¹

5. **Academic literary scholarship and literature in the epoch of post-aesthetics and post-art.** We might discern one more strategy for adapting Russian classical literature, and of the self-adapting of literary scholarship, asking whether we are living in the era of post-literature (by analogy with post-art and post-aesthetics, which are claimed by Hans Belting and others) and how, given that possibility, our approach should change. We have the opportunity to ask again the question: what is the power of literature to resist ideological, but also multimedia, pressure? We have the opportunity to seek those niches within which literary scholarship, having made concessions to the dominant discourses, has not surrendered but rather has adopted for its own agenda the insight and the techniques of the probable candidates for hegemony (in what is the current war “between the faculties”): applied religious studies and applied management. We have the opportunity to ask again the question: where does the unspoken (or maybe-spoken?) core which we keep from violation lie?²

6. **The (non)demand of responsibility towards/fidelity to some kind of constitutive perspective of literary scholarship.** We can inquire as to our

---

¹ Adopting the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, one can easily identify the aforementioned historical self-consciousness with the historical memory of the autonomous scholarly field itself and with the scholarly “doxa”, the under-reflected sediments of the history of the field.

² A related question could be added: are a “post-literature” and an autonomous literary field compatible?
responsibility towards some kind of core of “scholarship-ness” and “literature-ness”, is this responsibility in demand (for example, by literature, the specificity of which we claim to preserve through appropriate procedures of interpretation)?

At least three viewpoints on the adaptability of literature are worth distinguishing here: that of literary scholars and critics; that of agents of heteronomy; and that of literature itself (does it foresee its own misuse?).

7. The epistemic potential of the standpoint advocated in this text. We hope that a scholarly synthesis beyond the two main strategies of adaptation mentioned above is possible; this is a possibility worth exploring. The capacity of the position advocated in this text to mediate is also worth investigating. By sole virtue of its inner structure, it aims to be mediatory.

8. Literature, literary scholarship, and multiculturalism. The research agenda we propose could refer to subjects outside the scope of literary studies, for example to issues of multiculturalism. It seems to us that in Bulgaria specifically and in Europe generally these issues are usually viewed from a limited perspective: collective sovereign powers concede or do not concede certain rights to groups inhabiting the territory governed by those sovereign states. We have in mind cases such as the Anglophone Canadians in Quebec, or the Turkish Gastarbeiers in Germany, which are primarily related to domestic policy. Yet there exist states advocating a multi-centred world order and supporting their geopolitical interest via multiculturalist visions. Russia is one among them. Multiculturalist visions are articulated not only in geopolitics but also in “high” “impartial” culture, which adopts them for its own agendas. Russian classical literature seems to us enough important a resource to be invested in these visions, and enough powerful to support or destroy them.

9. Literature and cinema. In surveying adaptations of Russian classical literature by mass culture, we suggest a focus on cinema. Nevertheless we are aware that to preconceive cinema as profanation of “high” literature can be misleading. In some cases, cinematographic approach can be more apt for conveying “high” meaning than the original source medium (the literary work). Which of the two cultures of perception is more refined today, the literary or the cinematic? What is the scope of their mutual differentiation, and how do they differ?

10. A look from Russia and from outside Russia. Negotiating its own identity with the two above-mentioned strategies for adapting Russian classics in mind, non-Russian Russistics (Russian studies) has the opportunity to rethink the challenges to the autonomy of research in its “home” context. We pose as well the more general aim of exploring to
what extent the conditions of Russian and non-Russian literary classics are analogical, similar, or comparable with each other.

11. **Fashionable themes and themes in the aura of “high” classicality; themes that are despised.** We suggest rethinking the thematic repertoire of literary Russistics, extrapolating the opposition between “mass culture” and “messianism” on the range of autonomous self-awareness of the discipline. Both mass-literature and messianism, as addenda to the normal subject of inquiry, seem to be more fashionable than normal. What themes and thematic addenda belong then to the realm of the “high classics” of literary studies’ thematic repertoire? Are there grounds to consider that an adherence to the “high classics” (also) results from repression? Within such an approach, of course, the autonomy of research craved by us becomes an ever-evasive asset.

During the process of receiving and selecting paper proposals, the research goals of the conference were modified (to a reasonable degree) in order to meet the actual demand represented within the applications and, more importantly, to reflect certain shifts in our understanding of the issues we had suggested for discussion. Our agenda went through a process of being structured in terms of time: some things arose which seemed worth focusing at the conference, whilst other things had to be postponed for later phases of research.

Further reconsideration of our temporary goals against the context of Russian-language publication changed the structure of this book from that of the journal issue.

In the opening contribution to this volume, Radostin Rusev speaks about two general conditions of literary (artistic, cultural) autonomy, one of endangeredness by political power and other of endangeredness by the market, stating that in the 1990s the Russian literary field switched from the former to the latter mode of existence.

Hristo Manolakev redirects the inquiry towards the condition of those who produce generalisations like that above: to the not so much post-totalitarian, but rather post-national-state-affiliated, post-modern literary scholarship in its relatedness to the canon(s) of literature that is not its “own” (primarily, but not only, in the ethno-national sense).

How did the above-mentioned general shift within the field of literary production affect the main modes of producing value in this field; that is, the production of artistic works and the maintaining the status of works already produced? How did it affect the self-positioning and the engaging of allies among forefathers and elders? How do the main agents in transforming short-term capital into a long-term one, the literary scholars and the school and university teachers, perceive this shift?
Being reminded, by Rusev, of the panegyrical image of the supreme political leader as an unsurpassed master of the word, one wonders who the contemporary unsurpassed masters are: the media celebrities? Or maybe the high-flying executives? Have professional writers recaptured, remastered their faculty?

The Russian literary field is not a self-consistent field of artistic autonomy, but one imbued with specific aspiration. It bears something which can be called its own politico-theological project, one competing, and probably in a specific symbiosis, with the politico-theological project of political power. This is what is usually designated as “Russian literature-centrism” (see more on this term/phenomenon in the Conclusion). Further, there are reasons to believe that this alternative political theology of Russian literature-centrism “feels” itself better when pressed by political hegemony, and not by the market (such a view can be supported by Freidin 1993, 161–62, 164). How do the different types of contributors (producers, writers, perpetuators, scholars, and teachers) to this seemingly vanishing project act? How do they feel about the quite probable end? Are they involved in any of its similes? Does anyone from outside the literary field try to (re)adopt its vanishing project?

The literary canon is worth contemplating as a methodological issue, says Tat’yana Megrelishvili, though her contribution is more typical with its tacit presumptions and concern: the literary scholar is not at ease when s/he faces the end of literature-centrism, including the emerging dominance of previously peripheral types of readers. The Russian canon is diverse in time, and potentially dual (the more or less “official” is paralleled by an “unofficial”, “alternative” quasi-canon) and even multiple (on an individual scale) in space, as Megrelishvili demonstrates. A canon is diverse not only in the national but also in the international space, as Megrelishvili claims and Dagne Beržaitė (Berzhaite) demonstrates. And it may be not the market but a new imperial agenda, that is, a heteronomy more political than economical, that places pressure upon the canon(s) of Russian classical literature and the agents of its dissemination today, as Beržaitė’s contribution witnesses. The Russian canon is multiple within a single “period” and national literary field, and on a super-individual scale, as Glanc demonstrates; and a multiple canon in statu nascendi is indeed worth studying (an idea at which Megrelishvili also arrives).

The contributions of Irine Modebadze and Maya Gorcheva help ponder the territorial variability of a national literary canon, examining two cases of probably the most conspicuous aspect of “territoriality”: that of pertaining to a foreign culture and of considering a canon from abroad. Let it be noted that Russian literature had a formative role in the modern
literatures of Bulgaria and Georgia, a role reinforced and partially discredited in the Soviet period. These circumstances provide a more specific reason to address the cases: our curiosity/concern about how far emancipation and divergence have gone since the breakdown of the Soviet block and the USSR, that is, since the visible change within the political heteronomy and in the balance of powers between the political and the economic.

One can try to comprise the total diversity of forms through which a canon is remade, as Tat’yana Rybal’chenko does. Her overview shows that in the Russian literary field of recent decades, whatever the situation with the quite probable uniqueness of the Russian case resulting from the politico-theological aspirations of literature-centrism in Russia, the literature of the past, when not neglected, is far more wanted than rejected. One can ask what kind of philosophical sense contemporary artists make from the classical tradition, as Marina Urtmintseva does. One can investigate the very “mechanism” of adoption, focussing on a particular case and on its textual dimensions, as Ol’ga Bagdasaryan does. One can focus on the textual and extra-textual effects of a particular “body” of the multiple or plural canon and draft a map, through the “mirror” of that “body”, of the overall actual condition of a national literary field, as Nina Barkovskaya does.

The contribution of Urtmintseva is given particular attention here for its understated yet important premises and implications. She views a recent artistic project by Ivan Sergeev, definable in traditional terms as a “novel”, as an individuation project, a fundamentally being-for-itself (Sartre) enterprise, an attempt of self-creation ex nihilo, supposedly to oppose some kind of inactiveness of the Russian public consciousness. In a performative way, Ivan Sergeev overthrows what seems to be an unexpectedly enduring semantic idiom of/about Russian classical literature: “среда заела” (literally: “the [social] milieu got/ate [him]”), an expression which can be taken as the Russian classical literature cue for “being-in-itself” (probably solid and self-identical, and surely passive and inert\(^3\)).\(^4\) Sergeev has demonstrated the ontological primacy of personality,

\(^{3}\) Cf. the entry about Sartre in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Flynn 2011, Section 2, Ontology).

\(^{4}\) According to the Russian Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Humanities, the expression “среда заела” was in use, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to characterise “certain world-view attitudes based on the conviction that human life is under the determination of (the) laws of mundane existence” (entry for Среда заела, 2002). A number of examples from literary works from the third quarter of the nineteenth century are quoted in Vinogradov (1966).
or of personality-towards/with-society,\(^5\) over just society (and over the other possible candidates for such primacy: the state and the market). What can one learn from Russian classical literature today? In what kind of self-positioning in the world can one use it? For what kind of life-project: personalist, social-collectivist, business, nationalist, or religious-fundamentalist? What kind of intuitive philosophy, in the sense both of philosophical “ism” and of life-strategy and profession, can one adopt from it? Answering these questions, which are unavoidable in the (Russian) cultural field, Sergeev’s project, titled *Fathers and Sons*, answers some other more particular questions. For example, it attempts to show that the conflict between generations is indeed meaningful when it follows the axis of the in-itself-for-itself controversy, that is, when and in so far as “sons” succeed in launching a project which breaks not only with meanings associable with “fathers” and their views, but with modes of existence which come to be perceived as “solid, self-identical, passive and inert” (the attributes of Sartre’s being-in-itself summarised by Flynn, see above). From this perspective, historical evolution would be understood as neither accumulation nor transformation, but as intensification of resistance to entropy. Here Sergeev’s project seems to come too close to the life-project of Bazarov, the protagonist of the novel Sergeev apparently refers to. Yet Sergeev has probably gone beyond the disjunctive thinking of Bazarov to a kind of inclusive or dialogical parody or travesty: the pre-text is parodied/travestied for the sake of expanding its explanatory power. (This is a kind of interaction with the canon theoretically foreseen by the extensive contribution of Rybal’chenko.)

Nikolai Neichev sketches the *differentia specifica* of what is called the “Russian classical literature” of the nineteenth century within the major period of post-Renaissance culture and thus, intentionally or not, justifies, to some extent, the messianic, or the politico-theological, pretence of Russian literary culture and the messianic expectations within the literature-centric Russian culture of the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century. Panov and Ivashkin, through a little bit hermetic implementation of Hegelian dialectics and Schopenhauerian cosmology, contradict and complement Neichev, claiming the impostorship of the Russian classical literature of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike Neichev, Sergei Panov and Sergei Ivashkin conceive of literature more as a social institution (pragmatic) than as a textual instruction (semantics), and it is, probably, this that allows them to discern what may be called the ambivalence of its stance. Yet, given the statement that “the institution of art/literature in a fully developed bourgeois society may be

---

\(^5\) Compare to Sartre’s “being-for-others”.
considered as a functional equivalent of the institution of religion” (Bürger 1992, 18), the idea that Russian classical literature imitates monotheism and aspires to its place in society and its outlook could be interesting only in a number of limited (particular) senses. In the Russian case, literature claimed more than the function of religion; and there was probably not so much a succession as parallelism. For these reasons, and because of the even more acute personological awareness within “high” Russian culture, the issue of impostorship became so important that (mere) functional equivalence became hardly possible intellectually and socially. The construction of the literary-centric intellectual and social universe around what came to be called “Russian classical literature” is viewed by Panov and Ivashkin from an immanent standpoint, as an institution from within, as a process forged through changes in the protagonist’s conscience, and in the structure of the relation between the protagonist, the narrator and the author. To conclude, the typical protagonist of that literature (the impostor) can be finely counterbalanced, as Neichev has shown, by and within its artistic structure, thus contributing to a profound ambivalence.

Nikita Bystrov and Larisa Kislova explore two “high” receptions of the aforementioned (quasi-)religious ambivalence of “Russian classical literature”, shifting the focus from “what is Russian messianism?” to “who speaks about it or promotes it or embodies it and how?” Bystrov and Kislova demonstrate the operability of messianic discourse in Russian literature in two quite different (inter)personal contexts: within the close-to-prophetic solipsism of the artistic universe of a modernist writer, and in between the increasingly sceptical and ironic discourses of late twentieth century writers.

Ludmiła Łucewicz (Lyudmila Lutsevich) succeeds in demonstrating the recurrent personal conditions that make personal as well as social realisation of messianic pretence and expectations impossible, in twentieth century Russia as well as in contemporary Russia; thus unpremeditatedly offering an explanation for the trajectory of parody-and-travesty which the aforementioned discourse seems to have made between the cases studied by Bystrov and Kislova.

Aleksandr Medvedev traces the landmarks of an alternative Russian intellectual tradition, which can be designated as one of messianic, or politico-theological, self-containment and which, like the mainstream

---

6 See early hypothesising on both issues in (Miljukov 1896–1903, Vol. 2: 185–87; 161, 358–365); a recent one is available in (Freidin 1993, 157; 153–54).

7 The semantic complexity of “personality” within Russian culture grew (Markov 2008, par. 2) while a one-sided focus on individuality (with disregard to autonomy and identity) persisted throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Plotnikov 2008).
tradition, can be derived from the specificities of nineteenth century Russian classical literature, as outlined by Neichev.

The sober (and sobering) accounts of Łuciewicz and Medvedev give way to examining the two likely main conditions for (or against) the consistency of what can be called the Russian project of literary, artistic and cultural autonomy. One of these conditions stems from the personal – in the sense not of “private” but of personal proper or personological – predicament and awareness of the agent of literary/artistic/cultural (re)production. The other stems from the collective capability of the agents of such (re)production, of their launching and maintaining self-restrained politico-theological projects that contend with both tendencies to self-exaltation on behalf of autonomy and oppressive inclinations on behalf of heteronomy; and, moreover, projects that contest the more influential (for the given period or place) heteronomy. These two issues are approached, through temporal estrangement, by Irina Belyakova and Iordan Lyutskanov.

Belyakova and Lyutskanov pay attention to such aspect of (Russian) literature-centrism as its self-celebratory stance. Lyutskanov demonstrates the compatibility of this stance with the vision of a messianic Russian not nation but empire. Does this self-celebratory stance persist in the era of vanishing literature-centrism? Does it contribute to (re)constructing the historical continuity of high Russian culture? The contribution of Elena Pedigo Clark suggests answers to these questions, driving, besides, the collective investigation carried on in this volume to a kind of an epistemic verge, to be passed through in subsequent research: then we shall be inquiring not “Can we explain what we feel about and think of Russia?” but “What does Russia feel about and think of us?” Perhaps overinterpreting the subject matter analysed by Clark, but standing on her shoulders, we are tempted to question whether the image of Raivo, the Finnish writer working on a book about the Russian national hunt, and a protagonist of Aleksandr Rogozhkin’s 1995 film, can emblematise each of us, the contributors to this volume. Besides, the contribution of Clark reminds us of the relational nature of a collective cultural identity, of the latter’s dependency on assigning identities to one’s geo-cultural neighbours. To conclude with this part of the introduction, one is stimulated to speculate how the landmarks of national cultural identity that are distinguishable in Rogozhkin’s films of the 1990s are related to those distinguished by Tatyana Kruglova in Vladimir Bortko’s TV series of the 2000s.

As Aleksandër Panov shows, a screen-adaptation of a classical literary work had predicted the general social shift which determined the particular
shift in the literary/artistic/cultural field discussed by Rusev at the beginning of the book. The shrewdness of insight and the power to transmit it nationwide made that film inconvenient, instinctively unwanted by the heteronomy. In the 1980s, Russia still had its “dangerous texts”\(^8\), and one of them was cinema. The question is open as to whether this “dangerousness” passed from literature to cinema or just vanished in the post-Soviet period; this question is touched upon by Kruglova in the concluding contribution for this part of the book. What is important is probably the capacity of cinematic texts to forge a new version of the national idea that is in demand in Russia now, or at least to attract substantial attention to its own (mis)guided attempts to forge it (again an issue touched upon by Kruglova). The stakes (and, correspondingly, the chance of re-establishing the institution of a “dangerous text”) could rise or fall. If one believes Kruglova that Russia has entered, in the 2000s, a new “Culture 2” (in the sense of Vladimir Papernyi) period, than the stakes are likely to rise.

The proto- or quasi-dominant position of cinematographic (or, more widely, of audio-visual) discourse within the field of the arts manifests the power of a third factor of heteronomy with regard to literature (besides market and politics) but, unlike the former two, it does not seem so offensive to literary autonomy. Firstly, this discourse’s quasi-dominance within the field of arts is new and should probably be viewed as the *modus vivendi* of an autonomy that is younger than the literary, not only in terms of chronology, as Liliya Nemchenko’s contribution shows and hints at. Secondly, this dominance is not detrimental to high culture of artistic (re)production and perception, as Ol’ga Cherkezova’s analysis of an adaptation of a classical novel shows. Thirdly, cinema can be helpful in perpetuating certain idiosyncrasies of Russian literary culture, as Anna Men’shchikova’s analysis of a biographical film about Akhmatova demonstrates. However, fourthly, it can achieve this only in its high segments, being unable to help the agents of film production and consumption avoid the imperatives of the market heteronomy elsewhere, as Ol’ga Kryukova’s survey of the biographical myth of Dostoevskii in contemporary media shows. Finally, it is dubious whether cinematographic transpositions of the potential personalism of the Russian literary culture (cf. Men’shchikova, Kryukova) and of the self-restrained version of its messianism (cf. Kruglova) have enough social and cultural power to perpetuate artistic autonomy in contemporary Russia.

A fourth, and probably least powerful, factor of heteronomy for the literary field can be indicated, and, like cinema, it is intra-cultural (that is,\(^8\) A conceptualisation of Kathleen Parthé, quoted in this book by Kruglova.)
it can be located neither in the economic nor in the political field). This factor is the power of the (constitutively marginal) producers and consumers of literary value, such as literary critics, scholars, and teachers. Deliberating their unequivocal impact offers a chance for self-reflection. We suggest that the contributions of Mariya Litovskaya and Dmitrii Dolgushin (but also that of Manolakev, which partly introduces them) represent a good starting point, given that market and political theology induce and induct the choices of scholars no less than those of writers.

References


PART I

THE AUTONOMY OF THE LITERARY FIELD IN RUSSIA AND THE SCHOLARLY NEED OF CANON, THEN AND NOW
In different times and eras, Russian writers and Russian literature have repeatedly been subjected to severe trials, faced with open or hidden challenges, and put under various kinds of pressure.

In the conditions of a single-party regime – which, according to the definition offered by the political scientist Raymond Aron in his analysis on the origin of the totalitarian phenomenon, is to be found in its “purest and most complete form” (1993, 30) in the Soviet Union – writers and literature are subordinate to ideology. Totalitarian regimes are characterised by the monopoly of a single party over legal political activity; this party alone has the right to conduct political activity, it dominates the state and imposes its ideology on everyone through the state institutions; it has monopolised the right to use the means of coercion, publicity, and propaganda (ibid. 1993, 116). Literature, as well as the other arts, is destined to become a strictly controlled subordinate element of the propaganda apparatus that guards the political system and power. This is exactly what happened to a literature of such traditions and actual standing as Russian literature in the Soviet state when power was monopolised by the Bolshevik Party.

According to the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky, the linguistic norms which were prescribed by the Soviet state transformed the entire population into one mass of readers. Hence, the importance of writers and literature in Soviet society rose dramatically. The Bolshevik regime, which

* Slavic mythological figures personifying good luck and fortune (Dolya), and ill-fortune (Nedolya).