

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

VYACHESLAV IVANOV AND THE RUSSIAN MESSIANISM

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The ontological status of Russia and its historic role are, for Vyacheslav Ivanov, to a great extent connected with the idea of “monanthropism”; that is, with the universality, the pan-humanity of the individual Being. According to Sergei Averintsev, “this idea defined, coloured, and impregnated [...] the whole of Vyacheslav Ivanov’s historical, cultural, and social perception” (Averincev 2002, 65). Indeed, in a number of the poet’s works, the idea is being put forward that the experience of the whole of mankind is contained in the life experience of each man; that in every individual’s face, the “inner faces” (*лики*) of all past and present generations are reflected. This motive can be considered as the main one, for instance, in the poem “Деревья” (The trees¹):

To waters bend,
And you will come to see your twins alive,
Your every face, and rather yours than that
You shamefully misfit, and can’t forgive,
And kinsmen’s row will wait for you and stand,
And by oblivion you shall none aggrieve.

(Original:

Склонись у вод –
И двойников живых своих увидишь:
Твой – каждый лик, и больше твой, чем тот,
Что ты, стыдясь, несешь и ненавидишь.
И родичей по духу встретишь род,
И никого забвеньем не обидишь. (Ivanov 1979, III, 535²)

¹ All translations from Vyacheslav Ivanov in this chapter are by Vladislav Bortnikov.

² This edition is cited throughout with Roman numerals showing the volume, and with the Arabic ones for the page.

Literally: “Lean forward to the waters, / and you will see your twins alive: / every face [of theirs] is yours, and more yours than the one / you, being ashamed, have and hate. / And you will meet a kin of your kinsmen for spirit, / and you will none [of them] offend by oblivion”.)

The same we find in the *melopoeia* (мелопея)³ *Человек* (Man):

[...] in newly transformed church
 There appeared a myriad of Fathers,
 The peoples' hive, like seiners full of catch.
 And in this host I soon discerned the others,
 Who erewhile fellows were of my investment,
 And who erstwhile had shone in sunny vestment.

(Original:

[...] в преображеньи новом
 Не храм предстал, но мириад родных,
 Людской собор, как невод, полный ловом.
 И в сонме лиц я различал иных,
 Что ближними моими были прежде,
 И все сияли в солнечной одежде (III, 240).

Literally: “[...] [i]n the new transformation / there appeared not a temple, but a myriad of forefathers, / the council of people, like a [fisherman’s] seine full of catch. / And in the host of faces I was discerning those certain [figures] / who were my fellows before, / and all of them were shining in the sunniest clothes”.)

According to Ivanov, monanthropism is a general principle of world culture (especially of culture in the epoch of the “crisis of humanism”). It is not only a principle, but also “a dogma of the newest *epiphany of the things invisible*” (III, 379⁴), accepted not abstractly, but as a religious truth. “Man is one” (ibid.), or “we all are an/the integral Adam” (ibid.) – these are the most straightforward formulae of the “dogma” given.

Russia, being principally anchored in a monanthropical conception of the world, is always – intentionally or otherwise – guided by this principle, which makes it possible to apprehend a certain focus of the whole world of

³ Corresponding to the Ancient Greek *μελοποιΐα*, meaning “lyric poem”, the word was employed by Ivanov as a genre designator (Ed.).

⁴ The italics in this and subsequent quotations are mine (N.B.).

culture⁵ or, to be more precise, to perceive an invisible (as it is not yet drawn) “axis” of Christian civilisation running through her. The Russians, like the Slavs in general,

have a gift to gain their personal *Ego* whole with respect to the whole, and there is the first sprout of the upcoming all-human conscience greening in their hearts, of the conscience that will be the manifestation of the integral *Ego*, beheld as a real face. (IV, 669–670; “Духовный лик славянства” (The spiritual face of the Slavdom))

In these statements (which are typical of Ivanov), one can be certain to find the influence of the Slavophil tradition to which he, in general and on the whole, was close. However, the Slavophil theories are not their only source. The poet does not set the limits of Orthodoxy over the Slav-Russian *sobornost*’ (he frequently uses this term, translatable as “absolute councilarity”, “togetherness”, “symphony”, et cetera). On the contrary, the “council conscience” for him means an all-Christian conscience, that is, at least that of Orthodoxy together with that of Catholicism. In one of his poems he names St. Vyacheslav (Wenceslas), his celestial protector and a “founder” of the Slavonic *sobornost*’, an “illuminator of [the] two Churches”. Having become aware, through his ecumenical experience, of the differences between these two denominations, he is, however, sure that they organically complete each other and co-exist in a real, though not quite obvious, union. This idea is given expression in the poem “Милы сретенские свечи” (Nice are nights on Candlemas) (*Римский дневник 1944 года* (Roman diary of 1944)):

Where Latin words are murmured,
One does not believe so griefly,
As in homeland a hermit,
But more facilely, more meekly.

Here one cannot put a cross on
So humble and complying,
For God, as lamps in blossom,
As our candles East are lighting⁶.

⁵ In the mental universe of Ivanov, the whole world of culture tends to be tacitly identified with the world of *Christian* culture and its pagan predecessors and neighbours from the ancient Mediterranean and post-ancient Europe (Ed.).

⁶ Discussing this poem, Sergei Averintsev notices that the word *беспечней* (“not so full of grief”) “is not only a rhyme to *человечней* (‘more meekly’), but also something like an occasional synonym to it” (Averincev 2002, 110). One can

(Original:

Где бормочут по-латыни,
 Как-то верится беспечней,
 Чем в скитах родной святыни,
 Простодушней, человечней.

Здесь креста поднять на плечи
 Так покорно не сумеют,
 Как пред Богом наши свечи
 На Востоке пламенеют. (III, 591)

Literally: “Where they murmur in Latin, / one believes more carefreely, / than in our native hermitages, / more simple-heartedly, more manly. / There to raise the cross / so humbly they are not able, / as for God our candles / are flaming at the East”.)

To summarise, the concept of *sobornost*’ was considerably extended and modernised by Ivanov, in comparison to its understanding by the classics of Slavophilism.

However, the “ecumenical” element in Ivanov’s idea does not define it completely. In comparing the generic peculiarities of the Slavonic and Romance-Germanic peoples, Ivanov relies on the operation of another dichotomy: “Dionysism vs. Apollonism”, which is for him probably the underlying model of any notable contradiction or conflict on earth. According to the article “The spiritual face of the Slavdom”,

our Romance-Germanic brethren have predominantly built their spiritual and sensual existence upon the Apollonian idea, – and that is why they are subjects of a formation tying the rebellious forces of the fertile life chaos,

whereas the Slavs “from time immemorial were the fairest servers of Dionysius” (IV, 667). As a result, the West European world is more committed to “integration, measure, formation, order, equilibrium”, and the “self-sufficient stability of completed forms”, whereas the Slavonic temperament is more attuned to the “enthusiastic dissolution of a mind in the superpersonal universal Mind, in the personified whole of the universal existence” (IV, 667). From the standpoint of this understanding of Slavdom, Ivanov’s supposition that the cult of Dionysius, brought to

remember that in a letter to Charles Du Bos Ivanov confessed that, being an Orthodox only, he felt “something like dissatisfaction”, as if being “deprived of the other half of the enlivening thesaurus of sanctity and grace”, breathing, “like a consumptive, with one lung only” (III, 429).

Ancient Greece from Thrace, could be “an indigenous cult of the Balkan Slavs” (IV, 168), is especially notable.

This Dionysism is understood by Vyacheslav Ivanov as an element of a freedom inaccessible to the West, as an impulse persistent in the Slavonic soul to overcome any forms of earthly existence. This primarily refers to those forms which are set by the force of the immanent “intellectuality” of history, so much respected by the Europeans:

We are akin to the freedom,
It is greed, for you unknown:
You make eras in years drown,
And your tombs in storms are thrown,
Names anonymously ridden. (I, 627)

(Original:

В нас заложена алчба
Вам неведомой свободы:
Ваши веки – только годы,
Где заносят непогоды
Безымянные гроба.

Literally: “There is a greed given to us, / [a greed for] freedom, unknown to you: / your centuries are only years, / where the storms are [choking up/ writing down/ depositing] / unnamed tombs”.)

Dionysism, however, lies beyond the disdain for various kinds of “limits” (cf.: “Lack of bounds – this is ours! / Bounds are yours, and bounds clash!”). Here, anarchy (безначалие), rebelliousness, and the struggle against God are always positioned “in front of the face of God”. In other words, Dionysism means refutation of any worldly order, combined with a total openness to the transcendental. Both dispositions are reflected in the Slavs, and to equal degrees. For all that, neglecting order – including moral order – is often regarded by Ivanov as an act of struggle against God. The peculiar irrational “logic” of Dionysism demands a shift from this neglect to another – opposite – existential position. In this respect, one of the sections of the *Интеллектуальный дневник 1888–1889 гг.* (Intellectual diary of 1888–1889) is telling: the poet speaks about Dostoevskii’s novel *Братья Карамазовы* (*The Brothers Karamazov*) as if explicating the structural model of such a shift, or transformative transition:

[The novel’s] world is the world of the elementary forces caught in an awful struggle, it is the world where Ormuzd and Ahriman, the Spirit and

the Body, are struggling, but *where the purest love of the Christian is born out of the wildest love of the violator*". (Ivanov 1999, 15)

There is one more moment connected with Dionysism which Ivanov added to the definition of *sobornost*: a sense that might be translated as tragediousness. Broadly speaking, the Dionysian and the tragic forms of thinking are indivisible. Tragedy is the only possible form of realising the Dionysian impulse. In his work *Дионис и прадионисийство* (Dionysius and pre-Dionysianism) (1923) Ivanov names Dionysius "the God of the divided universe" and "the [personal] causer of the individual form of being". He adds thereby that Dionysius "has nothing in common with the instinct of self-protection displayed by the self-concentrated individual form of existence"; as far as this form is concerned, Dionysius is "the inner stimulus of self-wasting as re-uniting with the whole" (Ivanov 1994, 168). This "self-wasting" is already in progress by sole virtue of the fact that man dares to act according to his or her own will, independent from that of the gods, and this is why his or her actions are an act of struggle-against-God. Exhaustively precise metonymical definitions of such an act are found in the tragedy *Тантал* (Tantalus). Ixion, weltering in a flaming wheel, says: "I'm moving, Tantale!", and Sisyphus, rolling a stone to the top of the mountain, exclaims: "It is I who moves!" (II, 72). One can see the same in one of the poems from the book *Прозрачность* (Transparency), "Слоки" (Slokes):

The fire is burning; moving, Forces move;
The will is willing – there is the Rite. (I, 743)

(Original:

Горит огонь; и, движась, движет сила;
И волит воля; и где воля – действие.

Literally: "The fire is burning; and, moving, the force moves; / and the will is willing; and where is the will – there is an/the act".)

Here, the "act" becomes connected with the ideas of "priest" and "sacrifice" (which is important for the understanding of the essence of Dionysianism):

Be "Priest" bespoken and betoken as "Victim."
The Motion, Ecce's Victim. Burnt. Be silent.

(Original:

“Жрец” нарекись и знаменуйся “Жертва”.
Се, действо – жертва. Все горит. Безмолствуй.

Literally: “‘Sacrificer’ be called/ call yourself and be(come) the symbol of ‘Sacrifice’. / Here, an act is sacrifice. Everything burns. Keep silent”.)

“The limit of the self-wasting is the death of the (self-)detached form of embodied existence” (Ivanov 1994, 168); however, it is a death which is not final, but turns into “palingenesis” – into the soul coming back to life through sacrificial renovation.

It is this mythopoetical construction that was re-projected by Ivanov on the idea of Slavo-Russian (now more Russian than all-Slavonic) *sobornost*. He recognised the real “prophet” of the latter (or, to be more precise, the forerunner of the Dionysically-aware way to it) in Dostoevskii. If we are systematic regarding the leading motives of Ivanov’s texts devoted to this writer (among which the most essential are the essays “Достоевский и роман-трагедия” (Dostoevskii and the novel-tragedy), 1911, “Лик и личины России” (The face and masks of Russia), 1917, and the book *Достоевский. Трагедия – миф – мистика* (*Freedom and the Tragic Life: A Study in Dostoevsky*), 1932), these motives are as follows:

- a) Dostoevskii’s character is man in his pride, in his thrust for “original” self-assertion, rebelling against the Mother-Earth and against God; in fact, he is a typical tragic hero, driven by the principle *Ego sum*.
- b) This character, having decided to commit a crime, is spiritually dead – it does not matter whether he is aware of his guilt or not; “the term of guilt”, as Vyacheslav Ivanov puts it, “cannot be proved but by the mystic reality. Otherwise, the guilt ceases to be tragic guilt or even guilt at all” (IV, 425).
- c) The character’s suffering opens for him the perspective of renaissance, of Dionysian “palingenesis”, and he either cannot see and accept it, as, for example, Stavrogin, or may make an attempt to self-assert within it, as Raskolnikov or Dmitrii Karamazov; in the latter case the Dionysian choice is finished in the way in which it must finish, according to its immanent “logic”.

Therefore, Dostoevskii’s novel is a “novel-tragedy”, which reconstructs the ontologically pure model of human existence that was long ago explicated in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Andrei

Shishkin is right in noting that “Ivanov writes of Dostoevskii as of an all-European writer who turns back to Antiquity” (Šiškin 2013).

But what is important here is the following. Ivanov perceives both the “myth” and the “mystique” of Dostoevskii not only as a metaphysical perishing and recovery of the “Dionysus-possessed” criminal, but also as a metaphysical analogue of the historical fate of Russia – and this is even more important for Ivanov. In this regard, the following idea, expressed in the article “Dostoevskii and the novel-tragedy”, is worth noting. Pondering on the fact that Dostoevskii’s man, in his criminal “self-will”, “loses his soul, detaches from himself the inner face of his soul, and forgets his name”, but afterwards recovers it, Ivanov says:

Dostoevskii managed to embody, to the extent maximally possible for art, in the images of the inner renaissance of the personality, this soul-recovering process, *on the confirmation and the anticipation of which the pure form of Dionysian religion had been based and which had become the core of the mystical moral preaching in Christianity.* (IV, 414)

It turns out that the mystique of Dionysism and the mystique of Christianity coincide, and it is the deepest basis of the Dionysian religion that is crucially important for Christianity. Dostoevskii, without knowing anything about Dionysism, felt this better than anybody else. And it was in this that he saw the mission of Russia: to manifest to all the peoples an image of a Christian-and-Dionysian spiritual transformation – an image truly tragedious and sacramental.

According to Ivanov,

the “originally Russian idea” proclaimed by Dostoevskii – the idea of transforming the whole of our social and state union into a church – *is the only creative way open to us*” (IV, 465).

It is remarkable that such an idea is born in our hearts “under the Providence which had put it in the darkest tomb”, “in the Ariman’s darkness” (IV, 472), where it is like a grain that will grow only after having died (in this way, one of the basic axioms of the Gospel is represented as a “re-codification” of the principle of the Dionysian tragedy). Following this idea, several pages further on, Ivanov’s text comes to the Russian *sobornost*’, “which has nothing else with which to defeat the world but the only Name and the only Face” (IV, 481).

In the article “О существе трагедии” (On the essence of tragedy), Ivanov reminded his readers that the number of Dionysius had been always the dyad – the symbol of “division in unity” and “the source of any

multiplicity” (II, 191). The dyad is opposed to Apollo’s monad, “as the male is opposed to the female”:

the woman remained the main communicator of the deepest idea of tragedy, because originally Dionysius’ rite was a woman’s affair, an exposition of her intimate depths and unuttered psychic enigmas. (II, 197)

The tragic heroine was originally a “menade” (a bacchante, consumed with Dionysian frenzy); in her soul the two counteracting forces are struggling: she “loves, and fiercely strives against the lover’s courtship; loves, and kills” (II, 198). In other words, a menade is directed towards the sacrificial coitus with the god, moved by love for him, yet simultaneously opposes this, instinctively protecting her imaginary separateness. These forces cannot be reconciled in any final “synthesis”, and that is why “the end of the tragedy which is appealed for is death; its denouement is a murder” (II, 198). But it is death (strictly ritual in the rite, equal to “devastation” and “exhaustion” of the soul) that, with the purifying influence of the god,

affirms [...] the woman’s integrity, [...] the woman as the most ancient sacrificer, the woman’s element as the element of the Mother-Earth, Earth-cradle and Earth-tomb. (Ibid.)

In general, Dostoevskii’s Russia, as seen by Vyacheslav Ivanov, is also a “menade” of some sort, one embodied in the image of each of the heroes who strive against God. She loves God and misses Him, but at the same time she submits to the seduction of the egoistic separation, atomisation, “self-wasting”. She rebels against the “original laws of Mother-Earth” (laws that are her own, but still not perceived as such), Mother-Earth sending to her “Furies of the psychic terror” (IV, 533) and making her repent, thus the possibility of a new birth being incited. The essence of this birth is the sacrificial union with the Earth (the integration and shaping of the “female element”, now directed not to its passions, but to the image of the celestial Groom); and the form of this birth being the *sobornost’* that lives by but “the only Name” and “the only Face”.

To conclude, for Vyacheslav Ivanov, *sobornost’* is all-Slavonic in its ideal essence. (It is interesting that in the article “The face and masks of Russia” the poet supports Dostoevskii’s idea of the necessity to re-establish the capital of the Slavonic and all-Christian world in Царьград (Tsar’grad) (see IV, 469), which is the Bulgarian/ Russian/ Serbian name for Constantinople; this motive gives a non-vivid yet distinct messianic shade to the whole conception.) Besides, *sobornost’*-after-Ivanov is

ecumenical, has a Dionysian origin, and is born from tragedy, understood as a mystery of the spiritual transformation of man.

Ivanov's vision is a brilliant example of a modernist synthesis, which intertwines components that are completely different – Christian *sobornost'* and ancient Dionysism, the Gospels and ancient Greek tragedy, the ancient hero struggling with the gods and the theorist of “self-will” from Dostoevskii's novels. As Pamela Davidson correctly noted, Ivanov's interpretation of the cult of Dionysus

eventually led to the creation of a new syncretic version of the Russian idea, in which the mystic teachings of Christian thinkers such as Fedor Dostoevskii, Aleksei Khomyakov, Vladimir Solov'ev were grafted onto the fertile soil of classical antiquity, viewed through the prism of Dionysus in his tragic, cathartic aspect. (Davidson 2006, 16)

The messianic (actual for all Christian cultures, even if not necessarily salvational) significance of monanthropism as a modification of *sobornost'*, according to Ivanov, is probably concentrated not only in the fact that it might represent an example of the genuinely Christian togetherness, but also in its capacity to recover the memory of some “pre-source” of human existence, of the primary mystery of struggle against the gods, crime and transfiguration, and to include it in the register of immediate experience.

The notion (or, to be more precise, the philosophic and poetic symbol) of Memory has a key meaning in this context. As a rule, Ivanov marks with it the ontologically self-sufficient, hidden “in the perdition of perditions, inaccessible for us” (III, 410) element of successiveness and consent in the human world. By means of that element

the Supernatural Providence teaches mankind to convert the means of universal separation – Space, Time, Inertial Matter – into a means of union and harmony, and, therefore, to realise God's pre-eternal intention to create an ideal creature. (IV, 431)

Memory is immanent to consciousness; that is why it might be called its “source”. If we understand this source not in a purely metaphoric, but rather in a concrete-historical sense, then it is the (classical) antiquity, or, rather, its tragic archetypes, that the Memory appears to be closely connected with.

Thus, in the notion of a special trans-historical role of Russia, the (as it seemed) necessary and inevitable emphasis on ethnic-confessional exclusiveness is relegated to the background, whereas Dostoevskii's well-

known idea of the “all-humanity” of the Russian soul is further (though somewhat unexpectedly) deepened.

(Translated from Russian by Vladislav Bortnikov)

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