

The Role of Literary Education in Semiotics of Professional Behaviour: A Socio-cultural Study of Russian Students

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to trace cultural continuity between generations in the Russian context by studying a correlation between the cultural background of Russian students, acquired especially through their literary education, and their semiotics of behaviour, in particular their ethical choices within a business environment. To this end, the results of a recent sociological study will be analyzed. One aspect of the study was to uncover the cultural background of the respondents through their literary preferences, resulting from the role of literary education in their life, so that it can be then juxtaposed to their ethical choices in the hypothetical business context. We aim to test our conjecture that, despite the sweeping process of globalization, the national cultural and moral values, which in Russia can be traced back to Metropolitan Hilarion in the 11th century and are firmly imprinted in the Russian literary heritage, continue to live on and, to a large extent, shape the outlook at life of Russian youth. As is well known, Hilarion was one of the first to proclaim that our inner law is prevalent over the external law, established by the state. This philosophical heritage is transmitted, in particular, via classical Russian literature, as the analysis of the results of the sociological survey demonstrates. It thus highlights the importance of literary education in Russia, and stresses the unique features of Russian thought, which ultimately puts mercy above justice.

Keywords: cultural continuity, literary education, moral values, Russia's students, sociological survey, classical Russian literature, economics and culture, law, justice, mercy

I. INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that the processes of globalization have deeply affected Russia, and, for that matter, the rest of the world. Almost thirty years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet empire. During this time, Russia has radically changed its political and economic orientation, which could not leave the cultural sphere unaffected. The era has changed, and a new generation has grown up: much more technological, free and open to the world. It would seem that this is a generation of other values, significantly more oriented towards the world of capitalism and Western democracies. However, the struggle between the old and the new, between the "conservative" and "progressive", traditional and innovative, pertaining to either Slavophiles or Westernisers, did not disappear; if anything, it has escalated. This struggle in the form of ongoing intense debate can be observed in all areas of the country's

cultural, social, political and economic life. One can observe it in the scientific literature as well, which describes the current situation and the processes taking place in society.

For example, cultural scientist and philosopher Igor Yakovenko believes that Russia is leaving the historical scene, since traditional Russian culture is "uncompetitive and therefore needs to be transformed to a more competitive culture" [1]. The latter is, obviously, the culture of Western countries, which is being increasingly associated with commerce, with a market economy, adopted in Russia too since the collapse of the Soviet system. The new realities of Russian life deny and, ultimately, cancel old values. "The absolute imperative of survival has entered into an insoluble conflict with the imperative of fidelity to innate culture, which the outgoing culture translates into the psyche of its carriers" [2], notes Yakovenko. Indeed, sociological studies show that the values of youth, in comparison with the older generation, are

more oriented towards Western liberal values. The attitudes and aspirations of young people, especially students, are changing towards greater individualism and rationalism, characteristic of Western culture, as well as hedonism. As a result, as many authors note, there is a stratification of young people into two groups: those who are closer to Western values and those who are inclined to traditionalism (see on this, for instance, [3], [4], and [5]).

And yet, to a large extent, cultural continuity continues to persist, since the deepest values that guide the life of society are changing extremely slowly and extremely reluctantly. In this paper, we want to show how, despite the very significant impact of globalization and the value reorientation towards the West which is undoubtedly taking place, Russian students nevertheless continue to inherit this continuity in many respects. We will demonstrate this phenomenon based on the results of our sociological research, the purpose of which was to identify a correlation between cultural, especially literary, heritage on the one hand, and the economic behaviour of respondents and their business ethics, on the other. This, in turn, leads to a continuing discussion of the role of literary education and the continuity of moral values in contemporary Russia.

II. CULTURE AND ECONOMICS

First of all, let us emphasize the inextricable and very important connection between culture and economics, which is becoming more and more obvious in the modern world. Thus, Richard Lewis points out in his works that instead of theories of economic and genetic determinism that have turned out to be untenable, one should talk about cultural determinism [6]. In Russia, at the dawn of perestroika, the writer and thinker Fazil Iskander persistently stressed that the mistake of Marxism (which, he feared, post-Soviet Russia might repeat) was the idea that “economics is the basis, and the rest is the super-structure. The state that lives by this law is doomed, it already carries the larva of death in itself. That’s why the Soviet state perished” [7]. According to Iskander, “what is most important in a person is central to human society and the state as well”, and “the most important thing in man is conscience”. At the same time, he argued that, paradoxically, “a state where economics is the basis is, first of all, doomed to die economically”, because “in such a state economics is run not by professional economists, but by ideologists from economics” [8].

A number of works studying the relationship between culture and economics indicate that attempts to build an economically successful state without taking into account social factors and cultural traditions – in other words, without taking into account the national mentality – are doomed to failure. And if by an

economic person – homo economicus – we mean a person of rational economic behaviour, that is, able to make informed decisions, calculating options and always striving for the greatest profit, then the question asked by some authors: “How representative is homo economicus in Russia?”, certainly seems appropriate [9].

Indeed, as Russian philosophers of the Silver Age tried to prove, Russian people are traditionally oriented more to the common good than to acquiring personal wealth – a striving which they see as almost shameful. It seems paradoxical that the Soviet power, having largely destroyed both the moral and social foundations of the old Russia, nevertheless exploited and developed precisely this imperative that the public is above the personal, and the thirst for profit and personal wealth is a shameful characteristic of the immoral class of the bourgeoisie. And although few people took the political doctrines of socialism seriously, especially in the late Soviet era, the orientation toward the shame of being wealthy and the nobility of self-sacrifice was deeply rooted in people’s minds – precisely because it was based on the fundamental features of Russian mentality.

Some Russian economists have developed this idea – about the orientation of Russian cultural consciousness towards the common good, which stands in the system of values much higher than personal wealth acquisition and profit increase – applying it to economics as a whole. For them, it was precisely the emphasis on the social and moral aspects of economic development that was important, and they focused on examples of such a worldview in a global context. So the famous Russian economist Dmitry Lvov relies on the thoughts of Friedrich List, a German economist and publicist of the 19th century, who argued that “there is no world of wealth! The concept of the world can only be spiritual or alive... How can we talk about the world of minerals, for example? Eliminate the spiritual basis and everything that is called “wealth” will become a lifeless substance. Remember what happened to the treasures of Carthage and Tir, to the wealth of Venice palaces when the spirit had gone from these heaps of stone?” [10].

Economists who think in this way take into account the inextricable link between economics and culture in their proposals for economic development. They also argue that the Russian reforms of the 1990s largely failed precisely because they did not take into account this connection between economics and the spiritual characteristics of the nation, its mentality and cultural traditions [11]. Examples of other countries can also teach us how important it is to take into account the existing national culture. For example, in Italy in the 1970s, attempts were made to carry out economic reforms throughout the country according to a single model, but as a result, the difference in development

between the North and the South turned out to be very significant, precisely due to different local cultures inherited from earlier times [12].

Returning to the peculiarities of the Russian tradition, it should be noted that here the idea of an “economic person” has always been the subject of debate and has been questioned not only in the academic environment, but also far beyond. It must be remembered that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, not only Russian political economy, but also national economic science as a whole, was characterized by universalism in the approach to the analysis of economic phenomena, by a social orientation, and by the shift from purely economic research to the field of philosophy. This can be clearly seen in the works of the famous economist, philosopher and religious thinker of that time Sergiy Bulgakov, who strongly criticized the concept of “*homo economicus*”. It was important for Bulgakov to reconcile political economy with the ethical principles of Christianity. He interpreted the concept of “economic man” in the most negative way, calling the latter a “counting line”, a person who “does not eat, does not sleep, but adds up interests, striving for the greatest profit at the lowest cost” [13]. A further example of this way of thinking is another famous hero of the Silver Age – the philosopher Vasily Rozanov – in whom the ideas of hoarding aroused indignation, reaching the complete denial of economic progress as such. Thus he declared a “normal” life to be the life “of poverty and labour”, “with prayer, with heroism and not even thinking of becoming rich”! [14]¹

As we have argued elsewhere (see, for example, [15]), such well-known areas of Russian social thought of the mid-19th century as Westernism and Slavophilism, which still permeate the most diverse aspects of Russian culture, have even penetrated into economic thinking. The struggle between them manifests itself in two currents of modern economic science that can conditionally be called economic liberalism and economic conservatism. At the same time, it is important to understand that the debate between modern Slavophiles and Westernisers (in particular, in the economic field) is essentially a discussion about fundamental life values.

Of particular interest here is the fact that, despite the sometimes polar points of view, a certain tendency can

¹ It would be appropriate to recall here that, on the whole, the idea of progress as it evolved in Western culture has been traditionally alien to the Russian cultural consciousness: as far back as ancient Russia, public feeling was not for constructing the future, but for looking back to the past – in the attempts to equal the ancestors, “to be like the early princes”. This orientation toward cultural continuity, which was subsequently interrupted several times (in particular, by the Soviet regime with its artificial dream of a brighter future), nevertheless, every time stubbornly returns to the field of historical memory of the people.

be traced, which is in some way characteristic not only of the Slavophiles, but also of Westernisers – an orientation toward the inner world of man rather than towards legality. Fazil Iskander expressed this peculiarity very succinctly, saying that “a Russian person is strong in his ethical striving, but weak in obeying the ethical laws. A mighty ethical striving perhaps results from a horror of encountering ethical lawlessness. What are the results of all this? Great literature and feeble statehood” [16]. We find the sources of such a worldview in the ideas of the first Russian Metropolitan Hilarion of the 11th century. He taught that law is only a shadow of the truth rather than truth itself, since it was established by state power rather than divine power, and hence it only has judicial, not moral content [17]. Nine centuries later, the philosopher Ivan Il’in argued similarly that “law is an external order of life. However, if this external order is detached from the inner states of human spirit, if it is not created and accepted by them or does not grow from their maturity and their autonomy, then it degenerates, withers, abases a human being, and, when disintegrating, it destroys spiritual life” [18].

III. RUSSIAN LITERATURE AS A ROOT OF THE INNER LAW

Where do these basic attitudes come from, how are fundamental cultural values transmitted? By and large, this happens through classical Russian literature, which is an alphabet of sorts of Russian mentality. In the Russian context, it was literary discourse that traditionally absorbed all the others, including politics, economics, and philosophy (so the fact that Fazil Iskander combined literature and statehood in the quote above is not accidental).

Russian literature is traditionally considered to be one of the most conscience-oriented in the world. Its distinguishing feature is its striving for the abyss, for eternal questions (called ‘cursed’ in Russian culture), which have no solution, but penetrate the very essence of human predicament, the insoluble tragedy and beauty of existence, the nature of eternal universal human values. Sergei Averintsev, speaking with a certain degree of caution about Russian cultural constants, especially emphasized the tendency to individual (rather than institutional) heroic effort, to asceticism and self-sacrifice [19]. Adherence to an inner, rather than an external law – that is, the problem of conscience – has always been at the centre of Russian cultural debates. Thus one of the main maxims developed by Russian thought is the belief that justice is above the law, and mercy is above justice.

In this vein, Yuri Lotman, characterising Pushkin’s late writings, notes that “at the heart of the author’s position is a search for political relations that elevate humanity into a state principle, i.e., not replacing

human relations with political ones, but turning politics into humanness” [20]. In other words, “Pushkin dreams of forms of state life based on truly human relationships” [21].

For a law-abiding Westerner, this formula is not entirely acceptable, because above all else in the Western, especially Anglo-Saxon tradition, there is an objective law, the legislation, and not subjective personal feelings. This seems, of course, correct on both sides of state borders, if only because the decision-making about the fate of people depends, in this case, on a well-established system, and not on the unpredictable will of individuals. However, the extremely developed legal system has its own downside. Turning again to Iskander, “Now in Russia the prevailing spirit in life is lawlessness. But let’s imagine that the law has triumphed, and obedience to law becomes the primary spirit in life. Then, having reigned in society as the main spirit in life, does the law not replace conscience? [...] If the law becomes life’s pivotal principle, conscience wanes. But no matter how much laws are developed and govern the life of society, there have always been, are and will be occasions in life where a person must act in accordance with their conscience. But how can they act in accordance with their conscience when it has withered away? And it withered away precisely because the laws developed well and people became used to restricting themselves only by the law?” [22]. Here we can see in a nutshell the main feature of Russian thought – its focus on human conscience, on issues of morality, its anthropocentrism. “Russian philosophy [...] is most preoccupied with the topic of the human being, of his fate and ways, of the meaning and purpose of history. First of all, this is reflected in the degree to which moral problematics predominates everywhere (even in abstract questions): here lies one of the most effective and creative sources of Russian philosophizing” [23].

It can be argued that Russian writers’ turning to religion in their works was dictated above all by their search for answers to moral problems. Thus Dostoevsky, for example, had been tormented all his life by questions of faith, though not abstractly but in direct connection with the problem of the meaning of life. His penetration is unparalleled, into the very depths of the human psyche, into (long before Freud!) the ‘subconscious wells of darkness within his readers themselves’ [24] of which those readers were often unaware. In fact, Dostoevsky to a large extent continued the traditions of Western European irrationalism, which basically resisted the ideas of the Enlightenment. Indeed, the central theme of his novels was the theme of suffering as a necessary and inalienable element of human existence, while the main task and goal of the Enlightenment was to separate humanity from suffering forever. Dostoevsky understood not only the absurdity, but also the immoral

effect of such plans, and sought to show how, having separated from suffering, a person is separated from his conscience and turns into an insatiable animal. The writer was clearly aware that no external, that is, socio-political changes could bring happiness to mankind until inner changes took place and everyone reformed their own soul. That is to say that he, in fact, continued that tradition dating back to Metropolitan Hilarion, which was discussed above.

It was among the goals of our sociological survey to trace the influence of this tradition on the minds of recent schoolchildren (current students) in their moral choices within the framework of their professional future (especially related to creating a personal business).

In modern Russia, classical Russian literature is still an integral part of the school curriculum. Despite the fact that the post-Soviet society as a whole has ceased to be literary-centred due to (apparently inevitable) devaluation of the artistic word as a consequence of the newly acquired freedom of speech, Russian classics continue to contribute to national pride. In this sense, Russia continues to measure itself in Pushkin’s terms, and still remains within the comprehensive framework of the slogan “Pushkin is our everything”. Love for Pushkin is unconditional and “obligatory”, which our survey also confirms; in this sense, the “Pushkin” component of our respondents’ answers is not very informative, although it does not, of course, rule out a true and unforced love for a national genius and his ideas. However, the situation with other writers is more instructive and interesting, as it is not so predictable and categorical. Thus we can assume with a degree of certainty that those, for example, who prefer Dostoevsky – voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously – fall into the magnetic field of his philosophical searches and those fundamental ideas that were discussed above. In particular, the idea of conscience and search for the truth, the determination to confront injustice, even if it contradicts the external way of life (the law), is of undoubted importance for Dostoevsky’s fans.

In our sociological survey of Russian students, our goal was to identify the hypothetical relations of students with the law and the correlation of these relations with the cultural (first of all, literary) baggage of respondents. The survey involved 800 students from five cities of the country: Moscow, Voronezh, Tyumen, Astrakhan, and Tver’. The range of disciplines covered more than eight subjects, including economics and law, other social sciences, art and design, technical and natural sciences, mathematics, and information technology. The age of respondents varied from 17 to 25 years. At the first stage, we wanted to find out, even if only theoretically, whether students are going to be guided by the law (understood as a legal norm) or want

to act “in fairness” (that is, guided by their conscience) if “law” and “justice” come into conflict. Note that a similar dilemma, as discussed above, often arises in classical Russian literature, where heroes tend to act according to their conscience, that is, in fairness – according to the inner law, even if it conflicts with the external law. This line is consistently developed by

Pushkin; the same spirit, as already mentioned, permeates Dostoevsky’s novels as well.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY’S RESULTS

The results of the first stage are presented in "Table I".

TABLE I. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION: “IF AN ENTREPRENEUR SUDDENLY FINDS HIM/HERSELF IN A SITUATION WHERE FOLLOWING THE LAW DOES NOT SEEM JUST/FAIR TO HIM (HER), HOW DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BEHAVE?”

Behaviour type	% of respondents
Comply with the law first, and only then attempt to restore justice	36.2
Act in fairness (as you deem just), and only then fight to rectify the law	11.7
It depends on the specific situation.	44.0
Difficult to answer	8.1

We see that those who are prepared to comply above all with the law comprise less than half of the respondents. Although only 11.7% definitely choose justice as their priority, the majority does not rule out the possibility of breaking the law for the sake of justice. This is a very convincing result.

Our hypothesis was that the students’ views were related to their cultural, and above all literary, baggage – namely what books they had been brought up on, and who was their favourite writer. Of course, this is not the whole “culture”, but, given the inertia of the literary-centred attitude that prevailed in pre-perestroika Russia, as well as the axiological power of the Russian classical heritage, such a hypothesis is entirely valid. The list of authors named by the students as their favourites turned out to be quite extensive. It included a variety of authors including novelists, poets and scholars, from Sigmund Freud to Agatha Christie, Joseph Brodsky and Vladimir Mayakovsky, Haruki Murakami and Dmitry Glukhovsky. To analyse these data, we used a special calculating method to establish authors' frequency scores (based on the frequency of their occurrences in the respondents’ answers), and selected eight authors, who received the highest ratings by a large margin. The students most often named as their favourite authors those who are represented in the school curriculum and belong to the Russian and world classics. Thanks to compulsory schooling, even young people who are not interested in literature and read little are still aware of these authors. And although the survey was conducted anonymously, we should not forget that respondents are always prone to socially approved answers, and the choice of classics is essentially consistent with this. Even more interesting then is the preference given to the modern American writer Stephen King, who works in fantasy genres, including thrillers, horrors and mysticism. This fact deserves a separate discussion, which we will provide in the sequel. Below, we present the results of the survey demonstrating the relationship of the answers presented in Table 1 with the ratings of

the chosen favourite writers. (See "Table II", "Table III", "Table IV", "Table V").

TABLE II. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE WRITER FOR THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO PUT LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE FIRST PLACE

Favourite authors	Scoring
Alexander Pushkin	6.1
Stephen King	5.9
Fedor Dostoevsky	5.8
Mikhail Bulgakov	5.4
Lev Tolstoy	5.2
Erich Maria Remarque	3.2
Mikhail Lermontov	2.9
Sergei Esenin	2.9

TABLE III. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION ABOUT THE FAVOURITE WRITER FOR THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO PUT JUSTICE (RATHER THAN LAW) IN THE FIRST PLACE

Favourite authors	Scoring
Fedor Dostoevsky	8.9
Alexander Pushkin	6.6
Lev Tolstoy	5.6
Stephen King	5.2
Mikhail Lermontov	4.2
Nikolai Gogol	2.8
Erich Maria Remarque	2.8
Ray Bradbury	2.8

TABLE IV. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE WRITER FOR THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO WILL MAKE A DECISION DEPENDING ON THE SPECIFIC SITUATION

Favourite authors	Scoring
Stephen King	6.5
Fedor Dostoevsky	6.0
Alexander Pushkin	5.4
Lev Tolstoy	4.2
Erich Maria Remarque	4.1
Mikhail Bulgakov	4.0
Ray Bradbury	3.4
Nikolai Gogol	2.4

TABLE V. DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE WRITER FOR THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO ANSWER THE QUESTION ABOUT THEIR MORAL CHOICE

Favourite authors	Scoring
Alexander Pushkin	6.2
Stephen King	3.9
Fedor Dostoevsky	3.9
Ray Bradbury	3.9
Erich Maria Remarque	3.1
Anton Chekhov	3.1
Charlotte Bronte	2.3
Sergei Esenin	2.3

The survey results allow us to talk about a certain correlation between the literary predilections of modern Russian students and their moral choice. The very choice of the most beloved authors, all of which, with the exception of Stephen King, can be safely attributed to the classics of world literature, speaks of the high cultural level and refined interests of Russian students. On the other hand, as already mentioned, one should not, of course, forget that the framework of the school curriculum is the most obvious source for the answers of recent schoolchildren. This, however, does not negate the element of truth that is revealed by such polls. The high proportion of the presence of the Western fantasy author Stephen King in the answers of the respondents is a testimony to this, and also confirms the fact that the Western world has a significant influence on the life of modern Russia.

What is unexpected here, in our view, is a non-trivial number of those respondents for whom, despite the influence of globalization and the new socio-economic order, the previous tradition remains relevant, with its focus on inner rather than external law, on conscience rather than jurisdiction. At the same time, their adherence to Dostoevsky is observed: those respondents who unequivocally put justice above the law have given the first place to him (see "Table III"). At the same time, respondents for whom the law stands highest, and especially those who prefer to act depending on the particular situation, are more focused on King. Such Western classics as Erich Maria Remarque and Ray Bradbury, extremely popular in the late Soviet era, still remain in demand today, as we see from the results of the survey. However, they are significantly inferior in popularity to the American author King, who symbolizes the values and foundations of modern Western civilization with its tendency towards the prevalence of mass culture, which in turn leads to a simplification of the human inner world and its artistic reflection. In this sense, King's attitude to literary creativity, which stands in sharp contrast with Russian cultural tradition, is very revealing. "If you wrote something for which someone sent you a check, if you cashed the check and it didn't bounce, and if you then paid the light bill with the money, I consider you talented" [25], the writer claims.

Even taking into account a possible attempt to shock the audience, that is, even in the form of a joke, this provocative statement, intentionally lowering (and vulgarizing) the literary art, looks at least blasphemous in the Russian cultural context, where the role of the writer is traditionally the role of the prophet and the martyr.

The controversy over the legitimacy of including King – certainly an extremely popular and widely sold author – in high literary canons is inherent in Western society as well, and reached its climax in 2003 in connection with awarding him a prestigious national literary prize. Well-known critic and literary scholar Harold Bloom said in this connection: "The decision to give the National Book Foundation's annual award for 'distinguished contribution' to Stephen King is extraordinary, another low in the shocking process of dumbing down our cultural life. I've described King in the past as a writer of penny dreadfuls, but perhaps even that is too kind. He shares nothing with Edgar Allan Poe. What he is, is an immensely inadequate writer on a sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, book-by-book basis" [26]. Nevertheless, King, who masterfully develops the fantasy genre leaning towards horrors, vampirism and other themes inherent primarily in the Western tradition, remains an author widely in demand not only in America, but also in post-Soviet Russia. It seems that interest in King is not accidental among Russian youth. One study in 2017 revealed that 73.1% of Russian students love science fiction, with 65% of them opting for fantasy and mysticism rather than science fiction per se [27]. This gives us reason to assume that a significant part of the educated Russian youth mentally seeks to escape from reality into the world of dreams, tales and myths. G.G. Malinetskiy draws attention to this fact in his book saying that "futurology itself, and with it science fiction, are undergoing a deep crisis. While earlier it was about the route to the stars, penetration into the secrets of nature, building a beautiful bright tomorrow based on high technology and human abilities, now the emphasis has changed. From science fiction, from the future, from aspirations of science, the world turned to fantasy, to the past, to the world of magic. The creator, researcher, pioneer, who opens up new horizons, got replaced by a wizard, 'a qualified user' of magic items, who strives to maintain the established order of things and keep the status quo. Thus if we recall the most famous films of the decade in the fantastic genre, these will be *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. By the same token, worldwide popularity of the fantasy genre is associated with the infantilization of mass consciousness, with the desire to return to your childhood, and live through it again and again" [28].

V. ROLE OF LITERARY EDUCATION IN PERPETUATING MORAL VALUES AND CULTURAL TRADITION IN RUSSIA

Thus, there is an evident connection between, on the one hand, the ideas of Russian students about justice, morality and the rule of law, and, on the other, the literary and ethical baggage with which they were provided in school and through education in a broader sense. The above-mentioned hierarchy of values, traditional for Russian thought, where justice is above the law and mercy is above justice, begins from these sources. In our case study, we have traced only the first link in the chain. It would now seem logical to make the next step in our research and move from justice to mercy, with which it is deeply associated in national consciousness.

The idea that, on the scale of values, mercy is above justice is deeply rooted in the national literary tradition. In the 20th century, this idea is expressed explicitly, for example, by the writer Sergei Dovlatov, who remarked in his notebooks: “What could be more important than justice? [...] Mercy for the fallen, I suppose” [29], and repeated in his prose: “So what is higher than justice? [...] Well, if you want a concrete answer – it’s mercy” [30]. Dostoevsky nurtured similar thoughts. Thus, for example, in “The Idiot”, Aglaya explains to Myshkin that bare truth alone, without tenderness, cannot be just. The same maxim pervades Pushkin’s writings (from where, in fact, Dovlatov borrowed “mercy for the fallen”). Yuri Lotman, analyzing the ideological structure of *The Captain’s Daughter*, notes that “the opposition of mercy and justice, which is impossible for the educators of the XVIII century, or for the Decembrists, is deeply significant for Pushkin” [31]. Indeed, Peter the Great from Pushkin’s “Feast of Peter the First” “celebrates forgiveness like a victory over an enemy”, “rejoices in pardoning the guilty” [32]. “The theme of mercy becomes one of the main themes for Pushkin in his later years” [33], Lotman concludes.

Similarly, Dostoevsky believed that not ideology, but love (not a judicial law, but mercy) should rule the world: “If someone proved to me that Christ is outside the truth and that in reality the truth were outside of Christ, then I should prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth” [34]. Idealizing, like Leo Tolstoy, the Russian people, Dostoevsky connected its deepest values with Russian patristics and portrayed its eternal search for truth in the spirit of the statements of Alexander Nevsky that “God is not in strength, but in truth”.

Moreover, as Irina Levontina, Alexei Shmelev and Anna Zaliznyak note in their book, in Russian culture “justice is not necessarily opposed to mercy. This is connected with a special view of injustice” [35]. And here, as the authors emphasize, it is very important that

the concept of injustice is understood not only and not so much in the sense of “banal misallocation of benefits”, but in the sense of “an individual not receiving personal warmth, attention, and love” [36]. But in this case, injustice is essentially identified with a lack of mercy, which means that justice is understood, on the contrary, as mercy!

Thus, either an external, mechanistic understanding of the law (of justice in the legal sense) opposes mercy, or the lack of justice (identified in such a case with the internal rather than the external law) is perceived as a lack of mercy. As a result, mercy (that is, an internal law) still turns out to be the highest value and outweighs the external (legal) law. It is precisely this message that the Russian classical tradition transmits. And it is on this tradition that literary education of schoolchildren and students in Russia is still based, despite the massive trend towards globalization. It is this tradition that is decisive in the formation of personality. Hence the prevalence of justice over the law in the worldview of a significant part of our respondents, and the correlation of these trends with literary predilections, with a link specifically to Russian classics, especially to Dostoevsky. At the next stage of our study, as was mentioned, it would be interesting to search for a correlation between the literary heritage laid down by education and the preference by Russian students for mercy (as the internal law) over the external (legal) law.

It is important to emphasize here that literary education, in essence, conveys an ethical tradition primarily by aesthetic means – that is, by means of art – instilling a literary taste as an enchantment against evil. Indeed, as Joseph Brodsky said in his Nobel lecture: “A man with taste, particularly literary taste, is less susceptible to the refrains and the rhythmical incantations peculiar to any version of political demagoguery. The point is not so much that virtue does not constitute a guarantee for producing a masterpiece, as that evil, especially political evil, is always a bad stylist. The more substantial an individual’s aesthetic experience is, the sounder his taste, the sharper his moral focus” [37]. This once again emphasizes the close relationship between literary education, moral values and life choices (and, in particular, the semiotics of professional behaviour).

VI. CONCLUSION

In the case of King, whose writings give an ideal example of successful Western fiction, the break with classical Russian tradition is obvious, as it is obvious in the case of the ocean of domestic pseudo-literary products built on the Western model and flooding the Russian book market. Against this backdrop, as was mentioned, staying faithful to the Russian cultural tradition in moral and hence also in literary terms on the

part of a number of respondents seems rather surprising, because, according to a common point of view, “when encountering classical Russian literature, our young contemporary feels that the ideological and value underpinning of this layer of artistic culture is in insoluble conflict with the outside world. It offers goals, values, evaluation criteria and methods of action which are not applicable to reality” [38]. However, our survey does not confirm this stance and demonstrates a certain resilience of traditional cultural values. The nature of this resilience, which grows, most probably, from literary roots based on unshakable eternal values, as we have tried to show in this article, has perhaps broader and mysterious sources. This is as if we are talking about some transpersonal way of cognition, about the knowledge that is absorbed with one’s mother’s milk, as if transmitted genetically, and scattered in the very air of the country. In the words of Aron Gurevich, it creates an “ether of culture” [39]. Education then (cultural, artistic and especially literary) basically draws from this ether, is intrinsically steeped in it.

In this way, paradoxically, the successors of the ideas of Westernism and Slavophilism (for example, in economics) on both sides of the barricades are often unfamiliar with the teachings of the founders of these ideological trends in Russia, but nevertheless unconsciously follow these historically given lines. That is, the continuity of the value choice apparently determines the corresponding worldview and ideology.

It is interesting that the same sustainability of tradition against the background of rapidly and apparently irrevocably changing mores and cultural habits can be observed in the gender sphere. We already wrote elsewhere [40] that a romantic halo surrounding gender relations, a sublime attitude towards women and love in general, continue to prevail in Russian youth culture, despite the significant and very tangible influence of Western models that are not oriented towards a traditional family and undermine previous gender roles and the philosophy of love.

Summing up, we can say that we are now witnessing an ongoing covert struggle for the minds of the young generation, where the divide is not so much between Russia and the West, but between high and low, real and fake, on a global scale. Academician Andrei Sakharov dreamed, in the spirit of St. Augustine, about a peculiar merger of civilizations, about a mixture of the value worlds of Russian and Western culture. Now we can only hope that future development will indeed lead to such a merger, where the best of the two worlds will ultimately be dominant and viable, and will form the culture of the future. In this process, the role of literary (and more generally – artistic and cultural) education is perhaps more important than ever.

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