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A Culture Course Based on a Semiotic Pattern
I. Russian Culture

In planning a course on Russian culture, one must often take into consideration the entire Slavic program available to the student: what courses has he taken? What courses may he take in the future? What is the course meant to prepare him for? Is the culture course a requirement for the major, or is it a hook meant to get potential majors interested in the department? Often such courses are taken by a mix of majors and non-majors. How can one interest and inform all levels, without overtaxing the less prepared, while still avoiding making the course too easy? Culture courses can easily become a kind of passive entertainment for the students, who may simply sit back, listen to music, and watch slides and films. Yet a serious scholarly analysis of the entire panorama of Russian and Soviet culture is obviously impossible. One solution is to select representative themes and to study them in detail in some framework.

I have taught several such courses, both in English and in Russian: a one semester survey of Russian and Soviet culture in Russian at Middlebury, a two semester sequence in English at the University of Virginia, and a two semester sequence in Russian at Middlebury. This semester (Spring '93) I am teaching the culture component of an introductory course for non-majors, "Beyond the USSR," which includes segments taught by a historian, a geographer, and a political scientist. When it came to selecting themes for these courses, I have been guided by two criteria: personal preference and coherence. Emphasis was to be placed on contrast between the Russian tradition and that of the West, which is more familiar to the students.

Contrastive analysis is obviously acceptable in the medieval segment. Even Western medievalists are allowed to define their field

by contrasting it to the world we know. It is universally acknowledged that art before the Renaissance was governed by principles completely different from those that produced, for example, super-realism or the canvases of Jackson Pollock. This is particularly true of Byzantine art, which seems even further removed from contemporary sensibilities.   Everyone should agree that one cannot begin to appreciate Russian culture of the middle ages without some understanding of the Orthodox religion and of the aesthetic system that went along with it. And here the historian of art and culture is at an advantage: as several popularizers of Orthodoxy have realized, Byzantine art (specifically the icon) provides an ideal introduction to the premises of Byzantine theology and the Byzantine world-view in general. As proof one need only point out that it was the last Ecumenical Council (the 7th, at Nicaea in 787) that restored the place of icons after the Iconoclastic Controversy, and that the main arguments of those in favor of icons were based on Christology, which was always the center of Byzantine theological thought.

Perhaps this may seem to be going back too far into the prehistory of Russian culture? Not really: one need only devote a few days to the Byzantine underpinnnings of Russian aesthetics, the basis of which remained dominant for the entire medieval period. And it was the Byzantines who in the Iconoclastic Controversy best articulated the theory of icons.

All one really need do is point out the major arguments of those for and against icons and show a few slides of Byzantine and Russian icons, perhaps contrasting them with some works of the Renaissance in the West. The students will of course immediately realize that the icons seem to repeat one another without much stylistic variation and that they do not seem very "realistic" -- they seem not to obey the laws of perspective, the saints always face forward, the icons are unsigned, but they often bear an inscription identifying the scene or saint depicted.[1]

Contrast with the West can begin here. One of the points brought up in the Iconoclast Controversy was Pope Gregory I's

statement that icons should be accepted so that "the illiterate people could at least read by looking at the walls what they cannot read in books."[2] This became the standard response of the West throughout the Iconoclast Controversy, the real significance of which was never understood in the West. But what I jokingly call the comic-book approach to religious art was never central in the East. The point is not that the worshipper makes some connection between several scenes which remind him of a story, but that the icon of a saint is really connected in some mystical way with its prototype. For the West what is important is the physical <u>horizontal</u> sequence of images as they remind the worshipper of a temporal sequence of events -- a story. One thinks of the many Western basilicas whose long lateral walls were so often decorated with illustrations of Old and New Testament books. In the East the centralized plan predominated in church architecture, not the linear basilical plan. And while one might find scenes from a saint's life framing his icon, there was never any question that the frontal image of the saint in the center was more important. In Byzantine terminology the icon and its prototype are different in nature but identical in person. An icon of the Mother of God does not merely remind the worshipper of the Mother of God, it <u>is</u> the Mother of God in a sense, and the important thing is that reverence shown the icon flows to its prototype and divine energy descends through the icon to earth. The <u>vertical</u> dimension is more important than the <u>horizontal</u>. Hence the importance of the frontal pose, which insures maximal contact between the worshipper and the image. But all this is true only if the icon is a true icon -- if there is a real identity of person with the prototype -- hence the copying of previous models. The same semiotic function is assigned to the word in the East. The Gospel is also a kind of icon of Christ. In the West respect is shown to the bread and wine which become the body and blood of Christ. In the East the Gospel book is given a position analogous to that of the gifts in the liturgy: the Little Entrance, in which the priest carries the Gospel through the Royal Doors into the altar, prefigures the Great Entrance, in which he carries the gifts along the same path.

The easiest analogy to make in a Russian culture class is that between icons and saints' lives.[3] Here the important point to make is that both genres are based on imitation of inherited models, though the word <u>imitation</u> must also be redefined to accomodate what is in theory a real identity between icon and prototype. Once they have read a few saints' lives the students will notice certain recurring motifs -- birth from pious parents, extreme humility and obedience, prediction of one's own death, miracles. These may be compared to the conventions associated with icon painting. Contradictions may arise -- the pious parents beat their children or chain them to a wall, the obedient saint is always getting into trouble for disobeying his mother. And there are always the miraculous episodes the students find indigestible: being saved from one's enemies by being sealed up in a rock, living for years in a tree stump or buried up to the neck in the earth. All of these discrepancies with the familiar world are explained by the conventions of the genre itself -- the inherited models. <u>We</u> may compare the saint's life to what we see in everyday life and decide not to accept the saint's life; but any representative of Byzantine or Russian culture in the middle ages should rather reject the evidence of his own experience.[4]

An extremely fruitful semiotic distinction can be drawn at this point. In their article "The Semiotic Mechanism of Culture"[5] Lotman and Uspensky divide cultures into two basic types according to the view of the relationship between expression and content. Specifically, the relation between expression and content can be viewed as the only possible one or as arbitrary and conventional. If the relation is the only possible one, there is a one to one correspondence between expression and content and any change in expression entails a change in content. Lotman and Uspensky designate such cultures as being oriented primarily toward expression. Cultures which interpret the relation between expression and content as arbitrary they refer to as content-oriented, since any expression may be agreed upon by convention to designate the desired content.

This opposition proves extremely useful in the culture class,

and I would like to defend the article both in itself and as a methodological tool. We teachers of Russian culture are fortunate in having at our disposal so much material in the most interesting critical school produced in the Soviet Union, which is primarily devoted precisely to our subject. Why not take advantage of the Moscow-Tartu Semiotics School? Or is current criticism too recondite for undergraduate consumption? No doubt much of it is, yet small doses adequately explained can be extremely helpful.   The students were assigned only the first ten pages of the article, in which the opposition expression vs. content is set out. And the success was enormous. The article, controversial though it may be, provides a critical framework and vocabulary for dealing with several major issues in Russian culture. Not only did the students seize upon Lotman and Uspensky to explain some patterns programmed into the course, they periodically brought the article up in discussion of issues I hadn't myself thought of in those terms.

This article has a number of applications in a class on Russian culture. Cultures oriented toward expression tend to view themselves as an aggregate of normative texts: a text is considered correct if it fits in with the traditional models, with the canon. A text can be either correct or incorrect: either an image is an icon of St. Nicholas or it is not one. To be one, it must be viewed as identical to the canonical icon.

Content-oriented cultures, on the other hand, see themselves as a system of rules for creating texts. Abstract rules allow for introduction of new material. They also accommodate relations other than identity. An image can be more or less like its prototype. The relation of the image to its prototype in the West is an arbitrary one: the image merely reminds the worshipper of its prototype.

Perhaps the ideal point at which to introduce Lotman and Uspensky is in the discussion of the Raskol. In <u>The Icon & the Axe</u> Billington sets up a nice opposition between <u>xitrost'</u> and <u>blagočestie</u>.[6] <u>Xitrost'</u> he associates with the West and with new introductions into Russian culture. <u>Blagočestie</u> stands for custom, received tradition -- the aggregate of normative texts associated with expression-oriented

culture. Both sides of the controversy were concerned with preserving <u>blagočĕstie</u>, and both were concerned with expression: changing the spelling of Isus changed the content. Since the only recognized relation was identity, any change in the expression of God's name signified the Antichrist. Nonculture in expression-oriented societies, write Lotman and Uspensky, is read as anticulture, rather than as chaos to be organized into culture. The xenophobia so characteristic of the period can be explained in terms of orientation towards expression. Macarius, the patriarch of Constantinople, was warned against speaking Turkish: one cannot use alien means of expression and stay within one's own ideology. Rules, characteristic of content-oriented culture, can account for translation from one language into another: normative texts cannot. This also explains the efforts at composing grammars of a Helleno-Slavic language: if both societies are Orthodox and correct, they must therefore have the same language.[7]

　　　The point is that ideally Lotman and Uspensky should help defuse some of the typical Westerner's perplexity at arguments over apparently trivial things: the spelling of Isus, the number of alleluias sung, the number of fingers used in making the sign of the cross. Even Guerney, as much as I respect his skill at translation, refers to the Raskol as a "fascinatingly imbecilic section" in the "neverending chronicle of human idiocy."[8] The Russians were <u>not</u> arguing over insignificant details. Their culture was different from ours. Lotman and Uspensky's opposition had its roots in the anthropological thought of the turn of the century -- specifically the controversial idea of "primitive mentality" associated with Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.[9] Much scoffed at by more recent anthropologists, Lévy-Bruhl's "primitive mentality" was actually part of an effort to save the so-called primitives from imputations of stupidity. If their thinking is the same as ours, we must conclude they are simply worse at it -- a difference of degree. If, as Lévy-Bruhl was one of the first to suggest, there is a qualitative difference -- different kinds of thinking, there can be no condescension on the part of the "civilized" world. Lévi-Strauss, who made much of his own opposition to Lévy-

Bruhl's ideas of "primitive mentality," himself came to many of the same conclusions using different terminology. Lotman and Uspensky avoid the charged term "primitive," but their definition of expression-oriented culture really has the same features described by Lévy-Bruhl. Quite possibly the missing link between the French anthropologist and the Soviet Semioticians may be the Marrist school, especially Olga Freidenberg, whom Lotman acknowledges as a symbolic progenitor of the Sermiotics school, especially in their broad analyses of culture.[10]

The opposition expression-oriented vs. content-oriented again becomes helpful in the debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. Lotman and Uspensky point out that cultures oriented toward content tend to view nonculture as chaos -- a disorganized field to be organized into ordered culture. This was the Western view of Russia, and the Westernizers' view from Chaadaev on. The difference between the cultures was seen as one of degree -- Russia simply had less culture than the West. "The consensus of opinion," writes Kireevski, "was that the difference between European and Russian culture was merely a difference in degree and not in kind, their spirit and basic principles being the same. We (it was then said) used to be barbarians; our civilization began only when we started to imitate Europe, which had immeasurably outdistanced us in intellectual development."[11]

According to Lotman and Uspensky, "cultures directed primarily towards expression have a conception of themselves as a correct text (or aggregate of texts) whereas cultures directed mainly towards content see themselves as a system of rules."[12] In the Slavophile-Westernizer debate these rules appear as formal logic, Aristotelian syllogism. Chaadaev criticizes Russia because it lacks logic, "the syllogism of the West is unknown to us."[13] Kireevski writes that the "West is blind to living beliefs, which are above the sphere of logic and reason--the truth cannot be reached by syllogisms."[14] Kireevski criticizes Western culture precisely because of the artificiality of the social contract: "the only limitation they would admit to their arbitrary actions was in the forms of rules

governing external relations, rules which they themselves formulated and voluntarily accepted."[15] He claims that laws in Russia were based more on essential truth and custom than on external form. "A law in Russia," he writes, "usually was not composed, but merely written down after the idea of it ... became part of their customs and way of life."[16] Again we see the characteristic of expression-oriented culture viewing itself as a set of normative texts rather than as a code of rules.

A further consequence of this opposition is a different approach to change. Cultures oriented toward content, governed as they are by formal rules, can accommodate incorporation of new materials. Expansion, change, and progress may be viewed as positive. But this is not necessarily true of an expression-oriented culture. This corollary distinction is developed by Lotman and Piatigorsky in "Text and Function."[17] "'Culture of the closed type' [text-oriented -- KM] sees itself as continuing according to tradition, from the time... when there existed 'fullness of truth,' i. e., a 'full text.' ... Culture of the nonclosed type' [content-oriented] sees itself as arising 'from zero,' 'from nothing,' and as gradually accumulating elements of 'truth' whose fullness is believed to lie in the future."[18] Kireevski's description of Eastern culture fits Lotman and Uspensky's first description perfectly: "Naturally, we cannot look for anything new as regards Christian doctrine in the writers of the Eastern Church.... But that is precisely their merit; their distinguishing characteristic is that they preserved and maintained the basic Christian doctrine in all its purity and fullness."[19] New texts that do not fit the pattern of the received canon must be rejected. Kireevski writes, "in a society which has arisen naturally ... every change in direction is an illness and is fraught with some danger."[20]

What about 19th century literature? How does it fit the pattern? By the second part of the course the students are prepared to view art forms as repetition of received models. But an interesting transformation takes place in 19th century literature. First, the models come not from the native tradition, but from outside Russian culture -- from European literature. But then they

are not faithfully imitated as a saint's life would be. Here one may remind the students of the circular relation between art and life in Russia even in the Middle Ages. Saints' lives are doubly imitative: not only does the author follow the model of previous lives, but the saint himself probably follows the behavioral model of the traditional saint's life. The same is true of the nineteenth century. On the one hand there is the theme of life imitating art -- the women who drown themselves after reading Poor Liza, the many Russian characters who theatricalize their lives.[21] And on the other hand there are the conscious imitations of Western literary forms. But at least from Pushkin's time Russian writers (like the characters they write about) tend to take up Western models only to reject them.[22] Russian Realism is attained not by merely depicting reality -- in literature it always involves the gesture of rejection of a received pattern. This thread is very clearly seen in Pushkin, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, though it runs through other writers as well. And the same thing happened in art, at least in the history of the formation of the Wanderers -- they did not simply set out to depict real life; first they rejected the assigned task of depicting the feast of the gods in Valhalla -- a traditional subject taken from Western mythology.

Pushkin's Belkin Tales provide excellent examples of both kinds of patterns: literary or foreign models are important to all of the tales. The main character of "The Shot," Silvio, combines Byronic features with traits borrowed from Hugo's de Silva and Schiller's William Tell, but the actual shots hit, among other things, a cap (Romantic costume) and a picture of Switzerland (Romantic setting) and the Byronic hero is undermined. In "The Blizzard" Marya Gavrilovna is "brought up on French novels and consequently in love,"[23] but with a man Pushkin disposes of in the course of the story. "The Postmaster" contains a Biblical pattern, the parable of the Prodigal Son, which proves innappropriate when it is interpreted too literally by Samson Vyrin.

Muromsky, in "Mistress into Maid," patterns his life on the English model with an English garden, English uniforms for his stable-boys, and an English governess for his daughter. Alexei and

Liza are matched in part because they do <u>not</u> fit the Romantic roles they so consciously play: Alexei, "in spite of his sinister black ring, his mysterious correspondence with a lady in Moscow, and his air of gloomy disenchantment, was just a cheerful, ardent young man with a good heart, capable of appreciating innocent pleasures."[24] Pushkin, in this story, is parodying the Sentimentalist/Rousseauan tradition of love between the upper class man and the peasant girl. It works here because they are <u>not</u> of different classes.

　　None of this is new in Pushkin scholarship. Debreczeny, for example, discusses at great length Pushkin's models.[25] And Bethea and Davydov provide a brilliant interpretation of "The Undertaker" as a kind of metaphor for the process of rejecting foreign and domestic foreign patterns they see as central to the <u>Belkin Tales</u>.[26]

　　Another classic which lends itself easily to discussion in terms of the influence of literature on life (as reflected in literature) is Lermontov's <u>Hero of Our Time</u>. Both Lermontov and Pechorin make fun of Grushnitsky as a parody of the Byronic hero: "His ambition is to become the hero of a novel,"[27] an ambition Pechorin, by the way, succeeds in. Not only does Princess Mary perceive Pechorin as a hero -- Werner says she saw Pechorin "as the hero of some novel in the modern taste,"[28] but he constantly describes his own actions in literary terms: "We'll see if we can provide a <u>dénouement</u> for this comedy."[29] "Through all my active life fate always seems to have brought me in for the <u>dénouement</u> of other people's dramas."[30] "<u>Finita la commedia</u>."[31]

　　Of Dostoevsky's works <u>White Nights</u> and <u>Notes from the Underground</u> provide excellent and accessible examples of the theme of life imitating art. When he first meets Nastenka, the narrator refrains from calling her "Madam!" because he knew "that that exclamation had been made a thousand times before in all Russian novels of high life."[32] To live one is expected to have a story, and again the narrator segments life into parts as though it were a work of literature. "What an awful introduction!" exclaims Nastenka, when the hero begins his story "as though reading from a book."[33] When

Nastenka finishes her story (which is even set apart in the text with a title, "Nastenka's Story," marking it as literature), the narrator exclaims, "I had never expected such an ending" (<u>dénouement</u> would be a more accurate translation of <u>razvjazka</u>).[34] Furthermore, the whole plot is based on a consciously recognized parallel to Rossini's <u>Barber of Seville</u>, an opera which is itself based on the embedded plot of another opera, <u>The Needless Precaution</u>. The material is too rich to discuss here at length, and much of it has been covered by Thomas Seifrid in his article on theatricality in <u>White Nights</u>.[35] Dostoevsky's <u>Notes from the Underground</u> also lends itself to this kind of analysis. Tolstoy's <u>The Cossacks</u> provides another example of debunking of the Romantic/Byronic pattern.

II. Soviet Culture

A course in Soviet culture provides an ideal forum for introducing texts and genres which are not covered in the usual Soviet literature survey. The primary genres in the medieval period were icons and saints' lives, in the 19th century the Realist novel; the dominant genres in the Soviet period were film and the Socialist Realist novel. Often one can conflate the two, either comparing the film to its novel-prototype or simply showing the film in place of the often lengthy novel. While Socialist Realist novels may be long, students invariably find them easier to read than, say, Bely's Petersburg. One can also deal with important issues through reading entertaining works which might otherwise be considered too topical for inclusion in a literature course: Voinovich's Ivankiad and Trifonov's "Exchange" on the housing shortage, for example, and Iskander's Goatibex Constellation in the context of some background reading on Lysenko.

But what can be used as a theoretical background for a semiotic typology of Soviet culture? Lotman and Uspensky write about medieval Russian culture and about Russian culture of the 19th century. They do not write about contemporary culture or about culture in the Soviet period. Writing about the poetics of everyday behavior in 18th century Russia, Lotman states that objective description of culture requires geographic or historical distance: "the further a culture lies from us historically, geographically or culturally the more clearly can we see that its particular everyday life-style is a specific object of scientific study."[36] In another programmatic article, "On the Typological Study of Culture," he points to the problem of auto-reference which arises when the metalanguage of description coincides with the language of the object described: "the language of our culture can be used to describe other cultures (which we do in practice all the time), but it cannot be used to describe our own culture, otherwise it acts simultaneously as the language of the object and the language of the description."[37] Nevertheless, Lotman goes on to suggest that an objective typology should allow one to

describe even ones own culture: "but the very idea of a typology is to produce uniform and therefore comparable descriptions for all systems of human culture, including, of course, even the culture of the author of the description."[38] Can the methods and typologies of the Moscow-Tartu semiotics school be applied to Soviet culture or can they not? Ostensibly Lotman and Uspensky avoid Soviet culture to avoid the problem outlined above. But many of their descriptions seem as well suited to contemporary Soviet culture as they are to the culture of the Russian Middle Ages or the nineteenth century.

Soviet culture, like medieval Russian culture, is oriented towards expression rather than content. According to Lotman and Uspensky, "cultures directed primarily towards expression have a conception of themselves as a correct text (or aggregate of texts), whereas cultures directed mainly towards content see themselves as a system of rules."[39] Katerina Clark suggests that such an aggregate of texts (rather than a system of rules) underlies Socialist Realism: "It is not in theoretical writings but in practical examples that one should look for an answer to the question What is Socialist Realism? … I shall use a strictly pragmatic approach and define Soviet Socialist Realism as a canonical doctrine defined by its patristic texts. … Ever since …Socialist Realism was declared the sole method appropriate for Soviet literature, most official pronouncements on literature… have contained a short list of exemplars (obrazcy) that are to guide the writers in their future work."[40] If it is difficult to sort out the facts behind saints' lives because both the saints and their biographers place more store in the inherited tradition (expression) than in historical fact (content), the same can be said of Socialist Realist novels, many of which are ostensibly based on fact and some of which are even autobiographical (e. g., Furmanov's Chapaev and Ostrovsky's How the Steel was Tempered). In his Story of a Real Man, Polevoy shows how Socialist Realist literature and life are expected to interact. First the Commissar reads Meresyev How the Steel was Tempered, but "Korchagin was not an airman."[41] Next he gives Meresyev an article on a World War I airman, which eventually gives him the strength to recover. It is significant that

the turning point is provided by a story in written form which provides the hero with a pattern to follow.

Cultures oriented towards expression are characterized by ritualized behavior and language and taboos. Clark's subtitle, History as Ritual, and the title of an article by Efim Etkind, "Soviet Taboos,"[42] both suggest that these terms are as appropriate to Soviet culture as they are to so-called primitive culture. The ritual attention to words in Soviet culture is as easy to discover in literature as it is in Western accounts of life in the Soviet Union. "As a communist," says Ivanko in Voinovich's Ivankiad, "I protest the words 'the torture of Pasternak.'"[43]

According to Lotman and Uspensky, "within the conditions of a culture oriented primarily towards expression and represented as an aggregate of normative texts, the basic opposition [between culture and nonculture] will be 'correct -- incorrect,' i. e., wrong."[44] Incorrect designation will be associated with culture with a negative sign in front of it: a different spelling of Christ's name is taken to mean the Antichrist, for example. In Iskander's Goatibex Constellation a change in the name of the animal from goatibex to ibexigoat has ideological consequences: "It turns out that what we assumed to be a slip of the pen or a simple confusion of terms was actually the false and harmful manifestation of a whole system of beliefs."[45]

The text which best shows the Soviet orientation towards expression rather than content, with its corollary ritualized language and taboos, is also one of the best works of literature of the Soviet period: Bulgakov's Master and Margarita. We are interested in the Jerusalem plot because of the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of the Gospel. If Woland's Yeshua is the historical Jesus, then the Jesus we know from the Gospel is a creation of Matthew the Levite; expression (in the writing of Matthew the Levite) is more effective than content (the historical truth). Even in the Jerusalem novel, what is written takes precedence over the reality it describes. Yeshua denies to Pilate that he intended to destroy the temple. Pilate objects, "You… are a liar. It is clearly

written down: 'He incited people to destroy the temple.'"[46] Later it transpires that Yeshua's metaphor has been taken literally: "I spoke, Hegemon, of how the temple of the old beliefs would fall down and the new temple of truth would be built up. I used those words to make my meaning easier to understand."[47] As Lotman and Uspensky point out, emphasis on expression is usually a consequence of seeing a one to one correlation between the level of expression and the level of content;[48] figurative meanings, which require a second interpretation on the level of content, are consequently excluded.

But it is the Moscow section of the novel that best shows the primacy of expression in Soviet life. Characters exist and events occur only if there are documents as proof. No document -- no man (and vice versa): the Master's file is removed from the hospital records; Aloysius Mogarych's name is removed from the landlord's books; the Master's papers are returned; Nikolai Ivanovich requires a document explaining that he was at Satan's ball; finally Woland's band is declared a hallucination because no record can be found of them: "every official body in Moscow concerned with visiting foreigners stated firmly and categorically that there was not and could not be a magician called Woland in Moscow. He had definitely not registered on entry, he had shown no one his passport or any other documents, contracts, or agreements, and no one had so much as heard of him."[49] As I have demonstrated in the pages of this journal, realization of metaphors is one of the central structuring devices in the novel, from the initial appearance of the Devil's band the moment he is invoked by a usually empty oath.[50] The novel plays on the parallel between the taboo against mentioning the Devil and the taboo against mentioning the NKVD -- both of which play major roles in the action. But there are other realized metaphors as well: the chapter Черная магия и ее разоблачение ends with the very real разоблачение of some members of the audience -- their clothes vanish.[51]

The ritualization of Soviet language must have reached its peak under Stalin, and it is his name that is surrounded by the most

strictures. Against the background of highly ritualized language, the absence of an item can be as significant as its presence. In Aitmatov's <u>The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years</u>, Kuttybaev is arrested because he "did not say to that English colonel that without the genius of Stalin, victory would have been impossible, no matter how long they danced round and round with the partisans -- or anyone else, for that matter. So he was not keeping Comrade Stalin in the forefront of his thoughts!"[52] Solzhenitsyn's "Incident at Krechetovka Station" is based on a similar situation: Tveritinov is arrested because he does not know the new name of Stalingrad.[53] Freidenberg even goes so far as to suggest that it was because of its name that Stalingrad was defended at such great cost.[54] In Voinovich's <u>Chonkin</u> a character is arrested, then released immediately upon proving that his name is Stalin.[55] According to Lotman and Uspensky, the characteristic orgnanization for an ideal Book or Manual in a culture oriented towards expression is the question and answer format of a catechism.[56] Stalin's own style proves a perfect example. We read his "On Marxism in Linguistics," which is organized as a series of questions and answers and includes the ritual-like repetitions of key phrases that characterize Soviet journalistic style of the period.[57]

Education and ideology also reflect the orientation towards expression. In art classes, children are asked to draw according to a pattern.[58] In other classes, they are asked to copy and memorize what the teacher says. Shipler writes, "youngsters are drilled in a catechism of memorization and correct response."[59] Just as distortion of certain holy words was proscribed in medieval Russia, so today certain words cannot be misspelled. According to Roy Medvedev, censors criticised a textbook for leaving out letters in words like "socialism" and "party" for the children to fill in: "These sacred words, and you don't write them in full! ...You may not mutilate such important words."[60]

To a large extent it was the language of Lysenko's theories that assured him success with party officials. Phrases like "materialist

principles of development," "the dialectics of heredity," and the "theory of the stadial development of plants"[61] made Lysenko's theory sound as if it was in line with Marxist principles. When practical results were unfavorable, the theory was held on to even more tenaciously. This is what Czeslaw Milosz refers to as "consistent reasoning which orders one to by-pass a fact when a concept comes into conflict with reality."[62] As he sees it, the Method "first introduces the concepts, and then takes their contradictions to be the contradictions of the material observed."[63] Again this would be characteristic of a culture primarily oriented towards expression rather than content: the relation between expression (concepts) and content (material) is perceived as the only possible one, rather than as arbitrary and conventional.

If the typology expression-oriented vs. content-oriented is so ideally suited to a discussion of Soviet culture, why is it Lotman and Uspensky make no reference to the Soviet Union in their otherwise far-ranging works? Perhaps they really do not see the parallels, but it is the similarity with features in their own familiar culture which allows them to perceive these features in pre-revolutionary Russian culture? More likely they are simply sidestepping a potentially sensitive issue. While typologies do help to avoid quantitative evaluation of culture, culture oriented towards expression may still be associated with the Middle Ages and with primitive societies. An overt placement of Soviet culture in the same category as primitive or medieval culture might be taken amiss by the Soviet censor. Nevertheless, there are a few hints here and there that Lotman and Uspensky did, in fact, occasionally have their own culture in mind. In "The Semiotic Mechanism of Culture" they mention that "a change of culture (in particular, during epochs of social cataclysms) is usually accompanied by a sharp increase in the degree of semiotic behavior (which may be expressed by the changing of names and designations)."[64] Surely one could not write this without thinking of the many changes in personal and geographic names, even of the alphabet, that accompanied the October Revolution. Now, of course, many of the original names have been replaced in another flurry of

semiotic activity. In the same article they say that "one of the sharpest forms of social struggle in the sphere of culture is the obligatory demand to forget certain aspects of historical experience. Epochs of historical regression (the clearest example is the Nazi state culture in the twentieth century), in forcing upon the community highly mythologized schemes of history, end by demanding from society that it forget those texts which do not lend themselves to being so organized."[65] Surely the <u>clearest</u> example is Soviet culture, with its periodic rewriting of history and obligatory forgetting of nonpersons. It is a traditional device of Soviet Aesopian language to shift the setting in place (often to Nazi Germany: Shvarts's <u>The Dragon</u> is a case in point) or in time as well (Bulgakov's Rome in <u>The Master and Margarita</u>).[66] But is one justified in giving an Aesopian reading to a scholarly text?[67] Lotman and Uspensky seem to give license themselves, in an introduction to the American collection <u>The Semiotics of Russian Culture</u>: "At the most different historical periods situations have arisen that are typical for Russia: people evidently using the same language (on the expression plane) in fact speak different languages (on the content plane), i. e. they use the same words or phrases but give them different meaning."[68]

The primary orientation of Soviet culture towards expression need not be viewed as negative. It is a commonplace that the exaggerated attention paid to the literary work by authors, readers, and censors may have actually been beneficial to literature.[69] In fact this attention may be the result of a more general orientation of Soviet culture towards expression, which has the same effect. In his article on <u>Master and Margarita</u>, Sinyavsky writes that under Stalin "Russia became filled with "enemies," no less literal for being invisible, who acted like devils and blurred the line between reality and fantasy. Stalin had brought into play (possibly without suspecting it) the magic powers contained in the language, and Russian society, ever susceptible to a graphic perception of words and to the miraculous transformation of life into the plot of a novel (the source, incidentally, of the beauty and grandeur of Russian literature), submitted to the terrifying illusion of living in a world of

miracles, sorcery, perfidy, and artifice."[70] It is perhaps because Russian and Soviet culture are oriented towards expression that we find Russian and Soviet literature so interesting.

Admittedly Lotman and Uspensky's division of culture into two types is an oversimplification -- it cannot explain all the significant features of any culture. But it is a beginning, and it does provide a framework for the students to come away with a sense of having learned at least one big thing about the difference between Russian or Soviet culture and their own. And if the introduction to the opposition between cultures oriented toward expression and cultures oriented toward content expands their tolerance for any cultural difference, then the effort required is worthwhile.

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[1]On icons and iconoclasm in general the following can be used in class:

Ernst Benz, The Eastern Orthodox Church: Its Thought and Life (Chicago: Aldine, 1963), 1-19.

Steven Runciman, Byzantine Style and Civilization (Baltimore: Penguin, 1975), 78-89.

Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church (New York: Penguin, 1963), 38-43.
For a semiotic analysis see the following:

L. F. Zĕgin, Jazyk zḷvopisnogo proizvedenija (Uslovnost' drevnego iskusstva) (M: Iskusstvo, 1970).

B. A. Uspenskij, "K sisteme peredacḷ izobrazĕnija v russkoj ikonopisi," Readings in Soviet Semiotics (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1977), 262-76.

B. A. Uspenskij, The Semiotics of the Russian Icon (Lisse: P. de Ridder Press, 1976).
On theology see also Leonid Ouspensky, Theology of the Icon (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978).

[2]Gregorii Reg. IX, 208 (M. G. Ep. II, 195, 19-23) , also Mansi XII, 1060.

[3]I used the saints' lives in Serge Zenkovsky, Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales (NY: Dutton, 1974). On saints' lives see also Kljucevskij, Zḷtija svjatyx kak istoricĕskij istocḥik (M: Soldatenkov, 1871).

[4]Lest I be accused of excessive optimism about the students' abilities, I will include some selections from their take-home exam essays on the topic of icons and saints' lives: "Like the icons, saints' lives were written in a highly stylized, conservative, and imitative form, but, like the icons, they were not intended to be actually lifelike representations of the saints." "Just as the icon functions as a material channel between the human and the divine, the saint acts as human proof of man's ability to establish personal contact with God. In the making of icons, attention was paid not to artistic realism, but to the rendering of the image in a manner mystically similar to the object being depicted. The artist creating the icon therefore had to be divinely inspired while painting the icon; this procedure is described by Benz in his article "The Orthodox Icon" as a liturgical act with a high degree of holiness and sanctification demanded of the painter. The sanctity of the painting process is also echoed in the lives of the saints, which were produced by divinely inspired monk/chroniclers."

[5]Yu. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," New Literary History, vol. IX, no. 9 (Winter, 1978), 211-32. Also relevant is the companion article, "O dvux tipax orientirovannosti kul'tury," Readings in Soviet Semiotics (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1977), 387-390.

[6]James H. Billington, The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture (New York: Vintage, 1970), 120-162.

[7]Again I include a sample response to an essay question on the topic: "defining and understanding Russian culture in these terms is essential for understanding the schism, but the schism was not an opposition of two different types of culture; rather it was a struggle within a culture based on expression. This helps explain why the bases for the schism were so little understood in the West. Russia's culture was based on a collection of texts; the schism developed out of a struggle over which texts were to be followed. The lines were drawn between the theocrats, led by Nikon, and the fundamentalists (Old Believers), led by Avvakum.   The theocrats felt that the church had strayed too far from its Byzantine and Greek roots and they therefore sought to restore Greek traditions and symbols."

[8]Bernard Guilbert Guerney, trans., Nicholai Gogol, <u>Dead Souls</u> (New York: Modern Library, 1942), 549n.

[9]Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, <u>How Natives Think</u>, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Arno, 1926-1979); Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, <u>Primitive Mentality</u>, trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Macmillan, 1923).

[10]See my dissertation, <u>Olga Mikhailovna Freidenberg: Soviet Mythologist in a Soviet Context</u> (Cornell, 1984), and Iu. M. Lotman, "O. M. Freidenberg as a Student of Culture," in <u>Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union</u>, ed. Henryk Baran (White Plains: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974) 257-68.

[11]Ivan Vasil'evich Kireevski, "On the Nature of European Culture and its Relation to the Culture of Russia," in Marc Raeff, ed., <u>Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology</u>, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1966), 176.

[12]Lotman and Uspensky, 218.

[13]Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev, "Letters on the Philosophy of History," in Marc Raeff, ed., <u>Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology</u>, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1966), 165.

[14]Kireevski, 189.

[15]Kireevski, 187.

[16]Kireevski, 198.

[17]Yu. M. Lotman and A. M. Piatigorsky, "Text and Function," <u>New Literary History</u>, vol. IX, no. 9 (Winter, 1978), 233-244.

[18]Lotman and Piatigorsky, 236.

[19]Kireevski, 192.

[20]Ibid. Again I will quote what one of the students wrote about the Slavophiles and Westernizers: "According to Chaadaev, Russia has its roots in European culture, so what it has now is just a backward form of that culture. Kireevsky and Khomiakov, both Slavophiles, see Russian culture not as chaos, but as another form of culture, legitimate in its own right. They both criticize Western culture to such an extent, however, that they almost label it anti-culture. Western culture, they assert, is based on abstract reasoning, and so is not natural to man. Religion in the West, they say, is based on syllogisms, while in Russia it is more spiritual. In Russia, apparently, law is natural, because it is based on rules which are first universally recognized by the people and then became law, whereas in the West, it is based on abstract principles, not real life."

[21]Ju. M. Lotman, "The Theater and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth Century Culture," The Semiotics of Russian Culture (AnnArbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), 141-164. Thomas Seifrid, "Theatrical Behavior Redeemed: Dostoevskij's Belye noči," SEEJ, vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 163-73.

[22]See Caryl Emerson's comments on the "Russian tendency to distrust narrative as such:" Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 28.

[23]The Complete Prose Tales of Alexandr Sergeyevich Pushkin, tr. Gillon R. Aitken (New York: Norton, 1966), 83.

[24]ibid., 130.

[25]Paul Debreczeny, The Other Pushkin: A Study of Alexander Pushkin's Prose Fiction (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983), 56-137.

[26]David M. Bethea and Sergei Davydov, "Pushkin's Saturnine Cupid: The Poetics of Parody in The Tales of Belkin," PMLA, 1981, Jan., 96(1), 8-21.

[27]M. Yu. Lermontov, A Hero of Our Time, tr. Foote (New York: Penguin, 1966), 94.

[28]Lermontov, 103.

[29]Lermontov, 103.

[30]Lermontov, 135.

[31]Lermontov, 167.

[32]Fyodor Dostoevsky, "White Nights," in <u>Great Short Works of Fyodor Dostoevsky</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 152.

[33]Dostoevsky, 161.

[34]Dostoevsky, 179.

[35]Thomas Seifrid, "Theatrical Behavior Redeemed: Dostoevskij's <u>Belye noci</u>," <u>SEEJ</u>, vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer, 1982), 163-73.

[36]Ju. M. Lotman, "The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Russian Eighteenth Century Culture," in <u>Semiotics of Russian Culture</u> (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), 231.

[37]Ju. M. Lotman, "O tipologičeskom izučenii kul'tury," <u>Readings in Soviet Semiotics</u> (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Publications, 1977), 374.

[38]<u>ibid</u>., 374.

[39]Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," 218.

[40]Katerina Clark, <u>The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual</u> (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3-4.

[41]Boris Polevoi, <u>A Story about a Real Man</u> (Moscow: Foreign Languages, 1952), 209.

[42]Efim Etkind, "Sovetskie Tabu," <u>Syntaxis</u>, No. 9 (1981), 3-20.

[43]Vladimir Voinovich, <u>The Ivankiad</u> (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 7.

[44]Lotman and Uspensky, "On The Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," 219.

[45]Fazil Iskander, <u>The Goatibex Constellation</u> (AnnArbor: Ardis, 1975), 24.

[46]Mikhail Bulgakov, <u>The Master and Margarita</u>, tr. Glenny (New York: Signet, 1967), 24.

[47]Bulgakov, 26.

[48]Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," 217.

[49]Bulgakov, 324.

[50]Kevin Moss, "Bulgakov's <u>Master and Margarita:</u> Masking the Supernatural and the Secret Police," <u>RLJ</u>, XXXVIII, Nos. 129-130 (1984), 115-131.

[51]Bulgakov, Ch. 12.

[52]Chingiz Aitmatov, <u>The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years</u> (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983), 190.

[53]Alexander Solzhenitsyn, <u>Stories and Prose Poems</u> (London: The Bodley Head, 1971), 216.

[54]O. M. Frejdenberg, unpublished retrospective diary, VII/2/96.

[55]Vladimir Voinovich, <u>The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin</u>, tr. Lourie (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

1977), 193-212.

[56]Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," 218.

[57]J. Stalin, "On Marxism in Linguistics," The Soviet Linguistic Controversy (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951), 71-76. We used this text in connection with Soviet science: Lysenko and Marr.

[58]David K. Shipler, Russia: Broken Idols, Solemn Dreams (New York: Penguin, 1983).

[59]Shipler, 64.

[60]Shipler, 104-5.

[61]Loren Graham, Science and Philosophy in the Soviet Union (New York: Knopf, 1972), 209-10.

[62]Czeslaw Milosz, The Captive Mind (New York: Vintage, 1951), 48.

[63]Milosz, 50.

[64]Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," 212.

[65]Lotman and Uspensky, "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture," 217.

[66]On these devices see Lev Loseff, On the Beneficence of Censorship (München: Otto Sagner, 1984), 60-66.

[67]See, for example, Clark and Holquist's interpretation of some of Bakhtin's works as a covert critique of socialist realism: Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, Mikhail Bakhtin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984), 272-274.

[68]Ju. M. Lotman and B. A. Uspenskij, "Author's Introduction," <u>The Semiotics of Russian Culture</u> (Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, 1984), xiii.

[69]Loseff even titles his study <u>On the Beneficence of Censorship.</u>

[70]Abram Tertz (Andrei Sinyavsky), "The Literary Process in Russia," <u>Kontinent</u> (New York: Anchor, 1976), 93.