



РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

**ALEXANDER POTEKIN. «RUSSKIY PACIENT»,
«KABALA», «IZGOY», «ЇЄЛОВЕК OTMENJAETSJA», «JA»**

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Alexander Potemkin's creative work can be viewed from different literary perspectives. One particular feature of his multifaceted oeuvre is that it presents a literary anthology of a bipolar world that is strictly divided into the oligarchy and the poor masses. The author repeatedly points to the soullessness of the powers that be and their sycophants who engage in successful kowtowing and enjoy a life in clover at the financial feeding trough. His novels *The Russian Patient*, *The Bondage*, *The Outcast*, *The Abolition of Man*, and *My Self*, as well as other works, explore this bipolarity of contemporary Russian society in depth. His prose gives expression to specific social phenomena that are manifest in our rapidly changing reality. And most important, these specific phenomena form a leitmotif that is brought to fruition in semantic concepts. It is these concepts that build an invisible bridge to the creative work of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche. It is worth noting that the philosophy and psychology of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche can be felt in nearly all of Alexander Potemkin's books, but this philosophy and psychology articulate a particular literary feature of his creative work. Writer Alexander Potemkin most certainly possesses profound contemporary philosophical (James, Bergson, Proust, Losev, and others) and psychological knowledge combined with immense literary talent. An internal character appears, but he is represented due to desire, expectation, past reminiscences, and hopes for the future. This character represents a combination of what has been accumulated in the past and what is projected into the future. However, he may miss the moment, the present. And this moment has everything, the past and the future, required for experiencing enlightenment. The present moment is recognized as a naked, existential instant – it is the only possible spiritual life. This is why the poor, like Buddha and Christ, have the richest spiritual potential. So each person should strive

to pass through the thorns in search of their spiritual origin.

Alexander Potemkin's creative work has much in common both in style and spirit with the creative work of the great Russian philosophers of the end of the 19th-beginning of the 20th centuries, such as Vladimir Soloviev, Semyon Frank, and Nikolai Berdyaev. Another feature of Alexander Potemkin's creativity is that readers must take the time and reflection to digest it, as they would to read a scientific philosophical essay. It is the rare scientific philosophical publication that has such virtues, where strict philosophical reasoning decorates, like pearls, the fabric of the literary narration written in an entertaining Russian style. The author strictly adheres to the intentions of Friedrich Nietzsche in his creative work: "In three respects history belongs to the living person: it belongs to him as an active and striving person; it belongs to him as a person who preserves and reveres; it belongs to him as a suffering person in need of emancipation. This trinity of relationships," as Nietzsche writes, "corresponds to a trinity of methods for history, to the extent that one may make the distinctions, a *monumental* method, an *antiquarian* method, and a *critical* method. However, the problem to what degree living generally requires the services of history is one of the most important questions and concerns with respect to the health of a human being, a people, or a culture." (*On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History For Life*.) See, for example, "There could be no other destiny for the Russians. For we have always reveled in violence, either over ourselves or over someone else, but always over a fellow countryman. We are as used to humiliation as we are to bad weather. We are drawn to it by some dark irrational craving . . . this need to be and feel constantly abused. And it is not borne of hate toward the world, it is a projection of the national mentality. Russians are searching for themselves in the enigmas of their history." (*The Russian Patient*).

In terms of the latest linguistic techniques, Potemkin's context has a specific "horizon of expectation." It is this feature that defines Potemkin's prose as a philosophical work. Here it is appropriate to remind the reader of the French paraphrase, "Façon de parler," which reveals most precisely the hidden meaning of the text. In his review of Maxim Gorky's new novel *Foma Gordeev*, Anton Chekhov wrote that all the main protagonists had the same way of talking, they all spoke with a kind of ulterior motive, in understatement, as though they knew something, but were not letting on... this is their façon de parler, talking round corners, tongue in cheek (end of February 1900).

So it turns out that the contemporary Russian has lost the dominating meanings of the Byzantine mentality imposed at the end of the 10th century (988). This process has been taking place most graphically in modern and, particularly, contemporary history, for Russia is geographically located between the West and the East. During the time of Muscovia, the country underwent self-isolation under the slogan of hegumen Philotheus of Pskov: "Moscow is the Third Rome." However, during the time of Ivan the Terrible, in order to preserve its sacral dogmatism and mentality, Russia rejected European absolutism and accepted the doctrine of eastern Turkic despotism, which was pleasant and customary for the soul of the ordinary Russian. It is precisely these thoughts that are the "horizon of expectation" in the thinking writer.

I would like to note still one more feature of Alexander Potemkin's creative work – his books are meant for the Russian-speaking intelligentsia, and not for the mass reader looking for popular books. Alexander Potemkin's books struggle with the cult of quasi-literary mediocrity, with the cowardly, but cruel misfit. Potemkin's literary heritage can be described as follows. Everything that is accessible to our understanding passes through the sieve of consciousness and, after latching on to a certain extent, becomes embodied in the creations made by human hands. Everyone knows that art requires sacrifice from the genuine artist of the word, the ability to sacrifice oneself for the sake of a single aim – this is a manifestation of the titanic will power that is most vibrantly and fully expressed in Potemkin's creative work. I think that only these kinds of books can build a foundation for the future mental shift in people's consciousness that will make it possible to overcome the entropy in our evolution. But this new mentality is already floating in the air and is manifested in the boldest relief in *The Russian*

Patient, "death has greater meaning than life" – this is the psychological resume – the capacity for sacrifice and the expansiveness of the Russian soul, no matter what misfortune descends on its poor head. What is more, we see an attempt to combine personal wretchedness and grandeur into a single whole. It is precisely in this contradiction that the mysterious Russian soul resides, as it is embodied in the images of Andrei and Anton Puzyrkov. Here we have an allegory – the struggle between the id and the ego.

The novel *The Bondage* explores the confessions of a drug addict who goes into raptures over his intoxicated id state. At this juncture, a certain doctor appears, who with one injection can change even the national mentality of the Russian, turning him either into a German, or a Jew, or even a Chinaman. In other words, the following "horizon of expectation" unfolds: in the near future, people might disappear, dissolve into the global melting pot of world civilization, thus losing their ethnic face, that is, the value references of their nation. And this takes place under the influence of hyper acculturation. The name of the novel is profoundly significant – everything depends on the caliber of life. Wealth does not play an important role, people will always be in the bondage of their life circumstances, they will either have to "move into a rail carriage for odd-job workers and travel along the Trans-Siberian railroad from Novosibirsk to Chita;" or "work as a seasonal cook in the taiga with a lumber team; or "return to [their] home village and, resigning to a despondent life, take to the bottle" (*The Bondage*).

The Outcast, the first book in a trilogy titled *The Thorns of Spirit*, tells of the life of Russian prince Iverov, who is a French aristocrat and financial genius in the world stock market. However, something is lacking for this successful respectable gentleman's passionate rebellious soul. The novel consists structurally of the following parts: the first describes Iverov's life in France, after which he suddenly leaves for Russia. The plot goes on to delve into the self-reflection of the main protagonist. He becomes immersed in contemplation and tries to understand what is going on in the world while engaging in self-absorption. He ponders on man's purpose and the meaning of life and heads off into cultural and anthropological quests related directly to his university years, when he studied in France. The problems of acculturation were the subject and target of the studies of famous scientists of Western civilization (Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and others). These problems are studied in West European



universities, and our main protagonist knows and uses this technology in his considerations of particular phenomena of social life. So the emotional vulnerability and impeccable purity of the main protagonist's soul are similar to that of Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin. His philosophical pursuits allow me to see intercepting parallels with Nikolai Berdyaev. The novel's leitmotif, in my opinion, is a kind of fracture of everyday life of the country's population and the cultural and anthropological crisis that has descended on Russian society. The meaning of life has been lost due to the influx of the surrogate mass culture of Western Europe, which has led to the emergence of a "new balance" (according to Gershkovich) in the cultural code of Russians. To put it in a nutshell, Alexander Potemkin's novel is devoted to a description of an outcast's emotional and spiritual searching, that is, we have a contemporary superfluous man, a kind of internal isolation of the mercantile merciless and hostile world that surrounds him.

In my opinion, Alexander Potemkin's novel *The Abolition of Man* is a human comedy of contemporary Russian society, as the author defines it himself. In structure, style, and approach, this book is close to the works of Honore de Balzac. Society is divided into two large groups – one is abandoned on the sidelines of life, these are the lowlife intellectuals, and the other is comprised of the satiated super rich, corrupt bureaucrats, sticky-fingered writers, business-like speculators, greedy politicians, visiting guest workers, and vagrants. Here we have the variegated gallery of prototypes that fill the novel.

The spiritual pursuits of the novel's characters are shown in real life and this portrayal has its roots in the best traditions of world literature.

Now for the short story *My Self*. This work fully reflects the classical scheme of Sigmund Freud – the Ego, Id, and Superego, all manifest in the internal world of Vasily Karamanov. He has been an orphan since childhood and in this suspended state encounters the cruel and despicable world. He is an introvert, constantly reflects on the cruel world around him, and tries to find an answer to why this superego, i.e. man's inherent essence, is so inferior. He tries to find a way to improve the ego in man and reduce the id to a minimum, thus adjusting and enhancing the current state of the superego in society. This is an eternal question, which, incidentally, was also addressed by Svyatoslav of Kiev in his *Izbornik* (Anthology) of 1076. Moreover, I would note that this short story also resonates to a certain extent with Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical treatise *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

So, the literary works of Alexander Potemkin are multidimensional creations – they are reflective novels with psychological content and philosophical generalizations on the most urgent problems of Russian reality. I can assuredly say that an author has appeared in world literature who is penetratingly, with hope and love, pointing the way to reclaiming man's spirituality and opening up a new page in the philosophical and psychological vector of literary history. Knowing this, I confidently recommend Alexander Potemkin for the Nobel Prize in Literature.