Martin C. Putna

Rus Ukraine Russia

Scenes from the Cultural History of Russian Religiosity

KAROLINUM PRESS VÁCLAV HAVEL SERIES

Rus – Ukraine – Russia
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Published by Charles University, Karolinum Press
Translation by Michael W. Dean
Cover and layout by /3. dílna/
Typeset by Karolinum Press, Czech Republic
First English edition

Originally published in Czech as *Obrazy z kulturních dějin ruské religiozity*,
Prague: Vyšehrad, 2015

ISBN 978-80-246-3580-4
ISBN 978-80-246-3581-1 (pdf)
ISBN 978-80-246-4739-5 (epub)
ISBN 978-80-246-4738-8 (mobi)

Charles University
Karolinum Press

www.karolinum.cz
ebooks@karolinum.cz

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INTRODUCTION

Czech Perspectives on the Cultural and Spiritual Roots of Russia

This book is being written at a time when the Czechs' relationship to Russia has again become a question, one that concerns the country's internal norms and its place in Europe. It is being written as Russia vigorously asserts its claims in Ukraine and, no less vigorously thought by different means, reasserts its influence in Central Europe and thus in the Czech lands as well. One part of Czech society expresses shock at these developments, the other part trivializes Russia's actions or even supports them as part of a desirable process that is historically and morally justified. Both sides appeal in their arguments to historical experience, referring to Russian mentality and its roots as well as to the history of Russian-Czech relations. While this Czech book about Russia avoids direct engagement with contemporary politics, it does seek to provide a more systematic interpretation of those historical experiences and to describe the spiritual and cultural roots from which the present situation has arisen.

In the long history of Czech thinking about Russia's spiritual roots, there have been several different traditions. First among them is romantic Russophilism. It arises from the idea of a genetic and historically fatalistic bond connecting all those nations which speak Slavic languages. Russophiles admire the power of the Russian state and the hierarchical structure of Russian society; they desire as strong a Russian influence as possible in the Czech lands, even direct annexation of their country by Russia. This tradition was born of European romanticism in the early nineteenth century and its spirit pervaded the scientific and artistic creations of that era.

The canonical expression of early Czech Russophilism in this sense was provided by Jan Kollár's epic poem, *The Daughter of*

Sláva (*Slávy dcera*). In typically romantic fashion, Kollár considered himself no less a scientist than a poet, expressing in verse the same truths revealed in his etymological and archaeological studies.[1]

Kollár's ideas contributed to the development of the Czech National Revival during the early nineteenth century. His ideas were picked up in literature by many writers not normally considered particularly Slavophile: one might for example consider the many Russian motifs in the work of Julius Zeyer.[2] Slavic scholars of greater caliber than Kollár developed his ideas further.[3] In the twentieth century Kollár's thinking was adopted in cultural and political writings by authors of a national-conservative persuasion: texts by Josef Holeček emphasizing the supposed moral purity of the Russian people,[4] Karel Kramář's project of "neo-Slavism" with its vision of a Slavic federation headed by Russia,[5] Rudolf Medek and his experiences as a Russian legionnaire,[6] or Karel VI Schwarzenberg's references to the genealogical and heraldic ties between the ruling dynasties of Bohemia and Russia.[7] This tradition retreated to the background during the communist era and survived on the margins in exile—only to emerge more recently on the extreme right-wing of the political spectrum.[8]

A second tradition was born of Czech liberal-democratic orientation and observed Russia with equally great interest, but did in a way

1 Cf. Jan Kollár, *Slávy dcera: Báseň lyricko-epická v pěti zpěvích*, with commentary by Martin C. Putna (Prague: Academia, 2014).
2 Cf. Janina Viskovatá, *Ruské motivy v tvorbě Julia Zeyera* (Prague: Slovanský ústav, 1932).
3 Cf. Milan Kudělka, *O pojetí slavistiky: Vývoj představ o jejím předmětu a podstatě* (Prague: Academia, 1984).
4 Cf. Josef Holeček, *Rusko-české kapitoly* (Prague: privately printed, 1891).
5 Cf. Ljobov Běloševská and Zdeněk Sládek, eds., *Karel Kramář: Studie a dokumenty* (Prague: Slovanský ústav, 2003).
6 Cf. Katya Kocourek, *Čechoslovakista Rudolf Medek: Politický životopis* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 2011).
7 Cf. Martin C. Putna, ed., *Karel VI Schwarzenberg: Torzo díla* (Prague: Torst, 2007).
8 Cf. *Proti Proud: Kontrarevoluční magazín Petra Hájka*, protiproud.parlamentnilisty.cz, accessed June 9, 2015.

that was critical and analytical. A "forerunner" of this perspective was the first modern author from Bohemia to spend time in Russia, Count Joachim von Sternberg, who had experienced life there while traveling with priest and linguist Josef Dobrovský. In his narrative of the journey, *Bemerkungen über Russland* (Remarks about Russia, 1794), the author wrote of his shock at the inhumane treatment of the Russian people.[9] But it was not until Karel Havlíček penned his Pictures from Russia (*Obrazy z Rus*), published serially in the 1840s, that the "realistic" Czech approach to Russia received its foundational text. Based on the author's long sojourn in Russia among the Slavophiles of Moscow, Havlíček clearly demonstrated that neither the tsarist regime nor Russian mentality could provide a model for Czechs to follow at home. The greater part of Czech society, with Palacký at its head, arrived at a similar conclusion after witnessing tsarist armies crush "the springtime of peoples" in Europe.[10]

Havlíček toyed with the idea of writing an original history of Russia in Czech, but he never found time for more than a collection of essayistic observations. What Havlíček originally intended, T.G. Masaryk brought to completion with his work *Rusko a Evropa* (1913–1919, originally published in German as *Russland und Europa*, in English as *The Spirit of Russia*), a systematic, scholarly and in-depth analysis grounded above all in Russian literature and religious (as well as anti-religious) philosophy. While many of the details found in Masaryk's study have since become outdated, the work's enduring value consists in its distinction between two currents in Russian mentality: the nationalistic-theocratic-autocratic and the liberal-critical-democratic. However, when considering present events these currents can no longer be categorized according to

9 Cf. Vladimir Andrejevič Francev, *Cesta J. Dobrovského a hraběte J. Šternberka do Ruska v letech 1792–1793* (Prague: Unie, 1923).

10 Cf. František Stellner and Radek Soběhart, "Rusko jako hrozba? Vytváření negativního obrazu Ruska u české veřejnosti v letech 1848–1849" in *19. století v nás: Modely, instituce a reprezentace, které přetrvaly*, ed. Milan Řepa (Prague: Historický ústav, 2008), 554–566.

Masaryk's original labels "Muscovite" and "Saint Petersburgian." Those Czechs familiar with the literature considered the work by the Russian historian and liberal politician Pavel Milyukov, Studies in the history of Russian culture (*Ocherki po istorii russkoi kultury*, translated into Czech as *Obrazy z dějin ruské vzdělanosti* between 1902 and 1910), to be a Russian parallel to Masaryk's analysis.

Many Czech historians and publicists continued to develop Masaryk's line of thought, most notably Jan Slavík. One result of Masaryk's attention to democratic currents in Russia was the Russian Action, an extensive relief operation to support exiles who left the country following the Bolshevik coup of 1917.[11] The literary scholar Václav Černý provided a distinctive postscript to Masaryk's volume with his study *Vývoj a zločiny panslavismu* (The development and crimes of pan-Slavism). Černý wrote the work at the beginning of the 1950s, though it would not be published until 1993, after the author's death. Composed in the early days of Czech vassalage to the USSR, the work bears the mark of passionate indignation.[12] According to Černý's dark vision, a direct path leads from naively romantic pan-Slavism, which arose in Russia as a response to German and Czech influences (Herder and Kollár),[13] right up to the ideological justifications of the Soviet Union's incursion.

The third tradition concerns the culture of Czech Catholicism. In this instance, too, one can identify a "forerunner": baroque Slavism, or the interest taken by seventeenth-century Catholic (but also Protestant) scholars in Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary in the historical ties between Slavic-speaking peoples, and above all their interest in Russia. Many looked to Russia for deliverance from the

11 Cf. Václav Veber, ed., *Ruská a ukrajinská emigrace v ČSR v letech 1918–1945* (Prague: Karolinum, 1996).

12 The study was first published by the journal *Střední Evropa* in 1993, as a book in 1995 and again in 2011. See Václav Černý, *Vývoj a zločiny panslavismu* (Prague: Václav Havel Library, 2011).

13 Though Russian pan-Slavism with its vision of the powerful state as the carrier of a spiritual message can also be traced back to the thinking of Hegel.

Turkish menace—and a possible destination for Catholic (and Protestant) missionaries.[14] In the nineteenth century Catholic Unionism followed in the footsteps of baroque Slavism. It was a movement that adopted as its proximate goal the study of Russian religious traditions. Its aim was to unite the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches (Scene 14). In the Czech lands, Unionism flourished more than anywhere else in Moravia among revivalist circles gathered around the person of František Sušil. Its symbolic center was Velehrad, once the seat of the mission of Sts Cyril and Methodius, whom Unionism understood as models for a Slavic-speaking church not yet divided into antagonistic Eastern and Western parts.[15]

While it is true that Unionism did not arouse mass sympathy for Catholicism among Russians, it did engender a large quantity of scientific and cultural material in the fields of Russian, Slavic, and Byzantine studies. In the form of translations and commentaries, Unionism introduced an abundance of texts from Kievan and Muscovite Orthodox culture (or their echoes in modern culture), texts with which the representatives of liberal trends, such as Havlíček and Masaryk, had little patience. The philologist and Catholic priest Josef Vašica was the prime mover of this cultural transfer. Thanks to him, Russian spiritual texts became a dominant feature of Josef Florian's Catholic publishing program in Stará Říše.[16] One of them, the publishing house of Ladislav Kuncíř, released a book in 1930 titled *Duch ruské církve* (The spirit of the Russian church), a first attempt at the comprehensive treatment of Russia's older spiritual history. Written in Czech and adopting a Unionist standpoint, the work emphasized those personalities and currents of thought that

14 Cf. Rudo Brtáň, *Barokový slavizmus: Porovnávacia štúdia z dejín slovanskej slovesnosti* (Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš: Tranoscius, 1939).

15 Cf. Michal Altrichter, *Velehrad: filologoi versus filosofoi* (Olomouc: Refugium Velehrad-Roma, 2005).

16 Cf. Libuše Heczková, "Rozanov a ti druzí: Rozhovor s Andrejem Stankovičem," *Volné sdružení českých rusistů* 8 (1992): 65–67.

aimed to unite the Eastern and Western Churches. Its author was a Russian exile, the publicist Valerij Vilinskij. Although his later fate caused some controversy,[17] Vilinskij's work played a role for sympathizers of the Czech-Catholic take on Russia not unlike that played by Milyukov in liberal circles.

Needless to say, these views were removed from public sight along with the rest of Catholic culture after the communist seizure of power in 1948. From the 1960s, however, they began to appear again, at least marginally, in the tolerated "gray zone." Scholars of Church Slavonic or Byzantium, for example, were permitted to have their work published by Vyšehrad, a publisher that released series of translations of medieval legends and other mainly religious texts of eastern Christendom.[18] Other scholars chose exile. At least two, both of them Catholic priests, won renown abroad for propagating the understanding of Russian religious culture and eastern Christianity more generally: the Byzantine scholar František Dvorník[19] and the popularizer of eastern, especially monastic, spirituality, Tomáš Špidlík.[20] The latter was a close acquaintance of Pope Karol Wojtyła. Špidlík's appointment to Cardinal in 2003 was intended to demonstrate the church's official interest in the spiritual traditions of Orthodoxy. It was by way of Špidlík and Wojtyła that sympathy for Orthodoxy arrived to the Czech lands, where it has exerted a considerable influence since the 1990s.

The fourth tradition is that of the Czech left, which began looking with hope to Russia in 1917, the year of the Bolshevik take-over. This tradition found cultural expression in emphatic odes to Lenin and the revolution penned by first-rate authors like J. Wolker,

17 Cf. Anne Hultsch, *Ein Russe in der Tschechoslowakei: Leben und Werk des Publizisten Valerij S. Vilinskij, 1901–1955* (Köln: Böhlau, 2011).
18 Cf. Pravomil Novák et al., *Sborník 70 let nakladatelství Vyšehrad* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2004).
19 Cf. Ludvík Němec, *Francis Dvorník: Mistr historické syntézy* (Olomouc: Refugium Velehrad-Roma, 2013).
20 Cf. Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualita křesťanského Východu* (Olomouc: Refugium Velehrad-Roma, 2002).

V. Nezval, F. Halas, and V. Holan, or in uncritical accounts of "building socialism" in the USSR, the tone for which was set by Julius Fučík's book *O zemi, kde zítra již znamená včera* (In the land where tomorrow is already yesterday). In scholarship, the tradition found expression in the obedient acceptance of theses put forward by official "Soviet science" in the USSR about the political and cultural history or Russia and the Czech lands. Political and artistic attitudes that before 1948 had been counted as private matters after 1948 became tests of loyalty to the regime in power, entry tickets into public life. The great paradox is that however much this new culture and science wished to emphasized its novel break with the traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia (tsarism, religiosity, reaction, and backwardness), it was in fact permeated by the tradition of Russophilia. Its exponents emphasized the superiority of Russian history, Russian culture, and the Russian nation. But "Soviet science" could never obscure the fact that it was, in truth, the heir of romantic-era "Slavic science."

The fifth tradition emerged from polemics with the fourth, developing as it were within the womb of the latter. Some members of the interwar left reconsidered their enthusiasm for Soviet Russia after confronting its underside. An example of this waning enthusiasm are the novels written by Jiří Weil, whose books *Moskva-hranice* (Moscow-border, 1937) and *Dřevěná lžíce* (The wooden spoon, published posthumously in 1992) offer a literary depiction of Stalinist terror. During the communist era in Czechoslovakia, Russian studies were elevated to the status of a privileged scholarly and cultural discipline that drew many Czech intellectuals into its orbit, albeit not always voluntarily. In other words, there were among the Russianists some who engaged with their subject in a "subterraneous" manner: scholars who resuscitated marginalized, forgotten, or repressed authors; who recovered lost intellectual trends and values, presenting them to the public under the guise of disseminating "fraternal Russian culture." They did so as much as was permitted by the cultural politics

of the regime. When this sort of subterfuge proved unworkable, finished texts were set aside for publication as samizdat.

With regard to this tendency, mention should be made of Jan Zábrana, a poet who was allowed to work as a translator in the "gray zone"—but who at the same time helped translate Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* into Czech for samizdat, noting with bitterness in his diary how revolting he found "Byzantine Asiaticism, characteristic not only of Stalin, but of Russian mentality generally—Chaadaev knew that about his compatriots already."[21] Mention must also be made of Karel Štindl, who by contrast directly joined the dissidents and translated the works of Russian religious authors. One should mention Miluše Zadražilová, who translated and composed epilogues together with her husband Ladislav Zadražil, although her name was no longer permitted to appear in print after 1968. Zadražilová simultaneously maintained secret contact with Russian dissidents inside the USSR and in exile (Scene 19).

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Zadražilová and her husband, Karel Štindl and other Russianists of the "gray zone" or dissident circles arrived—or returned—as instructors in the department of Russian Studies at Prague's Philosophical Faculty. Once there, they began to foster a new conception of Czech Russian studies: the Czech Russianist should not be one who loves, admires, and propagates all things Russian. Above all, he should not be a supporter of Russian or Soviet imperialism. The Czech Russianist should be intimately familiar with the Russian cultural context and, as a consequence, be able to evaluate it critically. The Czech Russianist should support those people and values in Russia that stand on the side of individual freedom against the regime, against state terror, against hollow institutions, against the repression of freedom of conscience and expression. It was of secondary importance whether these individuals and their values hailed from the liberal

21 Jan Zábrana, *Celý život: Výbor z deníků 1948–1984* (Prague: Torst, 2001), 440.

tradition (in the spirit of Havlíček or Masaryk), from the religious tradition (in the spirit of Vašica or Špidlík), from the tradition of leftwing social criticism, or whether they maintained an ironic, postmodern distance from all preceding values.

I passed through this school myself and, like many others, I initially found myself having become an "involuntary" Russianist. From the mid-1990s, when I began to turn my attention to topics beyond the field of Russian studies, I repeatedly ran up against the problem of Czech perceptions of Russia: in my work on the history of Czech Catholic literature and the Unionist tradition of Sušil and Vašica; in my study about Václav Havel's reception of the liberal-critical tradition of Masaryk and Černý; when working through the legacy of Karel VI Schwarzenberg and also upon composing a commentary to Kollár's *Slávy dcera* about the tradition of romantic Russophilism. Thus instructed, I now return by way of detour, motivated by the intention to address one of Czech society's urgent needs as well as by a feeling of gratitude to my former teachers and the desire to repay old debts by means of the present book.

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This Czech book about Russia is titled "scenes from the cultural history of Russian religiosity." The title is meant to recall Havlíček's *Pictures from Russia* and Milyukov's *Studies in the History of Russian Culture*. But above all, it follows my earlier book, *Obrazy z kulturních dějin americké religiozity* (Scenes from the cultural history of American religiosity).[22] As in that volume, this book arranges vast and complicated material—material which might have threatened to become too unwieldy or to take on the proportions of Masaryk's *Spirit of Russia*—into a collection of "scenes." Each "scene" represents a chosen moment, a point in Russian history when an event of fundamental significance occurred within some spiritual current

22 Martin C. Putna, *Obrazy z kulturních dějin americké religiozity* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2010).

or movement, an event directly or indirectly reflected in some particular cultural object, an object which itself in turn shaped the further development of Russian spirituality.

The crucial importance of literary works for the comprehension of developments in Russia has been demonstrated many times over. In Russia, where beyond a few brief epochs and happy exceptions an open and free public life has never existed, let alone an open and free political life, literature played an even more important role as medium for social reflection than it did in Central or Western Europe, to say nothing of America. For that matter, Masaryk's *Russia and Europe* also considered Russian literature as the key to understanding Russian spiritual life. As with Masaryk, the objective here is not so much to offer an aesthetic analysis of Russian literary works and artistic creations (there are plenty of those already) as it is to examine how these works document spiritual trends. The concern is with the scenes chosen and the works selected; some classic authors will be addressed only marginally, others not at all, while in some scenes the more "marginal" works will prove the most illustrative.

As a method, this approach to "setting the scene" comes with certain risks. Many important personalities, works, and events are of necessity left out (this book is not and does not want to be a substitute for a history of Russian literature or of the church in Russia). Nor does the method necessarily prevent one from drowning in the material—it is enough to recall Alexander Solzhenitsyn suffocating in his attempt to structure the history of the Russian Revolution into similar historical "junctures" in his voluminous, and never completed, cycle *The Red Wheel* (1984–1991, see Conclusion). Solzhenitsyn's attempt should thus serve as a warning and admonishment to single out that which, from the perspective of the book's conception, represents—put biblically—the *unum necessarium*.

But what is the *unum necessarium,* the "one thing necessary?" Five basic thoughts run through the individual "scenes" which comprise this book, scenes that I consider necessary for understanding

Russia's spiritual past and, by means of them, understanding Russia's present, politics included.

The first three are "negative"—they consist of reversing the ideological trinity of Russian imperialism, a motto formulated in 1833 by the tsar's minister of education, Count Sergei Uvarov (Scene 15): autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality. The motto is clear and intelligible as a political program—formulated in full awareness that it was to force into its image a reality to which it did not at all correspond.

First: a single Russia with a single, immutable identity has never existed. Rather there existed several distinct formations, each one with a separate regional center and cultural trajectory: Kievan Rus, Novgorodian Rus, Lithuanian Rus, Muscovite Rus, Ukrainian Rus and Belarus, and the exile "Russia beyond Russia." The word "Russian" itself contains multiple, mutually exclusive meanings. It is usually identified with the Muscovite state and its imperial successors right up through the USSR and the empire of Vladimir Putin. But such an association is an "Uvarovian" simplification. One can only understand the ambiguity and contradictions of that which we call "Russianness" after recognizing the many and varied traditions of Rus.

Second: never in its history has "Russianness" been identical with Orthodoxy. On the one hand, Orthodoxy itself was never so unchanging in its cultural forms (Scene 4). On the other hand, there were contacts with Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, Uniatism or Greek Catholicism. There were individual attempts to combine confessional identities, as in various forms of domestic "heterodoxy" from the ultra-Slav Old Believers to radical "sectarians", or as in Judaism and esoteric beliefs. These all belong to the cultural history of Russia. The dynamism of Russian culture does not arise from some single, permanent Orthodoxy—to the contrary, it comes from religious plurality.

Third: never in its history has Russian culture been ethnically homogenous. The Scandinavian Rurikid dynasty, Finnish shamanism, Byzantine Orthodoxy, Bulgarian apocrypha, Mongolian military

and administrative forms and families of Tatars intermarrying with families of Russian boyars, German intellectuals and officers from the conquered Baltics and from Germany itself, Polish intellectuals and officers from "tripartite" Poland, and of course Jews—these all contributed to the making of Russian culture. Moreover, Ukrainians and Belarusians—the former more vociferously than the latter—assert a claim to no small part of that history which the ordinary Russian simply assumes to have been ethnically Russian. The unity of all this is real only on the level of Russian as a shared language of culture, one that forms a discrete sphere of civilization. And even with that caveat, one must remain aware that up to the era of Petrine reforms the cultural language of this civilization was a slightly modified form of Church Slavonic, of which we can regard Russia as an heir. There were also periods in which other languages predominated, above all French.

The fourth basic thought is "culturally comparative." It consists in recognizing the uneven cultural development of Russia, on the one hand, and Western and Central Europe, on the other. If in Europe one can identify a "pendulum of artistic movements"[23] according to which artistic creation and thinking developed along the arch "Romanesque art—Gothic—Renaissance—Mannerism—Baroque—Classicism—Romanticism—Realism" etc., then in Russia, and above all in Muscovite Russia after centuries of isolation from the West, this sequence cannot not be applied. Historians of art and literature have resorted to various criteria to discern something one might label a Russian Gothic, Russian Renaissance, or a Russian Baroque (in fact, only with the rise of Classicism in the eighteenth century does one finds any true correspondence, Scene 11). They find parallels in slightly delayed echoes of Western influences (influence that of course were present in Lithuanian Rus, but by no means

23 Cf. Jiří Kroupa, *Školy dějin umění: Metodologie dějin umění* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2007).