

Shestov or the Absolute Pitch

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1 Introduction

In the introduction of his book *L'invention du langage*, Denis Duclos makes this observation: *En gros les discours savants sur le langage se divisent en deux clans: ceux qui soutiennent que le langage est un outillage de communication, toujours plus exact dans la transmission d'informations, et ceux qui croient au fond que l'essence du monde étant ineffable, les choses sérieuses commencent ...quand on se tait.*

Dany Jaspers, of course, belongs to the first club. He has been arguing and demonstrating this point of view to all of us, all those years we were working together. But you can also juggle these two attitudes, as does the Russian Jewish philosopher, Lev Shestov, who successfully combines words and silence. Not only does he achieve this in his own philosophical discourse, by avoiding statements and definitions about the essence of his thought and belief, but also in the way he reads his authors, according an attentive ear to what is not being said in their writings. Furthermore, his style – that we will define as 'metaphorical style' – is based on this same mix of communication and reserve. This threefold occurrence of the subtle interplay between what is said and what remains unsaid allows us to speak of a form of apophaticism in Shestov's philosophical discourse, in his philosophical approach and in his metaphorical style.

Let us begin with a beautiful analogy. In his novel *The Discovery of Heaven* the Dutch writer Harry Mulisch sets up a dialogue between a sculptor and a child prodigy. The sculptor claims that everybody can sculpt, 'all you have to do', he says, is 'remove the excess stone'. When, a few moments later, the boy asks him who God is, the sculptor answers that God does not exist, but that according to his believers, God created the world. 'Michelangelo', explains the sculptor to the child, 'tried to represent God, but probably just represented some old chap who sold pizzas in the neighborhood, as nobody can represent somebody who does

not exist.' To this the boy replies that he knows how to represent God. 'You take a block of marble and you hack at it until nothing is left'. Further in the dialogue the boy asks about the Devil. 'You do not know who the Devil is?' exclaims the sculptor. He then explains that, like God, the Devil doesn't exist, but that he is meant to be the archenemy of God. 'Then I know how to represent him', answers the boy, 'you have to do the opposite: stuff the whole world with marble'.

Transposing this idea from sculpting to speaking demonstrates the polarization between on the one hand, the purification of language leading to the complete absence of language, and on the other, the over-use of language which leads to a complete obstruction of communication.

The former position, the absence of language, can result in a void, and encourage disengagement towards life and towards anything external. Pontius Pilate, or Sartre's Roquentin in *La Nausée* can be taken as representatives of this kind of attitude. Their gradual withdrawal from any form of involvement transforms their discourse into a denial of communication. One could describe their position as the position of a subject without a means of communication.

The second situation, the over-use of language, is very clearly illustrated by Dostoyevsky's panoramic overview of the evolution of sin in his short story 'The Dream of a Ridiculous Man': As they became wicked they began talking of brotherhood and humanitarianism, and understood those ideas. *As they became criminal, they invented justice and drew up whole legal codes in order to observe it, and to ensure their being kept, set up a guillotine.*¹

Words replace reality and build a thick wall between an expression and the essence of what is been expressed.

Bakhtin was one of the first to show us how our own discourse is embedded in the discourse of the other. At the outset, this new insight seemed to render the communication between two subjects more interesting and more intense. Yet Kristeva's further exploration of this idea, Lacan's structural analysis of language, Foucault's revelations of the links between language and power, and the development of discourse analysis and intertextuality, all go to undermine the illusion of man being master of his words. We are faced with the astonishing impression that language has become an organism within its own right, cutting its ties with man and reality: a means of communication without a master.

¹Достоевский Ф. М., Сон смешного человека, V: Когда они стали злы, то начали говорить о братстве и гуманности и поняли эти идеи. Когда они стали преступны, то изобрели справедливость и предписали себе целые кодексы, чтоб сохранить ее, а для обеспечения кодексов поставили гильотину. (Dostoyevsky, *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*, V, English translation by Constance Garnett).

To re-establish a balance between these extremes, it is helpful to discuss also the creative dimension of language and to remember that in Hebrew the term 'dabar' means not only 'the spoken word', but also 'the thing', 'the event' or 'the object of action'. Whereas the Greek word λόγος relates to the concept of thinking, in Hebrew the word 'dabar' refers to a speech-act that modifies the world, and in this sense corroborates John Austin's intuition that in the final analysis, all sentences are implicit or explicit performative utterances. 'Dabar' emphasizes the creative foundation of language that, according to Lev Shestov, was lost after the Fall, meaning that Reason...*has taken away from us the most precious of heaven's gifts – the sovereign right to participate in the divine 'fiat – let there be' – by flattening out our thought and reducing it to the plane of the petrified 'est – it is'*.²

It is on the border between this lost power and the actual impotence of language that the Russian Jewish philosopher, Lev Shestov, thinks, listens and speaks.

2 Thinking: Shestov's philosophical discourse

Shestov's awareness of the limits of language is a recurrent theme in his philosophical discourse. Thus he offers advice to his friend and pupil, Benjamin Fondane, while discussing his approach to Kierkegaard: *...he doesn't really deserve your reproaches of him! This is because you forgot his manner of 'indirect speech', or rather because, as you admit yourself, this manner irritates you. What a strange thing! Berdyaev told me too: 'Why speak indirectly? If you want to say something - say it openly.' But I don't think that Berdyaev is right. There are things that can only be said indirectly. This is also true of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. It is important not only to 'forgive' them this manner of speech but also to know how to appreciate it and understand the secret meaning of their writings.*³

²Шестов Л.И., Афины и Иерусалим, с.21: ...отнял у нас драгоценнейший дар неба, державное право участвовать в творческом fiat (да будет) втолковав и расплотив наше мышление в плоскости окаменевшего est (есть). (Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem*, English translation by Bernard Martin, p. 70).

³Fondane B. *Rencontres avec Léon Chestov*, p. 123: ...vous lui faites des reproches qu'il n'a pas mérités! Cela provient de ce que vous avez oublié sa manière de parler 'indirectement', ou plutôt parce que cette manière de parler, comme vous l'avouez, vous irrite. Etrange chose! Berdiaeff m'a dit aussi: 'A quoi bon parler indirectement? Si tu veux dire quelque chose – parle ouvertement.' Mais je ne crois pas que Berdiaeff ait raison. Il y a des choses dont on ne peut parler autrement qu'indirectement. C'était aussi le cas de Nietzsche et de Dostoïevski. Et il faut, non

Fighting once again with his friend and opponent, Berdyaev, who happened to point out some incongruity in his writings, Shestov answers: *What is true is true. He has caught me. But why try to catch me? And is this the way to read books? After reading a book, one should forget all the words and even all of the author's ideas and remember only his personality. For words and thoughts are only imperfect means of communication. It is impossible either to photograph or to draw the soul, so we turn to words.*⁴

This distrust for language and for the possibilities of language is directly related to Shestov's belief that truth is a living thing and cannot be grasped by words or encapsulated by language. If truth were to be grasped, it would cease to be the truth. Thus he says, referring to the wise man of old: *One cannot say of God that He is, for when one says 'God is' one immediately loses Him.*⁵ Shestov's attitude exasperates some readers, for example, Kent Hill who bitterly reproaches him: *He spends his time attacking that which he does not believe, rather than in putting forward what he does.*⁶

Shestov's reticence concerning the content of his belief is perhaps partly due to his personality, although it is more obviously linked to his conviction that faith can never be taken for granted and cannot be stored in a safe place of the mind, ready to be downloaded as soon as it is required, or as soon as we wish to describe it. A faith such as this, condensed into a standard formula, ready for consumption, is exactly what Shestov struggles with. Instead, faith, according to Shestov, should be a creative power, the *fiat* we lost immediately after the Fall. Within the constraints of our human existence, whatever is left of this creative power can only be expressed in a never-ending combat, a struggle without relief, a fight to the death. That's why Shestov defines faith as the following: *Faith brings neither peace of mind nor stability. Faith is not based on the consensus omnium. It knows no end and no limits. Unlike Reason it never reaches triumphant*

seulement, leur 'pardonner' leur manière de parler, mais savoir l'apprécier et comprendre aussi le sens caché de leurs écrits (English translation by Ariane K.).

⁴Шестов Л.И., Начала и концы, с. 121: Что правда – то правда. поймал. Только зачем ловить было? И разве так книги читают? По прочтении книги нужно забыть не только все слова, но и все мысли автора, и только помнить его лицо. Ведь слова и мысли только несовершенные средства общения. Нельзя душу ни сфотографировать, ни нарисовать, ну, и обращается к слову. (Shestov, *In Praise of Folly*, English translation by Taras Zakydalsky, p. 52).

⁵Шестов Л. И., На весах Иова, с. 89: про Бога нельзя сказать, что он существует. Ибо сказавший: 'Бог существует' - теряет Бога. (Shestov, *In Job's Balances*, English translation by Camilla Coventry & C.A. Macartney, p. 78)

⁶Hill Kent R., *On the threshold of faith*, p. 143.

*self-satisfaction. Faith is tremor, anguish, torment, hope, expectation, a premonition of something higher and unexpected, boredom and dissatisfaction about the present and impotence with regard to the future.*⁷

Shestov's reticence and view of faith as something superhuman, make his writings come across as negative theology. He openly refuses to submit the content of his faith to the scrutiny of reason. One might imagine this as something difficult to do, as reason can appear to be the only genuine communication tool at one's disposal. Abandoning reason we fear to lose that which we consider to be the true foundation of universality. But rational communication is not the only means of communication, and, while it can be said that Shestov remains extremely secretive about his faith, it can equally be said that he whispers it in every single sentence and throughout his entire work.

3 Listening: Shestov's philosophical approach

In our opinion to reproach Shestov this *via negativa*, as does Kent Hill, is not to recognize the creative dimension of Shestov's philosophical approach. It is important to distinguish between his philosophical thought and his philosophical approach. In his thought he is forced, as are all human beings, to deal with the limitations and impotence of language. Yet in his approach Shestov shows great ingenuity in finding ways to reach beyond the impotence of language to the level of the creative and powerful speech-act. How does he achieve this tour de force? We saw how he identifies and admits the infirmity of language within his own discourse. He links this infirmity with the paralyzing effect of Reason, which he sees as having usurped the power of God and taken authority over man. He makes the diagnosis as follows: *That which we call "understanding" is like an enormous stone, fallen from God knows where, which has crushed and flattened our consciousness, beaten it down to the two-dimensional plane of an illusory hall-existence, and weakened our powers of thought. We can only "accept"—we are not yet able to challenge, we are convinced that "challenging" only spoils and corrupts human thought; Job, Abraham, and the Psalmist, in our opinion, think badly. But*

⁷Шестов Л. И., *Sola fide*, с. 280: Вера не дает ни покоя, ни уверенности, ни прочности. Вера не опирается на *consensus omnium*, вера не знает конца и пределов. В противоположность знанию, ей не дано никогда торжество самоудовлетворения. Она – трепет, ожидание, мука, страх, надежда, постоянное предчувствие великой неожиданности, тоска и неудовлетворенность настоящим и невозможность проникнуть в будущее (English translation by Martine Van Goubergen).

*for existential philosophy, the greatest defect in our thinking is its loss of the ability to "challenge," because it has thus forfeited the one dimension that alone is able to guide it to the truth.*⁸

We lost the ability to 'challenge', to 'modify' the world, 'to create in the image of God', to 'change water in wine'. But just as two dimensions are only an abstraction and in reality do not exist without a third dimension, similarly the third dimension of language must exist, but in a flattened form, barely registering in everyday life. This third dimension is so difficult to recognize that it took more than twenty centuries before Western linguistics began to investigate the way we act when we speak. Malinowski, and later Jakobson, brought attention to phatic language, language that performs a social function as opposed to conveying information. Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of the dialogic interaction of language. John Austin drew performative utterances and illocutionary acts from language. Shestov was not acquainted with these new developments in the study of language, and his writings do not contain any specific thoughts regarding the creative possibilities of language. On the other hand Shestov's whole philosophy is based on interaction with his readers and with the people he reads. This other-oriented aspect is a distinctive feature of Shestov's writings. He doesn't simply speak about fellow writers, but 'speaks' with the writers themselves. He tries to find out what motivates their writing. He tries to understand what it is that they have not written, what they have hidden from the reader, what they are afraid of, what their main concerns are and why they may have reason not to be direct in what they say or don't say. It seems apt to say that if there was an equivalent in philosophy to the absolute pitch in music, Shestov would have this ability. He manages to hear the *Cries and Whispers* or read between the lines of other writers. Thus he says: *There is no such a misunderstanding as the widely spread opinion...that a writer writes for his readers. On the contrary, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche speak not to spread their opinions among the audience and to teach the others,...but to beg the permission of the reader to*

⁸Шестов Л. И., Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия, с. 72 : То, что мы называем «пониманием», – точно огромный камень, Бог знает откуда свалившийся, раздавило и расплющило наше сознание, вбило его в двухмерную плоскость иллюзорного почти существования и обессилило наше мышление. Мы можем только «принимать» – взывать нам уже не дано; мы убеждены, что «взывание» только портит и извращает человеческую мысль – Иов, Авраам и псалмопевец, по-нашему, дурно мыслят. Но для экзистенциальной философии величайший порок нашего мышления в том, что оно потеряло способность «взывать» – ибо, таким образом, оно утратило то свое измерение, которое одно только и может привести его к истине (Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, English translation by Elinor Hewitt, p. 90-91).

*think the way they think.*⁹

And it is in this role of a reader recognizing the responsibility of being a reader, that Shestov approaches other writers. When Dostoevsky wrestles with his dark and distorted characters and tries to compensate the damage they have caused by staging an endearing and redeeming character, such as Father Zossima, Shestov throws himself into the breach in order to save the difficult insights Dostoevsky and his bad characters are conveying.

The author tries there to present the ideal type of the Master under the figure of Father Zossima. But we have only to compare the pale and bloodless harangues of Father Zossima with the burning and inspired words of Dimitri and Ivan Karamazov to realize that Dostoevsky's truths fear general validity as greatly as the average man fears liberty. It is the author who speaks through the mouth of Zossima, just as much as through the mouth of his underground hero, but in the former case we hear nothing but the words of 'omnitude' or common consciousness. See what happened to Dostoevsky with Father Therapont; when Dostoevsky tried to paint a great solitary, a Stylite who should please the fancy of common consciousness, he only succeeded in painting a figure that was almost comic ... But when he painted Kirilov, whom he felt obliged to sentence to suicide, this silent, solitary man became under his pen a formidable, profoundly moving character.

Exaggeration is a key indication that the author has something to hide. The way Plotinus says and repeats his view that reason is the principle behind everything, that nothing is more important than reason, that reason is superior to emotion ... reveals, according to Shestov, that the last great philosophical figure of the ancient world was struggling with his loss of faith in the λόγος and in the νοῦς. Plotinus can repeat words and sentences (λόγος; νοῦς; ἐπιστήμη; οὐδαμοῦ δὲ κρεῖττον ἄλογον λόγου / τὸ μὲν κρῖνον βέλτιον ἢ κατὰ πάθος), write whole pages about the heritage he received from Plato and Aristotle, but then suddenly he forgets everything and declares things that have nothing in common with the doctrine of Plato or the philosophy of Aristotle, still less with that of the Stoics. Not only his new visions have nothing in common with the whole trend of classical thought, they are in complete contradiction with it. According to Shestov, the abundance of signs of obedience and great respect towards the

⁹Шестов Л. И., Достоевский и Ницше -- Философия Трагедии, с. 17: Нет большего заблуждения, чем распространенное ... мнение, что писатель существует для читателя. Наоборот ... Достоевский и Ницше говорят не затем, чтоб распространить среди людей свои убеждения и просветить ближних ... они от него хотят получить право думать по-своему ... (Translation by Martine Van Goubergen).

logos must hide that Plotinus had betrayed the *logos* and that his last endeavour was precisely to free himself from the power of the *logos*. *The same Plotinus who extolled reason and thought so often and so passionately has lost his trust in reason and become, in spite of the Platonic tradition, a misologist, a hater of reason.*¹⁰

Whispering is an other indication to find out what authors wants to say, but are afraid to say. Still as regards Plotinus, Shestov picks up one remark of the Greek philosopher concerning the boldness of the *voũç*, turning away from the One and concludes: *Through one of his spiritual experience granted him at particular moments when human thought and even human words reach a unique and unusual strength and freedom, Plotinus discovered this other 'truth', and cursorily, in passing, almost whispering he told us about it. He did it in such a way so that it should be said, but not heard. The most important, the most significant is often said that way. It is said, but nobody notices it.*¹¹

Shestov often reminds us that it is quite easy to keep secrets away from prying eyes. The best hiding place is the marketplace when it is especially crowded. And that's where Shestov is seeking 'living' truths mingling themselves into the crowd of the general truths.

The stowaways of the thought is a third method to introduce some truths that are difficult to digest. Some hidden implications board the vehicle of an expressed idea in order to travel without being detected. In that case Shestov likes to turn towards the followers who do not always understand the subtlety of their masters and who admit openly what was kept silent intentionally. Socrates' assertion that a better man cannot be harmed by a worse one (*Apol.* 30 d 1) carries the idea of Epicurus that the wise man can be happy even inside the bull of Phalaris, as well as the idea of Epictetus and the magic wand of Hermes. The difference between the assertion of Socrates and the words of his disciples cannot be explained by a lack of sincerity or by an excess of naivity on behalf of Socrates. On the contrary it is the full awareness of the outreach of his words that explains

¹⁰Шестов Л. И., На весах Иова, с.318: Плотин, тот Плотин, который столько раз и так страстно превозносил разум и мышление, потерял доверие к разуму, стал, вопреки завету Платона, мисологосом - ненавистником разума ... (Shestov, *In Job's Balances*, English translation by Camilla Coventry & C.A. Macartney, p. 332).

¹¹Шестов Л. И., Роковое Наследие – О мистическом опыте Плотина, с. 102: В каком-то исключительном, неповторяющемся опыте Плотину открылась такая истина, и в один из тех моментов, когда человеческая мысль и даже человеческое слово обретает необычную, несвойственную смертным силу и свободу, Плотин мельком, мимоходом, почти шепотом поведал об этом – так, чтоб было сказано и не было услышано. Особенно важное, особенно значительное нередко так и говорится, чтоб быть сказанным и не быть услышанным (English translation by Martine Van Goubergen).

Socrates' silence: *His conviction that nothing bad can happen to a good man and that knowledge is virtue, a conviction that appears to many people as the expression of a naïve optimism, hid in itself the most terrible and cruelest "truth" that the human soul has ever accepted.[...] It was in this probably that Socrates' 'secret,' which he concealed with so much care under the mask of irony and of dialectic, consisted.*¹² If Socrates could not express this truth out loud as did after him the Stoics, it is because for him it was not just an idea, but it was reality. Socrates maybe did not speak about the Brazen Bull of Phalaris. His destiny however says more than the words of the Stoics do.

Significant digressions is also a clue to enter the internal dialogue of the authors and to discover the stumbling block of their thoughts. What Shestov tries to do is to find the Thorn in the flesh, the thorn in the discourse of the philosophers or, in other words, the origin of the insidious uneasiness which caused a spiritual upheaval. So for instance, the character of Prins Valkovsky in Dostoevsky's novel *The Insulted and Injured*. According to Shestov Dostoevsky's old ideal of idealism and humanitarianism collapsed after his penal servitude and gave way to the philosophy of the underground world. However Dostoevsky did everything he could to preserve his old faith until he could no longer remain silent. *Something spontaneous, ugly, and horrible had awakened in his soul - and it was something beyond his power to control.*¹³

In the novel *The Insulted and Injured* the author puts some monstrously cynical words into his character's mouth: *And among other things, I wanted to explain to you that I have one peculiarity of which you don't know yet, that is my hatred for all these vulgar and worthless naivities and idyllic nonsense; and one of the enjoyments I relish most has always been putting on that style myself, falling in with that tone, making much of some ever-young Schiller, and egging him on, and then, suddenly, all at once, crushing him at one blow, suddenly taking off my mask before him, and suddenly distorting my ecstatic countenance into a grimace, putting*

¹²Шестов Л. И., Афины и Иерусалим, с. 92 & 94: Его убеждение, что с хорошим человеком не может приключиться ничего дурного, как и его твердая вера, что знание есть добродетель, - многим казавшиеся выражением наивного и благодушного оптимизма, скрывали под собой самую жестокую и страшную "истину", какую когда-либо принимала в себя человеческая душа. [...] В том, по-видимому, и была "тайна" Сократа, которую он так тщательно прикрывал своей иронией и своей диалектикой (Shestov, *Athens and Jerusalem*, English translation by Bernard Martin, p. 174 & 177).

¹³Шестов Л. И., Достоевский и Ницше – Философия Трагедии, с. 54: В его душе проснулось нечто стихийное, безобразное и страшное - но такое, с чем совладать было ему не по силам. (Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, The Philosophy of Tragedy*, English translation by Spencer Roberts, p. 171).

out my tongue at him when he is least of all expecting such a surprise. What? You don't understand that, you think it nasty, stupid, undignified perhaps, is that it?"¹⁴

And Shestov points out: *Dostoevsky tried to go on speaking in the old way; almost simultaneously with Notes from the Underground, he was writing The Humiliated and Insulted, in which he forced himself to champion the idea of self-renunciation, despite the fact that he staggered beneath its weight. But where was he to get the strength for such systematic fraud and self-deception? He was already having difficulty sustaining the tone in The Humiliated and Insulted. Even it has pages in which the ominous light of the new revelation breaks through. True, they are few. The underground man is evident here only in the Prince's talk with Ivan Petrovich (at night in the restaurant), but it is enough for us to realize what a storm was gathering in Dostoevsky's soul. The Prince all the time ridicules "ideals" and "Schiller" in a most brazen way, while poor Ivan Petrovich sits there downcast, unable not only to defend himself, but even to behave with a semblance of dignity. When you let anyone, even in a novel, deride your holy of holies so caustically, it means you have taken the first step toward its denial. True, Dostoevsky lets the Prince triumph just once, and even then only for a moment. Later, in the pages that follow, all the characters seem to flaunt their nobility and selflessness before one another. But one rotten apple can spoil the whole barrel. Dostoevsky's pathos had dried up. Goodness and service to the idea no longer inspired him.*¹⁵

¹⁴Достоевский Ф. М., Униженные и оскорбленные, часть III, глава 10: А между прочим, я хотел объяснить вам, что у меня именно есть черта в характере, которую вы еще не знали, - это ненависть ко всем этим пошлым, ничего не стоящим наивностям и пасторалам, и одно из самых пикантных для меня наслаждений всегда было прикинуться сначала самому на этот лад, войти в этот тон, обласкать, ободрить какого-нибудь вечно юного Шиллера и потом вдруг сразу огорошить его; вдруг поднять перед ним маску и из восторженного лица сделать ему гримасу, показать ему язык именно в ту минуту, когда он менее всего ожидает этого сюрприза. Что? Вы этого не понимаете, вам это кажется гадким, нелепым, неблагородным, может быть, так ли? (English Translation by Constance Garnett).

¹⁵Шестов Л. И., Достоевский и Ницше – Философия Трагедии, с. 52-53: Достоевский пытается продолжать говорить по-старому; почти одновременно с "Записками из подполья" он пишет своих "Униженных и оскорбленных", в которых усиленно натаскивает на себя идею самоотречения, несмотря на то, что валится под ее тяжестью. Но где взять сил для такого систематического обмана и самообмана? Он уже с трудом выдерживает тон в "Униженных и оскорбленных". И там есть страницы, в которых прорывается зловеший свет нового откровения. Их, правда, немного. Подпольный человек там виден только в разговоре князя (ночью в ресторане) с Иваном Петровичем, - но этого достаточно, чтобы понять, какая гроза собирается в душе Достоевского. Князь все время нахальнейшим образом смеется над "идеалами" и "Шиллером", а бедный Иван Петрович сидит, точно в воду опущенный, и не умеет не только защититься, но даже держать себя хоть с некоторым

Violent reactions: Tolstoy undertakes a moral battle against an entire generation. Kierkegaard directs his thunder against Hegel. We all know Nietzsche's passionate polemics against Christianity. Through his *Underground Man* Dostoevsky spits out his contempt for *the Sublime and the Beautiful*.

Shestov picks up all the voice modulations of his authors that reveal anger or indignation and sees in these passages the revenge for the *innere Besudelung*, to put it in Nietzsche's words. *And what possible outlets for the energy of a tempest-tossed soul are so effective as preaching, anger, indignation? [...] Only helplessness before the enigmas of life could give birth to that secret, deeply hidden hatred that was the hallmark of all these extraordinary writers.*¹⁶

I could lengthen my list of the moments chosen by Shestov to make some intrusions into the secrets of great men, but I think those examples are enough to show how Shestov is listening and reading behind the words, to show us the backstage of the writers thinking. Shestov is one of the rare thinkers, who breaks down the fascination of the word and who explores what is to be found behind it. He does not act the way a psychoanalyst would do it, exploring the unconsciousness of the patient. What Shestov is doing is addressing the authors about their consciousness and trying to break the deadlock in which they find themselves. What is still more exceptional, is the deep sympathy Shestov feels for his authors urging him to relieve them of a heavy burden. Thanks to his perspicacity he answers their cry for help. This unique attitude lends a very special tone to his writings in which gentleness mingles with vehemence: gentleness and understanding towards his authors; vehemence towards the blindness and the deafness of men who not only pay no heed to the cry for help hidden in the author's texts, but, into the bargain, bury those cries and whispers under a monument to the

достоинством. Позволить, хотя бы в романе, кому-либо так едко насмеяться над своей святыней - значит сделать первый шаг к ее отрицанию. Правда, Достоевский только один раз дал торжествовать князю - и то на минутку. Затем, на дальнейших страницах все действующие лица словно щеголяют друг перед другом своим благородством и самоотверженностью. Но одна ложка дегтю портит целую бочку меда. Тем более, что и мед-то не настоящий, а искусственный, поддельный. Пафос Достоевского исок. Добро, служение идее не вдохновляют его больше. (Shestov, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, The Philosophy of Tragedy*, English translation by Spencer Roberts, p. 170).

¹⁶Шестов Л. И., Добро в учении гр. Толстого и Ницше, с. 312-314: А в проповеди, в возможности негодовать и возмущаться - лучший исход, какой только можно придумать для бушующей в душе бури. [...] Только бессилие против роковой загадки жизни порождает ту скрытую, глубоко затаенную ненависть, которой запечатлены произведения этих замечательных писателей. (Shestov, *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, English Translation by Bernard Martin, p. 136 & 137).

glory of Human Reason.

4 Speaking: Shestov's Metaphorical Style

Finally we would like to say some words about Shestov's style which, in our opinion, is directly related to the content of his thought. Russians greatly admired, and still admire, Shestov's style. He often received compliments for it and was, incidentally, irritated because of this, assuming that the readers were paying more attention to the form of his writings than to the content. But this very special style is not just a lucky coincidence. His style that we like to call a *metaphorical style* is the only possible style for Shestov if he wants to be true to himself. As we have seen, according to Shestov truth cannot be caught by reason, by definitions, by logical argumentation, by syllogism, by dialectic argumentation or by any possible system. Reason and its definitions only smother and kill the truth. Reason tries to appropriate the truth, to impose it to everybody as being general and universal, but eventually remains after such a dissection with a lifeless formula. The metaphor, on the other hand, operates on a completely different way: the metaphor is strong, sudden and ephemeral. The metaphor causes a collision between two concepts and the spark, produced by this collision just for a moment throws some light on what one wants to show. What we catch at that moment holds thus only at that moment and cannot be used as evidence for further investigation. Therefore Shestov's thought may not be approached as an architectonic complex patiently erected on basis of logical arguments and counter-arguments. His discourse is more of a violent dispute in which everybody, readers included, is roughly seized. These metaphors are thrown at our head. They have the strength and the efficiency of creativity and, even if in our craving for objectivity, we would restore law and order, they still would have reached the intended purpose and left after them deep, indelible marks.

We find metaphors in Shestov's writings in the first meaning of the word: figures of speech expressing implicit comparisons. By using these metaphors Shestov comes up with a text that we read as if it was an adventure novel, of course about a philosophical adventure, with the great philosophers as principal characters. These great men enter a dispute with each other as if they all were participating in one overall debate. Ancient Times, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modern Thinking ...they are all present and speak with and across each other as if time did not exist and did not separate them. Ideas, opinions, propositions are confronted to each other and the concerned authorities,

which it is all about, the Necessity, the Reason, the Knowledge, the Ethics are embodied in highly impressive images. They are represented as usurpers who took over the power of God and who dominate mankind. *The Necessity, that terrible Medusa's head which turns to stone all those who gaze upon it.*¹⁷

...man can laugh, weep, rail, curse, but this will make no impression on Necessity, which will continue as before to crush, smother, burn, and reduce to ashes everything "finite" (above all, man) that it finds in its path. [...]. Our reason, as if bewitched by some magic spell, is making straight for the place where man's destruction awaits him. What is this? Is there not concealed here that concupiscentia invincibilis which led our forefather to the Fall?¹⁸

...But the ethical does not loosen its grip on him and holds him firmly in its clutches.¹⁹

...By its side, also revealed by intellectual vision, stand Eternity and her sister Infinity. Perhaps human daring already has the power to cope with ethics—but is there a power capable of vanquishing Eternity? Eternity devours everything and never returns what she has seized.²⁰

¹⁷Шестов Л. И., Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия, с. 56: Необходимость – эту страшную голову медузы, которая превращает в камень всякого, кто на нее оглядывается. (Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, English translation by Elinor Hewitt, p. 70).

¹⁸Шестов Л. И., Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия, с. 73-74: человек может насмеяться, плакать, бранить, проклинать, но Необходимости этим не проймешь, она по-прежнему будет раздроблять, душить, сжигать, испепелять все «конечное» (прежде всего человека), что ей попадет на пути. [...] Разум наш, точно замороженный какими-то чарами, безотчетно и неудержимо стремится туда, где уготована человеку гибель. Что это? Не кроется ли тут та concupiscentia invincibilis, которая привела к падению нашего праотца? (Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, English translation by Elinor Hewitt, p. 93).

¹⁹Шестов Л. И., Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия, с. 114: Но этическое не отпускает его и твердо держит в своих цепких лапах. (Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, English translation by Elinor Hewitt, p. 150).

²⁰Шестов Л. И., Киркегард и экзистенциальная философия, с. 70: На стороне его стоит тоже открытая умным гением Вечность с ее сестрой Бесконечностью. С этикой, быть может, еще дано справиться человеческому дерзновению, – но есть ли такая сила, которая может преодолеть Вечность? Вечность пожирает все и никогда не возвращает своей добычи. (Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, English translation by Elinor Hewitt, p. 88).

But the use of metaphors is going further than figurative language in Shestov's writings. When we speak of metaphorical style, we have in mind the whole philosophical discourse of Shestov. His discourse is woven upon a framework that follows the pattern of metaphors. A philosophical treatise follows the laws of logic and draws a line on the base of causal relations. At the end of the treatise the obtained rough outline must help the reader to understand and to visualize the idea that had to be explained. Shestov proceeds on a completely different way. He does not gather all the pieces of the puzzle together in order to construct some 'geometrical' truth. From the very beginning of his thinking Shestov has in mind a particular rough outline of what he wants to tell the reader about. To do so, he refers to associative fields of meaning that shed light on the given item thanks to partial similarity. Let us likewise explain this by a metaphor: if Shestov wants to tell us about a circle, he will not tell us about pi and the ratio of the circumference to its diameter, but he will show us the sun.

This metaphorical style gives Shestov works a specific strength. Often the pith of a philosophical argument lies in the initial intuition of the philosopher (as Bergson puts it). This intuition can only be rendered by the thinker through visual representation. In other words, a philosophical argument always starts with a metaphor: the ideas of Plato, the One of Plotinus, the monads of Leibniz, the a priori and a posteriori knowledge of Kant, the Hegelian triad, ... Those intuitions, transposed into metaphors are the fundamentals of sometimes very complicated philosophical systems that in their further development often disappoint or even annoy. In Shestov's writings, on the contrary, the initial tension is never given up. His metaphorical discourse, again and again, and each time from another angle, throws light on his intuition that thus keeps its original strength and freshness throughout his entire work. That's probably what meant Benjamin Fondane when he said: *With Shestov I never understood enough. Even when he repeated an idea for the hundredth time, it looked to me as new.*²¹

5 Conclusion

Taking a second analogy with music, we would like to conclude comparing the very specific feature of Shestov's thinking, listening and talking with the interplay between sound and silence. What actually makes a melody? Not the sepa-

²¹Fondane, Benjamin, *Rencontres avec Léon Chestov*, p. 26 : Mais, avec Chestov, je ne comprenais jamais assez ; même quand il répétait une idée pour la centième fois, je la voyais encore nouvelle (English translation by Martine Van Goubergen).

rate notes, not the G, not the E, not the C, but the distance between them, or, put differently, the void, the nothingness. We could say the same about Shestov's virtuosity to combine words and silence, and conclude that, on his very own way, Shestov says the unsayable.

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