“Hearts of the Children...Hearts of the Fathers”:
The Sense of Transcendent Familial Ties in Selected Films and in
Works by Twentieth-Century Russian Writers

Thomas F. Rogers

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Some of you may remember Ingmar Bergman’s “Wild Strawberries.” That’s how I’m feeling right now! What a super Homecoming--for me anyway. It’s eleven years since my retirement, and until Dean Scanlon’s surprising phone call in August, I had--like the proverbial desert nomad--long since folded up my tent and mentally moved on, As inevitably at the end of a career, I felt written off, on the shelf gathering dust. But no longer.

Nor was I till now accorded the privilege to give that traditional ‘last lecture.’ And what a setting for it: You see on the back wall two of my revered former colleagues, also professors of Russian, who in their time here were deans of General Education and Honors. Both have also served as mission presidents in Russia, and since then. Don Jarvis and his wife Janelle have put in a second, steep uphill mission in Belarus, while as I speak Gary Browning has just landed in Rostov on the Don, now serving in his approximately eighth year as our senior Russian speaking patriarch. In the next minute or two I’d like to play stake patriarch--which I never was. So--as if you’re being sustained for a calling and if you’re here--as I mention your name, please stand so that others will know who you are. And remain standing. Don’t be shy: Michael and Lisa Kelly, who like the Jarvises presided over the Moscow Mission, are also with us. I saw your missionary son this past June in Novosibirsk, by the way. Thanks for coming. And thanks also, David and Loraine Hart--our former Russian majors, then David...our long term colleague and recent Germanic--Slavic Department chair

Recalling those Honors students who taught me as much as I them, I could spend the rest of the evening recalling their names--just for starters, Elder Bruce B. Porter, Dean John Bell, Professors Glen Cooper--Glen, if you’re still poised to write the music for my Scarlet Letter libretto, have at it!--Steve Goates, John Hall, Ralph Hancock, Valerie Hudson, Mary Karen Bowen Solomon (you also became a teacher), George Tate and a foremost LDS playwright, Tim Slover, and his wife Mary (how grown up your boys must be by now!)--all with us tonight, I believe--Elder Clayton Christensen, Karen Lewis, John Tanner, and Jack Welch--whose family annually sponsored outstanding Honors guest lecturers. I’m not sure if Randy Paul was an undergraduate here but, if so, you too were surely a
precocious Honors student. Also with us is the former ‘Elmser,’ Lew Cramer (he’ll know what that means)—his brother, Doctor Joe, that excellent “Des News” columnist—both also doubtless Honors bright lights back then. And yet another truly formidable talent, the Department of Theater’s long standing dramaturg Eric Samuelsen, who tells me that during his undergraduate years my plays were an incentive that led to his brilliant and prolific playwriting achievement, on a par with Tim Slover’s. I was just fortunate to have already addressed some noteworthy subjects before those two so impressively snatched up the baton. Bob Eliot, Thom Duncan, Scott Bronson, Richard Dutcher and a few others belong on that list. And, of course, Sterling and Merilee Van Wagenen. I’ll say more about Sterling in another minute.

[Also allow me to embarrass a young man I never met until this evening—Ryan Christensen, who, as far as I know, is the latest actor to have played the lead role in “Huebener” in that play’s fairly recent performances at Dixie College. And finally, last but not least, there’s Rory Scanlon, current Associate Dean of General Education and Director of the Honors Program in this very venue, who also just happened to design the fabulous set for the same play’s BYU main stage revival in 1992.]

And thanks, Rory, for all you and your great staff have done to make this evening possible, including the tasty ‘eats.’ As Rory expressed it to me, this lecture “captures... [my] blended love for the Russian literary voice and the dramatic arts.” I could at length nostalgically reminisce about the plays I was privileged to write, direct and perform in on the Margetts, Pardoe and Nelke stages and the many we produced in Russian and German with, as actors, students of those languages. But I’ll only further mention a particularly precocious former student and teaching assistant—Sterling Van Wagenen, again—later the first director of Robert Redford’s Sundance Film Institute, who went on to produce and direct numerous fine films—commercially, for the Church and here at BYU, besides heading up the film program at the University of Florida, Orlando, and who first put me on to a number of intriguing foreign films that, beginning in the 1950s, struck me as strikingly, though perhaps unwittingly, evoking the universal human sentiment so sacred to Latter-day Saints and mandated in Malachi at the very end of the Old Testament. I’ve since encountered other memorable though rare films with that same sentiment and aspiration.

In all, I’ve collected approximately ten, from which I’ve extracted particularly climactic scenes, transferring these to a disk and titling it “Hearts of the Children...Hearts of the Fathers.” Hence the title of this evening’s presentation. In each of these films, it seems to me, a child plays a crucial role in carrying forward his or her progenitors’ legacy, at times intimating their continued association even beyond this life. I would not be surprised if some of you could expand my list, but I doubt that—as film fare goes—there are many others. On your handout, you have the titles of those ten films, with very short synopses—three, you will note, by the same emigre Russian auteur director, Andrey
Tarkovsky, himself, a product of Soviet atheist indoctrination but whose works I consider perhaps the very most spiritual in the medium of film. We will sample them at the end of the lecture.

Allow me now to show you the final moments of two others from quite different cultures--East Indian and American. We will first sample the ending of the last film in Satyajit Ray’s *Apu Trilogy*. Its protagonist Apu--played in each of three sequential films by a different young actor of increasingly older age--has witnessed the deaths of his sister (from cobra bite), his father, mother and beautiful young wife, who has succumbed giving birth to their child. At this point he’s become so bitter that he disowns their infant son until, several years later when, upon once more encountering the child at much the same age we knew Apu in the first film, his heart turns to the boy, who still does not know that Apu is his father but, finally hidden, joins him, the boy’s maternal grandfather looking on--thus reaffirming the cycle of generational continuity. Almost wordlessly, this moving moment also illustrates a theme and spiritual principle especially important, I know, to Sterling in the films he most values, as it should be to us all--reconciliation.

*[MOVIE CLIP FROM APU SANSAR [The World of Apu—from The Apu Trilogy], 1959 (Indian–Bengali), director—Satayajit Ray]*

Now for the ending of the otherwise straightforward and realistically depicted *Places in the Heart*. We hear a preacher address his congregation, probably Baptist and likely in Texas, where the film’s director, Robert Benton, spent his own childhood. Trays are passed for communion. All are present--the story’s protagonists and its villains (even members of the local Ku Klux Klan)--all assembled together, including characters played by Ed Harris, John Malkovich and Danny Glover. (What a star studded cast! ) Also present are the late sheriff’s widow, played by Sally Field, and their young daughter and son. Then, suddenly, we see, yes, the deceased sheriff himself and, next to him, the black adolescent, himself still almost a child, who, while drunk, had unintentionally shot his former benefactor, the sheriff--for which the young man was promptly lynched. (This is the South early in the last century.) As each character partakes of the host he says to his neighbor, “Grace of God.” This is the, for me, *all time* most affecting and unexpected ending in any film I know. That ending, again wordlessly, asserts the theme of this lecture, worlds without end.

*[MOVIE CLIP FROM PLACES IN THE HEART, 1989 (American), director—Robert Benton]*

What in turn caused me to write my last scholarly monograph, *Myth and Symbol in Soviet Fiction*? Well, I can tell you who? it was Gary Browning. As my department chair, he’d urged me toward career’s end to make another stab at a lengthy critical investigation. As it turns out--though I was not aware of it at the time--the literary works I settled on abundantly convey the same thematic
concern--the sacred and lasting tie between "children" and their "fathers"--that so poignantly emerged for me in the ten films I'd found so arresting. To my mind at least, these two quite disparate sources--particular films from post-World War II international cinema and selected works by Soviet writers--thematic convergence in a profoundly fundamental manner. You also need to know that, in its investigation, I was prompted to apply as an interpretive tool the psychologist Carl Jung's theory of archetypes.

Briefly put, according to Jung, the psyche in each of us is composed of opposed urges. One possible indication are the inferences of our dreams, which pose predicaments analogous to the challenges that confront the adventurous heroes of legend. In Jung's scheme, a nearly universal threat and obstacle for both mythic hero and individual psyche is the Terrible, Great or Earth Mother. Representing both procreative and destructive natural forces, this matronly personage has engendered the hero and nurtured him as a child but would keep him forever confined and dependent. The mythical Hero--or, respectively, our individual psyche--is thus pitted in a life-and-death contest with this smothering, engulfing force in the effort to achieve its own personal individuation. (Allow me to emphasize that the Terrible Mother is a purely symbolic conception and not a real person. Certainly not my mother, and I hope not yours.)

Another female figure, the anima, becomes the hero's supportive sister, affectionate paramour, and inspiring muse. An equally important reward logically resulting from union with the anima is the prospect of the Hero's biological extension of himself into the future in the form of a surviving child. The works we will consider often feature the portentous appearance if not loss or absence of such a child. The surviving or just as often absent or destroyed Child serves, in my view, as a reliable barometer to the ultimate optimism or pessimism of an author's outlook, reflecting the often grim reality of life in Soviet Russia. My investigation pays special attention to the Savior Hero (my own term), Great Mother, anima and Child archetypes. The Savior Hero, generally a work's protagonist, becomes the bearer of traditional but lost values--of what is most sublime and needful in human culture.

In superb studies dealing with individual Soviet authors--particularly in dissertations written mostly during the fifteen years preceding my investigation--scholars had already identified a number of archetypes, further elucidating and enhancing our appreciation of the works in question. My own special contribution was to trace these archetypes' remarkably recurring and largely unconscious pattern from one author to the next over some seven decades in Soviet letters. Note that--though still being written during Stalin's monopolistic consolidation of power in the early 1930s and his consequent twenty-year reign of terror--later works, like Pasternak's and Bulgakov's, only appeared after World War Two and Stalin's death in May, 1953. (What a horrible year, parenthetically, was 1933, the year of my birth, to which I and my infant peers were as yet
blessedly oblivious!: the beginning of Stalin’s demoralizing purges of often totally innocent Soviet citizens; his collectivization of agriculture and, with it, the starvation of millions of peasants, especially in Ukraine; the formation of his monopolistic Writers’ Union; the rise of Adolph Hitler in Germany; and the great World Depression.)

On the reverse side of your handout is a list of the authors and works I’ve been referencing. It may help you some as I variously mention them. Though little known abroad, each was a popular sensation when it first appeared in the USSR, and, although written under unprecedented external constraints, they are as impressive a corpus as anything that emerged during the same period in the West. In my view, they also strongly substantiate Jung’s theory. We have little time to deal specifically with any one of them, but allow me to share the following generalizations:

As, recently, I once more took these authors in hand--re-reading my book nineteen years after its first publication--I again marveled at their honesty, courage and genius. Babel and Pil’nyhak, who before the formation of the Soviet Writers’ Union had, like Zamyatin in St. Petersburg, headed the less state-dominated Moscow association of writers--were both sent to Stalin’s camps, where they were either executed or subsequently perished. Only two, Zamyatin and Tarkovsky, managed to emigrate. Most of the rest were utterly suppressed until after Stalin’s death. Unlike the others, Tarkovsky was a filmmaker, but the author of his own scripts. Though before his emigration his earlier post-Stalin era films were issued in the USSR, he was allowed to make them only after long, constraining intervals, and his films were never widely distributed.

In these works, blizzards, water, fire, moonlight and wolves are frequent primordial motifs--suggesting both the threatening, destructive menace of elemental forces generally equated with the Terrible Mother and also the lustful, rapacious, anarchic component of everyone’s id. Burrows, deserts and excavations figure as significant Earth Mother emblems. Haunting images of life-threatening burial, often ambivalently associated with public works and the ideology of large-scale social progress, recur in the writing of Olesha and especially Platonov, himself an experienced land renovation engineer (as was Zamyatin, also an engineer, the builder of Russia’s first ice breaker). In “The Epifan Locks,” Platonov evokes the failure through adverse natural causes of a canal, actually commissioned by Peter the Great, and the consequent execution of the English engineer in charge. In Platonov’s novel Chevengur, a young boy yearns to return to his mother’s womb. In his last great novel, Kotlovan (meaning a ‘foundation pit’) the central image is an excavation that--like his Englishman’s locks and the dams in Pil’nyak’s The Volga Falls to the Caspian Sea and in Rasputin’s Farewell to Matyora (the name of an island: note the root for ‘mother--‘mat’--‘in that title)--is perhaps the ultimate violation of Mother Earth herself. Like Kotlovan’s characters, the excavation sinks ever deeper without coming to fruition, affording a similar dire commentary on both the futility of grandiose
schemes and society’s Great Mother tendency to engulf and swallow up the lives of its members.

With their incomplete or devastated womblike architectural constructs, Platonov’s novels further reflect the failed search for a social utopia, in lieu of which physical hardship, sterility and parental neglect prevail. Social control opposes spontaneous, authentic fellow feeling, such that in the works of both Platonov and Rasputin certain characters even seek an elusive peace in the grave or through drowning rather than any sort of resurrection. In Pil'nyak, as still later in Aytmatov, sterility becomes a major theme. In Pil'nyak’s repertoire various young persons or those still in their prime either succumb to venereal disease or die violently, precluding their chance for either a full life or offspring. A key family name in Pilnyak’s oeuvre is Bezdetov—‘Childless’—as also with Bulgakov’s Bezdomny—‘Homeless’.

Many of these writers’ protagonists--or their frequent alter egos--are also artists, writers or inventors who represent their authors’ sense of the ‘saving’ role of imagination and creativity. The artistic vocation of such Savior heroes frequently merges with symbolic allusions to a Messiah, particularly Christ’s mission and passion. Powerful allusions to Christ in Bulgakov’s novel--whose subplot’s depiction of Christ before Pilate is as realistic as any I can recall--and in the novels by Pasternak and Aytmatov implicitly identify their heroes if not the entire Russian nation as a kenotic Christ-figure.

The women in Zhivago’s life (his name itself means “the living one”)--his aristocratic first wife Tonya, the bourgeois Lara and later the proletarian Marina--represent the successive faces of Mother Russia in a time of exceptional travail. This is what validates his serial attachment to one and then the other. We entirely miss this in David Lean’s film version, which so captivated Mormon audiences at the Wilkinson Center’s Varsity Theater with its appealing “Laura’s Song”--not unlike Puccini’s beloved operas, an outright celebration of adultery. (You can say anything if you set it to thrilling music!)

An especially important change in pattern came to my attention as I traced the later employment of the archetypes I’ve mentioned. In works still written or sparingly published under Stalin in the late twenties and throughout the thirties prior to World War II, whereas the fate of children remains dire, female characters increasingly assume the role of anma (Jung’s positive, encouraging soul mate) rather than that of a menacing Terrible Mother, while, together with children, female figures become, rather than a threat, themselves victims. This development exactly coincides with the peak years of Stalin’s Five Year Plans and Reign of Terror. In later works, female figures, particularly maternal ones, become a source of spiritual, even supernatural, virtue and wisdom. Their fate and that of children, often orphans, reinforces their authors’ greater sense of helplessness and more despairing view of the future. Filial ties and nostalgia for a departed father are also poignantly depicted, while Mother Nature now
becomes far less a threat, or no threat at all, by contrast with brutal oppression and regimentation on the part of other ideologically driven human beings.

Such dire circumstances uncannily foreshadow Platonov’s own tragic loss of the son who, in an officially instigated reprisal against his father, was arrested at the age of fifteen as a counterrevolutionary and sent to the camps, where he contracted the tuberculosis that, after his release, led both to the boy’s early death and, by in turn infecting the father, to Platonov’s own untimely demise. Echoing Dostoevsky more than any other Soviet writer and regarded by the émigré Nobel Prize winning poet Joseph Brodsky as Russia’s greatest twentieth-century writer of prose—Platonov grieves at the suffering and death of children, concluding that this alone negates the prospects for any utopian social order. Orphanhood is also prevalent in Pil’nyak, Pasternak, Aytmatov and Tarkovsky.]

In the course of four successive generations Russia’s great socialist experiment devastated individual lives and adversely impacted families. Seventy to eighty percent of marriages still end in divorce, and single parent homes are the norm, not the exception. (Our own nation’s statistics don’t lag too far behind anymore, do they—when people even bother to marry?) The large-scale abandonment by mostly husbands and fathers is fueled by alcohol, violence and traditional male chauvinism. While a mission president and during temple recommend interviews with older sisters I did not know well, I soon discovered that I could have almost every time fairly safely started out with the question: “When was your divorce?” For all that, the sacred and universal human yearning for lasting ties between parents and children still persists—as evidenced by the lives of our convert members and as reflected in a number of the characters in these stories and novels, and in the films of Tarkovsky, where children play a more hopeful, even catalytic role. Those writers who to some degree advance a more confident, transcendent view, the perspective of Faith, include—despite his avowed atheism—Platonov in his yearning for connection with ancestors, Bulgakov in his ironic rejoinder to the forces of materialism via a phantasmagoric Devil modeled after Goethe’s Mephistopheles, and particularly Pasternak, Rasputin and Tarkovsky with their distinctive and, though unorthodox, highly reverent other-worldly points of reference. As I put it in my book’s final sentence, “These writers tend to share a common concern about the loss of heritage and the consequences of its disruption, effacement and failure to be remembered.”

In all class all his own, Tarkovsky’s sources include childhood memory, sacred Christian lore and science fiction. With their visual and dramatic appeal, we will now conclude with segments from the three Tarkovsky films listed on your handout. Each arrestingly depicts the crucial role of children who, as their elders pass from the scene, respond to their fathers’ legacy and bring forward what is vital for succeeding generations. First, the ending of the film Andrey Rublyov, Tarkovsky’s hypothetical re-enactment of the 14th Century career of Russia’s and perhaps the world’s greatest icon painter. Here, at the time of Russia’s
oppressive Mongol occupation, a young boy, the son of a deceased bell maker, pretends to know the secret his progenitor took with him to the grave. Exercising either bravado or pure faith, he helps rediscover his father’s art—bringing hope for Russia’s future emancipation with the successful casting of a new cathedral bell and inspiring Rublyov himself—who now assumes the role of yet another surrogate father—to once more pick up his brush and paint the icons for which he has since become world renowned. As the camera focuses on a bonfire at film’s end—till then in black-and-white—the remaining images—details from Rublyov’s immortal icons, [DISPLAY FRAMED PRINT OF RUBLYOV’S ‘SAVIOR’ ICON] including that of the Savior, haunting in its incompleteness, its still deeply piercing eyes—that now assault the viewer in vivid color. [Note—by contrast with today’s fast action flicks—how slow paced the films we’ve been sampling are—allowing the viewer time to contemplate, even meditate on what’s being shown. For instance, the sequence in “Andrey Rublyov” that shows the casting, raising and ringing of its portentous bell has got to last a good half hour, or longer.]

[MOVIE CLIP FROM ANDREY RUBLYOV, 1966 (Russian), director—Andrey Tarkovsky]

Then there is the film “Stalker,” whose protagonist despairs at others’ unwillingness to follow him to a remote, mysterious place called the Zone and a room there that is sacred to him. (One thinks of our temples.) He returns home, once more an unsuccessful guide, and laments about it to his wife (played, significantly, by Tarkovsky’s own wife), who in an intervening monologue explains why life means more to her because she joined him, a misunderstood idealist and dreamer. (Is she really speaking about a character in a film, or about Tarkovsky, himself?) When I view these scenes I’m reminded of Mormon missionaries’ frequent rejection and the sorrow they must feel at the world’s general indifference to their message. How did Tarkovsky, like other Russians his age subjected to monolithic atheistic indoctrination, come by such insight, such feelings? Where LDS missionaries are concerned, of course, there’s an important difference. Currently, four of our grandsons—two brothers and their cousins—are so serving. We thrill at the letters they send each week to their parents and at the way that on a daily basis they patiently, hopefully, lovingly seek out ‘the one’ and what that process manifestly does for both that ‘one’ and for them. Nor is the ‘celestial’ room the ‘one’ will eventually arrive at in the least empty. [There are with us tonight one or two who so served in or from St. Petersburg nearly twenty years ago. Would you please stand? Thank you.] Like the bell ringer’s son in Andrey Rublyov, the Stalker’s crippled young daughter, who in an earlier close up appears to be walking in normal fashion but, as the camera pulls farther back, is clearly transported on her father’s shoulders, has, we discover, inherited her father’s rare ‘telekinetic’ gift and clairvoyant--or spiritual--sensibility.

[MOVIE CLIP FROM STALKER, 1980 (Russian), director—Andrey Tarkovsky]
And now for Tarkovsky’s culminating masterpiece, filmed in Sweden in a language he did not know, with the bequest of the admiring Ingmar Bergman’s camera man, crew and actors. In order to forestall a third World War and nuclear holocaust, a man falls to his knees and vows to denounce all his possessions and, like those in certain monastic orders, become mute if God will only spare his family and, with them, the world. What this man so fears is perhaps only a bad dream (we can’t be sure), but the war is averted. Dutifully and to his family’s chagrin, he then burns down their home and refuses to speak. An ambulance is summoned and--not unlike the protagonist at the end of Dostoevsky’s profound novel, *The Idiot*, both truly among literature’s most full blown Christ-figures--the man is led off to an asylum. Meanwhile, his young son, called Little Man, who due to an operation on his throat has throughout the film so far himself not spoken, is seen, as the ambulance passes by him, watering a dead tree that, according to his father, will yet come alive if nurtured with sufficient faith. Then Little Man speaks: “In the beginning was the Word? What is that, Papa?” And we recall his father’s earlier words to Little Man--written by a dying filmmaker for his final masterpiece, in my view, when you sufficiently fathom its symbolic import, the most sublime religious film ever made: “There is no such thing as death. Only the fear of death.” The camera now intensely focuses on the dead tree, and in our wishful thinking we are tempted to imagine green buds bursting through its withered bark. Then we encounter another juxtaposition: across the tree’s image we read the film’s dedication to Tarkovsky’s son Aleksey, long detained in the USSR after his father’s defection, but who, because of his father’s illness and just before Tarkovsky’s death, managed to receive for him the jury’s Special Prize at the 1986 Cannes film festival--a marvelous instance where art and life converge. [Now for another quick production note: Sven Nykvist’s frame of the burning house and the ongoing interplay between actors--as laced with humor as, again, Dostoevsky’s grim *The Idiot*--is the longest continuous pan shot in cinematic history: count the minutes when you manage to view the entire film! The first attempt failed, we’re told, so the crew had to rebuild the structure before once more setting it on fire.]

[MOVIE CLIP FROM ORFET (Sacrifice), 1986 (Swedish), director—Andrey Tarrkovsky]

In all of this I’ve had next to nothing to say about the author Valentin Rasputin--not to be confused with who you’re thinking of. Rasputin is a Siberian, from Irkutsk. His deeply spiritual writing intriguingly combines both Christian elements and the shamanistic lore of the Buryat Mongolians, so prevalent in that area. When in firesides I address our Russian members, I like to praise our sisters. I tell them they are the “glue” that holds our families and, in all they do behind the scenes, the Church itself together. I then cite two of the notable works by Soviet authors that eulogize their heroines--elderly peasant women. At the end of his marvelous story, “Matryona’s Home” (again a title bears the root ‘Mat’; the Russian word for ‘mother’), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn says of Matryona,:
“None of us who lived close to her perceived that she was that one righteous person without whom, as the saying goes, no city can stand. Neither can the whole world.” When I taught our survey of Russian classics that spans the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, which, back then, included among other works Crime and Punishment, Anna Karenina and Doctor Zhivago, I would ask my students which of all the works they had read most impacted them. Surprisingly, the majority often cited Rasputin’s Farewell to Matyora. I wondered if that might be because it so movingly describes its heroine’s sacred yearning for her ancestors and so compellingly suggests just how thin the veil is between her and them. Maybe that will further entice you to read Rasputin’s masterpiece. And then Solzhenitsyn’s short story—truly one of the world’s greatest.

As much a sensation for late Soviet readers were novels by the only non-Russian in my survey—the Kirgiz Chingiz Aytmatov, in whose The Day Lasts More Than A Hundred Years, whose principal setting is the USSR’s principal nuclear proving ground in Kazakhstan, we encounter ingenious parallels: On the one hand, we learn about the earlier primitive ‘lobotomization’ of a legendary nomadic tribe’s captive foes by wrapping their skulls in the moist udder of a freshly slaughtered camel—yet another female victim—which, upon shrinking in the torrid Central Asian sun, deprives those so adorned of all memory, rendering them completely submissive. In one instance, such a victim draws an arrow and, upon command, dispassionately shoots his own once beloved mother. On the other hand, we’re told about a hypothetical joint US--Soviet outer space venture that would in turn cap the atmosphere and deprive humanity of any future contact with other intelligent beings beyond planet Earth—daring metaphors for the Cold War impasse between our own and Soviet dominated peoples and its further exacerbation during the nuclear arms race with its precarious rivalry over the Star Wars initiative. [Just think of all that has changed since then that none of us could have foreseen—how for instance in their limited but profound way the Lord’s Church and its representatives have reversed those earlier suspicions and tensions.] In The Execution Place, the same writer, whose people’s religious traditions are animistic or Muslim rather than purely Christian and his contemporary indoctrination...atheistic, nevertheless presents us with an exceptionally noble and Christ-like protagonist whose confrontation with Soviet era drug smugglers leads to his own literal crucifixion. With further salvific overtones, yet another of Aytmatov’s desert heroes entices voracious eagles to devour his exposed flesh while, until he succumbs, managing to shoot several of them as succor for his cruelly exiled and starving people--thus bringing them saving ‘manna,’ himself a sacrificial host—the vivifying, embodied source of a literal life renewing communion.

If, as students, we were again starting out, we might well opt for, instead of Russian, say, Mandarin or Arabic, if not Farsi or Urdu. But let us not forget the Russians I’ve called to your attention and both the horrendous events and uncommonly noble response to them to which these literati bear such eloquent
witness. Or, as after in an episode of *The West Wing*, Martin Sheen tells the Russian ambassador: “I really don’t know where you guys get the nerve,” the ambassador calmly replies: “From a long hard winter, Mr. President.”

Thank you.