

Holy Foolishness as a Key to Russian Culture

Priscilla Hunt

The Byzantine ascetic, Symeon, after many years as a desert recluse, engaged in a specific form of behavior to announce his new public vocation as a holy fool. He entered the city of Emesa in rags, dragging a dead dog behind him, according to his seventh-century hagiographer.¹ He not only earned the jeers and blows of the neighborhood children, he also announced a new way of conveying spiritual teachings that would be played out on the stage of Russian culture. Three centuries later, in the *Vita of Andrew of Constantinople*, a holy fool provided another authoritative cultural model for Russia by engaging in provocative behavior on the streets of the Byzantine imperial capital, Constantinople. A hagiographer in Muscovite Russia, six hundred years later, sardonically commented on the show put on by the local Moscow fool Vasilii (Basil), and his ilk:

Whenever the spectators and listeners would find out that one of these valiant sufferers had come from anywhere, a crowd would gather to see how courageously he would fight and they would train both their carnal and intellectual eyes on him, as if a marvelous musical artist had arrived and they were taking part in the shameful spectacle, listening with great zeal to the songs and hooting.²

This short passage from a Muscovite Russian holy foolish vita captures the essence of holy foolishness (*iurodstvo*) as cultural phenomenology. Holy foolishness exists at the center of a clash of viewpoints, in this case, of the hagiographer, who sees the fool as a “valiant sufferer,” and of the crowd, which fails to differentiate the fool from a street entertainer despite seeing him with both “carnal” and “intellectual” eyes. The hagiographer has illuminated the interpretative challenge that holy fools offer both to their contemporaries and to the modern observer.

Russian holy foolishness speaks to our modern age because it clothes spiritual teaching in alienation, conflict, and ambiguity. Yet it is embedded in

¹ See Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's "Life" and the Late Antique City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 151. See also A. M. Panchenko, “Laughter as Spectacle,” 41–147, in this volume.

² Quoted by Panchenko, in “Laughter as Spectacle,” 56–57.

a religious framework that reflects the spiritual basis of Russian culture. Holy foolishness is a radical model of sanctity derived from Paul's description in his First Epistle to the Corinthians of what it means to be an "apostle" of Christ:

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last.... We have been made a spectacle to the world.... To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten and homeless.... We are made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things until now. (4: 9–11)

Further in this passage Paul proclaims that these "apostles" are "fools for Christ's sake." Paul's underlying irony shows that he considers their embrace of Christ-like sacrificial humility an open protest against the worldly definition of wisdom that discounts their actions as foolishness. He thus forges a new path for "apostles" of the crucified Christ, which was followed in Orthodox Byzantium and ancient Russia.

The holy fool voluntarily lives out the behavior described above in order to exemplify Paul's wisdom of the Cross (1 Cor. 1: 18–24). The fool for Christ's sake is a male or female person (or a hagiographical figure) often the subject of a saint's cult, who makes a public display of his lowliness and uncleanness. He or she acts for "Christ's sake" in two senses: first, to commune in the sacrificial humility exemplified on the Cross; and second, to bring others back to Christ by confronting them with a shocking holy foolish instantiation of the Cross. The fool's behavior thus has a militant edge. His or her own self-humiliation exposes pride and hypocrisy in the same way as Paul's irony and sarcasm shames his addressees: "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!" (1 Cor. 4: 10).

The Byzantine-Russian cultural institution of holy foolishness has no direct counterpart in the West.³ Its unique expression and development in Russia has long been recognized. E. Thompson, in her study *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture*, has explored its relation to the "national character." She goes so far as to say that "the society's perception of itself

³ Simone Weil appears to have come close to its phenomenology. According to Czesław Miłosz, Weil lived a "life of deliberate foolishness." Referring to fools in Shakespeare's plays, she wrote: "In this world only human beings reduced to the lowest degree of humiliation, much lower than mendicancy, not only without any social position but considered by everybody as deprived of elementary human dignity, of reason—only such beings have the possibility of telling the truth. All others lie"; Miłosz, "The Importance of Simon Weil," in *To Begin Where I Am: Selected Essays*, ed. Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 246–60, here 251.

has been influenced by its perception of holy fools.”⁴ The articles in this collection explore holy foolishness as a phenomenology that exists in a “performative context,” that “works through action, and interaction to change perception,” and that “conveys a message about the intersubjective community and their power relations [and] shared moral institutional values.”⁵ They show that holy foolishness is a “pattern of culture” inherited from Byzantium and active in Russian culture from the eleventh century to the present.⁶

Holy foolishness is still relatively unknown to the Western public, which is generally unfamiliar with Eastern Orthodoxy, the context in which holy foolishness emerged and flourished. Thompson’s book and H. Murav’s *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky’s Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* offer stimulating introductions for the Western reader.⁷ However, until recently, knowledge of the Russian language was necessary for access to the main traditions of and textual sources for this phenomenon. Now, S. Ivanov’s 2006 study in English, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, has finally mapped out the entire textual tradition that established the paradigm of holy foolishness, from its Byzantine origins to its heyday in Muscovite Russia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ivanov’s book provides summaries of otherwise inaccessible holy foolish vitae, and a useful bibliography. It thus opens up the field of holy foolish studies to the West. However, Ivanov’s largely historical analysis does not embrace a phenomenological approach as pioneered in 1976 by A. M. Panchenko’s study “Laughter as Spectacle.”⁸

This volume opens with the first English translation of Panchenko’s study (in its 1984 edition). Its articles illustrate the depth with which this medieval phenomenon has penetrated Russia. Holy foolishness emerged in a monastic setting in both Byzantium and Rus’. It became a fully developed behavioral model in its urban form (exemplified by the Byzantine vitae of St. Symeon of Emesa and Andrew of Constantinople) as practiced in Russian towns and cities beginning in the fifteenth century. The urban fool becomes an apostle of the crucified Christ by living within the city as a vagrant and an outcaste. He or she assumes a guise of madness in order to be misunderstood and persecuted. The fool behaves in an uncouth way in public places to earn rebukes

⁴ See Ewa M. Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 176–95, esp. 185. The italics are Thompson’s.

⁵ See the article on “Phenomenology,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology (accessed 28 July 2011).

⁶ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2005), 48–49.

⁷ Harriet Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky’s Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

⁸ S. Ivanov’s work fills in the gap noted by Panchenko when he modestly wrote: “Now let me anticipate the questions of those who are interested in the history of holy foolishness. These readers will not find this work useful...” See Panchenko, “Laughter as Spectacle,” 53.

and blows. Thus the fool humbles his own pride and exposes the pride of those who subject him to rebuke. When failed Christians increase their own separation from Christ by persecuting the fool, they unwittingly enter into a provocative scenario aimed at opening their eyes to spiritual Truth.

The ambiguous nature of the fool's performance places the point of view of the "world" and of Christ in a state of eye-opening collision: in the world of vanity and lies, the fool's acts are misunderstood as irrational and outrageous. To those who have overcome this vanity, his acts partake of a hidden spiritual dimension that is both instructive and salvific. The fool's behavior thus places the spectator on an epistemological boundary between truth and the lie, reality and appearance, self-awareness and self-deception.⁹ Its purpose is to make the hypocritical Christian uncomfortable enough with his unexamined faith to begin to recognize and honor Christ in the person of the holy fool.

The fool uses his "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2: 16) to effect his antagonist's salvation. He is able to see into the metaphysical dimension where, invisible to others, demons and angels battle over human souls. When the fool foresees that someone is in moral danger, he may intercede by shaming and exposing him, on the one hand, and by offering secret prayers, on the other. Thus, paradoxically, the fool's provocative alienation from the "world" serves to restore the inner community associated with Christ.

In Muscovite times, holy fools had special access to rulers and served as their "walking conscience."¹⁰ Russian holy foolishness developed a dialectical relationship with the autocratic and bureaucratic state as a culturally productive antipode to the latter's potential for alienation and violence. Holy foolishness made sense within the context of the pre-Petrine state's messianic Wisdom ideology and was an accepted paradigm of sanctity.¹¹ However, it was rejected as a spiritual phenomenon by the modern regulatory "absolutist" state established by the reforms of Peter I. In the eighteenth century, it was treated officially as a form of social insubordination at worst and social parasitism at best. By the nineteenth century fools were treated as mentally ill, subjected to a scientific medical model of interpretation that viewed foolishness as a pathology.

Russia inherited holy foolishness from Byzantium through literary conventions in a specific tradition of sacred texts. These conventions inspired the conscious adoption of holy foolish behavior by radical Orthodox Christians. They were also used and adapted to make sense of strange or otherwise idi-

⁹ On this problematics, see Priscilla Hunt, "The Holy Foolishness in the Life of the Archpriest Avvakum and the Problem of Innovation," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 35: 3-4 (2008): 285-89.

¹⁰ See the quotation from V. O. Kliuchevskii in A. M. Panchenko, "Laughter as Spectacle," trans. Priscilla Hunt, Svitlana Kobets, and Bethany Braley," in this volume.

¹¹ See Priscilla Hunt, "King and Fool: The *Vita* of Andrew of Constantinople and the Russian Tradition of Urban Holy Foolishness," in this volume.

otic behavior for a variety of cultural reasons. When adopted in a Russian context, these conventions proved generative for a rich cultural behavioral and literary paradigm that far exceeded their impact in Byzantium (Byzantium invoked sanctions against holy foolish behavior from the seventh century). Moreover, beginning in the self-conscious nineteenth century and extending to the present postmodern age, holy foolishness has served as a semiotic category, or even as a postmodern "simulacrum," that articulates and defines the problematics of identity.¹²

Holy foolishness has been relevant throughout Russia's entire history. It has persisted despite the divide between ancient and modern Russia. Appealing to the conservative faithful of all social classes, it survived the post-Petrine cultural divide between a Westernized elite and the people. It reentered the cultural mainstream as a meaningful phenomenology during the nineteenth century, when it was evoked by writers such as Pushkin and Dostoevsky, and then in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by the sophisticated avant-garde, by Russian dissident poets facing the Soviet regime, and by postmodern thinkers, artists, and writers.

This volume of collected articles is the first to present a cultural perspective on holy foolishness as a phenomenon that has been vital through the ages. Although it does not claim to be inclusive, this volume throws light on the importance of holy foolishness as an ongoing pattern of culture. The articles are exemplary of the interdisciplinary methodological perspective necessary to fathom the full meaning and function of holy foolishness in Russia. They ask a variety of questions answerable within different scholarly disciplines such as philology, literary and semiotic analysis, urban ethnography, and social history. They present case studies of particular issues, movements, or texts. They describe the primary Byzantine sources and models of holy foolishness and the creative reception of these models in Russia. They examine this reception over the entire span of Russian history, from the Kievan period at the origins of Rus' through the Muscovite period, when urban holy foolishness came into its own, and then finally in the Westernizing milieu of the eighteenth century continuing to the present time.

The first article, by Svitlana Kobets, "Lice in the Iron Cap: Holy Foolishness in Perspective," is a bibliographical overview of scholarly approaches to the field. Her discussion of historical, cultural, and textual developments in the research on holy foolishness includes analyses of key scholarly contributions. Her study provides a background for appreciating the new perspectives offered in this volume.

Next the translation by Priscilla Hunt, Svitlana Kobets, and Bethany Braley makes available for the first time in English the seminal work on the

¹² "Simulacrum" in this context refers to "an image without the substance or qualities of the original." See *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

phenomenology of holy foolishness, "Laughter as Spectacle," originally published by A. M. Panchenko in 1976, in the book he co-authored with D. S. Likhachev, *The World of Laughter of Ancient Rus'* (reissued in 1984 as *Laughter in Ancient Rus'* with the addition of N. V. Ponyrko as an author).¹³ Panchenko's essay was the first to interpret holy foolishness in terms of the cultural norms of the period in which it flourished. He looks at it as a form of medieval spectacle and social protest. He explicates its phenomenology by drawing on a rich variety of historical material from popular, religious, and court culture, including folklore narratives and symbols, hagiographical accounts, and icons. Writing in the atheistic Soviet era, Panchenko focuses mainly on the non-Christian aspects of this spectacle. Inspired by M. Bakhtin's study of West European carnival traditions in *Rabelais and His World*, Panchenko sees holy foolishness as a type of ritualized behavior related to the folk culture of "carnival" laughter. For Panchenko, the closest neighbor to the Russian holy fool is the Russian folk-entertainer-clown (*skomorokh*).

Although Panchenko acknowledges that holy foolishness emerged within the Church and continued to exist on its radical periphery, he positions it within the popular oral and performance culture that was shared by all classes of the population. Panchenko's work is semiotic in orientation insofar as it looks at holy foolishness as a paradoxical cultural language, serving both denunciatory and moral-didactic purposes. While explaining and demonstrating the performative nature of this spectacle, Panchenko creates a vivid picture of the holy fools present on the Russian cultural scene in the pre-Petrine period. He also establishes the basic components of the holy fools' "theatrical language" of "gesture," including nakedness or near nakedness, enigmatic speech, cries, muttering, or silence. Finally, he identifies the literary motifs (*topoi*) that comprise the standard holy foolish vita.

Panchenko's comprehensive analysis of the way holy foolishness was embedded, accepted, and used within the culture demonstrates that it was a pre-eminently "national" phenomenon of pre-Petrine Rus'. This essay has had a profound impact on the study and reception of holy foolishness, as indicated in Russia by the recent history of holy foolish scholarship, and by the modern and postmodern uses of holy foolishness (see articles in this collection by M. Sabbatini, P. Bodin, and L. Piccolo).

Panchenko understood that his framing of holy foolish spectacle as a "street" performance similar to that of the *skomorokh* does not tell the whole story. Recognizing that holy foolishness emerged in the Byzantine period, he challenged scholarship to address its relationship to "antique spectacle." Priscilla Hunt's article "The Fool and the King: The *Vita of Andrew of Constantinople* and Russian Urban Holy Foolishness," answers his challenge. It finds that the "antique" spectacle that is paradigmatic for holy foolishness is litur-

¹³ For Panchenko's explanation of his methodology, see "Laughter as Spectacle," 53 and 78 n. 53.

gical in nature, that is, the imperial ritual of the Elevation of the Cross. This Elevation liturgy calls on the Pauline understanding of the Wisdom of the Cross (in an epistle reading from 1 Cor. 1: 18–24) to interpret the ritual raising of the cross before the eyes of the faithful. Thus Hunt's discovery of the predominantly Christian and liturgical framework for holy foolish spectacle restores it to its original Pauline context and relegates the folk-carnival aspects to a subordinate and complementary role.

Moreover Hunt's analysis of the Christian imperial basis of holy foolish spectacle provides the key to other defining aspects of Russian holy foolishness. Andrew of Constantinople's identification with the Elevation liturgy explains the unique relationship between the fool and the ruler, the fool's prophetic role, his capacity to address apocalyptic-like catastrophes threatening a nation or a given community, and to serve as a boundary between spiritual blindness and vision. Hunt also points out that the Muscovite iconography of the Intercession of the Mother of God (based on an episode in the *Vita of St. Andrew*) was authoritative for the stereotypical relationship between king and fool in Russian urban holy foolishness. In one condensed image it linked holy fool and emperor as dual and complementary safeguards of the empire's messianic calling. According to Hunt, Andrew's embodiment of the Christian basis of imperial ideology explains the cultural depth of *iurodstvo's* reception in Russia.

Thus, this introduction, together with the first three articles by Kobets, Panchenko, and Hunt, establishes the paradigmatic and scholarly context for understanding definitive aspects of holy foolishness that are further elucidated by the other articles in this volume. The next three contributions address the establishment and cultural uses of the holy foolish paradigm in Rus' and Muscovy. Cynthia Vakareliyska's study, "The Absence of Holy Fools from Medieval Bulgarian Calendars," initiates the reader into a previously unexamined aspect of holy foolish studies: the institutionalization of holy foolishness in the larger cult of the saints of the official church. She examines the reasons for the presence or absence of holy fools in medieval calendars of the saints in Byzantium, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Rus' from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. These calendars offer evidence of the official Church recognition or non-recognition of holy fools at a crucial period in the formation of Slavic national identities. By asking why there are virtually no holy fools in the medieval Bulgarian church calendar tradition when they are well represented in Russian calendars, Vakareliyska sheds light on different attitudes to holy foolishness among the ecclesiastical communities of the Slavic Orthodox lands that were predictive for whether or not a holy foolish tradition would develop.

The next two articles address the use of holy foolish typologies in Rus' and Muscovite Russia as a way of responding to crises in specific communities. Svitlana Kobets, in her article "Isaakii of the Kiev Caves Monastery: An Ascetic Feigning Madness or a Madman-Turned-Saint," offers a compelling

argument for accepting the edificatory biography of the monk Isaakii as the first known description of a native Russian holy fool. In her view, it evinces a behavioral phenomenology that points forward to later Muscovite tradition. She shows that the author borrows from the inherited Byzantine ascetic monastic model of holy foolishness to describe a specific period of this monk's life. She argues that the holy foolish paradigm was applied to Isaakii so that his actual behavior would not be interpreted as demonic possession. The concrete details of the account suggest to Kobets that Isaakii had actually suffered a stroke, probably due to an earlier over-zealous embrace of hermitic asceticism. She argues that Isaakii was depicted as a fool actively engaged with the community to support the monastery's transition from a hermitic-anchoretic to a coenobitic communal model of living.

Sergey Ivanov's article, "Simon of Iurievets and the Hagiography of Old Russian Holy Fools," explores the use of the urban holy foolish paradigm to respond to a crisis of authority confronting the northern town of Iurievets at the very end of the sixteenth century. This *vita* describes Simon's aggressive actions against a governor known for his cruelties. It was written under the auspices of the next governor in 1594, a year after this new governor had assassinated the fool. Evidence from the Cadastre of 1594 gives Ivanov the unusual opportunity of verifying the presence of factual data alongside hagiographical *topoi*.

Ivanov shows that Simon's *vita* was the first to blend contemporary historical reality with the literary conventions of urban holy foolishness. Unlike earlier *vitae*, it was not written retrospectively, long after the protagonist's alleged existence. The historical evidence surrounding its production suggests to Ivanov that it was written to mediate between the new governor and the population. He postulates that this governor allowed Simon to be represented as a holy fool to express his repentance before the angry community for Simon's assassination and other cruelties. In Ivanov's view, Simon was not a holy fool at all but merely the "town idiot." When this idiot acted out against the previous governor, he could be fit into the dominant cultural paradigm for critique and mitigation of corrupt worldly power and transformed into a vehicle of social reconciliation.

The first five topical articles in the collection offer the reader a complex and rich picture of Russian holy foolishness from its origins in Byzantium to its adoption in Russia through the seventeenth century. These articles offer new insights into the literary and experiential Russian paradigms of holy foolishness in both the monastic and urban variants. Additionally, they address a number of central questions: How was the cultural model of holy foolishness received from Byzantium into Russia and uniquely developed there? When was a reputed holy fool actually such in real life and when was he just a dressed-up version of the "village idiot" or an otherwise mentally-disabled person? What are distinguishing features in the tradition of holy foolish *vitae*, whether they are written long after the fact and comprised exclusively of

topoi or contain verifiable facts and presumed eyewitness accounts? How do the different cultural frameworks for interpreting holy foolish spectacle, such as the folk-performative or Christian-mystical liturgical, throw a different, and possibly complementary, light on the essence of the phenomenon, its place in medieval culture, and its relation to the state? What is the basis of the holy fool's protection by the ruler who he is allowed to denounce? In what ways did fools serve the interests of the Church and state authorities?

The remaining four articles explore holy foolishness under the modern state. Holy foolishness survived the divide between pre- and post-Petrine Russia by descending to the cultural "underbody," since *iurodstvo* was subject to persecution.¹⁴ In the eighteenth century and afterwards, holy fools, bearing chains or other insignia of their vocation, wandered from monastery to monastery and stayed in hermitages of both the Orthodox and various Old Believer communions. They emerged from among peasants and townsfolk, Old Believer and Orthodox religious communities, and received the patronage of conservative members of the elite.¹⁵

N. Bubnov's article, "Illustrations to the *Vita of Andrew the Holy Fool of Constantinople* in the Tradition of Russian Old Believers," testifies to the continued meaningfulness of the holy foolish paradigm among radical priestless Old Believers of the Fedoseevtsy (Theodosian) communion. Refusing to accept the westernized Church and state, Old Believers of all types retained aspects of Muscovite spirituality and messianism into the modern age. Wandering fools received special protection within their closed communities. The priestless Old Believers especially, with their radical sense that the modern state and ruler embodied the reign of the Antichrist, carried forth the apocalyptic framework in which holy foolishness flourished in medieval times.¹⁶

Bubnov examines the impact of the *Vita of Andrew of Constantinople* on a Fedoseevtsy community of the early twentieth century.¹⁷ Their rich manu-

¹⁴ See A. S. Lavrov, *Koldovstvo i religiiia v Rossii: 1700–1740 gg.* (Moscow: Drevlekhranishche, 2000), 259.

¹⁵ See, for example, *ibid.*, 257–67; and N. Bubnov, "'Istoriia' o iurodivom Makarii (Povest' o nachale edinoveriia v Tveri)," in *Materialy i soobshcheniia po fondam ot dela rukopisei BAN*, ed. I. M. Beliaeva (St. Petersburg: BAN, 2006), vyp. 5, 331–44.

¹⁶ N. Gur'ianova, *Krest'ianskii antimonarkhicheskii protest v staroobriadcheskoi eskhatologicheskoi literature perioda pozdnego feodalizma* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1988). Iu. D. Rykov has recently published the mid-nineteenth-century prophetic apocalyptic writings of a certain priestless Old Believer, Peter the Holy Fool. A former married schoolteacher from Arkhangelsk province, he left his family and the Orthodox faith and took up the life of wandering and prophecy befitting his new role. See Rykov, "Neizvestnyi staroobriadcheskii pisatel' XIX v. Petr iurodivyi i ego eskhatologicheskie sochineniia," in *Staroobriadchestvo v Rossii (XVII–XX vv.)*, ed. E. M. Iukhimenko (Moscow: Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei, 1999), 149–85.

¹⁷ On the Theodosians and Pomorians, see I. Part, *Old Believers, Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). An ex-

script book culture, reproducing traditional models of sanctity from the Muscovite period, played a key role in upholding their faith and manner of life. Bubnov presents us with thirty-three miniatures that accompany a short Fedoseevtsy version of Andrew's vita in a spiritual miscellany produced in the Kalikin workshop (Vologda province), many of which are reproduced in this volume. Bubnov looks for possible sources of these miniatures in the border scenes of medieval icons dedicated to St. Andrew; he also discusses how their thematic content relates to illustrations of Andrew's vita in other Old Believer collections in the Library of the Academy of Sciences (BAN).

These miniatures offer evidence that these Old Believers directly correlated their own polarized reality with Andrew the Fool's. Bubnov identifies depictions of their own clothing, houses, and other contemporary features in miniatures portraying Andrew as a spiritual warrior fighting demons, arduously winning back souls in a world under attack. According to Bubnov, scenes emphasizing Andrew's immediate visionary connection with guardian angels, the Mother of God, and Christ reflected the response of the Fedoseevtsy to the absence of any institutional channels for communication with the divine.

In "An Illuminated Vita of Andrew the Fool of Constantinople from the Hilandar Research Library of Ohio State University: Preliminary Notes on the Manuscript and Illuminations," Svitlana Kobets also offers us a tantalizing look at another illustrated manuscript of Andrew's vita. Nine of its fifty-seven miniatures are reproduced in this volume. I. Pozdeeva dates this manuscript to the eighteenth century (although the illuminations themselves may have been made at various times). Further research is necessary to establish its provenance, the version of the vita it contains, and stylistic features of the miniatures and their relationship to the vita text. It will then become clear whether SPEC.OSU.HRL.SMS.2 contributes to our understanding of the Old Believer's reception of Andrew's vita and offers a significant point of comparison with the illuminated manuscripts described by Bubnov in his article in

tensive bibliography is also available at www.staropomor.ru (accessed 10 October 2011), a site that testifies to the active cultural presence of the Fedoseevtsy today. On the apocalyptic mentality of the priestless Old Believers and especially the Fedoseevtsy, see Oleg Tarasov, *Icon and Devotion* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 143–99. On the religious material culture of the Fedoseevtsy, see *Obrazy i simvolny staroi very: Pamiatniki starobriadcheskoi kul'tury iz sobraniia Russkogo muzeia*, ed. N. Pivovarova (St. Petersburg: Palace Editions, 2010), items 12–20. Their reproduction of Golgotha crosses reflects their continuation of the messianic Muscovite eschatologically-oriented worldview, the cultural matrix in which the *Vita of Andrew of Constantinople* was developed and received. Item 17 is a Golgotha Cross with the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem, produced in the Kalikin workshop in the early twentieth century (Pivovarova, ed., *Obrazy i simvolny staroi very*).

this volume and in *Litsevye starobriadcheskie rukopisi XVIII-pervoi poloviny XX vekov*.¹⁸

A telling contrast to the Old Believers' use of holy foolishness as a model for repudiating the modern culture is the cult of Kseniia of Petersburg described by Sergei Shtyrkov. In "The Unmerry Widow: The Blessed Kseniia of Petersburg in Hagiography and Hymnology," Shtyrkov documents the way nineteenth-century, early twentieth-century, and post-Soviet mainstream religious and popular culture normalized the holy foolishness of an eighteenth-century widow named Kseniia. To provide evidence for this process, Shtyrkov expands the definition of hagiography. Although Kseniia's cult did not become official in Russia until the post-Soviet period, Shtyrkov establishes the existence of an open and ever-accumulating tradition of lay and clerical narratives about Kseniia from the early nineteenth century: popular nineteenth-century pamphlets written by priests; lay hagiographies, including plays, fiction, and film; and official and unofficial church panegyrics (*akathistoi*) in the post-Soviet period.

This open tradition integrates the saint into the official worldview by introducing motifs about her patronage by the regulators of the state, including military examiners and medical practitioners. It gradually rids the saint's evolving biography of the paradoxes associated with holy foolishness, reframing her role as intercessor for poor women and others within the positivistic paradigms of modern thought. At the same time this tradition responds to the changing needs of the faithful in pre- and post-Soviet reality.

As Shtyrkov notes, this normalization of Kseniia contrasts with the characteristically negative official attitude towards *iurodstvo* that invoked medical or scientific expertise to reduce its spiritual, prophetic, and social-denunciatory aspects to the level of pathology.¹⁹ The regularization of Kseniia's holy foolishness also goes against the use of holy foolishness for cultural critique of the modern authoritarian state by holy fools themselves, by Old Believers, and within the mainstream literary culture of the nineteenth century.²⁰

¹⁸ See N. Iu. Bubnov, E. K. Bratchikova, and V. G. Podkovyrova, eds., *Litsevye starobriadcheskie rukopisi XVIII—pervoi poloviny XX vekov* (St. Petersburg: Biblioteka Akademii nauk, 2010).

¹⁹ See Murav, *Holy Foolishness*, 5–7. As in the case of the fool Ivan Koreisha (former teacher and seminarian), fools could be found in mental institutions as well as ordinary prisons.

²⁰ Thus, Pushkin's play *Boris Godunov*, published the same year as the Decembrist rebellion, represents a fool denouncing a ruler. In the *Brothers Karamazov*, as Murav has pointed out in her study *Holy Foolishness*, Dostoevsky embodies potentials of the holy foolish paradigm in a wide spectrum of characters. She notes that Andrew the Fool and the Liturgy of the Intercession were an inspiration for the thematic constructions of this great novel (ibid., 124–30). There Dostoevsky's characters, through their interactions, model the problematics of conscience and self-restraint as an alternative to external control by the authoritarian state.

Marco Sabbatini's article, "The Pathos of Holy Foolishness in the Leningrad Underground," shows that this oppositional use of holy foolishness continued into Soviet times. Documenting the history of intellectual and artistic dissidence during this period, he describes a group of Leningrad poets who assumed aspects of holy foolishness in both behavior and lyrical writings.²¹ Sabbatini notes that these poets engaged with holy foolishness to model their existential situation as outsiders to the Soviet utopia, and to continue the spiritual quest of pre-revolutionary movements of the Silver Age, including the symbolists, the futurists, and the absurdist OBERIU. When unofficial culture moved to the social periphery and engaged in conscious self-denigration (in part to avoid the oversight of the KBG), it positioned itself to identify with holy foolishness. Both unconsciously and consciously poets adopted this markedly Russian paradigm to express a sense of crisis that was also informed by readings from contemporary German philosophy and French existentialism.

Sabbatini offers moving examples of the relevance of holy foolishness to poems by Viktor Krivulin, Elena Shvartz, Sergei Stratanovskii, Aleksandr Mironov (as intellectually buttressed by the thought and writings of Tat'iana Goricheva.) For example, Stratanovskii's use of the metaphor of imprisonment and torture in his poem "God" implies an analogy between the poet and the holy fool incarcerated by the state. In a powerfully modernized image of crucifixion, an impersonal God, in the form of the light fixture in the poet's study, is a remorseless observer of the poet's voluntary self-emptying (*kenosis*). Having taken everything and left him naked, this God still requires that he pass through the ultimate anguish, the self-divestment of creating the poetic word.

Sabbatini notes that many of these poets' literary experiments "bordered on postmodernism." In this context, the case of the peasant poet recluse and sometimes tramp Oleg Okhupkin is unique. Brought up to see himself as a prophet, he recited religious poems in an ecstatic state when he attended meetings of the dissident poets' circle. He completed the characteristic path of a modern urban holy fool, when committed to a psychiatric hospital.

Per-Arne Bodin's article, "Holy Foolishness and Postmodern Culture," takes us into post-Soviet times. Bodin asserts St. Kseniia's appeal to the post-modern sensibility, even as he notes her self-association with Andrew the fool. (His approach contrasts to Shtyrkov's analysis of the official and popular normalization of her foolishness.) However, Bodin's overall mission is to illuminate the uses of the holy foolish concept by a group of sophisticated cultural critics, writers, and artists seeking to recover from the Soviet holocaust of values. Bodin shows that they employ holy foolishness both to connect

²¹ On actual holy fools in the Soviet period, see Per-Arne Bodin, *Language, Canonization and Holy Foolishness: Studies in Postsoviet Russian Culture and the Orthodox Tradition* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2009), 201–09.

themselves with national culture and to voice their own sense of disorientation as they grapple with the limits of meaning itself. Thus, they view *iurodstvo* through the prism of a number of categories that address these limits: apophaticism, kenosis, theatricalization, simulacra, and queer. In describing the principle influences on postmodern thought about *iurodstvo*, Bodin credits Panchenko's interpretation of holy foolishness as spectacle and "low" carnival-type behavior (as informed by M. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*); Bakhtin's estheticization of holy foolishness in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*; and the writings on madness of M. Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari.

Bodin points out the active role of the *iurodstvo* concept in 1) the cultural controversies around media events such as Christian rock music; the 2006 film, *The Island*; and the performance art described in the ensuing article by L. Piccolo; and 2) controversies with a conservative orthodox Christian and between postmodernists themselves. He throws light on the influence of Panchenko's "Laughter as Spectacle" when he describes M. Epstein's differences with the émigré writer Dmitrii Shalin: the former asserts that postmodernists are like holy fools, while the latter objects that they are closer to the jester than to the holy fool.

Laura Piccolo's article, "From Stylization to Parody: The Paradigm of Holy Foolishness (*iurodstvo*) in Contemporary Russian Performance Art," shows how both thinkers are correct. She examines two artistic generations represented by the Actionists and the Blue Noses respectively, their artistic roots in the early twentieth century, and their own poetic trajectory. In both cases, Piccolo argues, they are making use of the rhetoric of scandal innate to holy foolishness to protest against the artist's loss of status as commentator on contemporary reality. The pre-verbal, gestural-performative nature of this rhetoric is their response to the collapse of the artistic discourses opposing the government (and also of the official discourse) together with the Soviet Union's fall. However the two groups make use of *iurodstvo* in different ways while sharing the preeminently non-verbal performative communicative method characteristic of holy foolishness.

Piccolo notes that the first generation, the Actionists, took on holy foolish behavior in a sincere sense through the mechanism of stylization (consonant with the ideas of M. Epstein). The second generation, the Blue Noses, subjected this stylization of *iurodstvo* to parody and acted more like jesters than holy fools (substantiating the viewpoint of D. Shalin). The Blue Noses' parody of the Actionists emptied *iurodstvo* of its earlier associations and reduced it to nothing more than a lexical and iconic sign. By voiding *iurodstvo* of the meanings it had accreted in postmodern usage, the Blue Noses placed it in a position to be taken up again and newly embodied.

Piccolo's article brings this volume to a fitting conclusion: her analysis leaves the reader guessing about *iurodstvo*'s next role on the stage of Russian culture. The articles presented here illustrate key aspects of *iurodstvo*'s poten-

tial as a “pattern of culture” that has remained meaningful throughout Russian history. They show that, by calling on different aspects of this potential at different times and for different reasons, Russians have transformed this paradigm of marginality into a source of cultural coherence and self-renewal both articulating and safeguarding Russian identity.

Thus, this volume illuminates the integral place of *iurodstvo* in Russian culture. The authors’ contributions, starting with Panchenko’s foundational work, offer new insight into the behavioral and phenomenological paradigm. Beginning with S. Kobets’s article, they orient the reader within the scholarly discourse about holy foolishness and provide resources for further research. They present a new basis for the English-speaking reader to approach and understand this culturally and spiritually resonant phenomenon. The editors hope this volume will inspire interest that in turn will result in additional research on *iurodstvo*, scholarly publications of its source texts, and their translation into English. Scholars of Russian culture will find that the analyses here provide holy foolish keys to problems in a variety of disciplines, especially regarding Russia’s psychological and spiritual orientation, its messianism, typologies of dissent, and its phenomenological and experiential approach to epistemology.