Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov
(5 July 1928 — 5 December 2005)

Of all the losses suffered by scholarship and culture in Russia in late 2005 and early 2006, the greatest is that of Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov. Naturally, I cannot help but be biased when talking of my teacher, of the man who had the biggest and most sustained influence on my way of thinking. Yet I do not believe that I err in my evaluation, no matter which celebrated figures may be put forward for comparison. In one sense it is anyway impossible to place a value on Vladimir Nikolaevich's standing; or at any rate, to make such an evaluation is an academic (historico-academic) rather than a 'quantitative' task: it is a matter of describing the nature and the details of his contribution to the modern academic and cultural landscape, not of deciding who is 'the greatest'. Vladimir Nikolaevich belongs to that foremost group of scholars which includes Saussure, Baudouin, Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, Benveniste and Dumézil. One does not rank them in order, just as one does not argue over whether Goethe or Pushkin is greater.

When I speak of the cultural landscape, I do not mean simply that scholarship forms a part of culture. Vladimir Nikolaevich's contribution to a broader, 'esoteric' culture is also enormous. I once had the honour of conveying to Vladimir Nikolaevich V. M. Borisov's suggestion that he write the foreword to an underground anthology of writings by A. A. Me-

yer. I remember clearly how Vladimir Nikolaevich agreed straight away and would not hear of using a pseudonym. The project certainly coincided with his academic interests of the time (in his work from that period themes from twentieth-century philosophy begin to appear), but equally certain is that his involvement was prompted by more besides. Vladimir Nikolaevich had always avoided contemporary subject matter,[1] but his readers, like those of Yu. M. Lotman and M. L. Gasparov, were not confined to a narrow specialist circle.[2] This point is borne out by relatively recent prizes — the Solzhenitsyn and the Andrei Bely prizes — wherein, of course, lies a certain irony: Vladimir Nikolaevich was awarded the latter prize for his literary criticism, a field in which Bely himself, though the father of modern poetry studies, must yield position to Vladimir Nikolaevich.

Long before the prizes were awarded, I was interested to learn that Henri Volokhonsky had written a poem dedicated to Vladimir Nikolaevich: 'To V. N. Toporov, writer of the *poema*[3] "The Poet" (Volokhonsky was thinking of Vladimir Nikolaevich's article in *Mify narodov mira* [Myths of the Peoples of the World], and also, most probably, of Khlebnikov's poem of the same name) — further evidence of the breadth of his readership.

To write about one's teacher and about his death is very difficult,[4] the more so because it is impossible to compete with Vladimir Nikolaevich himself, who wrote remarkable obituaries combining factual comprehensiveness and precision with restrained but perceptible emotional depth. If he wrote forewords and reviews largely out of his boundless benevolence,[5] sometimes praising works unduly,[6] he wrote obituaries only about those who were not in need of indulgence and overstatement. I cite, for instance, his

---

1   And also contemporary literary criticism. I recall a conversation from the mid or late 1970s, when Vladimir Nikolaevich was working on Zhukovsky: he said that he would like to write something about Delvig, a general work, maybe even an essayistic piece, *'even though in general I do not like that style'*. Maybe that is why, to the best of my knowledge, the work was never written. (I do not of course flatter myself to think that I am acquainted with all of Vladimir Nikolaevich's work. It seems to me essential that a full bibliography should be compiled and published, but an obituary is not an appropriate place for it.)

2   I refer to his translation of the Dhammapada (1960).

3   *Poema* is a narrative poem, and the term is sometimes also used for epic works in prose (it was Gogol's own subtitle for his novel *Dead Souls*). [Editor].

4   And it seems to be more difficult the closer one is to that person. For example, it was easy for me to write an encyclopaedia entry about V. Ya. Propp, who never thought of me as his student (even though his work influenced me greatly), but I was completely unable to write about K. F. Taranovsky, who called me his unofficial student (our relationship, conducted largely by letter, lasted from 1973 until his death in 1993), although I had spent several years trying to write a foreword to a collection of his works. His family and many mutual friends still cannot forgive me — and rightly so —, though it was neither remissness nor lack of time which prevented me from writing the piece. (I had already published a detailed review of his final book and given a paper about the Taranovsky school at a conference on the history of structuralism.)

5   Once, when I was still a graduate student, I asked Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov some elementary question or other about etymology. He gave me an answer, but he seemed taken aback that I had asked him and not Vladimir Nikolaevich. I explained: *'I think that I could talk complete nonsense to Vladimir Nikolaevich and even then he wouldn't tell me I was wrong'*. Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich replied, *'Maybe you've got a point there'*.

6   Although mention must be made of the many reviews he published, particularly at the time he himself called his *Sturm und Drang* period, in which he *'succeeded in saying some important things'* (as he once said of a review I wrote of one of his books, if my immodesty may be forgiven). Of particular note are reviews in the collections compiled by the Structural Typology

Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov

obituary of V. M. Illich-Svitych, or of O. N. Trubachev (notwithstanding their difficult relationship in later years), and also the article about Z. G. Mints which introduced the Festschrift marking her 70th birthday.

For Vladimir Nikolaevich, death was no less legitimate a subject than any other aspect of human life and culture, as is shown by his multi-part article about funerary rites (one of many on the topic[1]), which concludes with an analysis of Jorge Manrique's *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*,[2] and which discusses the ambivalence of death in the context of mythology. The introduction, dedicated to A. N. Veselovsky, demonstrates the keen sense of continuity and tradition which is also evident in the obituaries just mentioned. Characteristically, even in polemic, which as a rule he disliked, Vladimir Nikolaevich was always keen to stress the worth and significance of his opponent, especially if that opponent were a predecessor, and also, if possible, of his opponent's position. Examples are easy to find in his polemic with Propp[3] or in his obituary of Trubachev.

Vladimir Nikolaevich was born in Moscow on 5 July 1928, and he entered Moscow University in 1946. I remember his comparison of the Stalin and the Brezhnev eras: *'We began university straight after Zhdanov's speech'* (or perhaps he said, *'after the decree on the journals Zvezda and Leningrad'*), *'and then there followed the debate about Veselovsky'*.[4] His conclusion: 'those times were worse, but no more base' (he was speaking from the perspective of the 1970s, of course). The stories — and not just Vladimir Nikolaevich's own — have it that his generation studied Indo-European virtually under-ground (in the seminar led by M. N. Peterson), and only the unexpected fall from grace of the new linguistic orthodoxy made it possible for them to embark on graduate study. In 1955 Vladimir Nikolaevich defended a dissertation for the degree of Candidate of Philological Sciences (*Lokativ*

Sector in the 1960s, whose subjects included Jakobson's *Linguistics and Poetics* and volume one of Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropologie structurale* (Strukturno-tipologicheskie issledovaniya [Structuro-typological Research]. M., 1962. 261–7).

[1]   See, for instance, his article in *Issledovaniya v oblasti balto-slavyanskoi dukhovnoi kultury. Pogrebalnyi obryad*. [Studies in Balto-Slavonic Spiritual Culture. Funerary Rites]. M., 1990.

[2]   'Zametki po pokhoronnoi obryadnosti (K 150-letiyu dnya rozhdeniya A. N. Veselovskogo)' [Notes on Funerary Rites (In Honour of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of A. N. Veselovsky)] // *Balto-Slavyanskie issledovaniya*. M., 1987. Pp. 10–52. Vladimir Nikolaevich wrote about *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* earlier: *Zapadnoevropeiskaya srednevekovaya slovesnost*. [West European Medieval Literature]. M., 1985. Pp. 100–05.

[3]   'K rekonstruktsii mifa o mirovom yaitse' [Reconstructing the Myth about the Universal Egg] // *Trudy po znakovym sistemam III*. Tartu, 1967. pp. 81–100; 'Zametki po pokhoronnoi obryadnos-ti...'; 'Funktsiya, motiv, rekonstruktsiya (neskolko zamechanii k *Morfologii skazki* V. Ya. Proppa)' [Function, Motif and Reconstruction: Some Remarks on Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*] // *Issledovaniya po slavyanskomu folkloru i narodnoi kulture* / eds. A. Arkhipov and M. Polinskaya. Issue 2. Berkeley, 1997. Pp. 120–41.

[4]   i.e. the infamous condemnation of these journals, and particularly their star authors Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko, as inimical to Soviet values. This brought an end to the 'semi-thaw' with regard to cultural matters that had set in during the War years. The 'debate on Veselovsky' refers to the condemnation of the work of the pre-Revolutionary scholar, Aleksandr N. Veselovsky (1838–1906) in the late 1940s. Veselovsky had been the leading representative of the so-called 'comparative-historical' school in literary and folklore studies, whose work remained influential into the 1920s–30s. The condemnation of Veselovsky after the Second World War ushered in a period of repression in Soviet folklore studies and ethnography as well. It became impossible to write about similarities across Soviet and non-Soviet cultures and to cite Western sources. See further in the obituary of E. M. Meletinsky below. [Editor].

v slavyanskikh yazykakh [The Locative in the Slavonic Languages][1]), but he declined to defend a doctoral dissertation, for he thought that to do so was a sign of conformism and servility.

By 1989, when the composition of the Academy of Sciences began to change under *perestroika*, Vladimir Nikolaevich had attained such eminence that he could be awarded a doctorate without a viva voce (it transpired that such an option existed). A year later he was elected a member of the Academy, then in the last year of its existence with the name of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. Elections to other academies followed, as well as honorary degrees from various universities and the Orders of Latvia and Lithuania. He was awarded the two prizes mentioned earlier, but he declined a Soviet state prize for his contribution to the encyclopedia *Mify narodov mira* [Myths of the Peoples of the World] (1991) in protest at the authorities' actions in Vilnius on 13 January 1991.

Throughout these years it was very interesting to discuss politics with Vladimir Nikolaevich and to hear new and untypical turns of phrase appear in his speech. His outlook at the time combined cautious optimism with level-headed preparedness, if not for the worst outcome, then certainly for extremely serious complications (to use his expression: *'a thief deserves a beating'*).

Vladimir Nikolaevich worked in the Section for the Structural Typology of the Slavonic and Baltic languages at the Institute of Slavonic Studies (later the Institute of Slavonic and Baltic Studies[2]) all his life. He was head of the section for a short time, but handed the post on to Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov at the earliest opportunity. From 1992 he also worked in the Institute of Higher Research in the Humanities at the Russian State Humanities University. To the best of my knowledge, Vladimir Nikolaevich never taught,[3] and in the years when I knew him he tried to avoid public appearances altogether.[4] Only once did I hear him give

---

[1] A book of the same name was published in Moscow in 1961.

[2] It was there that we became acquainted in 1971. At the beginning of September 1971, when I had just graduated from university, I received a note from Lotman, who wrote that he had discussed my situation with Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, and the latter had suggested that I send my work to him with a view to undertaking postgraduate study at the Institute of Slavonic Studies. At that time postgraduate study seemed an absolute fantasy. I went to Moscow for the first time since my childhood (during my student years I had used all my opportunities for travel to go to Tartu), and arranged to meet Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich at a little house on Trubnikovsky pereulok. (I arrived early and had to wait for him for a little while, during which time I made the acquaintance of someone I later, in 1994, learned to be Dean Worth.) Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich immediately took me out of the Section and into a small hall. Out from an office towards us came a stocky man with a beard, whom Ivanov addressed as 'Vova' [a familiar form of the name Vladimir: Editor]. We sat down on a leather sofa in that hall, and it is difficult to describe how I felt, knowing that I was sitting in between Ivanov and Toporov, two almost god-like figures to me. We made arrangements for my talk at the Section and for my graduate work, but shortly afterwards I was forced to leave: my father had died. I wrote to Vyacheslav Vsevolodovich, asking who would supervise me. He said that at his suggestion Vladimir Nikolaevich would be my supervisor.

[3] Rumour had it that he was not seen at Moscow University for many years after Ivanov had been dismissed for unreliability. The first time he broke this self-imposed ban was, I think, in 1978, when Jakobson gave a lecture there.

[4] There used to be a joke that Ivanov only went to hear his own papers, whilst Toporov only went to hear other people's.

a paper, and even that was done against his will, because circumstances obliged.

It strikes me as superfluous to list all Vladimir Nikolaevich's monographs (around 30), all his seminal studies[1] and seminal ideas. I have written about his work and his methods[2] in some detail elsewhere, and here I will review just a few main points.

A fundamental feature of Vladimir Nikolaevich's methodology is his choice of the *word* as the basic unit of study: *philology* in its literal sense. Important as the concepts of the *symbol* and the text are, they are not primary and not philological, or at least not purely philological. In the concept of the word the linguistic (first and foremost etymological) and poetic strands of Vladimir Nikolaevich's research come together. In his methodology more so than in others, the text is viewed as a combination of words, and the word is regarded as a unit of the text. His etymological research reconstructs the entire fragment of culture embodied by the word at its centre.

The indivisibility of linguistics and poetics comes even more clearly to the fore in Vladimir Nikolaevich's work on textual reconstruction. In essence, anything larger than a word — a myth, ritual, mythologeme, 'philosopheme', or idea — is reconstructed within the system of the language as a whole, either Common Slavonic or Indo-European, depending upon the limits chosen. A myth can sometimes be condensed into a single word (especially a personal name), but always it finds expression in words, and these words are amenable to reconstruction.

Establishing the etymology of a word requires an examination of the contexts in which it occurs, and by the same token textual analysis requires an etymological approach to its components, lexical components in the first instance. For this reason the explanatory power of any study of the word in context extends in two directions. If etymological commentary on the word is traditional in ancient philologies, in modern literary studies it is an approach which presupposes a very particular view of the relationship between language and poetry. When the word becomes the basic unit of analysis, the scope for interpreting the text also changes. If the word itself

---

[1]   For a bibliography up to 1987 see A. M. Bushui, T. M. Sudnik, S. M. Tolstaya. *Bibliograficheskii ukazatel po slavyanskomu i obshchemu jazykoznaniyu. Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov*. [Bibliographic Index on Slavonic and General Linguistics. Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov]. Samarkand, 1989. A partial list of later works, the books at least, can be found in T. M. Nikolaeva. 'Akademik Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov (k 70-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya)' [Academician Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov on his 70th Birthday] // *Izvestiya RAN. Seriya lit. i yaz.* 1998. Issue 57. No 4. Pp. 78–80. When I took the examinations for admission to postgraduate study, it took a long time for the acceptance letter to arrive. Vladimir Nikolaevich explained to me later that since he himself did not have a doctorate the academic affairs committee had to approve him as a supervisor. For this reason he had had to compile a list of his works, *'and there are lots of them'*, he commented, a little shyly. Later, he was shown a list of works submitted by a colleague who had been approved very quickly: four articles in the Belgrade newspaper *Borba*. In Vladimir Nikolaevich's own estimate, the sum total of his works exceeds 1700.

[2]   The article was written to mark his fiftieth birthday, but it was not printed, and was published only a few years ago: G. A. Levinton. 'Zapozdalye pozdravleniya. 1. Tekst i slovar (filologicheskie zametki). K pyatidesyatiletiyu V. N. Toporova' [Belated congratulations. 1. Text and lexicon (philological notes). On the fiftieth birthday of V. N. Toporov]. // *Studia Ethnologica. Trudy fakulteta etnologii*. St Petersburg, 2004. Issue 2. Pp. 221–60 (http://www.eu.spb.ru/ downloads/02Sb_2004_pdf/ethn_260.pdf).

is a (minimal) text, then the text not only acquires inexhaustible depths, in the sense that it comprises an multitude of semantically diverse texts, but also extends in breadth, in that it can be interpreted extremely widely and include extralinguistic dimensions. For instance, one may talk of 'the text of Russian literature' or even the text of Indo-European cultural tradition: the main or overarching theme of Vladimir Nikolaevich's endeavours.

Thus the claim that archaic senses of a word are retained in the poetic text holds true for both perspectives, for etymology (context as argument) and for poetics (etymological meaning as a component of textual meaning). The latter entails memory of a word's recent history (cf. the concept of the subtext) and also of its most distant history. Linguistic memory may be the fundamental factor determining textual meaning, and it is undoubtedly stronger and more reliable than so-called genre memory or the 'collective unconscious'. Indeed, word memory would provide an especially interesting angle from which to interpret the concept of the archetype.

An important aspect of this approach is the study of texts through their lexicon: prime examples are Vladimir Nikolaevich's articles on the Lithuanian ballad[1] and *Crime and Punishment*. In the former, an attempt is made to move from the lexicon of the ballad to the level of 'elementary images', understood as combinations of a noun and an adjective which encapsulate the characters and the physical world of the genre. In the latter, the method of analysis itself, which aims to describe individual lexical units and their contexts and which calls to mind the idea of decipherment, brings a whole new level of detail to reconstruction of the text's content (model of the world). The article traces the usage of certain crucial lexemes whose interrelationship delineates the fundamental characteristics of the world of *Crime and Punishment*. This world is shown to coincide substantially with much more archaic models. The article and its appendices pertaining to specific motifs and words contain a detailed treatment of their usage in other 'Petersburg texts' (Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Andrei Bely). It is a significant innovation in both poetics and linguistics: since linguistics gives a practical description of the language of literary texts, the transformation of a word into a motif can be seen as a lexicological issue, too, and the traditional 'history of the word' takes on a new dimension.[2]

Vladimir Nikolaevich's numerous works look like pieces of a mosaic under construction, surprising readers with the diversity of their subject matter. Yet on a careful reading it becomes clear that they are fragments of a single description of something — of what precisely it is difficult to say — in a world which is understood as a semiotic whole. (The distinction between a semioticised perception of the world and a desemioticised, atheistic view

---

[1] 'K analizu neskolkikh poeticheskikh tekstov (preimushchestvenno na nizshikh urovnyakh)' [Towards an Analysis (Primarily Lower-level) of Several Poetic Texts] // *Poetics. Poetyka. Poetika*. Warsaw, 1966. Pp. 61–120. The ballad is treated in the fourth and final part of the article.

[2] It is not possible to go into detail here about the methodology, and particularly its literary (poetic) aspects. In my article I limited myself to comparing the idea about 'the strains of Blok [subtexts, reminiscences] in early Akhmatova' with 'the Baltic stratum in Slavonic hydronyms', a comparison originally made in the review mentioned earlier to which Vladimir Nikolaevich responded sympathetically.

Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov

was discussed in the foreword to the book *Slavyanskie yazykovye modeliru-yushchie semioticheskie sistemy*[1] [Slavonic Linguistic Semiotic Modelling Systems]). The mosaic has a design, a sketch whose outline is known or may be guessed, just as a poet writes that which already exists, and has the task not of creating, but of divining or discerning.[2] Vladimir Nikolaevich once said that knowledge (fullness of knowledge) actually excludes (renders superfluous) both learning as a process of knowledge acquisition and faith, which compensates for ignorance.

The world is viewed as a text in two senses: in its spatial aspect, in which the empirical amorphousness of the map is ordered and prioritised by toponymy (cf. the concept of the *toponymic text*); and in the sense that it is interpreted in a language which has established correspondences between elements of many subsystems: the same words can be used to designate parts of the body, features of the landscape, of buildings, clothing, household goods and so on,[3] thus revealing their structural unity. The same process takes place more systematically in the mythological organisation of space, where units of a higher order are 'effaced' by the lower, more valuable, ones contained within them, forming a concentric system which focuses down towards the centre of the world, the *axis mundi*.

For readers of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, Vladimir Nikolevich's most important works are naturally those on mythology (which include a large number of articles in *Mify narodov mira* [Myths of the Peoples of the World], ritual, folklore, the reconstruction of myths, texts,[4] mythological

---

[1]   The religious aspect of Vladimir Nikolaevich's thought and work is not only in evidence in a study such as *Svyatye i svyatost* [Saints and Sanctity]. A. M. Pyatigorsky quoted his conversations 'with the linguist T' in his article 'O metafizicheskoi situatsii' [On the Metaphysical Situation].

[2]   Vladimir Nikolaevich was often reproached for failing to distinguish between 'scholarly' and 'poetic' etymologies. We discussed this question frequently in the early 1970s and, recalling the conversations, I conclude that his critics simply did not know how to read his work. It is not a matter of two types of etymology, but of a multiplicity of etymologies. One man's scholarly etymology is another man's folk etymology. *'Why,'* Vladimir Nikolaevich would ask, *'is it necessary to insist upon a 'definitive' primary etymology, when not even that is actually definitive?'* In context (both the context of the words in question and the context of the studies devoted to them), secondary associations and paronyms may be more important than the actual etymology, and that which started out as a paronym can then become an etymology. (Even O. N. Trubachev, whose view of the evolution of words was much more straightforward than Vladimir Nikolaevich's, used to talk about *'the neutralization of lexical oppositions'*, when a single word is *simultaneously* the continuation of two different etymons which cannot be distinguished within it.) Or, to put it another way, every period has its own reality, and a chance paronym in one period may have greater reality than a strict etymology at an earlier period. I believe that many of Vladimir Nikolaevich's ideas cannot be understood properly unless the importance he allotted to context is taken into account. I once asked him whether such and such an etymology was likely; he answered, *'That's like asking whether such and such is a good rhyme — it's taken out of context! The context is everything.'*

[3]   I remember Vladimir Nikolaevich explaining this system of correspondences between diverse lexical structures to me. *'It turns out,'* he concluded, *'that in the beginning **were given** really rather few words, and they were then transferred from one system to another.'* At that time, this systematic 'isomorphism' (as it was then called) was a completely new idea and it made an exceedingly strong impression on me and my contemporaries (see, for example, the work of A. K. Baiburin).

[4]   Especially, V. V. Ivanov and V. N. Toporov. 1) 'K rekonstruktsii praslavyanskogo teksta' [Towards the Reconstruction of the Common Slavonic Text] // *Slavyanskoe yazykoznanie. V. mezhdunar-*

names and ritual terms, and sacral toponymy (and the structure of space in general).[1] Perhaps less well known are the studies which started out as a brief note in the theses of the 1974 symposium (a continuation of the Tartu summer schools which ceased in 1970, until one further school was held in Kaeriku in 1986).[2] In this note the Lithuanian village is seen as a complete text representing a variant and embodiment of an Ur-legend.[3] This spatial approach was developed in a large cycle of studies about various towns and geographical features,[4] and also about various aspects of space,[5] both semiotic and geographical[6] (for example, the distribution of differen-

odnyi syezd slavistov. Doklady sovetskoi delegatsii. M., 1963. pp. 88–158; 2) *Slavyanskie yazykovye modeliruyushchie semioticheskie sistemy*. [Slavonic Linguistic Semiotic Modelling Systems]. M., 1965; 3) *Issledovaniya v oblasti slavyanskikh drevnostei*. [Studies in Slavonic Antiquity]. M., 1974.

[1] V. N. Toporov. 1) *O mifopoeticheskom prostranstve (Lo spazio mitopoetico)*. Pisa, 1994; 2) *Mif. Ritual. Simbol. Obraz. Issledovaniya v oblasti mifopoeticheskogo. Izbrannoe*. [Myth. Ritual. Symbol. Image. Selected Studies in Mythopoetics]. M., 1995; 3) *Predystoriya literatury u slavyan. Opyt rekonstruktsii*. [The Prehistory of Literature among the Slavs. An Attempt at Reconstruction]. M., 1998; 4) *Neomifologizm v russkoi literature nachala XX v. Roman A. A. Kondrateva "Na beregakh Yaryni"*. [Neomythology in Russian Literature at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century. A. A. Kondratyev's Novel "On the Banks of the Yarynya"]. Trento, 1990; 5) *Svyatye i svyatost v russkoi dukhovnoi kulture*. [Saints and Sanctity in Russian Spiritual Culture]. M., 1995, 1998, vols 1–2.

[2] 'Ob odnom lokalnom variante osnovnogo mifa (DIEVENIŠKĖS)' [On a Local Variant of the Ur-myth (DIEVENIŠKĖS)] // Materialy vsesoyuznogo simpoziuma po vtorichnym modeliruyushchim sistemam I (5). Tartu, 1974. pp. 33–37.

[3] Another accusation frequently levelled at Vladimir Nikolaevich by his young colleagues was that he could find traces of an Ur-legend 'wherever he liked'. That of course is an illusion. Having established, together with V. V. Ivanov, the kernel of an Ur-myth, Vladimir Nikolaevich would go on to seek variants, traces and connections, and, according to the logic of his mosaic of research, he naturally sought them in the most inaccessible places, working on the assumption that he could leave the most obvious gaps for others to fill. Hence the fragmentariness and unpredictability of his findings.

[4] 'Eshche raz ob i.-e. *BUDH- (: *BHEUDH-): 1. Frak. Βυζάντιον v indoevropeiskoi perspektive' [Once more on IE *BUDH- (: *BHEUDH-): 1. Thracian Βυζάντιον in an Indo-European Perspective] // *Etimologiya 1976*. M., 1978. pp. 136–150; 'VILNIUS, WILNO, VILNA: gorod i mif' [VILNIUS, WILNO, VILNA: the City and the Myth]. // *Balto-slavyanskie etnoyazykovye kontakty*. M., 1980. pp. 3–71; 'O sledakh epicheskoi stikhotvornoi traditsii v starorusskikh povestyakh o Moskve' [On Traces of an Epic Poetic Tradition in Old Russian Tales about Moscow] // *Balto-slavyanskie issledovaniya 1982*. M. 1983. pp. 223–262 (and other studies about Moscow); 'Tekst goroda-devy i goroda-bludnitsy v mifologicheskom aspekte' [The Maiden City and the Harlot City from a Mythological Perspective] // *Issledovaniya po strukture teksta*. M., 1987; *"Bednaya Liza" Karamzina: Opyt prochteniya* [Karamzin's "Bednaya Liza": A Reading]. M., 1995; 'O proiskhozhdenii Sandui' [On the Origins of the place name Sandui] // *Etimologiya 1985*. M., 1988. pp. 86–110, and many others.

[5] 'Prostranstvo i tekst' [Space and Text] // *Tekst: Semantika i struktura*. M., 1983. pp. 227–284.

[6] 'O nekotorykh problemakh izucheniya drevneindiiskoi toponimiki' [On Some Issues in the Study of Ancient Indian Toponymy] // *Toponimika Vostoka*. M., 1962. pp. 59–66; 'Iz oblasti teoreticheskoi toponomastiki' [On Theoretical Toponomastics] // *Voprosy yazykoznaniya*. 1962. No. 3. pp. 126–131; 'Nekotorye polozheniya teoreticheskoi toponimiki' [Some Principles of Theoretical Toponymics] // *Printsipy toponimiki: Materialy k Soveshchaniyu*. M., 1962. pp. 3–5; 'O paliiskoi toponomastike' [On Pali Toponomastics] // *Toponimika Vostoka. Issledovaniya i materialy*. M., 1969. pp. 31–49; V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov. 'Mifologicheskie geograficheskie nazvaniya kak istochniki dlya rekonstruktsii etnogeneza i drevneishei istorii slavyan' [Mythological Geographical Names as Sources for the Reconstruction of the Ethnogenesis and the Earliest History of the Slavs] // *Voprosy etnogeneza i etnicheskoi istorii slavyan i vostochnykh romantsev*. M., 1976. pp. 109–128.

Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov

tial linguistic features in geographical space[1] or Slavonic and Baltic hydronymy) and it led, amongst other things, to the concept of the Petersburg text, one of Vladimir Nikolaevich's most famous discoveries.[2] Vladimir Nikolaevich's love of certain cities, combined with some sort of special spatial awareness, had a striking consequence: he undoubtedly knew Petersburg much better than its citizens, and he also knew Rome, where he spent some time in the 1990s, like the back of his hand. I suspect that his talent did not stop there; we just happened to talk about these two cities. I recall an episode which surprised me at the time: we were talking about Annensky, and I mentioned the monologue in *Famira-Kifared* [Thamyris the Citharede], in which Hermes predicts that he will stand as a statue in a northern park. I asked Vladimir Nikolaevich, *'So is there a statue of Hermes at Tsarskoe Selo, then?'* Vladimir Nikolaevich replied, *'It was last mentioned in a guidebook from...'* [supplying the year]

Conversation with Vladimir Nikolaevich sometimes called to mind the experience described by Nabokov in Ultima Thule: the interlocutor knows the answers to all the questions (knowledge without learning?), and one just has to pose the question correctly in order to obtain fundamental, ultimate answers. But it goes without saying that the question was never successfully posed. *'Now you are there, where everything is known'* (as Akhmatova said): perhaps not an altogether new experience for Vladimir Nikolaevich.

Georgy Levinton

Translated by Sarah Turner

---

[1]   'Indoevropeiskie yazyki SSSR (Vvedenie)' [Indo-European Languages of the USSR: An Introduction] // *Yazyki narodov SSSR . T. 1. Indoevropeiskie yazyki*. M., 1966. Pp. 31–43; Baltiiskie yazyki (Vvedenie) [Baltic Languages: An Introduction] // ibid. Pp. 455–65; 'Neskolko zamechanii k fonologicheskoi kharakteristike Tsentralno-Aziatskogo yazykogo soyuza [Some Remarks on the Phonological Characteristics of the Central Asian Sprachbund] // *Symbolae linguisticae in hon. G. Kuryłowicz**. Wrocław et al., 1965. Pp. 322–330; 'Zametki po lingvisticheskoi geografii Yeniseya. I.' [Remarks on the Linguistic Geography of the Yenisei: I] // *Lingvotipologicheskie issledovaniya*. M., 1973. Issue 1. Part 1. Pp. 5–79; 'Predvaritelnye materialy k opisaniu fonologicheskikh sistem konsonantizma dardskikh yazykov' [Preliminary Material for the Description of the Phonological Systems of Consonantism in Dardic Languages] // *Lingvisticheskie issledovaniya po obshchei i slavyanskoi tipologii*. M., 1966. Pp. 172–192; 'About the Phonological Typology of Burushaski' // *Studies in General and Oriental Linguistics Presented to Shiro Hattori...* Tokyo, 1970. Pp. 632–64; V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov. *K postanovke voprosa o drevneishikh otnosheniyakh baltiiskikh i slavyanskikh yazykov (IV mezhdunarodnii syezd slavistov)* [Defining the Issue of the Earliest Balto-Slavonic Linguistic Relations. The Fourth International Congress of Slavists]. M., 1958; T. M. Sudnik, S. M. Tolstaya. V. N. Toporov. 'K kharakteristike yuzhnoi chasti baltiisko-slavyanskogo yazykogo soyuza' [Towards a Characterisation of the Southern Part of the Balto-Slavic Sprachbund] // *Sovetskoe slavyanovedenie*. 1967. No. 3. Pp. 38–45.

[2]   *Peterburgskii tekst russkoi literatury. Izbrannye trudy*. [The Petersburg Text in Russian Literature. Selected Works]. SPb., 2003.