

Faith Wigzell

Reading the Map of Heaven and Hell in Russian Popular Orthodoxy: Examining the Usefulness of the Concepts of *Dvoeverie* and Binary Oppositions¹

The desire to know where the dead go, to imagine and construct an alternative world in which they dwell, would appear common to all human societies. The resulting cultural construct becomes a model that is instilled and maintained through religious and traditional teaching, or both. In Russia the desire to map and people the world beyond the grave remains active in certain circles despite all the political, social, and economic trauma of the twentieth century. The rural worldview of many still includes a traditional topographical model of the afterlife, as an oral narrative from 1995 shows. The informant, aged 79 and illiterate,² recounted a neighbour's dream, in which she had visited the Other World, *tot svet*, reached by climbing Mount Zion. There on the right-hand side she spied the souls of the virtuous together with the saints, and on the left the souls of the wicked with the devil. She then glimpsed a beautiful, tidy garden with, as she said, trees and so on. 'Just like in our world'. The souls of the wicked

Faith Wigzell
University College, London

¹ My thanks to the Leverhulme Trust for support during the research stage of this article.

² Vera Stepanova Taranova from Sinichino village.

meantime wept, because they knew their destiny was to be boiled in pitch [Warner 2000: 269].

The details are recognisable: heaven as a beautiful garden; the opposition of right and left, with negative value assigned to leftness; the idea of the Other World/afterlife on a level above this world; the wicked punished by being immersed in boiling pitch. Mount Zion is also a recognisable Christian reference — though in Russian visions of the other world it is in fact very unusual, and hence perhaps an individual or local detail. Also unusual, at least in oral narratives, is the idea that the heaven is a cultivated space; most rural informants see it as pleasant open fields.¹ In recounting her dream, this informant was providing confirmation of community knowledge about the place to be visited in a dream or in *letargicheskii son* [lit. lethargic sleep, i.e. a coma].

This article begins by considering eschatological space, the imagined map of the Other World, and more especially the spatial relationship between heaven and hell: in traditional culture in Russia, both before the Revolution and still today, there are distinct if varied ideas about the location of the dead [Vinogradova 1995: 372–4].² It then examines the problems in reading this map, most particularly in relation to the conception of binary oppositions as a basic mental structuring device in Russian culture, one especially evident in traditional culture [e.g. Ivanov, Toporov 1965, 1974; Tolstoi 1995]. Although binary oppositions are frequently seen by scholars outside Russia as too schematic, they are so self-evident in the traditional Russian worldview that their usefulness has been questioned much less (and, to be fair, a great deal of extremely interesting work using this model has been done). It may be thought that the binary opposition between heaven and hell would be especially intense given the focus on opposites in Christianity (good/wicked, heaven/hell, light/darkness etc.) and as well the absence of a formal doctrine of purgatory in Orthodoxy.³ The aim here is to examine this assumption, and then to consider whether the map of *tot svet* in folk and popular Orthodoxy may usefully be regarded as a manifestation of *dvoeverie* (dual faith), that is, a combination of Christian and Slav mythological conceptions of the world of the dead (a description that is itself, of course, a form of binary opposition). In pursuit of this

¹ Even this depends upon which word was used in Russian, but without access to the original, I cannot check.

² This is a highly generalised statement, not relevant to all parts of Russia today. On contrasting attitudes and practices in two areas not very far apart during the 1990s, see [Kormina, Shtyrkov 2001].

³ As Jacques le Goff has shown, Purgatory resulted in a new geography of the otherworld, reflecting a new interest in intermediate categories in general [1984: 71, 86]. The essential contrast between the paths of the wicked and the just are present in the Bible, e.g. Matt. 7:13–14.

aim, I propose to examine the general parallels with contemporary Western near-death experiences, drawing on Carol Zaleski's analysis which compared them with medieval west European visions [Zaleski 1987].

A discussion of the otherworld map requires an outline of the sources and traditions that inform them. Both the religious legends (*legendy*) and the religious songs (*dukhovnye stikhi*) supply a picture of the world beyond the grave, but for my purpose the most relevant is the *obmiranie*, an account of how, in a coma, dream or unusually deep sleep, the subject has visited the other world. Here, she, or sometimes he, is shown by a guide round heaven and hell. Though the genre is relatively uncommon, the nearly sixty examples of *obmiraniya* recorded since 1840 nonetheless suffice for the purpose. Though differing in emphasis and detail, they conform to a basic structure, and, as N. I. and S. M. Tolstoi have shown, should be regarded as a genre [Tolstoi, Tolstaya 1995]. The *obmiranie* presents an individual's direct personal view of heaven and hell, albeit based on cultural knowledge, and as such is more prone to reflect changing social circumstances as well as personal preoccupations. The religious legends and songs, by contrast, are retold/sung as closely as possible to tradition and lack this personal element.

Although the *obmiraniya* are uncommon, the range of periods and backgrounds from which they come allow for a broad understanding of popular Orthodox conceptions of the afterlife. Some texts were produced in monastic or active churchgoing circles. Some are transmitted in written form, and come from urban circles, but others are oral (with the inevitable impact of orality on the material). Some are pre-Revolutionary, from a population familiar with Christian teaching. Most were recorded in the late Soviet or post-Soviet periods, and demonstrate both the extraordinary durability of tradition, as well as a decline in familiarity with Orthodox teaching about heaven and hell. Oral narratives are mainly recent, while most of the written texts are pre-Revolutionary. The collection does not include any written texts of dreams about visits to the afterlife, apart from a couple written down informally by the dreamer herself. The oral dream texts, which usually depart considerably from canonical conceptions, all date from the late twentieth century.

A few general points should be made. Information about heaven is scantier than about hell, firstly, because, as an Old Believer informant from the Upper Kama put it, '*one cannot really tell what Paradise looks like: nobody's been there*' [Smilyanskaya 2001: 36]. Since all men are sinful, visionaries can at best glimpse it through the golden railings. Secondly, the primarily moral aim of the *obmiranie* means that hell, the locus of punishment for sins, is depicted more fully. A similar emphasis is manifest in early Christian and medieval west

European visions [Zaleski 1987: 92; Gurevich 1977: 22–3]. Thirdly, narratives do not necessarily provide much topographical information to assist in the construction of a map of hell, though some can often be gleaned. Even when in oral *obmiraniya* reunion with relatives replaces the emphasis on punishment [Wigzell 2003: 58], it may be just as unenlightening about otherworld topography. Last but not least, the informant may provide contradictory or unclear information, a feature of both latter-day Russian *obmiraniya* and translated Christian apocrypha.

Despite these remarks, generalisation about the features and spatial location of heaven and hell is possible. To deny the stark contrast between them is not my intention; to a great extent these are reverse images of each other, classic binary oppositions. Thus heaven is bright light, hell — darkness, heaven — peace and relaxation, hell — suffering and/or backbreaking work. Hell is marked by extremes of heat and cold: rivers of fire, boiling cauldrons, icy wastes; heaven is eternal sunlight [Novichkova 1995: 200]; hell is a stinking wasteland filled with the shrieks of sinners, heaven is birdsong, greenery and flowers. In heaven there are groaning tables, in hell starvation. More interesting are the ways in which this stark contrast is blurred and complicated. The imagined location of heaven and hell, the topographical features, and the spatial relationship between the two, all vary considerably in Russian popular Orthodoxy, and in *obmiraniya* in particular. The confusion arises mainly from two factors: the continuing existence of beliefs about the afterlife, which, because they are attested in various early Russian sources would seem, in essence, to be of pre-Christian origin, and secondly, the heterogeneity of the inherited Christian tradition itself.

The first conception, which is often termed ‘mythological’, is reflected in the peasant funeral rite, folk belief, and funeral laments, and in the secular wonder tale (*volshebnaya skazka*), where it has close parallels in other cultures. In our narratives it features more in visions experienced in a dream than a coma. Some of these beliefs, such as the idea of death as a journey, coexist easily with Orthodoxy (and with many other traditions). Other aspects fit uneasily with the moral considerations that dominate the Christian view of the afterlife. This is most obviously because the latter engender spatial distinctions, for example the separation not only of the wicked from the just, but even the sorting of sinners into categories with a different space for each. By contrast, the place where the dead reside, according to the ‘mythological’ worldview, is not divided into different and contrasting areas, and hence the *obmiraniya* that envisage heaven and hell territorially as one reflect the most archaic beliefs [Morozov, Tolstoi 1995: 93–4]. These conceptions mingle in varying degrees according to genre, area, and even within individual narratives. In the folk beliefs surrounding death, far from being the

opposite of this world, *tot svet* is very similar.¹ There are grassy fields, woods and *izby*, village houses, where the dead ‘live’ much as they do at home; altogether it looks like rural Russia, with the variations in landscape and lifestyle that this implies.² For example, a dream from the Soviet period mentions life on the otherworldly collective farm [Semenova 2001: II.1]. In wonder tales and religious legends, the emphasis is sometimes on the other world as a grand building [Pigin, Razumova 1995: 60], or it may contain rich and exotic features. Access to the other world may require changing levels — flying or climbing up, or going down — though it can also mean moving beyond, perhaps by crossing a watery boundary or deep forest. Whatever the route, once there, it is all essentially on one level.

Levels, on the other hand, are a defining feature of the Christian conception of heaven and hell, though in varying ways. In the case of the otherworld vision the sources are the Bible, translated apocrypha, and a range of hagiographical and homiletic literature. The spatial arrangements of heaven and hell in the various texts are often contradictory. Part of this stems from the presumed location of paradise: was it a real place somewhere on earth, or a heavenly place *post mortem*, somewhere near the dwelling place of the Almighty in the heavens? The Garden of Eden myth is found in various near-Eastern religions including Judaism and Christianity [Patch 1980:11–6]. Though later expanded, the Christian tradition rests upon the description in Genesis 2, 8–14, which locates paradise in the east as a place of plenty and beauty with its four rivers and luxuriant flora and fauna. In addition to the core information in Genesis, detail about paradise was contained in apocryphal literature, much of it extremely popular in the East Slavonic area (for example, the *Pilgrimage of Agapius to Paradise*, the *Pilgrimage of Zosima to the Rakhmans* (5th–6thCs) or the *Life of Macarius of Rome*). Reaching Paradise according to these accounts was fraught with difficulties, represented by water or a desert that had to be crossed, or a mountain climbed [Mil’kov 1997: 230ff.]. It was conventionally surrounded by walls or railings with a gate, and noted for the brilliant light that emanated from it. So, though possibly only reached after a climb, the earthly paradise was essentially on the same level as this world, merely far off and with a clear boundary as well as walls around it. It symbolised the perfect location, and was borrowed for descriptions

¹ In some folk genres, notably laments and riddles, *tot svet* is a dark, unpleasant place. Laments express the immediate outpourings of grief of the bereaved, whereas other parts of the funeral ritual focus on consolation and present the otherworld as more pleasant. Riddling takes place in situations where death is not close at hand, and, perhaps therefore, without any need for consolation, can safely be regarded as a gloomy place.

² The image of the other world or paradise commonly varies according to the subject’s place of habitation, e.g. those who live near the sea often envisage paradise on an island.

of heaven/paradise as a similarly verdant place bathed in bright light with the sound of birdsong and the sight of beautiful flowers, as for example in the vision of St Andrew, Fool in Christ.

When it comes to the location of heaven and hell, the various texts, canonical and apocryphal, vary considerably. Heaven is above, whereas paradise only *may* be there. One concept envisages a multi-level universe, usually with seven layers, something taken from Syrian culture [Pascal 1976: 78]. It is found, for example, in the apocryphal *Vision of Isaiah*. The torments take place on specific levels, but this is not a binary view of the otherworld. By contrast, in the third-century *Vision of St Paul* paradise is found in the third heaven [Milkov 1997: 64], the torments lie beyond an ocean surrounding the universe, with the most terrible of them at the bottom of abysses or deep wells (thereby introducing symbolic levels into the picture of hell). Another important text, the hugely popular apocryphon, the *Pilgrimage of the Mother of God among the Torments*, is quite confusing about spatial relationships; it places heaven above, but, though mentioning the seven heavens, does not dwell on them. It generally seems to see hell on one level, distinguished by the four compass points and divided into places of particular torment with the worst in the north. Although vague about the location of hell, certainly in relation to the earth, the Mother of God must *descend* from paradise to see the torments. Paradise itself is seemingly below the heavens.

This conception is linked to the dominant idea in both official and popular Russian Orthodoxy (as indeed elsewhere in Christianity) of heaven on a level above the earth, and hell either underneath heaven or below the earth. Paradise and heaven may or may not be separately identified. Within the space of hell, there are separate areas, often enclosed spaces symbolising constriction and darkness (cells, cauldrons, as well as rooms and houses), but also lower levels: nether regions in the form of pits and abysses, places of no escape. The concept of verticality is reinforced by representations of the subject on icons and *lubok* pictures, especially those depicting the Last Judgement. Here God and his saints, prophets, archangels, and angels sit above in serried ranks, while below sinners cling to a ladder as devils try to drag them down to hell. The ladder is connected to the concept of the aerial tollhouses (in Russian *mytarstva*), a series of places where the soul's specific sins are weighed, and familiar in Russia from the account of St Theodora's passage through them in the ninth-century *Life of Basil the New*. By implication the soul rises up through the tollhouses '*which are in the regions of the air*' before its place in the afterlife is decided. Despite the presence of levels, this is essentially a binary model.

The combination of different traditions both within Christianity

itself and on Russian territory inevitably results in a mixed picture. It is not surprising that in general those visions with no connection to a church, monastery, or religious community, that is, most contemporary oral *obmiraniya*, are also farthest from canonical images of heaven and hell, and affected much more by the 'mythological' worldview. As already mentioned, it is dreams of visiting the other world that diverge most from official Orthodox teaching; for example, in a recently recorded dream from Kargopolye, the visionary learns from her dead brother that he is still a schoolteacher in the afterlife [Semenova 2001: II, 6], while in Vladimir province, sometime before 1914, a dead man appeared to a relative in a dream and told him: *'I'm living in the Urals in the fields of paradise'* (*zhivu na Urale, v rai'skom pole*) [Zavoiko 1914: 87], an interesting concretisation of the eastern location of Paradise. In the discussion that follows, I shall be examining how sharply heaven and hell are distinguished by examining the extent to which they are vertically or horizontally arranged in relation to each other, and, secondly, how far the division into heaven and hell is modified by a morally determined space with links to the concept of purgatory, or indeed by any other kind of intermediate space.

A quick scrutiny of *obmiranie* texts reveals that, although the concept of multiple heavens is known in early Russian literary tradition, it survives only partially in one written text [Cherednikova 2002: 243]; proof perhaps of the importance of binary oppositions for Russian culture. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that popular Christianity elsewhere in Europe follows similar lines.¹ In Russian popular Orthodoxy, the idea of heaven above and hell below is the standard view, with the usual vagueness as to where hell is in relation to the earth [Vinogradov 1923: 309]. Written *obmiranie* texts preserve the idea of levels much better than oral ones, in particular in relation to hell; they may often retain notions of levels corresponding to degrees of moral turpitude. Thus in a text from 1852 a peasant sees his elder brother suffering at the very bottom of hell (what he did to deserve such a dire fate is unclear) [Strannik 1862: 154]. Another written text from 1902 presents a detailed map of hell. The visionary, Fekla, a novice at a monastery in Tikhvin, describes a range of ovens and small, dark rooms where sinners are tested, as well as cauldrons and abysses. As she follows her guide along a dark, narrow pathway, she must climb ladders crossing various abysses (it is unclear whether she goes up or down, but if she falls off she will certainly be dragged down to the fires of hell) [Panteleimon 1996: 42–9]. Subsequently,

¹ In Poland, as Polish phraseology testifies, the number seven has also been applied to hell [Bartmicki, Niebrzegowska 1999: 64]. In medieval Western Europe where the otherworld journey was a popular genre, the binary model is complicated and varied by reference to multiple heavens, or greater and lesser areas of blessedness and perdition, as well as, inevitably, with purgatory.

these torments are called the tollhouses (*mytarstva*), but they are clearly part of hell [Panteleimon 1996: 49].¹

At this point this text ceases to replicate the ecclesiastical tradition of a vertically structured otherworld; Fekla enters an icy waste, but then she comes upon a large grassy field strewn with flowers, then a church and further on a heavenly monastery with its fields nearby (typically monastic visionaries see heaven in terms of church or monastery architecture). In depicting heaven as a place reached after passing through hell, the vision of Fekla may have been influenced by the popular *Pilgrimage of the Mother of God*, but in shifting to a horizontal model of heaven and hell, she brings in aspects of the undifferentiated ‘mythological’ conception. While in some folk beliefs and genres this contiguous heaven/hell is separated by a liminal feature, a fiery river or abyss, here it is not, though at the end we are told that she can see to a dark place beyond the river where crowds of the unrepentant wait in vain to get in [Panteleimon 1996: 49–54]. In an Old Believer written narrative from 1956/7, the visionary, Agniya, walks eastwards, passing through an essentially flat hell containing a dark house (for her mean landlord) and a cauldron for two suicides, before reaching a more benign place, where in a flower-bedecked house she is reunited with her mother and aunt [Pokrovsky 1997: 40]. This concept seems to present a paradise that is close to the ‘mythological’ idea of *tot svet*. No change of level or boundary point is mentioned despite Agniya’s familiarity with eschatological writing evident elsewhere in the text.²

In the examples above, the tendency to avoid the binary spatial opposition of heaven and hell has been noted. Other visionaries see the map of the otherworld without contrasting levels. Heaven may not be mentioned at all.³ For example, in a text from Gomel province in Polesye, recorded in 1975, the visionary says that the entrance to the otherworld is through twelve doors, but these simply lead into the enclosed spaces of hell where individual torments take place, though they could equally represent a concretised version of the tollhouses all on the same level [Tolstaya 1999: no. 7].⁴ Alternatively, the

¹ A process paralleled in the West, where ‘*the difficulty in ... allowing an intermediary other-world... led the Church to a quasi-identification between Hell and Purgatory, to an “infernalization” of Purgatory*’ [Le Goff 1984: 33].

² The horizontal model may be structured in reverse: the visionary passes through heaven to hell, e.g. [Zinov’ev 1987: no. 437].

³ In Ukrainian oral tradition, the majority of visionaries (49) visit both heaven and hell, but 17 see only heaven, considerably more than the 9 who just see hell [Bilyi 1930]. The more pessimistic nature of contemporary Russian vision narratives may reflect the underlying apocalypticism of believers; the 20s, 30s and 90s were periods of intense apocalyptic mood in some sectors of the population [Belousov 1991; Panchenko 2001].

⁴ The classic description of the tollhouses from the *Life of Basil the New* does not depict the sufferings of specific kinds of sinner, merely describing the sin and the fear of the visionary, Theodora, that devils will seize her. Oral tradition always tends towards concretisation.

otherworld conforms to the ‘mythological’ image of a version of our own with elements of the torments grafted on. In two remarkably similar dreams, one from Kargopolye in the Russian North [Pigin 1997: 45] and one from Novgorod province [Cherepanova 1996: no. 44], the subject finds herself walking through the countryside (through a meadow or along the bank of a river) before entering a village or house. In the former, different houses represent hell (cold) and heaven (flowers and reunions with deceased relatives); in the latter, after meeting a deceased friend upstairs in the house (the only reference to levels), she is led by her along a road where little hills equal graves and the damned appear in shadowy form.

Another model retains the binary spatial opposition of heaven and hell, but structures them not by level but a left/right divide. The traditional symbolism of left and right is built into the Christian image of heaven as well as well as being familiar to many cultures. It has been argued that it is particularly strong among the East Slavs [Uspensky 1973; Tolstoi, Tolstaya 1995; Tolstoi 1974], though I would prefer to say simply ‘strong’, given the existence of the same phenomenon in Western Europe, as demonstrated by the modern meaning in English of the Latin word for ‘left’, *sinister*. In this instance *obmiraniya* follow the Slavonic redaction of the *Pilgrimage of the Mother of God*, which adds a phrase not in the Greek original, placing paradise on the right and the great torments on the left (and further confusing the inherited spatial picture) [Pascal 1976: 73].¹ Thus, for example, in a narrative recorded in 1987 in the Nizhny Novgorod area, the visionary sees souls of the baptised on the right in white, and the unbaptised on the left in black [Shevarenkova 1998: no. 157], cf. [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: 23, and no. 5]. A similar division was evident in the narrative cited at the beginning of this essay. The distinction may also be observed in the otherworld dream: in one from Kargopolye recorded in 1994, the visionary passes boiling tar on the left as she travels through open countryside with her dead father [Semenova 2001: III, no. 2]. Though the two sides are not always designated left and right, they are clearly seen as adjacent and on the same level. In a narrative from Kuninskii region in Pskov province, women lie on one side and men on the other. This, we learn, is because it is fine for men to play around, but a sin for women [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: 23]. In a dream, recorded in 1988 in Toropets region, Tver province, the subject sees the otherworld, which she terms *rai*, as tables on either side with her mean father on one side deprived of food, while on the other those in

¹ The symbolism of left and right is reversed on some icons of the Last Judgment, but this is not replicated in the *obmiranie* with one exception, a written text from an Old Believer environment [Pokrovskii 1997: 40].

paradise eat their fill. The torments are in a separate place behind a door [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: no. 4].¹

The importance of moral contrast can even override spatial conventions to the point where feast and famine images are juxtaposed, placing the righteous and the damned at the same table. The location is or appears to be hell, but without any explanation as to why the just should be dining there. In a narrative recorded in 1996 in Krechetovo in Kargopolye [Folklore Laboratory 1996], the visionary declares that some people have a brick or a rock on the table in front of them, while others have piles of scrumptious food. We may compare this with a nineteenth-century Ukrainian narrative in which the charitable (who, by implication, fed the poor) have everything in front of them and the hardhearted have nothing. The same narrative includes an innovatory detail, reflecting the popular tendency to see the otherworld as a mirror of our own: the rich who did not give alms have thin oxen, while those belonging to the charitable poor are fat [Kulich 1856: 306]. If pursued to its logical conclusion, this would imply that hell has green fields (after all, the plump and scrawny cattle have to graze somewhere), making hell here closer to the undifferentiated 'mythological' conception of *tot svet*.

The hell where this feasting takes place appears a much less terrifying place than the conventional hell of Orthodox teaching. Although Orthodoxy does not formally distinguish a third place, the same texts that led to the evolution of a concept of purgatory in the West between the third and the thirteenth centuries [Le Goff 1988] were part of the Eastern Church's heritage too. In official Russian Orthodoxy, the emphasis is on the intercessory power of the prayers of the living for the dead, but this motif features hardly at all in oral *obmiraniya*, and only occasionally in written narratives, such as the account of the vision of a thirteen year-old girl from Tiflis in 1892 [Panteleimon 1996: 304–5]. However, following medieval visionary and Judaeo-Christian apocryphal tradition [Veselovsky 1889: 142–66; *Vision of Paul*, Milkov 1997: 66], some *obmiraniya* do distinguish a place for those neither wholly virtuous nor wicked. These are not usually places where the possibility of redemption exists, but areas of lesser torment. For example, in the written vision of Pelageya (1863 or 1864), where the division of otherworld space is very highly developed, there are places of temporary and permanent bliss and torment. Among the permanent places there is one denoted spatially as an area between heaven and hell. Conceptually, it more closely resembles hell than heaven, divided as it is into

¹ The contrast between feast and famine for the just and damned respectively may be expressed spatially as a sequence: Agniya first sees a table with people eating and then further on one that is bare [Pokrovsky 1997: 40].

separate areas, such as a house where the uncharitable are tormented or a snake-infested bog.¹

In rare instances, the place of judgement is evidently located in paradise; in an *obmiranie* from Bryansk province recorded in 1985, the visionary ascends to heaven/Jerusalem from a grassy field by plane. Here she sees her dead relatives and observes the tollhouses. There is some confusion here, however: it is suggested that as a sinful mortal she is not allowed into heaven to see her daughter [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: no. 1]. It may be guessed that the tollhouses are envisaged as close to, but outside heaven, while the heavenly Jerusalem is a lesser heaven on the same level. Much more commonly, when the tollhouses are mentioned, something occurring in only a few narratives, they are located in hell, as was noted in the discussion of Fekla's vision [cf. Vinogradov 1923: 313].

When an intermediate area is designated separately, its topography is rarely described; in the written vision of Vera (1962) the place for not very sinful people is simply described symbolically as grey gloom (*seraya tma*) [Cherednikova 2002: 242–3], though a Ukrainian narrative exceptionally describes it as a twilight place with thorn bushes and grass but no trees [Bilyi 1930: 84]. The most detailed description comes from a nineteenth-century Ural Cossack vision of a single-level otherworld with clear divisions between heaven, hell and a third place. Far more time here is devoted to a description of the inhabitants of this third place than to either heaven or hell; topographically, it is basically open countryside with villages consisting of houses in varying states of repair according to the inhabitants' sins, plus a separate place for children, with one of them locked away behind bars [Zheleznov 1992: 348].

The commonest reason for designating a special place that is not entirely heaven or hell is for dead children, paralleling the *limbus puerorum* of medieval and later Catholicism. Parents made every effort to baptise children who were about to die, because those who had not been were condemned to posthumous suffering.² In Russia the category included dead children whose mothers had broken ritual proscriptions such as eating or giving their children apples before St Saviour's Day on August 20th (*Yablochnyi Spas*). Psychologically, it was easier to imagine children who had died through no fault of their own in an intermediate place (as in the text mentioned above). Generally, this separate place is a much happier one than

¹ For a detailed discussion of the layout and features of the otherworld in this vision, see [Gritsevskaya and Pigin 1993].

² Such children were believed to exist in the *limbus puerorum* until the Last Judgement, though some held that they were condemned. The belief was active in Ireland until recently, while even in Protestant England before the twentieth century the Church of England refused to bury them in consecrated ground.

the grey, purgatorial darkness of Vera's vision, and shares some features of paradise. All dead children are conventionally believed to be together, if not in this third place, then perhaps in the east, the traditional locus of paradise [Zavoiko 1914: 87]. It was also the opposite direction from hell, believed by some to be in the west [Pigin, Razumova 1995: 62]. But if visionaries cannot bear the idea of unbaptised children languishing in hell, and instead consign them to a pleasant place, they nonetheless believe they are set apart from the baptised by their clothing, toys, ability to see, or the quantities or type of food they receive. For example, in an oral vision from Polesye, recorded in 1982, happy children play with apples in their hands, while those who were given apples before August 20th have none [Tolstaya 1999: no 6; cf. Gritsevskaya, Pigin 1993: 59; Pan-teleimon 1996: 129–130]. Occasionally, the unbaptised, a category which includes aborted fetuses, are separated physically from the baptised, in which case the locations approximate more closely to conventional images of hell and heaven; for example, in an oral vision from Tver province, aborted babies are immersed in water, and deprived of food, while those who were baptised eat kasha [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: no. 3].

Finally we can note a kind of no man's land that is simply a transitional area between heaven and hell, but lacks the features of either a place of judgement or a liminal divide. For example, the visionary who catches a plane to the heavenly Jerusalem has already passed through hell in the form of a cloud of devils, a large puddle with snakes and an abyss containing the souls of women who have had abortions, before she comes to a meadow, the take-off point for a heavenly place which is obviously on high [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: no.1].¹

From the above it is clear that the map of heaven and hell in the Russian *obmiranie*, as in Christian visionary tradition as a whole, is primarily determined by moral considerations. These generate contrasting areas. Moral considerations are demonstrably primary, because they at times override symbolic spatial divisions, for example when the just and the damned sit at the same table. Here the contrast is inherent in the moral category rather than the spatial relationship. The linkage between moral evaluation and spatial relationship in Church tradition is most commonly connected with ideas of verticality, but in the Russian *obmiranie*, especially oral narratives, hierarchical structures do not dominate. One solution, as has been

¹ The confusion between Jerusalem, Paradise and the heavenly Jerusalem is found in early Russian culture and in religious folklore. It comes from Greek sources, notably Palladius the Monk's *Sermon on the Second Coming and the Last Judgement* [Milkov 1999: 198; Rozhdestvenskaya 1994, 1998]. This example is the sole mention of the heavenly Jerusalem in an *obmiranie*.

seen, maintains the opposition in a basically horizontal structure through a left/right division of a single-level otherworldly space.

It would further appear that the popular imagination perceives degrees of blessedness and sinfulness, making it hard to fit everyone into a dual-level other world. Consequently conceptions of the other world diverge from simple binary opposites towards spatial contrasts that not only vary, but are also in themselves not absolute. In the case of the Ural Cossack narrative, these considerations influenced the conception of a third place as countryside with villages, where deceased family members and friends dwell. The third place itself, though rarely designated as such, comes from Christian tradition, even if in Orthodoxy it did not develop into a full-scale purgatory. Some locate this place of individual judgement in hell (perhaps offering gradations of hellishness, that are reflected topographically), others prefer a separate place or even the approaches to heaven. Many more imagine a third place for dead children, a place that may resemble either the Garden of Eden or the 'mythological' other world. What the variety of spatial conceptions in *obmiraniya* narratives suggests, therefore, is that binary oppositions in this area are far from monolithic, and often more interesting in the breach. Though interplay between different traditions, Orthodox and 'mythological' views of the afterlife is evident, overuse of the binary model of the map of the other world may well oversimplify and overschematise.

Lurking behind any discussion of the binary division of the other world is the more general problem of whether the concept of 'dual faith/belief', *dvoeverie*, adequately explains what we find in the *obmiranie*. Adopting the approach favoured by many scholars of Russian and Slav folklore, it would be conventional to attribute the frequency of the single-level structure in oral *obmiranie* narratives to the impact on visionaries of traditional 'mythological' conceptions of the other world. The overall map of the other world in its mixture of pre-Christian and Christian ideas would thus present a prime example of *dvoeverie*. The suggestion gains additional weight when it is noted that not only are most oral narratives recorded from peasants, but also that the subjects in written texts who conceive of a horizontal other world (even if only in part) often also come from a peasant background. Mythological conceptions are seen as surviving best among those rural Russians who retain a largely traditional worldview. Although a horizontal other world may also be found in apocrypha and early Russian ecclesiastical literature, its much greater frequency in late twentieth-century *obmiraniya*, including dream visions, would seemingly provide evidence of the transposition of 'mythological' concepts from traditional death beliefs (as found in laments and funeral beliefs) to the Christian genre of the *obmiranie*. The image of the other world as a duplicate of our own,

albeit more pleasant, can then be seen to affect the visualisation of the intermediate or neutral space crossed on the way from hell to heaven (or vice versa), that is, here combining with (or for those who prefer to underplay Christian influence, even substituting for) the undeveloped concept of a third place in Orthodox Church teaching.

Underlying this approach is the problematical assumption that everything that is not part of the Christian tradition should be ascribed to 'mythological beliefs'. As Eve Levin has cogently argued, the division of popular religious beliefs into Christian/Orthodox and pre-Christian, that is, using the concept of 'dual faith' or *dvoeverie*, removes the impetus towards examining not only moral and physical shadings, grey areas, but also the possibility of a range of historic and contemporary influences and impulses. More nuanced readings are excluded by not using the term 'syncretism'. Furthermore, when Western scholars of Russia employ the term, there is often an unfortunate implication that the phenomenon is specifically Slav rather than a constant factor in popular religious beliefs everywhere [Levin 1993]. More specifically in relation to the origins of folk concepts of the afterlife, it means that elements that do not correspond to Orthodox teaching tend to be seen as representing fragments of a much older mythological worldview. Exceptions include anachronisms, such as the plane that bears the visionary up to heaven. Even this, though, can be seen as the modernisation of a traditional detail; in Russian oral tradition the journey to heaven may be a flight, and the soul is envisaged as a bird or butterfly. But what do we make of an afterlife encounter with a neighbour who has continued working as a schoolteacher in the afterlife [Semenova 2000: II, 6]? Such details are often, if only implicitly, regarded as diluting tradition, and, as such, an essentially negative phenomenon. Those non-Christian details and concepts that do not obviously fit the proposed model of the mythological worldview are almost never discussed.

Obvious problems in defining which non-Christian elements are 'mythological' emerge. If the traditional mythological map of the other world is a place like our own, where dead relatives dwell, then the similarities logically should extend beyond the natural scenery to encompass other aspects of life, such as the village school and the collective farm [Semenova 2000: II, 1]. The problem is in knowing where to draw the line. Perhaps it is safer to recognise these problems and restrict the mythological image of the other world to a place much like this where happy reunions take place, allowing for time and circumstances to modify the individual vision of the other world? Certainly, as I have argued elsewhere, the moral emphases of the *obmiranie* change over time, in accordance with changing social circumstances, gender concerns, area and the decline in knowledge of Orthodoxy [Wigzell 2003; Wigzell 2004]. On the

whole, these types of changes maintain the essential binary opposition of the *dvoeverie* model, because the traditional features of the genre are retained. What they do is to lead visionaries to emphasise one traditional feature, set of sins and so on, more than another. Even the topography of heaven and hell can be affected by the provenance of the visionary: monastic visionaries often see heaven as a church. Treating the *obmiranie* as a historical phenomenon considerably enlarges areas for research, which can be seen to include changes in attitudes and beliefs. Excluding much of the detail may leave a basic image that could be described as 'mythological', but limits the usefulness of the *dvoeverie* model. Furthermore, can such a limited conception be regarded as specifically Slav and pre-Christian?

Unfortunately the problems with *dvoeverie* do not end there. The one-level other world that resembles the Russian visionary's native countryside has become much more common in the many oral visions and dreams recorded in the last twenty-five years. If this is the conception that predates Christianity, the implication is that Christian beliefs, weaker here, are essentially much more superficial, and easily eradicated in favour of the much more durable archaic Slav belief construct. There is, however, no reason why this should automatically be the case. An obvious alternative interpretation presents itself. The tendency to imagine the world beyond the grave as a duplicate of our own is, I would suggest, a natural imaginative response where alternative taught models are not readily available. During the second and third quarters of the twentieth century and subsequently, little if any religious instruction has been available in Russian villages. In many places there remains just a residue of community traditional religious knowledge supported by icons and perhaps a few books. This factor could explain why this conception has become more common. It does not seem probable that the problem lies with the unrepresentative nature of the sources. Relatively fewer oral *obmiraniya* were recorded in the pre-1917 period; far more are written, often recorded by priests. Those that do exist clearly indicate a much greater familiarity with the heaven and hell of Orthodox tradition, but there is no way of proving that some less religious *obmiraniya* were ignored because they were deemed too crude.

Fortunately a way of casting light on these questions does exist: a comparison with modern near death experiences (often known as NDEs for short). From the 1950s these have been extensively recorded and researched largely by doctors and psychologists in the United States but also in the UK and elsewhere. The definition of the near-death experience is slightly different from the *obmiranie*. They focus on the subject's apparent clinical death and recovery, not the case with many *obmiraniya*, but then almost every Russian

obmiranie was recorded and discussed in an overtly or implicitly religious but non-medical environment. Many *obmiraniya* come from a period or milieu where the differences between death, coma and sleep are slurred. Russians who experience an otherworld vision nowadays, as earlier, regard themselves as believers (Orthodox, Old Believer etc.), and the traditionalism of their visions underlines that identity. They are supported in their conviction by the Russian Orthodox Church, which regards the vision of the afterlife as a legitimate form of religious experience, even promoting some as devotional material [Gubanov 2000; Ueskell 2004]. So long as it has ownership of them, this is unlikely to change. Contrast the situation in the US, where those who have had a near death experience may not claim a religious affiliation, nor even much religious education or background. Here the Orthodox Christian Information Center's website presents the NDE phenomenon as '*being founded on faulty assumptions, selectively chosen evidence and lies...[it] appears to be one element of the emerging religion of the Antichrist*' [David Ritchie, <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/death/nde.htm>].

The hostility is hardly surprising, given the many general similarities between the NDE and the Russian *obmiranie*. Some of the parallels apply to all *obmiraniya*, others primarily to oral narratives recorded in the last three decades from those who have had less contact with the Church and its representatives, precisely those that could be claimed to reflect the mythological worldview most clearly. Overall, in both listeners/collaborators play a role in shaping the text, whether through their own expectations (some narratives may have been invented or adapted to satisfy others)¹ or their needs (the desire for consolation in bereavement).² Both NDE and the *obmiranie* may function as conversion narratives, in which the experience is a life-changing one, though the motif is much more common in modern Orthodox-promoted *obmiraniya* than oral narratives.³ Thus a text from 1964 relates how Klavdiya Ustyuzhanina, an atheist Party member, is transformed into a pious Orthodox Christian after she 'dies' during an operation for cancer, goes to heaven and repents [Gubanov 2000].

The shared elements of the visionary journey underline the general parallels. Like the *obmiranie* and otherworldly vision of tradition, NDEs vary considerably, but commonly, after the person leaves his

¹ The expectation that an *obmiravshaya* will have seen the other world may affect what listeners, all agog, are told. Equally editing may occur in ecclesiastical circles, e.g. [Gubanov 2000].

² Visionaries often reassure others that their loved ones are happy in the afterlife.

³ For an oral example see [Shevarenkova 1998: no. 158]. The life-changing nature of the event is a genre component [Tolstoy and Tolstaya 1995], but oral visions generally direct the moral message outwards to the community, emphasising either the punishments awaiting sinners, or reunions with deceased relatives [Wigzell 2004].

or her own body, he/she goes through a dark tunnel or corridor, perhaps floating through a dark void, going upwards or sometimes down, even burrowing but ultimately moving towards light [Zaleski 1987: 121–23]. When the journey is described in the *obmiranie*, it is in essence similar but borrows its imagery from Christian tradition, like the medieval west European vision, with which Carol Zaleski compares modern near death experiences. Subjects cross a dark liminal divide, or a fiery river, perhaps on a thread [Pokrovsky 1997: 40; Lurye, Tarabukina: no. 2], climb Mount Zion [Warner 2000b] or Ararat [Mayak 1843], or, less traditionally, fly to *tot svet* [Gubanov 2000: 7–8]. A narrative from Troitse-Chudtsa in Kostroma province from 1866 describes how the subject, a deacon's wife, is taken by her two dead sisters to a pit in the cemetery where she goes down a ladder and through a dark constricted area to a place of light [Smirnov 1920: 26]. Read in the Russian cultural context, the descent into a hole and darkness reflects folk beliefs about burial and the emergence of the soul to undertake a journey, but in the NDE the same motif of moving with difficulty along a dark restricted place is usually interpreted as a symbolic recapitulation of birth. It is the reading of the event more than the experience that differs.

Other similarities are also striking. In both NDE and *obmiranie* the subject is usually accompanied. In the former the guide may be a surrounding presence of light, sometimes interpreted by the subject as an angel, in which case the influence of Christian tradition is evident, but may alternatively be a deceased relative. In written *obmiraniya* and narratives from a milieu close to the Church the guide is normally a figure of religious authority, a saint, an angel, the Mother of God, a deceased local priest, an abbess or a godparent [Lurye, Tarabukina 1994: 22–3]. This corresponds both to the Orthodox Church tradition of otherworld journeys and to medieval west European vision narratives, where the guide is similarly a figure of religious authority. In many of the least Christianised of the *obmiraniya* narratives (especially the dreams), however, and in some written texts, as in some NDEs, it is relatives who accompany the visionary. Such was the case with the deacon's wife. What this suggests is that the life experiences and degree of religiosity or religious education are major factors in defining the form the otherworld vision takes.

One parallel that only appears in those modern written *obmiranie* narratives where the event occurs in a hospital, but is almost a standard feature of the NDE, is the out-of-body experience, where the person escapes his or her own body and looks down on what is going on. For example, in 1964 Klavdiya Ustyuzhanina observed the doctors recording her death [Gubanov 2000: 6]. In oral narratives the visionary satisfies the listeners' curiosity about the other world by concentrating on the journey there and who and what was

encountered. Even, therefore, if some informants had an out-of-body experience there is no tradition of discussing it.

Another feature of the NDE is the intense feeling of joy that the visionary experiences. Given the oral and traditional religious character of the *obmiranie*, which does not incline informants to dwell on their personal feelings, their joy is not normally mentioned, but it can easily be deduced. There is a difference: this joy is not a personal state of happiness, but joy at reunion with loved ones. Indeed, few *obmiraniya* present the other world solely as a happy place of light and reunion or even at all. They follow Christian tradition in describing hell more graphically and in greater detail than heaven. Even though NDEs often include a review of the subject's own life and deeds on earth, something found in some *obmiraniya* (e.g. [Gubanov 2000]), they aim at conversion through an intense feeling of love rather than through fear of infernal torment. Near-death visionaries miss out '*the tour of hell*' as Carol Zaleski puts it [Zaleski 1987: 134], and it is this element that attracts the hostility of the Orthodox Church in the US. The closest parallel in the *obmiranie* to the happy place of the NDE is the heavenly place described in some more traditional *obmiraniya*. These not only draw on the heavenly imagery of biblical and early Christian revelation, but also bear a certain similarity to the topography and architecture of the wondrous place visited by the person who has a near-death experience. Both emphasise light, splendour, clarity, pure bright colours, verdant lawns (fields for Russian rural *obmiraniya*), and spacious buildings (though some of these details are less common in the *obmiranie* than the NDE, which also describes the richness of the place in terms of gold, silver, and diamonds, something more reminiscent of the other world of the wonder tale (the *volshhebnyaya skazka*)). Last but very much not least, the tendency towards visualising another world on one level is repeated in the NDE.

The emphasis in both the NDE and a large majority of *obmiraniya* on reunion with the dead is particularly telling. The idea that the dead await the newly deceased person is a common Russian folk funeral belief, fitting with the body of evidence that a cult of ancestors existed among the early Slavs. To this day commemoration plays a much larger part in the Orthodox Church calendar than the Catholic, and the Russian Orthodox Church designates more days for commemoration than the Greek. Not surprisingly, this element is seen as strong evidence of the persistence of archaic beliefs and patterns. If there is a difference, it seems that the *obmiranie* bears witness to the continuing concern in Russian culture with deceased parents, such that the *obmiranie* focuses on meeting them and seeing whether they are happy, whereas in the NDE the focus is much more on the individual and his/her spiritual experience.

It may be concluded that religious and moral considerations are usually primary in the modelling of heaven and hell in the *obmiranie*, but that despite this, narratives recorded from informants with little knowledge of the ecclesiastical tradition frequently play down judgement in favour of a picture with greater similarities to the NDE. Since the latter have not been publicised in Russia until the last few years, the possibility of influence has to be excluded. Given the conservatism of death beliefs in Russia, as everywhere else, it may be an adequate explanation to say that informants were merely translating death beliefs of a mythological kind to the previously staunchly religious *obmiranie*. On the other hand, the similarities with NDEs suggest that many of the features are shared much more widely. Not all those who undergo an NDE have a Christian background, so the similarities cannot always be explained that way. As Carol Zaleski shows, NDEs are themselves culture-specific, a version of an age-old '*desire to survey and reappraise the imagined cosmos*' [Zaleski 1987:100]. In the American material surveyed by Zaleski the 'new religion' element is clear; the search for and belief in the right to happiness of each individual features strongly in modern American civilisation. *Obmiraniya* similarly reflect their environment in their moral emphases, gender concerns, topography and emphasis on reunion with the dead. The fact that it is mainly parents and then deceased family members who are conventionally mentioned simply highlights the strong elements of reverence for ancestors in the Russian traditional worldview. Modern *obmiraniya* focus on what concerns the person and his or her community most. The modelling of the other world as a duplicate of our own world may be the default option when Christian influence is minimal, but despite this, Slav culture can still keep its belief prehistory. The cult of ancestors and a morally undifferentiated other world still seem credible hypotheses. Nonetheless, by choosing a syncretic model rather than *dvoeverie*, due weight can be given to the relationship of the otherworld vision to the culture, time and place in which it operates, while recognising the continuities. Traditional concerns and beliefs can then be shown to shift. For folklore study, which emerged out of Romantic ideas about the distinctive features of nations and peoples, the danger of exceptionalising a given culture is ever present, and far too often has been a feature of studies of Russian and Slav oral culture. A more nuanced comparativist view does not deprive a given culture of its distinctiveness, and in this case allows the map of heaven and hell to be read with more reward.

References

- Bartmicki E., Niebrzegowska S. 'Yazykovaya kartina polskogo raya i ada' [The Linguistic Image of Heaven and Hell in Polish Culture] // *Slavyanskije etyudy: Sbornik k yubileyu S. M. Tolstoi*. Moscow, 1999. Pp. 58–69.

- Belousov A. F. 'Poslednie vremena' [The End of Time] // *Aequinox: Sbornik pamyati o Aleksandra Menya*. Moscow, 1991. Pp. 9–33.
- Bilyi V. 'Opovidannya ukrainskikh zavmiralnykiv' [Accounts of Ukrainian Near-Death Experiences] // *Etnografichnyi Visnik*. 1930. Vol. 9. Pp. 55–95
- Cherednikova M. P. 'Pismennaya traditsiya obmiranii' [Written Traditions of the *obmiranie*] // *Sny i videniya v narodnoi kulture*. Moscow, 2002. Pp. 227–46.
- Cherepanova O. A. *Mifologicheskie rasskazy i legendy russkogo Severa* [Mythological Tales and Legends of the Russian North]. St Petersburg, 1996.
- Folklore laboratory database of Kargopol'e folklore on www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/folklorelaboratory/base.htm.
- Gritsevskaya I. M., Pigin A. V. 'K izucheniyu narodnykh legend ob "obmiranii"' [On the Study of Popular Legends about 'obmiranie'] // *Folkloristika Karelii*. 1993. Vol. 8. Pp. 48–68.
- Gubanov V. A. (ed.). Chudo voskreseniya K. Ustyuzhaninoy iz Barnaula v 1964 g. [The Miracle of the Resurrection of K. Ustyuzhanina from Barnaul in 1964] // *Pravoslavnye chudesa v XX veke. Svidetelstva ochevidtsev*. Moscow, 2000. Vol. 1. Pp. 5–20.
- Gurevich A. Ya. 'Zapadnoevropeiskie videniya potustoronnego mira i "realizma" srednikh vekov' [Western European Visions of the Other World and the 'Realism' of the Middle Ages] // *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*. 1977. Vol. 8. Pp. 3–28.
- Ivanov V. V., Toporov V. N. *Slavyanskije yazykovye modeliruyushchie semioticheskie sistemy. Drevnii period* [Slavonic Linguistic Modeling and Semiotic Systems. The Early Period]. Moscow, 1965.
- _____. *Issledovaniya v oblasti slavyanskikh drevnostei*. [Studies in the Domain of Slav Antiquities]. Moscow, 1974.
- Kulish P. *Zapiski o yuzhnoi Rusi* [Notes on Southern Russia]. Vol. I. St Petersburg, 1856.
- Le Goff J. 'The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages' // *Understanding Popular Culture. Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*. Berlin, 1984. Pp. 19–37.
- _____. *The Medieval Imagination*. Goldhammer A. (trans.). Chicago, 1988.
- Levin E. 'Dvoeverie and Popular Religion' // *Seeking God. The Recovery of Religious Identity in Orthodox Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia*. De Kalb, Ill., 1993. Pp. 29–52.
- Lurye M. L., Tarabukina, A. V. 'Stranstviya dushi po tomu svetu v russkikh obmiraniyakh' [The Soul's Wanderings in the Other World in Russian *obmiraniya*] // *Zhivaya starina*. 1994. No. 2. Pp. 22–6.
- Mayak*. 1843. Vol. 9. Pp. 55–6.
- Milkov V. V. *Apokrify drevnei Rusi: teksty i issledovaniya* [Apocrypha of Old Russia: Texts and Interpretations]. Moscow, 1997.
- Milkov V. V. *Drevnerusskie apokrify* [Old Russian Apocrypha]. St Petersburg, 1999.
- Morozov I. A., Tolstoi. N. I. 'Ad' [Hell] // *Slavyanskije drevnosti*. Moscow, 1995. Vol. 1. Pp. 93–4.
- Novichkova T. A. *Russkii demonologicheskii slovar* [A Russian Demonological Dictionary]. St Petersburg, 1995.

- Panchenko A. A. 'Eschatological Expectations in a Changing World: Narratives about the End of the World in Present-Day Russian Folk Culture' // *SEEFA Journal*. 2001. Vol. 6. No. 1. Pp. 10–25.
- Panteleimon, Archimandrite. *Tainy zagrobnogo mira* [Secrets of the World Beyond the Grave]. Moscow, 1996.
- Pascal P. *The Religion of the Russian People*. Williams R. (trans.). London, 1976.
- Patch H. R. *The Other World according to Descriptions in Medieval Literature*. Cambridge, Mass., 1950.
- Pigin A.V. 'Videniya potustoronnego mira v rukopisnoi traditsii XVIII–XX vv.' [Visions of the Other World in Manuscript Tradition from the Eighteenth to the Twentieth Centuries] // *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*. 1997. Vol. 50. Pp. 551–57.
- Pigin A.V., Razumova I. A. 'Eschatologicheskie motivy v russkoi narodnoi proze' [Eschatological Motifs in Russian Folk Prose] // *Folkloristika Karelii*. 1995. Vol. 9. Pp. 52–79.
- Pokrovsky N. N. 'Dva rasskaza iz Uralo-Sibirskogo paterika XX veka' [Two Tales from a Urals-Siberian Patericon of the Twentieth Century] // *Zhivaya starina*. 1997. No. 2. Pp. 39–41.
- Ritchie D. 'The Near-Death Experience' <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/death/nde.aspx>, accessed 15.07.2005.
- Rozhdestvenskaya M. V. 'Obraz svyatoi zemli v drevnerusskoi literature' [The Image of the Holy Land in Old Russian Literature] // *Ierusalim v russkoi kulture*. Moscow, 1994. Pp. 8–14.
- _____. 'Svyataya zemlya i Ierusalim kak voploshchenie raya' [The Holy Land and Jerusalem as Embodiments of Paradise] // *Antropologiya religioznosti* (Almanakh 'Kanun'. No. 4). St Petersburg. 1998. Pp.121–46.
- Semenova, T. Yu. *Severnorusskie rasskazy o snovideniyakh (po zapisyam vtoroi poloviny XX v.)* [Northern Russian Tales about Dreams (Field Records of the Late Twentieth Century)]. Undergraduate dissertation. Petrozavodsk State University. 2001.
- Shevarenkova, Yu. M. *Nizhegorodskie khristianskie legendy* [Christian Folk Legends from Nizhny Novgorod]. Nizhny Novgorod, 1998.
- Smilyanskaya, E. B. 'God Has Plenty of Space': Old Belief and Popular Christianity' // *Slavonica*. 2001. No. 2. Pp. 28–41.
- Smirnov, V. *Narodnye pokhorony i prichitaniya v Kostromskom krae* [Popular Funerals and Laments in Kostroma Region]. Kostroma, 1920.
- Strannik*. 1862. No. 10. Smes'. Pp. 153–54.
- Tolstaya, S. M. 'Polesskie "obmiraniya"' [The *obmiraniya* of Polesye] // *Zhivaya starina*. 1999. No. 2. Pp. 22–3.
- Tolstoy, N. I. *Yazyk i narodnaya kultura* [Language and Folk Culture]. Moscow, 1995.
- _____. 'Binarnye protivopostavleniya' [Binary Oppositions] // [Tolstoy 1995: 151–66].
- _____, Tolstaya S. M. 'K semantike pravo i levo storony v svyazi s drugimi simvolicheskimi elementami' [The Semantics of Right and Left in Connection with Other Symbolic Elements] // *Σημειωτική. Materialy Vsesoyuznogo simpoziuma po vtorichnym modeliruyushchim sistemam*. 1974. Vol. 1 (5). Pp. 42–5.

- _____, Tolstaya S. M. 'O zhanre "obmiraniya" (poseshcheniya togo sveta)' [On the Genre of *obmiranie* (Visits to the Other World)] // [Tolstoi 1995: 458–60].
- Uekskuell K. 'Unbelievable for Many, but Actually a True Occurrence' // <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/death/unbelievable.aspx>, accessed 15.07.2005.
- Uspensky B. A. "'Pravoe" i "levoe" v ikonopisnom izobrazhenii' [Left and Right as Represented on Icons] // *Sbornik statei po vtorichnym modeliruyushchim sistemam*. Tartu, 1973. Pp. 137–45.
- Vinogradov G. 'Smert i zagrobnaya zhizn' [Death and the Afterlife] // *Sbornik trudov professorov i prepodavatelei Gosudarstvennogo Irkutskogo Universiteta*. 1923. Vol. 5. Pp. 261–345.
- Warner E. A. 'Russian Peasant Beliefs and Practices Concerning Death and the Supernatural, Collected in Novosokolniki Region, Pskov Province, Russia, 1995: Part II: Death in Natural Circumstances' // *Folklore*. 2000. Vol. 111. Pp. 255–81.
- Wigzell F. 'The Moral Dimension of the *Obmiranie* and its Relationship to Gender and Society' // *Issledovaniya po narodnoi religioznosti*. St Petersburg (forthcoming).
- Wigzell F. 'The Ethical Values of *narodnoe pravoslavie*: Traditional Near-Death Experiences and Fedotov' // *Folklorica*. 2003. Vol. 8. No. 1. Pp. 54–70.
- Zaleski C. *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times*. New York and Oxford, 1987.
- Zavoiko G. K. 'Verovaniya, obryady i obychai velikorussov Vladimirskoi gubernii' // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 1914. Vol. 103–104. Issues 3–4. Pp. 81–178.
- Zheleznov I. I. 'Obmiravshaya' [The Woman Having a Near-Death Experience] // *Narodnaya proza* (Biblioteka russkogo folklora 12). Moscow, 1992. Pp. 341–52.
- Zinoviyev V. P. *Mifologicheskie rasskazy russkogo naseleniya Vostochnoi Sibiri* [Mythological Tales of the Russian Population of East Siberia]. Novosibirsk, 1987. (Motif index of memorates, also available online: www.ruthenia.ru/folklore/zinoviev2.htm#12).