



**THE PLOT DEVICE OF CONSPIRACY  
IN NIKOLAY BURLYAEV'S FILM  
LERMONTOV AND A DIRECTOR'S DIARY:  
ON THE 'ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE EMOTIONS'  
OF THE NATIONAL-CONSERVATIVE COMMUNITY**

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the film director Nikolay Burlyaev's handling of the plot 'death of a poet' presented, on the one hand, in his film *Lermontov* (1986) and on the other hand, in his *A Director's Diary*. The author traces the director's apprehension of conspiracy schemes as a way to explain why part of the cinematographic community did not accept the message of the movie. The author states that the motifs of Masonic conspiracy against Russian classical literature, which circulated within the milieu of conservative nationalists, clearly reveal the affective background of conspiracy theories. These motifs also reveal the late-Soviet nationalists as an 'emotional community' (B. Rosenwein), united not only by commonly shared ideological views, but also by emotional experiences (in particular, the feeling of deprivation, caused by the activity of what was called 'the Jewish lobby', which was said to occupy political and cultural spheres of the Soviet state). Burlyaev perceived the sharp criticism of his film, dedicated to the 'authentic' reasons for Lermontov's death, as further evidence of the secret Masonic organization's activity. Later in debates with opponents, he identified himself with Lermontov, who perished in the hands of Russia's enemies more than a hundred years ago, and attempted to describe his own position in terms of open resistance to a secret enemy. Finally, Burlyaev's public effort to unmask the mechanisms of conspiracy, an effort supported by the rhetoric of his proponents, clearly demonstrated how in times of social and political changes, traumatic emotions of disadvantage and resentment worked as 'instruments of sociability' (Rosenwein), creating a public non-conformist reputation for the patriotic community and becoming an important source for political action.

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## The Plot Device of Conspiracy in Nikolay Burlyaev's Film *Lermontov* and *A Director's Diary*: on the 'Ethnography of the Emotions' of the National-Conservative Community<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on the film director Nikolay Burlyaev's handling of the plot 'death of a poet' presented, on the one hand, in his film *Lermontov* (1986) and on the other hand, in his *A Director's Diary*. The author traces the director's apprehension of conspiracy schemes as a way to explain why part of the cinematographic community did not accept the message of the movie. The author states that the motifs of Masonic conspiracy against Russian classical literature, which circulated within the milieu of conservative nationalists, clearly reveal the affective background of conspiracy theories. These motifs also reveal the late-Soviet nationalists as an 'emotional community' (B. Rosenwein), united not only by commonly shared ideological views, but also by emotional experiences (in particular, the feeling of deprivation, caused by the activity of what was called 'the Jewish lobby', which was said to occupy political and cultural spheres of the Soviet state). Burlyaev perceived the sharp criticism of his film, dedicated to the 'authentic' reasons for Lermontov's death, as further evidence of the secret Masonic organization's activity. Later in debates with opponents, he identified himself with Lermontov, who perished in the hands of Russia's enemies more than a hundred years ago, and attempted to describe his own position in terms of open resistance to a secret enemy. Finally, Burlyaev's public effort to unmask the mechanisms of conspiracy, an effort supported by the rhetoric of his proponents, clearly demonstrated how in times of social and political changes, traumatic emotions of disadvantage and resentment worked as 'instruments of sociability' (Rosenwein), creating a public non-conformist reputation for the patriotic community and becoming an important source for political action.

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The activity of the late Soviet national-conservative community<sup>2</sup> has remained for the most part within the fields of interest of political history or the history of ideas [Dunlop 1983; Brudny 1998; Mitrokhin 2003]. However, the possibility of discussing it from the point of view of the anthropology of emotions is suggested by the very nature of the national conservatives' utterances. Characteristic of this type of mentality are a distrust of 'speculation', of ideas as such, and a preference for 'organic' emotions and life-events that are incorporated into the body and act upon the 'experience' of the person or group. They produce an emotional attitude specific to national-conservatives, what Ronald

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<sup>2</sup> This article will be concerned with that part of the national-conservative camp which operated in the public space and was the object of the 'politics of inclusion' [Brudny 1998: 15] — support from the authorities at elections for certain of the national-conservatives' ideas and projects, limited preferential treatment of them (large print-runs for their publications, relaxation of censorship, etc.) in exchange for the use of their creative potential for ensuring 'the new ideological legitimacy of the regime' [ibid.: 17].

Suny has called ‘a disposition’, or ‘the inclination to think or act in a certain way in particular circumstances, a set of preferences and intellectual habits and the feelings and emotions connected with them’ [Suny 2010: 81].

The appeal to the emotions in cases where it is necessary to make a cultural or political evaluation, to distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’, is only one of the variants of the disposition that is native to national-conservatives. Serguei Oushakine quotes a striking passage from Solzhenitsyn’s *Two Hundred Years Together*, a work which was supposed to answer the question of whether there could be unity between Russians and Jews: ‘The key is not predetermined by one’s origins, not in the blood, not in the genes, but: whose pain is closer to your heart, the pain of the Jews or that of the native population amongst whom you have grown up?’ (cited in: [Oushakine 2009: 97]). Comparing the intensity of the experience of pain and discussing its origins, Solzhenitsyn essentially acknowledges that emotions are, firstly, socially and culturally constructed, and secondly that they are more fully and frankly characteristic of a subject’s position than his ideological declarations. An appeal to traumatic experience, the mode of survival of which, if we follow Solzhenitsyn, separates the suffering group from those responsible for their misfortunes [ibid.], was already being practised by the right-wing intelligentsia, in a veiled and less expressive form, in the ‘long 1970s’. During that period ‘pain’ — referring to previous traumatic events — became a key concept in the emotional vocabulary of the neo-pochvennik, nationalistically orientated intelligentsia (for example [Belov 2002: 50]), and the experience of ‘loss’, taking Oushakine’s observations retrospectively,<sup>1</sup> became an instrument of social self-awareness. During the Brezhnev years the national-conservatives were insistently seeking the rhetorical and symbolic means that would allow them to put the experience of ‘pain’ into a relatively comprehensible historical context and thereby legitimise both it and the social demands connected with it: hence their cautious outlook, expressed through subtexts and allusions, on the events of the October Revolution, the Civil War, and collectivisation as a ‘shattering’ which produced a post-traumatic sense of ‘loss’ (of Russian statehood, culture and traditions). As a result the formulae ‘return to our roots’, ‘renewal of traditions’, etc., which had been popular since the end of the 1960s,

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<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless I do not feel that one can transfer the idea of ‘communities of loss’, as Oushakine understands them, directly onto the late Soviet national-conservative community: the definition of the meaning of ‘loss’, its interpretation, the cultural practices that ‘declared’ it, and the very nature of a community in conditions of relatively stable cultural and ideological order (the 1970s) were substantially different from those in conditions of ideological transition and the collapse of previous semiotic systems (the 1990s and the following decade) analysed in *The Patriotism of Despair*. The author of this work does himself discuss the problematic nature of analogies with late Soviet representations of ‘loss’ [Oushakine 2011: 289].

fitted organically into Brezhnev's politics of remembering and thereby became a form of the signs of 'loss' that were completely adapted to the ideological conventions and reflected a reaction against all the more evident symptoms of the crisis of the 'authoritative word' and the official historical narrative.

The diversity of ideological outlooks within the 'Russian party' [Mitrokhin 2003: 249, 323] stresses once again that the consolidation of the community took place not only, and, perhaps, not so much on a platform of ideas as on one of emotions. This provides a basis for studying the national-conservatives as an 'emotional community' [Rosenwein 2006: 2] whose representatives were brought together by emotional experience, ideas of the value of particular emotions, and the means of their expression [ibid.]. Without attempting to differentiate within the confines of this article those emotions which were key to the self-identification of the 'Russian party', I shall note that many of them were connected with a situation of deprivation (above all pain, indignation and outrage). The very sense of deprivation, irrespective of its reality, was again directly correlated with the events of 1917, during which, as the right-wingers supposed, people of Jewish origins had made deft use of the situation and, partly eliminating and partly marginalising the native Russian elite, had occupied the leading posts in the Soviet state. This explains why the mentality of conspiracy theory was so common in national-conservative circles, being perfectly adapted to expressing the pretensions of a group which felt itself 'suppressed' and limited in its opportunities to articulate its political and cultural presence (cf.: [Suny 2010: 85]), kept away from the real levers of government by a powerful enemy that kept its true face hidden. For most of the late Soviet right wing, the theory of a Jewish-Masonic conspiracy<sup>1</sup> seemed an effective tool for interpreting both the zigzags of the party's personnel policies and global socio-historical processes. Besides, as I have attempted to show, it also allowed them to channel their emotions of protest, giving them a structured narrative and a culturally acceptable form.

I am interested in a subject which was quite popular in the national-conservative milieu and — which is not without significance — represented in public Soviet literature in the 1970s and 80s: the Masonic conspiracy against Russian literature. This article examines the interpretation of the motif of the death of the 'holy' poet at the

<sup>1</sup> This variant of the conspiracy theory — the idea of a coalition between world Jewry and the Masonic structures with the aim of seizing power on a world-wide scale — was the one that circulated widely in the late Soviet national-conservative milieu. This was partly due to the nature of the sources from which the idea had been absorbed: the works of émigré historians and publicists, usually of right-wing leanings, which were a reaction to the revolutions of 1905 and of February and October 1917, and partly to the current political situation, i.e. the official anti-Zionist line and critique of world imperialism, of which Freemasonry was considered to be a tool and at the same time a 'nerve centre'.

hands of a secret enemy in Nikolay Burlyaeв's film *Lermontov* (1986) and in *A Director's Diary*, which is a sort of authorial commentary on the picture and the circumstances of its release. Burlyaeв<sup>1</sup> is certainly nothing more than an epigone of national-conservative ideas, which had much more prominent and talented promoters (such as the critics Vadim Kozhinov (1930–2001) or Yuriy Seleznev (1939–1984), or some of the 'village' writers).<sup>2</sup> However, the story of the film *Lermontov* — an attempt at the public unmasking of the mechanisms of conspiracy — revealed as clearly as could be the emotional foundations of conspiracy theory motifs in their patriotic arrangement and demonstrated how emotions became an effective 'instrument of sociability' [Rosenwein 2010: 19] in the context of the social changes of 1986–88, both enabling a consolidation of the community within the group and affecting its public self-representation and political programme.

*Lermontov* was released during perestroika, but the relaxation of censorship that took place during that period had practically no effect on the film's conspiracy-theory message. Its conceptual origins are the 'long 1970s' and the prolonged work of the national-conservative camp on demonstrating and popularising the idea of a Masonic conspiracy against Russian literature. Therefore, before proceeding to examine the motif of conspiracy theory in Burlyaeв's work and the politico-cultural circumstances and emotional structures associated with it, it is worth giving at least a general outline of the contexts in which the idea of a Masonic conspiracy against Russian literature built up its resources sufficiently to become a fully legitimate one in the second half of the 1980s.

### The 'invisible power' of 'secular Judaism'<sup>3</sup>

The problems of political Freemasonry and the Masonic conspiracy in the Soviet public space of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s existed in a close contextual combination with anti-Zionism, which was a cover for antisemitism, and also 'on its own' as a separate

<sup>1</sup> The actor Nikolay Burlyaeв (b. 1946) shot to fame after playing the title role in Andrey Tarkovsky's movie *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), and had a busy career as a cinema actor thereafter. From the mid-1970s, he also worked as a film director. *Lermontov* is the second of his three full-length films. Burlyaeв is now the director of the Golden Knight Russian Orthodox film festival (see further below), and an advisor on culture to the Moscow Patriarchy. [Eds.].

<sup>2</sup> The 'village prose' movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a 'back to the soil' direction in late Soviet literature that lamented the despoliation of the Russian countryside. Works by writers such as Valentin Rasputin and Vladimir Soloukhin were particularly prominent for their lamentatory and nationalistic stance. [Eds.].

<sup>3</sup> This formula was put together by me out of a metaphor that circulated in the 1970s and stressed the aura of secrecy around Freemasonry (see: [Genri 1984: 15]) and the ideologeme invented by Valeriy Skurlatov encapsulating the idea of 'Judaeo-Masonry' (quoted in: [Begun 1983: 51]).

thematic or discursive block.<sup>1</sup> This relative thematic 'autonomisation' had been preceded by several decades (beginning in the 1920s) during which the subject of Freemasonry had either been passed over in silence or treated as a historical anachronism, and this, in the opinion of supporters of the theory of a Masonic conspiracy and of several historians of the movement, had been contrived by the Masons themselves, unwilling for the names of high-ranking party members who had once been members of their lodges to be divulged.

The sign that the public discussion of political Freemasonry was no longer forbidden was the publication of Nikolay Yakovlev's book *1st August 1914* (1974). According to Yakovlev, the suggestion that he should write it had come from Yuriy Andropov, the head of the KGB, and Filipp Bobkov, the head of its Fifth Section, who were worried about the growth of a climate of dissidence<sup>2</sup> that might open 'doors for Western interference in the internal problems of our country' [Yakovlev 1993: 290]. From the point of view of the official treatment of the events in Russia before and during the revolution, Yakovlev's governing concept, that the Russian bourgeoisie and the Provisional Government had provided a collective channel for Masonic influence, was highly debatable [Khlebnikov 2012: 374–6]. Nevertheless, it was regarded in right-wing circles as a breach in the 'thick shroud of silence' [Semanov 2003: 350] that had surrounded the Masons' role in the revolution: 'Yakovlev has not written about the February Revolution and the Provisional Government in the Soviet tradition of Mintz,<sup>3</sup> but as it really was. He has used a panoply of classified material to show that that revolution was prepared and carried out by the Masons' [Semanov 2003: 345–6]. The words used by Semanov, who was an active member of the 'Russian party', are typical of how this phenomenon was received by the late Soviet right, who saw Freemasonry primarily as a systematically constructed expression of liberalism, individualism, cosmopolitanism and rationalism, in a word, the antithesis of 'traditional values'. Even the cautious mentions of the Masons' links to revolutionary movements in the West that were attacking the state structure acquired a particular meaning in the eyes of the national-conservatives, insofar as they fed their lucubrations on the subjects that excited them: the hidden mechanisms, aims and initiators of violent historical changes. In other words, their interest in Free-

<sup>1</sup> The presence of the Masonic theme in the public field was paradoxically legitimised, for example, by Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which was a school set book, and from which any Soviet schoolboy could find out about the 'spiritual searching' of Pierre Bezukhov, which for a time involved him with the Freemasons.

<sup>2</sup> However, by no means everybody finds the idea that *1st August 1914* was an attempt to bring the dissidents to their senses convincing; see e.g.: [Vitenberg 2004: 379].

<sup>3</sup> Isaak Mintz (1896–1991) was a leading figure in official Soviet history, particularly highly regarded for his work on the October Revolution.

masonry was an interest in the symbolic Other, in opposition to which they were constructing their own identity.

The wider public's interest in Freemasonry, which became evident at more or less the same time, was probably stimulated by two events: the publication of Valentin Pikul's novel *At the Last Frontier* (1979), and the scandal in Italy surrounding the P-2 lodge (1981). The legal investigation, reminiscent of a detective novel, into the activities of P-2 was widely reported in the Soviet press, and the cinema reacted quickly (by the standards of those days) to the sensational story: in 1983 Tamara Lisitsian made the political detective film *The Secrets of the Villa Greta*. For several years after the international scandal, publications giving easily understood explanations of who the Masons were, and why they were dangerous, continued to come out in the USSR. The model for this sort of educational / propagandistic literature was Vladimir Begun's *Stories of the 'Widow's Children'* [Begun 1983], published under the imprint of the Academy of Sciences of the Belorussian SSR, which set out the basic information of the origins of Freemasonry, its symbols and organisational structure, accompanied by an ideologically reliable commentary. Overall, in the latter half of the 1970s and in the 1980s an interest in Freemasonry and its political aspects had acquired the status of a legitimate and justified enquiry. Accordingly, the 'Masonic footprint' came to be discovered more and more often in national-conservative interpretations of history.

### **The Masons against the Russian classics**

During the 1970s the national-conservatives reminded the public with remarkable persistence that secret and open enemies had long been waging war on the Russian classics ['Klassika i my' 1990: 191]. Taking one of the *topoi* of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian culture — the myth of the 'holy' poet [Debreczeny 1999] — as their starting-point, they implanted it in those politico-cultural contexts that were relevant to them, in which the majestic classical heritage suddenly displayed a startling vulnerability in the face of enemies eager to disparage, humiliate and distort it, or else, using methods already perfected in the nineteenth century, physically eliminate outstanding creative talents and thereby undermine the might of Russia.

As early as the second half of the 1970s, in the biographies of the series 'Lives of Remarkable People', literary scholars from national-conservative circles had begun to address the question of the role of the Masons in the fate of nineteenth-century Russian literature. Freemasonry is mentioned in Yuriy Loshchits's book *Goncharov* [Loshchits 1977] in connection with the Decembrist uprising, which was canonised in official history as one of the fundamental stages

in the liberation movement. But the literary scholar cautiously informs us of 'compromising' information on the Decembrist movement: it turns out that it had a Masonic component and its development was not uninfluenced by Western ideas [Loshchits 1977: 20]. A little later, in 1980, Semen Reznik attempted to unmask the seditious subtexts (from the point of view of official ideology) linking the Masons with the Decembrists: he wrote in a letter to Felix Kuznetsov, the First Secretary of the administration of the Moscow Writers' Organisation that in Loshchits's book 'the liberation movement in nineteenth-century Russia is declared to be devilry secretly directed from Masonic centres abroad' [Reznik 2010: 63]. Not only that, Reznik reconstructed a possible source that might have inspired Loshchits — the theory of a Judaeo-Masonic conspiracy and in particular a work by the 'highly productive theoretician of the "Union of the Russian People"' Aleksey Shmakov [Reznik 2010: 95].

In his biography of Tyutchev (1983, published 1988) and in his works on Pushkin [Kozhinov 1989; 1999] Vadim Kozhinov also suggested to his readers that there was a conspiracy against Russia, but unlike Loshchits he refrained from openly hinting at its source, that is, he did not utter the key word 'Masonic'. He was particularly intrigued by the role played in the fates of both those Russian poets by 'that truly enigmatic figure' [Kozhinov 1988: 340] Karl Nesselrode. Nesselrode's resistance to Tyutchev's political initiatives, and his involvement in the complex series of moves designed to provoke Pushkin to a duel, were both explained by Kozhinov as due to the anti-Russian position of the 'Austrian Minister of Russian Foreign Affairs' who was striving to weaken Russia by whatever means he could. Using Evgeniy Tarle's works on the Crimean War, he treated Nesselrode's activity as sabotage, if not downright treason. Kozhinov thought that one of Nesselrode's agents was Van Heeckeren,<sup>1</sup> who, as the Dutch envoy in Vienna on the eve of the Crimean war, played an active role in the secret negotiations between France and Austria and, being in constant contact with d'Anthès, who was pursuing a diplomatic career in Paris, tried to win the favour of Napoleon III [ibid.: 341].

Kozhinov aimed to prove that the conflicts in which Russian classical writers became involved had an eternal, inevitable character and reflected the 'metaphysical' difference between Russian and Western civilisation. Therefore he insistently repeated 'The opposition between Pushkin and Nesselrode and his wife was at bottom far from "personal" in character' [Kozhinov 1999: 100]. Quoting Vyazemskiy,

<sup>1</sup> Jacob Derk Burchard Anne baron van Heeckeren tot Enghuizen (1792–1884), Ambassador to the Court in St Petersburg, 1823–1837, was the father by adoption of Georges d'Anthès (1812–1895), Pushkin's adversary in the duel that led to the death of Russia's leading poet. [Eds.].



Kozhinov connected the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his wife with ‘an international Areopagus which sat in the Parisian suburb of Saint-Germain, in Princess Metternich’s salon in Vienna and in Countess Nesselrode’s salon in St Petersburg’ [Kozhinov 1999: 100]. And although he did not actually call ‘the Nesselrode salon’ a Masonic assembly,<sup>1</sup> the cascade of arguments and quotations from diverse sources that he gives prompts the reader to draw just such a conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

The Masonic footprint in Lermontov’s duel was studied by Yuriy Seleznev, the prominent critic and literary scholar of the national-conservative camp, who planned to write a biography of the poet for the series ‘Lives of Remarkable People’, but who did not succeed in accomplishing his project because of his sudden death in 1984. We may form some idea of the circle of his ideas from the memoir left by N. Burlyayev, who came to know Seleznev a few months before the critic’s death. At that time Burlyayev was ‘pushing’ his film about Lermontov (in which he had not only written the script, but also directed and played the leading role) through the cinema bureaucracy. The poet’s personality and enigmatic death were the chief topic of conversation during Burlyayev and Seleznev’s brief acquaintance. In his memoirs Burlyayev recalls, not without a certain pathos, the sympathy that immediately arose between them ‘Soul called to soul,’ [Burlyayev 2011: 455] but it is more interesting to see precisely which of his interlocutor’s emotions the director underlines and the context in which he places them. It turns out that what he liked in Seleznev was his ‘unwillingness to keep to the rule-book’, ‘life <...> following the urgings of his soul’, ‘speech without allegories’ [ibid.: 455, 456], that is, an openness and frankness which contrasted markedly with the ‘dangerous’ topic of the Masonic conspiracies that they were discussing. This piling up by the author of ‘emotives’

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, some Pushkin scholars see Kozhinov’s version as a variant of the motif of the Masonic conspiracy [Fomichev 1999: 166].

<sup>2</sup> In the ‘popular’ Pushkiniana of the late 1970s and early 1980s, on the wave of growing interest in Freemasonry, the version of direct Masonic involvement in Pushkin’s death was discussed quite openly [Pigalev 1979: 16–17; Plashevskiy 1983]. However, the very idea of the opposition between the poet — a patriot and statesman — and ‘antinational forces’ could have seemed relatively new only in the late Soviet cultural context. It was conceptually formulated in the Pushkiniana of the Russian emigration — Vasilii Ivanov’s *A.S. Pushkin and Freemasonry* (1940) and Boris Bashilov’s *History of Russian Freemasonry* (vol. 7: *Pushkin and Freemasonry*, 1959), in which references to the evolution of the poet’s ideas and work were used for a retrospective quarrel with the errors of the ‘rootless’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ Russian intelligentsia, who had provoked the 1917 Revolution and the ‘denationalisation’ of Russia that followed. These authors supposed that Pushkin had rejected the liberal and destructive ideas of the Masons and ‘providentially’ abandoned ‘the false trail which educated Russian society had been following for the 125 years since the revolution brought about by Peter I’ [Bashilov 1995: 28]. It is curious that the ideologically similar turn of the topic of ‘Pushkin and the Masons’ in Soviet literary studies of the 1970s — 80s, even with a certain ‘sensationalist’ overlay that was not officially approved, fully corresponded both to the general conservative anti-Westernising tendency, and to the mass interest in the ‘secret springs’ of history. Consequently, by that time the *frondeur* subtexts of such interventions no longer appeared particularly radical.

[Reddy 2001: 128] such as 'frankness', 'directness', and 'courage' was, dramatically, a very good move (and, incidentally, one played again in the film), because these 'emotives' allowed him to construct the 'motif of the struggle' to heroic effect, stressing that those who refuse to mask their feelings and opinions in the face of the secret, cunning enemy are simultaneously ethically superior and vulnerable: 'After listening to Yuriy, I said to him "You ought to have a body-guard..." But the friend I was with expressed himself even more forthrightly. "How is it that they haven't killed you yet?" Yuriy smiled sadly and said, "Somebody should. People will read it and catch on: I see, now you can say this, why don't I say something too, I'm no worse than he is, am I?... We're at home, aren't we, we're here in Russia?"' [Burlyayev 2011: 348]. Indeed, the positive self-identification of the national-conservative community — and Burlyayev has not 'invented' anything here — was often 'anticonspiratorial' in principle, and was built on an accentuated extreme emotional openness, directness, and freedom from any ulterior meaning to what they said or did, which was strikingly different from the guileful, calculating, behind-the-scenes activity of the enemy, in politics as everywhere else.<sup>1</sup>

It is not surprising that in the version of Lermontov's biography proposed by Seleznev and developed by Burlyayev, motifs of sacrifice, rooted in the subject-matter of the Old and New Testaments, are formative of meaning. This concerns, in the first place, the motif of the prophet poet who denounces evil no matter what mask it hides behind (the model for the poet's biography taken from Lermontov's poem 'The Prophet'), and secondly the suffering poet [Debreczeny 1999: 92], the structure of which assumes attention not only to the figure of the 'martyr', but also to that of the 'persecutor'. Since the pattern of the division of functions is the same in hagiography as in conspiracy theory,<sup>2</sup> the martyr is identified with the unmasker of secret schemes, and the persecutor with the agent of secret wickedness. At the same time, in bringing back to life the idea of Lermontov as the victim of secret hostile forces, which is typical of the myth of the 'holy poet', Seleznev and Burlyayev aimed, using allusions to the passion of Christ (compare: 'No man taketh it [life] from me, but I lay it down of myself,' Jn. X 18),<sup>3</sup> to present

<sup>1</sup> Compare the description of the direct, open, 'Russian' struggle with the opponent, a struggle in which feeling inevitably leads to action [Kunaev 2001: 186–95].

<sup>2</sup> On the elaboration of the scheme of actants in detective fiction and conspiracy theory see: [Amiryani 2013: 129].

<sup>3</sup> Symbolically, in the film it is not only the poet who is likened to Christ, but also Russia, crucified by her enemies but following her messianic mission of preserving truth and goodness. In a key scene of the film the poet discusses the bitter lot of the prophets and symptomatically switches his attention to the confrontation with some forces that embody self-interest: 'They wait for a new Saviour, but is there any point in sending him to the people who betrayed Christ? They might kill him again... They crucify people today, too. Look at Pushkin... They destroy the prophets and blacken their names... <...>

Lermontov's action as self-sacrifice. '*The conscious self-sacrifice of the Russian genius in the struggle against the forces of evil* [author's italics — A.R.]' [Burlyaev 2011: 458]: that is how the critic formulated the idea of his future film.

The effort to give the secret evil that caused the Russian poets' deaths a specific form brought Seleznev and Burlyaev back to Freemasonry, and then to put into motion some of those arguments that had been 'stigmatised', 'pushed aside' or consciously rejected by the expert community [Barkun 2003: 27–8]. Seleznev, for example, acquainted Burlyaev with the arms of the Martynov family, which, in his opinion, played on Masonic symbolism (three six-pointed stars and a sword descending from a cloud). Seleznev had found the Martynov arms in a work by Aleksey Nortsov, a historian and specialist in the local history of Tambov, who was related to the man who killed the poet [Nortsov 1904]. Afterwards Burlyaev, mentioning as highly significant in *A Director's Diary* the fact that this had been hushed up in official Lermontov studies, decided not to ignore 'such a substantial detail in the biography of Lermontov's killer' [Burlyaev 2011: 280] and included a representation of the arms in the film.

Another direction taken by Seleznev's interest in conspiracy theory was 'the circle of the sixteen' and the reconstruction of its secret intentions. Unlike Soviet literary specialists, who wrote of the circle as a group of young people inclined to opposition [Eikhenbaum 1935; Gershtein 1941], Seleznev suggested that they might be 'a peculiar organisation for the liquidation of M. Yu. Lermontov' [Burlyaev 2011: 460] connected with the Jesuit order (through Prince Ivan Gagarin). Afterwards, moving along in the direction the critic had indicated to him, and using more and more 'stigmatised' arguments, Burlyaev met a 'doctor of ballistic sciences' [sic!], Col. K. V. Kuzenev, from an armoured tank regiment, who travelled to Pyatigorsk and after investigating the place where the duel took place came to the conclusion that the poet had been shot from below [ibid.: 106]. This confirmed the director even more in his guesses about a carefully devised plan to kill the poet, and even made him think that it would be useful to exhume the poet's body [ibid.].

It is possible that it was not only under Seleznev's influence that the conspiratorial moves appeared in Burlyaev's film. The famous expert on Lermontov, Irakliy Andronikov, with whom the director had shared his ideas for the film [ibid.: 99], was also of the opinion that there had been a conspiracy of government and society circles

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The Saviour was sent like a ray of light into the depths of the inferno, to the very offspring of self-interest. They did not want to listen to the voice of truth. <...> Ever since self-interest has been spreading over the face of the earth and rusting away the soul. But Russia will be too much for it.'

against Lermontov. However, there are no Masonic accents in the version told by Andronikov [Andronikov 1977: 620–1], whereas the duo of Burlyayev and Seleznev evidently considered their reading of Lermontov's biography if not revolutionary, at least sufficient to overturn the official story that everybody learns at school. In *A Director's Diary* Burlyayev sketched the outlines of the myth of Lermontov that he was intending to attack in the film by proving that the brilliant poet had been the victim of a skilfully laid conspiracy:

*A man trained as a teacher came up to me [in Pyatigorsk — A.R.]. He recognised me and started to talk. As a result it became clear that this 'teacher' had formed a tendentious idea of Lermontov which had been drummed into him since he was at school: 'It was his own fault for offending Martynov', and so on. I explained to him that people are not killed for joking and mockery among comrades. That is no reason for bloody revenge, and the version that he was 'spiteful and offensive' was invented to distract public attention from the secret, hidden forces that had settled their account with the poet [Burlyayev 2011: 172].*

#### **'The poetics of conspiracy'**

Burlyayev gives the story of the film *Lermontov* the status of the central event of his creative life: the first volume of his recent three-volume work is entitled *My Lermontov* and in interviews he often refers to his mystical connection with the poet, which arose in his childhood and has continued unbroken to this day ['Bez durakov' 2009]. When making his film, Burlyayev followed the 'methods' of the national-conservative re-reading of the Russian classics, which is aimed at revealing 'genuinely national' spiritual and patriotic values in the works of classical literature. The desire to 'bring out' the image of Lermontov 'into the radiance of harmony and faith' [Burlyayev 2011: 225] gave birth to the visual and stylistic realisation of the image of the hero as played by Burlyayev, who, unexpectedly for a gifted and experienced actor, carefully reproduced all the romantic stereotypes: in the film *Lermontov* is good-looking, impulsive, noble, passionate, bold, incredibly talented and at the same time profound and far-sighted. For the most part the director and cameraman 'insert' him into emblematic Russian and Caucasian landscapes, the 'illustrative' expressiveness of which is stressed by the fact that they alternate with images of the poet's watercolours.

The conspiracy motifs are also presented in a 'chromolithographic' illustrative style, which critics of the picture later ironically called 'painted slides' [ibid.: 327]. This explains why the conspiracy in *Lermontov* is developed less at the level of plot than at the symbolic level. There is no coherently presented, motivated conspiracy narrative in the film, there are only the signs of a conspiracy: the

Martynov family arms, already mentioned; Masonic symbols in the scene where highly placed members of the imperial court are meeting; a mysterious stranger who follows the poet incessantly and gives instructions to Martynov; a ring, which Nesselrode silently gives to the fortune-teller Kirzhof before she delivers her enigmatic and terrible prophecy to Lermontov; and finally the jesting remark of the beauty Solomirskaya, 'There's obviously a plot against you.' Burlyaev has evidently followed Seleznev's instruction not to go into the details of the poet's death ('"His friends" brought Lermontov to the duel, "his friends" shot him at point blank range. Everything here is a mystery. And [Lermontov's] killing must remain a riddle' [Burlyaev 2011: 459]), and in the end produced a conspiracy theory by innuendo, which not only made use of what passed for new facts, but provoked a sorrowful sense of a great loss.

However, even these hinted-at emblems of conspiracy were enough to make the film-maker's position on the poet's death clear, especially since the discursive symbolic background that had formed over the previous fifteen years allowed the viewer to reconstruct the general conspiratorial logic of the film without difficulty (in outline, at least). Even before the visual realisation of the film, the conspiracy message could be read clearly in the scenario.<sup>1</sup> It frankly echoed the contemporary phobias linked to 'the national question' and demonstrated the powerful emotive charge that the conspiracy theory had accumulated. The subtexts connected with an experience of deprivation and the presence of an enemy who is responsible for that feeling are unveiled in the film by allusions to the absolute power of 'foreigners' and 'cosmopolitans' (read: Jews). Only obliquely related to the subject of Lermontov,<sup>2</sup> but directly connected with the concerns of a certain part of the Russian cinema elite,<sup>3</sup> this conspiracy narrative literally runs all the way through Burlyaev's footage. Lermontov's enemies in the government are foreigners (the hero, observing the Tsar's ministers and Benckendorff and Pushkin talking at a ball, dramatically concludes 'Poor Aleksandr Sergeevich! <...> And poor Russia, when her chief people come from the Nesselrode family!' [ibid.: 45]). The director himself, as can be seen from entries in his diary at the time he was making the film, was profoundly

<sup>1</sup> Burlyaev's xenophobic and conspiracy-theory ideas may well have deterred several people who might have worked on the project from collaborating with him. For example, the director remembered that the actor Sergey Yurskiy, who had previously expressed a desire to act in it, refused to take part after reading the script [Burlyaev 2011: 160–1]. [Sergey Yurskiy, b. 1935, made his name at the Bolshoi Drama Theatre in Leningrad, but has also done a great deal of work for the cinema. He is himself of Jewish origin, making the approach by Burlyaev particularly insensitive. — Eds.]

<sup>2</sup> The foreign origin of Pushkin's killer had been noted several times by memoirists and certainly affected the genesis of the myth of the poet [Debreczeny 1999: 91]. In this respect Burlyaev was following the beaten track.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the writer Vasilii Shukshin's thoughts on the obstacles put in the way of the 'Russian cinema' [Belov 2002: 59–60].

resentful of the limitations placed by the authorities and the 'Jewish lobby' on the expression of Russian national feelings:

*I am increasingly worried and enraged by the fact that the words 'Russia' and 'Russian' and everything connected with Russianness are perceived by certain people living in my country as nationalism. <...> How long is this to go on? Or are we Russians not living in our own country? <...> Not in Russia?.. Why should we constantly have to look over our shoulders and feel like strangers in our own Homeland? This will not do! We are Russian! We are at home! We are in Russia! We shall speak at the top of our voices!* [Burlyayev 2011: 281].

Some phrases from the fragment just quoted were given by Burlyayev to the hero of the film, upon whom he bestowed a burning concern for the fate of his Fatherland. Another motif which clearly resonated with the publicly expressed anxieties of the patriotic camp in the first half of the 1980s was the 'alco-genocide' of the Russian people. The director does not merely 'archetypify' the problem, finding its roots in the nineteenth century (Martynov's father, as the film makes clear, ran an 'establishment' right next to the Kremlin), but puts into Lermontov's mouth his own doggerel about the deliberate inebriation of the Russian people: 'They've built lots of pubs. Got Russia drunk. Befuddled its wits. "The mighty man can't stand upright, And so can't put the fiend to flight."' <sup>1</sup>

It is not entirely clear from *A Director's Diary* to what extent such analogies with the present day were discussed within the film crew, or whether they were discussed at all, but, to all appearances, even without further discussion, their presence in the film, lifting the curtain on the 'mechanism' of the killing of the Russian poet and the suppression of the Russian spirit, was recognised by many people, including the director himself, as potentially dangerous:

*A woman who had a modest position in the 'Lermontov' group said to me: 'You're a dangerous man. If we don't watch out we'll end up doing porridge.'*

*'Why?' I said. 'Our film's about Russia...'*

*'That's just why,' she answered. 'It was one thing then, when the Decembrists were alive, but now... times are dreadful.'*

*The conversation was half-joking, so I answered with a smile: 'They won't touch the group. It's the writer and director they'll shoot...'* [ibid.: 232].

A practising conspiracy theorist, as a rule, naturally falls into the procedure of 'continual interpretation' of the conspiracy theory

<sup>1</sup> On the television programme *Tea at the Central Writers' House* Burlyayev, an enthusiastic supporter of the ideas of Academician Fedor Uglov, declared without beating about the bush, 'Solomon Martynov, Lermontov's killer's father, was a rich vintner and took an active part in the inebriation of the Russian people' [Burlyayev 2011: 342].

[Fenster 2008: 94], searching out ever new arguments in support of his point of view. But in Burlyaev's case intellectual, analytical efforts to solve the mystery of Lermontov's death were less significant and valuable than the experience of a profound psychological and emotional identification with him, quite different, the director assures us, from an actor's usual 'getting into' a part. Although Burlyaev never states it outright, it seems that he sees himself if not as a reincarnation of the poet, then at least as his 'spiritual brother'. It is no accident that the existence of a mystical link, of 'spiritual contact' [Burlyaev 2011: 100] with the poet is constantly stressed in the *Diary*.<sup>1</sup> For example, Burlyaev recounts that while he was still working on the scenario, in 1982, he witnessed a 'miracle'. Once, while intently scrutinising a portrait of the poet by Zabolotskiy, he lost the distinction between his own personality and that of Lermontov: 'Before my very eyes the features of Lermontov's face began to turn into my own! Some mystical transference took place: looking out at me from Lermontov's portrait was — myself!' [ibid.: 102]. Burlyaev himself perceived this exclusive 'spiritual contact' with Lermontov as the guarantee that the 'knowledge' about Lermontov that he had received was genuine, which, though it was uncanonical with regard to the principles of the academic study of Lermontov and his work, carried great emotional conviction for the director [ibid.: 241].

This high degree of identification with the poet explains why Burlyaev so easily 'absorbed', so to speak, the scenario of Lermontov's emotions and rhetoric (nonconformity, denunciation of evil, self-'sacrifice' for the sake of higher truth) and began to interpret the circumstances of his own biography in the light of the conspiratorial moves that he had previously attributed to the biography of Lermontov:

*My parents are secretly afraid for me and my future. They understand what sort of a film I'm making. They can feel that I'm taking on powerful enemies head on. They know that people who stand up straight get shot at, like Pushkin, Lermontov and many other fighters for the Russian soul* [ibid.: 280].

In this fragment the 'codes of emotional expression' [Kelly 2010: 58], which refer us to the classics seen in heroic mode, are obviously connected by the author with a particular cultural and political

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<sup>1</sup> The director, in calling himself 'a conduit for a higher idea' [Burlyaev 2011: 280] is clearly referring to the biblical model of the service of a prophet (both parts of the *Diary* notably have epigraphs from Lermontov's 'Prophet'), but his discussion of his 'energetic contact' with Lermontov [ibid.: 109], his interest in Juna [a faith-healer and astrologer. — *Transl.*], whom he tried to have play the role of the fortune-teller Kirchhof, and his acknowledgement of the possibility of negative extrasensory influence [ibid.: 251] reflect, among other things, the widespread interest among the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1980s in non-traditional spiritual practices.

position, and are not just borrowed for stylistic purposes from Lermontov's works or the biopic of the poet by Burlyayev himself, but attach the director to the national-conservative tradition, and make him — as yet virtually — a member of the 'eternal' national-conservative community. Burlyayev's efforts to correct his behaviour and emotional reactions with reference to Lermontov's texts, the memoirs concerning him and his on-screen image, return us to Barbara Rosenwein's idea, formulated in respect of the 'emotional communities' of the Middle Ages, which she also saw as 'textual' [Rosenwein 2006: 25]. Discussing the effect of mediaeval hagiography, which prescribed models of behaviour and feeling, Rosenwein underlines that it was texts that provided the models for experiencing and expressing emotions, diminishing the value of some and raising the significance of others [ibid.]. And although this observation cannot be transferred to the present day without a large number of reservations, it does draw attention to the role of Russian classical literature and the writers' biographies (which often contain hagiographical elements) in the processes of self-identification of the national-conservative community. It is understandable that Gogol and Dostoevskiy, Pushkin and Lermontov, Chekhov and Blok were looked upon by the national-conservatives as models of service to the homeland and its people and as examples of discernment that allowed them to recognise the main dangers in Russia's path and denounce her enemies.<sup>1</sup> But besides that, the emotions of indignation and resistance have always been regarded as highly valuable in the behaviour of the Russian classical authors, and they are particularly relevant to a person or group which feels itself under pressure from its enemies and is trying to extend the field of its own influence. Thus the biographies of the classical authors, and certain of their sayings, reassessed in the light of conspiracy theory, were adapted to express emotions of protest, sometimes with overtones of resentment, and the motif of a conspiracy theory, with such an authoritative figure as a classic of the national literature as its hero, worked as a mechanism to re-cast personal frustrations as socially significant emotions and acts.

### 'They crucify people today, too...'

From the *Diary* we learn that during post-production Burlyayev started to react particularly attentively to the 'black marks' which

<sup>1</sup> Compare the passage from Vasily Belov's reminiscences of Vasily Shukshin, who, in Belov's opinion, by revealing the wiles of the Jews in his story 'Until the Third Cocks', was following in the footsteps of Dostoevskiy and Gogol and had made himself a target for the secret enemy: 'In his story Shukshin boldly banged his fist on the table of the theatre. <...> In his Ivan, sent to get a document certifying that he wasn't a fool, Makarych [i.e. Shukshin. — *Transl.*] bitterly reflected the fate of millions of Russians, and fearlessly tore from the Russian the label of fool and antisemite, which we only tolerate for fear of the Jews. Since Gogol and Dostoevskiy there have not been many who have dared to take such a step. Perhaps Makarych paid with his life for taking it — who knows?' [Belov 2002: 64].



he supposed were being sent to him by the agents of a hostile force: he got an anonymous letter from Leningrad wishing him dead [Burlyayev 2011: 284], and the director Andrey Smirnov's indignation at a speech about the inebriation of Russia given by Burlyayev at an evening dedicated to the memory of Gennadiy Shpalikov<sup>1</sup> was also interpreted as a message from his enemies: 'The "friends"' first signal. "This cup" shall not pass from me' [ibid.: 288]. The film's première at the House of Cinema, during which 'the mass of viewers, critically inclined, squirmed visibly and hissed quietly' [ibid.: 309–10], the leading film critic Andrey Plakhov's sharp assessment of the film at the Fifth Congress of Cinematographers in May 1986,<sup>2</sup> and the discussion of *Lermontov* at the secretariat of the administration of the Union of Cinematographers, which Burlyayev equated with 'a deliberate kicking of the writer-director and his baby' [ibid.: 325], may be seen as narrative and rhetorical elements of a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', inasmuch as everything that happened, as far as Burlyayev was concerned, was an eloquent confirmation of his own predictions: obstacles would be put in the way of a film that told the truth about Lermontov, and its author would be ostracised. In such a situation the figure of the symbolic enemy, which had been relevant even before [ibid.: 122, 217, 246], took possession of the director's imagination ever more powerfully. Now he drew up his behavioural strategy, mindful of the close and constant presence of a sinister secret force, having recourse alternately to the rhetoric of protest and of sacrifice, 'borrowing' this combination from his film about Lermontov:

*The enemy is furious and isn't hiding it. <...> It's time to go underground spiritually, to go into concealment, but how? Shut myself up, cut myself off from the world outside? Impossible. I must continue to work actively in the world, increase the power of spiritual activity, advance without surrendering any of the positions that I have taken... I must not forget the enemy, or forget that he might be present in any audience* [ibid.: 312, 314].

In respect of this passage one is tempted to medicalise Richard Hofstadter's reflections on the 'paranoid style' [Hofstadter 1996] and interpret the discourse of conspiracy theory as a sort of therapy that allowed the director to distance himself from his colleagues' painful reproaches of the film's artistic inconsequentiality, weak

<sup>1</sup> Gennadiy Shpalikov (1937–1974) was a poet, songwriter, and screenwriter, and the director of *A Long Happy Life* (1967), a landmark of the Leningrad 'new wave' cinema. He had no associations with the neo-nationalist sympathies of Burlyayev. [Eds.].

<sup>2</sup> This was a landmark occasion of the perestroika era at which two-thirds of the Union's Board were turfed out of their positions by a popular vote, and the director Elem Klimov, whose films had repeatedly been shelved and delayed, was elected Secretary. [Eds.].

plotting, distortion of facts, and nepotism.<sup>1</sup> Burlyayev himself provided the reasons for this, speaking repeatedly of the 'media campaign' unleashed against him, allegedly provoked exclusively by the fact that he had dared to attack the world order established by the Jewish-Masonic elite:

*[I] dared to touch on a forbidden theme. I hinted in the film that one and the same circle of people were involved in the demise of both Lermontov and Pushkin. And these persons belonged to a secret 'brotherhood'. Furthermore, I was told by someone in the KGB that one of my 'persecutors' was also a member of the 'brotherhood', and that until recently he was under investigation by the competent organs. <...> Not long ago I read in a book about secret 'brotherhoods' that if somebody's name and work are displeasing to them, they will begin to blacken both name and work long before people have had a chance to hear about them — which, essentially, is what happened to me and my 'Lermontov'. Even now, it has effectively not yet been released [Burlyayev 2011: 374–5].*

In the circumstances of democratisation and glasnost Burlyayev reinterpreted the hostile assaults on him as yet another 'act of sabotage' against Russian culture. He tried to achieve what he had long been striving for, something from time to time practised by certain legal nationalists, namely the public denunciation of the enemy who, as they suppose, has been using refined methods (from lies to intimidation) to force them to remain passive and obedient. In other words, he spontaneously attempted to turn his sense of exclusion and accompanying, culturally not entirely legitimate, emotions (primarily, the feeling of insulted and disadvantaged) into a source of socially and politically significant action. Therefore Burlyayev, who was extremely sceptical in his evaluation of many aspects of perestroika [ibid.: 310, 361] did not fail to make use of the liberalisation of the social atmosphere in order to make known his slow-burning dissatisfaction with the dominance in the cinema milieu of 'landless cinemaesthetic nomads and their painful attempts at new forms' [ibid.: 389]. In the *Diary* he advises paying close attention to the names on the office doors at the Union of Cinematographers (an evident hint at the Jewish origins of many of his colleagues), and to the residents of the Cinema Veterans' Home, the Cinema House at Bolshevo, and 'other promised lands' [ibid.: 310–11]. In general, the 'mendacious' criticism of his film about a Russian genius, spirituality and patriotism seemed to give the director *carte*

<sup>1</sup> Lermontov's mother was played by Burlyayev's then wife, Nataliya Bondarchuk; her mother, Inna Makarova, played Elizaveta Arsenyeva; Lermontov as a child was played by the director's son Ivan Burlyayev; and the film was produced in a section of Mosfilm headed by Burlyayev's father-in-law Sergey Bondarchuk. [Sergey Bondarchuk, 1920–1994, was one of Mosfilm's leading directors, especially famous for his 1960s screen version of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Nataliya Bondarchuk, b. 1950, his daughter by his second marriage, is, like her mother, a leading film actress. — *Eds.*].

*blanche* to display emotions connected with a sense of deprivation of which a professional who had enjoyed reasonable success within the Soviet film production system, and only suddenly found himself under attack after the release of *Lermontov*, could hardly have been suspected.

And so Burlyayev, who had already placed himself inside the story of the conspiracy theory while he was making *Lermontov*, now took upon himself the mission of unmasking the secret enemy, thereby attaching himself to that powerful flow of lamentations and denunciations that accompanied perestroika [Ries 2005: 286–9]. At the period when the film was being discussed he continued actively to popularise the tactic of resistance to the passive sacrificial scenario into which his enemies were allegedly trying to force him. ‘I won’t be quiet, this is my road, and I don’t give a damn for all that riff-raff... I have no intention of swallowing their poison pills,’ he told the actor Dmitriy Zolotukhin, who had warned him against writing an article for *Nash sovremennik*,<sup>1</sup> since that might enrage the enemy even further and be a ‘death sentence’ for the director [Burlyayev 2011: 402]. His entry in the *Diary* about his appearance at the Palace of Culture at Zelenograd, where he read his poetry and showed clips from the film, ends with a characteristic aside: ‘Then of course I got carried away and started baiting the people who were attacking *Lermontov*’ [ibid.: 377].

But how typical is this release of the emotional potential of protest for the conspiracy-theorist mentality? On the one hand, we can reasonably expect it from a group whose representatives have always felt disadvantaged and indignant because of inequality in their access to social goods.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, psychologically an inclination towards the mentality of conspiracy theory is often connected with the passive position of a subject who ‘places him- or herself at the center of attention of a malevolent coalition, which he or she is helpless to counteract’ [Zonis, Joseph 1994: 453]. At first sight Burlyayev’s text and behaviour disprove the American researchers’ observation: the director describes his activity by reference to Lermontov’s motives of rebellion, challenge and disagreement [Burlyayev 2011: 122, 137, 168, 341], and notes how highly motivated he is psychologically for the struggle. Nevertheless, a great deal in his position is determined by the excluded and unrecognised concept of

<sup>1</sup> *Nash sovremennik* [Our Contemporary], one of the leading ‘thick journals’ (literary and political monthlies) of the Soviet period, became in the 1960s and 1970s a mouthpiece of Russian nationalist writing, a kind of riposte to the liberal oppositionism of *Novyy mir*. Dmitry Zolotukhin was cast in the role of Dmitry Stolypin in Burlyayev’s Lermontov biopic. [Eds.].

<sup>2</sup> Burlyayev’s ‘mutiny’, which transformed disadvantage into protest, almost coincided chronologically with what may have been the first public literary reflection by the national-conservatives on the experience of deprivation and social inequality, the publication of Viktor Astafyev’s story ‘Catching Gudgeon in Georgia’ (1986), which caused a scandal.

'passivity'. Burlyayev's protest is a reaction to the passivity that his adversary allegedly attributes to him (it is unclear whether there really is a compulsion to passivity or whether this belongs to the sphere of the imaginary, but what matters is that the subject regards it as the main 'negative' impulse of his actions), and correspondingly the stress he lays on the emotions of protest is an attempt to break out of the confines of the conspiracy-theory story, without denying or regarding as problematic the mentality of conspiracy theory as such, and remaining inside the conceptual and emotional structures of the conspiracy theory. The uninterrupted circulation of the conspiracy-theory logic that is important for the community's self-identification is thus assured: once they have unmasked one enemy and grasped the desired power and control, the national-conservatives immediately discover another conspiracy and another enemy who is oppressing them and keeping them away from the levers of power, and therefore stimulating their feelings of disadvantage and outrage.

By an irony of fate, the situation surrounding *Lermontov*, which was traumatic for Burlyayev as a film director (primarily because of the unconcealed suggestion of his professional incompetence), was exceptionally successful in legitimising the national-patriotic community's potential for protest: the 'campaign against' the director, the 'blockade' against him in certain sections of the media,<sup>1</sup> provided a reason for him to convince himself once more of the existence of a conspiracy and re-live the whole gamut of emotions, from disadvantage to righteous anger, in the expression of which the national-conservatives affirmed their position in the field of politics. Moreover, in a situation of 'persecution' the director himself accumulated symbolic capital and for a certain time advanced to become one of the leaders of the national-conservative intelligentsia. In 1986–1988 he made the acquaintance of the most prominent figures in the patriotic camp: Kozhinov, Belov, Valentin Rasputin, Mark Lyubomudrov, Ilya Glazunov, Vladimir Soloukhin, Viktor Astafyev, and the ecologists who were campaigning against the project to reverse the flow of the northern rivers [Burlyayev 2011: 347], and began to think of himself as a member of a closely-knit band of fighters: 'For the first time I became conscious of a simple thought that makes you catch your breath — people were looking at me with hope, as one of the leaders who were fighting on behalf of Russian culture' [ibid.: 346].

<sup>1</sup> It should be borne in mind that 'campaign' and 'blockade' were Burlyayev's perception of the situation. In spite of this, there are typical slips of the pen in the *Diary* that reveal that the situation was by no means as critical as the author represents it. It turns out that during the 'campaign' against him the director could travel extensively about the country, he had an evening devoted to his work at the October Hall of the House of the Soviets, and Komsomol organisations took part in arranging showings of *Lermontov* [Burlyayev 2011: 335, 347]. Burlyayev admits that once he 'was glimpsed' on television four times in a week on different programmes [ibid.: 371], and besides that he was at this time invited to take part in weeks of Soviet cinema in Vietnam and South America.

It is notable that at this period, among the people who supported Burlyaev were a few well-known figures whose behaviour, inside the community, was also interpreted as open resistance to the enemy. It was considered that they had all made efforts to unmask the wiles of the Jews and Masons, and had paid for it. These included, besides Mark Lyubomudrov (who had been dismissed from the higher education institutions of Leningrad for his nationalist views) and Viktor Astafyev, whose correspondence with the historian Natan Eidelman had become the subject of a stormy polemic in intellectual circles, the writer Ivan Shevtsov, who had, as he saw it, spent his life struggling against the 'Zionist menace' and had written novels about the secret activities of the Jewish lobby in seizing power in the USSR.

Some of these figures understood their anti-Jewish or anti-Masonic démarches as deliberate rebellion. Astafyev, for example, was inclined to see them as impulsive acts committed under the influence of emotion. It was another matter that, as Astafyev was convinced, his emotions had been misread by his adversaries, and that he had therefore become the victim of a Jewish 'provocation', pursuing the aim of discrediting Russian writers [Astafyev 1998: 314]. These personalities had a variety of attitudes to Burlyaev's *Lermontov*, from the enthusiasm of Shevtsov, who declared that that film 'had made the greatest impression on him of anything in the cinema for the last twenty-five years', to the cautious assessment of Astafyev, who, as far as one can tell, thought that the image of the poet was too pious [Burlyaev 2011: 341, 430]. All the same, this was a case when solidarity with the persecuted director was assured not just by considerations of an ideological nature (approval of speaking out in public against the Masons<sup>1</sup>), but by emotional factors: a complex range of feelings which included resentment, indignation at the perfidy of the adversary, and a thirst for resistance. Even though there were some among the national-conservatives who preferred to fight the enemy with his own weapons, using the rhetorically sophisticated tactic of hints and innuendoes or adopting techniques such as 'spin' or disinformation,<sup>2</sup> during the social ferment of perestroika it was important to maintain the community's non-conformist reputation, which is what persons like Burlyaev and

<sup>1</sup> 'Now I know what they want to kill you for,' said Astafyev to Burlyaev after watching the film [Burlyaev 2011: 397].

<sup>2</sup> As has already been said, the national-conservatives preferred public behaviour dictated by patriotic 'feeling', but at the same time they recognised that the opposite tactic — the intentional concealment of their true convictions — was useful. Compare: 'Petr Vasilyevich Palievskiy was much inclined to wise advice about the game "behind the scenes". <...> Palievskiy always knew how to walk the tightrope. He knew what to say and where. Although once — the Russian soul could not restrain itself — he forgot himself during a discussion of "The Classics and Us". He said so much "that he shouldn't have", and in front of "them" too, and for that he was subjected to the most savage Judaic persecution.' [Baigushev 2006: 317]. (Petr Pavlievskiy, b. 1932, was a noted literary critic of the Soviet era who during the 'long 1970s' took a prominent part in the conservative nationalist movement.)

Lyubomudrov did. They were the ones who called upon like-minded people 'on the wave of the growing patriotic arousal <...> to go over to the attack' [Lyubomudrov 1989: 171–2]. When Lyubomudrov called himself and Burlyaev 'kamikaze, trailblazers carrying out a social experiment on themselves, harsh, but useful to those around them' [Burlyaev 2011: 345], he involuntarily demonstrated, firstly, how effective an instrument for maintaining identity the appeal to traumatic emotional experience can be, and secondly, how substantially this traumatic emotional experience can influence the public political gestures of an individual or community.

The unmasking of enemy conspirators was understood by many national-conservatives, including Burlyaev, as an enlargement of the space for their individual or collective social self-realisation (in a remarkable turn of phrase, the raising of a monument to St Sergius of Radonezh in Gorodok, to the designs of Vyacheslav Klykov, was likened by the director to the emergence of the Russians from the ghetto [ibid.: 368, 433]). At the same time, even when assured of the support of like-minded people, Burlyaev, as his *Diary* shows, could not rid himself of the emotional experience of a threat from the enemy. Attending the 'Days of Slavonic Literacy' in Novgorod as part of 'a golden echelon of the creative artists of Russia', he pondered the question 'What if the enemy derail this train? <...> If they lay mines?...' [ibid.: 427]. Burlyaev, striving for a heroically sacrificial, emotionally unambiguous statement of his views, ended *A Director's Diary* with a list of events that gave hope to the national-patriots. However, to all appearances, their subsequent development convinced the director that explicit drives to unmask enemies only increased such people's resistance and made their methods of combating the 'Russian cause' more subtle. An unmasker who 'exposes himself' too much, it emerges, becomes more vulnerable. As a result, unmasking has been transformed from a once-and-for-all act into a lengthy process demanding not only courage, but also a diversity of rhetorical methods.

In 1990 the director turned to the language of conspiracy again, filming Vasilii Belov's novel *The Best is Yet to Come* (1986), in which perestroika was depicted as ideological sabotage against Russia on a massive scale.<sup>1</sup> In so doing he minimised Belov's heroes' debates about the necessity of activism in the struggle against evil, which are conceptually important for the original text, but very effectively depicted the devilish plans for the demoralisation of the country, indicating, by means of symbolic poetics, their source — world Judaeo-Masonry. It is hard to call this a 'regression' to a conspiracy-theory mentality, for the simple reason that Burlyaev had never

<sup>1</sup> This anti-cosmopolitan and misogynistic novel was one of the most celebrated neo-nationalist texts of the 1980s. [Eds.].

departed from it. It is another matter that with time he nevertheless abandoned the expressive conspiracy-theory style (but not the appeal to the experience of deprivation); perhaps that style was too radical for a respectable cinéaste who had found his niche in structures that encourage cultural and ideological traditionalism;<sup>1</sup> perhaps there was no longer a relatively compact community that would count on achieving its aims by publicly protesting and denouncing the (Judaeo-)Masonic conspiracy. In any event, Burlyayev's latest article on the conspiracy against Lermontov does not touch on the Masonic topic, but noticeably denounces the liberal Westernisers who put their hand towards the removal of a potential spiritual leader of the nation, who was capable of 'directing the country along its own particular path of development, rejecting liberal values' [Absava, Burlyayev 2014: 238].

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<sup>1</sup> Since 1991 Burlyayev has been head of the "Golden Knight" Slavonic arts forum, the motto of which is 'For moral, Christian ideals, for exalting the human soul'. The project's official site says that 'the conduct of the "Golden Knight" Slavonic arts forum is a practical embodiment of the policy of the state in the field of culture which affirms traditional spiritual and moral values. The aim of the project is to consolidate the positive creative forces of artists and cultural workers in the countries of the Slavonic world and in all regions of the Russian Federation.' The institution that Burlyayev has created, as in former years, has found it possible to lean on powerful administrative resources (the forum's patrons are Patriarch Kirill and Nikita Mikhalkov, the Secretary of the Union of Cinematographers of the Russian Federation, and in carrying out their planned events, the Burlyayevs receive assistance from the Council of the Federation, the Ministry of Culture, the Government of Moscow, the Moscow Patriarchate, and the administration of the Russian regions). With its protest against modern culture ('sabotage' in the sphere of the spirit), the 'Golden Knight' has found a sure place in the official neotraditionalist trend, anti-Western and anti-liberal. See the documents of the forum and numerous interviews with its president on the 'Golden Knight' site <<http://www.zolotoyvyaz.ru>>.

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