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## Leontiev's Prickly Rose

Contemporaries and latter-day critics of Constantine Leontiev have tended to respond to him in one of two ways. The first and by far the more common approach has focused on his reactionary political views, homosexuality, and quirks of personal life; the second, on his talent as a writer. The eccentric psychopolitical image of Leontiev created in the first instance has injected a paradoxical note of disharmony into the appreciation of a seemingly inverse grace and form in his fiction.<sup>1</sup> The man has come to represent one thing, his literary work something quite different and unrelated. Although critics like Vasilii Rozanov, Nicholas Berdiaev, and Father Georges Florovsky have hinted at the ideological factors which suggest possible ways of resolving this paradox, no real organic interpretation explaining Leontiev's fiction in terms of his own cultural situation, his ideas, beliefs, and ideological problems is

1. Ivan Aksakov spoke of Leontiev's "voluptuous cult of the cane." See Konstantin Leont'ev, *Moia literaturnaia sud'ba* (New York, 1965), p. 96 (available from Johnson Reprint Company); Turgenev thought that he surpassed Dostoevsky in fatuous "self-satisfaction," I. S. Turgenev, *Sobranie sochinenii v dvenadtsati tomakh* (Moscow, 1958), 12:136; N. Strakhov suggested that "with him religion, art, science, patriotism . . . were so many excuses for his most base stirrings and his most depraved thirst for pleasure and self-gratification." V. Rozanov, as in the case of Dostoevsky, managed to color Leontiev with many of his own exotic tastes. For Strakhov's remarks to Rozanov see *Literaturnye izgnanniki* (St. Petersburg, 1913); for Rozanov's own views, "Neuznannyi fenomen," in *Pamiati K. N. Leont'eva* (St. Petersburg, 1911). V. Soloviev, in his encyclopedia entry, "Leont'ev, K. N.," *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brockhausa i Efrona* (St. Petersburg), 17:562-64, hypothesized that no synoptic view of Leontiev was possible. T. Masaryk in *The Spirit of Russia*, vol. 2 (London, 1919), pp. 207-20, attempted to maintain his usual insight and impartiality, but ended up being as hostile to Leontiev as Leontiev was to the Czechs. S. Bulgakov considered Leontiev to be an "ethical monster," *Tikhie dumy* (Moscow, 1918), p. 119. On the other hand, George Ivask has recently done much in the way of translation to introduce Leontiev's fiction to a wider audience: *The Egyptian Dove* (New York, 1969); *Against the Current: Selections from the Novels, Essays, Notes, and Letters* (New York, 1969). His own essays in *Vozrozhdenie*, beginning with no. 118 of October 1961, and continuing to no. 138, and his more recent *Konstantin Leont'ev: Zhizn' i tvorchestvo* (Bern, 1974), offer much somewhat diffuse biographical data and one of the few attempts in Western scholarship to discuss Leontiev as a writer. Soviet sources have only recently begun to show promise with P. Gaidenko's "Naperekor istoricheskomu protsessu," *Voprosy literatury*, 1974, no. 5, pp. 159-205. The material is scarce in other instances. In "Konstantin Leontiev's Fiction," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 20, no. 4 (December 1961): 622-29, Professor Ivask interprets Leontiev in the framework of the Narcissus myth. In a review of the translations, Clarence F. Brown recognizes Leontiev's fictional craftsmanship but pessimistically separates it from his ideas in "Slightly to the Right of the Czar,"

available.<sup>2</sup> Such a critical procedure, which originates in the writer's basic intellectual constructs rather than the external features of his biography or literary style, would be a useful corrective both to Leontiev's extravagant reputation and the neglect of his fiction. Viewing Leontiev's texts as part of his response to certain crucial ideological tensions and changes in the literary tradition to which he belonged suggests a complexity and subtlety in his art which have not been explored for their full range.

At the outset it should be noted that Leontiev followed the Russian romantic tradition, except that he carried romanticism to an extreme rarely seen in traditional lives.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he viewed reality with the typical romantic intransigence which refuses to accept the unseemly and imperfect things of our world, but he went far beyond the view into the actual meat and gist of what the doctrine entailed. In everyday practice this meant an ever-present feeling of revulsion for the soiled and rumpled sheets, the shoddy furniture, and the unshaven waiters he encountered. We can find him describing with obvious sincerity the actual nausea that he felt in a particularly unpalatable hotel room. Conversely, he was at peace with clean and perfumed linen, the air

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*New Republic*, April 19, 1969, pp. 25–27. Eduard Swoboda in *Wiener slavistisches Jahrbuch*, 13, (1966): 83–89, examines biographical background and analyzes the stylistic devices in *The Egyptian Dove*. Critical studies which place greater emphasis on Leontiev's intellectual history are: N. Berdiaev's *Leontiev* (London, 1940); V. V. Zenkovsky's *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline, vol. 1 (New York, 1953), chapter 15; and Father Georges Florovsky's *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (Paris, 1937), p. 305, and "Die Sackgassen der Romantik," *Orient und Occident*, 4 (1930): 14–27. Berdiaev follows Rozanov in comparing Leontiev to Nietzsche but is scarcely interested in literary issues which arise out of the comparison. Father Zenkovsky's chapter on Leontiev is one of the better general introductions available; my own essay often follows Father Florovsky's interpretation of the romantic "blind alley."

2. I agree with Robert E. MacMaster (*Slavic Review*, 28, no. 1 [March 1969]: 134–35) that "a fuller, analytic consideration of . . . cultural, social, and situational matters" would have greatly improved Stephen Lukashovich's recent study *Konstantin Leontiev (1831–1891): A Study in Russian "Heroic Vitalism"* (New York, 1967). In this instance, unfortunately, Erikson and the psychoanalytic approach has contributed much to Leontiev's bizarre image in scholarship, and little to an understanding of his fiction or its intellectual and literary context.

3. Controversy over the use of the term "romanticism" is summarized in René Wellek's essays "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History," *Comparative Literature*, 1 (1949): 1–23, and 2 (1949): 147–72; and "Romanticism Re-examined," in Northrop Frye, ed., *Romanticism Reconsidered* (New York, 1963), pp. 107–33 (first printed in *Concepts of Criticism* [New Haven, 1963]). As will become obvious further on, I do not share Arthur Lovejoy's view that romanticism is a vague or impractical concept; nor do I agree with Northrop Frye's suggestion that a "conceptual approach" to romanticism is unwise. In the last instance, our differences seem to arise from a question of genre. Professor Frye shows a marked predilection for poetry, while I prefer to emphasize prose writers such as Leontiev, Stendhal, and Dostoevsky, whose often romantic images are best understood with a conceptual critical sensibility. I do, however, accept the critical principle adhered to by Mr. Frye and René Wellek that the inner standards of ro-

of flowers, and the melody of the Orthodox service.<sup>4</sup> In defining the cultural situation in which Leontiev was located, it is useful to link these feelings to two particular impulses of the romantic sensibility—the rejection of the real world of ugly and banal reality (commonly expressed by romantics through ridicule, irony, or withdrawal), and a yearning for another more perfect sphere of existence in which idealism suggests the possibilities of true beauty.

Despite intellectual and emotional affinities, however, as a writer of the second half of the nineteenth century Leontiev could not permit himself to be fully content with the romantic tradition. The earlier forms of romantic nihilism in Western literatures—the sensibilities of *Weltschmerz* or *mal du siècle*, for example—were now inadequate, because a more direct approach was necessary in a period of growing skepticism, science, and materialism. After Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and the Crimean War (which Leontiev experienced at first hand), a writer who chose a romantic viewpoint could no longer withdraw into the disillusionment of a Lermontov, the fantasy of an Odoevskii, or the mystery and terror of Zhukovskii. It was clear that more direct modes of attack on the imperfections of reality were necessary if the new reading public were to be drawn at all to the basic romantic dissatisfaction with the way things are.

Leontiev echoes a number of these new modes of attack—ridicule of the bourgeoisie, of rationalism, and of banality—which men like Nietzsche later used in a manner only hinted at earlier in the century. More important, however, he also suffers the pivotal problem of romanticism in modern culture, that is, finding a goal or purpose for intransigence and the critical spirit. Unlike Schelling, Coleridge, or Wordsworth, the modern romantic could no longer depend on idealism to provide an alternative reality or a metaphysical hope. Leontiev was eminently modern in this sense, for he steadfastly refused to view

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manticism should not be examined outside of the concrete textual situation of some one writer's or poet's work. Much of the following discussion is indebted to two other studies which still retain their vigor in our time: Oskar Walzel's *German Romanticism* (New York, 1966); and Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Cleveland and New York, 1955). In both works, the chapters dealing with romantic irony and Schlegel are particularly relevant to my discussion of idealism and the notion of a romantic crisis in modern conditions. Morse Peckham, in "Toward a Theory of Romanticism," *PMLA*, 61 (1951): 5–23, suggests the same view of romantic nihilism that I share but comes to different conclusions than those proposed in this essay. Florovsky's "Die Sackgassen der Romantik"; I. Zamotin's *Romantizm dvadtsatykh godov XIX stoletiiia v russkoi literature*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1911); and Dmitrii Čiževskij's *History of Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*, vol. 1 (Nashville, 1974) and *Outline of Comparative Slavic Literatures* (Boston, 1952), pp. 85–103 provide pertinent material dealing with the Russian tradition.

4. For the biographical details used here see Leontiev's memoirs *Moia literaturnaia sud'ba* (also published in N. Mescheriakova, ed., *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* [Moscow, 1935]), and the material Ivask has accumulated in *Vozrozhdenie*.

life as a reflection of another hidden process of nature. Indeed, the major tensions of his political and fictional writings had their source in an inner romantic crisis. Without ever being able to stifle completely the impulses of idealism, he turned the nihilistic imperative of the romantic vision against, rather than toward, the companion yearning for other-world absolutes and for the future development of reason and abstract realms of the beautiful.

This intellectual bias probably explains the change of direction which Leontiev introduced into the predominant romantic view of history in his writings on Russian society and politics. Bolstered by the pessimism of Herzen and Danilevskii, he moved away from the German idea of a vast, organic force of nature progressing to the Absolute and stopped on a biological view of things based on a sense of inevitable decay. But the same romantic nihilism, deprived of an outlet to the Absolute, also provides the ideological key to most of the familiar features of his fiction, including his so-called "aesthetic immoralism," his concern for the immediate sensual image, and his ridicule of liberal hopes for future political progress.<sup>5</sup> *Podlipki*, the first novel he published in the *Annals of the Fatherland* toward the end of 1861, already reflects the essence of this fictional response. The romantic influence is not hard to single out. In *Podlipki* Leontiev rejects the ugliness and banality of reality—and the literary technique of naturalistic realism most often used to depict it in Russian fiction—by creating another world and an opposite narrative mode to approach it.

In contrast to the sometimes gross detail and extensive description of Russian realistic works—a constant concern of Leontiev's literary criticism—*Podlipki* unfolds through the chance, unstable memory of a young protagonist, Volodia Ladnev. The first person prism of Ladnev is effectively used to convey an impressionistic, many-colored sense of experience; we catch brief glimpses and bright moments of life rather than the squalor, poverty, and madness that the Russian reader could expect in fiction devoted to clerks and merchants. The technique is not unlike that developed later in *La Porte Étroite* and *Speak, Memory*, with much of the narrative constructed out of snatches of memory floating in evasive images out of the haze of the past: "Or I remember myself as though in a deep mist . . . I do not see the house or the trees in front of me, but only the railing of a balcony and on the balcony, three girls. I—still very small it must be—come out . . . and blow bubbles out of my mouth. I do not remember the faces of the girls in this moment, but the bright printed calico of

5. See Zenkovsky's *History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 439–42, 445–47, for an extensive discussion of Leontiev's aesthetics and ethics from a religious perspective. Leontiev's paradoxical religious views often reflect the tensions of his romanticism; his reading of Herzen on Mt. Athos, and his refusal, even as a monk on his deathbed to speak of an afterlife, would seem to be indications of the same rejection of idealism within the romantic tradition. See A. Konopliantsev's "Zhizn' K. N. Leont'eva i sviazi s razvitiem ego mirosozertsaniia," in *Pamiati K. N. Leont'eva*.

one seems familiar; it is brightly colored in red designs.”<sup>6</sup> The bubbles are just the right touch here, providing both humor and the appropriate image to catch the evasiveness of Ladnev’s memory.

Instead of Nabokov’s faded photographs, Leontiev uses pictures to create an aesthetic world colored by memories and chance details. The recollection of his uncle, a soldier, does not introduce an actual description, but makes Ladnev think of the uncle’s gift to Ladnev’s aunt—a small box with a colorful battle between Turks and Cossacks drawn on the lid. The young boy, we are told, spent countless hours daydreaming over the exotic picture (a comparison with Nabokov’s box of Turkish delights inevitably comes to mind). Or Ladnev’s older friend, Sergei, draws pictures for him which he remembers better than the actual events of his past: “A ship is sailing, on the ocean my aunt and I look out over the railing . . . and coming towards us from Podlipki is a rowboat, and inside the rowboat are Ol’enka, Verochka, and Klashenka, and the watchman Egor Ivanovich is rowing. . . .”

The indirect, impressionistic style of narrative construction was to be used by Leontiev throughout his life and to attain its strongest expression much later in such works as *The Egyptian Dove*. Understandably, therefore, in the few instances when Leontiev’s fiction has been studied critics have tended to emphasize this aesthetic strategy.<sup>7</sup> The main literary enterprise of *Podlipki*, however, does not end with the static production of hazy, beautiful images, but involves the growth of Ladnev *out of* the haze of romantic imagery and fancy into the actual world. We can appreciate the sensuous detail and wonderful impressionism of the novel, but Leontiev’s text requires a more complex perspective than an aesthetic point of view that his own protagonist ultimately transcends.

Podlipki, the estate where Ladnev spends his childhood, is a magical fairyland where the snow is perfectly white, the air is crystal clear, and cleanliness and light prevail. The queen of the kingdom is Ladnev’s kindly, portly aunt. Her estate is the setting for Ladnev’s first feelings of beauty, friendship, and love. As the novel takes shape, however, we become increasingly aware that recollections of this magic edifice are constantly being set off against Ladnev’s awareness of the cracks in the structure. There is the beautiful melody, the mystery of the Orthodox religious service which forms one of his fondest memories, and next to it the image of the priest’s wife, a pretentious, horrible woman who unmercifully hounds her husband. There is the kindly aunt who keeps a “harem” of serf girls, household servants subject to the gentry’s whims and caprice. (Ladnev particularly dwells upon one youngster who was beaten, shorn, and tied to a tree for a theft she did not commit, and

6. Konstantin Nikolaevich Leont'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1912–14), pp. 24–25. All translations from Leontiev’s fiction are my own.

7. Ivask, Brown, Swoboda.

he notes with wry amusement his inability to understand then why the child wanted to run away from the magical kingdom.) There is Ladnev's brother, a handsomely sculptured youth and a typical romantic hero in the Pechorin mode, who in all his beauty does not hesitate to send his huge borzois after a peasant's small mongrel and to laugh with stupid glee at the brutal attack. There is, finally, Ladnev's uncle, a nobleman of the old school who hits peasants in the face with his fist and whose wife is mad. When Ladnev reaches eleven he is sent to his uncle's city mansion and there, he tells us, he learns conclusively to "reconcile fancy with reality."

From this point on, Ladnev's disillusionment and the growing up process become decidedly more painful. Particularly effective are his recollections of his cousin Modest, the victim of a grave injustice perpetrated by Ladnev's family, and a wonderful tool to deflate the romantic-sentimental expectations that his plight arouses. Ladnev expects to meet "a poor youth who is aristocratically attractive, [who is] graceful even within poverty," and encounters instead "a tall, thin, freckled, curly-haired and fat-lipped young man, who is not very careful about his appearance."<sup>8</sup> Modest seduces the serf girl whom Ladnev loves, and turns out to be a cynical groveler without pride or honor. The young narrator discovers that the injustice suffered does not make Modest noble or tragic, but simply vulgar.

The unfrocking of Ladnev's youthful ideals is made effective by the free structure of the novel. Leontiev does not hesitate to break the time sequence to juxtapose the romantic pictures of Ladnev's childhood with the actual reality he is eventually forced to face. A case in point is the same Sergei who drew pictures for him as a young man. Sergei and his wife, a former ward of Ladnev's aunt, are held up as paragons of virtue and religious feeling by the old woman. Ladnev remembers the wonderful moment when, thanks to her help, the two young people finally got married, and he imagines the scene when the newlyweds left Podlipki, full of life, happiness, and what he takes to be boundless gratitude. At this point, the narrative abruptly takes a huge skip in time to the description of a visit that Ladnev later made to the couple, when they had already settled down to their new life. They receive him in a cluttered hotel room with "bad tea but a warm welcome." Almost from the first words they utter, they begin to criticize Ladnev's aunt, accusing her of being a miser of the worst sort and bitterly complaining of the hardship she caused them. In place of his imagined idyll of protector and grateful wards, Ladnev is forced to confront the true nature of a relationship conditioned by ingratitude on one side and petty miserliness on the other.

Ladnev, finally, returns to Podlipki, hoping to rediscover his youthful world. He finds, instead, a young peasant girl who is no hazy faerie, but a

8. Leont'ev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 133.

snub-nosed, sexually enticing young woman. Ladnev is on the point of seducing her but stops at the last moment under the influence of nostalgia for the old Podlipki. It is clear, however, that the nostalgia is without real belief in the old ideals.

In *One's Land*, Leontiev's next novel published three years later in 1864, is essentially constructed around this same situation—a young man comes into maturity and learns to face up to an existence that is not simple, easy, or beautiful in the traditional sense. The thematic structure is noticeably different in comparison with the first work, however, for Leontiev puts greater emphasis on the philosophical odyssey of the hero, while throwing out a wider net over intellectual environment. Rudnev, the protagonist, is not a naïve boy exposed to the gradual erosion of a romanticized childish world, nor is he quite the disillusioned romantic that Ladnev came to be. Leontiev draws him as a determined, introspective, somewhat strait-laced young man, who sets out to find his role in life by clear thought and deliberated choice.

The alternatives open to Rudnev are varied and far from clear-cut. Leontiev consciously makes the task a difficult one for the reader by refusing to delineate black and white guidelines or to set up a ready made goal toward which his protagonist can strive. A not particularly successful outgrowth of this ambiguity is an extremely loose plot structure, full of sudden sharp corners and dead ends. In respect to Rudnev himself, however, Leontiev achieves a fascinating counterpoint to the simplistically easy moral solutions depicted in Chernyshevskii's just published *What Is to Be Done?* The thematic impetus is similar to Dostoevsky's antiradical fiction, but it is played out in a different key.

Rudnev's first intellectual conflict, not unlike Leontiev's own, comes when he begins the study of medicine. He is haunted by the images of dissected corpses. Under the pressure of science, and with the biological certainty of death grating on his earlier religious training and faith, Rudnev decides to withdraw to the small country estate of his uncle, where he intends to put his intellectual house in order by extensive reading in Rousseau and other philosophers. His ideal is uninvolved contemplation of the outside world, and the kind of withdrawal he imagines for himself unmistakably reflects the romantic cult of isolation from civilization's woes. As in the case of Ladnev, however, Leontiev does not permit this initial romantic situation to remain intact, but draws Rudnev out of self-imposed isolation into the life around him. There he is made to face a wide spectrum of the ideological realities of Russia and a world far more complex than he originally imagined.

He meets, on the one hand, the seminarist Bogoiavlenskii (or "God-manifestenskii"), an obvious caricature of the Feuerbach-inspired radicals on the Russian left. Bogoiavlenskii constantly uses the terminology of progressive German thought, but his openly admitted purpose in life is the simplest of

materialist doctrines: he wants to get his share no matter what the moral cost. In this pursuit he does not hesitate to spread malicious gossip about the people who house and feed him, or, in spite of his socialist convictions, to assure himself a warm bed and full board by marrying a rich member of the merchant class. Although mildly attracted by the impulse to get down to brass tacks, Rudnev is far from satisfied with this type of crude materialism or with Bogoiavlenskii's theory of self-interest.

Another mode of life is represented by Sardanapal, a member of the landed gentry and, of course, a complete debaucher. Although he spends most of his days immersed in alcohol fumes, Sardanapal is not unaware of current economic theory, which he puts into effect in his harem of serf girls. The maidens are organized on the strict principle of division of labor, with Khavronia, a fat girl, taking the major role in winter, and Fevronia, a thinner favorite, coming to the fore during the summer. There is a hint of social criticism here, but more obviously, Leontiev wants to caricature an unpromising way of life open to the young Russian nobleman in order to contrast it to the deeper intellectual search of his hero.

By far the strongest ideology which Rudnev comes up against is that of Mil'keev, a young teacher living on a neighboring estate. Mil'keev is a proponent of unbridled beauty; aesthetics is the only "sure measure" of all things for him, and this doctrine has usually been taken to represent Leontiev's own views.<sup>9</sup> In reality, Mil'keev represents only one of the alternatives open to Rudnev (the most important, it is true), and while he helps to shape the protagonist's thought, his own extreme aesthetic principles are firmly rejected in the course of the novel.

In contrast to Rudnev who is withdrawn and pessimistic, Mil'keev is exuberant and optimistic almost to the point of caricature. He loves the fervor and play of life and wants to gambol through it in great skips and jumps of Dionysian enjoyment. This intense feeling for pleasure and beauty helps Mil'keev to draw Rudnev out into the world, but is quickly exposed to be unrealistic and inadequate in the face of life's crueller elements. Mil'keev is unable to break through the psychological defenses of the woman he loves; he almost kills a man in a foolish duel; he leaves to join the armies of Garibaldi but can only manage to get arrested in Petersburg, and so on. Mil'keev wants revolution for the paradoxical reason that revolution will arouse reaction, and in this, as in other issues, he reflects some of Leontiev's own views. But the point is that Leontiev does not let political convictions interfere with the greater inner struggle of his protagonist.

Rudnev gradually learns to compromise between his earlier rejection of the world and Mil'keev's exuberant acceptance. Although recognizing the limita-

9. For example, by Lukashovich, *Konstantin Leontiev*, p. 47.

tions of science which he calls an “illuminated corner in the drunkenness of eternity,” Rudnev marries and opens a hospital, resolving to do his own small part as a doctor. He is grateful to Mil'keev for showing him “an aristocracy of mind,” the many faces of beauty, but he moderates this concern with the down to earth medical care of peasants and a recognition that all visions of beauty must be adjusted to the actual world. Thus, at the conclusion of the novel, when a friend is impressed by the carefree happiness of Mil'keev's former wards, Rudnev objects to this overly optimistic appraisal. He points out that individual flaws in each child—for example, ill health, pride, and stubbornness—are the kernels of future sorrow and tension in their lives. Addressing himself directly to Mil'keev's legacy, he concludes that the children's happiness lies not in “eternal gaiety,” but in “something else.” We have the right to suspect that this “something else” is represented by his own growth into a complex life of struggle and difficulty transcending his initial romantic impulses.

In *A Husband's Confession*, a novella written three years later in 1867, Leontiev has his protagonist confront directly the metaphysical tenets of romanticism. The first person narrator is another recluse, who, like Rudnev, takes to pondering over philosophical questions as a way of life. At one point in his random thoughts he decides to examine the colors of nature, but, not being content with simple admiration for the surface of things, he plunges into an epistemological problem: what makes us think we see what really is, what gives us the right to assume that “trees are green, dawn red, and cliffs black?” The question is used to approach reality in a manner not unlike that of the famous Schellingian Pavlov<sup>10</sup>: “An ethereal substance is active in infinity, its . . . waves strike the nerve of the eye . . . But what is a nerve? The conductor of electricity to the cell? But what is electricity? What is a cell? And who will swear that . . . a bottomless abyss of life does not seethe in its depths?” With the uncertainty of this “bottomless abyss” in the background, the narrator goes on to question rationalism and the modern ways of morality as a “madness of steadfastness, common sense, and utility.” Bolstered by his recognition of the beauty and power in nature's irrational movement, he can, thus, accept an unconventional moral situation and permit his wife, who is much younger than he, to take a lover closer to her own age. He cannot, however, force himself to separate emotionally from her, or from her lover, for whom he also feels deep affection, and indeed, he does not want to. When they drown in a storm, he commits suicide.

10. Pavlov left a clear imprint on Russian intellectual history. See Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 274; and James H. Billington's *The Icon and the Axe* (New York, 1966), p. 312.

The important romantic elements we have already encountered are crystallized in this short piece. Accepting the traditional romantic images of abyss and storm as a metaphysical principle, Leontiev deprives them of purpose and hope, while indicating that conventional morality can hardly exist in such a state of the world. The protagonist experiences his best moments as a result of a type of aesthetic immorality—that is, when he is both enjoying the full power and beauty of the cruel world and is rid of conventional prejudices about marriage and love. But he is also a victim of this process, for the metaphysical and ethical situation which we see has no hidden design or extraterrestrial dimension. The predominant point of view in the story, in short, suggests the rejection of bourgeois morality and banal reality, but instead of another sphere of existence, indicates tragedy and death as a resolution to romantic despair.

Leontiev left for consular service in the Balkans four years before *A Husband's Confession* was published. Most of his later work shows the influence of the southern countries, particularly in ethnographic descriptions of native dress, customs, and mores. While this exotic environment provided a rich store of images and sensations for Leontiev, its surface repercussions should no more be taken to sustain the dynamic of his fiction than did the imagery and style of *Podlipki* and *In One's Land*. It is true that Leontiev himself thought that he had reached a new stage of his creative life by moving in the direction of a less skeptical view of the world. His rejection of “Gogolishness,” that is, of narrative modes that emphasize the abhorrent or vulgar aspects of reality, attained a kind of apotheosis in the south. He felt that in such stories as “Hrizo,” “Polikar-Kostaki,” and “Hamid and Manoli,” he finally had found a way of writing truly beautiful, nonprosaic literature which did not lower life with excessively vulgar detail and naturalistic emphasis.<sup>11</sup> The impulse is obviously from his romantic self. In the south, Leontiev was still searching for the unflawed and perfect essence of reality untainted by the commonplace of this world. The Balkans, in the tradition of Byron (to whom he refers in one of his stories) would seem the ideal place to find beauty. Yet, in the southern tales and novels, as in his earlier work, Leontiev is completely unable to get away from “ugliness,” constantly turning to his ideological pursuit of it for catalysis. His major target, as for Herzen and Nietzsche, is again the bourgeoisie and the “European Man.” In almost every piece of the southern fiction, Leontiev either directly contrasts to the Balkan natives, or maintains in the background for an implicit contrast, the image of the European middle class, the epitome of *poshlost'*, narrow-mindedness, and petty calculation, whose dress, habits, and convictions serve to stimulate his romantic critical sensibility.

11. *Moia literaturnaia sud'ba, Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, p. 461.

The full literary implications for Leontiev's later work will have to be worked out in a more exhaustive study. But clearly, Leontiev retained the nihilistic spark in his later romantic concern and, as previously, his sense of rejection led to despair and impulses of pessimism and tragedy. The southern tales and novels are bright, well-polished gems, reflecting conflict, cruel passions, banality, and disorder, standing in strange and painful conjunction with images of harmony, grace, and love. Ladnev, the hero of *The Egyptian Dove*, refers to an extremely conventional metaphor seen through Leontiev's peculiar prism that goes straight to this aesthetic involvement in the pressure of being. It could serve very well as an epigraph to the fiction discussed above: "I knew how to admire roses without forgetting for an instant the pain which I felt from even the smallest of its thorns."<sup>12</sup>

12. Konstantin Leont'ev, *Egipetskii golub: Rasskaz russkogo* (New York, 1954), p. 148.