

**Aleksandr Ivanov and Nikolai Gogol:
The Image and the Word in the Russian Tradition of Art as Prophecy**

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‘The Slav-Russian poet should be more Asiatic in spirit, like a prophet.
-- He should declare faults clearly and praise virtues. -- The artist echoes him.
(A. A. Ivanov, ‘Thoughts Arising upon Reading the Bible’, 1846-1847)

‘[Ivanov] was the same in painting as Gogol in writing and Kireevskii in philosophical thought’
(A. S. Khomiakov, 1858)

The pervasive Russian image of the writer as a prophetic figure is generally regarded as a verbal construct, rooted in and developed through literary tradition. And indeed, there are ample grounds to support such a view, as the image can be traced through a chain of texts from the late eighteenth century onwards. Originating in the writings of Gavrila Derzhavin and Mikhail Lomonosov, it first became widespread during the period after the Napoleonic wars leading up to the Decembrist uprising, when it flourished in the verse of Vasilii Zhukovskii, Fedor Glinka, Vil’gelm Kiukhel’beker, Nikolai Iazykov and Aleksandr Pushkin. Its subsequent metamorphosis from an agent of social and political change into a religious, theurgic force was largely facilitated by Nikolai Gogol. By the time it reached Fedor Dostoevskii, Vladimir Solov’ev, the Symbolists and their successors, it had already become a canonical image, embodying an uncontested literary ‘truth’.¹

The aim of this article is not to dispute this view, but to enrich it by considering a hitherto neglected but significant contributing factor: the role of the visual image in building up the view of the artist and writer as prophets. For this purpose I will focus on a specific case-study that marked a crucial turning-point in the formation of the tradition: the

¹ On the development of the image of the writer as prophet in literary tradition, see the following articles by Pamela Davidson: ‘Between Derzhavin and Pushkin: The Development of the Image of the Poet as a Prophet in the Verse of Zhukovsky, Glinka, and Kiukhelbeker’ (hereafter, ‘Between Derzhavin and Pushkin’), in Catherine O’Neil, Nicole Boudreau and Sarah Krive (eds.), *Poetics. Self. Place. Essays in Honor of Anna Lisa Crone*, Bloomington, Indiana, 2007, pp. 182-214; ‘The Moral Dimension of the Prophetic Ideal: Pushkin and his Readers’ (hereafter, ‘The Moral Dimension of the Prophetic Ideal’), *Slavic Review*, 61, 2002, 3, pp. 490-518; ‘The Validation of the Writer’s Prophetic Status in the Russian Literary Tradition: From Pushkin and Iazykov through Gogol to Dostoevsky’, *Russian Review*, 62, 2003, 4, pp. 508-36; ‘Vladimir Solov’ev and the Ideal of Prophecy’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 78, 2000, 4, pp. 643-70; ‘Viacheslav Ivanov’s Ideal of the Artist as Prophet: From Theory to Practice’, *Europa Orientalis*, 21, 2002:1, pp. 157-202.

relationship between the artist Aleksandr Ivanov (1806-1858) and the writer Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852) from the time of their first meetings in Rome in the late 1830s until Gogol's death in 1852. Throughout this period Ivanov was settled in Rome, working on his magnum opus 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu' ('The Appearance of Christ to the People', 1833-1857),² while Gogol was toiling away on *Mertvye dushi* (Dead Souls, 1835-1852, first part published in 1842), revising his short story 'Portret' ('The Portrait', 1835, second revised version published in 1842) and penning *Vybrannye mesta iz perezpiski s druz'iami* (Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends, 1845-1846, published in 1847). The notion of the prophetic message of art (understood in its broad sense, encompassing both verbal and visual dimensions) is crucial to all four of these works in different ways. It is particularly rewarding to analyse the way that Ivanov's visual treatment of this theme interacted with and influenced Gogol's literary development of the image of the artist as prophet. While deriving considerable support from each other's ideas and artistic practice, the two men differed in their approaches to the relative value of the image and the word in creating new forms of religious art; at times they almost seemed to be competing for the role of principal prophet, leading to a growing tension in their relationship that reached a peak around 1847.

This study falls into three main sections. The first part considers the influence on Ivanov and Gogol of two key formative contexts -- the relationship of visual and verbal elements in biblical and iconographic representations of prophecy (unified through common purpose) -- contrasted with Western tradition (prioritising difference and competition). The second part traces Ivanov's creation of a series of visual images of prophecy, culminating in 'The Appearance of Christ to the People'. The third part analyses Gogol's verbal responses to the artist's work and the way in which their dialogue shaped their differing views of art as prophecy. Finally, some conclusions are drawn about the importance of the visual image and its legacy to the Russian tradition of art as prophecy.

1. Contexts: Image and word in biblical and iconographic representations of prophecy

The relationship of the visual image to the literary word in building up the tradition of art as prophecy raises several issues which first need to be set in a broader context. Some of these are addressed in the large body of theoretical literature on the relation between word and

² This title is used throughout for convenience, although Ivanov referred to his painting over the years by several different titles, including 'Iavlenie Messii' ('The Appearance of the Messiah').

image and the hierarchy of power ascribed to both art forms at different historical periods.³ Two specific contexts of particular relevance to Russian religious tradition deserve consideration at the outset as both were invoked by Ivanov and Gogol in support of their views: the representation of prophecy in Hebrew scripture and in Russian icons.

Prophecy in biblical tradition

How was the relationship between the visual and the verbal represented in the biblical tradition of prophecy? This question is best considered with reference to two distinct stages: the reception and the transmission of the prophetic message.

The reception or original experience of prophecy in Hebrew scripture can be both visual and verbal: it may result from the revelation of an image to the prophet's vision, or of a message to his hearing. Two key Hebrew terms for a prophet both relate to the faculty of vision: *roeh* (seer), derived from the root *raah* (to see), and *hozeh* (visionary), from the root *hazah* (to see a vision). Surprisingly, there is no equivalent term in Hebrew for a prophet defining him as a 'hearer', despite the fact that scripture contains many more examples of prophetic experiences received by ear than by eye, invariably introduced by the phrase 'the word of the Lord came unto me, saying'.

Of particular interest for our topic is the fact that these two forms of prophetic experience are frequently combined, usually in a particular sequence. The prophetic vision is commonly followed by a verbal message; indeed, the act of seeing is often presented as a preliminary stage, preparing the prophet to hear the voice of God. It is only after Jacob has seen the vision of a ladder connecting heaven and earth that he hears God speaking to him in his dream (Gen. 28:12-15). Joseph first has two vivid dreams (his brothers' sheaves bow down to his sheaf, the sun, moon and eleven stars all bow down to him) and then gives a verbal interpretation of what he has seen (Gen. 37:5-11). When Moses first sees the burning bush, he says: 'I will turn aside now, and see this great sight (*v-ereh et hamareh*), why the

³ See, for example, W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (hereafter, *Iconology*), Chicago and London, 1987; Antonella Braida and Giuliana Pieri (eds.), *Image and Word: Reflections of Art and Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Oxford, 2003; Martin Heusser et al. (eds.), *Text and Visuality: Word & Image Interactions 3*, Amsterdam, Atlanta, GA, 1999; Rui Carvalho Homem and Maria de Fátima Lambert (eds.), *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image* (hereafter, *Writing and Seeing*), Amsterdam and New York, 2006. On aspects of the image-text relationship in Russian culture, see Roger Anderson and Paul Debreczeny (eds.), *Russian Narrative & Visual Art: Varieties of Seeing* (hereafter, *Russian Narrative & Visual Art*), Gainesville, 1994 (including James West's essay, 'The Romantic Landscape in Early Nineteenth-Century Russian Art and Literature'); Maria Rubins, *Crossroad of Arts, Crossroad of Cultures: Ecphrasis in Russian and French Poetry*, New York, 2000; L. Geller (ed.), *Ekfrasis v russkoi literature: Trudy Lozannskogo simpoziuma*, Moscow, 2002.

bush is not burnt.’ (Exod. 3:3). The narrative continues: ‘And when the Lord saw (*va-iar*) that he turned aside to see (*lirot*), God called out unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said “Moses, Moses”. And he said: “Here am I.”’ (Exod. 3:4). In this last example, the emphasis placed by the prophet on the purposeful act of seeing (while awake, not dreaming, as in the cases of Jacob and Joseph) appears to be a necessary prelude to the direct verbal communication that follows from God.

Among the later Hebrew prophets a similar pattern is repeated. Isaiah opens with ‘the vision (*hazon*) of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw (*hazah*)’ (Is. 1:1), and then continues with the verbal message that he received from God, beginning ‘Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, For the Lord hath spoken’ (Is. 1:2). Later, Isaiah first sees (*va-ereh*) the Lord sitting upon a throne, surrounded by six-winged seraphs; after his lips are purified by one of the seraphs with a burning coal, he is able to hear the word of God (Is. 6:1-8). This passage is of particular significance to the Russian literary tradition of prophecy because of its frequent echoes in verse, most famously in Pushkin’s ‘Prorok’ (‘The Prophet’, 1826).

The book of Jeremiah, warning of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, begins with an account of the prophet’s calling. When the word of the Lord first comes to Jeremiah, he responds that he cannot speak for he is a child. God touches his mouth and reassures him that He has put His words into his mouth (Jer. 1:6-9). He then asks ‘Jeremiah, what seest (*roeh*) thou’ (Jer. 1:11). When the prophet answers that he sees (*roeh*) a rod of an almond tree (*shaked*), God says ‘Thou hast well seen (*heitavta lirot*); for I watch over (*shoked*) My word to perform it’ (Jer. 1:12). The play on the words *shaked* (almond tree) and *shoked* (watch over) has a deeper meaning, suggesting that what the prophet sees, translated into verbal form, reflects God’s providential relation to his creation. God asks a second time what the prophet can see. This time Jeremiah describes a seething pot facing from the north (Jer. 1:13), a vision for which God supplies a verbal interpretation, a plan of action to defeat the evil threat coming from this direction. This sequence implies that the prophet’s ability to ‘see well’ is in some sense a pre-condition of his ability to act as a conduit for the execution of God’s will in this world.

As in the cases of Isaiah and Jeremiah, a series of visions prepare the prophet Ezekiel for hearing the voice of God. The account of his calling opens with the words: ‘the heavens were opened, and I saw visions (*va-ereh marot*) of God’ (Ezek. 1:1). His ensuing vision of the living winged creatures surrounding the throne of God culminates in the transition from

seeing to hearing: 'And when I saw (*va-ereh*) it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke.' (Ezek. 1:28).

These examples all appear to suggest the primacy of the visual element over the verbal with regard to the initiation of the prophetic state. Indeed, since the verb 'to see' in Hebrew also carries the more general meaning of 'to perceive' or 'to apprehend', it connects with the act of understanding -- a link also suggested in Russian by the cognate verbs *videt'* (to see) and *vedat'* (to know). Accordingly, after hearing the ten commandments at Sinai, the Israelites can 'see' (*roim*) the thunderings and the voice of the horn (Exod. 20:15). Even a verbal communication can be 'seen' in this sense, as in 'the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw (*hazah*) concerning Judah and Jerusalem' (Is. 2:1). However, the fact that the vision rarely stands on its own and is almost invariably accompanied by a verbal communication indicates the need for a two-stage process, in which the vision first engages the attention of the prophet and deepens his understanding, but remains incomplete without the fuller verbal elucidation that follows.

When it comes to the transmission rather than reception of the prophetic experience, an interesting difference may be noted. In Hebrew scripture, since God has no likeness, he cannot be represented by any image (Deut. 4:12, 15). The prophets therefore did not have recourse to any visual aids; commanded to go forth and spread the word of God, they articulated and communicated their prophetic revelations to others through words, not images. The language of rebuke, admonishment and moral instruction must necessarily be verbal. The visual aspect occurs only in relation to the transmission of a verbal message, as in the case of the 'writing on the wall', seen by king Belshazzar and deciphered by the prophet Daniel (Dan. 5).

With the advent of Christianity, attitudes to the possibility of visual representations of the divine changed. If God had become incarnated as a man, it was argued that he could and indeed should now be represented. Although this was a point of considerable disputation during the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries, generally seen as the last step towards the great schism between East and West, the veneration of icons was eventually re-established in the Greek Church. Once the visual representation of the divine was accepted in principle, the way was open for art to serve as a medium for prophecy and for artists to be regarded as sacred priests, communicating a holy message. As we shall see below, this was precisely the line of argument adopted by Ivanov in his letter to Gogol of

1848, in which he claimed that Russian artists were the chosen successors to the biblical prophets.

Prophecy in Russian iconographic tradition

In such a context the Russian iconographic tradition naturally played a crucial and distinctive role in shaping attitudes towards the relationship between prophecy and its visual and verbal aspects. The iconostasis in its full, five-tier form gave considerable prominence to the Hebrew prophets. The top fifth row, known as the Forefathers Tier (*Praotecheskii*), included prophets such as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. The fourth row, called the Prophets Tier (*Prorocheskii*), was centred on the icon of the Virgin of the Sign and displayed a range of major and minor prophets, depicted holding open scrolls inscribed with their prophecies, usually associated with the coming of Christ. In the middle Church Feasts Tier (*Prazdnichnyi*) Moses and Elijah flank Christ at the Transfiguration. The second Deisis Tier (*Deisusnyi*) places John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, alongside Christ and the Virgin Mary. Finally, the bottom 'local' row (*nizhnii, mestnyi*) would often include icons of the popular prophets Elijah and Daniel on either side of the Royal Doors (*Tsarskie vrata*) through which the clergy could gain access to the inner sanctuary.⁴

Russian worshippers standing in front of an iconostasis found themselves facing this rather powerful, complex series of images, combining the verbal and visual aspects of prophecy. Many icons of Moses, for example, clearly point to both dimensions: he is shown next to the burning bush of his original prophetic vision, holding an open scroll inscribed with his verbal prophecies (Figure 1).⁵ Which aspect carried more significance? One could argue that the verbal aspect was more important because icons appealed to a prior tradition of written prophecy and emphasised this dependence by depicting the prophet presenting the words displayed on his scroll. Or one could take the view that the visual aspect was dominant, given the fact that the icon is an image, venerated in its own right as a holy 'spirit-bearing' object of worship. Since the first Orthodox Church Bible was not available in a full Russian translation until the publication of the Synod Version in 1876,⁶ and since Russian

⁴ Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky, 2nd rev. edn, Crestwood, NY, 1982, pp. 60-64, 67.

⁵ 'Moses the Prophet'. Russian icon from the first quarter of the 18th century. Iconostasis of Kizhi monastery. <<http://en.wikipedia.org>> [accessed 30 July 2012].

⁶ Alexander I founded the Bible Society in 1812. Work on the Russian translation of the Bible began in 1816, but was delayed by the block placed on the activity of the Russian Bible Society by Nicholas I in April 1826 and only resumed in 1858. For further details, see note 79 below.

Orthodox church services did not include regular readings from the prophetic books of scripture, many nineteenth-century Russians were likely to be more familiar with the Hebrew prophets through their visual representation on icons than through their original writings.

A third approach incorporating both dimensions is also possible: the visual representation of the prophets can be regarded as a sacred gateway, which prepares the viewer for a proper understanding of verbal prophecy (in the same way as the Hebrew prophets often saw a vision before they heard the divine message). The iconostasis not only provided a visual image of the biblical prophets, it also initiated the viewer into the prophetic experience in several ways. Its composition, through its vertical hierarchy and significant horizontal juxtapositions, was designed to draw attention to the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the church of the New Testament. In addition, unlike depictions of prophets in Western European art, the sacred status of icons enabled the worshipper to gain direct access to the spiritual message that they conveyed. The iconostasis mediates between the sanctuary (the domain of the priest, representing the Divine world and spiritual man) and the nave (the domain of the congregation, representing the human world and physical man). It acts as a boundary, showing division, but also as a symbol of how the two worlds are fundamentally united and can be reconciled.⁷ Since this symbolic representation is created by an artist, art -- as well as the artist himself -- can be regarded as the prophetic medium or conduit, through which this connection can be made.

According to Russian Orthodox teaching, the image and the word are on an equal footing in terms of their religious significance. As Leonid Ouspensky explains: ‘the icon is placed on a level with the Holy Scriptures and with the Cross, as one of the forms of revelation and knowledge of God, in which Divine and human will and action become blended. Apart from its direct meaning, each alike is a reflection of the higher world; each alike is a symbol of the Spirit contained in them. Consequently, the meaning both of the word and of the image, their role and significance are the same.’⁸

Influence of different traditions on Ivanov and Gogol

These two traditions -- scriptural and iconographic -- were instrumental in shaping a sense of the prophetic dimension of art. Not surprisingly, they framed Ivanov’s and Gogol’s debate about their respective roles in creating new forms of religious art and the relationship

⁷ See Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons*, pp. 60, 67.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

between image and word in this context. Both artists modelled their work on different aspects of Hebrew prophecy. Ivanov dedicated himself to the creation of visual illustrations of narratives of biblical prophecy, combining the aesthetic style of Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci with the religious significance of his native iconographic tradition, which was undergoing a gradual revival of interest.⁹ Gogol, as a writer, naturally drew more on the verbal tradition of biblical prophecy, but consistently sought support for his views in the power of the visual image. Both artists needed each other's backing -- just as the image needs the word to explain its significance, so too the word needs the image to validate its claims and authenticity. In line with the biblical and iconographic models outlined above, they could see themselves as forming a sort of prophetic duo, working in tandem to develop the visual and verbal aspects of prophecy, following distinct but related paths of equal importance. Ivanov's artistic representations of prophecy could be seen as testimony to the authenticity of his prophetic vision, linking him to the reception stage of prophecy, while Gogol's literary works could be regarded as a verbal development of the original prophetic vision, associating him more closely with the transmission of the prophetic message. Although this approach might appear to give primacy to Gogol as the more public figure, articulating and conveying the vision to a wider audience, Ivanov's art, especially when viewed as a modern extension of iconographic tradition, gained a distinct advantage by virtue of the holy status of the image.

Ivanov's and Gogol's contributions to the view of art as prophecy could therefore be seen as fairly evenly balanced, reflecting the complementary, mutually supportive roles of the visual and the verbal, outlined above. So much for the theory, but what about the practice? Was their partnership always harmonious, or were there elements of tension? Although the biblical and iconographic traditions presented a model of unity, based on a common religious ideal, Western cultural tradition offered several alternative models for the relations between the arts, generally marked by a spirit of competitiveness rather than cooperation. The core issue here was not how the different arts might support each other in service of a single goal, but rather how to rank them in a hierarchy based on difference. As W. J. T. Mitchell pointed out in his seminal study of image, text and ideology, 'the history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a "nature" to which only it has access.'¹⁰ Thus, for

⁹ On the revival of interest in iconography in the modern period, see the stimulating collection Jefferson J. A. Gatrall and Douglas Greenfield (eds.), *Alter Icons: The Russian Icon and Modernity*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.

¹⁰ Mitchell, *Iconology*, p. 42.

example, Leonardo da Vinci, while subscribing to the ‘sister arts’ theory associated with Horace’s dictum *ut pictura poesis*, used the nature-convention distinction to underwrite claims for the superiority of images to words in the tradition of the *paragone*, or contest of painting and poetry.¹¹ By contrast, in *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766) Lessing opposed the ‘sisterly’ analogy and insisted on the separateness of the arts, arguing that painting, the visual art of space, should not try to convey narrative progressions or ideas, because these can only be properly expressed in language and poetry, the verbal art of time.¹²

Such approaches emphasised division between the visual and the verbal arts rather than unity of purpose and tended to foster competition rather than collaboration. While nominally espousing the unified vision of religious tradition, in reality the prophetic partnership of Ivanov and Gogol was fraught with tensions reflecting the power struggle between word and image, exacerbated by personal differences of temperament. In order to reach a deeper understanding of the way these varied approaches informed the dynamic of their relations and their competing aspirations to the status of artist-prophet, we shall first look at the ways in which Ivanov drew on biblical and iconographic traditions to develop a new form of prophetic art and then examine Gogol’s response to these visual images of prophecy in his dialogue with the artist between 1838 and 1852.

2. Ivanov’s images of prophecy

Early representations of biblical prophecy (1824-1833)

Biblical prophecy played a prominent role in Ivanov’s oeuvre from as early as 1824. At the age of sixteen, he wrote to his uncle about his current work as a student of the Petersburg Academy of Arts: he had already completed and exhibited a picture of Moses giving the law and was finishing one of John the Baptist prophesying in the wilderness, for which he hoped to receive a prize.¹³ Although he also treated a conventional subject from Greek mythology (‘Priam, asking Achilles for the body of Hector’, 1824), the depiction of biblical scenes remained central to his work until the end of his life. An interesting note from the 1830s casts light on his possible motivation for this choice of orientation: ‘For the ancient Greeks the idea

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 78, 119.

¹² Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Poetry and Painting* (1766), trans. Ellen Frothingham, New York, 1969, p.x; cited in Mitchell, *Iconology*, pp. 40-41.

¹³ Ivanov, Letter to And. I. Demert of 16 February 1824, in I. A. Vinogradov (ed.), *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh, dokumentakh, vospominaniakh* (hereafter, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*), Moscow, 2001, pp. 30-31. Neither work has survived.

was a peripheral matter -- they were concerned with external form... We were made differently: our highest value is truth.'¹⁴ An additional impetus was the assignment set for him in 1827 by the Committee of the Society for the Encouragement of Artists (*Komitet Obshchestva pooshchreniia khudozhnikov*): to show Joseph in prison interpreting to Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and baker the significance of their dreams. This episode took the artist into the heart of the prophetic sequence with its visual and verbal components: understanding the divine communication, imparting the message and capturing its varied impact on the recipients. The painting was judged to be a great success, earning Ivanov a golden medal.¹⁵ Before 1829 he also drew a sketch, most probably of the birth of John the Baptist, for the iconostasis of the church of the Tauride Palace -- a significant first attempt at linking the prophetic theme in art to iconographic tradition.¹⁶

In May 1830 Ivanov set off on a journey through Germany, Austria and Italy to take up a four-year studentship in Rome, sponsored by the Society. He was under instructions to spend the first year familiarising himself with various works of art, in the second year to make a copy of Michelangelo's 'Creation of Man' from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, and in the last two years to produce an original painting of his own composition.¹⁷ After settling in Rome in early 1831, he worked assiduously on the copy of the 'Creation of Man', while searching all the time for a suitable topic for his future painting.¹⁸

Over the next few years he completed several oil sketches on a wide range of biblical subjects, including 'Samson in Delilah's embraces' (1831?), 'Jacob's dream' (two versions, early 1830s), 'David playing the harp for Saul' (1831), 'David comforting Saul by singing his psalms' (seven versions, before April 1832), 'David chosen to be anointed king' (before

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵ 'Iosif, tolkuiushchii sny zakliuchennym s nim v temnitse vinocherpiiu i khlebodaru', 1827, canvas, oil, 178,5 x 213, Gosudarstvennyi russkii muzei, St Petersburg (hereafter, GRM), reproduced in L. I. Iovleva (ed.), *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov: 1806-1858* (hereafter, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*), Moscow, 2006, p. 31. On critical responses to the painting, see L. A. Markina, 'Aleksandr Ivanov. Ocherk tvorchestva', in *ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶ 'Rozhdestvo Ioanna Krestitelia (Rozhdestvo bogomateri) (?)', sketch of a composition for the iconostasis of the church of the Tauride Palace (?), before 1829, paper, pen, pencil, brush, 13,6 x 22,5, GRM, reproduced in Grigorii Goldovskii and Nataliia Uvarova, *Aleksandr Ivanov* (hereafter, *Aleksandr Ivanov*), St Petersburg, 2006, p. 41. As can be seen from the catalogue's uncertain description, the subject and purpose of this sketch have not yet been definitively established. Ivanov's father, A. I. Ivanov, was one of the academicians who painted icons for the iconostasis, set up in 1829, of the Tauride Palace's church. See 'Tserkov' Vozdvizheniia kresta Gospodnia pri Gosudarstvennoi dume, <<http://www.encspb.ru/article.php?kod=2804676167>> [accessed 29 February 2012].

¹⁷ 'Instruktsiia Obshchestva pooshchreniia khudozhnikov, dannaiia A. A. Ivanovu pri otpravlenii za granitsu. 1830 g.', in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁸ 'The choice of a subject for my future painting troubled me for a long time'. 'A. A. Ivanov -- Obshchestvo pooshchreniia khudozhnikov', spring 1832 (?), in *ibid.*, p. 82.

April 1832), 'Joseph and Potiphar's wife (1831-1832), 'Joseph revealing himself to his brothers' (1831-1833) and 'Joseph's brothers finding the cup in Benjamin's sack' (several versions, 1831-1833).¹⁹ The choice of these subjects, while reflecting the Academy's promotion of biblical themes, highlights the painter's particular fascination with prophetic figures active in determining the history of their nation.

'The Appearance of Christ to the People' (1833-1857)

Ivanov was obliged to report on his progress to the Society every two months. Early in 1833 he informed the Society that, after sending them his sketches of Joseph's brothers finding the cup in Benjamin's sack, he had completed a further twenty sketches and had sought the advice of various artists. His revered mentor, the German religious artist Johann Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), had pointed out to him that the subject of Joseph's brothers finding the cup in Benjamin's sack was too episodic in character and advised him to choose a broader subject for his future work.²⁰ Ivanov had therefore renewed his search; after combing through the history of every nation renowned for its deeds, he came to the following conclusion:

I [...] found that there existed no people more elevated than the Jews, for they were entrusted from above to give birth to the Messiah, whose revelation opened the era of humanity, of moral perfection, or, which amounts to the same, to know the everlasting God! In this way, following in the path of the prophets' craving, I came to the Gospels -- to the Gospel of John!! Here on the first pages I saw the essence of the entire Gospels -- I saw that John the Baptist was charged by God to prepare the people to receive the teaching of the Messiah and, finally, to introduce Him personally to the people! This last moment is what I am choosing as the subject of my painting, i.e. when John, after seeing Christ walking towards him, says to the people: 'Behold the

¹⁹ 'Son Iakova', early 1830s, sketch, paper on pasteboard, oil, 20,5 x 32,5; sketch, paper, oil, 24,3 x 44,4, Gosudarstvennaia Tret'iakovskaia galereia, Moscow (hereafter, GTG); 'David igraet na arfe pered Saulom', sketch, paper, oil, 8,5 x 13,5, GTG; 'Iosif i zhena Pentefriia', 1831-1832, sketch, paper, pencil, chalk, 43,5 x 60,4, GTG; 'Iosif otkryvaetsia brat'iam', 1831-1833, sketch, pasteboard, oil, 23 x 38,5, GTG; 'Brat'ia Iosifa nakhodiat chashu v meshke Veniamina', 1831-1833, sketch, canvas, oil, 49,5 x 62,7, GTG; final sketch, canvas, oil, 36 x 55, GTG. All these works are reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 34-36, 137, 229. 'Samson v ob'iatiiakh Dalily', 1831?, is mentioned by M. P. Botkin, cited in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 58; 'David, uteshaiushchii Saula peniem psalmov svoikh' (7-y raz mnoiu traktovannyi) and 'Izbranie Davida v pomazanniki' are mentioned by Ivanov in his report to the Society of 9 April 1832, *ibid.*, p. 81. For further examples of biblical subjects, see the extensive lists of Ivanov's works in Mikhail Botkin, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov: ego zhizn' i perepiska. 1806-1858 gg.* (hereafter, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*), St Petersburg, 1880, pp. 433-465.

²⁰ Overbeck, originally of Protestant German descent, moved to Rome in 1810 and converted to Roman Catholicism in 1813. A member of the Nazarenes, he worked in Rome for fifty-nine years, completing several works on biblical subjects, including episodes from the life of Joseph.

Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world! This is He of whom I said: After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me, for he was before me. And I knew him not, but that he should be made manifest to Israel.’ This subject has not yet been treated by anybody, consequently it will already be interesting just for its novelty.²¹

This passage is extremely revealing about Ivanov’s initial concept of his work. A few points deserve to be underlined. First, his initial focus on the Jewish people, chosen for its spiritual role in the history of humanity. Second, his presentation of himself as the direct heir to the Hebrew prophets (‘following in the path of the prophets’ craving’). Third, his emphasis on the prophetic figure of John the Baptist (not on the Messiah, as one might have expected) and his relationship with the people (‘John the Baptist was charged by God to prepare the *people* to receive the teaching of the Messiah and, finally, to introduce Him personally to the *people*’) -- this emphasis becomes even more evident in the painting itself. Finally, his choice of text as the source for his painting. The verses cited from the Gospel of John (1:29-31) emphasise the dependence of the projected visual image on a pre-existent verbal tradition of prophecy. They incorporate the characteristic move in biblical accounts of prophecy from the moment of personal visual revelation (‘after seeing Christ walking towards him’) to the verbal message delivered to the public (‘says to the people’). They also embody the fulfilment of prophecy by including phrases that echo the Hebrew prophets (Is. 53:7, 11).

Ivanov rounds off his report by claiming that his work will be interesting because its subject has not been treated before. As he was undoubtedly familiar with the numerous representations of the ‘Ecce Agnus Dei’ scene in Western European art, this claim can only refer to his choice of what he calls the ‘last moment’: John the Baptist presenting Christ to the *people*. Most well-known Western European representations of the ‘Ecce Agnus Dei’ scene depict John the Baptist in two ways: either alone, sometimes pointing towards Christ but without a crowd of people, or preaching to the people but without the figure of Christ.²² Ivanov’s painting is unique in that it combines all three elements -- John the Baptist, Christ

²¹ Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 108-109. Part of Ivanov’s report was published in 1835 in A. V. Timofeev, ‘Russkie khudozhniki v Rime’, *Biblioteka dlia chteniia*, July 1835.

²² For examples of John the Baptist shown in isolation, see Rogier van der Weyden, ‘John the Baptist’ (ca. 1450), Musée du Louvre, Paris; Leonardo da Vinci, ‘John the Baptist’ (1513-1516), Musée du Louvre, Paris. For examples of John the Baptist pointing towards Christ, see Dirk Bouts, ‘Ecce Agnus Dei’ (ca. 1464), Munich; Raphael, ‘Madonna of Foligno’ (1511), Vatican Museum, Rome; Philippe de Champaigne, ‘Ecce Agnus Dei’, Musée de Grenoble. For examples of John the Baptist preaching to a crowd of people, see Raphael, ‘Saint John the Baptist Preaching’ (1505), National Gallery, London; Pieter Brueghel the Elder, ‘Sermon of St John the Baptist’ (1566), Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

and a large audience -- thereby simultaneously showing the prophet prophesying, the fulfilment of his message in the appearance of the Messiah and its public impact on a mixed crowd of recipients.

It is difficult to imagine what might constitute a more concentrated artistic representation of prophecy. Ivanov has not just chosen to focus on the prophet of greatest importance in Christian tradition ('Amongst those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist', Luke 7:28) with a unique role linking the Hebrew prophets to the New Testament. He has also chosen to highlight a particular moment from his life that enables him to depict the three stages of reception, transmission and fulfilment of the prophetic message on a single canvas.

Ivanov's father, a well-known artist and academician, wrote to his son on 14 February 1833, discussing the possible publication of the report and disputing Overbeck's view that the finding of the cup in Benjamin's sack was too episodic a subject. Despite these reservations he expressed an interest in seeing a sketch of the projected work and recommended following the 'perfect' image of John the Baptist created by Raphael in his 'Madonna of Foligno', conveying the prophet's years of isolation and inner nobility.²³ Ivanov evidently listened to his father's advice as there is some similarity between his representation and Raphael's, principally concerning the prophet's facial expression, hair and beard, the shape of the cross and the gesture of the pointing index finger.

The project was such an ambitious one that Ivanov felt impelled to prepare for it by first carrying out a work on a smaller scale. 'The Appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene' (1834) earned him the reputation of being the top artist in the Russian colony in Rome after the departure of K. P. Briullov. In the meantime he continued to work on several sketches of the future painting, corresponded about his plans, tried to find ways to finance his extended stay in Rome and petitioned the Society for permission to travel to Palestine to collect further materials for his subject.²⁴

His belief in the significance of his projected work grew apace alongside his utopian hopes for the future of Russian art. In 1832, even before starting work on the painting, he had

²³ Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 110. Ivanov could view Raphael's painting in the Vatican Museum.

²⁴ Ivanov's persistent but unsuccessful attempts to get the Society to support a trip to Palestine reflected his desire to follow in the path of the biblical prophets in order to create a 'historical' representation of the subject of his painting. For references to Ivanov's planned trip in November 1833 and February 1834, see *ibid.*, pp. 129, 135. At the end of December 1847 Ivanov expressed the hope in a letter to Gogol that they could travel to Palestine together (*ibid.*, p. 487). In the event Gogol went on his own; in a letter to Ivanov of 14/26 April 1848 he mentioned having completed his trip to Jerusalem (*ibid.*, p. 492).

already drafted a letter to Briullov, outlining his vision of the dawn of a new ‘Golden Age’ of Russian art: just as the Levite priests used to conduct their holy service in Solomon’s temple, so too Russian artists stationed in Rome would continue to serve their ‘mother’, the Academy of Arts.²⁵ In the spring of 1833 he sent V. I. Grigorovich, the Secretary of the Academy of Arts, a practical suggestion to advance the ‘Project of the Golden Age of Russian Artists’. Fired by the belief that the new era of historical painters and sculptors would bring ‘political glory’ to the ‘great fatherland’, he proposed that a ‘temple of the arts’ (*khram iskusstv*) should be established in St Petersburg for artistic gatherings, readings of literary works, musical performances and the display of future works of historical painting and sculpture (to the exclusion of all other genres). Visitors would be invited to make donations to finance the construction of a further purpose-built building.²⁶

In an undated draft letter from the 1830s he even begged Grigorovich to help raise funds to enable him to begin his ‘large painting’: ‘for the creation of an image embodying the essence of the entire Gospels -- in order to place it opposite the iconostasis in the Church of the Saviour in Moscow, once built’.²⁷ The money was to be collected from the public or temporarily loaned by the Tsar. The wording of this appeal makes it clear that Ivanov saw his future painting as a sacred work of religious and national significance, a modern counterpart to the traditional iconostasis.

In June 1833 Ivanov asked his father to send him more money and to encourage Grigorovich to carry out his wishes without further delay.²⁸ His father, clearly anxious about the state of his son’s mental health, replied to him at length on 15 June. On the question of a suitable subject, he reminded him of the need to choose a topic that would be possible to execute, given the limitations of visual art (*‘the meaning of the entire Gospels -- a rather important subject, but how will you depict this?’*). He counselled against attempting anything unusual, new, or large-scale, recommending instead the virtues of simplicity and artistic mastery. He found his son’s professed ambition to create an image ‘comprising the essence of the whole Gospels’ arrogant and redolent of pride and advised him to be more circumspect in his use of language, hinting at the need to overcome the insinuations of the devil by returning

²⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁷ Undated draft in *ibid.*, pp. 117-118. The second version of the Cathedral of the Saviour in Moscow (originally planned by Aleksandr I in 1812 to commemorate the victory over Napoleon) was initiated in 1831, under active construction from 1839 until 1866, and sanctified in 1883.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

to the truth of the Gospels.²⁹ In a follow-up letter of 19 June he continued to express similar reservations, insisting that his son should not ask for any further financial support from the Society without first submitting a sketch of the proposed work and begging him not to fling himself 'at anything high-flown'.³⁰

Some years before Ivanov started work on the large version of his painting, he had therefore already formed a clear idea of its threefold prophetic subject-matter (reception, transmission and fulfilment), sacred nature (to be displayed in a church opposite the iconostasis) and national significance (to be financed by the Tsar and members of Russian society, for the glory of the fatherland). These views were fully established well before he met Gogol in the late 1830s and cannot therefore (in their initial form) be attributed to the writer's influence, as has often been alleged. However, Gogol undoubtedly did influence the *further* development of Ivanov's painting and understanding of its significance, just as the image itself influenced Gogol's own work. Unravelling these lines of mutual influence is no simple matter, not least because Ivanov worked on his painting for nearly a quarter of a century, creating a vast number of preliminary versions and sketches (nearly four hundred in all), most of which cannot be precisely dated.³¹ The following account will trace the development of his work on two levels: the evolution of the image itself, from early sketches until the final version completed in 1857, and his understanding of its conception and purpose, pieced together on the basis of his reports to the Society, letters to his father, brother, patrons, friends and writers (including Gogol, Iazykov, Zhukovskii).

The earliest pencil and chalk drawing of the painting (dated 1833), described by Ivanov as his 'first sketch of the appearance of the Messiah', was later given by him to Zhukovskii for his album (Figure 2). It differs strongly from all later versions. The focal figure is not John the Baptist but Christ, placed in the centre at the front of the sketch, surrounded by penitents falling to their knees and reaching out to him in dramatic poses of entreaty; John the Baptist stands to the left by the water's edge, facing the viewer, stretching

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 120-121.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

³¹ Over three hundred sketches are held in Moscow in the Tret'iakov Gallery and approximately another eighty in St Petersburg's Russian Museum. See Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, p. 15.

out both arms sidewise towards Christ in a somewhat awkward pose, reminiscent of iconographic depictions of the prophet.³²

The first oil sketch (dated 1834) is quite different from the original pencil drawing and from all subsequent versions (Figure 3).³³ The scene is now pastoral; the figures, enclosed in a lush green landscape, still include women, children and infants. The most significant change lies in the positioning of Christ and John the Baptist. Christ, clothed in light robes, is now placed at some distance from the people and walks from the back right side of the picture towards the central figure of John the Baptist in the foreground (not towards the group on the right as in subsequent versions). Although the prophet's body faces Christ and points towards him with a raised right arm and extended index finger (holding no cross in the other hand), his head is turned round to the right, looking directly out towards the viewers of the painting, who are thereby drawn into the scene as witnesses of its prophetic content.³⁴

The centenary album published by the Tret'iakov Gallery in 2006 reproduces four further preliminary oil sketches of the whole painting, including the large 'small version' of the final work used by Ivanov as a working tool.³⁵ Although not provided with exact dates, these sketches were clearly completed after Ivanov's first meetings with Gogol, since they now include a figure resembling the writer. Many of the changes made in these later versions were suggested by the German artists, Overbeck and Peter von Cornelius, whose opinions

³² 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu: Pervonachal'nyi eskiz kompozitsii kartiny', 1833, brown paper, charcoal pencil, chalk, 25,2 x 42,2, GTG, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 152. In a letter to his father of January-February 1839 Ivanov reported giving this work to Zhukovskii. Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 201.

³³ 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu: "Pervonachal'nyi" eskiz', 1834, canvas, oil, 60,5 x 90,5, GRM, reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, p. 50.

³⁴ The first oil sketch is quite similar to an early pencil sketch, paper, Italian pencil, 52,6 x 74,8, GRM, reproduced in Goldovskii, *Aleksandr Ivanov*, p. 55. This pencil sketch shows John the Baptist in the same position, but with a cross in his left hand. The top part of the painting including the figure of Christ is entirely overhung by a tree and surrounding vegetation. Both these sketches follow Raphael's depiction of John the Baptist (suggested to Ivanov by his father as a model for his painting) in that they present the prophet facing the viewer, drawing him in to the picture, unlike all the other sketches and the final version, where the prophet is shown in three-quarter view.

³⁵ 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu: "Stroganovskii" eskiz', second half of 1830s, canvas, oil, 47,8 x 66,2, GTG; 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu: Eskiz', 1836-1837 (?), canvas, oil, 53,5 x 74,5, GRM; 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu: "Venetsianskii" eskiz', after 1839 trip to Venice, canvas, oil, 54,8 x 74,5, GTG; 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu: Malyi variant kartiny, odnovernemno sluzhivshii Ivanovu eskizom', 1836 to no later than 1855, canvas, oil, 172 x 247, GTG. All four sketches are reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 51-54. The final painting, 'Iavlenie Khrista narodu (Iavlenie Messii)', 1837-1857, canvas, oil, 540 x 750, GTG, is reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

were carefully recorded by the artist in his notebook.³⁶ The foliage in the landscape is much reduced and the original fresh green has given way to a predominantly golden brown palette, tinged with darker green. Several figures, including women and infants, have been removed. The positions of Christ and John the Baptist have changed to those of the final painting (Figure 4). Christ now approaches the scene from a greater distance and faces a larger group to the right of the painting in the background. John the Baptist, bearing a cross in his left hand, points as before with the extended index finger of his right hand towards Christ, but his face is now shown in three-quarter view, meaning that his range of vision can take in the viewers of the painting, the people on the right of the canvas and the advancing figure of Christ in the distance.

The inclusion of the viewer in the prophet's field of vision suggests that the painting does not just represent a distant, past event in Christian history, but also carries a message of direct relevance to present-day Russia. The *narod* (people) in the painting represents the contemporary Russian people as well as the original recipients of the prophet's message. In 1841 P. V. Annenkov underlined this particular aspect of the painting's impact. After describing the powerful effect of John the Baptist's prophetic words on his audience as he points towards Jesus, he commented on the way this energy was transmitted to the contemporary viewer: 'the electrical effect of this movement can be seen on all the faces and also spreads to the viewer, who knows that from this time the sermons of Jesus and our religion begin...'³⁷

To make this point even clearer, Ivanov introduced two contemporary Russians into all the later versions of the painting: Gogol and himself. As we shall see, the positioning of these two figures and the colour of their attire is of great significance. After experimenting with various options (including lending Gogol's features to the old man with the staff coming out of the water on the left, or to the slave at the centre of the foreground), Ivanov finally settled on linking the writer with the figure in the painting known as the 'closest to Christ'

³⁶ A. A. Ivanov, 'Zametka v al'bome', mid 1830s, cited in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 147. Peter von Cornelius (1784-1867) advised Ivanov to reduce the landscape and the number of naked figures and to emphasise the features of the people listening to the prophet; he recommended consulting Overbeck's composition of John the Baptist prophesying in the wilderness as a representation of the effect of the prophet's word on his audience. Overbeck suggested turning John the Baptist's head to profile (commenting that having him face the viewer made him look too much like an actor) and accentuating the expressions on the faces of the penitent sinners. Ivanov also notes suggestions from two other artists resident in Rome, the Danish Icelandic sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844) and the portraitist and historical painter Vincenzo Camuccini (1771-1844), but did not follow these up.

³⁷ P. V. Annenkov, 'Pis'ma iz-za granitsy' (1841), in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 232.

(*blizhaishii ko Khristu*).³⁸ Gogol's likeness can easily be recognized in this figure's hairstyle and moustache, similar to the features depicted by Ivanov in his portraits of the writer (Figures 5 and 6).³⁹ His bent body suggests a mixture of conflicting emotions: despair, shame, repentance, hope. In some versions his head hangs forward and down, but in the final painting it is raised and turned round towards the figure of the approaching Christ. The russet colour of his full-length tunic matches the colour of the under-robe worn by the Messiah and that of the garment worn by the writer in Ivanov's 1841 portraits of him.

Ivanov has accordingly linked Gogol to Christ in three ways: through his position (standing closest to him), his gaze (turned towards him) and the colour of his robe. In symmetrical fashion, he has linked himself to John the Baptist through a variety of similar devices. Just as he introduced Gogol into the painting as the man closest to Christ, he put himself into the painting by adding a small figure, known as the 'wanderer' (*puteshestvennik*), seated immediately below the outstretched arms of the prophet. This person can easily be recognized as a self-portrait by his angular features, pointed beard, wide-brimmed floppy hat and staff (the last item, symbolic of the artist's path, significantly leads up to and intersects with the prophet's cross extended above him).⁴⁰ Ivanov has taken his association with John the Baptist one step further. As well as positioning himself as the 'wanderer' next to the prophet, he has also modelled John the Baptist's head in the final

³⁸ See 'Rabota Ivanova nad portretom Gogolia' and 'Aleksandr Ivanov i Gogol', in N. G. Mashkovtsev, *Gogol' v krugu khudozhnikov: Ocherki*, Moscow, 1955, pp. 63-88, 89-131 (p. 99). Gogol's features can be traced in 'Figura obnazhennogo naturshchika dlia raba (s chertami litsa N. V. Gogolia)', 1833-1840-e, paper, Italian pencil, 44,3 x 58,5, GTG, reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, p. 155. In the sketch 'Golovy blizhaishego k Khristu, starika v kapiushone i peshego voina', paper on canvas, oil, 46 x 60, GTG, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 91, the head of the figure closest to Christ also bears some resemblance to Gogol. At one stage Gogol was also associated with the man holding a draped cloth, standing next to the shivering boy on the right; according to Vinitsky, these two figures represented Gogol and his young friend Iosif Viel'gorskii (whose death in 1840 affected Gogol deeply), depicted in the style of the father and possessed son from the bottom right of Raphael's 'Transfiguration'. See Ilya Vinitsky, "'Exegi Testamentum": Gogol's Posthumous Ode' (hereafter, "'Exegi Testamentum'"), *Ubandus: the Slavic Review of Columbia University*, 6, 2002, pp. 85-112 (p.106).

³⁹ In 1840-1841 Ivanov made two pencil and watercolour sketches of Gogol's head on one sheet and two oil portraits of the writer. The sketches on 'List iz zapisnoi knizhki s nabroskami', 1840 (?), paper, watercolour, 27,2 x 38,8, NIOR RGB, are reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 217-218. The first oil portrait, 'Portret Nikolaia Vasil'evicha Gogolia', 1841, wood, oil, 14 x 12,5 (oval), GRM, is reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 23 and in Goldovskii, *Aleksandr Ivanov*, p. 109 (illustration) and p. 149 (note). Ivanov painted the first portrait for Zhukovskii, who received it from Gogol in September 1841; it subsequently passed into the collection of Alexander III. Ivanov's second portrait, a copy of the first, held in IRLI, Pushkinskii dom, was given by Gogol to M. P. Pogodin. After Gogol's death Ivanov wrote to Zhukovskii about the two portraits of the writer he had completed 'in great secrecy', now to be reproduced; see his letter of 21 April 1852, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 535.

⁴⁰ The 'wanderer' resembling Ivanov appears in all the preliminary versions of the painting listed in note 34 (but not in the earlier sketches described in notes 31-33) and can be identified by the hat and beard; the staff only appears later in the final painting and the 'small version' of the large painting. See also the separate oil self-portrait of the same figure, 'Puteshestvennik: Predpolagaemyi avtoportret', paper on pasteboard, oil, 57,2 x 43,7, GTG, reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, p. 83.

painting and in various preparatory oil and pencil sketches on his own appearance: both share similar features, including a pointed beard and moustache on the upper lip (Figures 7 and 8).⁴¹

Ivanov is also linked to Gogol and Christ through the composition and the interaction of the three figures in the painting. The face of Ivanov the ‘wanderer’, shown in profile, looks upwards and across towards the figure of ‘Gogol’ with an expression of keen visual interest. ‘Gogol’ in turn looks towards Christ, whose forward gaze encompasses both artists. All three figures are thus inscribed in a triangle, linked by their gazes and the colours of their attire (Ivanov and Gogol share between themselves the colours of Jesus’s upper and lower robes, royal blue and russet brown).

By including himself and Gogol in the painting, Ivanov suggests that they are both recipients of the prophetic message spread by John the Baptist and witnesses of its fulfilment in the arrival of Christ; as such, they become part of a chain of prophets, chosen to receive and to transmit the divine message to contemporary Russia -- Ivanov through visual means (in painting) and Gogol through verbal means (in writing). The closer association of Ivanov as the ‘wanderer’ with John the Baptist (through their proximity and shared features) may be understood as reflecting his primary role in the preliminary stage of prophecy, whereas Gogol’s greater proximity to Christ reflects a more intimate association with its fulfilment. Their paths are different, but connected: Ivanov sits under the protective arms of John the Baptist, but looks for clarification towards Gogol, who is closer to Christ.

The final image created by Ivanov may therefore be interpreted on several different levels. Most obviously, its subject is the one described by the artist in his initial thoughts about the work: the appearance of the Messiah to the people, at the precise moment when John the Baptist is foretelling the coming of a Saviour who will remove the sins of the world. The emphasis is placed on the moment of prophecy to the people and its fulfilment, as well as on the promise of redemption from sin and the varying degrees of faith exhibited by the

⁴¹ Compare the head of the ‘wanderer’, ‘Puteshestvennik: Predpolagaemyi avtoportret’, paper on pasteboard, oil, 57,2 x 43,7, GTG, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 83, with the three different versions in oil of ‘Golova Ioanna Krestitelia’, paper on canvas, two from GTG, one from GRM, reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 62-63 and the preparatory sketch in pencil, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 153. The upper half of John the Baptist and the head of the ‘wanderer’ with hat and staff appear alongside each other on the sketch ‘Ioann Krestitel’: Podmalevok srednei chasti kartiny, sdelannyi poverkh neokonchennogo etiuda kamnei’, paper on canvas, oil, 45,3 x 62, GTG, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 61. For contemporary portraits of Ivanov, see V. I. Shternberg, ‘A. A. Ivanov za obedom: List iz al’boma M. I. Skotti’, 1842, paper, watercolour, charcoal pencil, 23,7 x 21,3, GTG, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 236 (Ivanov is shown seated at a table wearing a white brimmed rounded hat), and M. I. Skotti, ‘A. A. Ivanov, idushchii po Ripetta: List iz al’boma “Risunki russkikh khudozhnikov v Rime”’, 1843-1844, paper, watercolour, charcoal pencil, ink, 34,7 x 28,5, GTG, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 237 (Ivanov is shown wearing a white brimmed cylinder hat, draped in a royal blue cape, striding along the road, staff in hand).

recipients of the prophetic message. Although this message belongs to a specific point in time at the beginning of Christian history, it can also be read as a universal one, transcending historical, spatial and national boundaries, and within this broader context as one with particular relevance to contemporary Russia. This last reading, supported by the inclusion of figures resembling Ivanov and Gogol, raises potentially provocative questions about the extent to which the Christian message of redemption from sin and salvation through faith had been successfully ‘heard’ in tsarist Russia (this may perhaps explain why Alexander II took a particular interest in the central figure of the slave when Ivanov showed him the completed painting in the Winter Palace in May 1858).⁴²

These combined readings of the painting, taken in conjunction with the similarity noted above between the features of John the Baptist and Ivanov, lead to an interesting parallel: just as the original prophet offered a message of salvation to the people, so too the artist (Ivanov) now presents the same message to the Russian people. By advancing the same message in visual form, the artist fulfils a role akin to that played by the original prophet -- an idea that found support in Gogol’s essay on the painting (1846) and in Ivanov’s own ‘Mysli, prikhodiashchie pri chtenii Biblii’ (‘Thoughts Arising upon Reading the Bible’, 1846-1847), as we shall see below. Ivanov is present in his painting both visibly -- as a recipient of the prophetic message, and invisibly -- as the prophetic author of its transmission to a modern audience. Through the creation of this image he has in effect established his credentials as a fully-fledged artist-prophet.

3. Ivanov and Gogol: the dialogue of image and word

How, then, did Gogol respond to Ivanov’s creation of a powerful image linking the role of the artist to that of the prophet? Did it affect his own, previously established view of the writer’s prophetic mission? How did he seek to influence the image or its understanding by the public? Did he use it to promote his own agenda and reputation? Did his active involvement foster mutual support or generate tension between the two friends? How did Ivanov react to the writer’s reading of his work? These questions will be addressed, drawing on Gogol’s correspondence, his short story ‘The Portrait’ and his essay on Ivanov’s painting.⁴³

⁴² See Ivanov’s account in his letter to his brother S. A. Ivanov of 31 May 1858, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 606.

⁴³ On aspects of the relationship, see Igor’ Vinogradov, ‘N. V. Gogol’ i A. A. Ivanov: K istorii sozdaniia kartiny ‘Iavlenie Messii’’, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 670-708, and his earlier article, ‘Iavlenie kartiny -- Gogol’ i Aleksandr Ivanov’, *Nashe nasledie*, 54, 2000 <<http://www.nasledie-rus.ru/podshivka/5410.php>> [accessed 15 May 2012].

Early encounters (1838-1840)

When Gogol left Russia in June 1836, disappointed by the reception of *Revizor* (The Government Inspector, 1836), he had already cast himself in the role of unrecognized prophet, rejected by his fellow country-men. As he wrote to the writer and historian M. P. Pogodin on 15 May before his departure: 'I'm going abroad, there I will shake off the misery that my compatriots inflict on me every day. The up-to-date writer, the comic writer, the writer of social customs must be far from his native land. No prophet is accepted in his own country.'⁴⁴ By the time he arrived in Rome in March 1837, he faced a turning-point in his literary life. Upset by the news of Pushkin's recent death, he was determined to honour the poet's directive to write *Dead Souls*, yet felt that he had lost confidence in his ability to carry out the task without the guidance of his revered mentor.⁴⁵ If he was to succeed Pushkin as literary prophet for his generation, he needed a receptive audience, both in Rome and back in Russia. As we shall see, his encounter with Ivanov provided him with just what he required: a malleable disciple and striking example of dedication to the creation of 'prophetic' art (demonstrated by the artist's life-style and the subject of his projected painting), an image that could be presented to Russian readers as the living proof and validation of his own ideal.

After four years of prevarication, planning and preliminary sketches Ivanov finally took the plunge in May 1837, ordering a large canvas for his painting and moving to a new studio in the following autumn, big enough to accommodate his projected work.⁴⁶ Over the next year he worked intensively on his painting, sending sketches and progress reports to the Society and his father at regular intervals. His project acquired a new level of recognition when Zhukovskii brought his former pupil, Aleksandr Nikolaevich (Nicholas I's eldest son and heir to the throne) to the painter's studio in December 1838. After the young crown prince (only twenty years old at the time) expressed his approval of the work in progress, Ivanov was emboldened to ask for another three years' financial support, promising his painting as a gift in exchange (another twenty years would pass before he delivered the

⁴⁴ A. A. Karpov and M. N. Virolainen (eds.), *Perepiska N. V. Gogolia v dvukh tomakh* (hereafter, *Perepiska*), 2 vols, Moscow, 1988, 1, pp. 362-363.

⁴⁵ See Gogol's letters to P. A. Pletnev of 16 March 1837, M. P. Pogodin of 30 March 1837 and V. A. Zhukovskii of 18/6 April 1837, in V. Veresaev, *Gogol' v zhizni: Sistematicheskii svod podlinnykh svidetel'stv sovremennikov* (hereafter, *Gogol' v zhizni*), Moscow, 1990, pp. 206-209.

⁴⁶ On 10 May 1837 Ivanov informed the Society for the Encouragement of Artists that he had ordered the canvas and planned to start work on it in September, after spending the summer travelling and collecting further materials in Italy. Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 185-186. The new studio was located at Via del Vantaggio, 7, off Via di Ripetta.

completed painting to Alexander II in St Petersburg). Gogol was in Rome at the time and excitedly described the visit of the heir and Zhukovskii in his correspondence.⁴⁷

Gogol therefore encountered Ivanov just at the point when the artist's grand idea was beginning to acquire a tangible shape and a degree of public recognition and official support. As this was the very outcome that Gogol craved for his own work, it is not difficult to understand why he latched on to Ivanov as a figure who embodied many of his own ideals and demonstrated that they could be fulfilled. He was adept at formulating the purpose of the painting and found in the much less articulate Ivanov an eager recipient of his views. In his memoirs the artist and engraver F. I. Iordan (1800-1883) described Gogol's role at the heart of a circle of artists in Rome including himself, Ivanov and Moller. He emphasised the exceptional 'reverence' (*pochtenie*) that Ivanov displayed towards Gogol and noted that he was a good listener but a very poor speaker; together, the two friends formed an 'inseparable pair' (*nerazluchnaia parochka*).⁴⁸ Later he added an even more candid comment, underlining Gogol's status as a prophet in Ivanov's eyes: 'A. A. Ivanov was a strange individual; he was always smiling and saw in Gogol some kind of prophet. Gogol gave him directives, which Ivanov listened to slavishly. Moller and I, Gogol's evening visitors, were nonentities in his eyes compared to Gogol, and I laughed heartily at his infatuation.'⁴⁹

The hierarchical nature of the relationship was manifest from the beginning of their correspondence, in which Gogol assumed the leading role, despite the fact that he was three years younger than Ivanov. Significantly, in Gogol's first known letter to Ivanov of 8/20 September 1839 written from Vienna, he adopted the tone of a benevolent mentor, enquiring after the sketch of the 'large painting' completed by Ivanov over the summer in Venice and wishing him God's assistance with his work. He then gave details of various items, clearly charged with symbolic value, that he had despatched to Ivanov in Rome. The first was a silver watch, purchased by Gogol at Ivanov's request in Geneva. By sending this time-keeping gift to the artist, Gogol symbolically established his right to set the pace of Ivanov's work (a major theme of his essay of 1846 on the painting was its slow composition, defended by him as essential for spiritual reasons). The second item was Gogol's stick, used by him in

⁴⁷ Gogol, Letter to A. S. Danilevskii of 31 December 1838, in Veresaev, *Gogol' v zhizni*, p. 226. After this visit Ivanov gave his first sketch of the painting to Zhukovskii for his album. See note 32 above. In a letter to Zhukovskii of 18/6 April 1837 Gogol expressed his envy of the generous financial aid received by Russian artists in Rome and asked Zhukovskii to intercede on his behalf with the Tsar. Ibid., p. 208.

⁴⁸ 'Vospominaniia F. I. Iordana' (1879), in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 197, 238.

⁴⁹ F. I. Iordan, 'Zapiski rektora i professora Akademii Khudozhestv Fedora Ivanovicha Iordan[a]' (1918), cited in *ibid.*, p. 198.

Rome, which Ivanov was firmly instructed to put in the corner of his room and to keep there until Gogol's return to Rome. Elsewhere, in letters to his close friend from childhood A. S. Danilevskii and to the poet N. M. Iazykov, Gogol frequently referred to his stick or staff (*posokh*) as a symbol of his true spiritual home or of the spiritual legacy that he hoped to pass on to his chosen disciple or successor⁵⁰ (possibly represented by the staff held by Ivanov, portrayed in his painting as the artist-wanderer, sitting under the cross extended by John the Baptist). The third item consisted of three dozen Viennese pencils -- a dozen for Ivanov, a dozen for Moller and a dozen to be put aside for Gogol. The gift of this craftsman's tool, shared alike by artists and writers, reflected the unity and common goal of word and image that Gogol sought to promote.⁵¹

In the following summer of 1840 Gogol wrote once more to Ivanov from Vienna, enquiring after the progress of Ivanov's 'celebrated' (*famosa*) painting, asking whether it was approaching completion or would still need another 'fatal three years', and expressing his longing to 'behold it' (*uzret' ee*), to embrace the 'maestro' and to resume their 'paradisical life' together in Rome in September.⁵²

Ivanov responded in July with a detailed account of his trips to Perugia, Assisi, Florence and the mountains around Rome in search of materials for his painting (faces, landscapes, vegetation). Using the period of their separation as a yardstick by which to measure progress on his painting (rather slow, by his own admission), he expressed his recurrent worry that he had undertaken a task beyond his strength. He rounded off, however, by noting an important event of the current year: in Overbeck's studio he had seen his mentor's monumental canvas, 'The Triumph of Religion in the Arts' (1840), finally completed after more than a decade's work.⁵³ Clearly this example gave him encouragement. Like Ivanov, Overbeck was a foreign artist who had settled in Rome and turned to early Renaissance artists such as Raphael and Perugino as models of pure Christian art, untainted by the excesses of the later Renaissance. His painting gave allegorical expression to an idea cherished by Ivanov and Gogol alike: the link between all forms of art (writing, painting,

⁵⁰ See Gogol's letters to A. S. Danilevskii of 11 April 1838 (Veresaev, *Gogol' v zhizni*, p. 218) and to N. M. Iazykov of 27 September 1841 (*Perepiska*, 2, p. 372).

⁵¹ *Perepiska*, 2, pp. 441-443.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 2, p. 443.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 444-445. On 1 July 1835 Ivanov wrote to his father about 'The Triumph of Religion in the Arts', commenting 'Overbeck the hermit prays, prays in his paintings' (Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 155). In the symmetrical style of compositions by Raphael, this painting presents the 'upper' world, centred on the enthroned Madonna surrounded by prophets, evangelists and saints, above the 'lower' world of artists, sculptors, painters, architects and writers. The fountain in the centre symbolises the upward dedication of art to Christian ideals.

sculpture) and the Christian faith. Although Ivanov greatly revered Overbeck, referring to him as his ‘prophet’ and ‘only mentor’, he was also driven by the desire to demonstrate through his own work that Russian artists were more capable of creating an ideal form of Christian art than their Western counterparts.⁵⁴ Overbeck’s conversion to Catholicism may have fuelled this patriotic aim, which was echoed by Gogol and the Slavophile thinker A. S. Khomiakov in their comments on Ivanov’s painting and its superiority to the German artist’s work.⁵⁵

Visual and verbal portraits (1841-1842)

As well as conversations conducted in person or by correspondence, Gogol also turned to the creation and commissioning of portraits as a method for drawing others closer to his ideas and influence. He attached great significance to the power of portraiture, both verbal and visual, and used this medium to build stronger links with Ivanov.

In 1841 Ivanov painted two oil portraits of Gogol in Rome, evidently at the writer’s request and ‘in great secrecy from everyone’, as he later informed Zhukovskii after Gogol’s death. The first portrait was made for Zhukovskii and given to him by Gogol in September 1841 when they met up in Frankfurt. The second portrait, a copy made for Pogodin, was also given to its recipient by Gogol.⁵⁶ However, when Pogodin published an engraving of this portrait in *Moskvitianin* in 1843, Gogol felt betrayed. He was upset at the thought that people would be ripping out of the journal a portrait showing him in his dressing-gown, with tousled hair and a moustache, looking like a dissolute rake.⁵⁷ In the final section of his ‘Zaveshchanie’ (‘Testament’, 1845), he laid down three conditions for the publication of his

⁵⁴ Ivanov, Letter to his father of November-December 1840, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 225. Overbeck’s work was often censured by Russian artists and critics for being too cold and allegorical. This criticism echoed Friedrich Vischer’s harsh condemnation of Overbeck’s painting in 1841 ‘for being an allegory in which there is no clear demarcation between linguistic and pictorial signs’ (following Goethe and Schelling, allegory was commonly regarded as completed and dead, as opposed to the symbol, seen as living and dynamic). Overbeck composed a written explanation of the significance of his allegorical work (as Gogol did for Ivanov’s painting). See Mitchell B. Frank, ‘“Castrated Raphael”: Friedrich Overbeck and allegory’, *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 18, 2002, 4, pp. 87-98 (p. 87).

⁵⁵ In early October 1841, when Gogol asked Zhukovskii to request the Tsar to provide further support for Ivanov’s painting, he suggested pointing out that Overbeck’s painting was half the size of Ivanov’s but had taken over ten years. *Perepiska*, 1, p. 172. Khomiakov acknowledged Ivanov’s debt to Overbeck but insisted that German painters were not able to rise to the ideal Christian art to which they aspired (due to the inadequacies of Protestantism and Catholicism). ‘Kartina Ivanova: Pis'mo k redaktoru Russkoi Besedy’ (1858), in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii Alekseia Stepanovicha Khomiakova* (hereafter, *PSS*), 3rd ed., 8 vols, Moscow, 1900, 3, p. 354.

⁵⁶ For details of the portraits, see note 39 above. On Gogol’s gift of the first portrait to Zhukovskii in September 1841, see P. A. Efremov, ‘Portrety Gogolia i risunki k ego sochineniiam’ (1878), in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 240.

⁵⁷ Gogol, Letter to S. P. Shevryev of 2/14 December 1844, in *Perepiska*, 2, p. 308.

portrait: it should only be reproduced if God granted him the power to finish his great work (*Dead Souls*), if his fellow-country men, recognizing the novel's worth, wished to see the features of its publicity-shy author, and only in an engraving made by Iordan, to recompense this artist for all the years he had dedicated to engraving Raphael's 'Transfiguration'.⁵⁸ A few months after Gogol's death, even though *Dead Souls* had not been completed, Ivanov therefore asked Zhukovskii to send the portrait in his possession to Iordan in order to carry out the wishes of the deceased.⁵⁹

The art historian N. G. Mashkovtsev has argued quite convincingly that the original drawings and portraits were done in private to prepare for the inclusion of Gogol's likeness in 'The Appearance of Christ to the People'; complete secrecy was necessary because Gogol did not want Ivanov's portrait of him in his domestic appearance to be revealed to the public before the unveiling of his more elevated likeness as the figure 'closest to Christ' in Ivanov's master work.⁶⁰ It is also likely that Gogol only wanted Ivanov's portrait of him to be published after they had both completed their master works and gained public recognition; the resulting image would then serve as a fitting symbol of the link between the writer and the artist, crowning their joint achievement as national prophets to the Russian nation.

Gogol's belief in the power of an image was already clear from the arresting opening line of his story 'The Portrait', describing the magnetic attraction exerted on the public by the pictures on display at a Petersburg stall: 'Nowhere did so many people stop as in front of the picture stall in Shchukin dvor'.⁶¹ After purchasing a portrait of a merchant from this stall, the artist Chartkov (*Chertkov* in the first version, from *chert* [devil]) gradually falls victim to its demonic power and begins to peddle a cheapened version of his own art. When he is invited to the Academy of Arts to assess the work of a former comrade, a Russian artist who had spent many years in Rome studying Raphael and refining his art, he is so overcome by the purity and innocence of this artist's work that he is unable to pronounce a critical opinion and

⁵⁸ 'Zaveshchaniie', in N. V. Gogol, *Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druž'iami*, comp. V. A. Voropaev, Moscow, 1993, pp. 28-29. Gogol added that he would prefer the public to buy Iordan's engraving of the transfigured Saviour, rather than his own portrait. As noted by Vasari (whose *Life of Raphael* was known to Gogol), the 'Transfiguration' was Raphael's last work, displayed above his dead body after he died on Good Friday on his thirty-seventh birthday (Gogol's age in 1846); Gogol deliberately associates the publication of his portrait with this visual image testifying to the transfiguration of the Saviour's and artist's life after death. See Vinitsky, "'Exegi Testamentum'", p.104 (Vinitsky mistakenly writes of Iordan's engraving of a portrait painted by *Iordan*, rather than Iordan's engraving of the portrait painted by *Ivanov*).

⁵⁹ Ivanov, Letter to V. A. Zhukovskii of 21 April 1852, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 535.

⁶⁰ N. G. Mashkovtsev, 'Rabota Ivanova nad portretom Gogolia', in *Gogol' v krugu khudozhnikov*, Moscow, 1955, pp. 63-88 (pp.72-78).

⁶¹ N. V. Gogol', *Peterburgskie povesti*, ed. O. G. Dilaktorskaia, St Petersburg, 1995, p. 49 (cited from the second version, where this line differs only slightly from the first version).

runs away like a madman, overcome with tears. When Gogol revised the story in 1841-1842 (around the time Ivanov painted his portrait), he added many details that clearly evoked Ivanov (his life in Rome as a hermit [*otshel'nik*], his total dedication to art, affinity with Raphael, indifference to public opinion, inability to socialise, unfashionable attire) and emphasised the way his art exuded an 'inner force' that emanated directly from his soul.⁶²

It is clear from the two versions of 'The Portrait' that Gogol had already formed his ideal of the dedicated, spiritual artist in 1831-1832 well before his arrival in Rome, but then chose to associate his ideal with Ivanov after their meeting. In Gogol's view, a work of art, in particular a portrait, could exert a demonic or a spiritually uplifting influence on its owner or viewer. His controlling approach to Ivanov's portraits of him (keeping them secret, giving them to Zhukovskii and Pogodin -- two highly influential figures in the literary world, determining the time and the manner of their reproduction) has to be understood in this context. He was evidently trying to facilitate the creation and publication of a 'spiritual' image of the artist-prophet, a visual image of the writer to mirror the verbal portrait of the artist that he had created in his story.

Around the same time, in December 1841, Gogol asked Ivanov to commission on his behalf the artist I. S. Shapovalov (1817-1890) to paint copies of the heads of the Saviour from Raphael's 'Transfiguration' and 'Entombment'. Gogol planned to distribute these as gifts to select friends and, significantly, asked that the copies of the 'Saviour' should be just 'a little bigger' than the size of his head on Ivanov's portrait of him. After further instructing Ivanov to make a copy for him of the head of the Saviour from his own painting, Gogol rounded off his letter by reiterating his role as Ivanov's source of spiritual strength: 'Now for the main thing: be strong! Walk cheerfully and on no account let your spirits fall, or else this will mean that you do not remember me and do not love me: whoever remembers me carries fortitude and strength in his soul. Do not be anxious about the future, everything will be fine. You will have funds.'⁶³ In all these examples Gogol is constantly associating his role as Ivanov's personal saviour with portraits -- either of himself or of the Saviour. The juxtaposition is a telling one, reflecting Gogol's faith in the power of the image.

Tensions and crisis (1844-1847)

⁶² Compare in *ibid.*, pp. 70-71 (revised version of 1842), 178-179 (first version of 1832), 258-259 (on dates of composition), 282-283 (on Ivanov's presence in the revised version).

⁶³ Gogol, Letter to Ivanov of 25 December 1841, in *Perepiska*, 2, pp. 449-450. Gogol offered to pay Shapovalov one hundred roubles per Saviour's head. See note 58 above for Gogol's suggestion that Raphael's portrait of the Saviour in the 'Transfiguration' could be substituted for his portrait.

We can see from this last letter of 1841 that Gogol not only identified himself as Ivanov's saviour but could also be rather firm, even downright bossy, in carrying out his self-appointed role as the artist's spiritual mentor. To some extent Ivanov invited and encouraged this attitude. Plagued by doubts and lacking confidence in his own opinions, he relied on Gogol's support to resolve his dilemmas and buttress his beliefs.⁶⁴ However, when pushed too far, he could put up some resistance -- either retreating into silence, or attempting a countermove of his own. The pressure from Gogol built up over the next few years, resulting in a crisis in the two friends' relationship that reached a peak in 1847 and was never fully resolved. Significantly, the main point of tension revolved around who would take on the role of principal prophet -- the painter or the writer.

Some early warning signals can be detected in their correspondence. In March 1844, for example, Gogol advised Ivanov to strengthen his Christian faith so as to be able to continue what he now referred to as 'our work':

You have not yet acquired that which alone could move your work forward and impart to you that force which cannot be attained through any amount of effort or knowledge. In a word, you are still far from being a Christian, even though you have planned a painting for the glorification of Christ and Christianity. You have not felt the close involvement of God in our lives or the full loftiness of the intimate union into which he has entered with us. This is what I thought necessary to say to you in addition, so that you could think this over at an appropriate spiritual moment.⁶⁵

By chiding Ivanov for his inadequate level of spiritual wisdom, even accusing him of not being a true Christian, Gogol is probing uncomfortably far into the recesses of his friend's soul. In effect he is shifting his role from *artistic* adviser to *religious* mentor, thereby assuming a superior didactic position. Later, as we shall see below, in his 1846 essay on Ivanov's painting, he repeated this approach in a public forum, suggesting that the artist's work could not and would not be finished until he had successfully completed his 'spiritual task'.

Ivanov replied to Gogol's letter with a mixture of respect and defensiveness, side-stepping the most hurtful accusation: 'One bit of your letter, [saying] that I am far from being a Christian and so on, obliges me to stop and think. Right now I am not able to find an answer

⁶⁴ P. V. Annenkov, 'Zamechatel'noe desiatiletie. 1838-1848', in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 234.

⁶⁵ Gogol, Letter to Ivanov of 6/18 March 1844, in *Perepiska*, 2, pp. 451-452.

to this.⁶⁶ Gogol was not satisfied with this evasive response and returned to his original point more forcibly at the end of the year, this time drawing an explicit parallel between the conversion (*obrashchenie*) that Ivanov first had to undergo himself and his ability to represent this same process in his painting:

your painting is going slowly because there is no driving force that could spur you on to produce it confidently and firmly. Entreat God for this force. And remember *this word of mine*: until the inner event that you are striving to represent on your painting in the faces of those moved and converted by the *word* of John the Baptist happens with you, or rather within yourself, believe me that your picture will not be finished until that time. Your work is bound up with your spiritual task. And until this picture is drawn in your soul by the brush of the supreme artist, it will not be painted by your brush on canvas. When it is painted on your soul, then your brush will fly faster than thought itself.⁶⁷

For Gogol, Ivanov's work on his painting clearly both depicted and depended on the acquisition of true faith; it represented a public enactment or performance of a process of inner spiritual conversion that the true artist-prophet first had to undergo himself. The artist's success in reaching this goal would depend on his ability to follow the 'word' of his spiritual mentor. In the passage cited above Gogol clearly links his 'word' (*sie moe slovo*) to the 'word' of John the Baptist, thus associating himself directly with the prophet and casting Ivanov as a disciple still on the path to faith.

Although Ivanov continued in the role of willing disciple, assiduously reading Gogol's copy of *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and duly associating his mentor with the Saviour ('I kissed your little book, thought about you and bowed down to God'),⁶⁸ relations between the two friends became strained by the end of 1846 as Gogol began to demand a higher level of absolute obedience to his word. After accusing Ivanov of expecting everyone to run around like 'singed cats' attending to his needs, he voiced his exasperation over his disciple's failure to trust and follow his advice. A mounting note of hysteria can be detected in his obsessive references to the importance of his prophetic 'word', repeated five times in the following passage:

I told you plainly: 'Sit quietly, don't think about anything, don't worry about anything, work -- and nothing else, everything will be sorted out just fine. This much I

⁶⁶ Ivanov, Letter to Gogol of April 1844, in *ibid.*, 2, p. 453.

⁶⁷ My italics. Gogol, Letter to Ivanov of 28 December 1844/9 January 1845, in *ibid.*, 2, pp. 455-456.

⁶⁸ Ivanov, Letter to Gogol of autumn 1846, in *ibid.*, p. 462.

guarantee you.’ But you consider me a nonentity; you have no trust whatsoever in my *words*. You are more likely to believe [...] in the eloquent promises of the first blabbermouth than in the *words* of a person who has not yet been found guilty of lying, who did not entice any person with flattering assurances and who kept his *word*. Allow me, finally, to tell you that I have a certain right to demand Respect for my *words* and that it is far too thoughtless and rude on your part to show me so plainly that you don’t give a damn about my *words*.⁶⁹

Gogol rounded off by telling Ivanov to remain silent, hinting darkly that he had already taken steps to ensure his well-being. He could perfectly well have told his friend directly about the ‘letter’ he had written in support of his work. He chose not to, however, preferring the controlling power of mysterious allusion to the as yet unrevealed word (more consonant with the mask of prophet). A month later, in order to make his disciple truly live by his word, he sent him the text of a prayer that he had composed and recited every day -- a prayer for spiritual peace, protection from Satan and divine inspiration -- clearly wishing his word to become quite literally the artist’s daily word.⁷⁰

Gogol’s insistence that his disciple should fully submit to his ‘word’ finally provoked an oblique form of rebellion: Ivanov attempted to turn the tables on his mentor by demanding that the writer’s ‘word’ should be put into the service of his art. In January 1847 he somewhat tactlessly instructed Gogol to take up the position of ‘Secretary of the Russian artists’ in Rome; his duties would include writing ‘four to five reports’ about the best of these artists in order to prepare the Tsar for a ‘correct evaluation’ of their work in progress. All this was to be done while Ivanov devoted himself to completing his master painting.⁷¹

The casual assumption that the writer’s ‘brilliant pen’ would be deployed to serve the needs of the artist clearly nettled Gogol. After pointing out somewhat testily that his ‘main task’ (*Dead Souls*, ‘hardly a trifle’) might well require rather more time than Ivanov’s project, he raised an objection to being told his exact duties -- would Ivanov ever put up with being told to produce five watercolours a year to order? The core issue here is one of power: ‘And indeed, whose will is being declared here?’ In a tone of heavy irony, he commented that if Ivanov were a boss, he would be very good at allocating jobs to people. Whilst from a Christian point of view there may be nothing wrong with a lackey’s job, one must know who

⁶⁹ My italics. Gogol, Letter to Ivanov of 30 November/12 December 1846, in *ibid.*, 2, pp. 464-465.

⁷⁰ Gogol, Letter to Ivanov of 31 December 1846/12 January 1847, in *ibid.*, 2, pp. 465-466.

⁷¹ Ivanov, Letter to Gogol of 10/22 January 1847, in *ibid.*, 2, p. 467. Gogol was to work for Prince P. M. Volkonskii, who was responsible for the affairs of the Academy of Arts.

to offer it to and, crucially, not seek to divert a person from his chosen path. Moving over to a personal attack, he accused Ivanov of acting like a child and deceiving his mentor by pretending to be working on his painting and praying -- if this were the case he would have clarity of mind and no time to dream up such hair-brained schemes. Finally, he returned to his original position: the artist's lack of faith in his mentor's 'words' has led him to fall prey to the spirit of temptation. If only he would have patience, he would see the fruits of Gogol's efforts on his behalf.⁷²

Gogol's essay 'Ivanov, the Historical Painter' (1846)

These much heralded 'fruits' took the form of a 'letter', entitled 'Istoricheskii zhivopisets Ivanov' ('Ivanov, the Historical Painter', 1846) and addressed to Count Matvei Viel'gorskii, the Vice-President of the Society for the Encouragement of Artists. The 'letter' was never actually sent to its addressee and did not appear until January 1847 in *Selected Passages*.⁷³

The choice of the open letter as the vehicle for Gogol's appeal on behalf of the artist allowed him to combine a personal, at times confessional tone with a message of national import, thereby authenticating and adding pathos to his argument.

The essay builds on the image of the artist as a pure, dedicated being already elaborated in the second version of 'The Portrait' and now explicitly identified with Ivanov as the creator of 'The Appearance of Christ to the People'. The main goal of the painting as defined by Gogol is 'to represent in faces the entire course of humankind's conversion to Christ', illustrated through the varying degrees of faith exhibited on the faces of individuals ranging from Christ's contemporaries and future disciples to later recipients and carriers of the same message (such as Gogol and Ivanov). This phrase encapsulates the two levels of reading of the painting: the original appearance of Christ to the people and the continuing process of revelation.

Gogol makes two main points. First, the general principle that the value of any artist's work depends on the successful accomplishment of a 'spiritual task' (*dushevnoe delo*), defined as the acquisition of faith, to be achieved by 'conversion to Christ' (*obrashchenie ko Khristu*). The second point derives from this general principle: the subject of the painting -- the turning to Christ of the people -- cannot be understood or depicted by an artist who has

⁷² Gogol, Letter to Ivanov of 23 January/4 February 1847, in *ibid.*, 2, pp. 469-471.

⁷³ For the text of the letter and background on its composition, see Gogol, *Vybrannye mesta*, pp. 136-146 (text), 371-373 (notes).

not undergone this process himself. This accounts for the number of years Ivanov has been working on his painting, since the task of spiritual self-development is governed by transcendent laws regulated by a timetable independent of mundane affairs.

According to Gogol's reading of the image, Ivanov is representing the process of conversion not only as it applied to Christ's contemporaries at a specific historical moment and not only as it might apply to Russia in his time, but also as it applied to himself and by extension to Gogol -- hence the inclusion of both figures in the painting. The image is therefore at once universal and personal, eternal and historical, prescriptive as well as descriptive in the message that it conveys. In creating his work, Ivanov is acting out its subject, the acquisition of faith -- the performative dimension of the painting in progress becomes the key criterion for determining its status upon completion.

A substantial part of the essay (about a fifth) is devoted by Gogol to a recent period in his own life lasting over six years (roughly contemporaneous with his time in Rome and initial closeness to Ivanov), when he was too engrossed in his own 'transitional spiritual state' to be able to write.⁷⁴ The artist's delayed completion of his work thus provides a lofty explanation and justification for Gogol's own period of silence as a writer. The application of this idea both to Ivanov and to himself builds a bridge between the original prophet (John the Baptist) -- who revealed the path for the acquisition of faith to the people -- and the contemporary artist-prophets (Gogol, Ivanov) -- who follow the same path, turning to Christ in order first to receive and then to communicate the prophetic message to the people in artistic form. In this process Gogol is clearly in the lead: after accomplishing his spiritual task, he had already been able to finish the first part of his major work.

As well as mirroring both artists' anxieties over completing the great works with which they identified the purpose of their lives, this essay and the earlier exchange of letters reflect a crucial underlying issue: the balance of power between image and word as tools in the hands of aspiring prophets. Ivanov clearly placed the image above the word; he saw his painting as the primary source, to which Gogol's word would play second fiddle through a series of commissioned 'reports'. This option naturally did not attract Gogol, who chose a different route: the writing of a 'letter' about Ivanov's painting was a strategy to promote his own agenda. Although ostensibly seeking support for the artist, he was in fact using the genre of the appeal for two purposes: first, to explain his own creative and spiritual path in a

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

favourable light, and second, to establish his controlling position as the arbiter of Ivanov's spiritual level, defining the ultimate criterion by which the 'success' or value of his painting could be judged. The ekphrastic act of writing about an image effectively shifted the balance of power from the original image to its verbal explanation. While Ivanov might have been content to let the image speak for itself, Gogol had in a sense hijacked his project, interposing himself as its verbal interpreter and judge of its true value, thus reaffirming the supremacy of word over image. As a result his 'letter' about the artist, as his earlier fictional 'Portrait', served to enhance his own status as a prophetic writer.

Gogol clearly expected Ivanov to read his essay and to experience a surge of gratitude towards his mentor and patron. Matters turned out somewhat differently, however. Ivanov did not hear about the essay until Gogol drew his attention to it explicitly some months later. Even then, he made no effort to get hold of it, leading Gogol in desperation to tear the letter out of his own copy of the book and despatch it to the artist.⁷⁵ Ivanov did not immediately read the piece and only responded briefly in December 1847, almost a whole year after the essay had appeared. Somewhat tactlessly he even mentioned that he had not made any effort to get hold of a copy of Gogol's book, despite knowing that it was circulating in Rome. Although he commented that reading the essay had caused him to return to his previous state of 'deepest reverence' (faith in Gogol and submission to his authority in all matters), he delivered a rather backhanded compliment by describing his friend as the only person capable of interceding with higher management on behalf of artists, thereby confirming the notion of the writer's word serving the artist's agenda.⁷⁶

Ivanov evidently entertained serious reservations about the essay. His notebook includes the observation that Gogol, by placing him on the highroad of fame, had made it hard for him to walk and impossible to think peacefully.⁷⁷ A similar view is recorded in the memoirs of P. M. Kovalevskii. Recalling his visit to Rome in 1856 (on a mission to retrieve the deceased writer's letters to the artist), he noted that Ivanov cited the harmful effect of the

⁷⁵ On 13/25 March 1847 Gogol told Ivanov about the essay. In November or December 1847 Ivanov informed Gogol that he had not yet seen or read the book. On 2/14 December 1847 Gogol expressed his surprise that Ivanov had not read the whole book while in Naples with Sof'ia Petrovna Apraksina and promised to send him the letter, torn out of the book. On 16/28 December 1847 Gogol noted that he was pleased that Ivanov had found his letter about him 'satisfactory' and revealed that he had torn the letter out of his own copy. See *Perepiska*, 2, pp. 473, 475, 477. According to V. M. Zummer, 'O vere i khrame A. Ivanova', cited in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 734, Ivanov only read the full text of Gogol's *Selected Passages* in 1848.

⁷⁶ Ivanov, Letter to Gogol between 2/14 and 16/28 December 1847, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 484-485.

⁷⁷ Cited in *Perepiska*, 2, pp. 479-480 (note 1).

essay as the reason for his disinclination to allow members of the public to view his painting: ‘Nikolai Vasil’evich (Gogol) did me much harm with his praises: after his words I have no right to exhibit my painting... Too much will be asked of me.’⁷⁸ Gogol’s ‘word’ had created an inflated alternative version of his painting that -- paradoxically -- undermined the value of the original image.

Ivanov’s ‘Thoughts Arising upon Reading the Bible’ (1846-1847)

At the same time as Gogol was composing his essay, Ivanov was engaged on a new writing project of his own, which could perhaps best be described as an extended experiment in developing his own mastery of the art of verbal prophecy. From the second half of 1846 through to the end of 1847 he regularly jotted down his ‘Thoughts Arising upon Reading the Bible’, a patchwork miscellany of reflections gleaned from reading the Bible in Church Slavonic, Russian and French translations, interspersed with private prayers, diary notes, work plans and draft letters to friends and patrons.⁷⁹ The most useful sections for our subject are those that concern his vision of Russian artists as prophets for the contemporary age, modelled on biblical precursors. In these passages, with numerous repetitions and almost identical formulations, he delineates his view of the prophetic mission of the artist in relation to the tsar and the Russian people, all in the context of a strong eschatological expectation of the dawn of a new era of peace for humanity.

The essence of the ‘argument’ involves four stages, relating to the tsar, the artist-prophet, their ideal interaction and its envisaged outcome.

1) Ivanov starts from the premise that the Russian tsar is a divine figure, identified with the future Messiah, whose absolute power makes him the ‘most divine’ of temporal

⁷⁸ P. M. Kovalevskii, ‘Ob Ivanove i ego kartine’ (1859), in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis’makh*, p. 547.

⁷⁹ Ivanov’s ‘Thoughts’ were first published (surprisingly) in Soviet Russia in the late 1920s in V. M. Zummer, ‘Eskhatologiya A. Ivanova’, *Uchenye zapiski Nauchno-issledovatel’skoi kafedry istorii evropeiskoi kul’tury Kharkovskogo universiteta*, 1929, 3, pp. 393-408. All citations are taken from the text reprinted with minor corrections based on the manuscript in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis’makh*, pp. 648-669, 732-733 (notes). For the dating of the ‘Thoughts’, see *ibid.*, p. 732. Many ideas in the ‘Thoughts’ echo Ivanov’s letters to Gogol, including draft passages not included in editions of his correspondence, but published in V. M. Zummer, ‘Neizdannye pis’ma Al. Ivanova k Gogoliu’, *Izvestiia Azerbaidzhanskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta imeni V. I. Lenina*, 4-5, *Obshchestvennye nauki*, 1925, pp. 38-53. On Ivanov’s careful reading of different translations of the Bible, see his letter to F. V. Chizhov of 1844. He seized every opportunity to read his neighbour’s copy of a rare Russian version of the Old Testament translated by G. P. Pavskii (published in a limited lithograph edition of over 700 copies in 1828, but collected and burnt in 1844 by decision of the Holy Synod). He complained that the Church Slavonic translation was not always comprehensible, differed from the Russian version, and asked Chizhov to get hold of a French translation done by a ‘scholarly rabbi’, published in Paris. See Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis’makh*, pp. 314, 720 (note 155).

rulers. However, the tsar is also human and may not be entirely flawless. He therefore needs a mentor to guide him along the path to spiritual perfection.⁸⁰

2) This mentor will be the artist, whose role is modelled on various biblical antecedents: the Levite priests who provided spiritual guidance to the nation and the prophets who offered advice to the kings of Israel (as Samuel to King Saul, or Nathan to King David). The surprising shift from priest or prophet to the figure of the artist as spiritual mentor is justified by invoking a pseudo-historical argument. After the Israelites fell into idol worship, they were allegedly unable to sustain their faith despite the efforts of their prophets. Following the advent of Christianity, the task of redeeming the world therefore passed to the Russian nation, whose artists (not writers) were chosen to carry out this holy mission.⁸¹

3) The interaction of the artist-prophet and the tsar was to follow a particular pattern. First the artist had to abstain from wine and women so as to embrace the path of isolation and suffering. He was then required to immerse himself in reading the Bible and in preparing visual ‘representations’ (*izobrazheniia*) of select episodes. In order to prepare the tsar’s mind for the contemplation of these sacred images, he had to engage him in edifying conversation about the biblical narratives illustrated. At the appropriate moment the artistic image would then be revealed, first to the tsar, then to the public. The creation and correct reception of these images thus depended on a constant cycle leading from the initial narrative through its expression in an image and on to its explication in words -- with the artist remaining in control of both the visual and the verbal dimensions.⁸²

4) Following this process of spiritual education and refinement through exposure to artistic images and verbal explanations, the Russian tsar, now truly Christ-like, would be able to adopt the role of Messiah and lead the last nation (Russia) and other Slav peoples to teach all humanity through their example; in this way Russia would fulfil its final mission of establishing eternal peace and harmony in this world, as prophesied by Isaiah.⁸³

In putting forward this model, Ivanov was building on well-known literary precedents. Zhukovskii’s poetic address of 1814 to Aleksander I had already presented the poet as a prophetic figure, mediating between God, the Tsar and the people.⁸⁴ In one of the

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 657, 659, 661.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 652-653, 655, 661, 663-664, 666-667. Ivanov’s painting, with its inclusion of the ‘wanderer’ artist, can be read as an illustration of this idea.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 653-655, 657, 662, 665, 667.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 640, 651, 659, 661, 663.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of Zhukovskii’s ‘Imperatoru Aleksandru: Poslanie’ (1814), see Davidson, ‘Between Derzhavin and Pushkin’, pp. 187-191. By giving his early sketch of the painting to Zhukovskii for his album,

letters of *Selected Passages*, ‘Predmety dlia liricheskogo poeta v nyneshnee vremia’ (‘Subjects for the Lyric Poet at the Present Time’, 1844), Gogol issued an explicit call for Russian poets to model their verse on the Hebrew prophets, following the example of Iazykov.⁸⁵ Ivanov regularly met and corresponded with all three of these writers and was undoubtedly affected by their ideas. However, by shifting the role of the prophet from the writer and his text to the artist and his image, he added an entirely new dimension to the existing literary tradition of prophecy.

Ivanov experimented with the relation between text and image in an innovative way. He not only created a sacred image based on a biblical narrative, but also accompanied its creation with a text of his own making, thereby setting up a framework for understanding and promoting the prophetic dimension of art. This constant interaction between text and image was also reflected in his working methods. He frequently wrote out biblical passages next to his art work. For example, on the back of a sketch of the legs and clothing of John the Baptist and two apostles, he copied out texts from Jeremiah and Chronicles in French translation.⁸⁶

Despite the prolonged time invested in compiling his ‘Thoughts Arising upon Reading the Bible’, Ivanov evidently remained dissatisfied with his attempt at articulating his prophetic mission in words. The ‘Thoughts’ were chaotic, repetitive and unclear and did not amount to a coherent manifesto. In the summer of 1848 he drafted a letter to Gogol, trying to set out his views in a more organised fashion and asking him once more to serve as his mouthpiece. Writing from Naples, at a distance from his painting, he was anxious to resolve previous differences of opinion and to establish once and for all ‘what services can be rendered by the man of letters to the artist and by the artist to the man of letters’.⁸⁷

Citing the biblical promise that Japheth ‘shall dwell in the tents of Shem’ (Gen. 9:27), Ivanov suggested that the Russian nation (according to tradition descended from Japheth) is called upon to fulfil this prophecy.⁸⁸ In enabling Japheth to reach the last heights of its potential, Russia will be led by its historical painters, whose unique moral vision builds on

Ivanov was building a bridge between the literary tradition of prophecy established by the poet and his own visual image of prophecy. See note 32 above.

⁸⁵ Gogol, *Vybrannye mesta*, pp. 87, 90.

⁸⁶ ‘Zemlia; nogi, odezhda: Etiud dlia figur Ioanna Krestitelia, Ioanna Bogoslova i apostola Andreia’, paper, oil, 45 x 35, GTG, reproduced in Goldovskii, *Aleksandr Ivanov*, pp. 54, 152 (illustration, note with biblical texts).

⁸⁷ Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 497-500 (p. 498).

⁸⁸ Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. After Noah became drunk, Ham saw his nakedness (for which his son Canaan was cursed), while Shem and Japheth covered up his nakedness (for which they were rewarded). Shem is the ancestor of the Semitic races, while Japheth is commonly regarded as the father of the Europeans (according to a traditional reading of Gen. 10:5). Based on a link between the name *Iafet* and the adjective *iafe* (beautiful), Japheth has also been associated with the Greeks and their cult of beauty in art.

the achievements of European artists. However, Ivanov adds, these talented but self-taught artists cannot achieve their goal without their message being made plain to society in a clearly comprehensible form. Hence the need for the writer, who will take from the artist his truth and the essential laws of his existence and render them accessible through verbal explanation. This task must be carried out by Gogol, an ‘imposing man of letters’ (*predstavitel’noi literator*); the success of both writer and artist depends on this joint undertaking.

Ivanov is returning in a more determined and extended fashion to the proposal he had already made a year and a half earlier in his letter to Gogol of January 1847.⁸⁹ As noted above, this request upset Gogol at the time and he did not respond any more favourably to the painter’s repeated attempt to enlist his literary skills in support of his visual art. While Ivanov took pains to flatter Gogol by emphasising how crucial his role as verbal commentator would be, he left no room for doubt that the artist remained the primary agent of prophecy, communicated through the images that he created and the example of his life.

The final revelation of Ivanov’s image of prophecy (1858)

Although the two friends’ relations were restored on a superficial level, the underlying tension over who was to assume the leading prophetic role and whether this was to be expressed through images or words was never resolved during their lifetimes. After Gogol’s death in 1852, Ivanov continued to work on his painting obsessively, rarely allowing visitors into his studio. In the spring of 1857 he finally consented to show it to Aleksandra Fedorovna, the widow of Nicholas I, and then to select artists. When the influential patron of the arts, Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (married to Mikhail Pavlovich, the uncle of Alexander II) saw the painting in February 1858, she offered to pay for its transportation back to Russia.⁹⁰ Some twenty-eight years after his original departure for Rome, filled with trepidation at the prospect of returning home, Ivanov embarked on the lengthy journey through France and Germany, arriving in St Petersburg on 20 May 1858. Public excitement was stirred by numerous press reports announcing the long-awaited return of the artist and his celebrated work, soon to be unveiled.

The painting was first put on display in the White Hall, a grand room forming part of the Tsar’s own suite of rooms in the Winter Palace, decorated with Corinthian columns

⁸⁹ *Perepiska*, 2, p. 467.

⁹⁰ Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 16-17.

surmounted by statues of the arts. On 28 May 1858 Ivanov was granted a personal audience to show his work to Alexander II. The Tsar recalled having seen it in Rome (twenty years earlier, in December 1838), asked about the significance of the slave (no doubt related in his mind to the problematic issue of the serfs' emancipation) and thanked him at length.⁹¹ The painting was then transferred to the Academy of Arts on 9 June and exhibited to the public in a room chosen by Ivanov, alongside a large body of related studies and sketches, offered for sale together with photographs of the painting taken in Rome. One of these photographs was officially presented by Ivanov to the Petersburg Public Library, others were bought by members of the royal family.⁹² In this way the original image of prophecy was reproduced and disseminated to a wider audience.

Events appeared to be unfolding according to the utopian scenario mapped out by Ivanov in his 'Thoughts Arising upon Reading the Bible': the artist had completed a sacred image based upon his reading of a biblical text, presented it to the Tsar with an explanation of its significance, received the ruler's blessing and finally revealed it to the public. In actual fact, however, the situation was far from ideal. Ivanov's anxiety over how much he would be paid for his painting was exacerbated by endless rumours (the decision was delayed during the Tsar's absence from the capital).⁹³ Although the pomp surrounding the final return of the painting from Rome to the imperial capital and its unveiling to the Tsar bolstered the image's importance, Ivanov could no longer call upon Gogol to act as his mouthpiece and provide an appropriate verbal explication of his art. He was upset by a harsh review of his painting signed by V. V. Tolbin but evidently partly authored by his fellow artist F. A. Bruni.⁹⁴ When attending viewings at the Academy, alone and often unrecognized, he overheard visitors' comments and was confused by the public's failure to grasp the significance of his work.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Ivanov's letter to his brother S. A. Ivanov of 27-31 May 1858, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 606.

⁹² Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 16-17. On Ivanov's choice of a room at the Academy, see his letter to his brother S. A. Ivanov of 6 June 1858, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, p. 613. On the move of the painting to the Academy, see his letter to his brother S. A. Ivanov of 8-12 June 1858, in *ibid.*, pp. 618-619. On his gift of a photograph to the library, see 'Vospominaniia V. V. Stasova' (1879), in *ibid.*, p. 613. On sales of photographs to Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich and Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna, see *ibid.*, pp. 619, 622.

⁹³ Ivanov's letters to his brother S. A. Ivanov of 8-12 and 27 June 1858, in *ibid.*, pp. 619, 633.

⁹⁴ V. V. Tolbin, 'O kartine g. Ivanova', *Syn Otechestva*, 25, 22 June 1858, pp. 710-713, in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 624-625. Tolbin attacked the colours, figure of the slave, 'unchristian' nakedness, perspective and composition of the painting, as well as the detrimental influence of Overbeck. For Ivanov's reactions, see his letter to his brother S. A. Ivanov of 27 June 1858, in *ibid.*, pp. 633-634.

⁹⁵ See 'Vospominaniia V. V. Stasova' (1879), M. P. Botkin's account (1880) and the satirical description of visitors' comments by M. Z<aguliaev> (1858), in *ibid.*, pp. 620, 634, 636-637.

On 30 June Ivanov set off for the country estate of Sergievka near Peterhof to clarify the terms for the acquisition of the painting with the current President of the Academy of Arts, Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna (the sister of Alexander II and former pupil of Zhukovskii). He waited for three hours but was not received. He returned to the city upset and agitated, fell into a fever and died three days later, just before his fifty-second birthday. When a messenger finally arrived the next morning with an official letter informing the artist that the Tsar would purchase his painting for 15,000 roubles and had awarded him the order of St Vladimir, it was already too late.⁹⁶

Although Ivanov's death was clearly due to the cholera epidemic, widespread in Petersburg at the time, many of his contemporaries ascribed it to quite different causes, such as his failure to emerge victorious from the moral struggle that Gogol had written about, his return to the suffocating atmosphere of Russia, or the lack of recognition received by his work.⁹⁷ His sudden demise after the final unveiling of his painting was a potent factor sealing the myth of the holy artist, sacrificing his life on the altar of art dedicated to the Tsar and his people. If death is read in the Bakhtinian sense as the final creative act, retrospectively determining the meaning of an artist's life, then Ivanov's premature passing effectively established the myth of the *artist-prophet* in Russia, just as Pushkin's early death by duel in the same city some twenty years earlier had laid the ground for the myth of his redemption and status as national *poet-prophet*.⁹⁸

The importance of the visual image and its legacy to the tradition of art as prophecy

We have seen that Ivanov's image of prophecy, supplemented by Gogol's verbal comments, played a crucial, even pivotal role in establishing the Russian tradition of art as prophecy on a national level. We are now in a position to draw some more general conclusions about the importance of the visual image in this tradition and its long-term legacy.

Why did the image play such a significant role? Part of the answer to this question takes us back to our initial starting-point, to the prioritising of vision over word in biblical accounts of prophecy. Prophetic *vision* precedes *verbal* expression and is therefore on a

⁹⁶ See the detailed account in M. P. Botkin's letter to S. A. Ivanov of 27 July 1858, in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 17-18, and the descriptions of Ivanov's last days by D. A. Obolenskii, A. I. Herzen (1858) and M. P. Botkin (1880), in Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 637-639. Ivanov had originally hoped to receive 30,000 roubles for his painting.

⁹⁷ See the views of D. A. Obolenskii, V. A. Cherkasskii and A. F. Tiutcheva, in *ibid.*, pp. 640, 642, 645.

⁹⁸ See the section 'Martyrdom and Death as Moral Categories', in Davidson, 'The Moral Dimension of the Prophetic Ideal', pp. 510-514.

higher level. The prophet is defined as one who *sees*, his vision is complete and equated with fullness of understanding. As the modern equivalent of the original prophetic seer, the artist-prophet carries forward this unique ability to see with full vision. A natural consequence of the prioritising of the act of seeing over hearing in the reception of prophecy is the ranking of image over word in its transmission. The static image, which can embrace and convey the entire vision, is superior to the fragmented, sequential nature of verbal communication. It enables the viewer to take in the picture in one go, as a whole, in the same way as the prophet receives his initial vision. Images, once completed, create their own model of reality; they appear to 'exist' in the real world and can command a greater degree of authority than made-up texts, open to dispute.

These general differences were magnified in the case of Gogol and Ivanov by their different styles. Both artists had similar aspirations: to convey to contemporary Russians in artistic form the path by which a vision of harmony and spiritual wholeness could be attained. Gogol succeeded in providing a picture of the antithesis of this ideal in the first part of *Dead Souls*, but never managed to complete the ensuing parts showing the route to redemption. Although he was driven by the desire for wholeness, his works were marked by the very opposite -- by fragmentation of structure and literary technique. As Gary Cox has shown in his study of montage in Gogol, the writer's frequent use of visual blocks and tangential perspective led to a pervasive sense of disjointedness and division.⁹⁹ Even his last work, *Selected Passages*, designed to promote unity through its architecture and claims for the redemptive power of the divinely inspired prophetic word, was severely criticised by contemporaries for its fragmented structure and arrogant tone.¹⁰⁰

Ivanov, by contrast, created a vision of harmony; his painting exudes a static quality of serenity and calm, both in its composition and in the manner of its execution. It provides the viewer with the perfect illusion of being able to embrace the whole picture without sacrificing any of the details, and even manages to combine different temporal planes (past, present and future) on a single canvas. It is easy to understand why Gogol found his image so compelling; it was so utterly different from anything that he could produce in writing. Ivanov projected in visual art what Gogol was unable to convey in verbal form: a vision of redeemed

⁹⁹ Gary Cox, "Montage" in Gogol's *Dead Souls: The View from the Bachelor's Carriage*, in Anderson, *Russian Narrative & Visual Art*, pp. 63-77.

¹⁰⁰ See Lina Bernstein, *Gogol's Last Book: The Architectonics of Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, Birmingham Slavonic Monographs no.24, Birmingham, 1994, pp. 38, 101-103.

Russia and humanity. He created a modern icon in the style of Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, testifying to his own prophetic vision and enabling the contemporary viewer to take part in this vision.

Another reason for the perceived superiority of image over word lay in its public dimension of performance. The artist could be observed in his studio, creating the work of art, often over a period of many years, as was the case with Ivanov's magnum opus (twenty-four years from 1833 to 1857) or later in the century with Viktor Vasnetsov's 'Bogatyr's' (eighteen years from 1881 to 1898). The highly visible example of Ivanov, dedicating his whole life to art, provided Gogol with the model and disciple that he needed to validate his own status as literary prophet. The public dimension also made possible the involvement of high-profile patrons, including the Tsar and members of the imperial family; all the stages from initial viewings through monetary support to final purchase effectively transformed the private work of art into an object of national significance. Gogol had good reason to envy Ivanov, whose painting was personally viewed and funded by one heir to the throne and two subsequent Tsars.¹⁰¹ The writer could not possibly compete with this level of impact; the public readings he gave of his works were not well attended and often fell flat.

The high status of the image would not have been possible, however, without the element of verbal explanation that invariably accompanied its creation. Ivanov needed Gogol, just as in a later generation, Mikhail Vrubel would need Blok and Lev Bakst would need Viacheslav Ivanov to provide readings that aligned their work with prophetic tradition. The success of the image promoted the standing of the literary prophet, called upon to explain its sacred significance. The artist and the writer therefore often tended to work together in a partnership of mutual benefit.

What was the legacy of the relationship between Ivanov's image and Gogol's word? In the ensuing development of the tradition of art as prophecy, which would carry more weight -- the image or the word? Who would achieve greater prominence -- the artist-prophet or the writer-prophet? Would they collaborate or compete with each other?

To a considerable extent, the answer to these questions depended on the fashioning of Ivanov's posthumous reputation, a task largely determined by writers.

¹⁰¹ At the end of 1845 Nicholas I visited Ivanov's studio to see his work in progress. In a letter of 15/27 January 1846 to A. O. Smirnova Gogol described how he had glimpsed the Tsar from afar during his visit to Rome, but had not dared to introduce himself, as he had not yet achieved anything worthy of attracting the ruler's attention. He then commented on the Tsar's particularly favourable disposition to the Russian artists in Rome and on his high praise of Ivanov's painting (*Perepiska*, 2, pp.178-179).

After his death his reputation as a national prophet steadily grew.¹⁰² A key role in this process was played by Khomiakov, who embarked on a study of the artist's work after meeting him a few times in 1858.¹⁰³ In what turned out to be an extensive obituary article, he attributed Ivanov's death to his desire to live not for himself but for *all* Russians through his work. He overcame the latent tension between the competing myths of the artist and writer as prophets by skilfully combining them into a harmonious vision of joint architects building a unified national prophetic tradition: '[Ivanov] was the same in painting as Gogol was in writing and Kireevskii in philosophical thought'.¹⁰⁴

The view of Ivanov as a national prophet has subsequently become so well entrenched in Russia that it is reiterated unquestioningly. In 2006, for example, Grigorii Goldovskii rounded off his introduction to the Russian Museum's two-hundred year anniversary album on Ivanov with the hope that the 'Master's' utopian project of a golden age of Russian art would be realised by the time of his three-hundred year anniversary when Russia will have finished building the 'temple of humanity' envisaged by 'one of its greatest prophets'.¹⁰⁵

Khomiakov's vision of supportive cooperation was very much in tune with the unity of word and image in the biblical and iconographic traditions absorbed by Gogol and Ivanov into their literary and artistic representations of prophecy. Other contemporaries, however, emphasised differences and tension rather than unity and collaboration. Soon after Ivanov's death, his brother, the architect Sergei Ivanov, took pains to expose the deep rift that had existed between the artist's views and Gogol's ideas. In a frank letter to the art critic V. V. Stasov he attempted to correct a frequent misconception:

Do you really think that Gogol ever did anything important to determine the direction of A. A. Ivanov? [...] My brother never shared the same thoughts with Gogol, he

¹⁰² See the eulogistic memoirs and writings by F. I. Jordan (1879), P. M. Kovalevskii (1859), V. P. Gaevskii (1879), I. S. Turgenev (1861), K. D. Kavelin (1879), V. V. Stasov (1879), S. A. Ivanov (1862) and the extensive list of posthumous articles that appeared from 1858 to 1879 about the artist and his painting, compiled by N. P. Sobko, in Botkin, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 397-429, 472-477.

¹⁰³ Ivanov and Khomiakov met at the home of Jordan. On 6 June 1858 Ivanov wrote to his brother that Khomiakov wished to write an article about his painting. After his death, Khomiakov commented on how dear Ivanov had become to him over the course of their two or three meetings: 'He was a holy artist because of the humble attitude to religious art that constituted his whole life'. Vinogradov, *Aleksandr Ivanov v pis'makh*, pp. 613-614. Khomiakov owned several works by Ivanov, including the 'Venetian' oil sketch of the painting and the oil sketch of the full-size Christ, purchased for him from M. P. Botkin by I. S. Samarin (reproduced in Iovleva, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 53, 55); see the lists of works and their owners in Botkin, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, pp. 445-446, 461.

¹⁰⁴ Khomiakov, *PSS*, 3, p. 347.

¹⁰⁵ Goldovskii, *Aleksandr Ivanov*, p. 25.

never agreed with him internally, but at the same time he also never argued with him, avoiding whenever possible Gogol's unpleasant and, let's speak frankly, even insolent replies, which Gogol with his pride did not skimp on.¹⁰⁶

Not surprisingly, the balance between the collaborative and the competitive approaches to the relations between word and image continued to fluctuate throughout the nineteenth century. The increase in the number of prophetic writers towards the end of the century was matched in visual terms by a corresponding rise in the number of portraits of literary figures depicted with prophetic or Christ-like features. At the turn of the century the ethereal, visionary quality of Ivanov's late biblical works was given a new lease of life by Mikhail Vrubel (1856-1910). His remarkable series of prophets, starting with an illustration of Pushkin's 'Prophet' (1898) and culminating in 'The Vision of the Prophet Ezekiel' (1906), included his 'Head of a Prophet' (1904-1905), closely modelled on his own 'Self-portrait' (1904-1905).¹⁰⁷ These works not only captured the Silver Age resurgence of the cult of the artist as a prophet, they also reinforced the power of the visual image over the written word. As the poet Aleksandr Blok commented in his obituary essay on Vrubel of 1910: 'The worlds which he *saw*, we have not yet *seen in full*'.¹⁰⁸

A significant shift in the centre of gravity of this cult is reflected in the work of Mikhail Nesterov (1862-1942). 'The Soul of the People' (1914-1916) can be seen as an early twentieth-century response to Ivanov's 'Appearance of Christ to the People', indicating a new stage in the path of 'turning towards Christ' followed by the Russian people (Figure 9). Like its predecessor, it blends historical figures (the tsar) with contemporary prophetic thinkers (Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, Vladimir Solov'ev). Christ is now replaced by an icon of the Saviour, held up at the centre of a mixed crowd including priests, monks, nuns, writers and a soldier. The role of the prophet John the Baptist has passed to that of a dancing holy fool, leading the people not towards the Messiah, but towards a young blond boy (modelled on Nesterov's son), who walks towards the water. This representation of the soul of the people evokes the biblical verses 'a little child shall lead them' (Isa. 11:6) and 'unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Mat. 18:3). If Ivanov's

¹⁰⁶ S. A. Ivanov, Letter to V. V. Stasov of 15/3 May 1862, in Botkin, *Aleksandr Andreevich Ivanov*, p. 429. On Sergei Ivanov, see Liudmila Markina, 'Sergei Ivanov: v teni velikogo brata', *Tret'iakovskaia galereia*, 2007, 2, pp. 38-47 < <http://www.tg-m.ru/img/mag/2007/2/038-047.pdf> > [accessed 26 August 2012].

¹⁰⁷ I. Shumanova, 'Obrazy Proroka i Serafima v tvorchestve Mikhaila Vrubelia', <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/julia_zubareva/post125201431/> [accessed 27 August 2012].

¹⁰⁸ My italics. 'Pamiati Vrubelia', in Aleksandr Blok, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V. N. Orlov, 8 vols, Moscow and Leningrad, 1962, 5, p. 422.

painting depicted the prophet revealing the path of faith to the *narod*, Nesterov's response suggests that the people itself, led by its writers and empowered by the artist, has now become the carrier of this prophetic force. This compelling image of the national prophetic mission in Russian culture would not have been possible without the pioneering contribution of Ivanov's visual representation of prophecy. Neither, however, would it have been possible without the verbal contribution of writers, as Nesterov signalled in a later painting, daringly executed during the Soviet period. 'Holy Week' (1933) presents Gogol in a vast Russian landscape kneeling at the foot of the crucified Christ, while Dostoevskii stands behind him. Once more, following Ivanov, Gogol is cast as the one 'closest to Christ'.

The interactive dialogue between image and word in the construction of the Russian tradition of art as prophecy continues to develop. In 2009 a new film about Gogol directed by Natal'ia Bondarchuk was released, billed as the first cinematic attempt to lift the Soviet taboo on representing Gogol as a spiritual seeker. Significantly, its title, 'Gogol. Blizhaishii' ('Gogol. The closest') and opening episode were taken from Ivanov's painting. Yet again, this time through the mixed visual and verbal medium of film, the artist's image of prophecy was used to validate the myth of the writer as a national prophet.