Contents

Acknowledgments

I was a young man when my father gifted me a book by an author whose name I had never heard before—Lev Shestov (the book was *In Job's Balance*, in Italian translation). "I thought you might appreciate it," he said. My appreciation turned immediately into a desire to study Russian philosophy, learn the Russian language, and indeed to explore Shestov's thought in depth. Suddenly, a whole Russian world I had not been aware of opened up to me—and Shestov was the key to this world. At the same time, I realized that despite the large number of translations of his works in foreign languages, full studies on him were considerably fewer and often incomplete. At that time, Shestov remained to all intents and purposes a mystery: up to the mid-1990s, for instance, his first work on Shakespeare had been read by only a few scholars and his prerevolutionary life in Russia was still largely unknown, especially outside the country. From that point on, I began my long and productive quest: my first trip to Saint Petersburg in the early 1990s to find materials in libraries; my studies at The Lev Shestov Archive at the Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne in Paris; and many conversations with scholars who versed me in the complex and variegated context of Russian religious philosophy (in particular, I remember with gratitude an email exchange with James Scanlan). This work is the result of my long research on Shestov and of a "journey" extending over nearly thirty years. I should thank many people for this, but I will narrow down the list to some essential names: first of all, my father Bachisio, to whose memory I dedicate this work. Then, Ettore Marino, for our decisive conversations during long walks in Florence more than twenty years ago; Daniele Vinci and Massimiliano Spano, for their constant support; Anna Maiorova, for her precious help and for her wonderful generosity; and last, but not quite least, Karen Turnbull who revised my English throughout this book and, as always, was attentive and careful in helping me with this. I would also like to thank Igor Nemirovsky, the director of Academic Studies Press, for believing in this project from

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Editorial Notes

With few exceptions, all the quotations throughout this book have been made from the original Russian texts. All the translations from Russian and French are mine. Since Shestov loved to quote texts in the original language (mostly from German, Latin, and Greek) further translations from these languages, which are also mine, were sometimes required. For reasons of convenience and accessibility for readers, I decided to refer to the French edition of Natal'ya Baranova's biography, while a smaller number of Shestovian texts have been quoted from the English translations made by Bernard Martin. Since the entire context of this book is set against the historical backdrop of emigration from Russia to Europe, the spelling of names may differ depending on the original language of the quoted book: for example, Shestov/Chestov, Baranova/Baranoff, Shlëtser/Schloezer, Zen'kovskii/Zenkovsky, and so forth. But, luckily, these situations are limited. For the transliteration of Russian language into the Latin script, I adopted the BGN/PCGN system, with the sole exception of names that are quoted from books that employed another system. For citations, I used the author-date system with some integration. Since the final bibliography is divided in three sections (A, B, C) and a number of subsections (A1, A2; B1, B2, B3), the quotation sequence will be the following: author (surname), year of the book/article (when needed), and section with subsection (e.g., B1) in which the author's surname must be looked up. In sections A1 and A2, Shestov's publications are listed in chronological order, for each a list number will precede the year of publication of the book (or article) that is indicated: for example, Shestov 8/1993 (A1) (in this case, one must consult the eighth entry on the list in section A1 and within that, among the various indicated editions or translations, the item published in 1993). I have faith this system will be intuitive enough to be easily followed: it has, in my view, the significant advantage of providing a final bibliography list that, since it is divided into thematic sections, is undoubtedly clearer and easier to consult than one single alphabetic list.

Introduction

One of the most eminent Russian historians of the arts, Dmitrii Likhachëv, once wrote that Russian painting is above all a painting of faces (see Likhachëv [C], 23). The same could perhaps be said about Russian philosophy as a philosophy that portrays the human soul: not mere objects of knowledge or "landscapes" of reason but living human problems. Shestov would fit such a definition perfectly. Many—if not all—of his writings concern "people": they are works that indicate in their own titles the name of a personality (philosopher, writer, artist, intellectual). Shestov is primarily interested in *people* just as Russian painters were interested in *faces*. At the same time, he draws constant comparisons with the tradition of classic Western philosophy (Socrates, Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Pascal, Kant, Hegel, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl) in a way that few other Russian philosophers do. In this regard, he is undoubtedly a philosopher. But he is also a deep scrutinizer of people, that is, of "philosophical souls" in the way just described.

Lev Shestov (Lev Isaakovich Shvartsman), a Russian born in Kiev into a Jewish family, is mostly known in the Western world as a religious existential philosopher and also as one of the first philosophical interpreters of Dostoevskii, offering a fundamentally tragic reading of the author's late oeuvre. Following Vasilii Rozanov's lead, he identified *Notes from the Underground* as the turning point of, and key to, Dostoevskii's works. Although he always retained a clearly philosophical approach, at the beginning of his career Shestov worked as a literary critic in the circle of Russian artists and intellectuals that gravitated toward Sergei Dyagilev and his journal *Mir iskusstva* [The World of Art]. During those years (1901–1910), he wrote a number of essays on Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Shakespeare, Turgenev, Chekhov, Sologub, Ibsen, and others. After leaving Russia in 1920 to escape the Bolshevik takeover and finally settling in France, Shestov's interests increasingly turned away from moral philosophy and literature to focus on religion and theoretical philosophy instead. In the most

famous of the works he wrote in France between 1921 and 1938—*In Job's Balance, Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, and *Athens and Jerusalem*—he developed his predominant philosophical theme: the conflict between faith and reason. Using key notions such as "philosophy of tragedy" or "philosophy of the underground," Shestov marks the impossibility of any reconciliation between reason and the tragedy of human existence. Nor could morality be considered a defense against the chaos of an existence ruled by absurdity. This impossibility of reconciling rationality with actuality represents the tragic nucleus of the philosopher's thought, which was first presented in his second published book *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoi and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching* (1900) and continued to evolve with remarkable consistency throughout his career, with a significant shift towards religious themes in the latter part of his life. In this respect, the final two works he conceived *Athens and Jerusalem* and *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy* can be considered as the summa and coherently conclusive point of that evolution.

This study aims to analyze Shestov's philosophical work in all its individual parts, even the smaller and lesser-known articles and writings. There is a precise reason for this choice. The paradox as far as Shestov studies are concerned is that, although his works were translated into many languages and already appreciated throughout the world during his lifetime as well as after his death, there has been a much lower output of comprehensive studies on his thought. Shestov's style is always very clear and understandable. It should come as no surprise that Dmitrii Mirskii describes his as "the tidiest, the most elegant [. . .] in short, the most classical prose in the whole of modern Russian literature" (Mirsky [C], 175). This is one of the reasons why he had such extensive editorial success. But it could also be a red herring, as behind such misleading clarity the reader may be tempted to fall into overly easy interpretations. In fact, when it comes to writing a study or commentary on Shestov or his works, that is, in the case of specific "Shestovian scholarship," it too often seems impossible to escape a general discourse on wider dichotomies such as "reason vs. faith," "Athens vs. Jerusalem," "absolute vs. singularity," "logic vs. absurdity." After this "battle" of categories, the reader is left with only one possible Shestovian conclusion, that is, that reason is deceptive and life coincides with absurdity. In many cases, the scholarship on Shestov involves a considerable theoretical effort to push philosophy to its limits, which are the very limits of reason, and thus to face the end of philosophy itself. This is perfectly understandable, as Shestov himself offers such keys to interpreting his thought. On many occasions, he gives the impression of applying the same categories to every author he discusses. His readings on

the history of philosophy or on the history of literature appear anything but "unbiased." Many commentators have observed this: Albert Camus described Shestov's prose as "admirable monotony" (Camus 1991 [C], 23). Shestov's lifelong friend, Berdyaev, famously defined him as "a person with a single idea" (Berdyaev 1992 [C], 249), which he applied systematically to each different author and problem. In conversations with his friend, the poet Benjamin Fondane, Shestov himself referred to having been accused of "Shestovizing" any author he commented on (cf. Fondane [B1], 87).

It is, in many ways, true and undeniable that Shestov is "monotonous" and that he has perhaps one fundamental idea recurring through all of his writings. It is also indisputable that his arguments lead to a constant dead end of rationality, as in reasoning against reason he produces a sense of absurdity. But Shestov is also considerably more than this. In order to understand what that "absurdity" really means, beyond the appearance of a merely impracticable solution, one must look in a different direction, as it were, to uncover what Shestov himself strives to hide. Some of his closer friends, such as Benjamin Fondane and Boris de Schloezer, warned readers about the "traps" in Shestov's writings: nothing is exactly what it seems. Where all seems hopeless, there is hope; where the discourse does not appear objective, it is in fact objective. In introducing his thought, Paul Rostenne—one of the most influential French scholars of Shestov—once affirmed that "it is absolutely necessary to learn to read between the lines" of Shestov's philosophy, even of his repetitions or his apparent historical unreliability (Rostenne 1964 [B3], 340). Shestov's intuitions were relevant not at a first level of reading but, as he used to say, in a "second dimension of thought," that is, at an end point where things and facts are already beyond our consideration. (cf. Shestov 10/2007 [A1], 360-365) Thus, he does not read Tolstoi or Nietzsche in their actual texts but scrutinizes them at their deepest levels and discovers their ultimate results. Where did Tolstoi's, or Nietzsche's, or Dostoevskii's thought end up? What were their underlying assumptions? These were Shestov's questions, the only issues he was interested in—not the tangible level, but the often invisible or hidden "beginnings" and "ends." Not the facts in themselves, but their hindmost limits. I have reason to believe that, within this second and ultimate level, he came to many correct conclusions. Many of his intuitions were confirmed by history as they often came true: I am mostly thinking of Dostoevskii's and Nietzsche's tragic interpretations—which were highly fecund and appreciated in the twentieth century—but it would be interesting to also review his portraits of Plotinus, Kierkegaard, Tolstoi, Rozanov, Solov'ëv, Buber, V. Ivanov, Ibsen, and

many others in this light. Not to mention his ideas on Luther or St. Paul, or the possible development of a Jewish philosophy, as well as on the facts and revolutions of contemporary history. In this last case, his notorious detachment from historical facts or, as Dmitrii Mirskii would say, his well-rooted "common sense" (see Mirsky [C], 174), helped him to be more objective and stable than others in his, admittedly rare, consideration of politics and historical events. Shestov's oeuvre is full of such little "jewels," that is, small observations, details, and original quotations from the authors and people he describes. He was curious about the world around him, even or especially when he seemed uncaring of it. Each of his writings shows evidence of the same *osnovnaya ideya* [fundamental idea], as Berdyaev called it (Berdyaev 1938-39 [B3]), but it also conceals an original and often truthful vision of that specific author.

Shestov was certainly an atypical thinker. No wonder that, although he had considerable publishing success throughout the world and extensive influence especially in the philosophical tradition of Dostoevskii interpretations, he was not widely quoted within the early histories of Russian philosophy or the studies concerning the Russian religious renaissance. He was there—he was with Dyagilev, Benois, Merezhkovskii, Berdyaev, V. Ivanov, and the other protagonists of the "Renaissance"; he took part in meetings, groups, societies; he followed political and social events—but, at the same time, he was not "there." If any particular tendency or spirit of the time caught on, he usually took the opposite direction. As an intellectual, he was always idiosyncratic—he had his own way of dealing with historical and philosophical issues and situations, as if he were always "beyond" them. He could talk about Plotinus or Spinoza, or Dostoevskii, but in his analyses, he always flew above them as if their thought might be applicable to any time and any historical space. This is probably what he meant with the expression he liked so much: "to wander through the souls" [*stranstvovat' po dusham*]. Somehow, he believed there was a universal intuition that each of those authors had grasped—in different ways, the same intuition. But at the same time, he was able to identify specific differences among those authors and he had a gift for the relevant theoretical core of any given problem.

For all these reasons, Shestov's thought will be investigated in this work through all its individual explorations, giving importance to each of them. This study also intends to reveal Shestov from a number of less-considered aspects, including: an initial personal crisis; a defense of morality he sought to pursue at the beginning of his career; his first activity as a literary critic and his aesthetic thought; his relationship with the Russian philosophers; his political views; his studies on Greek philosophy; the experience of exile within the Russian émigré

community; the crucial role of Plotinus within his thought; his relationship with psychoanalysis; the shift towards a more religiously committed philosophy and a sort of return to Judaism; the heritage of his "only disciple" Fondane; the relevance of his meetings with Husserl; and finally the legacy of his thought in Europe.

Aside from its nature as an intellectual biography and an analysis of all of Shestov's works, this book also advances two main theses: one is of a more historical nature and the other is essentially philosophical. The first concerns the fact that Shestov's renown as a "lonely thinker" did not fully acknowledge the decisive influence he had on the development of a specifically tragic "Nietzschean-Dostoevskian conscience" within post-Solov'ëvian Russian religious philosophy and, later, within French and world existential philosophy. This idea is discussed in particular in chapters 1–3 as well as in the conclusion. The second thesis—which is dealt with in chapters 3 and 4, and in the concluding section—questions the idea that Shestov's philosophy is ultimately directed towards building an irrational thought or rather a religious-fideistic thought. As I aim to demonstrate, Shestov still remains firmly within the boundaries of Western philosophy (probably more than other—apparently less irrational—Russian religious philosophers do), albeit at its very edge and in a constant questioning of that "edge," just as the Neoplatonic tradition classically did from its beginnings. In this respect, he needs to rely upon those Western philosophers who can offer him the support for such a goal (i.e., remaining within a limit so as to question *that* limit). These philosophers are mainly Nietzsche, Pascal, Kierkegaard and, most significantly, Plotinus.[1] In a way—although a reversed and paradoxical one—Husserl also helps Shestov to define his quest for the ultimate limit of Western philosophy.[2] Such a quest—as is another implicit hypothesis of this book—lies within a wider paradigm of a "Russian (Neo-)Platonism" for which, at a certain point, the logos itself is called into question as an image of the true reality. Consequently, despite logos being the only "image," that is, the only way at disposal to reach that reality, it

1 The other nonexplicitly philosophical authors he relies on in a positive way (mainly, Shakespeare, Dostoevskii, and Luther) are however read through very strong Nietzschean and Neoplatonic/Augustinian lenses, that is, either as moral rebels in search of the real truth (e.g., some of Shakespeare's and Dostoevskii's heroes) or as those who are skeptical towards the full power of logos (Luther).

2 As is shown in appendix 1 of this book, Shestov sees Husserl as both the highest peak of rational-scientific thought in modern times, and also the one who pointed out the ultimate borders of that same rationality.

is also an unreliable tool in the search for the same truth. It is from this contradiction (in many ways of a Plotinian derivation) of a logos that is at the same time necessary and deceitful, that the main core of Shestov's "philosophy of tragedy" originates.

The analysis of Shestov's thought will follow a chronological order, although some leaps are not excluded where necessary, and later works may be anticipated from time to time solely to offer a better understanding of the issue under consideration. There are also sections that are not intended as analyses of specific books or essays but are, as it were, more theoretical or intertextual. They aim, in fact, to explain some crucial passages of his thought or to give some deeper hints as to how to interpret it. Where necessary, biographical and historical information will be provided. There is a hidden line of development following the events of Shestov's life: for this reason, the book is divided into four main chapters corresponding to the four epochal changes in his life and thought, and it is split in accordance with the two main parts of his biography—the Russian years (1866–1920) and the French years (1921–1938).

Chapter one deals with the early period of Shestov's activity, including his first four books (*Shakespeare and His Critic Brandes*, 1898; *The Good in the Teaching of Tolstoi and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching*, 1900; *Dostoevskii and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy*, 1903; *The Apotheosis of Groundlessness [An Experiment in Adogmatic Thought]*, 1905) and the general development of a "philosophy of tragedy," mostly following and commenting on Shakespeare's, Nietzsche's, and Dostoevskii's works. In this phase, Shestov is rather a skeptical philosopher (although he refused such a label) and he is mainly interested in the philosophical opposition between morality and truth.

Chapter two considers the years (1901–1910) in which Shestov worked mainly on the philosophical interpretation of literary works with a number of articles on Merezhkovskii, Shakespeare, Chekhov, Sologub, Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Ibsen, and an unpublished work on Turgenev. All these articles, except for the one on Turgenev, were eventually included in the two works *Beginnings and Endings* (1908) and *The Great Vigils* (1911). Through these essays Shestov was able to express his idea of art as a privileged place of truth—albeit a tragic truth, which eventually reveals its original bond with nothingness (see his article on Chekhov) but also the risk of taking the place of life itself (cf. his article on Ibsen).

Chapter three is concerned with a long transitional epoch of Shestov's life that started around 1911 and eventually ended up with his definitive exile from Russia (1920) and his early years in France. During this whole period,

he worked on a couple of projects that were published only after his death (a study on the history of Greek philosophy and a book on Luther), on a collection of articles that appeared in 1923 with the title *Potestas Clavium* [*The Power of Keys*], and on another collection of essays (*In Job's Balance: Peregrinations Through the Souls*, 1929) with some of his most famous readings of Dostoevskii, Plotinus, Pascal, Spinoza, and Tolstoi. In this part of his life, the discoveries of Luther, of some biblical themes, and of Greek philosophy are crucial to him in better defining his subsequent path.

In chapter four, finally, Shestov's last and more mature works are investigated (*Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, 1936; *Athens and Jerusalem*, 1938; and *Speculation and Revelation*, 1964). These works strongly reflect Shestov's more marked interest in the Bible and in Jewish thought as relevant philosophical sources, but also in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. In this original synthesis of an uncompromising Jewish consciousness with some distinctively Christian "tragic" traits (deriving mainly from Luther, Pascal, and Kierkegaard) lies one of the most peculiar results of his religious philosophy.

A concluding chapter is dedicated to a brief analysis and discussion on the historical results of Shestov's philosophy both in Russia and abroad; but also to an evaluation of some possible interpretations of his thought in terms of irrationalism and of "antiphilosophy"; and to a personal examination of his "quest for the limit" within a general paradigm of a Russian Neoplatonism. Finally, the three appendices at the end of the book are aimed at describing the three intellectual relationships that held the most significance for Shestov, and thus involved his entire life and thought, or a good part of them. These are the cases of his relationships with Edmund Husserl, the "master," with Nikolai Berdyaev, the "friend," and with Benjamin Fondane, the "disciple."

At the end of the book, the reader will find a reasoned bibliography that considers works by and on Shestov in three languages: Russian, French, and English. The bibliography is divided into three main sections and further subsections, which include Shestov's books but also his articles and edited correspondence; studies on Shestov (divided into biographies, memoirs, specific journals, and bibliographies; monographs on Shestov; journal articles and book chapters dedicated to him); and further references.

Part One

Shestov in Russia

CHAPTER I

The Philosophy Of Tragedy (1898–1905)

1.1 Introduction: The Birth of a Tragic Conscience

Lev Shestov's thought originates in the domain of the tragic and is directed toward the tragic. This affirmation, which can be easily ascribed to one of the purest Nietzschean motifs, is unquestionably true for a thinker like Shestov, whose philosophy stems from the concept of tragedy but, most of all, remains in it as if it were in a repetitive, inward-turned, often convoluted but still consistent process of self-development. Shestov is a tragic thinker and he reads everything through the lens of tragedy. Unlike the labels of "existentialist," "irrationalist," "nihilist," or "fideist," which Shestov never willingly tolerated for himself, the category of "tragic" à la Nietzsche—which he borrowed from the German philosopher and developed throughout his life—seems to perfectly fit the inner nature of his entire oeuvre.[1] Some of his most important achievements—in

1 This category indicates, even more explicitly than the aforementioned definitions do, the "aporetic nature" of a belief, that is, the "active impossibility" of something—the logical disjunction (or paradox) of a theoretical structure or of a practical situation. Existentialism, irrationalism, or nihilism are normally, in their own way (be it positive or negative), feasible fields or active possibilities for the thought itself. Less frequently, they are intended as aporias or irresolvable self-contradictions, as a "tragic thought" is meant to be. Not by chance, the first article that Shestov's "faithful disciple" Benjamin Fondane dedicated to him, in 1929, put the emphasis on this definition: "Un philosophe tragique: Léon Chestov" (see Fondane 1929a [B3]). In this text, Fondane insists on the aspect of profound "impasse" and "bankruptcy" of the Shestovian thought, which, as he explains, is a different concept than mere irrationality (147–150).

many ways some of the most recognizable marks he left on Russian and world thought—lie precisely in his tragic interpretations of Dostoevskii, Nietzsche, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, as well as in his criticism of whoever and whatever did not recognize or deliberately ignored the truth of the tragic, whether in philosophy or in other fields.

Therefore, answering the question "What, for Shestov, is the tragic?" would probably mean answering Shestov's most fundamental question—the one to which he devoted his whole life. Although the question of the term "tragedy" is explicitly posed only in the first chapter of this book in terms of Shestov's initial quest for a "philosophy of tragedy" in his first four books (largely, but not exclusively, intended as a critique of morality), the subsequent years of his life would be no less concerned with the same problem. Shestov's philosophical search would turn, in fact, to the quest for the tragic in art and literature (chapter two); in the personal lives and thought of the "souls" he was considering and interpreting at various times (chapter three); and, finally, in religious faith itself (chapter four), which to him is the pinnacle of tragedy. This is the development of his research as it is set out in this work, which closely follows the chronological events of his life and the publication of his works. The answer to the question of Shestov's definition of tragic will thus be dispersed throughout this book, although there will be a special focus on it in the last and concluding section.

But when did all this start? When did Shestov begin to be a philosopher? As he stated more than once (cf. Shestov 11/1982 [A1], 271; Fondane [B1], 148), his "first teacher of philosophy" was Shakespeare. By saying this, he meant of course that reading Shakespeare's tragedies raised in him some troubling questions and a deep crisis, in particular regarding the nature of morality. This happened, as we know from many sources,[2] around the mid-1890s, when Shestov was about thirty years old. In a rare and equally precious autobiographical note written in 1911 (Shestov 8/1911 [A2], 173–176), Shestov lists for the first time his earliest publications from those years, which appeared in the main literary journals of Kiev—although some of these works would

2 The first essential source is the biography of Lev Shestov, in two volumes, written by Shestov's second daughter Natal'ya Baranova (Natal'ya L'vovna Baranova-Shestova [1900–1993]), which was published first in Russian (1983) and then was translated in French (see Baranoff-Chestov 1991, 1993 [B1]). Natal'ya Baranova also published a complete bibliography of Shestov's works and a bibliography of studies on Shestov up to 1978 (see Baranoff-Chestov 1975 and 1978 [B1]).

remain virtually unknown up to present times.[3] But even before those early essayistic writings on Shakespeare, on Solov'ëv, but also on jurisprudential and financial issues—which were marked by a certain attraction towards the biggest questions on morality, justice, and the defense of human rights[4]—there

3 "In 1895, I wrote some articles (it seems to me, three) concerning literary and philosophical topics. These articles were not big; at that time, I was living in Kiev and for this reason, of course, I tried to get them to the Kievan journals. At the time, in Kiev, there were three journals: 'Kievlyanin,' 'Kievskoe slovo,' and 'Zhizn' i iskusstvo'" (Shestov 8/1911 [A2], 173). The first article that Shestov mentioned was published in *Zhizn' i iskusstvo*, with the title "Voprosy sovesti" [Questions of Conscience], while the second article "Georg Brandes o Gamlete" [Georg Brandes on Hamlet] appeared in *Kievskoe slovo*, and the third, "Zhurnal'noe obozrenie (O Vl. Solov'ëve)" [Journal Review (On Vl. Solov'ëv)], again in *Zhizn' i iskusstvo* (see Shestov 1/1895, Shestov 2/1895, and Shestov 3/1896 [A2]). Shestov did not sign these articles with his own name, however, but with pseudonyms or initials. As he explains in a somewhat polemical tone, the pseudonyms were due to the substantial changes made by *Zhizn' i iskusstvo* to his two articles, which eventually were not acknowledged as entirely his own (cf. Shestov 8/1911 [A2], 174). Also from 1896 is another text (Ms. 2110-1, file 91, The Lev Shestov Archive, Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Paris) entitled "Idealizm i simvolizm 'Severnogo vestnika'" [Idealism and Symbolism of the *Severnyi vestnik*], which appeared in *Zhizn' i iskusstvo* (see Shestov 4/1896 [A2]) and was republished in 1979 in *Russian Literature Triquarterly* (see Shestov 21/1979 [A2]), in which Shestov reviews numbers 11 and 12 (1895) and number 1 (1896) of the journal *Severnyi vestnik*. Here, as Natal'ya Baranova also remarks, Shestov shows an "admiration for the people of the 1860s and for the positive preaching of Tolstoi" that he would later recant (Baranoff-Chestov 1991 [B1], 29). For a general analysis of this earliest production by Shestov, see in particular Vorozhikhina 2019 (B3) and Ermichëv (B3).

4 In a recent study (2019), Kseniya Vorozhikhina discovered a whole unknown essayistic output that Shestov produced between 1895 and 1900 for the Kievan journals *Zhizn' i iskusstvo* and *Kievskoe slovo* (see Vorozhikhina 2019 [B3]). During this time, Shestov repeatedly collaborated with these journals and he was probably looking for a columnist position with them. The articles written and published within this lapse of time are seemingly much more numerous than the four mentioned by Shestov and by Natal'ya Baranova (see previous note). In her analyses of these texts, Kseniya Vorozhikhina points out their general populist character, which followed the main trend of *Zhizn' i iskusstvo* in particular. They deal with various topics ranging from literary criticism to the defense of human rights in various forms (e.g., by supporting liberal reforms, such as the introduction of jury trials and softer forms of crime prevention), but they also deal with financial issues, in which he fought for a more equitable distribution of the tax burden. Shestov often discusses what the truest justice is and the difference between human and divine justice. According to Vorozhikhina, in these texts, "the future religious thinker appears to us from an unexpected perspective, that is, as a progressive populist and a literary critic, scourging decadents and symbolists, as a liberal-minded publicist and a lawyer, reflecting on possible ways to improve criminal law and the penitentiary system" (68). This humanitarian and even populist aspect of Shestov, which continues up to 1900, might seem strange considering the amoralistic and skeptical character of his writings starting precisely from 1900 onwards, in which he never tackled any of these subjects. As Vorozhikhina argues, their general tone and content reveal a

was "another" Shestov, with different interests and a different background. In this case, life and thought are intertwined and linked in a mutual and deeply significant bond.[5]

Shestov was born in Kiev, on February 12 (Old Style January 31) 1866, the first child of a large Jewish family (his real name was Yehuda Leib [Lev Isaakovich] Shvartsman). Unlike his father—a deeply committed Jewish observant who developed a shop into a huge textile manufacturing business—Shestov preferred the world of ideas and contemplation. At that time, like the most of his generation, Shestov was interested in politics and considered himself a revolutionary.[6] In 1883, for political reasons, he had to quit his secondary studies in Kiev and move to Moscow. After he concluded his studies, he began university in Moscow first in Mathematics and then in Law, which he continued to study also in Berlin for a whole semester. After returning to Moscow, he still had problems with authorities and was obliged to return to Kiev where he concluded his degree in 1889—not without some difficulties, since his thesis was precluded from publication by tsarist censorship with the judgment that if it were issued "it would be the revolution" (Fondane [B1], 86).[7] The

detachment from Marxism and an adherence to more general principles of nonviolence and of humanitarianism, for—as it seems—Shestov "did not pass from 'Marxism to idealism,' but from populism to religious philosophy" (60). There are over twenty of these articles, all signed with the initials "L. S." or the pseudonym "Reader," although not all of them can be definitively ascribed to Shestov. For a complete list of these works, see Vorozhikhina 2019 (B3).

5 In her remarkable monograph in French on Shestov (2010), Geneviève Piron dealt with his thought from exactly such a perspective: that is, through an "approche génétique" (as she defines it) of Shestov's works, Piron managed to find a number of mutual connections between his texts and his life (also by means of a complete reading of his manuscripts and letters). In this way, proceeding as it were with a "spiral direction"—that is, not chronological, not thematic—this study pointed out Shestov's "subjective critique" to the authors he commented on so as to finally display a sort of "archaeology of experience," in Piron's terms, which would reconstruct Shestov's "book of life" (see Piron [B2]. On Shestov's "subjective critique" see also Piron 2003 [B3]). In a different way but also with similar premises, Tat'yana Morozova's 2007 work seeks to establish a direct relationship between Shestov's life and thought: see Morozova (B2).

6 "I was a revolutionary from the age of 8, to the great despair of my father. I stopped being one much later, when the 'scientific,' Marxist socialism appeared" (Fondane [B1], 116). Shestov's revolutionary attitude found expression mostly in his difficult relationship with paternal authority. "As a matter of fact," Geneviève Piron writes, "the distinguishing element of Shestov's biography is that his 'radical' phase seems to have been in his childhood rather than in his university years" (Piron [B2], 100).

7 The thesis' title was probably "The Industrial Legislation in Russia," while the article deriving from it that the censorship council of Moscow prevented from being published was

prohibited publication of his thesis did not prevent Shestov's inscription in the list of lawyers in St. Petersburg (cf. Baranoff-Chestov 1991 [B1], 22). In 1890, he attended military service and then began an internship as a lawyer in Moscow. However, he soon realized he was not interested in such a career. He therefore returned to Kiev where he started to work in the family firm although his real interest turned to writing a number of literary texts and tales with an autobiographical character. But once again, he understood that it was not his real aptitude.[8] In his short autobiography, Shestov admits he unsuccessfully tried to get his literary works published but that even his friends seemed not to appreciate them (cf. Shestov 8/1911 [A2], 173). He had also a beautiful voice as a singer: singing was one of his most important passions and, as he once recalled, he missed out on a career as a singer because of an accident to his vocal chords.[9] During this time (1890–1894), Shestov was mostly trying to steer away from paternal authority and from Jewish tradition: following a secret liaison with a Russian Orthodox girl who worked in his father's house, Anna Listopadova, a son, Sergei Listopadov, was born in 1892. As Natal'ya Baranova affirms, Shestov was always very attached to his boy and took care of him until his early death, in 1917, in the Great War (cf. Baranoff-Chestov 1991 [B1], 33). For this and many other reasons, the relationship with his father became more and more difficult: Shestov had to keep his life secret from him. Yet the troubling quest for his true vocation—in which he swung from anarchist to lawyer, from literary writer to singer, and that somehow explains why Shestov began his "philosophical activity" only at the age of thirty—was not the main issue of his youth.

Even though his family situation provided a wealthy and comfortable upbringing, his early life was not easy. From 1870 up to the assassination of

entitled "The Situation of the Working Class in Russia" (cf. Shestov 8/1911 [A2], 173, and Baranoff-Chestov 1991 [B1], 21–22). Shestov's dissertations and works from his time at university have been lost. But their subjects were clear: they dealt with the new industrial legislation and the extreme poverty of workers (cf. Fondane [B1], 86).

8 Speaking to Benjamin Fondane in 1935, Shestov recognized that his unpublished prose stories were, in the end, "just bad" (see Fondane [B1], 86). Nevertheless, Natal'ya Baranova largely uses them to reconstruct Shestov's early life because, she writes, "they are interesting as they undoubtedly contain some autobiographical element" (Baranoff-Chestov 1991 [B1], 24–27). These mostly unfinished early texts (103 paper sheets in total for ten different draft stories) are held at The Lev Shestov Archive, Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne, Paris (Ms. 2110, files 102–111, possibly dated 1890–1896).

9 Cf., on this, Malakhieva-Mirovich 2011 (B1), 139; Gertsyk (B1), 101; and Baranoff-Chestov 1991 (B1), 27.