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Native Soil and literature

The full complexity of pochvennichestvo cannot be appreciated apart from the aesthetic theory from which it sprang. The entire conceptual framework of the native soil movement had originated with the organic criticism elaborated by Grigor'ev in the 1850s and was still sustained by its links with literature. The organic interpretation of Russian literature served the reciprocal functions of first revealing to the pochvenniki the hidden content of Russian nationality and then verifying the social and political theories that they constructed from the original revelations of literature. The aesthetic underpinnings of pochvennichestvo plainly betrayed its romantic roots. The romantics viewed the universe as an aesthetic creation and tried to make sense of reality in terms of an aesthetic idea. The pochvenniki, as we have seen, believed that the ideal developed through the history of a nation, and they looked to literature as the main vehicle of this development. Literature mediated between the national ideal, which dwelt potentially or unconsciously in the life of the people, and the self-conscious manifestations of the national ideal that were realized in the ever-changing life of society. In a parallel process, literature also served as the primary instrument for the reconciliation of universal Western civilization with Russian fraternity. It is not surprising that the pochvenniki who lived by literature should have stressed the importance of the writer in national development, but their exaggerated faith in the efficacy of literature in the shaping of the nation illustrated the severe limitations imposed by the authorities on other more direct means of influencing social development even in the relatively liberal period of the reforms.

The aesthetic theory of Vremia and later Epokha was virtually indistinguishable from Grigor'ev's organic criticism. There can be little doubt that Dostoevsky's ideas about an, which leaned heavily on Schelling's aesthetics, were borrowed from Grigor'ev. Not only were the general conclusions of the two men almost identical, but the vocabulary Dostoevsky employed and the arguments dearest to him were also often the same as those used by Grigor'ev in his pioneering articles of the 1850s. There were some differences of temperament between them. Dostoevsky never surrendered himself wholly to aesthetics as did Grigor'ev. Whereas Grigor'ev held that thought entered conscious life only through an, Dostoevsky looked on an as one among several agents of human consciousness. Although both stressed, as had the Slavophiles, the superiority of intuitive knowledge over conventional logical thought, Grigor'ev interpreted intuition more narrowly than did Dostoevsky. For Grigor'ev intuition was artistic intuition which was to him inseparable from religious intuition. He maintained that science, which as the product of the rationalistic activity of the intellect was lacking in the vitality of life, was inferior to an, which was organically linked to concrete reality. Art was the spontaneous product of life; science was the product of abstract reasoning from the categories of the mind. Dostoevsky would have disavowed little of this. He, nevertheless, believed that science, too, if it were rooted in practical life, was endowed with creative intuition. These minor differences did not, however, imperil his essential agreement with Grigor'ev on the meaning and function of an in human life.

The pochvenniki were interested principally in the role of the writer in the development of the nation. Although a few articles on the plastic arts and a series on music appeared in Vremia, most of the articles that raised aesthetic questions concerned literature. Since the pochvenniki assumed that the sources of life and literature were identical, literature was, in their view, the spontaneous expression of reality. The writer was the organic product of the time and place in which he was born and wrote. His work was never entirely personal but contained the essence of the social milieu in which it was created. Literature was, therefore, always true to life and always contemporary. Dostoevsky wrote:

The important thing is that art is always faithful to reality to the highest degree, its deviations are fleeting and temporary; an is not only always faithful to reality but cannot be anything else but true to contemporary reality. Otherwise it would not be real an. The mark of real art is that it is always contemporary, urgent and useful... Art which is not contemporary and does not answer contemporary needs cannot exist. If it does exist it is not an, it becomes shallow, degenerates, loses its power and all artistic value.

Since the essential characteristics of a given time and place were
ultimately joined to nationality, literature was, as Grigor'ev held, always profoundly national: 'The truly essential power of the manifestations of an in general and poetry in particular consists in their organic unity with life, with reality, of which they serve more or less as intelligible expressions cast in artistic forms. And since any life, any reality, is meaningless without its popular (narodnaya), that is, national (natsional'naia), envelope, it would be more correct to say that this power consists in an organic link with nationality (narodnost').

For the pochvenniki, then, literature was the direct, spontaneous, and positive expression of the life of the nation. It re-created the national life in artistic forms not as the writer wished it to be, in order to accord with some preconceived theory, but as it really was. In this way, literature penetrated the unconscious workings of the national life and bestowed on them a conscious existence. In their turn, these ideas, now consciously expressed in a work of literature through the intuitive genius of the writer, gradually became an imperative for the whole of society.

Literature was both the conscious expression of the national ideal at its most advanced level of development and the agent of its future development.

The pochvenniki, particularly Grigor'ev, believed that art directed life in a way rational thought could never do. Rational thought was grounded in conscious, or past life. But life moved too rapidly for thought to contain it for more than a fleeting moment. Grigor'ev echoed Tiutchev's line from the poem 'Silentium,' 'A thought once uttered is a lie,' and continued: 'Consciousness can explain only the past: artistic creativity hurls, so to speak, its clairvoyant views into the future, often very distant, and flings out sketches which only subsequent development fills in with colours.' The organic view, Grigor'ev concluded, 'embraced not only mind with its logical requirements and the theories to which these requirements inevitably give birth, but mind and its logical requirements -plus life and its organic manifestations.' Such views on the superiority of art to rational thinking and the propheticism of artistic creativity were common to contemporary idealists. Schelling had given them their clearest formulation in Germany, but they gained supporters throughout Europe and America as well as in Russia. Balzac and Proudhon in France, Coleridge and Carlyle in England, and Emerson in America shared Grigor'ev's faith in the almost mystical qualities of art.

The insistence of the pochvenniki that contemporary literature faithfully reflected Russian nationality contrasted starkly with the Slavophile view that most of the literary output of Russians was alien to the native soil. Although Konstantin Aksakov among the Slavophiles had, with characteristic extremism, advocated a frankly utilitarian approach to literature, he was not typical of the Slavophiles. Kireevsky, Khomiakov, and Samarin believed that under normal circumstances art was the product of the national spirit. In 1847 Khomiakov wrote that 'everywhere and in all times the arts were national. By analogy alone, it is impossible to suppose that the law has changed for Russia.' But, he continued, 'the spiritual power of a people creates through the artist' only when the internal life of the nation was whole. 'With us,' Khomiakov concluded, 'because of the division between life and knowledge, art is impossible.' Kireevsky had already remarked on the unoriginality of Russian literature in 1845. The classes from which most Russian writers originated, he contended, were in the thrall of Western ideas and forms and so were separated from the real life of the nation. Until the gap between knowledge, which was contained in the educated classes, and Russian life, which dwelled in the peasant, class, was bridged, Russian an would remain imitative.

The Slavophile view of Russian literature had not changed substantially from the 1840s. After the deaths of Kireevsky in 1856 and Khomiakov and K.S. Aksakov in 1860, I.S. Aksakov emerged as the leading Slavophile ideologist. In an anonymous article in Den', with a note appended by Aksakov in which he expressed his agreement with the author, it was argued that Russian literature reflected not Russian nationality (narodnost') but an independent gentry nationality (natsional'nost') that was grounded entirely in the western European experience of the gentry after the reforms of Peter the Great. Its significance lay only in the satirical works it produced which exposed the despair and uselessness of the Russian public. In a later article, Aksakov himself wrote that the true function of Russian literature since the time of Lomonosov had been to protest on behalf of life and nationality against Europeanization. In his view only Boltin, Fonvizin, Griboedov, and Gogol' had actually met this function. Their protest 'disturbed the spiritual and moral complacency of fashionable society which was comforting itself with a lie.'

The pochvenniki had no patience with such views. Grigor'ev had long ago denied that the mind and body, or thought and life, of Russia had ever been divided, and his long-standing denial that nationality could be fragmented in the way the Slavophiles supposed was reasserted in Vremia. Nationality embraced the ideals of all the strata of a society in an organic whole. There could be no such thing as, for example, peasant drama, because literature always expressed the ideal of the whole nation. In this sense, the pochvenniki believed literature to be profoundly democratic.
Although the *pochvenniki* believed that literature expressed the national ideal, they did not feel that it was confined by nationality. It will be recalled that it was their conviction that the national contained some aspect of universal humanity and so participated in universality. 'We are joined,' wrote Dostoevsky, 'both by our historical and our inner spiritual life to the historical past and to universal humanity'; Artistic talent consisted in the ability of the artist to convey universal ideals through the national idiom: 'Of course, in every talent there is something universally human, otherwise it would not be a talent; but even this universally human element is expressed in the colours of time, place and people.' The closer the ties of a nation with history and with the universal life of humanity, the richer was its own life and the better could it cope with progress and with intellectual and spiritual growth.

With his superior intuitive powers, the artist divined the simple, universal truths of human life. These truths gave character and significance to his work and constituted his point of view. An artist could not merely reflect reality passively or mechanically: 'A true artist cannot do this: he will inevitably reveal himself, be it in a painting, a story or a musical composition; he will mirror himself unwittingly, even against his will, he will declare himself with all his views, character and level of his development.' The *pochvenniki* were critical of what they called simple realism. The simple realist held a mirror up to life but soon discovered that he was incapable of distinguishing the essential from the contingent in the reflection. Without a universal ideal, he fell easy prey to conventional ideals and preconceived, a priori ideas. The inevitable result of such servility to the mundane was scepticism.

The *pochvenniki* rejected both the utilitarian definition of art and that of the school of art-for-art's sake. In terms similar to those he had used in the 1850s, Grigor'ev wrote in 1862:

Poetry is not the simple reflection of life, a process which is indifferent and unselective in its attitude toward the eternally diverse manifestations of life, but is the comprehension, the rationalization, the generalization of phenomena. In this is its meaning, importance, legitimacy and eternality - in spite of the doctrine of the theoreticians [utilitarians] who in the present condemn it to slavish service to theory and in the future to final annihilation as something unnecessary and useless, and also in spite of the doctrine of the literary gastronomes who turn it into a kind of *sauce piquante* of life.

Grigor'ev was certain that only an autonomous art, free from the limitations of conventional ideals and preconceived goals, truly served society. Under these conditions art was a moral force that bridged the gulf between the ideal and the real.

The most complete expression of Dostoevsky's aesthetic views was his 'Mr Dobroliubov and the Question of Art,' a withering outburst against the utilitarian theory of art of which Dostoevsky believed Dobroliubov to be Russia's leading exponent. He began his analysis with the remark that in recent years Russian criticism had become pettier and increasingly more vulgar. The cause was, he suggested, the growing misapprehensions among literary critics about the nature and function of art. Like Grigor'ev, Dostoevsky disavowed any sympathy for either of the two existing trends of criticism. In the school of art-for-art's sake he located those critics who held that art was an end in itself and was justified only by its internal content. There could be no question of the utility of art, in the view of these critics, because it was as much a part of man as were his arms and eyes. Art grew out of itself and was constrained by no external purpose. In the utilitarian school he put those critics who argued, on the contrary, that art should serve man directly in accordance with the demands of external social circumstances. If a society faced a particular problem it was the duty of artists to apply themselves to its immediate solution. Dostoevsky granted that some utilitarians regretted such wilful constraint on art, but nevertheless they regarded it as necessary in the interests of a good cause. To them, art must first be of immediate use to society.

The weakness for Dostoevsky of the utilitarian view was that in subordinating art to short-term social ends, the utilitarians, in his opinion, undermined the true utility of art. For in the long run, unconstrained art was useful not just to a single society but to the whole of mankind. Since time alone could determine what in art was truly useful, the prescription of the goals of art beforehand was destructive of its real purpose. Dostoevsky did not deny that it was right to 'urge, wish and ask' that a work of art deal with current problems but maintained it was wrong to 'demand' that it should do so. The utilitarians, he continued, dispensed with the requirement that a work of art be of artistic value, provided it possessed a clear and useful aim. Butan inartistic work, he asserted, never attained its aims and usually harmed the cause in the interests of which it was conceived. Dostoevsky defined artistic value as the ability of the writer, for example, to 'express his idea in the characters and images of the novel so clearly that the reader, on reading the novel, completely understands the idea of the writer exactly as the
Since for art to be real; in order to be real, it had to express its ideal in conformity with the spirit of its time and place, through recognizable characters. The greater was the artistry of the work, the greater its utility: 'The fact is that art is the best, the most convincing, the most indisputable, the most intelligible means for presenting to the masses precisely that cause about which you [Dobroliubov] are so concerned, the most businesslike way if you will, you who are a business-like man. Consequently, art is to the highest degree useful and useful precisely from your point of view. Why do you despise it and victimize it when it should really be given precedence over all other demands? To abandon art, Dostoevsky believed, was to surrender the most useful weapon in the struggle for truth and social contentment. But to demand that art be useful was to violate its inherently free nature and deprive it of its real utility.

From the beginning of time, Dostoevsky went on, art was inseparable from man and responded to his needs and ideals. Since art was the catalogue of the inherent creative capacities of man, it could not have aspirations other than those of man. If unconstrained by preconceived aims, art remained loyal to the ends of man: 'The more freely [art] develops, the more normally will it develop and sooner will it find its true and useful path. And since its interests and aims are the same as the aims of man whom it serves and with whom it is inseparably allied, then the freer its development, the more use will it bring to humanity.' The pochvenniki therefore defended the autonomy of the artist while at the same time asserting the utility of his creations.

The logical extreme of the utilitarian view, the pochvenniki believed, was the complete eradication of art. If it were to be judged only on the basis of its usefulness to the cause, its function would be eliminated if a better, alternative means for serving the cause could be found. 'In essence,' Dostoevsky addressed Dobroliubov, 'you despise poetry and art; ahead of all else, you have to have a cause, you are practical men.' Strakhov later took up the same argument. The materialists, he said, at least recognized the existence of art, although they subordinated artistic forms to real objects. But the nihilists had gone a step further. They refused to acknowledge art at all. Their only question about art was what does one need it for? Nihilism and art, he concluded, were mutually exclusive: 'Nihilism in art means simply the pure and naked negation of art and its phenomena as things absolutely unnecessary in life, as unworthy to live. In a word -art is no more. It has died, has become obsolete.'

The pochvenniki warned that the annihilation of art would be catastrophic for mankind. Apart from its leading, prophetic role in national development and its usefulness in representing the truth in living images to the masses, art performed a still more essential function in the world. For the pochvenniki believed that truth and beauty were inseparable: 'Beauty alone can embody truth, and such an embodiment communicates to us a vital confidence in the reality, the properties and the movement of truth. Naked thought obtained from the cerebral process alone, only through the path of logic ...always remains something alien to us.' Since art was man's link with the ideal, it was deeply moral; literature was the conscience of society, the source of its ethical notions.

Schelling maintained that artistic creativity arose from a sense of inner spiritual disharmony. Man's need for harmony drove him to search for beauty because the essence of beauty was perfect harmony. Dostoevsky fully accepted the view that art met man's longing for harmony and was necessary to his spiritual well-being:

And perhaps it is in this that the greatest secret of artistic creativity lies, namely that the image of beauty which art creates at once becomes an idol which is worshipped without any conditions. And why does it become an idol? It is because the need for beauty is more strongly developed when man is in discord with reality, in disharmony and conflict, that is, when he is most alive, because man is always alive precisely at that moment when he is searching for and trying to get something; then he experiences a most natural desire for everything that is harmonious, for tranquillity, and in beauty there is both harmony and tranquillity.

The penetration of beauty into life through art acted on man morally, imperceptibly transforming his spiritual world. The evocation of beauty as the salvation of the world was not a metaphor for the pochvenniki but represented to them a real spiritual process of reconciliation and harmonization. The romantic tendency to identify the aesthetic with the religious ideal was at work among the pochvenniki. Grigor'ev, as has been seen, had already associated Beauty with the Russian Christ in the 1850s. Dostoevsky had not by 1863 yet linked Beauty as the saviour of the world to Christ as the image of Beauty. It was, however, a powerful formula to which he was not for long to remain indifferent.

Literary criticism was Grigor'ev's chief intellectual preoccupation. It was therefore not surprising that he should have defended its independent role. But Dostoevsky also stressed the important functions of criticism: 'Art assists human development by its strong and powerful
form, acting on man in a plastic and image-forming fashion. But criticism is as natural and has as legitimate a role in the question of human development as has art. It consciously considers what art has represented to us only in forms. The whole force and lifeblood (sok) of social assumptions and convictions at a given moment are expressed in criticism.\(^\text{30}\) Whereas criticism did not, apparently, deprive thought of its spontaneity and contemporaneity, scholarly writing and journalistic popularization did. They were derivative because they synthesized ideas already consciously expressed in literature. History, according to the pochvenniki, occupied a position midway between artistic creativity and scientific synthesis. Grigor'ev did grant, however, that at its best, history moved entirely into art.\(^\text{30}\)

The resemblance between Dostoevsky's and Grigor'ev's theories about the process by which artistic types were created is equally as striking.\(^\text{31}\) The process encompassed three phases: copying, typification, and idealization. Realism, or naturalism, was the product of the first. To the pochvenniki, naturalism was the lowest form of artistic activity since only an immature aesthetic sensibility could be stimulated by mere copying. Rather, it was necessary for the artist to separate the inessential and untypical features of the character he was portraying from the essential and typical. The function of art was to reduce the character or phenomenon to its essence, thus typifying it. Far from copying reality, the artist reflected, and so transformed, reality through the prism of his ideal:

If [the artist] unconsciously describes only the object, we learn nothing; but the artist comes and conveys his views about the object to us, tells us what this phenomenon is called and will name for us the people participating in it, and sometimes name them in such a way that these names are transformed into a type and finally, when everyone believes in this type, its name becomes the household Word for all people who are related to this type. The more powerful the artist, the more truly and profoundly does he express his thought, his opinion about a social phenomenon, and the more he serves social consciousness ... The duty and calling of art are contained in this, and along with this, the role which art plays in social development is clearly defined.\(^\text{32}\)

The actual process of idealization took place when a character began to 'live an ideal life in the fantasy and in the work of the artist, to act and to speak in complete conformity to this character.'\(^\text{33}\)

Typification was a crucial concept for pochvennichestvo. For it was typification that made the identification of literature and life possible. Literature presented ideal or archetypal representations of living people or real phenomena. These representations not only reflected social reality, but, because they were ideal, also conditioned the development of social reality. Literature contained the very essence of the real social processes that were taking place and served as a barometer of impending social change. Consequently, it was in literature that the pochvenniki sought and found the traits of the national character and the course of its development, and it was to yet more literature that they turned to validate their previous findings.

They believed that, the processes of typification and idealization in modern Russian literature had begun in the works of Pushkin. Dostoevsky made Grigor'ev's earlier idealization of Pushkin his own. Pushkin penetrated the essence of Russian nationality, analysed the duality of the Russian character, and set the limits of the Russian ideal. 'Pushkin was everything,' Grigor'ev wrote, 'the basic component of our spiritual life, the reflection of our moral process, its spokesman, as mysterious as our life itself.'\(^\text{34}\) Pushkin had captured the schism in the Russian soul that exposure to Western civilization had caused. In the Byronesque type, personified by his characters Eugene Onegin and Aleko, he disclosed the plight of Russia's educated man who was cut off from the soil, alienated from life, and tormented by destructive egoism. From the 'predatory' type was descended a whole line of characters, among them Lermontov's Pechorin and Turgenev's Rudin. These types were the ideal side of the national character. He represented also Russia's claim to European nationality and to intellectual and spiritual independence within the circle of European nations. Pushkin, according to the
pochvenniki, synthesised all the conflicting tendencies of Western civilization in his works. Russian nationality did not live in isolation from the rest of civilization but incorporated all the European ideals which it had encountered since the reforms of Peter the Great. Dostoevsky saw Pushkin as conclusive evidence of the universality of Russia:

The phenomenon of Pushkin is proof that the tree of civilization has already borne fruit, and that the fruit is not rotten but is a noble, golden fruit. Everything that we could have found out about ourselves from our acquaintance with Europe we have found out; everything that civilization could make clear for us we have made clear for ourselves, and this knowledge has appeared to us in Pushkin, in the fullest, most harmonious form. We understand through him that the Russian ideal is wholeness, universal reconciliation and universal humanity.

Pushkin's sketch of Russian nationality was progressively being filled in with the colours of life itself, and his 'colossal significance' was becoming ever more apparent. Faith in the interpenetrability and interchangeability of life and literature was the distinguishing characteristic of pochvennichestvo. The pochvenniki supposed that literature, taking its lead from reality, incorporated in ideal forms the unconscious processes of life and influenced life by generating awareness of those processes. The study of literature became, in large part, a substitute for the study of life itself. Literature was offered in evidence as proof that certain desired changes in social attitudes and forms were actually taking place. As Dostoevsky wrote in 1861, 'We see in Pushkin the confirmation of all our thoughts...For all Russians, he is the living exposition in full artistic completeness of the Russian spirit.'

By their analysis of Russian literature after Pushkin the pochvenniki reinforced their initial interpretation. Lermontov, they believed, had given the critical and negative side of the Russian character its fullest expression. He had, however, also produced the humble type of Maksim Maksimich. Gogol' had continued the critical trend in his exposure of the vulgarity (poshlost') of vulgar men. In so doing he had unwittingly founded the natural school of Russian literature. Pisemsky, in his earlier works, and Ostrovsky had further elaborated the side of Russian nationality that Pushkin had only sketched in Belkin. Turgenev's whole evolution, which had culminated in the creation of Lavretsky, had been one of movement from the depiction of the predatory to representation of the humble type. And Dostoevsky was the first to enter the soul of the common people in his Notes from the House of the Dead. Other writers such as Pisemsky, in his more recent writings, and Goncharov reflected the narrow, suffocating ideals of the conservative gentry, the bigoted merchants, and the Germanized bureaucracy.

The pochvenniki were particularly incensed by Dobroliubov's interpretation of Ostrovsky's dramas. In his 'Dark Kingdom' and 'A Ray of Light in the Dark Kingdom,' the latter a review of the play The Storm, Dobroliubov portrayed Ostrovsky as a disciple of the accusatory literature of the natural school. In his opinion, Ostrovsky exposed the inhumanity and ignorance of the merchant world, the 'dark kingdom' that was characterized by its 'petty tyranny' (samodurstvo). The pochvenniki did not deny the accusatory aspect of Ostrovsky's work but believed there was more in the 'dark kingdom' than petty tyranny. They emphasized the dramatist's close links with the native soil. Above all Ostrovsky was national: 'Nevertheless, Ostrovsky's new word was no more or less than nationality, a word which, properly speaking, is already old, because the aspiration towards nationality in our literature did not begin with Ostrovsky, but in reality new because it is defined more precisely, more clearly and simply, though, without doubt, incompletely in his activity.' The types created by Ostrovsky portrayed merchant life as it was, in both its somber and bright guises. Much of what was good and beautiful in Russian life, the pochvenniki believed, was emerging through his sensitive pen. In the light of his first unfavourable impression of Ostrovsky's work. Dostoevsky was particularly generous in his private as well as his public utterances about it. In his notebooks, for example, he singled out a number of characters from one of Ostrovsky's plays as brilliant depictions of Russian man and eulogized the directness of Ostrovsky's relationship to his characters.

Grigor'ev believed that the search for roots that had begun with Pushkin had ended with Dostoevsky. Society, of course, lagged behind literature but was gradually squaring itself with the living ideals of which literature had made it aware. The parallel development in social life had seen a movement from westernism and its reaction, Slavophilism, to nihilism and its reaction, pochvennichestvo. In this organic transformation creative writing had played the leading part. Dostoevsky wrote in 1861 that Pushkin, Turgenev, and Ostrovsky could do more for Russian development than could the political section of the very finest journal. In the revelation of truth, the poetic manner was the most efficacious because 'poetry could not be opposed to truth.' Literature had not only exposed the roots of the national life, but also revealed the two sides of the Russian ideal. The need for the reconciliation of fraternity and universality had finally been recognized in life and in literature. The future role of literature was to secure their union and lead Russia to its proper destiny.
Art played a decisive role in pochvennichestvo. Not only was it the agent of social consciousness, but also it was a moral force that transfigured man's spiritual world through beauty. As the only activity of the human mind that was spontaneously informed by life, art alone contained life's dynamic and multi-faceted activity. The artist was rooted in the soil of his nation, but artistic genius was also linked by intuition to those fixed and eternal ideals that underlay all reality and towards which all life tended. Since the aspirations of the human soul towards the ideal were always constant, the ideal content of art was the same in all times and places. But art always came dressed in national costume and concerned itself with the contemporary forms in which the eternal questions presented themselves. Aesthetic creativity was inherent in human nature and was inseparable from men's hopes and fears. As the product of its time and place, art could not but treat those hopes and fears in the context of contemporary reality. Though free from prescribed aims, art served both society, in its quest for the ideal, and humanity, in its search for harmony and tranquillity.

If aesthetics is the key to the understanding of the theory of pochvennichestvo, as the source from which it sprang, it is equally the key to the understanding of its limitations as an account of reality. By interpreting Russian social development through the prism of literature and by projecting their findings into an idealized future, the pochvenniki created a closed system that had almost no points of contact with reality. Grigor'ev was oblivious to the dangers. Dostoevsky, who once remarked that Grigor'ev, too, was only a theoretician, was more cautious. He felt compelled to refute the charge that the pochvenniki indulged in indiscriminate aestheticism. He asserted that pochvennichestvo interpreted society not entirely through literature but through literary criticism and science (nauka) as well. His protestations were, however, disingenuous. The pochvenniki discounted all criticism that did not accord with their own view of literature and refused to countenance any philosophical or scientific doctrine that did not support their ideal of Russian nationality, the nature of which they had predetermined by the interpretation of literature. The pochvenniki looked in literature and found what they yearned for; but so did the nihilists. Literature is not a transcript of reality, but a catalogue of human attitudes to reality. In this, Russian literature was faithful to life, but it could not be confined to a single interpretation.

The loyalty of the pochvenniki to literature, for all of its shortcomings as a guide to reality, is not difficult to understand. In periods of rapid transition, when the ideals that unite society are disintegrating and disagreements over new standards are pervasive, the search for some unifying principle is intensified. The romantics looked at human feelings and found them good; the pochvenniki looked at human feelings and found them not only good but also constant in their idealism. Literature was the realm of human feeling writ large, where men, with all their weaknesses showing, aspired together towards noble and worthy ends, and, where even heroic and tragic failures proved the value of the enterprise. Like idealists elsewhere in Europe, the pochvenniki reacted against what in Russia was called 'accusatory literature,' which in their view mocked and debased man by portraying only his lower nature. It was not the affair of art to conceal the worst sides of man, but neither was it its business to ignore human worth and idealism. For it was in the latter that men became one and the differences between them were erased. The pochvenniki therefore turned to a 'higher realism' that discovered in even the basest of characters the aspirations that bound man to man.