MY JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE

Harvey Goldblatt

Thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words about my journey through life generally and how I found my career path in particular. I shall place special emphasis on not only the rhythm of recurrent motifs that have governed my life but also the importance of certain contradictions I encountered early on. Finally, I am delighted to have the possibility of reflecting on more than fifty years of Yale connections as I approach my official retirement, which will begin on July 1, 2021.

History and Pre-History

I come from an immigrant Jewish family. I was born in the city of Hamilton, in the Canadian province of Ontario, on August 17, 1947, that is, during the surge of births that followed World War II throughout North America. Although born and raised as a Canadian baby boomer in Hamilton, the world of my fathers — even though utterly destroyed in the bloodlands of Eastern Europe several years before my birth — always remained very close and special to me and, indeed, never ceased to be an essential part of who I am and what I think.

After a very difficult journey, my father's family arrived in Hamilton in 1928, a mother and eight children but without my grandfather, who had died in 1925 in a small town called Seda, today in the northern part of the modern country of Lithuania. It is of note that I am named after my paternal grandfather, a humble rag-gatherer with

---

Harvey Goldblatt is emeritus professor of medieval Slavic literatures in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Yale University. Professor Goldblatt retired from teaching at Yale on June 30, 2021. A student of the eminent Italian Slavist Riccardo Picchio, who taught at Yale for two decades, Professor Goldblatt is the author of numerous publications on general problems of language debates in the Slavic world as well as specific works that deal with language speculation and the literary patrimony of the Orthodox Slavic community (*Slavia Orthodoxa*). His research interests extend from medieval Bulgarian and Serbian literature to the medieval and premodern East-Slavic heritage. Current projects include various aspects of the Cyrillo-Methodian literary tradition as well as a major study on the "Lay of Igor's Campaign," which will be published by the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. A two-volume collection of his studies appeared in print in Poland in 2019 under the title *Studies on the Medieval and Premodern Literary Civilization of Russia and Ukraine*. A volume of his articles on the writings and thought of the Ukrainian monk and cultural activist St. Ivan Vyshens'kyj will be published, in Ukrainian, by the Kyivan publishing house Krytyka, and the first English translation of the monk's complete writings will appear in the *Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature*. A collection of his studies, in Russian, will also soon be published in the series *Contemporary Western Rusistika Series* under the auspices of the Academic Studies Press. Finally, a multi-volume collection that contains approximately sixty of Riccardo Picchio's studies, all translated into English and annotated by Professor Goldblatt, will appear in late 2024.

a pushcart but also endowed with a beautiful singing voice, who always remained an essential component of a mythical past that I treasured.

My mother's family was finally reunited in Toronto in 1921, nine years after my maternal grandfather escaped alone from what today is Belarus to avoid being drafted for the second time (!) into the Russian army—or more precisely, to avoid being thrown into a Russian army truck for parts unknown. As early as 1904, at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war, my grandfather had been transported to the Far East, where he ultimately ended up in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp.

One other significant fact: whereas my mother was always referred to in my childhood as a "Canadian," given that she was born in Toronto a year after my grandmother and two siblings had arrived from a town called Bobruysk, located in the Mogilev Region of Belarus, my father, born in faraway Eastern Europe, was always considered an immigrant and was often called much worse by the local population. As my father learned early in life, the celebrated Canadian cultural mosaic—in contradistinction to the American melting pot—did not always mean that those Jewish immigrants were welcomed to meld together with other ethnicities in assimilation. More to the point, he was often not regarded as a "real Canadian."

Only thirteen years old when he arrived in Hamilton, my father received a total of three months of schooling—in the process of which he advanced from grade one to grade eight—before leaving school to start working at various jobs. Eventually he began peddling fruit—very successfully—on the streets of Hamilton; and, at about the time I was born, he opened a rather large grocery store in a town just outside of Hamilton; and still later, after a bankruptcy that deeply affected him, he would open what was called an army surplus store and sell work clothes to the many ethnic groups that had come to Hamilton, a leading center of steel production, for employment. I learned very early in *my* life that work seemed to be my father's life, and, indeed, as a youngster, I hardly ever saw him, except on Sundays. On the rare occasions when we spent time together, I was struck by his knowledge of the world and his intellectual curiosity. I still recall with great admiration and affection his favorite "game" with me in the car, when we would drive together to the jobbers in Toronto for the purpose of replenishing his store's merchandise. Suddenly, without warning, my father would bark at me: "What is the capital of Argentina?" "What is the capital of Latvia?" "What is the capital of Cambodia?" "What is the capital of Mongolia?" I was too young to answer many of his queries, but somehow, amazingly, he knew the answer to all of them! I would always be grateful to my father for any academic and intellectual successes I achieved later in life.

A Child Is Confronted with Some Contradictions

From my earliest years, I became fully aware of my Jewish origins and the importance of the Jewish heritage for my family, but with the caveat that only *some* of the Jewish traditions appeared to have been especially important for my father's family in

Hamilton. As I grew up, my inquiring mind wanted to know more, and more specifically, I desired to obtain direct answers to certain questions that puzzled me. More specifically, three unanswered questions (viz., not the four questions I encountered during the Passover Seder) occupied my mind. To be more precise: several perplexing contradictions left me especially uneasy.

The *first* contradiction: Although all family members that had remained in Lithuania and Belarus during World War II had been exterminated by either the Nazis or the local populations, and even if one of my aunts was a survivor of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, no member of my Hamilton family, not a single relative of any age, ever even *mentioned* the Holocaust. Every question I posed was met with dead silence, and this is probably why I became more consumed not only by the carnage and destruction of World War II, and the killing of millions of Jews, but also with *any* form of racial hatred or ethnic genocide.

The *second* contradiction is related to what I encountered in Hebrew school. I loved both Jewish history generally and Jewish religious history in particular, and there is no question that so very much of what I value today, in my seventy-fourth year, is what I held dear in my Hebrew school years. Regrettably, one of the badges of honor in Hebrew School was to misbehave, and I worked hard to be expelled from my classes with the same level of devotion that I manifested in my study of the Hebrew language and Jewish history when I wasn't disobeying my teachers. However, although it may remain a puzzling fact to some, ultimately I grew to love both the process of learning and the knowledge that I acquired at Hebrew school, and much of what I committed to memory in my remote past is still with me today.

In the evenings, and before going to sleep, I would read the books of the Old Testament. Strange as it may seem, I especially delighted in reading the seemingly endless book of Leviticus, with its 613 laws and commandments and the special emphasis dedicated to the crucial importance and sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. Yet in Hamilton, where I resided and where I was surrounded by a large number of uncles working—like my father—in their small army surplus stores, not a single one of them ever observed the Sabbath! To wit: none of my uncles or aunts ever went to the synagogue on Friday evening or Saturday morning. Only later in life did I begin to understand that my uncles and my father *had* to work on Friday evening and Saturday morning. In other words, if they had religiously observed the Sabbath, they would have been deprived of approximately half of their weekly earnings! At the time, this was the relatively simple answer offered by my father, his brothers, and his brothers-in-law, but it remained a serious contradiction for me for a number of years. I eventually assumed—as my meandering thoughts moved from one problem or concern to possible solutions for them—that the "sinful" departure from sacred tradition could apparently wait until the Jewish High Holidays, when my father and uncles could begin the process of repentance and be certain of, or at least hope for, God's merciful redemption.

The *third* contradiction, and perhaps most relevant for this series of recollections, concerns something that I had heard about and that often had been repeated in Hebrew school: namely, that the Jews were exceptional, for they were the people of the Book. Yet in all the homes I visited in Hamilton where my relatives resided, I never found a *single* book. I long searched for books but I never encountered them. This is why some years later when I began to work at Dominion Foundries—at the time, one of the two giant steel mills in Hamilton, called then the "Pittsburgh of Canada"—the first thing I did with my earnings was to buy for myself a desk and chair as well as a beautiful wooden bookcase with glass doors (which I still have) into which I placed with great joy two large dictionaries I had obtained. One was a Webster's dictionary, so beautiful to me then but now in tatters, and the other dictionary, instead, was my first Russian dictionary. The acquisition of the two dictionaries initiated a "way of life" and a loving devotion that eventually led me to assemble three basic collections of books: first, volumes in different Slavic languages and literatures of all ages; second, books on the Jewish and Christian religious traditions; and third, a set of dictionaries and bibles in many different Slavic and non-Slavic languages of all periods.

The Precious Discovery in Toronto

The reader of this essay might expect that—after my long and fruitless search for books in all of the Hamilton homes where my relatives lived—I would have been disheartened and even in despair. Fortunately, all was not lost; for in Toronto, I had an uncle who lived together with my maternal grandfather, whom I loved dearly and visited regularly. Lo and behold, in my uncle's living room, I found a set of books, in seven volumes, entitled *A History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*. I eagerly began to devour these volumes, finally able to stop thinking of why my Jewish family in Hamilton didn't have any books in their homes and concentrate on the copious amounts of knowledge I was now able to assimilate. I finally finished reading all seven volumes, and to this day, I consider the completion of what had seemed to be a "monumental task" at the time a significant moment in my intellectual development. Yet the *true* significance of those seven volumes was unlocked only a decade or so later, when I entered graduate school at Yale, in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures. Only then did I discover that the author of the volumes that I had read was Simon Dubnow, not only the greatest historian of the Jews in Russia and Poland but also the maternal grandfather of Victor Erlich, one of my beloved teachers at Yale. Early in my graduate school years, I also learned that Victor Erlich was the son of Henryk Erlich, a leading figure in the general Labor movement ("Bund") in Poland. These discoveries were accompanied by a growing realization that all my gifted professors in the Slavic department—namely, Victor Erlich, Robert L. Jackson, Alexander M. Schenker, Edward Stankiewicz, and Riccardo Picchio—were much more than remarkable scholars and wonderful teachers. Each of them was a veritable institution who provided a vivid recounting of his own rich and dramatic personal history as well as a constant reminder of what was best in

the Western humanistic tradition. My unique experiences with each of my professors enriched my knowledge of not only Judaic studies but also a multitude of other diverse areas of learning.

A Final Word about Growing Up in Hamilton

One last remark on growing up in Hamilton: this has to do with an enrichment class I attended when I was in grade seven. The class was taught by my first truly inspirational teacher, Mr. Donald Thomas. I still recall the manner in which Mr. Thomas would challenge us by asking us fundamental questions about life and death and making constant references to important historical events and persons. I vividly remember to this day how he would call my good friend not "Mark" but "Marcus Aurelius," thereby seemingly transporting us back to classical Rome, where we could visualize invading Germanic tribes and discern the philosophical musings of a great Roman emperor. Mr. Thomas's brilliance, kindness, decency, and humanity allowed us to spread our wings as both wordsmiths and thinkers. Moreover, I came to understand, perhaps for the first time, that the pursuit of learning would not only provide me with a true sense of satisfaction and a feeling of achievement but it could also serve to soften the blow of terrible events such as the one I had to endure on January 9, 1959, when my mother passed away at the age of thirty-five after a long and difficult illness. Indeed, I must confess, when she passed away it was not only the loss of my mother but essentially—I have to say—the virtual collapse of my family. Yes, times were going to be difficult, but I grew to understand that I could get some measure of relief from the kind of intellectual efforts I was beginning to enjoy and cultivate. Indeed, there is no question that my love of books and of diverse cultural and religious traditions remains an essential component of my well-being even in the face of the difficult moments we all must deal with.

In the early fall of 1960, I entered high school, and something very consequential happened as the result of my reconnection with a close childhood friend, whose name was Sandy, who was always excellent in school. As a matter of fact, I often was frustrated by him, because if I would receive a grade of 98 percent in a class examination, he inevitably would be given a grade of 99 percent! That was how it was from grade nine to grade twelve, but what is most relevant in this regard is how Sandy helped give me vital encouragement and crucial support for the intellectual path I was about to take. Thus, upon entering high school, I began to study languages with ever greater enthusiasm and devotion: I took French, German, Esperanto (very popular at the time), Greek, and Latin. I especially loved Latin.

However, it was not until I was fifteen years old and in my junior year in high school that traces of an intellectual trajectory finally began to take shape. More specifically, in the earlier part of my junior year, Sandy and I sought to expand our intellectual horizons still further by undertaking the study of the Russian language. Although many people around us considered Russian to be a strange and rather "exotic" subject,

we came to love the study of a language that was not offered in our high school curriculum. Even an awful textbook did not deter us from making great progress in the study of the language. In fact, after only a year of intense study, we began to visit the library at a local university to read Russian newspapers! As it turns out, we took up reading two of the most important Soviet newspapers (viz., *Pravda* and *Izvestiia*). Much to our surprise, we learned that only good things happened in the Soviet Union; that every single citizen was prosperous and content because of the achievements of Leninism-Marxism; and finally, that everyone in the Soviet Union was extremely happy, as the entire country moved steadily forward towards the era of "blissful" Communism. A year or so later, Sandy and I began to understand the powerful impact of propaganda and disinformation on young minds.

My College Years

In 1964, after completing grade twelve at Westdale High School in Hamilton, I entered McGill University in Montréal, then considered the best university in Canada. I began to study at McGill with the intention of fulfilling all my premedical requirements and then entering the university's prestigious medical school. After all, what else was there to study for a "nice Jewish boy" if he did not want to become a lawyer? Indeed, because many friends had chosen to pursue the study of medicine, so why not me? Thus, although I was not exhilarated by the study of physics, chemistry, biology, or mathematics, I understood that these subjects were a necessary "evil" if I desired to study medicine. The plain truth, however, is that I received very little advice or explicit guidance about a proper sense of direction in my studies, and, more to the point, I really didn't want to engage in the study of medicine and become a doctor.

Fortunately, I did select one course in my first year of college that truly excited me, and that was Russian. Ironically, in the many courses devoted to Russian language and literature I would subsequently take during my McGill years, my first-year course was the only one for which I did not receive an A. That really didn't matter to me, for by my second year of college it was clear to me that I would not only grudgingly continue to take my premedical requirements but would joyfully enter an honors program in Russian, with its own demanding set of requirements. So the die was cast: a decision had been made that would determine my career path and orient my intellectual trajectories in a particular direction.

A Year in the Soviet Union

Nonetheless, after my third year at McGill University, when I took a year off to spend a year at Moscow State University (MGU) in the Soviet Union—in accordance with the initiation of a private exchange program between MGU and McGill—I was surprised at the extent to which my time in Moscow immediately became one of the great experiences of my life. While all other Americans and Canadians studying in Moscow were doctoral candidates who faithfully "lived" in the Soviet archives every moment

they could, I was an undergraduate student who could do whatever I wanted, and so I sought to immerse myself in the language and culture of what I came to call the "Russian soul" or the "Russian idea."

It was a heady time to be in Moscow, from the late summer and fall of 1967 to the winter and spring of 1968. But for the Soviet Union and its adversaries, it was a crucial point in time on the world stage. On the one hand, I came to Moscow immediately after the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War (June 5–10, 1967) and long had to endure daily anti-Zionist propaganda and grotesque anti-Jewish caricatures in the leading Soviet newspapers and magazines. On the other hand, beginning in early 1968, I began to witness ferocious attacks on what came to be called the "Prague Spring" or "Socialism with a Human Face," culminating in the invasion of Czechoslakia by the Soviet Union and four of its Warsaw Pact allies on August 20–21, 1968.

In hindsight, which is more often than not twenty-twenty, it is easy to conclude that a nineteen-year-old Canadian was too young to understand fully what was happening in the Soviet Union and the world; on the other hand, I was able to continue to manifest my love of "all things Russian" by operating with a rigid distinction between the *evil* Soviet Union and the *enduring* beauty of Russian culture. Only later in life did I begin to comprehend that any solutions for the many problems and contradictions inherent in any aspect of Russian civilization and history required complex resolutions that had to be far more nuanced.

One final remark on my experiences in the Soviet Union: because I was the first North American undergraduate to spend a year at MGU as an exchange student (viz., in a special program *not* leading to a Soviet degree), and because the university bureaucracy continued to use the same term (*stazhër*) to refer to both me and the doctoral students, the administrators at MGU were unable to distinguish me from the other exchange students at the university. Moreover, inasmuch as they had never seen a North American undergraduate who was to spend an academic year in the Soviet Union, the solution was simple. I must be a graduate student, and if I wanted to live in the dormitory, eat in the student dining hall, and take courses in the Philological Faculty of the University, I could not possibly be anything but a doctoral candidate. Although I tried to make a case for my status, it never could be accepted as official, and after three weeks, in true Soviet style, I confessed that I had not told the truth, and, as it turned out, I was in fact a graduate student writing a doctoral dissertation. In fact, because in the world of Soviet reality I was a graduate student, I even gave a presentation on my nonexistent thesis which was very positively received, I am pleased to say. And when I finished my talk on the late writings of Leo Tolstoy, the alleged dissertation topic I had selected, I was asked to send "them" a copy of the doctoral thesis when it was completed, and I of course responded that I certainly would. This is a typical example of the many strange things that could happen in the Soviet Union, but the fact is that I gained so very much during my year in Moscow: not only true fluency in the language and an abiding love for all aspects of Russian culture but also a wonderful new companion who is still with

me. I have in mind the love and veneration I developed for all the works of Leo Tolstoy, including his nonfiction writings. I still recall with special fondness the many days I spent in the first hall of the Lenin State Library (as it was then called), with a perfect view of the Kremlin, reading all ninety volumes of Tolstoy's writings, and my love for "all things Tolstoy" remains with me to this day. Finally, when I returned to McGill for my final year of study as an undergraduate, I sought to improve my knowledge of "all things Russian" and began to associate almost exclusively with Russian speakers, and everything Russian seemed wonderful at the time!

My Graduate-School Years at Yale

As I was considering different places where I might continue with my studies, both in Canada and the United States, a fortunate stroke of serendipity—as my Yale students used to say—came my way. If it had not, I would never have undertaken graduate studies at Yale! The plain fact is that my intention was to enter the doctoral program in Slavic languages and literatures at the University of Toronto. At the time, my younger sister had moved from Hamilton and was living in Toronto after my father had died on January 6, 1969, and I felt obliged to take care of her. My idea was to spend a few years in the Toronto Slavic program before going on to medical school. Given that my academic record at McGill was excellent—I was ranked second in all the humanities programs at the university—and I was a resident of Ontario (resident of Hamilton), I expected to receive a substantial financial offer from Toronto. This was not to be, for some bizarre reason, and to my great fortune, I was *compelled* to accept a much more generous package from Yale.

Thus began my Yale life in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures in the early fall of 1969, with a focus in my first year on modern poetry and contemporary Russian prose in courses taught by an extraordinary faculty. I truly enjoyed being introduced to many aspects of modern Russian literature and Russian authors that I previously had never heard of. Nonetheless, by the second year of graduate study it was clear that my area of specialization would not be in a modern aspect of *Russian* literature but rather would be in the extensive fields of medieval and premodern *Slavic* literatures and that my academic orientation and so much more would be dominated by one teacher, namely, Riccardo Picchio, who had arrived at Yale from Italy in the fall of 1968 after resigning his position as professor of Slavic philology at the University of Rome (*Sapienza*).

The Impact of Professor Riccardo Picchio

It is difficult for me to overestimate the importance of Professor Picchio—in his capacity as my teacher and advisor and also through our very close personal relationship—for my future evolution as a scholar and citizen of the world. In point of fact, I find it exceedingly difficult to quantify his impact, and yet there is little doubt that he was the most important person in my life both intellectually and ethically for the more than

forty years we were together on this earth. Yes, he was a father figure, of course, but he was so much more than that. Throughout the many years of our collaboration, I often was called "Professor Picchio's disciple" who, it was said, seemed more like him than the "real Professor Picchio." What that meant was that my attempt at interpreting his brilliant syntheses and complex manner of explication appeared clearer and simpler in what I wrote than in his original texts or remarks.

It is true that in our relationship I saw the eventual emergence of unique and exemplary bonds, the very traditional ones between the perfect *maestro* and the imperfect *allievo*. At the same time, I believe, and this is something that still needs to be asserted, it would be a mistake to speak only about my past dependence on Professor Picchio's ideas and scholarly activity. The plain fact is that my critical temperament and my mode of tackling the Church Slavonic linguistic community and the Orthodox Slavic literary heritage proved quite different from my *maestro*'s general approach. On the one hand, Professor Picchio's brilliant ideas would generate *vast* cultural syntheses that would come to embrace an *entire* literary and historical landscape. My research, instead, involved the art of slow reading of *individual* literary monuments, to which I might then add a careful analysis of additional writings, with the aim of identifying in this *limited* body of works a network of connections, associations, and differences. It is no accident that I spent much time as a graduate student completing Professor Picchio's footnotes, given that he really didn't care for them, whereas I always liked them.

Finally, as I became more and more Italianized, and as I totally immersed myself in classical training and the world of humanistic learning in my daily encounters with my *maestro*, which began to condition much of my research, I sought to involve my Italian-born and European-trained teacher in the North American academic and nonacademic aspects of my life; I endeavored to explain what I considered the fundamental differences between America and Italy, even aiming to introduce him to the worlds of baseball and hockey. Regrettably, I was totally unsuccessful in this regard, and although I repeatedly attempted to break through the glass ceiling—that is, to smash the invisible barrier that separated European games and American sports—I was always met with the declaration that he "would remain faithful to soccer," and that was that.

What Professor Picchio Taught Me

Permit me to offer some remarks on the manner in which Professor Picchio influenced me, not so much to suggest that he was responsible for what I have published, on both sides of the Atlantic, or what I have stated at numerous academic conferences and universities, as to consider my research and teaching the faithful continuation of a strong humanistic tradition which he represented more passionately than anyone else I have ever encountered. Moreover, if there was one word that embodies what Professor Picchio taught me, it would be the term "philology." When he arrived in the United States in the late 1960s to teach early Slavic literary traditions, philology was still

considered—at least in scholarly communities such as in Italy and in Germany—the "handmaid of all historical disciplines" and the "matrix out of which all else springs," as was asserted by the celebrated scholar Ernst Robert Curtius. Among American scholars, however, the term had already fallen into disuse, or it was regarded as a rather old-fashioned European term that had never caught on and even was considered the equivalent to the study of what may be termed "dead linguistics."

It is important to emphasize that many of the scholarly debates concerning the applicability of the term "philology" for the study of literature took place at Yale. In the second half of the twentieth century, many American scholars believed that philology was no longer relevant for the main object of literary studies, namely, to evaluate works of literature as objects of art. As early as 1948, the great Yale comparatist René Wellek suggested that "philology" should be dropped from the lexicon of literary studies, declaring that it was open to misunderstanding because it had come to signify too broad a domain of applicability. Most important, negative evaluations had a great deal to do with an unfortunate rift if not total split between medievalists and their modernist colleagues. Finally, it is worthy of note that I have focused special attention on the crucial importance of philology in Professor Picchio's approach to both medieval *and* modern literature not only to emphasize a distinctive feature of my vision of humanistic scholarship but also to underscore my regret that at Yale and other American institutions of higher learning, the term "philology" and its applications to the study of topics in the Humanities have almost disappeared from view.

Nonetheless, it would be a serious error to conclude that all is lost and that philology is no longer relevant to the main objective of literary studies. Indeed, as the minds and hearts of increasing numbers of humanists turn away from their scholarly origins, it is important for us to not ignore either the passionate defenses of philology or the cautionary tales and warnings by notable scholars such as the great Romance philologist Yakov Malkiel, who pointed to several dispiriting but inevitable trends in scholarly research as early as the 1960s and argued for a general definition of the discipline that could be applied once again so that "philologists, as in the days of Boccaccio and Petrarch, can walk with their heads erect."

When Professor Picchio left Italy and began his teaching career at Yale, it soon became evident to him that he had little understanding of what had taken place in American universities, where even Greek and Latin—so essential to the humanistic discipline—were no longer obligatory subjects. Although he worked hard to assimilate a new way of teaching and learning, it is a fact that the task remained daunting. The notion that a graduate candidate focusing on Slavic literatures had never studied Latin remained a serious obstacle to complete assimilation into American academia. What this meant to me was that by the end of my second year at Yale, I was able to read Christian writings in both Greek and Latin, and by the end of my third year, I had achieved reading fluency in most Slavic languages. What this also suggested, at least to me, was the level of responsibility thrust upon anyone who wanted to be Professor

Picchio's "disciple," given that it seemed that he wanted me to know everything about Slavic languages and literatures and so much more! And I was the perfect complement to my "teacher from Italy" in the sense that I could say to him, "No! This is not what we usually do in America!" Most important, I bore witness to the extent to which he grew to take great pleasure in his academic position at Yale, and in his twenty years of teaching at the university, I also observed how colleagues and students grew to love and respect their "Professor of Medieval Slavic Literatures." Yes, it was a marvelous legacy to try and build on when I was appointed his successor in 1990.

While philology was at the very heart of what Professor Picchio taught me, it was not the only pressing concern that was reflected in his research. Of no less importance was his defense of an ideological stance that sought to counter the "Russocentric interpretive approach" to Slavic studies. By "Russocentric interpretive approach" I mean not only a clear preference for the study of linguistic and literary phenomena which belong to the cultural heritage of the Russian people—that is, the largest and geopolitically most important Slavic nation in the post–World War II (and especially post-Sputnik) era—but also a marked tendency to examine a given literary text or movement primarily (if not exclusively) from a Russian standpoint and thereby to minimize (if not ignore) a broader, comparative perspective. There is little doubt that the prevalence of this critical attitude has had a decidedly negative influence on the investigation of other Slavic national traditions, especially those with close interconnections, such as the Belarusian and Ukrainian cultural patrimonies, to the "long-lasting Russian civilization." Professor Picchio constantly warned against the excessive reliance on a *national* critical approach, that is, a Romantic interpretive legacy exalting the notions of "people" and "popular languages" and even seeking to transfer the modern acceptations of "nation" and "national" to periods when these concepts had entirely different meanings. What he saw as essential for the studies of literary traditions in the medieval and premodern periods was the need to evaluate the dialectal relationship between "larger" (supranational) and "smaller" (national), which could only be fully understood if one determined historically the specific functions of "confession" (*confessio*) and "nation" (*natio*), and even their convergence in certain circumstances.

Professor Picchio's critical orientation had a crucial influence on my research in many ways and in different fields and subfields, including comparative studies, poetics and rhetoric, literary genres, literary history, literary reception, textual criticism, and historiography (viz., the limits of any *single* interpretive approach). In this regard, of special concern for him were the chauvinistic excesses of a national perspective that significantly distorted the cultural history of a given people. It is not difficult to understand that Professor Picchio's intense dislike of any form of cultural sectarianism and its distortions was given a stimulus by the reality he had to confront in the early 1940s in fascist Italy. When he was twenty years old, in 1943, he went to study in Bulgaria. Shortly thereafter he was expelled from Bulgaria by the Italian authorities for not being a sufficiently "exemplary" fascist student. Professor Picchio's hatred of

fascism—and any form of totalitarian activity, as manifested in many *national* states during World War II—long dominated the structures of his thought, and he carried this way of thinking with him until his death on August 13, 2011. For him, humane values and humanistic studies, while distinguishable, could not and should not ever be separated.

A Full Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Yale

Beginning in the early 1990s, I began to publish my research which, while remaining the imperfect *allievo* to the perfect *maestro*, unconsciously expanded into fields unexplored by Professor Picchio. Nonetheless, the notion that I might be viewed as not being totally faithful and entirely devoted to his intellectual vision long weighed on me. In the late 1990s, I first published a study that was in direct contradistinction to what he had written some years before, and I even dared to criticize his methodology! I remember giving a copy of the yet-unpublished study to him. As I waited for him to read my paper, I worried about his response to what might be regarded as my "rebellion." Instead, he came out of his study with a smile on his face, and he then stared at me and said, "Bravo! You are right, and I was totally wrong!"

Although I enormously enjoyed my Yale career, by the 1990s it was not always easy to operate in accordance with an academic way of writing and teaching that remained dominant in Italy and Germany. Indeed, I did not always find the wiggle-room necessary to express ideas that were fully accepted by American scholarship. Indeed, many of my publications and lectures were welcomed more on the other side of the Atlantic than in the United States. In any event, the plain fact is that, beginning in the last decade of the twentieth century, my research began to move in directions different from what could be evidenced in the many decades of Professor Picchio's critical investigations of Slavic literary writings. This would include an increased focus on the following areas of research activity: (1) the thematic and rhetorical coincidences between medieval Slavic literature and the heroic epics of Western European medieval literature (especially Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, and Old French), (2) the meaning of icons and their place in Orthodox Christian worship and theology, and (3) new patterns of scriptural exegesis and their importance for a commentary on medieval Orthodox Slavic liturgical traditions and other Orthodox Slavic writings.

Permit me to conclude this presentation with an additional reference to the latter area of research (viz., scriptural exegesis) as a fitting reminder of a decades-long tradition of critical thought, which can be traced back to my childhood, when I was inspired by the Tanakh (viz., the canonical collection of Hebrew scriptures), which, as I learned many years later from the writings of Michael Fishbane and other celebrated scholars, are marked by an inherited *traditum* (viz., the received stuff of tradition), which through the process of *traditio* (viz., the activity of open textual transmission) was generally *transmuted* in accordance with new exigencies and thereby demonstrated how a culture can renew itself *hermeneutically* in a manner similar to what I would

discover in the diverse local traditions of the supranational Orthodox Slavic community. Thus, I can state with great satisfaction that my childhood not only allowed me to peruse the Torah (viz., the Five Books of Moses), with its instructions for a righteous life, but it also permitted me to examine the Nevi′im (viz., Prophets), with their plea for restoration, universal justice, and the defense of the vulnerable. Only now, in what might be considered my twilight years, has it become fully evident that had I not chosen to devote myself to the language speculation and literary patrimony of medieval Slavdom, I might have become a scholar lovingly engaged in the study of Talmudical hermeneutics!

Finally, it would be very remiss of me not to state, with much gratitude to all, that my Yale years made it possible for me to bring out the best in myself. I have been a very fortunate person indeed! Thank you, Yale!