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The Woman at the Window

Gorky's Revolutionary Madonna

Amy Singleton Adams

> A revolution is fruitful and able to renew life only when it happens first spiritually, in the minds of people, and only then physically on the streets and barricades. . . . [Otherwise,] it cannot change our life but will only increase brutality and evil.
>
> Maxim Gorky, 7 April 1918

DURING A JUNE 2009 CONVERSATION backstage at Moscow's Vakhtangov Theater, actress Dar'ia Maksimovna Peshkova expressed surprise that Western scholars were again researching Maxim Gorky; no one, she said, had asked her about her grandfather in twenty years.[1] By then, access to archival materials in the mid-1990s had already dispelled the stereotypical notion of Gorky as Lenin's uncritical supporter and the founder of Socialist Realism under Stalin.[2] Moreover, the early years of the twenty-first century would see a renewed interest in Gorky as an important writer and thinker of the Silver Age, whose intentions were those of a cultural preservationist rather than a political opportunist. Around the time of my meeting with Dar'ia Peshkova, scholars, writers, politicians, historians, and journalists were beginning to reevaluate the aesthetic merits of Gorky's work, focusing on his attempts to inject into early Soviet revolutionary philosophy and proletarian culture his own brand of collective humanism, or "God-building" (*Bogostroitel'stvo*).[3]

Following prevailing trends, the post-Soviet rediscovery of Gorky often highlights the same mytho-religious imagery and themes that Soviet era editors tried to eliminate.[4] Especially from the Russian side, contemporary descriptions of Gorky's writings take on a quasi-religious character of their own.[5] Pavel Basinskii's 2011 chronicle of Gorky's final days, for example, is imagined as a kind of passion play. In the 2008 film documentary *Gorky: A Living History* (Gor'kii: Zhivaia istoriia), award-winning Russian writer Dmitrii Bykov joins other post-Soviet interpreters in understanding Gorky's philosophy of God-building not as a spiritual form of Marxism but, rather, as a new kind of "Russian gospel."[6] Contextualizing Gorky in the fin-de-siècle atmosphere inspired by Nietzsche, Einstein, and the Bolsheviks, Bykov reexamines Gorky's notion of a "new heaven and new earth" (*novoe nebo i novaia zemlia*) inhabited by a new kind of person (*novyi chelovek*) who would differ fundamentally from the people who had lived before him.[7] The "reborn" person, as Gorky describes in *Untimely Thoughts* (Nesvoevremennye mysli, 1917–1918), would be remade morally, intellectually, and spiritually; works like *A Confession* (Ispoved', 1908) and *Mother* (Mat', 1906) call on familiar religious archetypes—at one time anathema to Soviet editors—to convey in rich but simple terms this vision of salvation.[8]

As tempting as it may be to claim revisionist thinking on the part of Gorky's contemporary readers, one has only to recall Lenin's vehement and methodical opposition to the writer's Capri School (1909–1913) and the notion of God-building itself to realize the value of such characterizations.[9] In the years surrounding the Russian Revolution, religious thought played an enormously important role in the struggle between the iconoclastic Bolsheviks and socialist intellectuals like Gorky who believed, as Richard Stites writes, "that bread and politics alone were not enough, that life had to be enriched by emotion, that communism itself was a kind of religious commitment, and that many people needed a unified set of rituals and symbols to bind their feelings to the goals of the regime."[10] Indeed, in her compelling study of political iconography during the early years of Soviet power, Victoria Bonnell shows how the Bolsheviks' concerns in 1917 were "not merely the seizure of power but [also] the seizure of meaning."[11] Soviet political posters, Bonnell continues,

> were the new icons—standardized images that depicted heroes (saints) and enemies (the devil and his accomplices) according to a fixed pattern (the so-called *podlinnik* in church art). The icons of Soviet political art did not reflect the social institutions and relations of the society. Rather, they were part of a system of signs imposed by the authorities in an effort to transform mass consciousness. Like other "invented traditions," the iconographic images

were consistent and incessantly repeated, and they resonated strongly with mythologies from the Russian past.[12]

As highly symbolic visual texts, early Soviet political posters functioned like the sacred icons Russians traditionally deciphered through a similar system of signs, or semiotics.[13] However, the field of symbols that comprised these iconographic images could also became a field of battle as various political and cultural forces often envisioned the "sacred" values of the revolution in conflicting ways.[14]

In his writings and literary works, Gorky's descriptions of the Mother of God icons and of characters that imitate that icon type in their appearance or pose provide the central metaphor of his God-building philosophy—the human and (mostly female) face of cultural and spiritual rebirth—and of his vision of what fellow writer Isaac Babel called a "good" revolution.[15] Gorky's metaphor is enhanced by the semiotic nature of the icon and by the Russian treatment of the sacred image as a sacramental sign (in which the line between the image and the thing itself is blurred), giving rise to the ekphrastic motif of the revolutionary Madonna.[16] In literary works such as "Twenty-Six and One" ("Dvadtsat' shest' i odna," 1899), *Mother* (Mat'), and *A Confession*, and in his later journalistic essays, Gorky draws ironic and non-ironic comparisons between female characters and Mother of God icons. Doing so, he demonstrates firstly his knowledge of the formal conventions of icon painting (the *podlinniki* to which Bonnell refers) that he acquired as a young apprentice in a Nizhnii Novgorod icon workshop, an experience he describes in the second part of his autobiographical trilogy, *In the World* (V liudiakh, 1916).[17] In this account, he expresses a clear preference for the Mother of God icon types he lists, although he finds something sterile and stiff about the images that the workshop's painters produce. "From my grandmother's stories," he writes, "I imagined the *bogoroditsa* as young, pretty, and kind, like the paintings in magazines. But their icons portrayed her as old and stern, with a long, crooked nose and wooden hands."[18] Throughout this episode, Gorky repeatedly draws attention to the eyes and other facial features of the Mother of God icons, further underscoring his fascination with the face by describing his extreme discomfort at the sight of the unfinished, faceless icons that line the walls of the workshop. Gorky's early writing often describes women's faces with the recognizable attributes and symbolism of the Orthodox icon—a face with large, lachrymose eyes often foregrounded against rays of sun, birds, and other prescribed symbols. Gorky also provides some kind of frame for these women. For example, he depicts them in doorways, windows, lying prone in wagons, and ringed by workers to create an icon-like composition.[19]

These "frames" function iconographically, establishing a boundary between two worlds: sacred and profane, "heaven" and "hell," revolutionary and prerevolutionary.

But, most importantly, these frames and the literary icons they define signify points in the narratives that develop Gorky's vision of a spiritual revolution in which women as sacred mothers play a central role. It is not surprising that, in *Untimely Thoughts*, Gorky lists the qualities of a "good" revolution as qualities mainly thought to be possessed by women: love, compassion, and warmth of feeling toward humanity.[20] Within the context of his God-building philosophy, Gorky's heroines—as living literary icons—embody and reflect the universal and collective energy of the people, breathing new life into exhausted forms of culture and faith.[21] In actual practice, the power of the icon is believed to be refreshed by repainting or by replacing the decorative overlay (*oklad*).[22] Imitating such practices symbolically, Gorky often "reframes" his literary icons to challenge the authenticity of revolutionary ideals and to demonstrate the collective power of his revolutionary Madonnas. Ultimately, reading through this motif gives shape to Gorky's attempts to influence the moral character of the revolution and provides a better understanding about why Lenin aggressively prevented the God-building movement from taking shape and flourishing.

GORKY IN THE CONTEXT OF SILVER AGE THOUGHT

Although marked by political and social upheaval, the Silver Age in Russia (1890s to the early 1920s) was a period of tremendous creativity and innovation in the Russian arts. For Gorky and other Silver Age writers like Isaac Babel, Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and Evgenii Zamiatin, philosophical and religious themes and symbolism were especially potent ways to describe the promise of cultural and spiritual renewal that seemed almost palpable in the revolutionary climate. However, while his contemporaries appreciated Gorky as an artist, Edward Brown rightly notes that he did not "properly fit any of the classifications so far established in the world of Russian writing."[23] But Gorky did fit—at that moment in Russian history and by virtue of his somewhat legendary biography—the image of the "new" Russian writer.[24] And, in this role, Gorky occupied the center of literary discussion and production, from the *Sreda* circle (named for its Wednesday meetings) and its *Znanie* (Knowledge) publishing house, to the later House of the Arts and the World Literature project, as well as organizations designed to provide material support and pleas for release from imprisonment (or even execution) to scholars, artists,

and writers.[25] Famously dubbed the "Noah of the Russian Intelligentsia," Gorky nurtured both the writers and their work.[26] "His role in shaping the newborn Soviet literature of the twenties," Konstantin Fedin writes, "was a tremendous one and his interest in the fate of a writer often determined the entire further development of a talented person and brightened the path of many a young writer."[27]

The giants of the Silver Age were the Symbolists, among them Valerii Briusov, Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and Fedor Sologub. As a group, the Symbolists of the early twentieth century were influenced primarily by the mystically transcendent worldview of Vladimir Solov'ev, whose vision of absolute unity among people and ideas, as Natalia Ermolaev's essay shows, was particularly appealing in such turbulent times. Fittingly, and almost by definition, Solov'ev's philosophy also represented a rejection of past social conventions and a protest against the limitations of ordinary language to express real meaning. Especially in the early revolutionary period, Solov'ev's ideas strongly influenced the Russian liberal intelligentsia, whose "God-seeking" (*Bogoiskatel'stvo*) movement was considered a renewed form of Christianity that opposed the old Orthodox faith and was marked by an anxious search and spiritual craving for meaning.[28] The modernist urge to transform or even transfigure faith and the world through art, however, still relied on the revival of older Orthodox forms to manifest its ideas. Thus, throughout Symbolist poetry and prose, complex images of Christ, Blok's Beautiful Lady (Prekrasnaia dama), and Sophia (the incarnation of Divine Wisdom) represent Symbolist ideas about spiritual unity, Sophiology, and Godmanhood.[29]

Gorky read and admired Solov'ev's work, even expressing regret in a 1912 letter to Vasilii Rozanov that—as with other "heretics" of the revolution—Solov'ev's "servitude to God" would go the way of the Khazars.[30] But in the case of the God-seekers, Gorky has strong words. The presumptive founder of the God-seeking movement Dmitrii Merezhkovskii is a "swindler and a clever little beast" who deserves "two or three good slaps in the face," while his followers are "little people who have taken to searching for God out of shame for the emptiness of their lives."[31] Despite these characterizations, Gorky does invoke what Barry Scherr calls the "impulses" of God-seeking in the novel *A Confession*, especially in those episodes from the peripatetic Matvei's life that also echo the "seeking" genres of the saint's life, bildungsroman, adventure novel, or the confession.[32] But, like Dostoevsky before him, Gorky modifies the conventions of religious autobiography to redirect spiritual self-discovery toward others and collective salvation.[33]

This push toward the realization of the collective self ultimately overshadows and undermines the elements of God-seeking in *A Confession* (and, as

Gary Rosenshield shows in the case of Dostoevsky, the genre of confession itself), offering instead an interpretation of Gorky's political philosophy of God-building. Doing so, Gorky is careful to portray not only the essential humanism of his philosophy, but also the "miraculous power" of the collective itself. "In my new novella," he writes to his wife in February of 1908, "I have tried to illuminate the path towards a merger with the whole; it is in this merger, and nowhere else, that happiness and the source of the highest spiritual pleasures are to be found."[34] This "merger" of the individual with the collective is capable, Gorky shows, even of earthly "miracles"—healings, resurrections, and salvation—usually associated, as Christine Worobec shows, with church-sanctioned icons and God himself.[35] But Gorky's vision of spiritual unity is based in the *human* collective. "Every individual, if he is a spiritually sound being, ought to be striving towards the world and not away from it—that's the thesis of my novella," he writes.[36] In *A Confession* and other works, it is often a female figure, one of Gorky's "living" miracle-working icons, that focuses the energy of the collective and demonstrates the possibility of collective salvation. Doing so, she transcends her own individuality, embodying the humane at the heart of the collective experience. "Everything personal is amazingly insignificant," Gorky continues in his description of *A Confession*, "of this I am convinced. It is not that I'm recommending a renunciation of the self, not at all. I am just talking about the need to find, to comprehend, and to cultivate the humane within one's self. There is little of the humane in the personal."[37] For Gorky, the ideal image of the collective self looked very much like the Mother of God icon.

REFRAMING THE WOMAN AT THE WINDOW: IDOLS AND ICONS

For Gorky, all women are mothers, either actual or—with the Mother of God as a model—symbolic. "A woman in my view," he writes in one of his 1918 essays for the daily newspaper *New Life* (Novaia zhizn') "is first and foremost a mother, though physically she may be a virgin; she is a mother in her feelings not only toward her children but also toward her husband, lover, and in general toward humanity."[38] Russian women, Gorky writes, have a "great cultural role." He envisions them as the "spiritual mothers" whose "creative powers" and maternal joy, although challenged by the "chaos of revolutionary days," will give birth to a "new" person. "You howl like beasts at the moment of birth and you smile the happy smile of the Virgin, pressing the newborn to your breast," he writes, "And I wish with all my heart, with all my soul that you should soon smile the smile of the Madonna, pressing to your breast the newborn people of

Russia!"[39] Gorky urges Russian "mothers" to remain true to what he calls their "psychophysiology"—the urge to give life rather than destroy it—by nurturing the spiritual elements of the revolution. "Physical mothers of the human world," he writes, "you could be its spiritual mothers as well."[40] Women need to introduce "something bright and good" into the revolution, he urges, and become representatives of the "revolutionary" values of "love," "compassion," "softness," "warmth," and "tenderness."[41] "Russia will not perish," he writes, "if you mothers will sacrificially pour everything beautiful, everything tender which is in your souls into the bloody and filthy chaos of these times."[42] Culturally and spiritually significant, the role of mothers in revolutionary Russia was of historical importance as well. God-building understood collective faith as energy to be tapped into through certain individuals; for Gorky, safeguarding the humane qualities of the revolution as a mother would protect her child serves an important historical and social function.[43]

Throughout human history, the role of women has largely been defined by their ability or inability to move freely from the domestic realm to public spaces. In this sense, the Russian icon of the Mother of God in Gorky's work can be considered a recasting of the ancient and powerful image of the "woman at the window," whose frame defines her cultural and historical function. In her study of this particular motif, Nehama Aschkenasy examines two sometimes contradictory aspects of the image. In ancient art, biblical narrative, and in examples of modern literature, the woman at the window (or doorway) can be associated with cults of fertility or with sexual availability, but also sometimes with danger and even death.[44] The motif, in these cases, Aschkenasy explains, "is linked to female deities who possessed omnipotent power and often used that power to taunt or punish men, adding a sense of awe to the image."[45] Other traditions convey a much different meaning, that of a woman "hemmed in, even locked" inside the domestic realm, unable to participate in the public sphere. In these instances, as Suzanne Delehanty notes, the window itself "expresses longings for worlds other than those confining, unhappy places of the present."[46] This interpretation reflects an everyday reality; until quite recently, women worldwide spent most of their lives indoors. "Yet," Aschkenasy writes, "they probably spent much time at the window, joining public life vicariously, as spectators rather than active participants."[47] Indeed, a woman's enclosure within the window frame emphasizes her confinement but also highlights her "removal from history."[48]

In visual art, the interpretation of the woman at the window depends largely on point of view. Regarded from the front, the image can be suggestive. But viewed from behind, from an interior space, the image emphasizes the woman's narrowed horizons and often her chastity. The icon, which does

not function as a work of art per se, offers an exception; although Gorky's descriptions place the reader in front of his literary icons, the image remains chaste.[49] Only when Gorky "reframes" the woman does the significance of her role change. For example, in a May 1917 *New Life* piece entitled "A Nightmare" ("Koshmar"), Gorky describes his gradual realization about a young woman's perniciousness using this reframing technique. At first, seated before a window, she is a Madonna, backlit by the morning sun.

> Small, slender, and elegantly dressed, she came to me in the morning when the sun was looking into the window of my room; she came and sat so that the rays of the sun embraced her neck and shoulders and made her fair hair seem golden. . . . The rays of the sun tinted her ear the color of coral. All of her was so spring-like, festive.[50]

This portrait recalls the impromptu prayers of Gorky's grandmother to the Mother of God as "Golden Sun" (*solnyshko zolotoe*) that he chronicles in the autobiographical *Childhood* (Detstvo, 1913–1914) and mentions again in *In the World* as a defining characteristic.[51] Biblical descriptions such as the "woman clothed in the sun" (Rev. 12:1) and the woman who "appears like the dawn . . . bright as the sun" (Song of Sol. 6:10) would also be familiar to Gorky.

When Gorky's visitor reveals herself as a tsarist informant and offers to become the author's mistress in exchange for social "salvation," however, the sun "seemed wrong for her." Instead, Gorky sees her as a "poisonous flower" and, when he rejects her request for help, he does so as she is stopped in the doorway rather than framed in the light of the window.[52] The biblical sources of the motif of the woman in the doorway suggest the dual role of womanhood. "Like the earth that she represents," Aschkenasy writes, "the woman has power to bring forth life, but she can also entrap and devour, turning from shelter into grave."[53] In Gorky's "Nightmare" episode a pattern similar to the one Aschkenasy describes emerges. Initially Gorky assumes that the woman has come to bring him something creative—a "poem or a story"—and he admits to a "dark, convulsive desire." But when her treachery is exposed, she is threatening. She becomes the deadly flower; "her pretty little head resembled a pistil in the black petals of the lace of her [low-cut] blouse."[54] Now casting only a "black shadow" on Gorky's soul, the implied icon she earlier embodied is exposed as dangerously false.

Gorky describes the unmasking of a "renewed" icon as a fake in *A Confession*, but he did not support the actual Bolshevik practice of exposing miracles and religious fraud.[55] The destruction of meaningful rituals without replacing them with new rituals seemed inhumane to him. In his fiction, though, in

addition to indicating the questionable moral character of its subject, the idea of the false "icon" can also reveal the weaknesses inherent in its own worship. In Gorky's early story "Twenty-Six and One" ("Dvadtsat' shest' i odna"), a group of overworked pretzel makers idolizes the sixteen-year-old housemaid, Tania, who devastates them when she unwittingly (but happily) fails their test of her purity. In the story, Gorky introduces the dynamic of reframing that he uses in the later *New Life* entry. In "Twenty-Six and One," however, the exposure of the false "icon" does not so much reflect on the girl's virtue but on the misguided efforts of the men to create their own object of worship in order to alleviate the misery of their existence.[56]

A series of shifting frames trace the changing significance of the men's interaction with Tania. She is first introduced into the story at the basement window; her flattened face against the glass (recalling Gorky's childhood ideal of the young *Bogoroditsa*) suggests what Boris Uspensky calls the "deformation" of the icon's perspective.[57]

> Every morning a little, rosy face with cheerful blue eyes would press against the little window cut into the door leading from the hall into the workshop and a clear, tender voice would call out to us. . . . We would all turn to that clear sound and would joyfully and good-naturedly look at that pure, girlish face, gloriously smiling at us. We liked seeing the nose and the small, white teeth—sparkling behind the pink lips, open in a smile—flattened up against the glass.[58]

For the men virtually imprisoned in a dank, dark basement kitchen, Tania takes the place of the sun (*zameniavshee nam solntse*), a description that anticipates the imagery of Gorky's 1917 "Nightmare" entry in *Untimely Thoughts*. They seem not to notice how her cheerful yet quite genderless sensuousness (the narrator's descriptions of her "pure, girlish" face studiously avoid feminine modifiers) makes an unlikely model for the *Bogoroditsa*.[59] The illusory nature of their worship is underscored when Tania steps into the doorway and becomes more of an idol than a living icon (a dynamic that recalls Aschkenasy's discussion about the framing of female deities).[60] While she stands on the raised threshold, the men seated below give her pretzels as "a daily offering to an idol" (*ezhednevnaia zhertva idolu*) while they pronounce "special words" (*osobye slova*) like an incantation. When they realize that they have deceived themselves by treating her as an object of worship, these words become insulting and obscene. They angrily surround her—thus creating a final frame—but she breaks away, her "flashing" eyes full of indignant pride. Having destroyed their own "icon," the men are left with nothing. "After that we silently went back into our damp, stone hole. As before, the sun never looked in through the window at us, and Tania never visited us again!"[61]

LIVING ICONS AND THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE

> You can't become a saint by staring at the icon.
>
> Maxim Gorky, *Mother*

The crux of "Twenty-Six and One" is the men's inexplicable desire to test to failure the same "idol" ("nam strashno khotelos' isprobovat' krepost' nashego bozhka") they hope will satiate their hunger for something pure and life-affirming. Almost twenty years later in *A Confession*, Gorky is able to resolve this contradiction with a more explicit articulation of God-building and its philosophy of collective salvation. The hero Matvei's quest for spiritual meaning is paralleled in a way by his search for a "true" icon. His story begins with an all-night vigil in front of an icon of the Mother of God. His subsequent journey (which he compares to those of Lot and Noah) is fraught with tragedy and false starts and results in a progressive loss of faith in the institutional church, which is signified by encounters with various icons that fail to inspire in him belief and the "joy of prayer" (*radost' molitvy*).[62] Matvei only experiences true spirituality when he encounters "living" icons. In one instance, his own reflection in a mirror—a portrait of despair—prevents him from killing himself and launches him on his pilgrimage.

The novella culminates with a living version of the icon—a lame girl who is cured by the collective energy of a pilgrimage crowd. This scene plays out the essential link between Gorky's literary icons and the spiritual collective as the girl transcends her own frame to establish for Gorky the "church" (*khram*) of God-building in the hearts of the people (*narod*). Matvei encounters the girl at a monastery near Kazan, where a large crowd waits for the ceremonial return of a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God and in which the girl's father has apparently lost hope.[63] The girl is lying in the back of her parents' wagon. Her stillness, the waxen whiteness of her face, and Matvei's focus on her melancholy eyes depict a different, but initially almost lifeless, "icon." Indeed, the hopeless words of the girl's father seem more like a requiem than a prayer for the living.

> At the monastery, people waited for miracles: in a smallish wagon a young girl lay motionless; her face was frozen, like white wax, her gray eyes were half open, the only sign of life seemed concentrated in her long, trembling eye lashes. . . . It was evident that her father had been carting his daughter to monasteries for a long time and had already lost hope for her recovery. He sang out the same words, but from him they sounded dead. People listened to his pleas and, sighing, crossed themselves, while the eye lashes on the girl trembled, covering her melancholy eyes.[64]

But in this final scene, suffused with rays of sun and the emblematic birds, feathers, and flight found frequently in Mother of God icons, the collective prayers of the people offer the girl new life and hope where none before seemed possible. Furthermore, the sacramental nature of Gorky's living icon locates the real power to heal among the pilgrims and within the girl herself. The promise of a miracle cure originates in the girl's own gaze, which in turn inspires the crowd and Matvei to concentrate the power of their prayers on her. The people join in this mutual gaze with the girl as they would to venerate the miracle-working icon they came see. It unites them in a new faith community of "world-wide God-building" (*vsemirnoe bogostroitel'stvo*), which Matvei experiences as that "other thing" he cannot quite describe, and injects the previously inert scene with life and movement.[65] The semantic nuances of lifting up and calling out (*vozbuzhdenie, vyzvannykh, vosstavshei*) combine with the powerful gaze of the people to effect a true transcendence of the self that allows a collective and universal force to sweep up the girl and Matvei—"like feathers in the fire's flame"—in her miraculous rebirth.

> There was great excitement [*vozbuzhdenie*]: people were pushing against the wagon. The head of the girl feebly and weakly rocked back and forth and her eyes looked at them in fear. Dozens of eyes bathed the sick girl with rays of light, concentrating on her weakened body a great force, called to life [*vyzvannykh k zhizni*] by the overpowering desire to see the sick girl rise up out of the wagon [*vosstavshei s orda*]. And I too looked into the depth of her gaze, and inexplicably desired together with the others that she stand up—not for my sake or for hers, but for the sake of some other thing, before which she and I were just like feathers in the fire's flames.[66]

In this interpolated "miracle tale," the girl is both the pilgrim in search of a cure and the source of the cure itself, a dynamic that demonstrates Gorky's use of "sacramental" metaphors and that contrasts sharply with the false icons and idols in his earlier work. Again, the comparison between the young woman and a Mother of God icon—in this case a miracle-working icon—is central to Gorky's articulation of his God-building philosophy. In *A Confession*, the girl's "miracle" cure offers the people an alternative to the actual miracle-working icon they have come to the monastery to venerate as well as the fraudulent icon that Savelka tries to pass off at the beginning of the tale. By shifting spiritual authority from the institutional church to the people, Gorky's God-building icons also become antiauthoritarian in their function.[67]

Reversing the nature of the human "frame" found in "Twenty-Six and One" and the imagery of "A Nightmare," Gorky has the crowd surround the girl not

to test her as a living icon but to revive her instead. The pilgrims embody the "miraculous power" (*chudotvornaia sila*) of the people with their "belief in their own power to effect miracles" (*vera vo vlast' svoiu tvorit' chudesa*).[68] True faith in their own power, not the worship of false idols, restores the girl to life. In the freshness of her rebirth, she is like a fledgling bird or a small child, learning to fly or walk for the first time.

> Rosy shadows began to glow on her dead face and her astonished and joyous eyes widened even further. Slowly moving her shoulders, she meekly lifted her trembling hands and obediently stretched them out before her—her mouth was open and she looked like a fledgling bird, flying out of its nest for the first time.[69]

Trusting in the people, whose unseen power supports her, the once paralyzed girl actually walks, smiling and white all over, "like a flower" in the dusty crowd—a reverse of the dark "petal" of lace worn by the woman in "A Nightmare." In *A Confession*, the repeated phrase "she walks" (*idet*) and the mention of her hands reaching out in front of her (*vpered*) echo the refrain of the Russian icon procession that the icons are coming or "the gods are walking" (*bogi idut* or *bogi idut vpered*), although here Gorky radically changes the meaning of the ancient phrasing.[70]

> She stopped, gave a lurch—and was walking [*idet*]. It was as if she were walking [*idet*] on a knife that cut her toes. But she was walking [*idet*], afraid and laughing, like a small child. The people around her were also joyful and affectionate, as if toward a child. She was afraid and her body was shaking, but she raised her hands in front of her [*vpered*], supporting herself with them in the air that was permeated with the power of the people. From all around hundreds of rays of light held her up.[71]

For Gorky, such frameless, living icons reify the tenets of God-building that meld spiritual and material worlds. While symbolizing the moral characteristics of Gorky's "good" revolution, they also represent its liberating effects. Like this young girl released from her physical confinement, the subject of Gorky's living icons can transcend social and political frames as well. Most notably, in his 1906 novel *Mother*—the work, as Mark Steinberg notes, through which the Soviet government shifted the author's own historical role from "conscience of the revolution" to "father of Soviet socialist literature"—Gorky uses apocryphal narrative and iconographic frames to trace the trajectory of his heroine Nilovna's growing revolutionary awareness and activity.

THE EARTHLY LIFE OF GORKY'S MADONNA

Gorky's "God-building people," as he calls them in *A Confession*, represent not just spiritual and creative energy, but a social and political force as well. Indeed, any individual "that is elevated by this collective energy and embodies it most fully," writes Irene Maryniak in her study on the revival of God-building in Soviet literature of the late 1980s, "is charged with a historical function."[72] In his novel *Mother*, Gorky uses the imagined and apocryphal stories about the earthly life of the Mother of God to chronicle the liberation of a young revolutionary's mother from the confines of the "old" faith of the institutional church. In his comparison between Nilovna and Mary, he also shows how his heroine overcomes her own political powerlessness and social obscurity to become a revolutionary herself.

Gorky's familiarity with and use of such tales was part of an upsurge of interest in Marian apocryphal literature at the turn of the twentieth century in Russia that played an important role in the discourse on early women's movements.[73] In his own library on various religious topics, Gorky owned several works on New Testament apocrypha, even one specifically devoted to the life of Mary.[74] But it is more likely that his own grandmother fed his early imagination with folkish (*narodnyi*) stories about Mary's life and her continued concern with the everyday struggles of earthly life. According to Akulina Ivanovna Peshkova, Mary herself put flowers on earth to ease human suffering.[75]

Evident in the generic structure of Gorky's *Mother* is *The Earthly Life of the Most Holy Birthgiver* (Zemnaia zhizn' presviatoi Bogoroditsy), the most popular nineteenth-century form of the apocryphal biography of Mary, which focuses on Mary's own experience of the Passion and on her active role in her son's ministry.[76] In her study of published versions of the *Life* at the turn of the twentieth century, Vera Shevzov explains how, like encounters with the ubiquitous iconographical images of Mary, the act of imagining and imitating the details that fill out the canonical lacunae of her life became a form of devotion. Some examples of the *Life* seem to follow other agendas as well, showing how Mary emerges from the "anonymity of motherhood" to take a part in her son's ministry during his lifetime and after his death.[77] Mary is the carrier of the "word" in both senses—Christ as God's Word incarnate and also her son's teachings. As such, she represents ideas about the role of women as purveyors of "history and culture" who, following the example of Mary's life, move from the confines of marriage and motherhood to what can only be understood in early revolutionary Russia as the political realm.[78]

As with Mary in the *Life*, Gorky emphasizes Nilovna's real and symbolic role as widowed and working mother to her son and to the other young revolutionaries.[79] But her true act of imitation of Mary's life is her progressive movement out of a series of frames that define and confine her. This movement is accompanied by her newfound mobility as well as a growing association with the written and spoken revolutionary word. Forming the core of Gorky's novel, Nilovna's trajectory echoes the same kind of concern as its apocryphal subtext, while also considering the political and historical implications of the frame itself. Nilovna begins as a traditional "woman at the window," subject to social restriction and unable to participate in political and history-making events that take place in the free and mobile male sphere. "The woman at the window," Aschkenasy writes, "as reflective of the prototypical female position postulates the subordination of the element of time to the element of space in the woman's existence. At the same time, the encasement within the window highlights not only the woman's removal from history, but her spatial constriction as well."[80] There are biblical tales, she continues, where women find a way around these limits and join the "chronological-historical mode," usually through the clever use of language and ingenuity or by having the tale shift focus in a way that moves the woman to the center of the canvas. In *Mother*, Gorky indicates the historical role of his heroine through a process of increasing freedom of movement and speech.

In *Mother*, Gorky portrays Nilovna first as an individual woman with a personal biography and, gradually, as a more collective entity, a "mother of all." This trajectory begins as Nilovna develops affection for her son Pavel's fellow revolutionaries and later culminates as she is conflated with the revolutionary cause itself and becomes the "spiritual mother" of the group.[81] Thus, the story of her life takes on "the significance of a symbol," and suggests that, as in the later *A Confession*, the roots of Gorky's novel lie in religious biography.[82] Indeed, much of Gorky's book focuses on Nilovna's emotional state and burgeoning consciousness, rather than on her son, whose political development is complete early in the book. "It must be good and terrible to have such a son," one revolutionary woman says to Nilovna, suggesting her role as the *Mater Dolorosa* (*skorbiashchaia mat'*).[83] In *Mother*, as narrative attention shifts from son to mother, the story traces Nilovna's growing ease with language and literacy, as well as her active role in the revolutionary cause. At certain points in Nilovna's development—the May Day parade, the distribution of leaflets, the death of the revolutionary Egor, and her final moments of freedom at the train station—Gorky pauses narration with an icon-like pose that allows the readers/viewers to share the mother's understanding of the revolution as the new source of spiritual renewal. In

one example that demonstrates the dynamics of Gorky's image-icons, the revolutionary Nikolai's stories "evoked in the mother's soul a feeling similar to that with which she used to stand before an icon."[84] While imitating the relationship between the icon and the worshipper, however, Gorky shifts the meaning of the icon itself. Indeed, the image-icon that Nikolai's stories create represent for Nilovna the "great truth" of the revolution, rather than of the established church. For her, this truth is one that "raises humanity from the dead, welcomes all equally, and promises all alike freedom from greed, wickedness, and falsehood"—the tenets of Gorky's God-building.[85] Instead of allying the image with the established church or state power, Gorky makes it clear that his Mother of God actually challenges existing hierarchies of power. Thus his revolutionary Madonna urges the viewer to consider both spiritual renewal and social protest.

At first, the windows that provide Gorky the "frame" for his image-icons are perceived as a fragile boundary between the world outside and the relative safety of Nilovna's home, the center of early revolutionary activity in the novel. Suspicious residents of the settlement peer through the window and, at the same window, the neighbor Maria Korsunova warns of an impending raid on the house. Later, a "hostile darkness" clings to the window as if to express Nilovna's initial fear and uncertainty about her son's political activities.[86] But as she better understands the revolutionaries, the nature of the "frame" changes—a rap on the window is no longer something she fears. "There was a knock at the window. Then another. She was used to such a knock; they did not frighten her, but this time she gave a little start of joy. Vague hopes lifted her quickly to her feet."[87] Gradually, Gorky moves the mother from the interior of her home (she often sits behind a partition) to the window itself. As she grows more active in the revolutionary cause, as on the night before she secretly distributes leaflets at the factory, she is repositioned in the window frame. And, on the morning of the May Day parade—a pivotal scene that liberates her from her former life and integrates her into the active life of the revolutionary world—she "sat down at the window, holding one hand to her face as if she had a toothache . . . She was filled with a strange calmness."[88] She sits briefly, but long enough to allow the reader/viewer to witness Nilovna's realization of the day's significance. In a transformation that parallels that of her son, she finds her own voice. Echoing the tradition of the "Stabat Mater" that depicts Mary at the foot of Christ's cross, she addresses the crowd, explaining her son's mission as her own.[89]

The death of the revolutionary Egor marks the next stage of the mother's revolutionary commitment and creates a new image-icon. Egor's death inspires in her a "great pity for humanity" but also a "somber but courageous

force goading her from within."[90] This force seems to coalesce as Nilovna stands with two of Egor's comrades at the hospital window.

> Liudmila got up and went to open the window. Presently they were all standing there close together, staring into the dark face of autumn night. . . . Through the silence came the weary night sounds of the city. . . . Out in the corridor they could hear smothered, frightened sounds—groans, whispers, and a shuffling of feet. But the three of them stood silent and motionless at the window, staring into the night.[91]

The scene suggests a Lamentation (Ne Rydai Mene, Mati) type icon, with its focus on the Mother of God, the disciple John and Mary Magdalene. Egor's body lies on the bed behind the mother, Liudmila, and the doctor, who stand at the window and are lit from behind against the dark night. Gorky is careful to avoid describing movement after Liudmila moves to the window. The mother and the doctor simply appear at the window and the three remain silent and motionless amid the bustle of the hospital and the city. Nilovna's new, intense period of involvement that follows Egor's death is characterized not only by symbolic acts of motherhood, but also by scenes in which Nilovna witnesses violence and bloodshed. In Nilovna's mind blood is connected with Christ's truth and resurrection. When her own clothes are soaked in the blood of a wounded revolutionary, it seems to prefigure her beating at the train station. There, finally captured, she famously proclaims, "Not even an ocean of blood can drown the truth!"[92]

In the final scene, the mother stops in a doorway at the train station where she is distributing revolutionary literature. Sensing her imminent arrest, she flings the copies of Pavel's speech into the crowd. In several ways, the scene echoes the familiar composition of the miracle-working Bogoliubovo Mother of God icon, with her raised hand, scroll, and attentive crowd whom the image protects and preserves. Nilovna captivates the crowd that rings her primarily through her words and with her iconographic expression. "The people were irresistibly drawn to the grey-haired woman with the large candid eyes in a kindly face," Gorky writes. "Isolated in life, torn away from each other, they now found themselves together here, listening with deep feeling to the flaming words which perhaps many of these hearts, hurt by life's injustice, had long been searching for."[93] Even when her body succumbed to a beating, "her eyes did not lose their shine. And they met other eyes, all of them burning with the bright fire she knew and loved so well."[94]

Even more so than in the other icon-like poses in *Mother*, however, Gorky emphasizes here the gaze of the mother and the corresponding gaze of the viewer

within the novel and without—as in the case of the readers themselves. As Pavel Florenskii explains, the Russian icon is not a work of art, but "a work of witness"; the act of visually contemplating the icon can be spiritually—or for Gorky, politically—transformative.[95] Indeed, the complex nature of Gorky's image-icons is captured in the illustrations the collective artistic group "Kukryniksy" produced for the 1950 edition of Gorky's *Mother*.[96] Combining elements of the twelfth-century Bogoliubovo icon and Iraklii Moisevitch Toidze's famous 1941 war poster "Your Motherland Needs You" ("Rodina-Mat' Zovet!"), the Kukryniksy visually capture the culmination of Nilovna's transformation into the kind of social and spiritual activist typical of the Earthly Life tale.

In this sense, the portrayal of the mother as "living icon" and her life story as a religious biography raises certain questions about Gorky's symbolic and generic "frames." Gorky's "woman at the window" is not confined by the frame, but rather invited into the chronological-historical world of language, change, and movement. His "living icons" of women are not only key images in Gorky's revolutionary vision, but also key players. The transformative power of Gorky's revolutionary Madonna is not a catalyst for religious epiphany, but a realization of social and spiritual truths associated with the revolution and an inspiration for revolutionary activity as well. But Gorky's Madonna is a sacramental image that represents a spiritual union among people rather than the hierarchy of state or church power with which *Bogoroditsa* icons have long been associated.[97] In *Mother* and especially in *A Confession*, Gorky is careful to undermine the relationship between his "living icons" and the hierarchies of power. In some ways, Gorky's use of iconic imagery reformulates the relationship, imagining the more horizontal structure of God-building, wherein man is God to man. Although Gorky's revolutionary Madonna was short-lived—Lenin perceived the whole God-building movement as a threat to his own political power—she may reverberate somehow through the modern and postmodern Madonnas, whose relationship with their frames may define them, but cannot confine them.

Notes

1. The performance was *The Last Moons* (Poslednie Luny) (based on Furio Bordon's *Le Ultime Lune*), directed by Rimas Tuminas.

2. Starting in the 1990s, access to archival materials allowed researchers to question assumptions about Gorky's friendship with Stalin. See, in particular, Lidiia Spiridonova, "Gorky and Stalin (According to New Materials from A. M. Gorky's Archive)," *The Russian Review* 54, no. 3 (July 1995): 413–23. Other sources that reconsider the relationship include Andrew Barrat and Barry P. Scherr, *Maksim Gorky: Selected Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) and Tovah Yeldin, *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999).

3. The most recent sources to consider Gorky's work in the realm of culture, literature, and the arts include Stuart Finkel, "Purging the Public Intellectual: The 1922 Expulsions from Soviet Russia," *Russian Review* 62, no. 4 (October 2003): 589–613 and Martha Weitzel Hickey, *The Writer in Petrograd and the House of the Arts* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

4. A history of Gorky's reworking of *Mother* to weaken the role of religious imagery in the novel can be found in S. V. Kastorskii, *Povest' M. Gor'kogo "Mat'": Ee obshchestvenno-politicheskoe i literaturnoe znachenie* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izd-vo, 1954), 60–69, 70–104. By the 1980s, *Mother* was widely accepted by Soviet critics as a work of pure Socialist Realism. See D. M. Stepaniuk, "Ob otnoshenii M. Gor'kogo k antireligioznoi teme v literature," *Voprosy russkoi literatury* 2, no. 24 (1974): 26–32 and Andrei Siniavskii, "Roman M. Gor'kogo *Mat'*—kak ranii obrazets sotsialisticheskogo realizma," *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 29, no. 1 (1988): 33–40.

5. Pavel V. Basinskii, *Strasti po Maksimu: Gor'kii: Deviat' dnei posle smerti* (Moscow: Astrel', 2011); Aleksandr Zaretskii, Eleonora Livshchits, and David Roitberg, *Gor'kii: Zhivaia istoriia*, 4 x 44 minutes, 2008, video.

6. Dmitrii Bykov, *Literatura Sovetskaia: Kratkii kurs* (Moscow: PROZAik, 2012), 23–25. See also Viktor Petelin, *Zhizn' Maksima Gor'kogo: "Ia—kotorzhnik, kotoryi vsiu zhizn' robotal na drugikh"* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2007).

7. Bykov, *Literatura Sovetskaia*, 14–15.

8. *Maxim Gorky, Untimely Thoughts: Essays on Revolution, Culture, and the Bolsheviks, 1917–1918*, trans. Herman Ermolaev (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 118.

9. From 1906 to 1913, Gorky lived on the island of Capri, where he promoted cultural thought that would dovetail with his understanding of the Bolshevik cause. Together with Anatolii Lunacharskii—the first Soviet commissar of enlightenment—he began to articulate the philosophy of "God-building," a kind of religious humanism that would imbue the revolution with creativity, morality, compassion, and joy. Lenin was adamantly opposed to the idea of "God-building," but Gorky continued to believe that cultural values were crucial to the success of the revolution. Correspondence between Gorky and Lenin on God-building, Luncharskii, and the school on Capri can be found in *Vladimir Lenin and Maxim Gorky, Letters, Reminiscences, Articles*, trans. Bernard Isaacs (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973), 17–57.

10. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian* Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 120.

11. Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

12. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 7–8.

13. Boris Uspensky, *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (Lisse, Belgium: Peter De Ridder Press, 1976), 7–30.

14. Like church icons, political iconography conveyed important ideas about the nature and location of the sacred. This idea is discussed in Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, 8.

15. Babel owed his literary career to Gorky's mentoring and shared with him a belief in the "good" revolution, one that Babel articulated most clearly in the *Red Cavalry* story "Gedali" (1924), in *Sobranie sochinenii v chetyrekh tomakh* (Moscow: Vremia, 2006), 142–47.

16. In *The Semiotics of the Russian Icon*, Uspensky explains how the basic sign system ("semiotics") of the icon becomes the "manifestation of the idea in the sensible" (21–22n17) and is thus essentially sacramental in nature. Indeed, summarizing Pavel Florenskii, he notes how the icon becomes the thing it represents. In other words, the icon is a "sacramental sign" of a sacred mystery, rather than a metaphoric representation. See also Amy Singleton Adams, "'Not by Bread Alone': Maxim Gorky's Sacramental Metaphors," in *A Convenient Territory: Russian Literature at the Edge of Modernity; Essays in Honor of Barry Scherr*, ed. John M. Kopper and Michael A. Wachtel (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2015), 245–58.

17. Gorky chronicles the entire episode of this two-year apprenticeship (1881–1883) in chapters 12 through 15 of *In the World* (V liudiakh). Maksim Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii v vosemnadtsati tomakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe isdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1962), 9:312–61. A

catalog of Gorky's library also lists a work on icon painting: *Ikonopisnyi sbornik* (St. Petersburg: R. Golike i A. Vil'borg, 1906).

18. Gorky, *In the World*, 313.

19. See Uspensky, *Semiotics*, 46n41 on how windows, archways, and doors can function as frames.

20. Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts*, 207–12.

21. During this apprenticeship Gorky was struck by the rigidity and doctrinaire quality of both icon painting and the faith that icons supposedly expressed. Gerhard Habermann notes, too, how Gorky saw in their veneration "the Oriental passivity of people whose faith was spiritually petrified by the fetters of prejudice and dogma." *Maksim Gorki* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1971), 20. In chapter four of *In the World*, Gorky describes his encounter with the Oranki Mother of God icon—the same icon considered in William Wagner's essay—as an unintentional testing of Orthodox devotional conformity. Unprepared for the "visitor's" (Mary's) arrival, the young Gorky worries that he will offend Mary by touching her icon with dirty fingers and, as numerous icon-related miracle tales suggest, whether his hands would shrivel as punishment. Inspired by his grandmother's characterization of the Mother of God as gentle, loving, and kind, the young Gorky spontaneously kisses Mary's lips instead of her hands, eliciting shock from bystanders and testing the limits of their devotion and sincerity. Many thanks to Vera Shevzov for pointing out this example.

22. See Uspensky, *Semiotics*, 8, 16, about how replacing the *oklad* changes conventions and, similarly, how repainting the same image over old icons can invest them with "fresh power."

23. Edward J. Brown, "The Symbolist Contamination of Gor'kii's 'Realistic' Style," *Slavic Review* 47, no. 2 (Summer 1988), 234.

24. For a contemporary discussion on Gorky's prominent place in the literary world of his day, see Boris Eikhenbaum, "Pisatel'skii oblik Gor'kogo," in *Moi Vremennik: Marshrut v bessmertie* (Moscow: Agraf, 2001), 114–22.

25. On Gorky's advocacy and care for other writers and artists, see the following sources: Mary Louise Loe, "Maksim Gor'kii and the *Sreda* Circle: 1899–1905," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 49–66; Nicholas Luker, ed. and trans., *An Anthology of Russian Neo-Realism: The "Znanie" School of Maxim Gorky* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982); Finkel, "Purging the Public Intellectual." Also, see Martha Hickey, "Maksim Gor'kii in the House of the Arts (Gor'kii and the Petrograd Literary Intelligentsia)," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 22, no. 1 (1995): 40–64 and Barry Scherr, "Notes on Literary Life in Petrograd, 1918–1922: A Tale of Three Houses," *Slavic Review* 36, no. 2 (June 1977): 256–67.

26. Victor B. Shklovskii, *Gamburgskii shchet: Stat'i-vospominaniia-esse (1914–1933)* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), 161.

27. Konstantin Fedin, *Gor'ki sredi nas: Kartiny literaturnoi zhizni* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1967), 3. See also Hickey, *The Writer in Petrograd*.

28. The God-seekers of this era developed out of the Religious-Philosophical Meetings (1901–1903) led by Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, his wife Zinaida Gippius, and Vasilii Rozanov. The religious and political philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, however, regarded "God-seeking" as an organic trait of Russian culture and literature that reaches back to Petr Chaadaev and is embodied in the work of Gogol and Dostoevsky. "A great pining, an incessant *God-seeking* is lodged within the Russian soul, and it was expressed over the expanse of an entire century. The God-seekers reflected our spirit, rebellious and hostile to every philistinism. Almost the whole of Russian literature, the Russian great literature, is a living document, witnessing to this God-seeking, to an unquenchable spiritual thirst," he writes in his 1907 essay "Russian God-Seekers" ("Russkie Bogoiskateli"), originally published in *Moskovskii ezhenedel'nik* 29 (1907): 18–28.

29. Irene Masing-Delic provides a substantial overview of Silver Age thought in *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth in Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992). On Blok in particular, see Martha M. F. Kelly, "Aleksandr Blok's Other Body," *Russian Review* 70, no 1 (January 2011): 118–36. For a more extensive treatment of Solov'ev, the Divine Sophia, and Godmanhood, see Judith D. Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

30. Barrat and Scherr, *Maksim Gorky*. See letters to Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, between 1 and 7 October 1900 (60), Vasilii Vasilievich Rozanov, about 10 April 1912 (167) and Vladislav Felitsianovich Khodasevich, 8 November 1923 (241).

31. Letter to V. S. Miroliubov, December 1901, in Barrat and Scherr, *Maksim Gorky*, 65–67.

32. Barry Scherr, "God-Building or God-Seeking? Gorky's *Confession* as Confession," *Slavic and East European Journal* 44, no. 3 (2000): 448–69.

33. Gary Rosenshield, "The Realization of the Collective Self: The Rebirth of Religious Autobiography in Dostoevsky's *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma*," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 317–27. Gorky owned several sets of Dostoevsky's collected works, including a volume containing *Zapiski*.

34. Barrat and Scherr, *Maksim Gorky*, 131.

35. See Christine Worobec's essay, "The Akhtyrka Icon of the Mother of God: A Glimpse into Eighteenth-Century Orthodox Piety on a Southwestern Frontier," in this volume (58–81).

36. Barrat and Scherr, *Maksim Gorky*, 131.

37. Ibid.

38. Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts*, 207.

39. Ibid., 209.

40. Ibid., 213.

41. Ibid., 210, 212.

42. Ibid.

43. Irena Maryniak, "The 'New God-Builders,'" in *Ideology in Russian Literature*, ed. Richard Freeborn and Jane Grayson (London: Macmillan, 1990), 191.

44. Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 14. In nineteenth-century Russian literature, for example, the suggestiveness of the "woman at the window" can be seen most notably in Alexander Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" ("Pikovaia dama," 1834) and in Mikhail Lermontov's "Princess Mary" chapter in *A Hero of Our Time* (Geroi nashego vremeni, 1840).

45. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 14.

46. Suzanne Delehanty, ed., *The Window in Twentieth-Century Art* (Purchase, NY: Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, 1986), 13.

47. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 14.

48. Ibid., 17–18.

49. On the essential difference between the icon and visual art, see Pavel Florenskii, *Iconostasis* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 134. On the difference between the icon and other works of art in Russian literature, see Jefferson J. A. Gatrall, "Between Iconoclasm and Silence: Representing the Divine in Holbein and Dostoevsky," *Comparative Literature* 53, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 214–32.

50. Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts* 26–27. "The Sun and the Moon" (Electa ut Sol, pulchra ut Luna) is one of the texts of the Canticles applied to Mary. Also, some interpretations of Rev. 12:1–6 understand the woman "clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" as Mary as well.

51. Maksim Gor'kii, *Detstvo* (*Childhood*), in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 9:168.

52. Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts*, 28.

53. Nehama Aschkenasy, "Biblical Females in a Joycean Episode: The 'Strange Woman' Scene in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*," *Modern Language Studies* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1985): 29. The primary biblical source for this study is the story of Jael and Sisera in Jgs. 4:17–22 New Revised Standard Version.

54. Gorky, *Untimely Thoughts*, 30.

55. On this Bolshevik practice, see Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 108. Renewed icons referred to those icons which, because of age, had darkened to the point where their image was unrecognizable and then were claimed to have "miraculously" lightened on their own. In *A Confession*, Savelka uses a phosphorescent substance to create this effect on a Burning Bush (Neopalimaia kupina) type of Mother of God icon.

56. George Gutsche reads the story as an early, artistic expression of Gorky's ideas on God-building, but does not consider the poignant tension between that nascent philosophy and the problems Gorky perceived in God-seeking. See Gutsche's article, "The Role of the 'One' in Gor'kij's 'Twenty-Six and One,'" in *Studies in Honor of Xenia Gasiorowska*, ed. Lauren G. Leighton (Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers, 1983), 145–54. On the complexities of Gorky's position in the debate between God-building and God-seeking, see Scherr, "God-Building or God-Seeking?"

57. Uspensky, *Semiotics*, 33–35. Tania's pose seems to echo the Virgin of Tenderness of Evil Hearts, the 1915 painting by Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, whose freedom Gorky negotiated after the artist was arrested in 1919. For Petrov-Vodkin, the compression of perspective also seems temporal, as the painting combines three stages of the *Bogoroditsa*'s life—her youth, the birth of Christ, and his crucifixion. The painting is displayed on the cover of the present volume.

58. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:405.

59. Indeed, in the original Russian, one can see how the physical descriptions of Tania only refer to her in the masculine and neuter gender, as well as in the plural, thus avoiding any feminine attributes.

> Каждое утро к стеклу окошечка прорезанного в двери из сеней к нам в мастерскую,— прислонялось маленькое, розовое личико с голубыми, весёлыми глазами и звонкий, ласковый голос кричал нам. . . . Мы все оборачивались на этот ясный звук и радостно, добродушно смотрели на чистое девичье лицо, славно улыбавшееся нам. Нам было приятно видеть приплюснутый к стеклу нос и мелкие, белые зубы, блестевшие из-под розовых губ, открытых улыбкой.

60. See note 45 above.

61. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:414.

62. Gor'kii, *Ispoved'* (*A Confession*), in *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:191.

63. Given the location and timing of this pilgrimage, the icon is likely to be the icon of the Mother of God of the Seven Lakes (Sedmiozernaia), a miracle-working icon of healing. This icon is celebrated in midsummer and is believed to have put an end to a plague that claimed nearly 50,000 lives around the city of Kazan in 1654.

64. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:301.

65. Vera Shevzov discusses the significance of gazing upon an icon in "Scripting the Gaze: Liturgy, Homilies, and the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Late Imperial Russia," in *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 61–62. "Looking upon an icon in Russian Orthodoxy," she writes, "was indeed a complex act. On the one hand, a believer's apprehension of an icon was deeply personal. . . . On the other hand, the act of the devotional gaze involved more than a single individual and a detached image. Icons and believers were also part of a broader faith community that provided a living environment in which icons were both produced and received . . . the production and reception of an icon were not simply attributable to the iconographer and the individual believer, respectively, but involved religious, cultural, and even political processes."

66. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:303.

67. On the promotion and control of miracles by the Russian Orthodox church in the late imperial era, see Christine Worobec, "Miraculous Healings," in *Sacred Stories: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Russia*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Heather J. Coleman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 22–43. Also, see her essay, "The Akhtyrka Icon of the Mother of God: A Glimpse into Eighteenth-Century Orthodox Piety on a Southwestern Frontier," in the present volume (58–81).

68. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:303.

69. Ibid.

70. Uspensky, *Semiotics*, 21.

71. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 5:304.

72. Maryniak, "The 'New God-Builders,'" 199, 191.

73. Vera Shevzov, "Mary and Women in Late Imperial Russian Orthodoxy," in *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Lives and Culture*, ed. Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 69–70.

74. These works are the following: S. A. Zhebelev, *Evangeliia kanonicheskie i apokrificheskie* (Prague: Ogni, 1919); Vega (pseudonym of the group of researchers and translators of New Testament apocrypha led by archpriest Aleksandr Vasilevich Smirnov of Kazan around the time of the First World War), *Apokrif, skazaniia o Khriste*, vol. 2, *Kniga Marii Devy* (St. Petersburg: Pervaia zhen. Tip. Tvorchestva, 1912); P. A. Lavrov, *Apokrificheskie teksty* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Akademii nauk, 1899).

75. Gor'kii, *Detstvo*, 42–43.

76. On the conventions of this apocryphal genre, see Shevzov, "Mary and Women," 64–90.

77. Ibid., 74–78.

78. On the movement from the "small sphere" of domestic life to the "big sphere" of the political and public realm, see ibid., 84.

79. On Mary's movement from mother to public missionary, see ibid., 76–81.

80. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 17–18.

81. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4:177.

82. Gor'kii,, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4:217. On the convention of the genre of religious biography, its invocation by a modern literary work and the idea of the resurrection of the collective self, see Rosenshield, "The Realization of the Collective Self."

83. According to Vera Shevzov, the *Life* is quick to point out the unique insight and suffering of Mary. Another popular apocryphal tale of Mary's life—the Russian Easter tale (*paskhal'nyi rasskaz*) also emphasizes Mary's maternal connection with Christ and her central role in the Passion. For sources of the Easter tale see, for example, N. M. Tupikov, *Strasti Khristovy v zapadno-russkom spiske XV v. Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti* (St. Petersburg, n.p. 1901), vyp. 140; for its treatment as a literary genre, see V. N. Zakharov, "Paskhal'nyi rasskaz kak zhanr russkoi literatury," *Evangel'skii tekst v russkoi literature XVII-XX* vekov (Petrozavodsk: Izd-vo Petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1994), 249–64. Modern Russian literature tends to repeat similar phrases to invoke these genres. Anna Akhmatova, for example, introduces the same idea in "Requiem," when her own *Bogoroditsa* figure says, "You are my son and my horror" (Ty syn i uzhas moi).

84. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4:324.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 26.

87. Ibid., 78.

88. Ibid., 161.

89. On the theme of transformation in this scene, see Alyssa W. Dinega, "Bearing the Standard: Transformative Ritual in Gorky's *Mother* and the Legacy of Tolstoy," *Slavic and East European Journal* 42, no. 1 (1998): 76–101.

90. Gor'kii, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 4:251.

91. Ibid., 250.

92. Ibid., 383.

93. Ibid., 381.

94. Ibid., 383.

95. Florenskii, *Iconostasis*, 134.

96. The Kykryniksy was an art collective formed by Mikhail Kupriianov, Porfirii Krylov, and Nikolai Sokolov. They were known mostly for their satirical political posters. Gorky encouraged the group's work beginning in the early 1930s when he first met them. This particular illustration of Nilovna at the train station can be viewed in Oleg Davydov's article, "Bolotnaia mat'," in the online journal *Peremeny* (http://www.peremeny.ru/column/view/1002/).

97. As Vera Shevzov discusses in *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 181–90, the power of the icon is often located in the collective human experience itself.