

Editorial

BY

RAMONA FOTIADE

The creation of the first Shestov Association in 1936 was meant to coincide with the author's 70th birthday. Many of his friends rallied at the time not only to celebrate his life's achievement, but also to help raise the funds needed for the translation of his latest study, an exegesis of Kierkegaard's thought. Thanks to the founding members and the supporters of this first association (which included, among others: L. Levy-Bruhl, Nicolaj Berdiaev, Paul Desjardin, Jules de Gaultier, Jean Paulhan), the book was translated into French and accepted by Librairie Vrin in Paris. It is true that the first edition (*Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle*) only came out in 1939, a year after Shestov's death; but, in undertaking to support this publication, the Association fulfilled a role whose real significance can perhaps be best appreciated in retrospect. For the book on Kierkegaard, alongside *Athènes et Jerusalem* (Vrin, 1938), turned out to be the most compelling, as well as the clearest, formulation of Shestov's philosophy.

Sixty years on, the launch of the Shestov Research Society (La Société d'Etudes Leon Chestov), in September 1996, came about as the result of a similar joint effort which involved the proposed publication of a journal, in the French Department of the University of Glasgow, to match a previous initiative announced at the close of the Shestov International Colloquium (held at Nanterre, in 1993). Martine van Goubergen, whose initiative gathered enough support to inspire the creation of a Shestov research centre at Glasgow, shared my hope of setting up an international forum for debate among readers, academic and non-academic researchers or writers interested in Shestov's work. However, it was thanks to the graceful intervention, enthusiasm and tireless dedication of Alice Laurent (Shestov's grand-niece) that these independent projects were finally brought together, and the first issue of the Shestov journal began to take shape.

Following the launch of the society and the positive response to our call for papers, information and suggestions, it is hoped that this quarterly publication will encourage an active re-consideration of Shestov's thought which, to this day, remains one of the most

pervading yet seldom recalled undercurrents of twentieth century philosophical reflection. The Shestov journal intends to combine the informative aim of a regular newsletter and the wider scope of a magazine devoted to the publication of new critical work as well as to the occasional re-printing of significant exegeses, or even primary texts which are long out of print. The editors are particularly pleased to acknowledge the contribution of a number of prominent writers and critics of Shestov's work to the first issue of the journal. Our special thanks go to Yves Bonnefoy, who has kindly given us permission to reprint his introductory study to *Athènes et Jerusalem*. We are also very grateful to David Gascoyne for permission to reprint here his study of Shestov's existential thought (the first critical presentation to come out in Great Britain, after the short preface which D.H. Lawrence wrote for the first English edition of *All Things are Possible*, in 1920). Michel Carassou, the editor of Fondane's work and the keeper of the Fondane archives, has agreed to let us reprint the memorable preface to *Rencontres avec Chestov*, a moving, unique account of the relationship between the two authors. We are greatly indebted for his support, and look forward to the possibility of extending the links between the Shestov Society and the Société d'Etudes Benjamin Fondane, which also came into existence at the Shestov International Colloquium in 1993. Monique Jutrin, the editor-in-chief of the Fondane Cahiers, has since been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement. Let us thank her for a message in which she recalls Shestov's decisive influence on his only "disciple". Fondane's enigmatic, previously unpublished, remarks which Monique Jutrin quotes in her message could be usefully contrasted with later considerations from *Rencontres avec Chestov*. Far from being a "mere disciple", as he might have thought when he first met Shestov, Fondane was to live through the crucial experience of revolt and "irresignation" which best identifies the source of existential thought: "Plus je vivais auprès de lui et moins je songeais qu'il était un philosophe, que je pouvais être son disciple. Disciple de quoi, en somme? Cet homme devant moi, n'enseignait guère, il se souciait fort peu d'enseigner quoi que ce soit. Seul, devant Dieu, il luttait".¹

The editors are very privileged to be able to acknowledge the contribution of many distinguished scholars to this inaugural issue of the Shestov journal. We are also grateful for the messages of support received from researchers and readers of Shestov all over the world (e.g. France, Holland, Italy, Russia, Israel, USA). The

¹ Benjamin Fondane, *Rencontres avec Chestov* (Paris : Editions Plasma), 1982, p. 30.

editors would like to invite all those interested to continue to send in their suggestions and proposals for publication. Subscriptions and donations which enabled us to print the first issue of the journal are herewith gratefully acknowledged. It is our intention to provide our readers with information on forthcoming events, editions, critical studies, translations; to present newly discovered documents, previously unpublished works by Shestov; to encourage the collaboration among researchers across Europe, in view of the need to translate archival and exegetic material from and into four languages (i.e. Russian, German, French and English). The journal aims to provide an opportunity to re-assess existing interpretations and give an aperçu of new, ongoing research projects relating to Shestov's life and work. It is also hoped that this publication will generate comparative studies which could situate existential thought in the context of twentieth century philosophy.