



The Precipice

Ivan Goncharov

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Ivan Alexandrovich Goncharov (1812-1891) was one of the leading members of the great circle of Russian writers who, in the middle of the nineteenth century, gathered around the *Sovremmenik* (Contemporary) under Nekrasov's editorship-a circle including Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Byelinsky, and Herzen. He had not the marked genius of the first three of these; but that he is so much less known to the western reader is perhaps also due to the fact that there was nothing sensational either in his life or his literary method. His strength was in the steady delineation of character, conscious of, but not deeply disturbed by, the problems which were obsessing and distracting smaller and greater minds.

The Precipice Details

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From Reader Review The Precipice for online ebook

Ilva says

Padevos pie 50%.

Man nepat?k galvenais varonis Raiskis, kurš ir "d?ks, dz?v? neatradis sev ?sto vietu, ne pie k? neapst?jies cilv?ks". Talant?gs, ta?u vi?am pietr?kst neatlaid?bas un paciet?bas savus talantus att?st?t. ?tr? aizraujas, un tikpat ?tri interesi zaud? un s?k garlaikoties. P?r?emts pats ar savu personu, bet iedom?jas, ka citus cilv?kus sp?j saprast un iepazīt tik vienas sarunas laikā, nedaudz tos pav?rojot. Sav? p?r?kuma apzi?? m??ina citus "p?rv?rst par cilv?ku", atkl?t vi?iem "dz?ves uzdevumus".

V?st?jums visu laiku griežas tik uz ri??i vien, rom?ns jau pus?, bet t? ar? ?sti nekas nenotiek, savuk?rt p?rdom?s par m?kslu, tikumiem un citiem jaut?jumiem monotoni atk?rtojas viens un tas pats, viens un tas pats...

Ivan Damjanovi? says

Imam 4/8 stranica folio bilježaka, ali nemam previše vremena tipkati (knjižnica se zatvara u pola 8, a nisam kod ku?e; a i da jesam....) pa evo samo najosnovnijih crta, dojmova i šta ve? ne. Major spoiler alert, to se valjda podrazumijeva (iako bi rijetki vjerojatno i uzeli ovo u ruke in the first place, nažalost- morali su u GISKO-u na tavan zbog mene, opet). Nažalost, moram konstatirati, dojam je da Gon?arovičev romaneskni opus, za razliku od, npr. kolege Rusa realista Fjodora Mihajlovi?a (?iji je opus strelovito kvalitativno rastao) u zamjetnoj mjeri kvalitativno retrogradirao od gotovo pa odli?ne Obi?ne pripovijesti do osrednjeg (ali najrazvikanijeg) Oblomova do razo?aravaju?eg (ali najdužeg) Ponora. Tako?er, kao da je retrogradirao iz postromantizma u romantizam. Kao i u Oblomovu, tu je gomilu opisa i okolišanja. Ono što ponajviše zapinje za oko ?injenica je da je junak Gon?arova uvijek nekakav naivac/ žutokljunac, ?ak glupan (što je samo po sebi zanimljivo i originalno, pogotovo za to doba). Ovdje je to itekako slu?aj. ?esto sam imao dojam da je protagonist Rajski ('promašeni, ali potkoženi umjetnik') najve?i krebil me?u protagonistima, možda ikad. Ima tu i odli?nog insighta, prije svega u ljubavnu problematiku; 'running jokes' (Jegorkino skidanje kov?ega s tavana); ima i 5 star dijelova (!); književnih i umjetni?kih referenci; vrlo solidna kvalitativna i kvantitativna razina humornih odušaka.

Ono najvažnije, fabula, uglavnom je predvidiva i (meni) razo?aravaju?a.

Naslovna simbolika, Ponor, predstavlja gubitak nevinosti prekrasne Vere u ne?asnim okolnostima, ali dobrovoljno, s bitangom Markom koji o?ito simbolizira liberalni svjetonazor/ateizam. Uz to pri kraju dolazi škakljiva pripovjeda?eva briga "Što ako nisam (ne budem mogao) provalijama okružiti njezin pad pa ruske djevojke po?nu kao koze skakati u ponore?"

Još neke napomene. Valja zapaziti, što se Marka ti?e, ne može se optužiti autora za klišejizirano demonificiranje, Mark je prikazan vrlo ambivalentno. To se ne može ustvrditi za neke likove, kao što je Kozlov, koji je vrlo neuvjerljiv i izgleda da mu je namijenjena samo uloga komi?ne karikature (nevjerojatno da je lik toliko na?itan, a da ga neka flundra dribla kao malog majmuna). Lik šumara, uzornog gospodarstvenika Tušina kao da je utjecao na Josipa Kozarca (izri?ito na Mrtve kapitale, Me?u svjetlom i tminom te Slavonsku šumu). Ako ne, vidi se duhovna srodnost. Op?enito, lik "mede" Tušina predstavlja uzornog ruskog ?ovjeka.

Pri kraju, tu je nadahnuta oda ženama u proznom obliku u formi "umetnutog rukopisa", za?etak romana unutar romana, (metatekst?) sli?no kao u Elijahovoj stolici Igora Štiksa i, naravno, "najve?em romanu svih vremena", Don Quijoteu.

Postoji dobra mogućnost da tu ovaj osvrt nadopunjavati ako budem osjećao potrebu/ ako se sjetim nečeg relevantnog.

David says

I was looking forward to the Precipice with not a little anticipation. I already enjoyed Goncharov's Oblomov, and apparently the Precipice is the product of 20 years of work which the author called "the fullest expression of my artistic abilities." Looking back, I was setting myself up for a big letdown, but I was more disappointed because the weaknesses steadily remained throughout the course of the book. It would be more tolerable if they showed up in spots.

My biggest problem with the Precipice is that the protagonist, Boris Raisky, is thoroughly unconvincingly developed. Note, he IS developed, but in an inconsistent manner which lacks the necessary support for the reader to believe in him. Supposedly, he is a talented artist, but we never once get insight into his practice and development in that sphere of his life (except in the last chapter which seems like it was carelessly tacked on to the end to make up for this glaring weak point). He seems to spend every minute of every day of his life stalking the object of his love. Plus, his artistic bent does not allow him to spend a moment's thought on managing his inherited estate (oh, what a burden...poor guy) because an artist cannot think of such things. Yet, he feels entitled to enjoy all the luxuries associated with owning an estate ("No, auntie, let's not go over the accounts now, but let us order a bottle of champagne."). His obliviousness to practical affairs, I gather, is supposed to be endearing but it ends up provoking resentment. So from early in the novel and throughout, the reader feels frustrated with the protagonist and is unconvinced of the talents and gifts he is supposed to possess (but never exercises or practices). I'm no novelist but that looks like a formula for disaster.

Mikhail Saltykov criticized this novel for being too aimless. He hit the nail on the head in one stroke. I don't mind a winding road, but one too many windings makes for a very weary reading experience. Such a meandering plot only breeds more resentment as most of us have little identification with a gentry culture where excessive leisure allows for the free reign of all our emotional states. Goncharov intends his reader to sympathize with his characters, but the reader might more often roll his eyes and groan. He could have trimmed his wandering plot down and spent some chapters developing his protagonist's supposed artistic merits. Such an approach might have rounded out his character and increased our ability to sympathize with him.

The positives which saved this book from becoming Narcissus and Goldmund include the welcome introduction of the character, Mark Volokov. He is a refreshing breath of air who arrives just in time, that is, when frustration with Raisky reaches boiling point. Plus, the character of Tatiana Berezhkov is a development to behold. The symbolism of the precipice as a divide between safe but despotic security and dangerous passion is clever. Actually, all three elements, Volokov, Berezhkov, the precipice, are all symbols, and Goncharov was slightly overzealous in establishing their meanings.

To sample Ivan Goncharov, I would recommend passing on the Precipice. Pick up Oblomov instead. The pathos of the protagonist is more convincing but still characteristic of gentry culture in a way that actually connects with us today.

emil says

i'm....kind of disappointed?? this was good...well it was okay. but kind of boring, sorry. i only stuck around because i liked Raisky and decided i should, if i legally could, take a shot every time they said "precipice"

???????? says

????????? ???????: <http://t.co/wuXjIJb3bm>

Anna Anjos says

One of my all-time favorites. The power of thought is so strong in this book, even despite the difference in today's traditions, habits and perceptions of love, relationship and decisions it still feels important and complicated to make these decisions and react on temptations (although the results would be much less tragic today, in most cases).

Ivar Volmar says

Lugesin seda esimest korda teismeeas. Mäletan vaid niipalju, et see avaldas mulle suurt mõju ning jäi aastateks meelde kui väga vapustav teos. Luges selle nüüd üle 30 aasta hiljem uuesti läbi, on rõhuasetused teised, mingit erilist vapustust ei ole. Jah, tegu on sellise korraliku klassikateosega, ent tänase pilguga tundub teos kuidagi moraliseeriv, näpuga näitav ja eelkõige kõvasti venitatud. Seega keskmine hinne - kolm tähti.

Fuschia says

Very odd large size (8.5x11) format. Translation seemed terrible. Would need to get regular paperback and re-read in future as couldn't get past this one (loved loved loved Oblomov).

Nemalevich says

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Bettie? says

Read here Original Russian Title: OBRYV. TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL RUSSIAN;
TRANSLATOR UNKNOWN {This text is condensed from the original.}

Opening: **Boris Pavlovich Raisky had a vivacious, unusually mobile face. At first sight he appeared younger than his years. The high, white forehead gave an impression of freshness and vigour; the eyes blazed one moment with intelligence, emotion or gaiety, a moment later they wore a meditative, dreamy expression, then again they looked young, even childlike. At other times they evidenced knowledge of life, or looked so weary, so bored that they betrayed their owner's age; at these times there appeared between them three furrows, certain indications of time and knowledge of life. Smooth black hair fell on his neck and half covered the ears, with here and there silver threads about the temples. His complexion had kept the tints of youth except on the temples and the chin, which were a brownish-yellow colour.**

J. says

First a note on the English translation: If you read this in English and not the Ardis 1994 edition, you aren't reading anything close to the Russian original. So if you had bad reading experience please blame the lazy translators who couldn't be bothered translating all of this brilliant masterpiece.

Now on to the book:

So little happens in about 800 pages, that I can summarize it in a sentence, "Some semi-wealthy nobleman's country cousin has a short affair with a pseudo-anarchist and then everyone freaks out. " If that sounds like too little action, please leave and go watch transformers.

So why is this perhaps the top 10 best books I have ever read? Why do I think its better than any Dostoyevsky text I have ever encountered? I honestly can't put a finger on it, but mainly its that Goncharov was better at writing human psychology than perhaps any writer in the 19th century. So many of Dostoyevsky's characters feel inflated, or deflated, almost like Dickensonian caricatures. Goncharov's cast feels real. I believe these people, or people like them actually lived, breathed, had conversations and had concerns about life, death, honor, and family. His situations aren't grandiose or manufactured, they arise naturally and normally.

The people in the Precipice are annoying, funny, pathetic, ridiculous. We've all met someone like that. They all have flaws, even the all-beloved and intelligent Vera, turns out to be way less free thinking and liberated that she thinks she is. She isn't so much judged by her immediate circle for her "fall," as much as she literally can't believe she isn't the ideal she thought herself to be. Her anarchist boyfriend is just a gadfly without any guile. He isn't half as interesting as an anarchist-nihilist seducer really should be. Raisky, the main character is so tiresome, half the women in the book want to avoid him for chapters at a time. One may think Vera is a tease, but one can't blame her for avoiding Raisky's annoying never ending, "woe is me," "I'm an artistic genius and will teach you about life" rants. Some of the secondary characters turn out to be much more insightful and interesting than the main ones. At times, you wonder, where is Goncharov going with this thread, and maybe you never really find out....

Overall, its easy to dismiss such a work. Its values and concepts aren't so much outdated, as too abstract and nuanced for today's post-modernism loving audiences. For the lover of the 19th century psychological novel, this is as good as it gets.

Luke says

A jolly good. Not brilliant or anything, but jolly good

Richard Thompson says

By the time *The Precipice* was published in 1869 the Superfluous Man, embodied here by Raisky, and the New Man, embodied here by Volokhov, were already well established characters in Russian literature. Raisky is a bit more energetic than Goncharov's more famous Superfluous Man, Oblomov, but equally ineffectual. Volokhov is a weak reflection of the more powerful and decisive New Men already introduced by Turgenev in *Fathers and Sons* and Cherneshevsky in *What Is To Be Done*. By moving these standard character types away from the extremes, back to a middle ground, Goncharov gives us characters that are perhaps more realistic and believable than the archetypes, but also, unfortunately, less compelling. Perhaps the greatest virtue in the weakness of Raisky and Volokhov is that it better allows us to appreciate the power of the leading female character, Vera, who towers above her male counterparts in the clarity of her vision of the world, morality and human relations. Also of interest is Tushin, the forester, who is a natural man, a pure Russian soul, steadfast and loving, happily tucked away deep in his wooded estate. Tushin struck me as a precursor of Tolstoy's Levin, and in some ways Tushin's calm plays against Vera's fire in the same ways that Levin's story contrasts with Anna's.

I read in some of the descriptions of this book that Goncharov considered it his best novel, but that it was poorly received by critics. The critics of that era in Russia who were heavily influenced by the tradition of Belinsky wanted literature to reflect the Russian national character (or at least what each of them in their own ways perceived the Russian character to be) and to be a vehicle for social change that could slyly get past the tsar's censors. The only acceptable kind of soft character would be one like Oblomov -- so extreme in his softness that he became instantly iconic. The middle of the road characters in this story did not serve the perceived social need. Still, critics aside, I think Goncharov was wrong because this book is no Oblomov. Oblomov is a treasure; this book was enjoyable, but just not up to the standard of Goncharov's more famous work.

Alexy Vassili says

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Anna Semenova says

I was quite disappointed with this one. 'Oblomov' by Goncharov, which is considered to be the 1st of the 3 books that he wrote, is an absolute masterpiece, whereas 'The precipice' is good but honestly, too long! Some parts were just excessive.
