It seems to me that any serious discussion of Averintsev's works must begin with an attempt to grasp his *method.* This is far from simple, but it is precisely this that is necessary. It is in his method that we discover Averintsev's uniqueness, his utterly distinct position in contemporary scholarship in the humanities, not only within Russia but probably throughout the world. What we are left with after reading him are not so much concrete 'results' which we can subsequently 'put to good use,' but, rather, a *method* of seeing, understanding and then imparting our new insight to others. Averintsev leads us not to new 'cultural phenomena' (meanings, facts, concepts and so forth) but to a new way of seeing. In that respect, his effect on his readers resembles the effect created by a literary or other artist (as, say, Proust, who alters the sensibility of his readers so that they will never again perceive things in the way that they used to do). Of course, Averintsev acts upon the vision of the mind,

not of the eye. With Dante you have Beatrice teaching the lesson of the *path* to concrete knowledge, not concrete knowledge itself. What she conveys to her pupil Dante is a method of understanding.[1] Here is how to get across the stream of that which is not understood: one moves from the bank of theological and cosmological premises to the bank of specific meaning, using the stones of correctly constructed syllogisms. Averintsev's work *The Rhetoric and Sources of the European Literary Tradition*[2] takes his readers along a path leading from the pre-reflective depth of ancient times through rhetorical reflection to an age which has lost touch with metaphysics. In this book of his he actually succeeds in constructing this great three-fold historical progression.

Approaching his book *Poets*,[3] which features some of Averintsev's small-scale essays, we can, as it were, leave to one side such large matters as his method and its specific qualities. If his large-scale works suggest the idiom of architecture, portrait painting requires a different idiom. The portrait painter is closer and more visible to the viewer than the architect tends to be. Nevertheless, the 'portraits' of poets as executed by Averintsev are, in their general proportions, linked to a great tradition and also to the separate specific traditions embodied in those proportions. Precisely this renders them essentially different in kind from 'normal' monographs treating those same themes, say, for example, Zhukovsky's technique as a translator. Averintsev is significantly less interested than are some philologists (unappealingly dubbed "specialists" in this or that) in 'interiors,' that is to say, in narrow studies focusing on one poet and his interaction with his Russian and European cultural milieu and his immediate predecessors. What he seeks to provide instead is a portrait of an artist within the whole edifice of culture and, above all, he relates that figure to the most general foundations of culture. For all that, Averintsev's method does not cease to be deductive. His move towards concrete detail invariably begins from those very general meanings which tend not to be part of the subject specialists' vocabulary, or else do not fit within their professional concern with a given author or given work and are confined purely to their private perceptions

as readers. What I have in mind, here, is the whole range of philosophical, theological and general anthropological presuppositions. It is precisely after reading Averintsev that one gets a sense of the lack of this dimension of height or depth in many philological projects or movements of the twentieth century. This is the case with the Formalists, whose thought has recently been cited again as an example of virtuosity in the field. Even if such poverty at the metaphysical level is declared to be a conscious and deliberate choice, a matter of due scholarly 'rigour' and 'purity' or a matter of honour on the part of Positivist-minded scholars, that changes little.

Before moving on to the subject of sobriety and gaining sobriety, I want to mention just one thing which, to my mind, has been completely overlooked or forgotten. It is not at all the case that growing cold to things is necessarily more 'sober' than what, from a distance, seems to be 'the fever of youthful years' (as evoked in *Evgenij Onegin*), or an unrestrained surrender to the emotions. One kind of sobering process takes hold of the mind, and that is a transition from naïve 'poetry' (as a rule, not entirely fresh poetry) to 'austere' or 'humble' prose. On that subject, see Goncharov's *An Ordinary Story*. However, there is another kind: it can be a sobering shock which lifts us from flat prose to great poetry, which can bring about a recognition of poetry's *depth*, *breadth* and *importance* (as the epigraph to this article affirms). It is this kind of sobering experience which Shakespeare's King Lear and Tolstoy's Ivan Iljich undergo.

In my view, when Averintsev expresses regret for his excessive respect for poetry, he somewhat exaggerates his own 'errors.' His works show not the least trace of any romantic exaltation of poetry to the detriment of all else. He was always opposed to the Romantics' conception of life; moreover, this opposition constituted yet one more factor which defined both the specific stance which he adopted and his place in our cultural history. Being the sole person among our contemporaries and compatriots who was, incontrovertibly, a direct heir to the Silver Age, Averintsev interacted with its figures from out of a *later* period. His thought constituted a sobering corrective to the enthusiasm

of the beginning of the century, and, without it, any discourse 'after Auschwitz and the Gulag' would simply have been false.