The Birch

A Journal for Eastern European and Eurasian Studies

Columbia University
Spring 2012



Culture & Politics ❖ Literary Criticism ❖ Creative Writing ❖ Photography ❖ Translations

A Letter from the Editors

The 1956 Hungarian popular uprising against Soviet dominance tore apart the cityscape of Budapest, left thousands of casualties in its wake, and was heralded as one of the most significant early anti-Soviet rebellions in the Eastern Bloc. In the wake of this brutally suppressed rebellion, ***Time*** magazine chose to commemorate the Hungarian Freedom Fighter, a battle-fatigued street soldier with soot on his face and a blood-soaked bandage, as the 1956 Person of the Year.

In 2011, the world stage was set for protest. We watched as citizens across continents demanded change. From the tents and picket signs that cropped up in America's parks and public spaces to the rustlings of revolution that grew into the Arab Spring, the desire for change was palpable across the globe. Again, ***Time*** magazine chose to commemorate a modern-day incarnation of the freedom fighter, and named the protester as the 2011 Person of the Year.

Here at ***The Birch*** we were thrilled to see Eastern Europe and Eurasia reflect this global trend in a series of enigmatic responses characteristic of this complex and diverse region. After a decade of near political dormancy, hundreds of thousands of people came out to the polling stations and to the frozen streets of Russia, expressing their outrage after falsified Duma elections in December. In Hungary, citizens took to the streets of Budapest to demonstrate their discontent with the Orbán government's discriminatory new constitution that poses a true threat to free press and an independent judiciary. After Romanians began protesting the European Union austerity measures that have dramatically impacted their everyday lives, Prime Minister Emil Boc was forced to submit his resignation.

It is this wave of active participation and a belief in the prospect of change that has inspired us as we worked to assemble ***The Birch*** Spring 2012 edition. As our region of interest continues to make headlines, it was only with the help of our editorial team, our new crew of bloggers, and all those who helped facilitate this year's on-campus events, that we were able to create this year's journal. We hope to make Eastern Europe a renewed topic of interest for students at Columbia and around the country.

We are grateful for the help and support we have received this year as well as for the level of engagement and enthusiasm of our writers and readers. We hope you enjoy the very latest edition of ***The Birch***!

Sincerely,



Laura Mills
Editor-in-Chief



Hannah Miller
Editor-in-Chief

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ARTS INITIATIVE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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The Newest Russians: Winter of Their Discontent

Laura Mills
Columbia College, Columbia University

When I studied in Moscow in the fall of 2010, the symbol of the city was still the Novy Russki, or the New Russian. Thanks to popular Hollywood stereotypes, we're already well acquainted with this class: the only things bigger than their swagger are their fur coats, they love easy money and hard liquor. More specifically, New Russians is a name for those who made it rich quick in the 1990s, buying privatized state assets on the cheap while pensions went unpaid and hospital budgets were slashed. Unsurprisingly, they have provoked the ire of the average Russian, and Muscovites I knew were always eager to share jokes lambasting this class in good anecdotal tradition. For example: The New Russian found his son sobbing one day after school. "Why don't I ride the bus to school like all the other kids?" the little boy plaintively asked. "Don't cry, my son," the New Russian answered, a concerned wrinkle struggling to surface on his botoxed brow. "I shall buy you a bus as well."

While not exactly a zinger, anecdotes like this one demonstrate just how entrenched and pervasive the idea of the Novy Russki is in contemporary Russian culture, and for further evidence all I had to do was look around. When I first arrived at my university in Moscow, I had to weave my way between the bumper-to-bumper Mercedes and BMWs, pulled ostentatiously onto the curb in front of our building. Throughout the halls you could hear the crisp clip of stiletto heels, girls in tight leather leggings doing their best to elegantly sashay into something as unsexy as a macroeconomics lecture. To earn a bit of cash outside the university I taught English to children swaddled in Prada who were hustled back and fourth from our lessons by thick-necked, unsmiling "drivers." Moscow was as perilously slick as its icy sidewalks, as absurdly glittery as the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. It was a place I managed to love but was still somehow alien, as if the people there breathed the air of a different planet.

Have things changed in Russia in the past year? After visiting the country again in early 2012, I stubbornly choose to believe that they have. You just have to know where to look. Sometimes you find it in the most banal of things when you see more iPhones on the metro, perhaps the mere symbol of a budding middle class.

More importantly, this change is embodied in the people who came out in the tens of thousands to protest this winter against falsified Duma elections. The majority of the protesters were comfortably well off and well educated. They weren't the desperate pensioners or hard-core liberal activists that have characterized Russian protest movements since Putin's rise to power. These aren't people in dire straits demanding a slice of bread, but people who—in the name of personal dignity or just because it was suddenly hip—came out to demand change.

Yes, these people are still a minority even in large cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, and far from a united one—the attendees were a motley crew, from the cantankerous Communists to the habitually disappointed liberals of Yabloko. Nonpartisan individuals were also in abundance, from supporters of intellectual heroes like Boris Akunin, to one indignant participant who held up a sign that simply read: "Glory to boobs!" But by most accounts, party affiliation didn't really seem to matter at the rally. Politics became yet another form of personal expression, like the choice to play squash rather than to practice yoga, or to prefer hiking to video games. So for now let's call them the Newest Russians: they're educated, middle class, they know their own tastes, and most significantly they're ready and willing to say no—to even laugh at—the powers that be.

The following interviews were taken in January 2012 with one Russian activist and one Russian journalist, both under the age of 30. Their optimism is tempered by an understanding that the Putin regime has at best come to see the people "as a factor they now have to deal with, but not as a counterpart in policymaking or dialogue."[1] And indeed, much has happened since these interviews were conducted: most significantly, on March 4th Vladimir Putin was reelected to the presidency for another six years by a very comfortable margin (shedding several masculine tears for the occasion). Change will be slow, but these young people are a testimony to the fact that it is very much real—and without further ado, The Birch would like their voices to be heard.

These interviews were conducted in early 2012 for a Columbia student-led documentary film about the awakening of civil society and political activism among a large portion of the Russian people. Both interviews were transcribed and translated by Laura Mills.

Ilya Yashin
Age: 28
Opposition politician, Solidarnost

How did you become involved in politics?

Regardless of the fact that I'm 28, I'm often called a veteran. When I was 16, The Second Chechnyan War woke me up. 1999 was a critical year in Russia: apartment buildings were blown up, there was a whole series of terrorist attacks … It was in that year that Prime Minister Putin pronounced the famous words: "If we find them in the toilet, we'll kill them in the outhouse." His rise in popularity began with that phrase. And I was one of the people who considered that this militaristic hysteria, the desire to kill, to fight … that it was all very dangerous. And I began to organize roundtables, to hold protests, and after some time became the leader of Yabloko's youth wing.



What is Yabloko?

Yabloko is one of Russia's oldest parties, which in the 1990s functioned as the democratic opposition to President Yeltsin. I entered Yabloko in 2002 but was excluded from the party in 2008. The thing is that in today's political system, the party leadership is forced to enter into treacherous agreements in order to preserve its official party registration and the right to participate in elections. Yabloko was forced to constantly hold consultations with the Kremlin, and to sign charters counteracting extremism, which in practice were directed against the political opposition in Russia. And it seemed to me in some sense that these steps by the party leadership betrayed the people who went to protests, the people who genuinely tried to oppose the Putin regime …. Essentially, those parties that are registered in Russia today aren't an opposition. They're sparring partners …. It's like an unfair boxing match. When the champion chooses his own opponents, he pretends he doesn't notice those who represent a real threat—as if they don't exist.

What are the possible scenarios in Russia going forward—reform or revolution?

The more Putin simply turns the screws, the more likely it is that there will be a bloody, revolutionary scenario. One alternative to that would be a roundtable with the opposition along the lines of Poland in the 1990s, and the Russian opposition in principle is prepared for that.

What is Solidarnost? How does it differ from a party?

Solidarnost is an opposition protest movement. You could say that in a way it's the avant-garde of the street protest movement

Solidarnost could be a party. We're prepared to take part in elections, and we have a platform, but as long as Putin is in power there isn't the slightest chance we'll be registered as a political party. We aren't ready, upon the will of the presidential administration, to introduce any kind of "correctives" to our electoral platform, and precisely for that reason Solidarnost doesn't stand a chance of participating in elections.

Today it's not a question of economic programs or social development programs in Russia. It's a question of the most basic institutions of democracy. Therefore at demonstrations we observe liberal banners right next to the banners of communists and even nationalists …. When Russia has a politically competitive system, those of us who went to the protests will fight amongst ourselves. We have different views as to reforming the Russian army, or about the development of a pension fund in Russia …. We have things to argue about. But we'll do it in elections and a free parliament.

Tell us about your participation in the recent protests.

On December 4th there were Duma elections. Over the course of the day, an enormous number of video clips appeared on the internet, showing falsifications, manipulations … in some clips observers even managed to capture the chairmen of electoral commissions literally filling out ballots for United Russia themselves, with their own two hands. This provoked serious indignation amongst the people. Today in Russia, many people have learned to use the internet, so information about violations and falsifications can now be spread instantly.

On the evening of the next day, December 5th, nearly 10,000 people went out to the streets to voice their protest. In just three hours, people had discussed amongst themselves on the internet and decided to express their discontent. The Russian special forces clamped down on this massive demonstration and over the course of the night nearly 300 protesters were arrested. I was one of them, and spent fifteen days in jail. Regardless of the absolutely peaceful and civilized character of our protests—not a single shop window was smashed, we didn't attack the police—the authorities reacted very harshly.

Would you say civil society is waking up?

Society has woken up, that's no question.

The fact that in Russia there were demonstrations in the hundred thousands says that people are no longer willing to put up with this arbitrariness, lawlessness, and permissiveness on the part of the authorities …. Many called the Russian opposition "virtual," but at some point a critical mass accumulates and virtual protest spills out onto the streets. That's exactly what we saw in December.

Other than arrest, what kind of pressure have you experienced by the state?

The most unpleasant thing is that in Russia in recent years there's been a growth in the practice of political provocation against opposition leaders and activists. I've encountered dozens of these provocations …. One day, two young men climbed onto the hood of my car, pulled down their pants, and defecated on the hood of my car while capturing everything on camera—the next day these shots appeared on the internet. It seems to me that this is a clear demonstration of the political style of the authorities. They are, in a literal sense, defecating on the opposition, on their own people, and they do it publicly and without shame. Just the fact that the special services make use of women, prostitutes, and drugs, speaks to the fact that for the Russian special services the law does not exist.

Some say that political humor is returning to Russia. Do you have a joke you can tell?

President Bush calls up President Putin. Putin asks him what's up. Bush sadly complains that the opposition is going to win in many districts, and it seems he has to give up his seat to the Democrats. And so Putin says: "I'll send you a specialist, our head of the Central Electoral Commission, Vladimir Churov, who will help you." Bush agrees, Churov goes on a business trip to the states and Putin calls him up … : "Mr. Churov, how are things?" Churov answers: "Everything is okay, Vladimir Vladimirovich. In virtually every state United Russia is in the lead."

Ekaterina Kronhaus
Age: 27
Journalist, Bolshoi Gorod,
Web Editor-in-Chief

You wrote fairly optimistically about the early December protests. What do you think about the future of the protest movement in Russia?

The elections produced a furor that no one could have predicted. All the people who went to the elections as observers and all the people who gathered video footage, photos, evidence of violations at the elections, led to a huge turn-out [at the first protest]. The next protest at Bolotnaya Square terrified me until the very last moment because 40,000 people had already said on Facebook that they were going. I for one was really worried that when such a big crowd assembled it would be difficult to avoid conflict. Because next to you there are a group of gay activists with parade banners, and next to them stand the nationalists with Russian imperial flags, who in general if they saw a gay on the street they would [beat them into the ground]. You're afraid--not that the police will break it up, but that in a panic or because of provocation, something might happen and there will be victims. The fact that that didn't happen was very surprising.

And the latest protest [on Prospekt Sakharova], where there were already 100,000 people, was less inspiring to me. Maybe it's because until that moment there weren't leaders in this movement. Everything had happened from below, and maybe that's why so many people came to the streets, because we didn't follow behind someone. We came on our own. But at Prospekt Sakharova, individuals and political heroes had already emerged, people who would like to use this crowd to their own ends.

So is it better when the opposition has no leadership?

No, it's bad that in Russia there aren't any powerful opposition leaders. But I'm talking



about the fact that in order to gain this kind of strength, it's important for the movement that there isn't any. One has to understand that, in order for new people, new heroes, to emerge, there has to be a foundation. We can't just say—well, we don't have a leader, so why protest? There is wrong, and we need to fight that wrong.

For me it's very important that a large part of this indignant movement is made up of young, successful people who grew up under Putin, and are very content with their lives. For example, I live very comfortably—I have a job, a salary, a house…. But I understand that in this comfortable life something isn't right…. The fact that people feel something, something that can probably be called conscience, is very important—and it's important that it awoke in the most successful stratum of society.

What role does your magazine and website, Bolshoi Gorod, play in all this?

Our website played a role. In general for ten years we've said the same things: "Fight for your rights, demand the fulfillment of your rights…" We were already so accustomed to the fact that nothing was happening. And then it's like suddenly everyone said "Let's go! We'll fight for our rights as well!" On the one hand we get a terrific high off of this… we think, "It is our 100,000-person crowd! Of course, it's ours! We did it all!" But we know that we also have a responsibility, because if you've lifted up the people—it doesn't matter whether it's fifty or 100,000—now you have to demand more. Not just: "Stand up!" They've stood up. Now it's: "Stand up, and take a step! To the left, to the right, forward!" Undoubtedly, we play a role. We won't overestimate that role, but we won't underestimate it either.

Have people woken up?

People have experienced a feeling of a power, a power belongs to the people and is non-political. Will things change in the short-term? No…. For at least six years, we'll have President Putin. In the long term, yes, I think things will change. For now we can fight, but on March 4th we won't have a real choice. In six years I believe we will.

Do you consider yourself a journalist or an activist?

Everything is kind of mixed up in Russia today. It's also happening with this so-called revolution. Undoubtedly we [journalists] play an active part. We don't hide the fact that we're for it, that we call upon everyone to be for it, that all decent people are for it, and if you're not for it there's nothing good about that. But we try to preserve a certain formal journalistic ethic. We don't command people to go. But the amount of attention we devote to it, how openly we're delighted by it, even when preserving formal neutrality in our words we of course are taking an active part. [On the site] we had a heap of information that we prepared about the violations on December 4th. It's obvious: we are a part of this story. We are creating it. We are taking part in it. ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Three Václavs , One Vaněk: Honoring the life of Václav Havel

Hannah Miller
Barnard College, Columbia University

On December 18, 2011, former Czechoslovak president and renowned playwright, Václav Havel passed away.

In 1973, a young playwright, political essayist and future president of the Czech Republic named Václav Havel was working in a brewery warehouse as dictated by the Party authorities. In 1978, his play *Audience* introduced the public to the character of Ferdinand Vaněk, a dissident writer in socialist Czechoslovakia who was assigned the same fate: an artist turned brewery employee reduced to rolling barrels of beer across a cold floor at the behest of a repressive regime.

The parallel situations of the two men—one a fictional character, one a real life writer and activist—became part of the fabric of Czechoslovak culture during the period of Normalization, when Havel and several of his colleagues would pen plays featuring Vaněk as a shared protagonist. Both the character of Vaněk and his creator, Havel, are important Czech national protagonists, so much so that their articulations, antics, and arguments have been committed to Czechoslovak collective cultural memory.

I first read the Vaněk plays last semester when I was studying abroad at Central European University in Budapest and was struck by the impact of "character theft"—the appropriation of the same main character by several of Havel's contemporaries—as the quiet, passive, yet morally intact Ferdinand Vaněk was used in one-acts by Havel's colleagues and creative partners-in-crime Pavel Kohout, Pavel Landovský, and Jiří Dienstbier. These short dramatic works are hilarious and mildly absurd, but also seem reflective of a highly unusual phenomenon. It is rare for several authors of the same era and location to use the same protagonist, and, therefore, this serves not only as a unique and innovative cultural production, but also as the embodiment of a national moment in identity. The Prague Spring provided the Czechoslovak people with a unique, albeit brief, opportunity to express themselves more freely and to advocate for reform in a cultural climate more conducive to incremental, but substantive liberalization. Thus, it is entirely fitting that the character of Vaněk, a dissident turned brewery employee, was born after the brutal suppression of this exciting historical moment.

I must be honest—I've heard the phrase "Socialism with a human face" referenced so often in my Eastern Europe-related classes at Barnard that, by the time I was considering it alongside Havel's work, it had almost started to lose its meaning. Reading Havel's obituaries reminded me of how crucial Prague Spring leader Alexander Dubček's rhetoric and Havel's ideas were and what they meant beyond the concrete plan of a new economic model and increased civil liberties. Havel's further absorption into the political realm was partially a result of being banned from the theater

after his involvement in the 1968 uprising.

The evolution of Havel from playwright to public figure and the trajectory of his work from his first play, *The Garden Party* (1963), to his later works can be traced by examining his use of the figure of Vaněk in Havel's one-act plays. His treatment of the Vaněk character reflects the professional and personal transformation that took place in conjunction with the rise and brutal suppression of Dubček's Prague Spring, in which he advocated for liberalizing reforms within the Communist Party and espoused the idea of socialism with a "human face." Václav Havel's role as a public figure, his presidency of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1989 and his eventual leadership of the newly formed Czech Republic in 1993 grew to somewhat overshadow his previous reputation for penning plays and political essays. Even his official website speaks to this delineation of his identity: "before 1989", "1989 -2003, and "after 2003". The changing presence of Vaněk in Havel's work speaks to the importance of remembering an earlier time in his life and career, one that has long been overshadowed by his influential activism and participation in 1968. Havel was undergoing a twofold transformation during the hopeful rise and devastating fall of Dubček's attempts to reform the Party. Havel's evolution into a figure active in that brief window in 1968 and again, as a prominent representative of the new, post-1989 political order generated both harsh criticism and exultant praise- and both extremes can be seen today in the posthumous evaluations of his legacy.

Havel the playwright, politician, popular icon and the tripartite identity and public image that accompany the three labels are equally fascinating. When the news of his death was announced on December 18, 2011, the world lost all three parts of Havel, but his legacy will live on through his works and characters like Ferdinand Vaněk.



21st Century Rudňany, Samuel Hanuščin Photos, 2011

Bucharest Before the Storm: A Brit in Ceauşescu's Romania

A review of *The Last Hundred Days,* by Patrick McGuiness

Usha Sahay
Columbia College, Columbia University

Students of Eastern European history are taught about Soviet communism through a series of abstractions: daily life devolves into the surreal and absurd, trivial actions take on a political dimension, the system engenders an inexplicable nostalgia after it is gone. These generalizations are accurate in many ways, but do little to explain the system to those who haven't experienced it. This, perhaps, is why the history and culture of the Eastern Bloc continues to fascinate so many people: Eastern Europe under state socialism was another world altogether, a surreal mix of extraordinary repression and ordinary existence that writers, filmmakers, social scientists and artists have sought to capture and convey to the world.

Given how difficult it is to accurately and artfully portray such a system, Patrick McGuinness' *The Last Hundred Days* is a feat of literature as well as history. This debut novel poignantly illustrates life in Bucharest, Romania in the last months of the Ceauşescu regime—what McGuinness calls "Europe's saddest dictatorship." *The Last Hundred Days* tells the story of a young British student who takes a job in Bucharest and becomes entangled with Ceauşescu's formidable surveillance society. Though the nameless protagonist is a foreigner, he narrates his experiences without seeming like one—his tone is neither bewildered nor condescending. In a genre where foreign "otherizing" of the Balkans is a constant and vexing problem, this is an impressive accomplishment.

It is precisely the narrator's distance from Romania that makes the novel both credible and compelling. He knows as little as most readers, if not less, about the bizarre underworld of the Romanian Communist Party, and he brings his audience with him as he acclimates to his new life. In this way, McGuinness shows, rather than tells, how nothing is to be taken at face value. The more secretive the political system, the more layers of secrets people seem to have.

One way in which McGuinness' novel is different from others of its kind is its engagement with the upper echelons of the Communist party. Almost immediately after his arrival, the narrator gains connections to party apparatchiks, estranged bureaucrats and double agents – often without realizing their true identities. One delightful, if ominous, episode is when the main characters find themselves in the same nightclub as Slobodan Milosevic. The new Yugoslav president is on a goodwill tour of the Eastern Bloc, but in this anecdote, he is simply one more political boss for corrupt Romanian officials to wine, dine, and squeeze for money. Cameos by well-known figures like Milosevic or Ceauşescu's spoiled son Nicu are interwoven seamlessly with critical appraisals of the plight of ordinary citizens. In this way, the book is not only a chronicle of everyday life in the Romanian capital; it also offers, in the vein of a political thriller or spy novel, an exciting look into the inner workings

of the massive Communist apparatus and its international reach.

The novel is weakest when McGuinness digresses from his wry analysis of life in Communist Romania and delves instead into the narrator's troubled past. This subplot, which centers on his rocky relationship with his parents, remains vaguely defined throughout the book. Its primary function is to show why the protagonist ran away from his past and immersed himself so fully into his new Romanian life. But references to the narrator's parents are neither frequent nor compelling enough to make a real impact; instead they feel like annoying interruptions to an otherwise fast-paced and engaging plot.

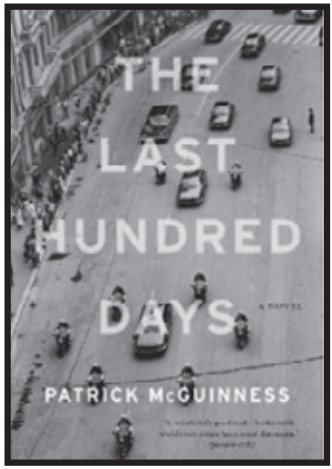


Photo: http://www.patrickmcguinness.org.uk/

The demons of the narrator's past seem to serve as a symbol for the fragile and corrupt regime – at one point, a direct comparison is implied between his abusive father and Nicolae Ceauşescu himself. This stab at symbolism doesn't work precisely because the comparison is too easy, too black-and-white – whereas McGuinness's strength lies in showing that there's always a grey area. Anything that boils down to a simple truth must have another side to it – in a totalitarian system or otherwise. This is shown most clearly through Leo, the protagonist's mentor and best friend, who constantly castigates the regime with bitter (and hilarious) sarcasm, even as he profits from it through his black market dealings. Dissidents more righteous than Leo charge him with hypocrisy, but his cynical retorts are persuasive. "The world's not divided into wimps and heroes," Leo tells his fiancée. "It's not like that. There aren't enough of either to really make a difference."

In the same way, McGuinness breaks down other simplistic dualities that people use all too often to think about the region. For instance, the divide between ordinary citizens and the politicians who represent the state apparatus is nonexistent. Double agents are an accepted part of life – one of the protagonist's students is casually referred to as the "class informer" – and even close friends are just as likely to be working for the *Securitate,* or secret police, than not.

Similarly, society didn't break down into Communists versus dissidents. The book is rife with characters who show that there was such a thing as a "good" socialist, or at least a sympathetic one. It was possible to genuinely believe in a humane socialism that benefitted the least fortunate while still opposing Ceauşescu for betraying the revolution's ideals. This complicates any attempt by Westerners to comprehend Eastern Europe through a simple binary of good and evil. The protagonist learns quickly that no matter what one thought of the system, there was something to be said for many of the people who believed in it.

The book rids the reader of one final illusion: the optimistic image of a single spark of freedom bringing the whole Communist house of cards crashing down. McGuinness makes it clear that in the days leading up to Ceauşescu's overthrow, it was not at all clear that any change was imminent. Even as the Berlin Wall fell and revolution spread to Romania's neighbors, most people doubted that anything was going to change in Romania. In hindsight, Ceauşescu's brutal crackdown before his fall can be seen as a desperate, last-ditch effort, but at the time it was simply further evidence that his regime was more repressive, and more durable, than the rest. It's easy to interpret 1989 as a slow but sure march toward freedom for the whole region. But for Romanians living through it, the revolution wasn't real until Ceauşescu's famous final speech on December 21 in Piaţa Palatului.

Just as it's difficult for Westerners to truly comprehend Eastern Europe under Communism, it may also be a challenge for people in other former Soviet Bloc countries to comprehend Romania under Ceauşescu. Even the most seasoned students of history may find it impossible to grasp the Romanian experience. Still, for those who'd like to try, *The Last Hundred Days* is an excellent place to start. • • •

An American Biography

Review of John Lewis Gaddis' *George F. Kennan: An American Life*

Emily Tamkin
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John Lewis Gaddis's official biography of George F. Kennan—historian, lover of Russian culture, State Department Soviet specialist, and, most notably, author of the containment doctrine, a creation he came to deeply resent—is not simply remarkable because it was so long in the making; nor only because it presents Cold War history from a totally new perspective (namely, that of an American who, by virtue of his career in the Foreign Service, was in self-inflicted exile, and often felt more a friend to those abroad than to his own countrymen); nor just because it gives the reader unprecedented access to the life and mind of such an enigmatic and brilliant man. This book is a masterpiece because it is simultaneously a biography, a history, and, put quite simply, a great piece of writing.

That is not to say that the book is not without its flaws. Part of what makes Kennan such a fascinating figure was that he somehow seemingly knew what was going to happen decades before it did—which made him both an excellent, prophetic teacher and a self-regarded failure as a policy writer. What Kennan is most famous for saying and doing thus unfolds mostly in the first half of the book, while the latter half is dedicated to watching the predictions prove themselves, which, through no fault of Gaddis's (for he himself did not choose when Kennan did what he did), leads the author to write the first half in such a flurry of exhilaration—Kennan was interned in Germany! He wrote the long telegram! He authored the famous "X" article! He was declared persona non grata by Stalin!—thereby setting a pace he cannot hope to keep in the second half. And readers looking for more history than biography will be, if not disappointed, then at least fleetingly frustrated with the amount of attention paid to Kennan's family life, and in particular to his wife, Annelise. But those fleeting frustrations will not damper the sense that one is indeed reading a brilliant book, at the end of which the reader is left with a great man who considered himself a failure, a prophet who predicted too early, an achiever who was deeply unsatisfied with what he had accomplished, and, ultimately, a teacher of statesmen, historians, and citizens alike. Kennan, Gaddis recounts, once hoped that people would say of him, "It is good that he taught as he did." By the end of this book, the reader will not hesitate to do just that.

Gaddis had the advantage of knowing Kennan well, and of having had years to write this book. But none of that renders the portrait he has painted, the story he has told, the history he has taught, or the character he has preserved for posterity any less of a feat. George F. Kennan, the reader is told, had a reputation for being, besides brilliant and overly emotional, somewhat unknowable. Thanks to this book, he no longer seems quite so unknown.

The Hedgehog and the Fox

John Lewis Gaddis at Columbia Univeristy

Jordan Valentine
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February 23rd, 2012 – Columbia Political Union, in conjunction with The Birch and other on-campus organizations, brought the Cold War historian, John Lewis Gaddis, to campus for a discussion on his latest biography: *George F. Kennan: An American Life.* Gaddis was quick to clarify that the afternoon was to be spent expanding his work, rather than paraphrasing what was already said in ink. Avoiding the typical, chronologic description, Gaddis offered a more personal characterization of Kennan, examining the statesmen through *The Hedgehog and the Fox.*

More than half a century ago, the analogy was put forth in its most popular form by thinker, Isaiah Berlin, in an essay of the same name. It has since become a handy character framework for historians, biographers, and IR experts. Hedgehogs are characterized by their focus and stability which only deepen as their expertise grows. Their foils are the foxes; agile and adaptive, they seek and thrive on action and change, but in Gaddis's words, "lack purpose … begging the question, 'to what end?'" These are the Clintons and Reagans of this world: leaders who draw as much praise as criticism for their mutability. In his consideration of ultimate purpose, Gaddis notably differs from Berlin, imparting a more a qualitative judgment.

According to Gaddis, Kennan was without doubt a hedgehog. He posits that after the loss of his mother in childhood, Kennan could not help but search for permanent ideas. With this disposition and a strong belief in God, he easily perceived what many at the time ignored: that an ideology (in the case of the Soviets, Marxism) could not simply be implanted in a people. This vision served as the basis of the political tenants for which he is now renowned.

Gaddis admits, though, that it was the fox in Kennan who relied upon this view to shape the containment policy in its most extreme form. Every American history class now teaches the significance of "The Long Telegram," but were it not for a fit of rage and a breach of protocol this famous policy would have been left to yellow in the State Department's filing system. For a moment, it seemed that an image of stability might be salvaged in weighing Kennan's actions through time.

However, trying to communicate this train of thought, Gaddis himself flirted with the realization that his subject was, in fact, more complex than a metaphor. All the while, colleague and critic, Anders Stephanson, patiently prepared for his chance to pry around this hole in his presentation. With a tinge of condescension reserved for close friends, he addressed the fault Gaddis would not: "well, you're lumping John, as usual." In just a few moments of debate between the two, it was apparent that judging Kennan's legacy was not a matter of discerning either or. George Kennan could be both hedgehog and fox, neither, and something altogether different to suit the moment. This was the defining aspect of the personality that for decades has cast a shadow on American foreign policy.

Russia's Failed Transitional Justice

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Between 1929 and 1953 over 14 million people passed through the USSR's infamous gulag forced labor camps. Entire ethnic groups were forced to move to harsh climates of Siberia and Central Asia. Yet, to date, the Russian government has not authorized any truth-seeking commission, nor has it brought anyone to justice for these crimes. During a transition period, persecution of crimes of preceding regimes can benefit the new government. In this investigation, I will attempt to return to1992 and analyze why Russia's pro-democratic forces chose not to initiate a process of transitional justice and seek retribution against the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

Beginning of the transition and collapse of the USSR

In the absence of an autonomous civil society in the USSR, Gorbachev's partial economic and political liberalization ignited the emergence of nationalist sentiment in each of the fifteen republics, including Russia. As a result, by 1991 the process of transition in Russia was influenced by three major actors: the reformist and the conservative blocs within the CPSU (both all-Union factions), and the increasingly nationalist pro-democratic coalition of the then-President of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Boris Yeltsin.

Within the triad, the balance of power was highly unsteady, a fact which was soon confirmed by the abortive putsch of the self-appointed State Committee on Emergency on 19 August 1991. The reactionary Soviet military leaders conspired with the USSR's Vice-President Gennadiy Yanayev and Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, both appointees of Gorbachev, to place the reformist President of the USSR under house arrest in an attempt to reverse the change. However, the story was quickly complicated by the much publicized emergence of Boris Yeltsin as the leader of resistance to the putsch. Yeltsin did not hesitate to exploit the situation to his advantage, so that when the putsch collapsed on the 20th of August, Mikhail Gorbachev practically lost his authority in the core republic of the USSR.

To confirm Gorbachev's political impotency, on August 23rd, Yeltsin issued a decree suspending the activity of the Communist Party of the RSFSR on RSFSR's territory. On August 25th, Yeltsin issued another decree declaring all assets of the CPSU and of the CP RSFSR to be the state property of the RSFSR. Disjointed and insolvent, the once almighty Communist Party essentially ceased to exist. The balance of power positively shifted into the hands of Yeltsin's government.

After a rather languid struggle with the remnants of CPSU, on November 6, 1991, Yeltsin consolidated his success by issuing another decree, putting a final end to the activity of the CPSU and CP RSFSR and upholding the previous decree on confiscation of their property. The new edict effectively precluded the possibility of restoring the Communists' activity

in Russia in the case that the temporary suspension was lifted. The document assessed the activity of the CPSU structures as "anti-popular" and "anti-constitutional," and held them responsible for sowing the seeds of "religious, social and ethnic discord" as well as for encroaching upon the "rights and freedoms of a human and a citizen". However, despite these accusations, the new Russian government did not follow up with a more thorough process of investigation of the crimes of the communist regime. Deeply impacted by the "shock therapy" reforms, a large proportion of Russians longed for the past stability of the Soviet era. Harsh treatment of that era's leaders would have likely further alienated the population from the reform process.

"Trial of the Century"

Ironically, judicial investigation of crimes of Communism was prompted by a group of former CPSU members, who demanded that the Russian Constitutional Court (RCC) established constitutionality of the CPSU's ban. In order to avoid potential humiliation in the case that the Communists won, on May 25, 1992, a pro-Yeltsin people's deputy, Oleg Rumyantsev, lodged another petition with the RCC, alleging that the CPSU constituted an illegal organization that usurped state functions. During the trial, the pro-President side released a number of important historical documents in order to support their claim that the CPSU absorbed all the state institutions, and was, thus, far from an ordinary political party. Defenders of the CPSU argued that while the Party did commit serious offenses in the past, it managed to rally the people around a common, noble idea, consolidating masses and elites into a strong state. The Communists' position was bolstered by the fact that until 1990, the Party's vanguard status was inscribed into the Soviet Constitution.

Overall, the trial lasted for a little less than 5 months, during which the court convened 52 times to hear the testimonies of 46 witnesses and 16 experts. Pronounced on November 30, 1992, the final verdict declared that CPSU's ban was only partially constitutional, while declining the consideration of the constitutionality of the CPSU and CP RSFSR as organizations. As a result, while evidence of some crimes of the CPSU surfaced during the hearings, the party was not brought to justice.

Setting the stage for forgetting?

Nevertheless, although the Court declined to consider the anti-Communists' petition, the "trial" of the CPSU had the potential of instigating a process of justice against the CPSU. The third part of the verdict, which explains the rationale behind asserting the constitutionality of Yeltsin's ban of the higher organizational structures of the CPSU, contains the RCC's judgment on the criminality of the Party. The verdict laid blame upon the CPSU for the mass terror of the Soviet people, stating that "the governing structures of the CPSU were the initiators … of the repression policy against millions of Soviet people, including towards the deported peoples." The infamous KGB, or the key instrumental institution in the policy of repression, was officially denounced as the Party's subordinate. From this follows that the higher echelon of the CPSU can be held responsible for all the crimes committed by the KGB structures.

Moreover, the RCC officially recognized the CPSU's interference with foreign policy, stating for instance, that in 1990 the CPSU's Central Committee discussed the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Hungary and their upkeep in the Eastern Germany. The CPSU was also held responsible for a number of economic crimes committed primarily during 1990-91, such as free usage of the airplanes and teletypes, usurpation of summer cottages (dachas), as well as usage of public funds for the maintenance of the party cadres and of political structures within the KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defense. The verdict was thus rather explicit in denouncing the past crimes of the CPSU.

In addition, the investigation process enabled the release of a number of revealing documents, to which the judges allude in the verdict. For example, the anti-Communist team of lawyers managed to get access to a series of documents pertaining to Stalin's Great Purge, repression of dissidents during Brezhnev's rule and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. While certainly falling short of a full-fledged truth

committee, the trial thus enabled the anti-Communists to substantiate their claims with real historical facts.

If it was not the RCC's fault, why then was the trial not followed by a more comprehensive process of transitional justice? Such a process would not have deviated from Yeltsin's pattern of marginalizing communists and could have reminded the increasingly nostalgic population about the other side of the "glorious" Soviet past. One possible explanation is that the Yeltsin's bloc was not interested in the public denunciation of the CPSU, as its majority originated from the Party's ranks. While certainly plausible, such explanation can be, however, rebutted by the fact that the RCC did not hold ordinary members of CPSU and CP RSFSR accountable for crimes of the regime. Furthermore, Yeltsin's decree already granted a blanket amnesty to the "ordinary members of the Party," and the RCC upheld the constitutionality of this specific clause. The newly-converted democrats could, hence, use these pretexts in order to distance themselves from the "evil" CPSU, as incarnated by Gorbachev and the putschists.

"DEEPLY IMPACTED BY THE 'SHOCK THERAPY' REFORMS, A LARGE PROPORTION OF RUSSIANS LONGED FOR THE PAST STABILITY OF THE SOVIET ERA."

In her article, (Andrieu 2011, 198-220), Kora Andrieu offers another rationalization of the ensuing amnesia. According to her, transitional justice in the immediate aftermath of the USSR's collapse failed due to a combination of four factors. First, since the CPSU penetrated virtually all state and civil society institutions, it was not clear which officials would carry out the process of transitional justice, and against which political figures or structures. Would Gorbachev's unprecedented reforms outweigh his complicity in suppressing protests in a number of union republics? Would Yeltsin's role in the demise of the Communist regime justify his prior membership in the Party? Amidst this uncertainty it was inevitable then, that the persecuting body would have not been entirely depoliticized and impartial. This would have not only undermined public perceptions of fairness of the proceedings, but could have also created martyrs of those selected for prosecution and punishment.

Secondly, according to Andrieu, is the absence of the civil society involvement and the dominating political apathy. Indeed, when deciding whether or not to prosecute the former regime, politicians oftentimes weigh the relative political cost of either decision. If the majority is indifferent toward the past regime, then prosecution will not yield significant political benefits for the incumbents. This was the case in Russia after the fall of communism. In his account of the trial, David Remnick notes the virtual absence of interest in the proceedings among the general public. Tired of the scandalous historical revelations that characterized the glasnost era, Russian society was more preoccupied with hyperinflation and the insecurity that followed Yeltsin's "shock therapy" economic reforms.

Lastly, an attempt at investigating the crimes of communism, particularly of the Stalinist period, could have inspired similar processes of truth-seeking at the level of federative units and autonomous republics. The elites feared that local truth commissions could instigate further secessions from the Russian state. The fear was not unfounded; in November 1991 the newly elected President of the Chechen Republic Dzhokhar Dudayev proclaimed Chechnya's independence from Russia. In addition, leaders of several other federative republics, such as Tatarstan and Khakassiya, publicly expressed separatist ideas. The investigations of the Soviet crimes towards the ethnic minorities would have essentially legitimized their claims for sovereignty.

Conclusion

Dealing with the preceding authoritarian regime will remain a fundamental issue for democratizing governments. On one hand, retaliation against the former regime may provoke a popular backlash against the new regime and forestall the development of democracy. On the other hand, if no sanctions are taken against the previous dictatorial rulers, they may hinder, or even curtail, the process of transition by rejoining the political system. In Russia, the process of addressing the status of the Communist Party was complicated by a unique set of political conditions at the onset of transition, which included the Party's complicity in an anti-transition coup, pervasiveness of its penetration into the state structures, political and civil societies, as well as the simultaneous disintegration of the USSR as a state.

Consistent with Samuel Huntington's suggestion, Yeltsin's approach to tackling the CPSU was shaped almost entirely by political strategy, and not by legal or moral considerations. Thus, the process failed to produce the same vigor in Russia that shook Nuremburg. While it certainly helped the Court avoid further allegations of political bias, the "business" of transitional justice in Russia remains unfinished.



Tallinn, Michael Crana, Siena College

The Role of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Chechen Conflict

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The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya is often cited as reason for the second Chechen war (1999-2000) due to the threat it posed to Russian national security. Religious extremism in this region threatens Russia's access to oil pipelines, which run through Chechnya, and fosters an environment for the growth of terrorism; the deadly effects of the latter have already been witnessed in Russia. The introduction of Islamic radicalism in the late nineties was, however, not a natural outcome of the Chechen separatist movement. This and the subsequent increase in extremism have been enabled by the coincidence of Chechen nationalistic sentiments and the instability that characterized Chechnya during the inter-war period. In Chechnya, Islam has consistently been used as a tool to achieve political power, as well as an expression of resistance against Russian invasions. Failing to see this, Russia has continued to escalate the use of force, and thus provide ample opportunity for the rise of another destabilizing force in the region.

The first Chechen war (1994-1996) resulted in the breakdown of an effective governing system, making Islamic rule under Shariah law-which promotes order, discourages corruption and holds leaders accountable to a moral code-appealing to Chechens.[1] It is important to note here that most Chechens support the implementation of Shariah law as a means to combat societal ills, rather than as a step towards the establishment of an Islamic state.[2] Although the majority of Chechens are Muslim, most actually prefer a secular government as opposed to a government based on Shariah law.[3]

Chechens are individualistic, and their primary loyalties are to their family, and clan. It is then uncharacteristic for Chechens to makes these ties secondary to Islam, which Shariah law demands.[4] This conflict between culture and the need for security is apparent upon examining the brief period of peace that was established following the Khasavyurt accords in 1996, when most Chechens rejected Islamists' attempts to institute Islamic rule.[5] In an effort to unite the population, reinstate order, and reduce the escalating crime rate, Islamists introduced the Shariah criminal code. This effort divided Chechens and was met with immediate suspicion.[6] While there was a portion of society that supported the implementation of Shariah law, others viewed it as "forced Islamization," and were unwilling to abandon their tribal beliefs and practices[7] The divide over the implementation of Islamic law was so great that it took until 1999 for Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov to put Shariah law into effect; even then, Maskhadov only did so with regard to the personal and practical, aiming to appease radical opponents and maintain his hold on power.[8] Since the first War, Maskhadov's peers have followed suit.

Beyond simple personal benefit, Chechen

leaders wield Islam as a political tool to consolidate Chechen anger against the Russian government.[9] The first Chechen president, Dzhokhar Dudaev, initially rejected the idea of forming an Islamic state; he only began to utilize Islam in 1994 in order to mobilize the public against the Russian invasion.[10] Islamic doctrine provided a practical means to instill discipline and solidarity among soldiers and to quell opposition within the Chechen population.[11] Chechen military leaders, such as Salman Raduev, knew that in order to avoid a Russian occupation Chechen forces would have to fight with unrelenting force. Islam offered a religious conviction that could provide the necessary motivation to unite Chechens and strengthen morale among Chechen soldiers.[12]

Politician and military leader, Zemlikhan Yandarbiev, also turned to Islam as a source of order in the face of Russian force. Maskhadov, his primary rival, lacked major political and economic support from Russia; without assistance from Moscow, Mashkadov's regime fell into a state of disorder and economic ruin, leaving his regime vulnerable to those who could offer alternative methods to restoring stability.[13]Capitalizing on this weakness, Yandarbiev pushed for the establishment of an Islamic state during his 1997 presidential campaign. This tactic, he knew, could unite the opposition against his rival.[14] While it is unlikely that Yandarbiev himself was truly an Islamic fundamentalist, he took advantage of Maskhadov's weakness and used Islam alongside the influence and financial resources of radical warlords to challenge Maskhadov. Thus, while there was a demand from the population for a return to stability, it did not stem from widespread devotion to Islam. Instead, the use of Islam by Chechen leaders originated from warlords and jihadists who provided human and financial resources.[15]

"...CHECHEN LEADERS WIELD ISLAM AS A POLITICAL TOOL TO CONSOLIDATE CHECHEN ANGER AGAINST THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT."

However, the use of jihadists and the eventual radicalization of Chechen warlords, such as Raduev and Shamil Basayev, was a direct result of the brutal nature of the war – had the war not been so relentless and all-encompassing, the population may not have accepted the influence that radical Islam played in Chechen politics. The bombing of Grozny in 1994 alone resulted in the death of over 24,000 civilians.[16] It was also common practice for the Russian military to set up "filtration camps," where Chechens were detained, tortured and often killed. [17] These transgressions along with instances of rape and execution allowed Islam to become a vehicle to express separatist desires.[18] Russia's use of brute force during the first war forced Chechens to turn to novel avenues of support to fight the Russians, which jihadists eagerly offered.[19] The persistent use of overwhelming force against the Chechen infantry, as well as Chechen civilians, allowed Yandarbiev and other Islamic fundamentalists room to cultivate an opposition; in Islamic fundamentalism Chechens found a means to express their discontent with and rage towards the Russian government.[20] When Russia invaded Chechnya in 1994, foreign jihadists made their way to the battlefield, bringing not only monetary support but radical Islamic ideology as well.[21]

Insufficient control over Chechnya prior to and during the first war allowed the Jihadist threat to spread. To the radicals, the goal of spreading Islamic ideology rises above recognition of state borders and the Chechen secession they opportunistically supported. Moreover, they aspire for the result of their efforts to encompass other territories in the region as well, threatening the stability of the Caucuses and creating a haven for terrorism.[22] This threat of destabilization in the Caucasus is hardly hypothetical. The 1999 holy war waged in Dagestan by Chechen warlords, Shamil Basayev and Omar Ibn al-Khattab,

nearly caused war to erupt in the Caucasus.[23] Perhaps more menacing is the fact that even the prospect of war and institutionalized religious extremism in areas like Dagestan could provoke the mass emigration of the ethnic Russians living in those areas; this in turn would negatively impact the Russian economy.[24] Such emigration would also tarnish the image of the Russian government as a failure to maintain control over its regions and its "inability to protect ethnic Russians" would make the government appear weak in its struggle with a poor failing nation.[25] Therefore, despite low levels of extremism among the general population, the Russian government is forced to address the actions of a violent minority or risk endangering their national security.

While nationalism and corruption help prolong the conflict, it is Russia's inability to provide Chechnya political and economic stability without the use of repression that guarantees its continuation. Furthermore, even if Russia is willing and able to provide such support to Chechen leadership, the nation faces significant obstacles, including Islamic fundamentalist leaders who reject any form of Russian administration in Chechnya and a severe Chechen distrust of Russian motives. In order to foster trust between Chechen and Russian leadership, Russia would likely need to refrain from the use of violence as a diplomatic tool. Normal relations will also require Moscow to negotiate with Chechen leaders whose views are representative of the overall population, rather than simply working with figures who are friendly towards Russia.

It is unlikely, however, that that such negotiations will take place in the near future. President Vladimir Putin has used George Bush's "War on Terror" to justify the protracted Russian involvement in Chechen affairs, as well as his hard line stance towards Chechen leaders.[26] While his military engagement of terrorism will garner Putin support from the West, it will do little to address the roots of the conflict. Unless there is a shift in policy that addresses the factors allowing extremism to play a major role in Chechen politics, the conflict will persist, if not worsen. Current Chechen president, Ramzan Kadyrov, is backed by the Kremlin and has achieved a significant degree of economic and infrastructural improvement; however, his government is marred by accusations of human rights abuses and corruption.[27] While Kadyrov has incorporated elements of an Islamic state into the government, he does not tolerate religious extremists, revealing that his primary goal is preserving his own power rather than promoting a specific ideology.[28]

Currently, Russia structures its approach to Chechnya around the idea that Kadyrov will seek to stabilize the region on his own. Such a strategy, however, fails to address the political, economic, and religious divisions within Chechen society that could threaten his ability to sustain order. Russia's strategy of maintaining stability through force strengthens the influence of Islamic fundamentalists because it does not provide Chechens a peaceful, substantive way to show their discontent. This strategy also makes Chechen nationalists more dependent on radical groups because of their ability to provide Chechens with the economic support that Russia refuses to provide. Should Moscow continue to combat disorder with artillery, Islamic fundamentalism will play a greater role in the conflict and the region will remain in a state of unrest.

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Slavic Proverbs to Ponder

Even the beardless give good advice. ❖ *Without work, there is no cakes.* ❖ *A shot goose will make gaggle*

Causalities of Criminality in 19th Century Odessa

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In Imperial Russia, the processes of urbanization and modernization occurred concurrently throughout the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, and centered around the autocracy and its policy manifestations in such cities as St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, and Odessa. The standardization of relations between the city and the state produced a relatively homogenous pattern of development across the Empire; urban populations became deeply familiar with such realities of urbanization, such as epidemics of communicable disease, economic inequality, and dilapidation of the built environment.[1] Socially, urbanization caused changes in population demographics and a new stratification of classes. Throughout the Empire, combined tensions of the changing public sphere and built environment produced a manifest presence of morally deviant behavior and criminal activity. However, nowhere in the Empire did this heightened criminality become so ubiquitous as to warrant the title "city of thieves,"[2] but Odessa. A larger picture of the city's criminal history is achieved by tracing the convergence of its varied elements, giving historical context to Isaac Babel's literary icon and fictional "king" of the Odessan criminal underworld, Benya Krik.

Three major components facilitated the emergence and perpetuation of criminality in Odessa in the 19th century. Of primary interest are the specific approaches to city planning carried out by tsars and city administrators – while these created an environment functionally effective for purposes of commerce and governing, they also perennially lacked necessary societal infrastructure. Closely linked to the program of city planning were the motives of economic development; the dominance of foreign trade through the port effectively slowed the rate at which industrialization occurred and, in turn, brought about a unique class structure. Lastly, both municipal planning initiatives and economic organization created a vastly multicultural society from which ethnic strife and crime developed. While many of the components of modernization in Odessa were also present throughout Imperial Russia, policy-making and economic development in this highly active port were nuanced such that it cultivated an infamously conspicuous underworld.

Many Russian cities had problems with improving and maintaining infrastructure, "[which] developed not through the interaction of socioeconomic and political forces at the local level but according to strictly defined procedures set down by the central government."[3] In Odessa, development was executed almost exclusively through a "structural approach"[4] until the middle of the 19th century. This paradigm of planning focused on creating a rational street layout, stately architecture, and the grandiose Primorskii Boulevard.[3] Early planners, commissioned first by Catherine II and then by Alexander II — Richelieu and Vorontoov — were successful in that "Odessa by 1825 had grown into a major commercial center."[5]

By the time the "systems approach," an adaptive, conditional model open to multiplicity in users and objectives, was appropriated by planners, the city's size and rate of growth mitigated the effects of their improvements.[6] Frederick Skinner notes that the construction of public service infrastructure, namely roadways and water access, was limited and slow-moving during the 19th century.[7] Prospects for more wide-reaching or efficient services did not improve by the second half of the 19th century, even with the imperial reformation of urban governance in the 1870s.

Prior to the measured and specific allocation of resources by the imperial government, city dwellers had more or less scattered themselves geographically. Early on, "the rich and poor [lived] in propinquity"[8] and commercial areas with restaurants, stores, and entertainment were generally homogenized with respect to social status. Concurrent with the city's flourishing economy, rapid population growth resulted in a new, physically-expressed stratification of residential areas along class lines. Herlihy attributes "Odessa['s acquisition of] concentric rings of neighborhoods, the inhabitants of which showed vastly different levels of wealth" to the large-scale influx of lower-class residents, whom the upper classes did not "relish."[5] Although there existed a confluence of rich and poor public spheres throughout the 19th century, patterns of residential segregation developed as Odessa's population increased. These patterns were later reinforced by the city's distribution of resources.



Illustration by Michael Crana, Siena College

During the reform era, the implementation of the "systems approach" to urban planning changed the rationing of municipal services from nonexistent to discriminatory. The city government, established under Alexander's zemstvo reform in 1864,[9] sustained the inadequacy of many residents' living situations with their mandate's inattention in that "housing constituted the one area of urban development not falling under the purview of the municipal government."[10] Further complicating the support that was provided to residents was the government's failure to pursue the development of public services and amenities as evenly in the suburbs as in the central quarters of the city.[11] The unequal distribution of infrastructure improvements served to exacerbate the wealth gap by worsening preexisting conditions of poverty in poor neighborhoods while augmenting the quality of life for the upper class. Skinner describes one example of this inequality in the distribution of street lighting: "most of the lamps that had been installed were concentrated in the central quarters of the city where the wealthy lived and worked; on a street such as Uspenskaia, which extended through a poorer neighborhood… there was only one lamp for every quarter mile of roadway."[12] It is a global phenomenon that those dark, forbidding atmospheres caused by the absence of street lighting are predisposed to higher crime rates. Hence, the lack of certain services in lower-class neighborhoods both furthered their impoverishment and increased their susceptibility to crime.

Residential segregation was especially conducive to crime for several reasons beyond the qualitative differences in living conditions amongst classes. First, the concentration of the wealthy in a specific geographic locale – their homes and the nearby financial district – narrowed the search for targets of thievery. Second, the spatial concentration of the lower and middle classes, already noted for higher crime rates than the upper classes, consolidated their criminal activities and behaviors. In the residentially dense

and largely poor neighborhood of Moldavenka, "children on the street were forced into a world dominated by the depraved."[13]

For Catherine, the foremost purpose of Odessa was the expansion of her "New Russia" by way of a competitive port on the Black Sea engaging in foreign trade — in this regard it was very successful. Initial investment opportunities and "tsarist colonization policies, which offered financial inducements to emigration from abroad" precipitated the immigration of thousands of foreign merchants and nobles, as well as the day laborers, dock workers, and small business owners who supported them.[14] While the capitalist mechanism of self-regulation aided the distribution of wealth, it also created a distribution of crime.

Odessa's free port status between 1819 and 1856 allowed for the unhindered practice of not only legitimate commerce, but also organized criminal activity like prostitution, smuggling, and the formation of Odessan mafias. While profit incentive mobilized every ethnic group from the French, Germans, Italians, English, Spanish and Greeks in the west and Ukrainians, Ethnic Russians, and Jews in the east, it also stratified the new migrants into a hierarchy of wealth, in which ethnicity corresponded to class. Eastern ethnic groups generally formed the middle and lower classes while their western counterparts formed the upper classes. At first, those upper-class foreigners generally invested their capital abroad, rarely entrusting their funds to local, inland enterprises.[15] Hence, the "delayed foundation of large-scale manufacturers" prolonged the concentration of commercial activity in the port, inevitably prolonging the criminal activity in the port as well.[16] Without the diversion of the lower classes to factories, which would later provide a new outlet of honest employment, there existed a critical juncture of massive amounts of capital, scores of the unabashed, and a self-reinforcing reputation of illicit behavior.

This particular economic arrangement — a downtown financial district surrounding the port of trade, without a suburban industrial district — produced a class structure that championed the growth of an upper class. The lower classes included a substantial petty bourgeoisie, or meshchanstvo, who were "independent artisans and small shopkeepers" and a small number of peasants, who engaged in unskilled labor as dockworkers, servants, and day laborers[17]. Thus, just as the city's economic vitality derived directly from commercial trade in the port and the foreign merchants who directed it, so did the employment of the lower-middle and peasant classes. Employment in or around the port assured proximity to notorious illicit activities; theft from the rich by the poor was certain where their public spheres overlapped. Indeed, some of the "poor and hopeful" flocked to Odessa "if for no other reason than that rich merchants resided there and the idle rich came to vacation there."[18] Odessa drew a wealthy faction of merchants and entrepreneurs, who, in turn, attracted a large number of middle and working class residents looking to profit from them either legally or extra-legally. Over time, the increased exploitation of these circumstances caused Odessa to appropriate its global reputation as a criminal haven. As a homogenous, single-race community, these factors alone bred crime. Like any city, it too faced the strife that accompanies the mixing of peoples.

The racial diversification that cities undergo during urbanization generally brings about alarm, tension, and disorder. The faster the rate and the more numerous the groups, the more heightened these reactions will be. In Odessa, there was no periodization or waves of migration by ethnic group; everyone came at once. Like other heterogeneous cities in the Empire, "[t]he motley character of the population put a strain on social relationships."[19] In a city such as Odessa, with its intermingling of public and private, rich and poor, the added dimension of ethnicity further complicated the residential and economic structures.

While social unrest caused by ethnic strife appeared in a variety of instances, criminal and otherwise, the situation of the Jews during the 19th century exemplified what may be termed "hate crimes." Imperial order struck again in crafting this "foreign city, filled with foreigners;" as we saw before, many ethnic groups were recruited to settle in Odessa. Catherine initially encouraged the settlement of Jews in Odessa,

classifying them into four categories: trading partners, professional experts, skilled artisans, and agricultural settlers. Good intentions and idealism marked early state policies, which allowed for "the participation of Jews in municipal management, and their contribution toward the social life and the culture of the city."[20] To some extent, Jews did fulfill Catherine's economic roles – they were an integral component in the upper class, helping bring capital and labor to Odessa. Unfortunately for her and for Odessa Jews, the harmonious relations characterizing the first half of the century deteriorated as Jews assimilated economically into Odessa's class structure. "The poverty as well as the prosperity of Odessa's Jews excited the resentment of others"[21] and caused the deterioration of their benevolent affiliation with the state. Voracious anti-Semitism, masquerading as competitive capitalist spirit, overtook Odessa's Orthodox community and was subtly appropriated by the state.

Reeling from the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II –which Jews were suspected of committing – the Russian government turned on Jewish city dwellers, acting as both instigators and passive bystanders to the era of pogroms in Odessa, beginning in 1881 and climaxing during the Great Pogrom of 1905. During the pogroms, anti-Semites terrorized Jewish neighborhoods by looting, destroying property, and engaging in violence that intensified greatly at the turn of the century. Skinner describes the demographic problems of Odessa's model of development as intrinsically related to its economic success in that it "found itself torn apart by violent racial conflict between those very elements that had been most responsible for [its] earlier prosperity.[22] Just as the city enjoyed the fortuitous aspects of multiculturalism encouraged at its founding, so it was later enveloped by the deleterious aspects.

The criminal behaviors of Odessans, and those who planned the policies and housing conditions in which they were rooted, compounded through the early 20th century as Odesskaia pochta journalists like Faust reported that "poverty was a main source of criminality;" even a full half-century following the Great Reforms, imperial and municipal disregard of the deplorable living conditions continued. Yet, while Odessa's destitute suffered under the imperial methods of city planning, the city's economic space and immigration regulations incentivized a stratified society in which every class participated in the port-based criminal infrastructure.

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Slavic Proverbs to Ponder

The grave will straighten out the hunchback. ❖ *After chopping off the head, you don't cry over the hair.*

The Marine Façade and the Petersburg Myth in Post-Soviet Russia

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St. Petersburg has always been Russia's 'window to the West.' At the time of its construction in the 18th century, Peter the Great envisioned a city encompassing the greatest architectural achievements of Western Europe: the romantic island-canal systems of Venice and Amsterdam, luxurious baroque architecture, and a court rivaling that of the French in power and elegance. However, the city has not always lived up to its intended purpose: To prove that Russia could leave behind her backward ways and enter into modernity with the rest of Europe).[1] Thus the Petersburg myth was born — its foundations lay in the discrepancy between the idealized city and its real counterpart. The myth, which expresses Russia's complicated experience of modernity, continues to be prevalent in contemporary St. Petersburg. The Marine Façade development project embodies the Petersburg myth and the three-hundred-year-old dichotomy between dreams and reality that lies at the heart of the city.

The Marine Façade, launched in 2004, is the largest and most recent of Petersburg's urban development plans. A joint project between the St. Petersburg City Administration and several private firms, the plan involves a commercial passenger port, a new business district, and an expansion of the city's transportation system. In its planning phase, the port was the original justification for building the Marine Façade – until the port's construction, Petersburg stood as the only major European city without a passenger seaport .[2]

Considering Peter the Great's intent to make St. Petersburg the owner of his empire's main commercial port, the Marine Façade immediately falls into line with Petersburg's cultural tradition. In order to render Petersburg a more prominent trading location, Peter increased the production of Russian ships and encouraged foreign merchants through trade concessions.[3] Years later, a modern Petersburg facing the same challenge finds remedy in the new Marine Façade, which welcomes luxury cruises in place of freight liners.[4] Until the Passenger Port was built, passenger ships had to share limited port space with cargo ships and oil tankers.[5] In order to cope with the pressures of a modern city and popular tourist destination, Petersburg needed to create incentives for ships to utilize this new port. Thus the idea for the grandiose Marine Façade district was born: an ultra-modern contrast to the rest of the city that would provide comfort and leisure for tourists.

Even with this attempted innovation, the weight of the Petersburg myth still rests upon the city. The downtown area, now the historic center, was the pinnacle of modernity in the 18th century. It was also just as contrived as the Marine Façade. Dostoevsky critically called Petersburg "the most intentional city."[6]The completed Marine Façade will be a sleek downtown area that caters to tourists, professionals,

and wealthy residents. It will cover 450 hectares of reclaimed land, nearly half the size of Vasilievsky Island as it exists today. The port, opened in 2008, consists of a rectangular bay in which international commercial cruise liners can dock at one of four terminals. Current predictions put completion of the business and residential areas near 2020, at which time they will be sold to private entities.[7] The reclaimed land serving as the foundation of these areas, called the "pre-coat," is currently under construction. The pre-coat resembles its host city in that any connection to its environment is forced, if present at all.

This artificiality is key to the Petersburg myth and the city's history. The city is seductive with its beauty and symbolic modernity, but these qualities hide the city's darker half—the unnatural and autocratic. The Marine Façade exhibits these same traits. By facilitating increased tourism, it will help the city, its economy, and infrastructure. However, these benefits come at the cost of the environment and the city's residents.

The ideal result of the project is decidedly utopian, appropriate for St. Petersburg. Scale models in the Marine Façade Management Company's office show a sophisticated district that looks more like Sydney, Australia than Petersburg, Russia. The new Western High Speed Diameter Highway will run horizontally through the district, alleviating Vasilievsky's congestion issues by providing an alternative to the city's famous bridges. There is also a plan to expand the metro system by adding two more stations in addition to the two that are currently on the Island.[8] Just as Petersburg was extremely fashionable in the 1700s, the Marine Façade is designed to be the most contemporary district in all of Russia.

There are, however, several drawbacks to the project that residents of St. Petersburg do not fail to notice. Locals have major reservations about the motives behind the project, its implementation, and its possible effects on the city. Debate over the Marine Façade focuses on two sensitive sets of values: the aesthetic and the practical. Generally, proponents of the project are city authorities, corporate developers, and groups that will benefit economically from the project. Opponents include architects, residents of Vasilievsky Island, ecological-advocacy groups, and political coalitions that oppose the authorities currently in office.

Those who feel that Petersburg's aesthetic tradition should be preserved worry that the Marine Façade will change the city's aura. The classic Petersburg style is characterized by a horizontal skyline, linear architecture, symmetry, and a strong contrast between water and stone. Architect, historical restoration expert, and city native Rafael Maratovich Dayanov considers the Marine Façade "upsetting" from an aesthetic point of view.[9] He sees it as a question of forgetting Petersburg's architectural identity and is afraid that the city will change beyond all recognition. The city's distinctive style is a direct reflection of the Western architects Peter commissioned to build his city. Completely departing from traditional Russian form, the tsar ordered the Moscow nobility to build palaces in Petersburg. He forced thousands of peasants from across Russia to construct and inhabit the new city. The combined human toll of building accidents, disease, and flood-related deaths illustrates the autocratic nature of Peter's project.[10] In Dayanov's words, the city was the dream of "one man."[11] The commoners and nobles hated the location and the hardships it caused for them, "but Peter would not listen."[12]

Similarly, the Marine Façade completely departs from the Baroque aesthetic of the city. The government and managing firms want it to look like a 21st-century business district, which is completely incongruous with the existing style of the city. Paralleling the city's birth, the Marine Façade is a top-down execution; the residents of St. Petersburg and Vasilievsky Island have had little say in the project's implementation, though it disrupts the lives of many as well as the surrounding environment.

In fact, Vasilievsky Island is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Because it is protected by UNESCO, the Petersburg government regulates the style of all new construction within the city limits. Within the City Administration there are two architectural committees that have jurisdiction over the city's design. One, the Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture, passes all legislation concern-

ing new development in the historical area. However, the Marine Façade area lies under a different municipal authority, and is therefore not subject to the same set of architectural and structural regulations.[13] This means that the 450 hectares of new development are not required to conform to the historical style.

Aside from aesthetic concerns, many see the Marine Façade as an impractical and harmful endeavor. Many argue that it is detrimental to not only the environment of the coastal area, but to the daily lives of those who reside there. Journalist Victoria Rabotnova, a resident of Vasilievsky Island, wonders why the port complex could not be built somewhere else along the coast. Before deciding on Vasilievsky, other options were being considered — such as Kanonersky Island, located to the south of Vasilievsky and far enough from the historical center that it would not be considered as controversial. Rabotnova's theory is that Vasilievsky was chosen because placing the port near an existing residential district would have given the developers an excuse to build the new district.[14]

"THE CITY IS SEDUCTIVE WITH ITS BEAUTY AND SYMBOLIC MODERNITY, BUT THESE QUALITIES HIDE THE CITY'S DARKER HALF—THE UNNATURAL AND AUTOCRATIC."

Ecological groups were furious at the lack of concern over the project's environmental impact, as the land reclamation process causes extreme turbidity around the coast and where the Neva meets the bay.[15] In 2010, the St. Petersburg People's Democratic Union of Youth protested against the destruction of local fish populations.[16] Other ecologists complain that the project will destroy the coast, reduce the number of green areas in the city, and make the Neva Bay unfit for wildlife.[17]

However, the government approved the Vasilievsky project for construction, and it passed all the necessary tests concerning environmental safety. Journalists Nadezhda Zaitseva and Alexander Medvedev quote an unnamed member of parliament who took part in the Marine Façade meetings of the Standing Committee on Health and Environmental Legislative Assembly in 2005: "We asked the experts questions about the impact … on the surrounding area, the impact … on the water quality in the Gulf of Finland and came to the conclusion that … it does not adversely affect either the health of the air or water.'" The representative also said he believes Vasilievsky is the only place where a port like this could be located, although many experts are quick to note the contrary.

The construction of the Marine Façade again echoes Petersburg's construction. The swampy mouth of the Neva was nearly uninhabitable. However, Peter desperately wanted a port, and it allowed him to move away from Moscow, a capital hated. Foreigners and nobles did not believe it would survive past Peter's reign as the climate was so poor and the residents despised it. However, for Peter, "no obstacle was great enough to prevent his carrying out his design.".[18]

Economically, many Vasilievsky residents are upset about the Marine Façade's potentially negative effect on apartment values. People who bought expensive waterfront property in the Primorskaya area are extremely angry and have formed lobbying coalitions to protest the construction of the Marine Façade. Not only will they lose their beautiful view of the Gulf, but they will also lose value on what was once considered prime real estate. One NGO, "Protecting the Island Vasilievsky" (ZOV), filed a lawsuit in 2006 attempting to stop development of the Western High Speed Diameter on the grounds that it would decimate the value of surrounding real estate.[19]

Although Peter's nobles built the city's original palaces, they too endured economic hardship because of construction. Having no choice but to move

to the new capital, the costs of construction and food led many to estimate they had lost two-thirds of their wealth.[20] The people hated St. Petersburg, and they "suffered greatly but did not complain."[21] Today's residents have no problems raising their voices against the Marine Façade, but they are no more effective than their 18th-century counterparts.

Public opinion goes unacknowledged in the implementation of the project. Groups such as ZOV and the St. Petersburg Youth League have tried laboriously to change the plans, but to no avail. ZOV has held rallies and written to both Presidents Medvedev and Putin during their terms in office.[22] They have also petitioned the local Petersburg government.[23] Tatiana Sharagina, who owns an apartment next to the port, is a prominent member of ZOV and elected representative of Vasilievsky Island. She admits the group has not had much success with accomplishing its goals, given that the port is already functioning. Residents of an apartment building located on Morskaya Naberezhnaya, right next to the construction, wrote a petition expressing their grievances about the noise of the construction, which disrupts their everyday lives. With the estimated deadline of the project set at 2020, they will have to put up with the disturbances for a while to come.[24] But as long as the city can get its makeover, the people's plight does not seem to be an obstacle.

American journalist David Greene published an article on St. Petersburg, in which he asses it as Russia's façade: "Peter the Great imagined a luxurious playground for the ruling elite … [now some residents] think Russia's current leaders are using the city for the same purpose."[25] Petersburg is a special city, as tour groups from cruise liners can enter without a Russian visa as long as they are accompanied at all times by a licensed tour guide. Greene argues that this, combined with the atmospheric discrepancy between Petersburg and the rest of Russia, gives the Russian government control over foreigners' impressions of the country. Not only does the Marine Façade facilitate this superficial tourist experience of the country, but the surrounding areas will also send these types of visitors a different perception of the country than what really exists, purposefully disguising its negative attributes.

Petersburg was built to be, and remains to this day, Russia's "window"—not "door"—to the West. As an image, it is "more constricted … more subject to control.[26] The Marine Façade facilitates this same control, just as the connection between Russia and tourists can be controlled. The front of modern business may hide the similarities between the Marine Façade and Peter's vision, but they are both utopias of modernity. Both stem from the intent to put Russia on par with Western Europe, but both are, in actuality, monuments to Russia's top-down power structure. The Petersburg myth lives on into the present, and the Marine Façade exemplifies the myth and shows that it is still an important part of the city and its culture. The conflicts between new and old, the powerful and powerless, and vision and reality can all be found under the surface of the Marine Façade.

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Slavic Proverbs to Ponder

Your elbow's close, but you can't bite it. ❖ *Don't mention the rope in the house of a hanged person*

A Tale Of Two Princes

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Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* reflect the authors' profound understanding of human nature through their child-like protagonists. Both novels express the necessity of an open mind and an inquisitive nature in order to understand the world and achieve happiness. In addition, the display of ignorance in the novels is employed as a critique of society and its own idiocy. Both authors also consider the meaning of true friendship as well as the unfortunate situation that results when these positive relationships do not develop.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote his novel during World War II, a time of chaos for the French people. Forced to leave his homeland, the author's nostalgia for childhood and peacetime contribute to the novel's portrayal of love and friendship. Fyodor Dostoevsky also penned his masterpiece after a long journey away from Russia. His isolation from society gave him the time for introspection as he attempted to define national identity.

The two child-like protagonists in these works live in a world where neither of them belongs. While Prince Myushkin in Dostoevsky's novel has been in Switzerland for the past four years and is often portrayed as an outsider to Russian society, the little prince in Saint-Exupéry's work is not even from earth; he is a traveler from outer space who learns about other planets after leaving his own. Ultimately, the little prince raises an important question, "Look up at the sky. Ask yourself, 'Has the sheep eaten the flower or not?' And you'll see how everything changes." [1] This inquiry epitomizes the struggle of both authors to seek to understand what happens when a person so innocent is placed in a world with a lack of values; where selfishness and disrespect prevail, and how that affects such a person.

Both novels offer depictions of the sense of ignorance that comes with a narrow-minded perspective. In *The Little Prince*, the adult narrator explains that he lives on another planet known as Asteroid B-612. The Turkish astronomer who first discovered this planet faced ridicule at the International Astronomical Congress where he first presented his findings. However, he was not laughed at because he was wrong, but because of the way he was dressed. When he presented his discovery once again in European clothing years later, everyone believed him. The astronomer's apparent inability to follow societal conventions leads others to laugh at him. Similarly, Prince Myushkin often displays an inability to conform and adapt to the societal norms of Russia at the time. Myushkin makes his way to the party at Nastassya Filippovna's apartment, for instance, despite the fact that he never received an invitation. The prince's appearance arouses "bewilderment and a few strange smiles" followed by "laughter and merriment."[2] As the novel progresses, this type of behavior from Myushkin leads the others to believe that he is an idiot.

However, neither the Turkish astronomer nor the prince fit under the category of "idiot." The astronomer presents his unique discovery, a clear example of his intellectual abilities. Similarly, the prince is aware of the emotional effects of his actions on others and himself. He wonders what implications his en-

trance to Nastassya's party might have, saying that the "worst thing" they might do is "think something bad" about him or "start laughing in [his] face."[3] While the other characters view the Prince as an idiot, he possesses important qualities that the others lack. He is an honest human being, humble, selfless, and giving. When he enters society, his benevolence is twisted into what the others view as idiocy. *The Idiot* could refer to the rest of humanity and the ignorance that results from their narrow-minded perspectives. In *The Little Prince*, those who mocked the astronomer also exhibit this restricted, superficial outlook; they only accept him when he follows their societal conventions and dresses like them.

The authors argue that inquisitiveness and open-mindedness are virtues held by children. Because the little prince and Prince Myushkin possess these traits, they come across as truly child-like individuals. St. Exupéry writes with the intent to evoke a sharp contrast between the different ways grown-ups and children view the world. The narrator explains that when he was six years old, he read a book about boa constrictors devouring other animals. He proceeded to create Drawing Number One, a picture of a snake swallowing an elephant. Whenever he showed his artwork to adults, they would however simply remark that it was supposed to be a hat. The narrator suggests that unlike children, adults lack imagination, awareness, and sensitivity to the mystery and beauty of the world. The inquisitiveness that the little prince displays in the novel develops into a deeper understanding of the world around him. He also explains that the reason adults are so different from children is not that they are older, but rather that they are less open-minded. The adult narrator has forgotten how to draw, for instance, but he maintains his friendship with the prince and tries to listen and understand everything he has to say.

Prince Myushkin also shows that it is quite possible to be child-like, even as an adult. He is an honest, open character who says whatever is on his mind. One of the most notable examples of this openness is during his first visit to General Yepanchin's office. Even though Myushkin has just met the assistant to the General, he passionately tells a story of the time when he witnessed a public execution in France. On the topic of capital punishment, he says, "To kill for killing is an immeasurably greater punishment than the crime itself… Here all this last hope, which makes it ten times easier to die, is taken away for certain; here there's the sentence, and the whole torment lies in the certainty that there's no escape, and there's no greater torment in the world than that"[4] The prince is honest with the servant, a member of a lower social class who he barely knows. While the other characters in the novel often view respectful behavior toward a member of the lower class as funny or strange, Myushkin is more aware of the surrounding world because he maintains respect for everyone and always keeps an open mind. His inquisitiveness is apparent when he imagines how a man would feel if his death sentence was removed. Through his imagination, the prince mentally evokes this Christ-like figure who desires nothing more than to be benevolent and provide hope to the hopeless. This wishful thinking further conveys Myushkin's child-like innocence. Both Myushkin and the little prince are hopeful for a better world, one that is less superficial and more caring.

Dostoevsky and Saint-Exupéry consider what it means to be a true friend. When the little prince meets the fox, he learns about the responsibilities demanded by relationships. The fox explains that the "only things you learn are the things you tame … People haven't time to learn anything. They buy things ready-made at stores. But there is no shop anywhere where you can buy friendship."[5] The prince's relationship with the rose expresses the love he has for her and is a parable that shows how true friendships should be. He begins to understand that the time he spent with his rose is what makes her unique: the prince remarks that "because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen; because it is for her that I have killed the caterpillars (except the two or three that we saved to become butterflies); because it is she that I listened to when she grumbled, or when she boasted, or even sometimes when she said nothing at all. Because she is my rose."[6] The prince learns, therefore, that investing oneself in another person makes that person more

special.

The care Myushkin displays for Nastassya can be seen as a form of taming. When Myushkin first sees the picture of her, he is not only amazed by how beautiful she is but also by how much she has suffered. He notes that this suffering "speaks in her eyes, these two little bones, the two points under her eyes where the cheeks begin."[7] Through his actions, Myushkin tames Nastassya: he offers his love because he understands that her physical, intellectual, and spiritual beauties have been tarnished by the corruption of the world. Nonetheless, Myushkin's innocence often leads him to be fooled by other members of society who do not feel true friendship with the prince. One of the few people who is genuine in her feelings is Nastassya. However, she ultimately chooses not to let Myushkin's compassionate love save her from death.

When these relationships do not develop, sadness and decay ensue. When Nastassya Filippovna arrives at Ganya's apartment in an unexpected visit, she enters a room filled with many of her supposed lovers. Rogozhin, who is slightly drunk, wonders whether she plans to marry Ganya. Nastassya's responds that she will not, which results in an auction to win her over. Rogozhin begins to make crazy offers, first to buy out Ganya for a hundred roubles, then one thousand, and finally one hundred thousand. Totsky and Ganya are willing to offer seventy-five thousand while General Yepanchin desires Nastassya as a mistress as well. They are all physically attracted to her and offer excessive amounts of money to win this metaphorical auction. Each of them sees her as a material object. Their lack of developed relationships and understanding of Nastassya suggests that they cannot possibly love her. Their view of money as the panacea for all problems conveys a lack of awareness of the world. Dostoevsky depicts these characters as ignorant to suggest that a lack of open-mindedness and development of compassion are what leads society to corruption and decay. Prince Myushkin is the only one who acts differently, expressing restraint when he stops Ganya from slapping his sister. Ganya in turn responds violently by slapping Myushkin in the face, angrily remarking "What, are you always going to stand in my way!"[8] Moreover, Myushkin appears to be the only one who sees through Nastassya's self-destructive behavior and understands that the disrespectful way she acts at Ganya's apartment is not consistent with her true personality.

In Saint-Exupéry's story, the little prince begins to talk about baobabs, enormous trees that are capable of destroying his planet. He understands that these bad plants have to be uprooted as soon as they grow; it is "a question of discipline," he explains, "A baobab is something you will never, never be able to get rid of if you attend to it too late. It spreads over the entire planet"[9] and ultimately destroys it. These bushes threaten the everyday lives of people even though they are not consciously aware of it. They go on with their lives, failing to take care of the bushes and ultimately, their world is wiped out. The planets with spreading baobabs are a metaphor for the falling world where Myushkin lives. The moral corruption and decay derive not from ill-intent, but rather from a lack of care and awareness.

Dostoevsky is correct in his insight into these relationships, "To love another as one loves oneself is impossible. The earthly law of personality binds one. One's 'self' stands in the way. The final development of personality is...to annihilate that self, to give it away entirely to each and everyone completely and wholeheartedly."[10] Humans will need to change before this world begins to free itself of moral corruption. The first step in that change is to be selfless like Prince Myushkin and the little prince and care about other people. St. Exupéry understands that this compassion is derived from the emotions: "Here is my secret. It is very simple: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eyes."[11] Through the expression of kindness, honesty, and care, everyone can make the world a little brighter and show that human beings can, in fact, be beautiful. Perhaps, then, one can look up at the sky and see not one but millions of blossoming flowers rejuvenating this world.

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The Cherry Orchard

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"To love is to suffer. To avoid suffering, one must not love. But then, one suffers from not loving. Therefore, to love is to suffer; not to love is to suffer; to suffer is to suffer. To be happy is to love. To be happy, then, is to suffer. But suffering makes one unhappy. Therefore, to be happy one must love or love to suffer or suffer from too much happiness." – Love and Death, Woody Allen

For Woody Allen fans, this quote instantly evokes an image of Boris, a cowardly anti-hero of the 1975 film *Love and Death,* a parody of Russia's gloomy national character. The self-absorbed Boris represents all Russians in his deep distrust of happiness and his eagerness to indulge his every distressing thought and melancholy emotion. While the famous Hollywood director might be accused of a Western-centric, oversimplified account of the Russian temperament, certain scholars specializing in the study of Russian national character, such as Daniel Rancour-Laferrière, have also concluded that "Russians do not merely suffer. They have concocted for themselves a veritable cult of suffering." [1]

In the following paragraphs, a dimension of the Russian "cult of suffering" will be explored that has often been discarded in ethnographical, sociological, and especially literary studies. I want to argue that paradoxically, even if Russians as a group are more self-reflective and more preoccupied with negative thoughts, this trait may not necessarily lead to negative effects. Anton P. Chekhov's tragicomedy *The Cherry Orchard* provides valuable insight to the way such practices as excessive self-criticism, undue rumination, fatalism, intra-punitive behavior and servility might actually be productive, rather than maladaptive, in their outcomes.

The Cherry Orchard concerns the lives of a once-rich landowning family that, caught in the social upheaval of turn-of-the-century Russia, must find a way to pay off their debts or potentially lose their ancestral home, an estate with a very old and unique cherry orchard. Each character's relation to the multifaceted symbol of the cherry orchard reveals their personal aspirations and particular class situation. The impoverished aristocracy, merchant class, peasantry, "superfluous" and radical intelligentsia all indulge in one or another type of behavior that can be associated with the "cult of suffering."

When applied specifically to the socio-political context of nineteenth — and early twentieth — century Russia, the word intelligentsia is often associated with a critically minded and publicly active social strata composed of educated individuals who are opposed to the prevailing order and institutions. In *The Cherry Orchard*, the "eternal student," Petya Trofimov, represents the radical intelligentsia as he calls for social amelioration, eagerly preaches on the need to work, and condemns the Russian legacy of serfdom.

Curiously, when attempting to define Russian intelligentsia, the qualities that a twentieth-

century Russian religious and political philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev attributes to the intelligentsia are the willingness to accept self-sacrifice and an inherently self-critical nature. More precisely, he states that it is "[…] a class of people wholly influenced by ideas and ready to face prison, hard labor and death for the sake of their ideas […]" and acknowledges that "[…] its feeling about itself was that it had no ground beneath its feet."[2] As an authentic member of intelligentsia, one of *The Cherry Orchard*'s characters, Petya Trofimov is also eager to condemn the social formation in which he himself partakes. In fact, he states that "The vast majority of educated people […] pursues nothing, does nothing, and so far isn't capable of work."[3]

An Eastern-European historian and polemicist Tibor Szamuely defines the Russian radical intelligentsia by referring to it as a "subversive monastic order" founded on genuine asceticism. He further theorizes its hand-to-mouth existence, recklessness, impracticality and indifference to appearances as a way to satisfy their deliberate search for martyrdom.[4] Very much in line with Szamuly's description of the intelligentsia, Trofimov proudly embraces asceticism and does not hesitate to show it off in front of his loved one, Anya: "I'm still a student, but I've already undergone so much! When winter comes, I'm starved, sick, anxious, poor as a beggar […]!"[5] Trofimov stresses that he rejoices despite the hardships he continuously undergoes and foresees an even brighter future.

Moreover, Trofimov sees only one way to be cleansed – to expiate the guilt of past privilege, and unfair institutions: "[…] we can atone for it only through suffering, only through extraordinary, unremitting labor."[6] For that reason, the sale of Ranevskaya's familial estate and the felling of a beautiful cherry orchard, amongst whose leaves Trofimov saw the faces of the oppressed serfs, appears to him as a symbolic act of liberation and a necessary condition of future renewal and general happiness.

However, this self-critical, tormented and ascetic character diverges greatly from Woody Allen's image of the gloomy, mystical, almost insane Boris. In a troubled political, social, and spiritual context, Trofimov is only fatalistic in such a way to anticipate positive outcome for all of Russia; he tries to stir up his disappointed friends and inspires Anya to a point of exultation. Anya also consoles her beloved mother: "We'll plant a new orchard, more splendid that this one, you'll see it, you'll understand, and joy, peaceful, profound joy will sink into your heart […]."[7]

"...RUSSIANS APPEAR TO HAVE A VERY SPECIAL WAY OF CONSTRUING NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES."

Lyubov Andreevna Ranevskaya, a member of the impoverished nobility, might also be accused of the "cult of suffering." However, unlike Trofimov's voluntary asceticism and martyrdom, Ranevskaya's need to be tormented is not a vital element of her ethos, but rather is rooted in a series of sensual pursuits. In *The Cherry Orchard*, Ranevskaya represents the disappearing class of the landed gentry and exemplifies its major vices: idleness, profligacy, and eccentricity. Ranevskaya is constantly throwing her money away despite her bankruptcy. Her recognition of her irresponsible and impulsive behavior, and consequent feeling of guilt and remorse, trigger episodes of self-laceration.[8] Ultimately, Ranevskaya's impracticality leads to her inability to pay the mortgage on the familial estate, which is put on auction along with the cherry orchard. She seems to feel infinite tenderness and affection towards her ancestral home and is disheartened by this news: "I love this house, without the cherry orchard I couldn't make sense of my life […]."[9] Despite the suffering that the prospective sale of the family nest puts her through, she refuses to take the

necessary steps to save it.

Ranevskaya has also been engaged in at least two abusive relationships: first, with an alcoholic and profligate husband, and later, with a faithless lover. Prior to Ranevskaya's return to her family estate and childhood home at the beginning of the play, her lover robbed her of what was left of her fortune, had an affair with another woman, and ran off.[10] Nonetheless, she admits she still loves him in a self-consciously masochistic way: "It's a millstone round my neck, it's dragging me down, but I love that stone and I can't live without it."[11] She equally engages in servile behavior, expressing her desire to nurse her beloved betrayer through an illness for the second time.[12]



Illustration rendered by Aisling Hunt

One might argue that Ranevskaya is acting in an unduly self-defeating manner, inviting her own ruin because of inability to admit the effects of the social change on her class, and experiences masochistic pleasure when victimized by her lover. However, the two aforementioned instances of self-induced suffering are intimately interrelated, and when considered mutually, produce a different meaning. Ranevskaya associates the cherry orchard with her childhood, a period of happiness and innocence. She has a vision of her mother walking through the orchard in a white dress and rejoices.[13] It might be that she has returned to the family nest after a regrettable love affair because of the impossible hope that it can wipe out everything shameful and unpleasant in her past adult life; that it can make her a child again. However, she soon understands that the past is irrevocable and deliberately gives up the orchard. By doing this, she is finally able to let go of the irredeemable past and acknowledges the present reality.

Two other characters of the play, Yepikhodov and Simeonov-Pishchik, provide a composite allusion to one of the best-known heroes of the Russian folktale, Ivan the Fool. He is a comic character who is always getting into scrapes for doing something silly, and is known in part for his overtly self-destructive behavior. He often manages to get punished, without even the intervention of another person, such as when he cuts the tree limb he is perched on.[14] Similarly, one of the most humorous characters of *The Cherry Orchard*, Gaev's clerk Yepikhodov, is so clumsy that he earns the nickname "Tons of Trouble."[15] He is ridiculed for his squeaky boots and falling over furniture, he finds an insect in his drink, and gets chased out of Ranevskaya's house after accidently breaking a billiard cue. Yepikhodov is a sad clown who acknowledges, "fate treats him ruthlessly," but "looks at this with a smile."[16] Equally laughable is Simeonov-Pishchik, an aristocrat whose own estate has hit hard times, but who nevertheless spends his time relaxing and socializing at Ranevskaya's estate. He often falls asleep in the middle of his speeches and in the first act suddenly swallows all of Ranevskaya's pills.

If Ivan the Fool is not an outright imbecile and does know his acts will be ridiculed or punished, his behavior can be associated with masochistic tendencies.[17] Simeonov-Pischik also expresses ironic self-consciousness from time to time. He proudly claims that the ancient stock of the Simeonov-Pishchiks was descended from the horse that Caligula made into a senator, and that it thus has a dual nature: it is at once meant heighten the respectability of his lineage and deliberately reduces him to an animal. Moreover, when discussing new fortuitous business ventures that may save him, or badgering Ranevskaya for a loan, he laughs at his own calamities: "I'll turn up. I never lose hope. There I think all is lost, I'm a goner, lo and behold! — the railroad runs across my land

and … pays me for it. And then, watch, something else will happen sooner or later….”[18] Simeonov-Pishchik exemplifies Ivan the Fool in Maksim Gorky’s interpretation that emphasizes his own willingness to take beating and to be passively resigned in the face of whatever *sud’ba* (fate) has to offer.[19]

Paradoxically, this very simplicity, foolishness, and propensity to get into trouble ultimately turn out to help these iterations of Ivan the Fool in their adventures. In the final act the “most amazing thing” happens to Simeonov-Pishchik: “Some Englishmen” find precious white clay on his land and rent it for twenty-four years, unexpectedly providing him with stable income.[20] But just like a typical Ivan the Fool character, Simeonov-Pishchik is not only masochistic, but simultaneously kind and altruistic. Thus, he rushes to Ranevskaya’s estate and enters it out of breath, in a most ridiculously amusing fashion to share his first revenue with the family that was hospitable, but sometimes also quite rude to him.

The character of Ivan the Fool that is expressed conjointly by Yepikhodov and Simeonov-Pishchik must also be considered in its relationship to the Russian reader/viewer of Chekhov’s play. The laughter provoked by the fool’s slapstick comedy and somewhat masochistic self-irony that always has a slight bitterness to it, is ultimately based on a kind of self-recognition. That is, as Rancour-Laferriere puts it, “In laughing at their folkloric fool, Russians are laughing at themselves.”[21] The Russian reader or viewer can relate to a character who chooses to be ridiculed, as the relation finds resonance in the Russians’ habit of laughing at themselves. This is manifestly a bright and positive side of self-reflection that may at first glance appear quite distressing. After all, Chekhov himself firmly refused to consider the play a pessimistic or gloomy study of Russian life. “It has turned out,” he wrote, “not a drama, but a comedy, almost a farce.”[22]

Thus it appears that the stereotype a self-indulgent Russian may contain an element of truth after all, but as the analysis of Chekhov’s characters has revealed, Russians appear to have a very special way of construing negative experiences. The psychological scientists of the Michigan University have demonstrated that reflecting over negative feelings is associated few detrimental consequences among Russians because of their capacity for emotional self-distancing.[23] Indeed, In the case of Trofimov, Ranevskaya, Yepikhodov and Simeonov-Pishchik, torments do not always lead to distress, and masochistic episodes do not necessarily terminate in trauma. In the end, their capacity to see their personal needs from an external perspective within in a larger context – that of a family, community, or social class – allows for such salutary self-distancing techniques such as idealistic altruism, festive sociability, and ironic humor.

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Slavic Proverbs to Ponder

Hunger is not your aunt, it will not bring you a pie. ❖ *Nobody goes to Tula with one’s own samovar.*

The Mongol Cause

Russia and "The Oriental" in Andrey Bely's *Petersburg*

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Eastern Europe, and especially Russia, has played a notably different geopolitical role than its Western counterparts. The modern appellation of this portion of Europe as "Eastern" informs this fundamental distinction by immediately equating Russia and its confreres with the Orient. St. Petersburg, on the edge of the Western world and the city that served as Peter I's (1672-1725) window into that world, provides the archetype for Andrey Bely's[1] discussion in *Petersburg* (1913) of the "Mongol cause,"[2] by which he means "Russia's cultural and historical relationship with the East."[3] While Petersburg is entrenched in the discord of the Ableukhov[4] family and the machinations of a Marxist party with murderous designs against Nikolai's tsarist-official father, Apollon, Bely's ideological agenda and his questioning of the geopolitical nature of Petersburgian—and Russian—identity are prominent throughout the novel. Using the Ableukhov family as a medium to better explain his opinion of Russia's geopolitical identity in relation to East and West, Bely champions the Orient and the Oriental. Two passages in Petersburg define and develop Bely's 'Mongol cause': Nikolai's dream in Five: "The Last Judgment" and the discussion of Russian military defeats by eastern powers (a juxtaposition of the Battles of Kalka, Kulikovo Polye, and Tsushima) in Two: "Escape." These instances of novelistic virtuosity act together to embody the Mongol cause, expressed through the theme of the Oriental, a topic that has received little attention from publications concerning Bely but which bears unmistakable significance in *Petersburg*.

Bely uses the 1905 Russian Revolution, complete with an accompanying Marxist assassination plot, and the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) as the practical backdrop for a discussion of Russian identity and Russia's politico-historical relation with the East, which becomes the basis for his definition and the (later expanded) Mongol cause. The first half of Two: "Escape" embodies what political scientist Thomas Bamforth has called Bely's "geopolitical vision" of Russia; Bely writes that "From that fecund time when the metallic Horseman [Peter I] had galloped hither [to Petersburg] … Russia was divided in two,"[5] which means that, as asserted in the interpretation of Maguire and Malmstad—co-translators and commentators on Bely's Petersburg—Peter I's foundation of St. Petersburg split Russia between both a Western and a native Russian identity.[6] Bely imagines an apocalyptic, harrowing world. This world will be created when the legacy of Peter's split-identity Russia is forced to relive its defeat by "yellow hordes of Asians,"[7] repeating the medieval loss at Kalka and the modern at Tsushima.[8] However, Bely's would-be apocalypse in Two: "Escape" is halted by Russia's victory in the second Battle of Kulikovo Ploye (1380), when the "final Sun will rise."[9] Bamforth asserts that Bely is decrying the dual personality of the Russian nation, and that when the author exclaims "Kulikovo Field, I await you!"[10] he is calling for "Russia's rebirth from the constriction of an exclusively Mongol or European political, philosophical, or geographical heritage"[11]—the creation of a purely Russian identity with links to neither the East nor the West. However, Bam-

forth misinterprets Bely's usage of the symbol of the sun, which he claims is the very image of Bely's pure Russia. If read in isolation, this interpretation remains valid, but coupled with Five: "The Last Judgment," Bamforth's theory falls apart.

In Five: "The Last Judgment" Bely completes his theory of Russia's historical association with the Orient and defines it as the "Mongol cause" through the medium of Nikolai's dream. Nikolai's dream is a theosophical experience: his soul sets "off on a distant astral journey, or sleep (which, let us not forget, is the same thing)."[12] Here, Bely invokes a fantastical story involving Buddhist incarnation and the Ableukhovs[13] to characterize the relationship between East and West—between Asia and Russia—as one of intertwined destiny. For example, Apollon names the "Mongol cause" as "not the destruction of Europe but its immutability."[14] This refutes Nikolai's assertion that the Mongol cause is to bring about the collapse of the "Aryan world,"[15] meaning Europe. In light of Five: "The Last Judgment", the Sun of Two: "Escape" may not be interpreted as a completely new Russia free of geographical inclination either East or West, as Bamforth suggests. Apollon's "Last Judgment"[16] is the immutability of Europe and that, "instead of a new order, the record of the circulation of the citizens of the Prospect"[17] will continue. What Bamforth calls a "paradoxical"[18] geopolitical vision is not that at all, but is an expressly logical and optimistic vision of Russia's future. Bely asserts the Mongols (and the Orient) as the West's enemies, recalling the Yellow Peril or Panmongolism fear of a few decades prior,[19] citing Russia's historical place as the bastion between East and West. Bely's Kulikovo Field and the rising Sun are not representative of a new Russia, but of a Russian experience as defenders of the West upheld by Russia's reconciliation with its historical relationship to the East.

Bely's intense philosophical treatise in Five: "The Last Judgment" relies more heavily than any other passage in Petersburg on the theme of the Oriental, but in a philosophical capacity. This is unsurprising as it is the culmination—and the explanation—of his own opinion of Russia's reconciliation with itself which first appears in Two: "Escape." Bely exposes the façade that "the existence of a planned, 'European' city demonstrated Russia's essential alliance with the West,"[20] which he relates formally when he expresses in the Prologue, that "if Petersburg is not the capital, then there is no Petersburg. It only appears to exist."[21] This philosophical remark draws out the fragility of St. Petersburg as Russia's Western mask and Russia in turn as Europe's red domino,[22] and notes that Russia's capital exists just for this fragile purpose, a remark true to the city's foundation and developed throughout the novel. Bely was not the first to stress the importance of Russia's historical allegiance to the East, however. Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826)—the Russian contemporary and counterpart to Britain's Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)—simultaneously proclaimed "Either all of Modern History must remain silent or Russian history has the right to be heard,"[23] while in the same work asserting that "Moscow owes its greatness to the Khans."[24] Likewise, Two: "Escape" makes use of the historical conflicts between Russia and the East, framing the future of Russia in terms of past battles to be relived.

"'EITHER ALL OF MODERN HISTORY MUST REMAIN SILENT OR RUSSIAN HISTORY HAS THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD'"

In a progression from the factual and historical to the metaphysical and theosophical, Bely uses the image of the Orient to conceptualize the constant historical dilemma faced by Russia. For Bely, the Last Judgment of Russia will be whether or not it recognizes and accepts its Oriental legacy, for better or for worse. Russia will either "sink to the depths of the oceans, into chaos, primordial and long-forgotten"[25] or it will rise anew like the Sun and accept the Mongol cause. ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

An Analysis of the Relationship between Eyesight and Perspective in A Hero of Our Time

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In the introduction to his novel A Hero of Our Time, Mikhail Lermontov cautions his readers against considering his prose through too literal a lens. Failing to attend to the novel's tone, he argues, skews the reader's perception of the book's themes. To reinforce his point, Lermontov constantly alludes to the power of a well-crafted perspective. He manipulates one particularly salient motif — eyes — to drive home his lesson about the merits of constructing tenable frames of reference. Throughout the novel, language about eyes correlates to perspective as many characters garner interpersonal knowledge about others through their eyes. Optic idiosyncrasies offer the most acute glimpses into characters' psyches, and the behavior of eyes reveals key facets of characters' personalities. Lermontov further underscores the symbolic meaning of eyesight through its lexical opposite: blindness. His shrewd references to eyesight magnify the importance of considering varied points of view; for the reader, just as for the characters, misperceptions prove pernicious.

Though eyes initially appear simply to depict physical attributes, the sheer number of references to eyes throughout belies this superficial reading. Within the text, eye-related discourse is ubiquitous. In "Bela," eyes transcend their biological function, allowing characters to probe into the souls and personalities of their companions.[1] This theme continues into "Maksim Maksimich," in which the narrator's impressions of Pechorin derive from Pechorin's "dazzling but cold"[2] eyes. Once the story shifts to Pechorin's perspective in "Taman," Lermontov upends his metaphor by exploring the pitfalls of visual impairment over the virtues of sight. In "Princess Mary," he reverts back to his original imagery, pitting Pechorin against his squirrely-eyed nemesis, Grushnitski, in a battle to woo Mary, whose alluring eyes enchant both men. Finally, in "The Fatalist," Pechorin appropriates the trope of eyes to elucidate how he envisaged Lieutenant Vulich's death.

This abundance of eye-related language underscores the centrality of perspective: the understanding that one's own point of view may differ from another's. First, eyes act as the mechanism through which characters evaluate personality. The propensity for basing character judgments on optic cues manifests itself most frequently in Pechorin's opinions of his love interests. In "Bela," it is Bela's "black eyes which resembled those of a mountain gazelle and practically peered into your soul"[3] — not her other beguiling charms — that most clearly entice Pechorin. While her svelte physique has its appeal, Bela's eyes truly mesmerize Pechorin, who cannot "take his eyes off her"[4]. Upon meeting the nymph-like girl in Taman, Pechorin fixates on the girl's eyes, which "were endowed with some kind of magnetic power."[5] After his ill-fated dalliance with this hypnotic girl, Pechorin moves onto Princess Mary, whose "velvety eyes […] [were] so soft, they seem[ed] to stroke you."[6] He applies this same method of assessment to his mistress, Vera, defining her by her "deep and calm eyes, [which] expressed distrust and something akin to reproachfulness."[7] Pechorin compartmentalizes women based on the nature of their eyes; though his paramours share few traits, the essences of their eyes dovetail with fundamental components of their personalities.

While Pechorin habitually infers others' personalities through their eyes, he is not the only one to employ this strategy. Pechorin's piercing glance discomfits the unnamed narrator and leads him to ques-

tion Pechorin's ethos. While his initial commentary on Pechorin revolves around tangible descriptions of his physical attributes, the anonymous narrator focuses most deeply on Pechorin's odd eyes. He chronicles how "they never laughed when he was laughing," asks if the reader has "observed this bizarre trait in some people," and fancies that this peculiarity "is either the sign of a wicked nature or of a deep and constant melancholy."[8] This first impression aligns impeccably with Pechorin's later displays of dispassionate rationalism. Maksim Maksimich's sycophantic admiration of Pechorin notwithstanding, this scene marks the reader's first formal introduction to the protagonist. Consequently, the narrator's encounter lays the foundations for the reader's future judgment of Pechorin's nature.

The instances in which characters cry — or do not cry — also reveal previously internalized elements of their personalities. Maksim Maksimich has no qualms about broadcasting his emotions and weeps often. After he and Pechorin finally reunite, Maksimich greets his old friend with "tears in his eyes,"[9] while Pechorin reacts coldly to the joyous occasion. Maksim Maksimich's unabashed happiness upon seeing his comrade seems genuine. Pechorin's relationship to crying, on the other hand, is striking and strange. After Bela's death, Pechorin cannot mourn her loss. His dry eyes disconcert Maksim Maksimich, who questions "whether [Pechorin] actually could not cry or whether he was controlling himself."[10] While Maksimich never reconciles his confusion over Pechorin's motives, he concludes that Pechorin's callous lack of tears is distressing regardless of its explanation. However, after breaking Princess Mary's heart, Pechorin finally weeps. He first is thrilled about his ability to show his feelings, but this delight is ephemeral. Immediately after his revelation, he conjectures that his tears were the result of solely somatic factors and states that, while it "pleases [him] that [he is] capable of weeping, … [it] may have been due, however, to upset nerves, to a sleepless night, to a couple of minutes spent facing the muzzle of a pistol, and to an empty stomach."[11] Unwilling to assume responsibility for the consequences of his seduction, Pechorin pins the blame on external phenomena. Even though his tears directly follow his repugnant treatment of Mary, in his twisted mind, he is above reproach. Crying, an ocular function, molds the reader's perception of the characters' personas.

Lermontov expands the role of eyes both as conduits of emotion and as conveyors of greater character insight through his pervasive use of 'the eye' as the vehicle for unveiling key nuances of ambiguous situations. When examining the staggering mountain vista in "Bela," the unnamed narrator remarks that one can only discriminate between clouds with a "practiced eye."[12] In this sense, the eye detects the true nature of clouds and discerns any potential tempestuousness. In "Princess Mary," too, the singular "eye" reveals crucial facts about unclear circumstances. When introducing Werner, Pechorin remarks that the doctor's "appearance was of the kind that, at first glance, impresses one unfavorably but attracts one later, when the eye has learned to decipher in irregular features the imprint of a dependable and lofty soul."[13] The eye, not linked to any particular character, guides both the characters' and the reader's assessment of Werner and unmasks previously concealed aspects of personality. In "The Fatalist," the mysterious 'eye' convinces Pechorin of Lieutenant Vulich's swiftly approaching death. Though Vulich exits a game of Russian roulette unscathed, Pechorin still predicts Vulich's impending demise. His strong convictions, which ultimately prove correct, derive from his analysis of Vulich's face, which "bears the strange imprint of his imminent fate, so that an experienced eye can hardly mistake it."[14] Again, the detached eye presages unpredictable events. Throughout A Hero of Our Time, this 'eye,' unconnected to the body of any character, brings hidden truths to light.

After introducing the concept of eyes as windows to greater understanding of perspective, Lermontov inverts his imagery to inspect how lack of eyesight prevents full awareness of situations. Lermontov introduces the metaphor of sightlessness in "Taman," and he later preaches about the dangers of blindness in his portrayal of Grushnitski in "Princess Mary." When Pechorin arrives in Taman, he meets a blind orphan, about whom he instantly has grave misgivings. Pechorin propounds a "strong prejudice against those who are blind, one-eyed, deaf, mute, legless, armless, hunchbacked, and so forth."[15] This discrimination stems from his belief that "with the loss of a limb, the

soul lost one of its senses."[16] In the case of blindness specifically, Pechorin asks what "one can read in a face that lacks eyes."[17] Pechorin repudiates blindness, for he believes that without the indispensible sense of sight, one's true designs cannot be ascertained.

This introduction to blindness casts an ominous air over the ensuing narrative. After Pechorin inadvertently witnesses a smuggling operation his first night in Taman, a young girl complicit in the malfeasance seduces him. Materializing almost supernaturally on Pechorin's roof, the girl first shields her eyes from Pechorin.[18] Throughout their subsequent flirtation, Pechorin is oblivious to her scheming, and their first kiss ends with everything turning "dark before [his] eyes,"[19] rendering him temporarily sightless. Pechorin's blindness prevents him from grasping the true intentions of the girl. He eventually realizes the error of his ways, but this consciousness comes only after he "barely recovers [his] senses,"[20] Once his "sight" returns, he sees the circumstances as they really are: the girl lured him to the boat to drown him, not to embark on a romantic pleasure cruise. Later, as Pechorin returns from his near-death experience, he fails to notice the blind orphan pilfering all of his worldly goods. In his literal and figurative myopia, Pechorin overlooks crucial signals about the smugglers' intentions, and his perspective on the situation becomes clouded.

Though the Taman fiasco supplies one allegory about the hazards of misperception, Pechorin's misplaced acrimony towards Grushnitski in "Princess Mary" provides another glimpse into the precariousness of shortsightedness. Pechorin ironically chides Grushnitski for his yearning to "become the hero of a novel,"[21] especially considering Grushnitski's cowardice when heroism is demanded. Pechorin scorns Grushnitski for rushing "forward with closed eyes"[22] and alludes to Grushnitski's lack of eye contact repeatedly throughout the novella. Pechorin, however, fails to see that he and Grushnitski are carbon copies of one another. As Pechorin mocks Grushnitski's feeble attempts at heroism, he engages in the same behavior. Pechorin, just like Grushnitski, has a reputation for courage, yet both characters fail to see that their personalities mirror one another. They both, in a sense, "rush forward with closed eyes," escalating their arbitrary conflict based on their misconceptions of each other.

The feud between Pechorin and Grushnitski stems from the absence of eye contact between the pair. Though Grushnitski and Pechorin continually interact throughout "Princess Mary," they fail to look at each other directly until their final meeting. Just before they duel, Grushnitski, for the "first time since [he and Pechorin] had come, […] raised his eyes to look at [Pechorin]."[23] While Grushnitski's eyes betray an "inner struggle"[24] about double-crossing Pechorin, Pechorin ultimately takes the final step to reject his doppelgänger. This perceptual blindness has lethal repercussions: as Pechorin and Grushnitski duel, Pechorin's enmity towards his own reflection drives him to commit murder.

The disastrous consequences of misunderstanding others' perspectives in A Hero of Our Time affirm the crux of Lermontov's argument. In his introduction, Lermontov laments that many who read his novel will extract meanings from it that wholly contradict its real lessons. He warns against relying on the "unfortunate faith that certain readers and even certain reviewers have in the literal meaning of words."[25] These readers and reviewers, just like the novel's characters, experience a sort of symbolic blindness. Trapped in their narrow-minded assessment of the book, readers preoccupy themselves with the exact wording and the outward appearances of the novel; subsequently, they do not dig deeply enough into the message and tone of Lermontov's creation. Lermontov guides the reader to a heightened understanding of the significance of both literal and figurative sight through his unrelenting deployment of eye-centric language; the quintessential 'windows to the soul,' eyes betray one's personality and point of view, but Lermontov pushes the metaphor past this more obvious understanding of eyesight's symbolic function. A Hero of Our Time serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of neglecting well-rounded perspectives, especially if they do not match one's own preconceived views.

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The Interplay of Language and Identity

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Language is an integral part of identifying an ethnic group; it serves as a unifying, common factor that makes the power of mutual understanding possible. However, it is also strongly divisive, as linguistic differences result in often negative judgments and prejudiced inferences about an individual's background. Many Jews in Eastern Europe encountered the complexity of having their widespread, ethnically linked language Yiddish, as well as the tradition of ancient Hebrew for sacred texts and religious services, abutting the national, political languages of where they lived, in particular Russian. Such linguistic division sometimes caused a crisis in identity among Jews living outside the shtetls, which surfaces as a frequent theme of Jewish literary works. The tension of a linguistic identity in conflict is present in both Osip Mandelstam's semi-autobiographical piece "Judaic Chaos" and Semyon Kirsanov's poem "R.," whereas, in "The Countrymen," David Aizman offers a more optimistic insight about how linguistic commonality surpasses ethnic boundaries. However, all three works focus on the power of language as a mark of one's identity and on the profound influence of linguistic heritage on an individual's development.

Mandelstam, born in 1891 in Warsaw, spent much of his childhood in a secularized middle-class Jewish household in St. Petersburg. As a result, he felt more comfortable in the society of the majority rather than remaining ethnically isolated.[1] In the excerpt from The Noise of Time, Mandelstam presents his encounters with Judaic tradition as confounding to him; during his visit to a synagogue he "sneaked around like a thief,"[2] a simile that implies his presence in a place of worship to be wrong, as he steals from this heritage that is so foreign to him. Linguistically he is distanced from other Jews: "As a child I absolutely never heard Yiddish, only later on did I get my fill of that crooning, ever surprised and disillusioned, questioning speech with its sharp accents on the semitones."[3] He does not scorn or mock Yiddish, but rather gives his intuitive analysis of a speech community to which he does not belong, focusing only on sound instead of meaning. Native speakers of a language hear words, sentences, and messages; when a foreigner listens, he instead analyzes the properties of the sounds superficially, which are devoid of any meaning. His parents' linguistic abilities present an interesting opposition: the semi-assimilated mother who speaks "grand literary Russian" contrasted with the "Father [who] had no language at all; it was hotchpotch, tongue twisting, and languagelessness."[4] Though he describes his mother's vocabulary as "meager and compressed, her phrases repetitive,"[5] he recognizes that her efforts to speak the dominant language indicated "something rooted and confident,"[6] revealing his support for her entrance into the mainstream. His father, however, has no true linguistic heritage, not even one indicating his Jewish roots, and Mandelstam condemns his lack of identity, for if a man has no language, then he loses part of his humanity and fails to integrate into any community.

Unfortunately, not learning the language of one's past makes interaction with family difficult; this is one of the hardest costs of assimilation, displayed in Mandelstam's visit with his Jewish grandparents: "I tried to explain that I wanted my mother, but they didn't understand. Then I used my fingers on the table to depict my desire to leave, making a walking motion with my middle finger and pointer...[grandfather] made me repeat after him words made up of unfamiliar noise; dissatisfied with my mumbling, he became angry and shook his head with disapproval. I felt suffocated and afraid."[7] Uncomfortable and misunderstood, Mandelstam wished to physically escape from being with his grandparents, symbols of the heritage he did not know and which seemed so strange and oppressive to him. Though presenting more economic and social opportunities, assimilation into a larger mainstream requires the relinquishing of one's ties to the past, creating foreigners among family members, most apparent in the inability to communicate with one another. For immigrants to other countries, this is a perpetual struggle, but it is even more poignant when considering the Jews in Eastern Europe who became, essentially, immigrants in their own homes, forced into the difficult choice of joining with the larger Russian society to avoid legal persecution or remaining faithful to their ethnic tradition and holding fast to the roots that bound their identity.

Semyon Kirsanov, a Jewish poet born in Odessa shortly after the turn of the century, spent most of his career writing Soviet propaganda poetry, though he also explored themes from his Jewish upbringing, notably apparent in the 1929 poem "R." Children, during their years of language acquisition, adopt the speech properties of those immediately around them, which caused Russian Jewish children brought up in Yiddish-speaking households to first learn the uvular liquid [ʀ] as opposed to the standard Russian alveolar trilled [r]. The difference in pronunciation led children to quickly mock their Jewish classmates, an issue Kirsanov addresses in "R." Describing his childhood punctuated with this different sound, Kirsanov proclaims "Trouble/with rolling your r's/ can be painfully torturous...Talk about torture--/my larynx has scars."[8] The repeated imagery associated with pain and suffering are not literal but rather describe the psychologically damaging experience of being mocked and labeled as different, stemming from a non-standard accent. He uses terms likening his accent to a debilitating illness: "Rasping r's/made my throat and neck sick...In some medical books/I would mull it."[9] His identity is an affliction from which he must be healed, and after his struggles, he succeeds in procuring the supposedly proper trilling, as he proudly "swaggered around/as if gargling/with fire,/with that sound, that miraculous/R!"[10] However, despite the poem's superficially jubilant, victorious pronouncement at the conclusion, one is left with a sense of conflicting emotions; in his strenuous effort to enter the mainstream, with speech standing as a symbolic barrier to his acceptance among peers, he, like Mandelstam, sacrifices his heritage, denouncing his past as a source of shame and suffering but nevertheless also denouncing the society that forces him to feel such pain for unwarranted reasons.

David Aizman's short story "The Countrymen" also addresses issues of language but emphasizes the comforting features of hearing one's native tongue in a foreign land, reflecting Aizman's own life of living abroad yet never relinquishing his emotional connection with a Russia that made life ever more difficult for Jews. Though his protagonist, Varvara, is Russian Orthodox, she learns to look past religious and ethnic differences to larger commonalities while living amid "the alien French faces, so different from the Russian type; the quick nasal speech that made it hard to discern what was being said...the strangeness of the peasants' garb—all this made Klobukova uncomfortable and sometimes angry."[11] Varvara is miserable and out of place in France, where her stilted language skills strain potential for interactions with others, a fascinating discourse when considering the history of the Jewish diaspora, which made an entire ethnic group feel foreign in their own homelands. Aizman causes his gentile protagonist to suffer a similar fate on an understated scale. When Varvara first learns about the Russian Jews living in the village nearby, she is overwhelmed with "chagrin, bitterness, and a gnawing disappointment"[12] that later is replaced with the resolve to set aside her prejudiced response

and visit them. When she hears the old couple speaking Yiddish, "Varvara Setpanovna's heart smiled at the guttural sounds that she could not understand but recognized so well."[13] Such a response to the markedly Jewish language is unexpected under normal circumstances, yet she is immediately comforted by hearing something reminiscent of home that she forgets her initial, unsubstantiated anti-Jewish feelings: "Her entire being was drawn to this noisily bustling Jew and even to his gloomy, pouting wife. Happy and excited, she continued her tale about life at the castle, speaking with complete openness, concealing nothing, and all the while feeling as though she were addressing members of her own family."[14] A common language creates a strong bond among individuals; Aizman reveals the potential power of this commonality. Although Dvoyra is less hospitable at first, after revealing the burden of their tale of misery, she too opens up: "Dvoyra's tongue was finally untied, and she jabbered loudly in a singsong...within half an hour Dvoyra no longer held back any secrets from her guest. She was pouring out her whole heart."[15] The bond established among the characters – the mutual understanding stemming from a common nationality and language – breaks down the typical divisions enforced by Russian law. Though the short story has an undercurrent of the bitterness of living abandoning one's homeland for the sake of freedom from religious persecution, it simultaneously develops this unusual situation in which a larger heritage supplants smaller ethnic groupings; they are not Jews speaking with an Orthodox Christian but all Russians discussing their homeland.

Language is necessarily intertwined with ethnicity; though physical features may not distinguish ethnic groups, once an individual begins to speak, one immediately makes judgments about his identity and upbringing. It is a natural human response to automatically identify with those who most reflece oneself, though this may conflict with the desire to join a different group, shedding one's linguistic heritage to adopt the speech considered more standard and socially acceptable. Jews living in Russia faced such a situation, and the aforementioned writers specifically address the complex consequences of shedding one's native tongue for the sake of wider acceptance. For all that is gained through assimilation, much is necessarily lost.

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Slavic Proverbs to Ponder

Mute as a fish. ❖ *Nosy Barbara's nose was torn off at the market.* ❖ *An unsolicited guest is worse than a Tatar.*

Reverberations of Empty Rhetoric

The Disparity Between Communist Discourse and Reality in Márta Mészáros' *Adoption*

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The social agency and moralizing aspirations of art throughout history can hardly be overstated, especially during times of exceptional economic, political and cultural unrest. Indeed, it is often while enduring the most insufferable hardships that societies produce their most compelling films, paintings, and literature—and late twentieth-century, communist-ruled Central and East European nations present no exception to this trend. It was within this cultural and political context that the deeply critical, daringly subversive film *Adoption*—released in 1975 Hungary, directed by Márta Mészáros and starring Katalin Berek and Gyöngyvér Vigh—came about. In the vein of further understanding art's historical, self-undertaken role as social critic and watchdog of the powerful, I will proceed in this text to explore how *Adoption* criticizes and subverts the disparity between twentieth-century, East European communist ideology and reality in the spheres of gender, family life, and art. With regards to gender, Adoption portrays women's continued oppression and impotence under communism, as well as men's failure to live up to the standards set forth by communist ideology. With regards to family life, *Adoption* demonstrates communism's failure to solve the purported moral problems inherent to the capitalist bourgeois family. Regarding art, Adoption offers a subversion of the communist-engineered artistic aesthetic of Socialist Realism.

Before examining the tense, critical relationship between *Adoption* and communism in East Central Europe, it is necessary to determine the ideological nature of communist discourse with regards to the three spheres mentioned above—beginning with gender. In a 1920 speech, one of the founding fathers of political communism—Vladimir Lenin—berates "capitalism [for combining] formal equality with economic and, consequently, social inequality" (61). Lenin then contrasts capitalism with the communist "movement, which has for its objective the fight for the economic and social, and not merely formal, equality of women" (62). According to Lenin, communism would achieve such women's "equality" and "liberation" by providing them with education, giving them jobs outside the home, encouraging their active political participation, and making them equal citizens under the law (53,61-65). The end result of such gender equality under communism, as promised by a 1949 Communist Party Statement on International Women's Day, would be women's "material and cultural well-being," as well as their "rapid spiritual and political growth" that would ultimately "serve as an inspiration … to the women of the whole world in their struggle for the happiness of the working people" (85).

A communist gender discourse went hand-in-hand with a discourse about family life. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the preeminent ancestors of political communism, criticized the capitalist "bourgeois family" and marriage as being "a contract" based "on capital, on private gain," as a result of which "all family ties … are torn asunder," "the bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production," and "the husband abandons himself to [concubines] and the wife to adultery" (35-36,71). In other words, due to capitalism's materialist emphasis on production and labor value, relations between husbands and wives came to be valued in purely economic terms, leading to loveless, adulterous marriages in which women became "head servant[s of the household,] excluded from all participation in social production" (39). Communism, however, promised to solve all those problems that were purportedly inherent to the bourgeois-style marriage. Along such lines, Lenin claimed that the advent of communism would "liberate women from housework;" and Engels envisioned a communist society in which marriages were "based on sexual love" due to the "removal of all the accompanying economic considerations" of capitalist-borne marriages (53,72). The "supremacy of the man" and the "indissolubility" of marriage, Engels claimed, would no longer be problems under communism (72-73).

Regarding art, communist discourse was most coherently and dogmatically embodied by the Soviet-engineered artistic aesthetic of Socialist Realism. Developed in 1932 and prevailing in Central-and-East European communist states until the mid-1980's, Socialist Realism constituted the sole acceptable standard for all art that was produced under communism, as it sought to portray a positive hero with the ability to preserve against all odds. The hero was to serve as an emblem of the struggle to build socialism and simultaneously construct a classless society. Because Socialist Realist art was commissioned and propagated by the ruling communist regimes themselves, any artistic criticism of the state was out of the question. Ironically, Socialist Realism often reached extraordinary levels of seeming un-realistic in its attempts to portray life under communism as utopian—full of self-sacrificing, able-bodied, party-minded youths working collectively to bring about a better societal future.

Character development constitutes a narrative feature of *Adoption* that furthers the film's critique and subversion of the disparity between communist ideology and reality—specifically, regarding gender, family life, and art—within 1975 Hungary. The character traits and personal development of Kata, one of *Adoption*'s two female protagonists, provides an excellent case by which to begin interpreting *Adoption*'s critical stance. First, Kata's personal story demonstrates that the gender equality and respect promised to women by communism still had not come to fruition in late-twentieth century Hungary. Kata works in a factory and is sexually involved with her married male superior, Jóska, a figure who lies to and almost abandons Kata due to her emotional desire to have a child with him. Furthermore, the employment that Kata and other women are guaranteed under communism seems to fall far short of offering the happiness and spiritual fulfillment that communist discourse promised, as *Adoption*'s entire plot revolves around Kata's feelings of personal unfulfillment, and her quest to adopt or conceive a child in order to fill that emotional void. That Kata thinks her best path towards happiness would be by raising a child presents a further complication for communist ideology, because it suggests that women might garner more satisfaction from their maternal, domestic roles than from communist-dictated economic and political participation. In this respect, it is also noteworthy that Kata's work life and interactions with the communist system are hardly portrayed in *Adoption,* which conveys the notion that Kata and her female co-citizens are so isolated from Hungary's power and political structures that it has no positive bearing on their private lives whatsoever. Finally, Kata's character traits works to subvert the communist Socialist Realist aesthetic, as Kata lacks all the youth, virility and party-minded enthusiasm of the typical Socialist Realist positive hero; moreover, her quest for single motherhood strives against the grain of communist family ideals.

A second female protagonist of significance

to *Adoption*'s communist critique is Anna, a troubled teen who lives in a reform home and meets Kata as she searches for a private space in which she can be intimate with her lover, Sanyi. Anna has previously run away from her parents, feeling no love and even a certain amount of "hate" for them, as she expresses in a letter written with Kata's assistance. Anna's state of familial affairs presents a sharp contrast with the "love"-centered family that was promised by communism's theoretical divorce of labor value from human emotional relationships. Even Anna's love-borne marriage to Sanyi soon becomes dominated by economic rather than emotional interests, as is most evident when Sanyi signs a contract with Anna's stepfather allowing for Anna's continued residence in his home if the two ever get divorced. Anna is not even present for this negotiation, and her being essentially bartered away to her future husband via a patriarchal marriage contract harkens much more to the materialist, subjugation-based capitalist bourgeois marriage than it does to the egalitarian, non-materialist marriages espoused by communist ideology. Anna, too, presents a subversion of Socialist Realism: unlike Kata and rather like the communist aesthetic's "positive hero," Anna is youthful, intelligent and attractive, yet she is neither satisfied with her personal situation nor a supporter of the communist state; and as she is unemployed and lives in a state-run reform house, she ultimately constitutes a detriment to Socialist Realism's collective progress-oriented goals.

Kata's lover Jóska is *Adoption*'s leading male character. He is a husband and a father, yet he still maintains an adulterous relationship with Kata—which is just the kind of relationship that communist ideology condemned as a product of capitalism and claimed to have ended. Rather than maintaining a communist-envisioned egalitarian and respectful relationship with his wife, Jóska ignores her requests to get a job outside the home, essentially forcing her to remain in the domestic realm. Jóska also lies to Kata and ignores her emotional needs, yet cannot bring himself to confront her directly, and one night after a spell of depressed drinking he runs back to Kata's house in a display of submissiveness and emotional instability. The ultimate synthesis of Jóska's infidelity, weak character, and drinking spells is *Adoption*'s portrayal of men as unable to rise to the moral and behavioral standards that communist ideology expected of them. *Adoption*'s other male characters' actions support such a notion: for example, Anna's father's marriage contract with Sanyi, restaurant patrons' tasteless courting of Anna and Kata, and Sanyi's turn to violence.

In addition to character development, cinematic techniques such as lighting contribute to the critical, subversive stance that *Adoption* takes towards communist discourse and reality in the areas of gender, family life and art. For instance, *Adoption* self-consciously presents its narrative in black-and-white format. In a time when color filmmaking was almost certainly available to Mészáros, to film *Adoption* in black-and-white implies her desire to make Kata and Anna's world appear dreary, dogmatic and oppressive—certainly an unflattering subversion of the utopian, spiritually uplifting society promised by communist ideology and Socialist Realism. Aditionally, lighting affects the portrayal of female sexuality in *Adoption*. A soft-focus camera lens captures shower and sex scenes in which Kata and Anna are nude, thus casting the fully bared female figure in a flattering, even reverential light. While Mészáros' choice of camera lens might not directly relate to a communist critique, it does connect to *Adoption*'s larger theme of favoring femininity over masculinity—and could represent a subversion of oppressive patriarchal regimes as perpetuated by the twentieth-century, Central-and-East European communist bloc.

Music plays a noticeable role in very few of *Adoption*'s scenes—a truth that makes the presence of music in those scenes all the more significant. At the film's beginning, as the viewer is introduced to Kata staring out the window of her empty house, a brooding, non-diegetic song plays over the camera's cuts and sets the mood for the rest of the film. This mood complements that which is provided by *Adoption*'s black-and-white lighting, thus adding to the dystopic, discontented nature of the characters' live as they attempt to navigate and realize their aspirations within communist society. Of great importance is the fact that the same music used to open *Adoption* also

plays at its ending, after Kata has finally succeeded in adopting a child of her own—thus suggesting that even with her new child, communist life for Kata may continue to be just as repressive and unfulfilling as it has always been. The music played during Anna and Sanyi's wedding reception, however, may be the most significant of all in terms of its implications for *Adoption*'s subversion of communist ideology. The band plays lively, upbeat music for what should be a joyous occasion, yet as others laugh and dance we see Anna getting accosted by a furious Sanyi after she refuses to let him kiss her, after which Anna is left alone in a corner to cry and console herself. The haunting disparity between the expectations and reality of Anna and Sanyi's marriage poignantly subverts of communist discourse and reality, as it reveals that the state of women and family life under communism—despite all its accompanying hopeful rhetoric—is no different from that of its violent, loveless capitalist counterpart.

Certain narrative devices, such as symbolism and juxtaposition, subtly pervade and tie together *Adoption*'s plot in a manner that further critiques communist discourse. The symbols of alcohol and makeup, for example, play a key role in the subversive gender discourse conveyed by *Adoption*. Alcoholism was a major problem in communist nations, yet it was a problem that was both ignored and encouraged by the communist state—ignored, because such problems could not be admitted to exist under communism, and encouraged, because communist governments felt that alcohol might effectively stultify and placate their disillusioned subjects. Thus Jóska's fervent consumption of alcohol in *Adoption* —and his subsequent submissive return to Kata—carries with it great symbolic weight, casting Jóska as a weakened, instable male who fails to live up to communism's ideological standards of hard work and faithfulness, yet who has simultaneously been socially and spiritually abandoned by communism itself. In contrast to communism's treatment of man's dignity and morality, *Adoption* portrays the act of putting on makeup as representing the gaining of female empowerment: Kata attends a beauty parlor before confronting Jóska about his lying and capricious ways, and for the first time she finds herself able to stand up to him with confidence. The symbolic power of makeup as such subverts communist gender discourse, suggesting that communism's call for the elimination of traditional gender roles had either utterly failed or was ideologically flawed to begin with.

Adoption's character juxtaposition serves to convey the consequences of communist reality for various social demographics—young and old, male and female, stay-at-home and employed—and the resulting picture is rarely positive or reassuring. Perhaps the film's most powerful character juxtaposition in terms of its implications for communism's failure is that of Kata and Jóska's wife. In one scene, Kata visits Jóska's home to see what life with a family is really like—a move representing yet another of Jóska's attempts to dissuade Kata from having a baby with him—and it is there that she meets and converses with Jóska's wife. Unlike Kata, Jóska's wife does not work outside the home; she has children; and she is married. However, Jóska's wife and Kata are identical in that they are both dissatisfied with their current situations; and while Kata craves a loving family of her own, Jóska's wife would love to have a job of her own. The first noteworthy aspect of this juxtaposition is that in each woman's case, it is a male figure—Jóska—who is preventing them from realizing their aspirations. Under communism, Jóska has retained economic control over his wife and emotional control over Kata—suggesting an unequal, oppressed state of women that is no better than the communist-disparaged situation of women under capitalism. Additionally, the dialogue between Kata and Jóska's wife suggests yet another serious disconnect between communist discourse and reality. Communist discourse promised to liberate women from housework and expected them to hold careers such as Kata's, but as Jóska's wife attests, communism left "plenty of work" around the household for women. So with the juxtaposition of Kata and Jóska's wife, *Adoption* critiques communism's perpetuation—and perhaps even intensification—of capitalist double standards with regards to gender and family life.

The ambiguous ending of *Adoption* is at once hopelessly complicating and a strong reinforce-

ment of the film's overall critique and subversion of communist discourse and reality. *Adoption* ends mid-shot during a scene, paralyzing the frame just after Kata has adopted a baby and is waiting to get onto a bus, thus beginning her new and presumably better life. By refusing to portray the reality of Kata's new beginning, *Adoption* forces the viewer to examine what has been presented to them before this abrupt ending in order to reasonably predict what might become of Kata and her newly adopted baby. While it is certainly possible that such an ending signifies the beginning of a happier, more fulfilling chapter in Kata's life, the very dismal, very un-Socialist Realist portrayal of life under communism that Adoption has previously conveyed seems to rather convincingly suggest the contrary. Even if Kata and her baby were to end up in a better-off situation, the critical artistic insight offered by *Adoption* testifies that their success would be the exception rather than the rule within an oppressive, hypocritical, systematically flawed society such as communist, late-twentieth century Hungary. And so long as the security and well being of individuals remains a rare exception to an almost hopelessly flawed rule of misery, poverty, and social inequality, art should continue in its historical role—a role so beautifully exemplified by Mészáros' ***Adoption***—to criticize and hold society accountable throughout history's challenges and triumphs, and failures.

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The Good Son

Karen Khodzhayev
Columbia College,
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Viktor had already been in America for six months getting things ready. My mother, my brother, and I walked off a Pan Am flight into the John F. Kennedy arrivals terminal. I had just turned seven and was in hysterics. I'd lost my birthday present, my toy ZiL limousine, left behind on the Aeroflot flight when we'd caught our connection in Berlin. Viktor gave me a hug and a pack of raspberry bubblegum, staying my tears long enough to take us home. He had a brand new Nintendo there waiting for me. The day was Halloween 1990 and although the streets were plastered in skeletons and eggs and shaving cream, I was more awed by the abundance of Bazooka Joe, the invigorating flavor of RC Cola.

I'm sure when I was a baby I called him papa, and when I mention Viktor to strangers, I'll say my father or dad. But since I was nine years old, to his face, I've only used Viktor. See, I'd fallen in love with Tiny Toons and started calling him Buster, but Viktor heard the word bastard instead. He didn't like it, gently expressing his distaste. But I was a persistent pain in the ass and he finally snapped. "I am not a bastard," he said, in accented English. "I have a mother and my name is Viktor." But like I said, I was a pain in the ass. Well, if that's how you like it, I thought, I'll call you Viktor then.

He was incredibly steadfast in affirming that he was not a bastard, repeating himself to make sure I knew. I wondered why he was so put off by such a mild word, meek even in the schoolyard. I can see now that he must've felt incredible guilt, moving his wife and sons to America, but forced to leave his mother, Lyudmilia, alone in godforsaken Russia.

A few years later, my parents bought a house in the suburbs and Viktor finally found himself with the room and the means to take care of his mother. Visas were arranged, flights were booked, and he again drove to JFK. Lyudmilia moved in with us and promptly started cooking and cleaning and nagging everyone to bundle up. She would offer cups of tea, warm and sweet. Lacking in English, it was a way to show her love. My brother and I were teenagers then. He was selling ounces of weed out of his bedroom and I was throwing punk shows in the basement. Lyudmilia, buzzed on a contact high, would be pushed out of her kitchen by wild packs of teens, smoking and sneaking beers out of the fridge. Occasionally, she'd get fed up and barrel through, yelling at everyone in Russian. Eventually, she'd had enough and moved out to a subsidized apartment in Manhattan.

In early November of 2009, waking up in the middle of the night having trouble breathing, Lyudmilia called 911. Firemen broke down the door and rushed her to Beth Israel Medical Center. When I visited the following day, Viktor said she'd been put into hospice care and it dawned on me that she would not be leaving alive. That day, I had *The Death of Ivan Ilych* in my bag and I sat in that hospital room reading about Ivan, humiliated and suffering, living in his own filth, struggling to accept his creeping death. From time to time, I would look up from the page to find my grandma's eyes, sometimes glazed, sometimes lucid, staring at a spot on the wall

directly above my head.

My spoken Russian was about as bad as Lyudmilia's English and what love there was between us was based more on memories from my childhood than anything that had been fostered in the years since. From atop this crumbling foundation, I felt too self-conscious to express tenderness. I tried to be loving, but I was scared to touch her or to see her flesh. I saw the tubes and the wires and the colostomy bag and trembled with the fear of the living, projecting onto her the deathbed anguish I'd skimmed off Tolstoy's story.

My visits were mostly motivated by my duty towards Viktor. This was his mama, and during her last ten days he exhausted himself, spending as much time with her as he could, stroking her head or holding her hand, adjusting her breathing tubes and fluffing the pillows. After the morphine drip was attached, Lyudmilia began trying to take off her hospital gown, complaining that she was too hot. He would try to maintain her modesty and comfort. He would try to coax her to take a teaspoon of applesauce or a sip of milk. When she slept, he would read a Russian translation of *Wodehouse* to keep his spirits up. Sometimes, he would sit there doing nothing and watch her sleep. He would sit there and watch her sleep with a placid look on his face, happy that his mother was not dying in Russia.

Viktor's father Vladimir had died there. It was an accident, a fuck-up. Suffering a persistent cough, Vladimir went to the Institute of Medical Radiology in Obninsk. Trying to obtain a sample of lung tissue, the doctors caused the internal bleeding that landed Vladimir in a coma. The attending physician told Viktor of a medicine he had read about in a foreign journal. "This would help your father," he said, "but you will never find it here." But Viktor tried, calling everyone he knew in Moscow. He found a friend of a friend who worked at the airport and obtained the medicine. Later, riding the elektrichka to the hospital, Viktor read the "Made in Algeria" stamp on the bottle and for the first time became embarrassed for the Soviet superpower. "First man in space, but our medicine is shit," he recalled. "We don't care about people.; we care about power." The medicine failed to revive Vladimir, but there was enough left over to save another patient. Vladimir stayed in the coma for a month before he died. The official cause of death was listed as lung cancer.

While Viktor cared for Lyudmilia, my mom and I cared for him. Mom would bring him cigarettes and fresh clothes. I would bring coffee and KenKen puzzles. The three of us would cross First Avenue to some urban lunchroom and sit around our orange plastic trays. One glum iced tea, one Diet Coke, one seltzer. Viktor would talk and we would listen, his memories trailing off into practicalities. It was easier to speak of closing bank accounts and cleaning out the apartment. We toasted Medicaid, which, thank God, was paying for all of it.

One night, the hospital rabbi was sent to comfort Lyudmilia. Viktor chased him away, explaining that the family was not Jewish. So then they sent a priest. Lyudmilia seeing a rabbi was one thing, an honest mistake perhaps, but seeing a priest, she'd be expecting last rites. "She said to me, 'Vitya, tell me, am I dying?'" Viktor said no and chased the priest away also. He did not do this to fool her or to avoid death. There was no avoiding it. Knowing how scared she was, he just wanted her to have peace. He didn't want her death to be hysterical. And I don't think Viktor was ready to say goodbye yet.

I was not ready to say goodbye either. Between running back and forth to the hospital, I was studying for a science midterm. I kept praying that Lyudmilia would not die before the exam. I knew I could only hold those facts in my head for so long and postponing the exam for a wake would certainly lead to failure. Sitting in my seat, minutes before the exam books were passed out, I received a voicemail. "Renchik, it's over, she has gone. Call when you can." I sat there smiling with tears in my eyes. God's got a good sense of timing, I thought. And although it would've made a good story, Lyudmilia's chemist soul did not flow through me to give me the answers. I passed, but barely.

During her fifteen years in America, Lyudmilia had managed to save enough money from her Social Security checks to pay for her own funeral. While thriftiness can be noble, when we were getting dressed for the wake it just made things sadder. No one aside from my mom owned a suit and I spent the day before driving

around picking up black ties and white shirts. My brother pieced together an outfit using my old debate club jacket, found forgotten in a storage closet. I wore a cheap blazer I'd bought for a funeral the year before. Viktor did insist on getting something special for the occasion, but to him this meant a trip to the Burlington Coat Factory. My mom stayed up late hemming his pants by hand.

I wanted us to have a typical American wake. Bushels of cut flowers and poster boards full of photos. Plastic laminates with a wise quote, with a bit of gospel. A priest. This was the kind of wake I was used to. I was hoping to hide my guilty lack of sadness in the ceremonial artifice.

But my family would have none of that. The viewing was a stripped down affair that only magnified the sorrow. We had one bouquet and a wreath. We had one picture of Lyudmilia, young and beautiful, and another of her smiling in contented old age. And a big gaping coffin. There were no poster boards for mourners to stand around. No candles, no music, no laminates, no priest. The attendance was small, just a handful of émigrés and some of my cleaned-up friends in back. People sat around whispering, watching Viktor. He sat silently looking at his mother's face. Or he would move from his chair to the coffin, get down on one knee and close his eyes. After about half an hour, everyone went to the parking lot. Everyone smoked.

My mom cut the viewing short a little while later. I give her credit for not trying to get our money's worth. There's already enough sadness in the Russian soul and there's no sense of closure that comes from staring at a dolled-up corpse. This was a wake done for the dead, not the living. Viktor laid Lyudmilia's beloved Swiss wristwatch on her chest and the thing was done. There was no need to prolong it. Lyudmilia looked peaceful, the flowers were beautiful, and the coffin well made, not a cheap scrap box like in Russia. Everything was as she would've wanted it. Afterwards, I asked Viktor why there was no eulogy. "She never needed a priest when she was alive," he said. "Why would she need one now?"

Earlier, after the priest and the rabbi had failed, Beth Israel sent a social worker. A Columbia graduate student named Jennifer led Viktor to a quiet room away from his mother and asked him how he was feeling. His response, as he later explained to me, was practical, not emotional. "If I sat in the hospice crying and mama saw this, my emotional response would be bad for her. Practical, it means, I have to forget about my emotions and make it be easier for mama, more comfortable. Emotional means I am following my emotions. That I don't care about my mother; that I care about myself."

To illustrate his point, he told her the story of Chekhov's last moments—a story I've heard him recount countless times before. The short version is that Chekhov, being a doctor himself, was aware that his end was very near. Instead of dragging it out, he requested that a bottle of champagne be sent up to his room. He had a drink with his wife and his physician; and after finishing off his glass, he turned over on his side and died. Viktor likes this story because instead of prolonged and tearful goodbyes, Chekhov held out to share a tender moment with the people closest to him. I think Viktor believes in the nobility of celebrating life in the face of death and only mourning it afterwards.

After the funeral, my mom got drunk on wine and chased my father's friends out of the house. It was now time to sit with our feelings and it was okay to stop being practical. To prevent Lyudmilia's soul from being trapped on Earth, all the mirrors in the house were covered up; some with black cloth and the bathroom mirrors with towels. And, following the Russian Orthodox tradition, my parents laid flowers on her grave on the ninth and fortieth days after death. They didn't do these things because they actually fear ghosts or demons. They spent most of their lives in the secular Soviet Union and knew there was more to fear from the living. They did these things because it's what one does, in the same way they knock on wood and spit three times to expel bad thoughts. In the same way they waited a year before placing a gravestone on the grave. In Russia, this was done because graves were filled in by hand and the ground needed time to settle. Lyudmilia's grave was filled in and tamped down by a bulldozer, but they waited a year anyway, because of tradition. And tradition often times is impractical and emotional.

I understood little of Viktor's practical outlook when he first spoke of it. I thought he was being too righteous. I mean, isn't it perfectly natural to shed tears in front of a loved one that's dying? I went back to Tolstoy and I saw the servant Gerasim taking care of Ilyich much in the same way that Viktor took care of his Lyudmilia. When Ilyich questions his selflessness, Gerasim responds, "We shall all of us die, so why should I grudge a little trouble?" In saying this, he reveals no fear in the face of death, because the real fear lies with the one who's dying. This is why Ilyich screams for days on end. Gerasim takes care of Ilych because "he did not think his work burdensome … he was doing it for a dying man and hoped someone would do the same for him when his time came." Likewise, Viktor took care of his mother because it was she who pampered him and fed him and wiped his ass when he was helpless to do it alone. Driven by love and duty, he returned the favor without any tears for himself. He did it all like a good son should.

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21st Century Rudňany, Samuel Hanuščin Photos, 2011

On A Train Somewhere In Poland

Saskia Brechenmacher
Brown Univerisity

I am not sure where we are now. The train is gliding eastward along barren fields that stretch to the horizon. With the window pushed halfway down, I lean out and feel the cold evening air as it rushes past. It carries the fragrance of cut grass and harvested fields. Apart from a few scattered houses that stood out like dark blotches of paint on a vast green canvas, wide meadows and rolling hills have long replaced the suburban greyness.

The train left the Warsaw station about three hours ago. According to our estimates we should reach the Belarusian border before midnight. With our luggage safely stored away in the small wooden compartment, I venture out into the corridor to explore. Everything radiates a dreamy, nostalgic charm – the white lace curtains, the dark wood panelling, the plastic flowers adorning the table and the drunken singing from next door. The train is crowded with Belarusian and Russian workers returning to their families for a weekend. Men in sleeveless shirts, bald men, tall men, muscled men, sleeping women, dishevelled women, little children, crying children, arguing couples, laughing couples – the train is alive with movement and agitation. People wander along the corridor, getting dressed and undressed, their sleepy faces turned towards half-opened compartment doors.

The smell of sweat and beer lingers in the air.

Berlin to Moscow: Weekend migration, migration routine.

A young man stands by the window, watching the sun as it casts its last glow over the fields that rush by us. His eyes are firmly fixed on some undetermined point ahead, as if he were trying to hold on to the landscape, against the steady advance of the train. What is his story, where is the place he calls home? Is it in Berlin, in a small apartment in Kreuzberg, among Turkish Kebabs and Lebanese newspapers? Is it in the anonymity of Moscow's suburbs, or in a sleepy village on the Volga? The train's pace gives me space and time to reflect on my journey and the vast distance between our starting point and our destination. Berlin is not three hours from Moscow. There is too much history, too many untold stories that lie in between.

This train comes and goes every day. It is a constant movement between worlds, along the trajectory of countless past and future migrations. Images of forced train deportations come to my mind, images of humans crammed into wagons like animals, perhaps along these very railway tracks. Throughout the last century, these

trains have deported entire populations away from their lands into an uncertain future or certain death; they have carried soldiers to the frontlines and brought the injured back home to their waiting families. They have transported migrants fleeing hunger and persecution, seeking a better life somewhere else. And here I am, travelling along the very same path as countless others, unsure whether my story lies in what I am leaving behind or in what I am setting out to explore.

The train comes to an abrupt halt.

It is almost midnight as we stop at the border in Brest. In the darkness, we can only vaguely guess the shapes of the iron structures of warehouses and barracks lining the tracks. Customs officers talk and gesticulate outside, their sounds muffled by the noises of the waking passengers around me. The artificial light of the lanterns illuminating the ghostly rails gives the scene a strangely surreal touch. I am told that for military protection, the railways in Russia and Belarus have different sizes than railways in the rest of Europe, and that the train's wheels will have to be changed at the Belarusian border. With the Polish integration into the Schengen Area, these borders have become the European Union's new frontiers in the East. Inspectors pass through the train, tapping the walls to find loose planks and hidden cavities while their dogs sniff in the dusty corners for drugs. From outside, I can hear loud noises as the wagons are lifted one by one in order to change the wheels. The corridors are suddenly empty as people retire into their compartments, anxiously awaiting the border police control.

Borders, more than any political institution, expose us to the raw power of state, the power of a nation. The power to refuse access to another part of the world suddenly becomes palpable in a dark blue uniform and a deep Russian voice. For a moment, we become only names on passports; we become visa applications and embassy stamps, a date and a signature, a check on a list and a subtle nod.

The officers depart as suddenly as they came. Passports are stored away, passengers return to sleep and silence falls over the train once more. The scene which had come to life for a fleeting instance, like the frozen picture of a gloomy film-noir, has reverted to stillness. The young man is standing by the window again, watching the now deserted platform. As the train sets back into motion with a sudden jerk, he looks over to me, and for a moment I imagine seeing the shadow of smile on his face.

A shimmer of relief, a momentary sense of victory. Let us set out to new horizons, it seems to say. The train rolls onward into the night.

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On The Train From Lithuania

Emily Tamkin
Columbia College,
Columbia University

"What did you like best about the trip so far?" she asked me.

I did not want to answer. I was annoyed at her for even asking, for speaking. We were waiting outside by the tracks because she was paranoid that we would miss the train. It was unbearably, stiflingly hot. The strap of my bag cut into my shoulder.

"What did I like best? I really liked that neighborhood we walked around yesterday. The one we couldn't pronounce? That was probably my single favorite thing. What about you?"

"Well." She smiled mischievously. "I said 'so far' because who knows what might happen on this train ride back home!"

"No. Absolutely not. Nothing is allowed to happen on this train ride."

My friend Katie and I were about to board a fourteen-hour train ride from Vilnius, Lithuania back to Saint Petersburg, Russia, where we were studying abroad. We had taken a bus from Petersburg through Tallinn, Estonia, then through Riga, Latvia, to Vilnius. I refused, however, to be on a bus – or any moving vehicle, for that matter – for twenty hours overnight and across two borders.

We boarded the train. A man came by to open the windows, letting the mosquitoes in. I didn't care about that; I was just happy I could breathe. There were no doors to the compartments. We set up our beds, which we had purchased in adjacent compartments because that was cheaper. I sat down on mine and read about countries that we had not been and to which we would not be going. It seemed like this was how I would pass the time. My friend mentioned possibly watching a movie later, the seventh of the trip.

I heard my friend's voice behind me. She was speaking slow, purposeful Russian. And a man's voice. He was speaking ebullient, broken English.

"My friend. He was the one who opened the windows!

"We will give each other free lessons on train! English! Russian!"

The conductor came around and passed out the migration cards we would need to enter Latvia. The cards asked for an identification number. I asked the conductor what this meant. She suggested that I ask Katie's new friend, as she did not know.

He was confused by our lack of personal identification numbers, a staple of Eastern Europe, but suggested we leave it blank, and we all too eagerly agreed. He smiled at me. "What excellent company on this train! Stay and talk with us!"

"Maybe later. I am going to go read." I looked over at Katie, who was mouthing "NO, DON'T GO" and gesticulating wildly. I smiled at her and went back to my excuse for a bed.

My compartment companion was an old woman. She looked up from organizing the many, many bags of food-product souvenirs she had purchased.

"Where are you from?" she asked me.

"I am from America, but I am studying in Russia," I replied in Russian.

"Are you studying Russian or German?"

"… Russian."

"Why are you not studying in Germany?"

"Because I study Russian, so I need to be in Russia."

"Why do you study Russian instead of German?"

"Well," I said slowly, trying to find words to both answer the question and cloak my disbelief, "maybe one day I'll study German. But I really love Russian literature, history, and culture, so I decided to study Russian."

"Brave."

I laughed.

"Good luck," she said with a smile.

Not wanting to discuss my choice of language study any longer, I went back to Katie and her new friend.

He was Russian-born, lived in Lithuania, had been in the Lithuanian army, and now worked with Danes. He was trying to learn English. Everything I offered about my friend, or myself, he already knew. "You see, we already know all." He grinned. "Tell me, what do you think of us?" Katie's eyes bulged. "You're an us? Already?" I asked. The man laughed and laughed. I did not.

An hour later, or maybe two, the train stopped at a platform in the woods. A man got on. He was wearing a wife beater and swim trunks. His seat was across from my friend's, in the enclave where she and Jurgus, the Russian-Lithuanian, chatted.

Jurgus helped the man, Sergei, set up his makeshift bed and put his bags away. As if they had agreed to it before, Sergei and Jurgus both sat down and brought out food. Chocolate, cranberry soda, caviar in a tube from Sweden, sliced meat, crackers, bread, and water. They offered it to us, and offered and offered until we relented.

I came over from my spot of strange superiority across the aisle. Sergei had been in the Russian army, and had a wife and son. Jurgus interjected that he himself was unmarried, but had been to many weddings. He knew wedding traditions very well. For example, it was the ultimate compliment for the bride to be called ribka by her new husband.

"Little fish?"

"Yes, of course!"

Sergei spoke only Russian but understood English very well. He used to speak English, he told us, as he had spent time in the United States.

"In America, Budweiser and theme parties are very popular."

"Tell me, Sergei," I said, smiling. "Were you a university student when you visited America?"

He was.

We ate and drank and talked and drank until Katie and I finally decided to try to sleep.

One hour after my head touched the pillow we were stopped by the Lithuanian border control. They walked through the train and took the migration cards that the conductor previously handed out. The officers,

stomping through, took the cards and scanned them in his electronic reader.

"Just wait," said Sergei and Jurgus, still sitting up and chatting across the aisle. "Here, they have electronics. When we get to Russia, it will be a wooden box."

I laughed, thinking it was a joke, and tried to go back to sleep. But an hour later, Katie, half-awake and panic-stricken, woke me up. The Russian migration officer wanted a migration card, she said, but didn't we give that to border control when we entered Estonia?

It quickly became apparent that we were supposed to receive another migration card from the Lithuanian border guards, one without which we could not get back into Russia. I tried to communicate this to the very austere woman checking passports, but she just took ours along with everyone else's and stormed off in a huff, clutching what was indeed no more than a wooden box. Two men went through our bags. A shirtless Sergei explained why he had rows upon rows of film canisters (for his son, apparently).

The austere female working border control marched back through, returning passports.

"Excuse me! How can I fill out the migration cards?" I asked.

She wordlessly pointed to my passport. She had filled out and inserted a new card.

"Well, that was nice of her," Katie murmured, her eyes already half closed.

A few hours later it was time to wake again. I changed my shirt, brushed my teeth, washed my face, and applied makeup in the train's tiny bathroom, trying not to take too long or smudge my eyeliner as the train jolted and bumped.

Sergei, now wearing a white shirt and white track pants, and Jurgus, wearing the same outfit as the day before, were cutting up fruit and cheese, and passing a bottle of fruit juice around. I thanked them, ate, drank, and thought about the lifetime I felt I had lived in the last twelve hours. Jurgus brought out some very warm tomato juice.

"Do you want some?"

"No, thanks."

"You don't like tomato juice?"

"Actually, I do. On planes."

"Oh, you like Bloody Marys?"

"No, I mean I just drink tomato juice."

"Bloody Marys!" Jurgus took a long, unrefrigerated gulp.

We asked them about their favorite Russian movies and how they liked living in Petersburg and for their best imitations of the voice that warned people that the doors were closing on the Metro. They asked us about the Back to the Future series and how we could help them learn English. Sergei sent us Facebook friend requests on his mobile phone. He and Jurgus exchanged numbers. Jurgus asked another passenger to take a picture of the four of us. They offered to carry our bags when the train reached Petersburg.

When the train did reach Petersburg, we thanked them for everything, and parted ways. Later, Katie and I talked about the truth behind the cliché that riding on a train in Russia is like riding a train nowhere else – people become fellow travelers in a uniquely, powerfully Russian way.

We never heard from Sergei or Jurgus again. Sometimes I look at my train ticket to remember that I ever took a train from Lithuania at all.

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The Language Struggle

Sasha Henriques
Barnard College,
Columbia University

My mother would never admit this, of course, but I had been a slightly disappointing child. This was not to say that something was wrong with me – I was an intelligent and bright toddler, friendly and loquacious, but the one thing my mother desperately wanted of me, I could not give.

My mother had emigrated from Kiev, Ukraine in 1992, soon married an older American man, and then had me, her first child, in 1993. Her biggest hope was that her new "American baby" would learn how to speak Russian. She stuffed me with Russian phrases, words, and children's rhymes while my babushka stuffed me with cured Russian kielbasa and pirozhki. My dedushka taught me how to play soccer as my uncle taught me to clap my hands and sing "ladushki ladushki." But despite their greatest efforts, despite the painfully desperate way they silently begged for me to retain my heritage, my inherited culture didn't interest me in the slightest. I made no pains to study the Russian language, acquiring only a few phrases and words, such as "grandmother" and "I am a good girl." I hated eating most of the Russian foods that my grandmother made, and instead of playing soccer with my grandfather, I took dance lessons. Throughout my school years, my heritage truly manifested itself in only two ways – my piano-playing abilities (a typical Russian mother, mine forced me to take lessons until I could no longer imagine giving it up) and my nickname, Sasha. This isn't to say that I wasn't proud or well aware of my roots. I just refused to actively pursue learning about them.

This changed with my first semester of college. Sick of high school Spanish and excited by the prospect of learning a new, unknown language (and partly driven by the four-semester language requirement), I began taking Russian classes. I knew I'd find it much easier than starting any other language; growing up around so many Russian speakers had given me an almost innate ability to understand the language as well as a near-perfect accent. Slowly and diligently, I began to learn the language. My mother would call me at night on the phone, begging for me to share a quick example of what I had learned in Russian class that day. I would laughingly refuse, telling her I didn't want to speak Russian right now (in Russian, of course). My skills sharpened with every class. I could speak in full sentences and with accurate intonation. My uncle's Russian wife once laughingly suggested that I call her father and say something in Russian. After I spoke a few brief phrases, she made him guess who was speaking; "Это Алёна!" he confidently announced. He had thought it was my mother speaking.

The first time my family visited me at school, we happened to run into my Russian professor. I formally introduced her to my mother and grandmother, expecting a quick exchange of polite yet insignificant comments. Instead, my mother took my professor's hand in hers with tears in her eyes and offered her the biggest of thanks for teaching her daughter their language – our language. I stood off to the side, struggling to hold

it together for my mother's sake as they laughed about the ridiculous grammar-related questions I had asked while visiting home.

Now, of course, at all family functions, I turn into the show pony as Russian relatives yell for me to speak in Russian for them. I always refuse, their eyes full of laughter and pride as I sarcastically retort, "Но сейчас я не хочу говорить по-русски!" It has been one of the most rewarding feelings I've ever felt in my life – the barrier between my distinctly American half and my Russian half shrinks with every word of Russian I learn. My family has waited for years for this – for this embrace of culture, for this pride of heritage. Learning a language may be a small thing in the long run, but for now, it means everything for my Russian family. They never hesitate to tell me how happy they are that I'm finally becoming a "real" Russian (despite their consistent jests at my abhorrence of caviar. I'm still hoping that that's a taste I'll soon acquire).

For all her years living in the United States, my mother has not once visited her hometown of Kiev. This summer, I plan to ask her if we could go together. I think we're both finally ready.

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Crossroads in Novgorod, Aisling Hunt, Barnard College

Poems From A Czech Village

Talia Lavin
Harvard University

This is a selection of poems from a larger collection entitled "The Speakers Series." The speakers are the inhabitants of a Czech village in the mid-1950s (which is as yet unnamed). Set in the landscape of post-war Czechoslovakia under Communist occupation, the poems explore the disconnect between traditional rural modes of life and the new realities of Eastern Europe in the mid-twentieth century. Though life seems, at its surface, to be unchanged, an air of menace pervades the poems, reflecting the trauma of modern menaces in traditional societies.

Sobeska Hlava

This is a woman with skin like an onion's
and lips closed tight as a preserve jar.
She would darn patches in the clouds
If she could, weave a skirt
of wisps that dangle from the bales.
With her red hands, smooth errant men
Into marching lines again.

Sister of wool-skeins,
handmaid of the yoke
that keeps the oxen neat,
Sobeska wants the whole world under her feet—
Or choked up in her hands like a throttled goose.
But up above her head the sun hangs loose,
Casting its favor carelessly
Over the suffering linden tree

Andel Prochazka

I too have been that drunk who howled at the moon
and imagined the night was appalled,
and all my recompense is illness,
and my mother tongue nearly
forgotten, my country's name
gained and lost and regained
not by its own hand,
and the mountains black frigates
with my fate in their hulls.
Ah, my life inadequate and still
as the black cup empty on the table,
the black cup
that gave up its contents
unwillingly,
while in the room the cigarettes were brandished
and a woman who had lost her earring somewhere
found it again, cupped it in her hand, and exclaimed softly...
Golden woman, I am your
poorest child, I was hung by my heels
at the mercy of mongrels, find me again,
I am the black cup calling
and I have no tongue at all.

Jaroslava Brozek

This quiet girl walks as if
she has a twin joined to her hips.
Her arms thin as stripped
boughs, her hair
like the stub-wheat
of an arid country.
Jaroslava walks between white pines
red
as a severed leg.
Where she walks the night keens towards morning
and sags beneath her like a black wet bread.

Pavel Cervenka

Ah, friend, we all remember you,
we've drunk to your health,
the liquor stung our cut fingers.
Stumble-about, with red cheeks,
you tilt like a hobby horse
and stay alone for weeks,
a gold silt of stubble on your face,
and your poor eyes two cockles split with ruin.
Friend, we remember you,
and we drink to your health.

How is it that only you
are so pinched with misfortune,
like a pill of dough in the red fingers of Dalka Rolicek,
the baker's daughter?
Our Pavel who swam the channel,
pulled the tails of goats,
gorged on gooseberries,
husked the beards of oats.

Pavel cried to the morning like a stallion buck,
Bright hairs on his dappled hide,
And took Dusana behind the stable--
She brayed and sighed.

Soon Pavel had a filly and a foal.
White milk curdled on the table
and raiska burned on the coals.
In swaddling the little lamb
howled like a wolf.
Pavel roared awhile even under the yoke--
But to say more is not for the public ear.
Friend Pavel, I raise my glass
to your health, a wayward daughter
still in her virgin's dress.

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Wild Honey Smells of Freedom

Translated by
Talia Lavin
Harvard University

Wild honey smells of freedom,
The dust—a ray of sun,
A girl's mouth has violet's perfume,
and gold has none.

The mignonette smells of clearest water,
And love of apple-wood.
But we've found out forever after
that blood smells only of blood.

In vain the alderman of Rome
washed his hands before his men,
under their black and wrathful cries;
And in vain the Scottish queen
scours her palms of scarlet drops
in the choked gloom of the kingly home..

Привольем пахнет дикий мед,
Пыль - солнечным лучом,
Фиалкою - девичий рот,
А золото - ничем.

Водою пахнет резеда,
И яблоком - любовь.
Но мы узнали навсегда,
Что кровью пахнет только кровь...

И напрасно наместник Рима
Мыл руки пред всем народом,
Под зловещие крики черни;
И шотландская королева
Напрасно с узких ладоней
Стирала красные брызги
В душном мраке царского дома...

-- Akhmatova, Leningrad, 1934

A Sad Story

Translated by
Olga Korovoba
Northwestern University

Long ago, year after year,
A small turtle would appear.
Like a recluse fleeing church,
From salt waters she'd emerge.

She had lived two centuries,
All alone, deep in the sea.
Never saw her dad or mama
('Twas an old family drama!)

Daddy had spent out his while
On remote Canary isles.
Mama, with her younger sister,
On the far Amazon river.

So, two centuries had passed,
When the water billowed
On New Years Eve, the turtle met
A very lonely hippo.

Много лет, за годом год,
Из глубин соленых вод
Как затворница-монашка
Выплывала Черепашка.

Двести лет жила она
Одинешенька-одна:
Двести лет без папы с мамой.
(Результат семейной драмы!)

Папа жил у черепах
На Канарских островах,
Мама с младшею сестренкой
Далеко, за Амазонкой.

На исходе двух столетий,
А точней - под Новый год
Черепашку как-то встретил
Одинокий Бегемот.

He was seemly and reliant,
Heavy, pleasant as a whole.
An energetic, handsome giant,
So responsive in his soul.
If the turtle wants to doze,
Then the hippo would repose
In the shade, where he would keep
Turtle safe while she would sleep.

When the turtle was unwell,
All her pain, the hippo quelled.
When the hippo became ill,
Many tears the turtle spilled.

There was keen consideration,
Tenderness, and so much faith …
Once, the hippo sat and waited,
But the turtle missed their date.

When tomorrow came, again!
Hippo didn't understand.

In his deepest misery,
Every thicket, cliff, and perch,
On the land and in the sea,
Everywhere, he searched and searched.

But he missed the furthest bay.
There, as the ocean waves roared,
There, among the cliffs, decayed,
A horned shell was washed ashore

Бегемот вполне приличный -
В меру толстый и большой,
Энергичный, симпатичный
И с отзывчивой душой.
Черепашка на песочке
Спит за камешком, в тенечке,
Бегемот вблизи лежит -
Черепашку сторожит.

Черепашка заболеет -
Бегемот ее жалеет.
Захворает Бегемот -
Черепашка слезы льет.

Было чуткое вниманье,
Нежность, преданность была...
Но однажды на свиданье
Черепашка не пришла.

И назавтра не явилась -
Как сквозь землю провалилась!

Бегемот в глубоком горе
Среди зарослей и скал -
И на суше, и на море -
Все местечки обыскал.

Не был только в бухте дальней,
Где волною штормовой
Океан на берег скальный
Вынес панцирь роговой.

-- Sergey Mihalkov

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10 Ibid, 65. Kulikovo Field meaning the Battle of Kulikovo Polye (1380), which has been interpreted as the final blow by the Muscovites against their former overlords, the Mongol Kipchak qanate (Golden Horde), representing the freedom of Russia from Mongol sovereignty.

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12 Bely, 165.

13 Nikolai is first a primordial being, then a cohort of the emperor of China (Apollon), one of Tamerlane's soldiers (Tamerlane supposedly also Apollon), and now a Russian nobleman.

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