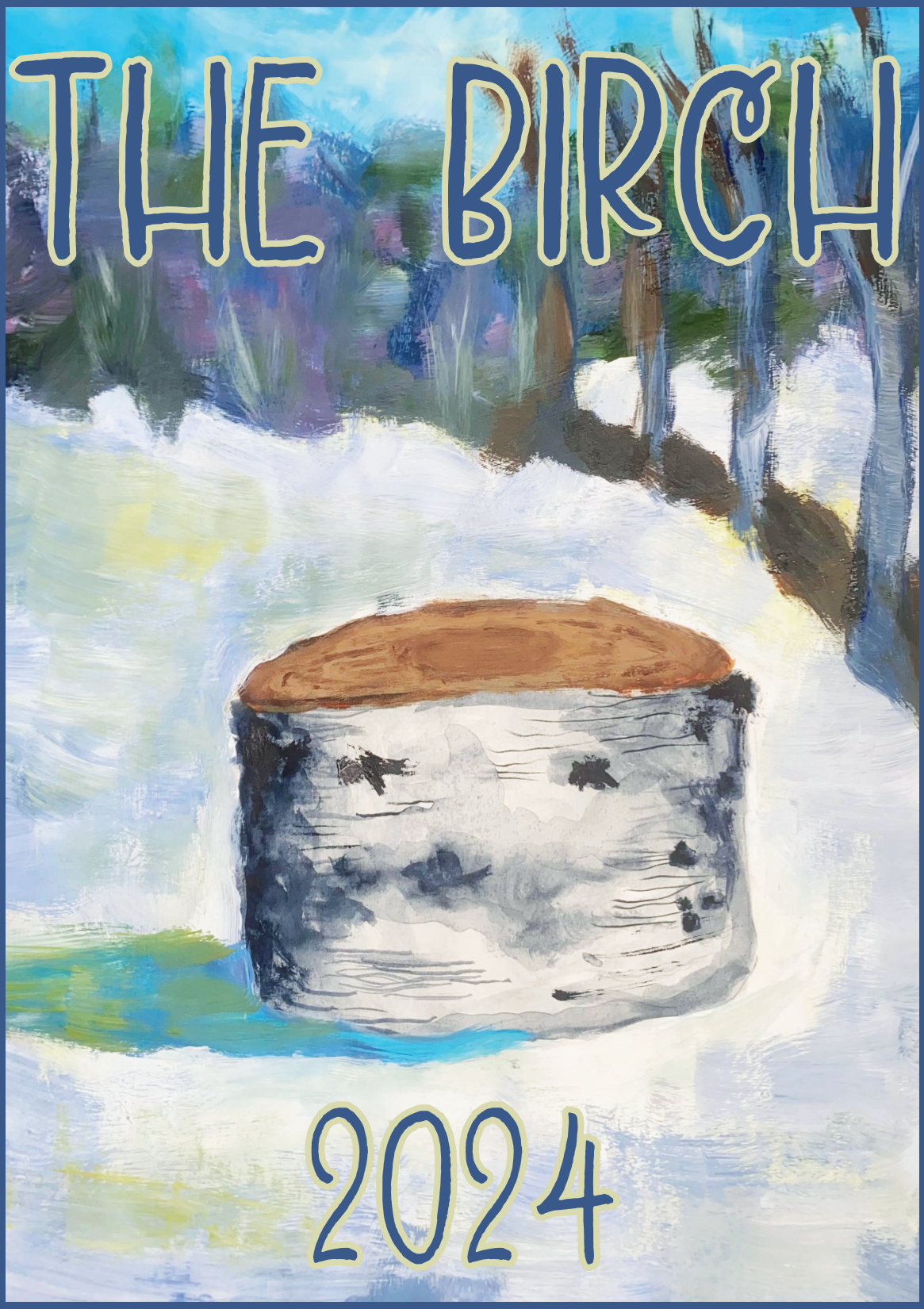
THE BIRCH



2024

The Birch Staff, 2023-2024



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We want to express our gratitude and appreciation for Columbia University's Slavic Department and Harriman Institute.

Thank you to all of our editors, writers, and supporters who have contributed to the success of *The Birch* over the past 20 years.

Front cover: birch tree stump in winter (acrylics)
Section title pages: landscapes from the Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian regions
Illustrations by Marianna Jocas, Barnard College '27

About *The Birch*

Founded in 2004, *The Birch Journal* is the first national undergraduate publication devoted exclusively to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian studies. Any undergraduate student at any college or university is welcome to submit work to be published in our issues, featured both online and in print. We accept essays on the culture, history, and politics of the greater region, literary criticism, photography, translations, and creative writing.

The Birch editorial board is composed entirely of current undergraduate students at Columbia University. More information about *The Birch Journal* is available online, our Instagram account (@thebirchjournal), our website (thebirchjournal.com), and by emailing us at thebirchjournal@gmail.com.

Letter From The Editors

We are proud to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of *The Birch* with the publication of our 2024 issue. Since 2004, our journal has maintained its commitment to platforming undergraduate voices from across the Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian region. Our dedicated editorial staff is composed of Columbia University undergraduates invested in diversifying academic discourse beyond mainstream Russo-centric narratives and creating a space for often overlooked voices.

This issue––which covers topics like Ukrainian nationhood, the legacies of iconic figures like Gogol and Tolstoy, and enduring consequences of Russian imperialism––reflects on core questions that have been asked with increasing urgency over the past 20 years. Ideological conflicts have spiraled into hostile divisions and battlefield tragedies. With a grossly distorted, revisionist claim on history, Russian president Vladimir Putin has driven Russia from a promising democracy to autocracy that has destabilized the region. With its 2014 annexation of Crimea, frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine, and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia continues to wage a war against Ukraine's nation and culture. In our pages, we have included images of the sunflower, a symbol of Ukrainian solidarity and hope for peace.

Belarus has followed a similar path to Russia under president Alexander Lukashenko, who has consolidated power through fraudulent elections, jail sentences for civil society activists, and arbitrary charges for exercising free expression. Authoritarian governments in Central Asia have taken a host of measures to restrict fundamental freedoms and curtail the operations of human rights defenders. Ethno-political tensions simmer in Moldova and Georgia, where regions with ties to Russia threaten to secede. A frozen conflict boiled over in 2023 in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Azerbaijan launched a lightning offensive that effectively cleared the region of ethnic Armenians, making 100,000 refugees.

However, it is also important to note that many of the 21st century transformations in the region have been for the better. Just this past year, Poland's parliament elected Donald Tusk as prime minister, ending almost a decade of nationalist populist rule in favor of a more progressive and democratic government. Greece legalized gay marriage mere months ago, becoming the first Eastern Orthodox country to do so. Over the past two decades, Eastern European independence movements have made various strides, such as Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia in 2008 and the Maidan Uprising in Ukraine. Additionally, Western organizations such as the EU and NATO have added many Eastern European countries to their ranks, symbolizing increasing participation by these nations in wider global affairs.

As America's oldest undergraduate Slavic studies journal, we have weathered many of the upheavals of the past two decades, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic. The combination of the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine halted *The Birch*'s operations in 2022. Determined to continue the important mission of our journal, the next year we rebuilt the staff, the journal, the website, and our social media––a process that culminated in the milestone publication of our 2023 issue.

The Birch has been a consistent home for scholarly discussion that has remained relevant, generative, and incisive. Regardless of what new struggles and successes the region experiences in the next 20 years, *The Birch* will continue to provide undergraduate scholars with a platform to investigate the nuances and trajectories of the region's culture, history, and politics.

Talia Abrahamson & Katherine St. George
Editors-in-Chief of *The Birch Journal*



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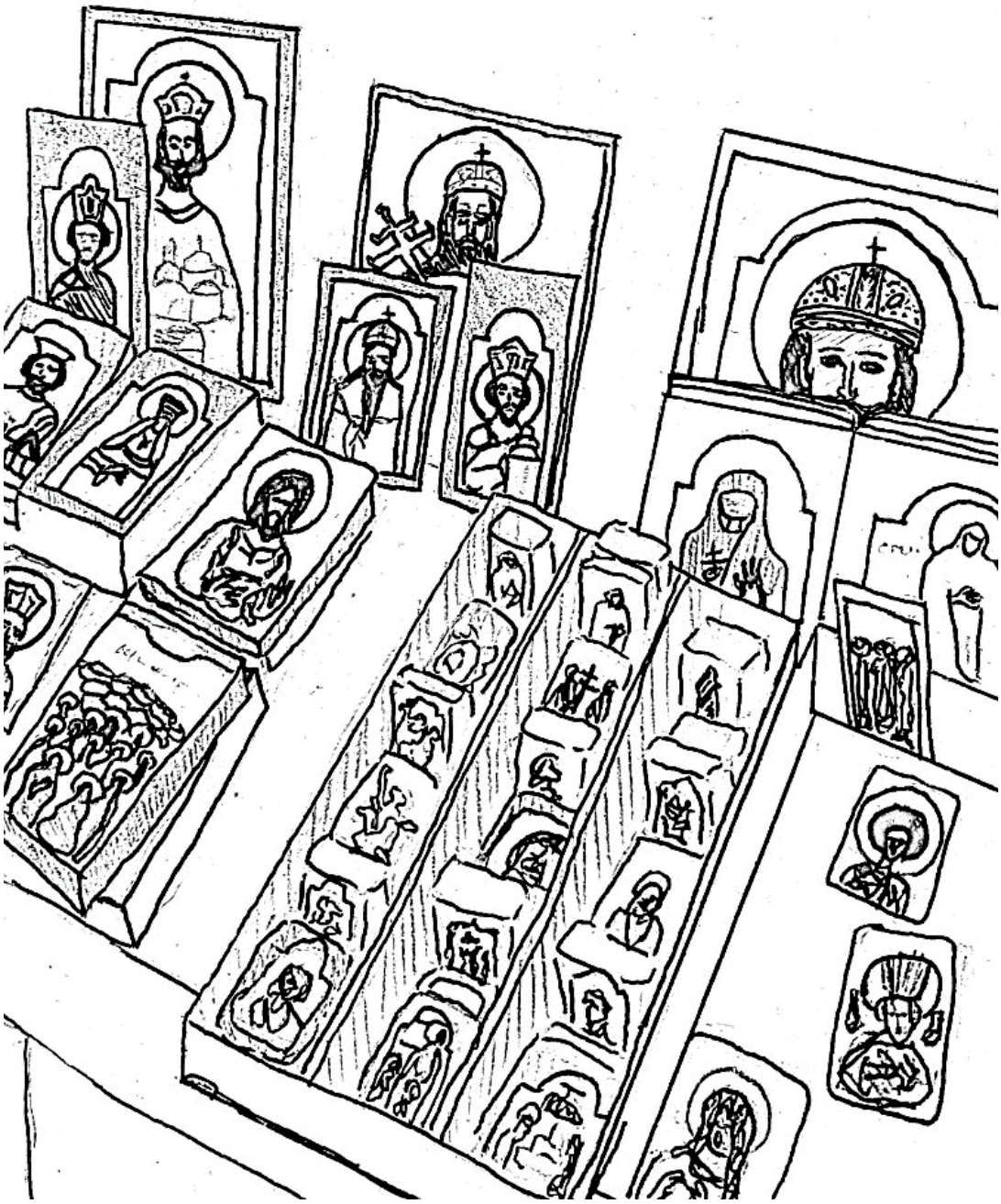
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CULTURE & HISTORY



Comically Serious and Seriously Comic: An Examination of Komar and Melamid's Work *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*

Atiana Novikoff
University of California, Berkeley

After Khrushchev's thaw in 1956, the Soviet Union began to reflect upon Stalinism which had brought the nation so much suffering and fear. The totalitarian nature of Stalinism resulted in state control over every aspect of life, including the creation of art. Artists of the Stalin period were forced to abide by the rules of socialist realism, the only art style permitted in the period which expressed nationalism in every genre, or face ostracism. The later acknowledgment of Stalin's crimes opened up the opportunity for artists to expand beyond socialist realism and reflect upon the period without less government control. Despite this opening, not all artistic movements were publicly accepted. One such unofficial movement was called "sots art," which was a variation of American Pop Art, depicting Soviet mass-cultural imagery. The term, fittingly, was coined in 1972 by two artists whose work exemplifies the style, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, two Russian-Jewish dissident artists who worked together primarily from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s.[1] Komar and Melamid's painting *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers* (1982-1983), is an especially striking example of sots art, as it utilizes national symbols to process emotions, only to ultimately reach an ambiguous resolution.

This essay will analyze the themes of sots art, as exemplified by *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*, through three main frames of analysis: socialist realism, Bakhtinian carnival and the grotesque, and the politicization of art. Each of these perspectives not only reveals something new about sots art, but also the way in which they intertwine reveals an entirely new synthesis: Komar and Melamid's enigmatic reflections on the past. Though on the surface the painting *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers* appears to be a satire of socialist realism, it is more ambiguous than that. It creates its own space to engage with the political, yet its ambiguous stance towards the political is what allows Komar and

1. Margarita Tupitsyn, Sots Art: Eric Bulatov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Alexander Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, Leonid Sokov, Kazimir Passion Group (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986), 4.

Melamid to use the painting to process their complex emotions about their childhood.

GROWING FROM SOCIALIST REALISM: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SOTS ART

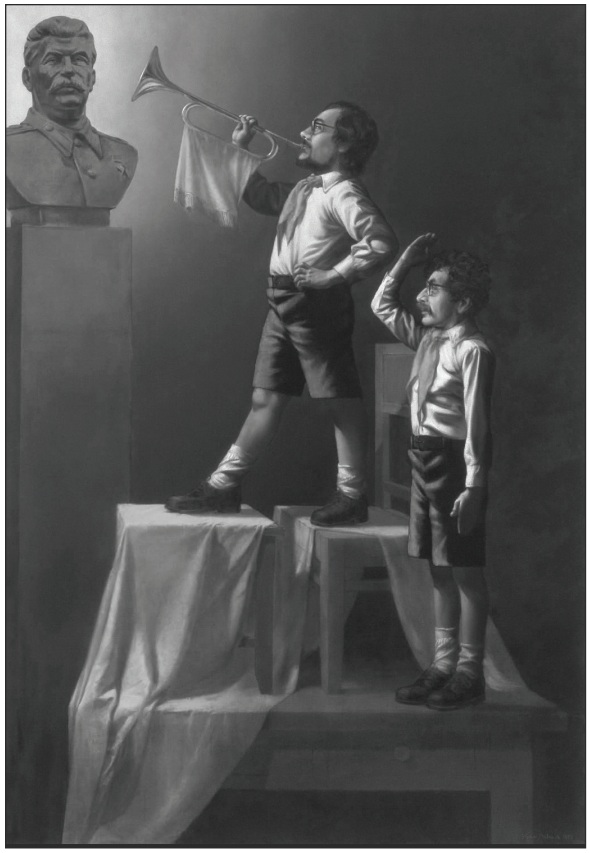
Sots art emerged after several decades of socialist realism as the only official style. The term "socialist realism" first emerged in 1932, and its principles were explicated by Stalin and Soviet writers as "national in form and socialist in content."[2] "Socialist content" referred to the ideological symbols of socialism, such as Party spirit and progressiveness, while the national form conveyed the importance of integrating the diverse national traditions of the Soviet Union.[3] In 1934, Andrei Zhdanov and Maxim Gorky, two writers who associated closely with Stalin, laid out the socialist realist principles such as "typicality," "Party spirit," and "reality in its revolutionary development." [4]"Typicality" referred to art serving as a reflection of everyday life, while "Party spirit" required the inclusion of national symbols of the party. "Reality in its revolutionary development" merged these two ideas, describing the ideal of portraying how the Soviet Union strove for communism in the past, present, and future.

An archetype of such socialist realist art is *Triumph of Our Fatherland* by Mikhail Khmelko, a painting full of Soviet nationalist imagery and sentiment. The painting depicts the Soviet Army laying down the banners of the defeated Germans before Lenin's mausoleum.[5] National symbolism serves as both the focal point and the physical setting of this painting. On the foreground, the painting depicts the Red Square, a cultural center of the Soviet Union that also houses Lenin's mausoleum, the resting place of the nation's principle revolutionary. Another visible symbol of the nation, the flag of the Soviet Union, waves, surrounded by soldiers as they are recognized for defending their country's honor through their defeat of the Nazis as they lay Nazi banners before Lenin's mausoleum. In the background of *Triumph of Our Fatherland*, a banner is depicted with portraits of Stalin and Lenin in profile—Lenin only slightly jutting out behind Stalin. Lenin and Stalin's likenesses are the only ones in the painting that are not physically present on the scene, conveying their omnipresence. This painting is excessive in its nationalist imagery, but this is precisely why it exemplifies what socialist realism strove for.

This painting is excessive in its nationalist imagery, but this is precisely why it exemplifies what socialist realism strove for.

However, the ambiguous guidelines of socialist realism meant that the *Triumph of Our Fatherland* provides many different avenues of interpretation. The Party was the sole authority on what was representative of socialist realism. Party control meant there did not need to be clear definitions because the principles were set by those who had been awarded with the highest State recognition.[6] This led artists trying to follow the strict guidelines set out by Zhdanov only to constantly face rejection of their work. In order to understand socialist realism, many artists were given access to privileged

2. Igor Golomstock, Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China, 84, 147.
3. Ibid.
4. Margarita Tupitsyn, Sots Art: Eric Bulatov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Alexander Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, Leonid Sokov, Kazimir Passion Group, 20.
5. Igor Golomstock, Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China, 239.
6. Ibid. 97.



Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers, 1982-1983
Vitaly Komar and Alex Melamid



Triumph of Our Fatherland, 1949
Mikhail Khmelko

Party groups in order to better comprehend correct, or typical, forms of socialist realist art.[7] Thus, only those who were already favored enough to interact with the most privileged members of the Party could even get close to accessing information regarding the expectations for socialist realism art.

SOCIALIST REALISM IN *DOUBLE SELF-PORTRAIT AS YOUNG PIONEERS*

Considering that sots art invoked the national imagery of socialist realism, understanding Soviet symbols proves essential to fully understanding the style's intended meaning. In *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*, a bust of Stalin looms in the background of the left side of the painting, with light shining behind it.[8] The viewer's eye is drawn to the bust as the figures of Komar and Melamid form a line pointing towards the bust and its large size. The bust evokes imagery of actual statues of Stalin across the Soviet Union during this period, seemingly a permanent part of the environment. However, as destalinization (the denunciation of Stalin and removal of his policies), began to take place after the 1960s, many of these statues were taken down. The location of the bust in this setting thereby simultaneously suggests permanence and impermanence. The vacant background of the painting portrays the bust as existing in a liminal space, outside of normal time and space and thus everlasting. Or it could be conceived as placed inside a storage room—removed from public view post-destalinization.

The location of the bust in this setting thereby simultaneously suggests permanence and impermanence.

The viewer's attention is also drawn to the bust as the painting's only light source emanates from behind it. This light motif is reminiscent of religious paintings in which light emanates from behind holy figures as an indication of their divinity. This interpretation of Stalin as a holy figure aligns with the characterization of Stalin as the demiurge of the Soviet Union. Art critic and philosopher Boris Groys characterizes Stalin as a god-like figure because the goal of Stalinist art was to make visible the "struggle to determine the destiny of the world and the protagonists of the struggle."[9] By this Groys means that Stalinist sought to depict the "struggle" Soviet heroes like Stalin and Lenin to create the world in their image. However, socialist realist art was not meant to reflect reality, but rather incarnated heroes of its art, most often Stalin. As the protagonist of the struggle for the power to determine the world, Stalin had the power to form the world as he pleased through his mythological, divine portrayal in socialist realist art.

Komar and Melamid stand at attention directed at Stalin's demiurgic figure in *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers.* In the painting, Komar and Melamid wear the uniforms of Young Pioneers, a compulsory political youth organization that sought to appropriately educate children on Party values.[10] The uniforms serve as national symbols of childhood in the Soviet Union, but Komar and Melamid satirize this symbol by compounding the presence of the uniforms

7. Boris Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992) 52.
8. Margarita Tupitsyn, Sots Art: Eric Bulatov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Alexander Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, Leonid Sokov, Kazimir Passion Group, 40.
9. Boris Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond, 62.
10. Igor Golomstock, Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy and the People's Republic of China, 202.

with their grotesque and playful figures. The striking red neckties of their uniforms visually connect Komar and Melamid's figures with other red features of the painting such as the table cloth, the flag on one of the boy's trumpets, and Stalin's bust.[11] The extensive inclusion of the color red is significant as Soviet national symbolism: it holds a strong representation in the national imagery of the Soviet Union, such as the Soviet flag, the Bolsheviks' alternative name "Reds", and Lenin's red mausoleum. The choice of the color red to be such a large piece of national symbolism may be its linguistic association in Russian. The word for red in Russian, *krasnyy*, is very close to the word beautiful, *krasivyy*, linguistically linking the color red with what is fine and good. So in making national symbolism red, the Soviet government is saying that the government is good and beautiful. Each of the red features of *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers* invoke national imagery and also linguistically connect these national symbols with what is fine and good. The tablecloth invokes the image of the Soviet Union's flag. The bust of Stalin looks to be made out of the same red granite as Lenin's mausoleum, thus linking political greatness with the color red.

Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers further satirizes the imagery of Socialist Realism by mimicking the profile portraiture of great leaders. For example, in Khmelko's painting Lenin's and Stalin's appearance is reminiscent of classical iconography with profiles of emperors featured on coins, thus evoking ideas of the rulers' power and omnipresence as well as their separation from real men as their full faces are not shown. In Komar and Melamid's painting, their figures are instead displayed in playful militaristic stances as Melamid strikes a failed salute with his hand above his head and Komar over performs trumpet playing with a hand on his hip. Komar and Melamid's figures satirize the severe portraits of Stalin and Lenin by playfully mimicking their seriousness. All the similarities between these paintings bring out that Komar and Melamid are satirizing socialist realism by mimicking it. However, it is not clear if they do so out of affiliation with socialist realism or rejection of it. Examining the grotesque aspect of this painting will help clarify the meaning of this mimesis.

All the similarities between these paintings bring out that Komar and Melamid are satirizing socialist realism by mimicking it.

BAKHTINIAN CARNIVAL AND THE GROTESQUE

The strangest aspect of *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers* is the fact that Komar and Melamid portray themselves in the bodies of young boys with adult faces. [12]Komar and Melamid's distorted stand on top of a table with other furniture stacked around them, reminiscent of a playground structure. Within the austere atmosphere of the painting, conveyed by a vacant background, the absurdity of the figures is especially apparent. This absurdity of the painting can be understood through Mikhail Bakhtin's explanation of the carnival and the grotesque.[13] In his work *Rabelais and His World* on the French Renaissance writer Françios Rabelais, Bakhtin explores medieval carnival festivities in which "serious

11. Margarita Tupitsyn, Sots Art: Eric Bulatov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Alexander Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, Leonid Sokov, Kazimir Passion Group, 40.
12. Ibid.
13. M. M Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, First Midland book edition (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984) 5.

rituals such as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight" were presented in a comical way. In such comical presentations of serious events, the carnival lowered the official aspects of the state and the church to unofficial aspects of popular culture—making what is conceived as solely for the elites available instead to the masses. The application of these rituals in a different context is crucial to understanding Bakhtin's conception of the grotesque—the essence of which is to present "a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life."[14] In the grotesque, two contradictory ideas or figures are inseparable;for instance, life is inseparable from death or the serious is inseparable from the comic. In this manner, the grotesque also degrades the spiritual and the ideal to the earthly and material.[15] Thus, the carnival and the grotesque share the qualities of lowering the state of the official realm to establish a juxtaposition that is strange in everyday life.

The grotesque is deeply positive and universal, representing all people in the style of humorous folk with themes often focusing on bodily growth, fertility, and over abundance.

Although the carnival and the grotesque share many similarities in their themes, what distinguishes them is the roles they play in their expression, as the carnival is a setting and the grotesque is an aesthetic. The carnival consists of a typical space at an exceptional time; establishing a venue upon which the aesthetics of the grotesque can be applied. In Bakhtin's characterization, the carnival occurs in the marketplace, a public space that did not exist in the Soviet Union, which was a unique location even within medieval Europe. Whereas churches, institutions and private homes were dominated by clear, stringent hierarchies, the marketplace was characterized by freedom, familiarity, and communality.[16] Carnivals were held only on a few days throughout the year, but during this time, there was a "suspension of all hierarchical precedence," and this breakdown of the official realm brought about a momentary freedom from the authority that dictated people's daily lives.[17] The essential way in which the masses obtained freedom in the carnival was through positive laughter, a universal and communal sharing of the comic which allowed them to break down hierarchy. The grotesque is deeply positive and universal, representing all people in the style of humorous folk with themes often focusing on bodily growth, fertility, and over abundance.[18] Things such as extra limbs, distorted bodies, mixing the old and young together in the same body are common tropes of the grotesque. The positivity of the grotesque, insofar as it adds to a body, makes it the ideal aesthetic for bringing about positive laughter in the carnival. The carnival's disruption of the social hierarchy, although it is still limited to the few days of festivities, makes it inherently political whereas the grotesque can be political when it is used in the context of the carnival, but an aesthetic representation of contradiction is not necessarily political.

In applying the carnival and the grotesque to *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*, the ambiguity of the painting is revealed.[19] The author flickers or "shimmers" in between identifying with their

14. M. M Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 62.
15. Ibid. 19.
16. Ibid. 154.
17. Ibid. 10.
18. Ibid. 19.
19. Mikhail Epstein, "Postmodernist Thought of the Late Soviet Period: Three Profiles," 487-488.

work and distancing themselves from it. Dmitri Prigov's concept of "shimmering" expresses a state in which the viewer and the author never know how sincere or parodic the author is in their self-identification with their work.[20] Where the carnival is a place of public gathering, Komar and Melamid in the painting are in an ambiguous time and space that is isolated from reality. Besides the furniture, the bust of Stalin, and Komar and Melamid's figures, the background of the painting is devoid of any other figures or fixtures.[21] The painting's lack of any contextualization puts distance between Komar and Melamid in real life and Komar and Melamid as represented in the painting. Yet, there is the obvious self-identification of the artists with the painting, as they use their own likeness for the figures of the Young Pioneers. This contradiction between the imagined and some semblance of reality brings out that their self-identification is meant to be ambiguous as the absurdity of their physicality reflects an emotional confusion.

Komar and Melamid regard themselves not as merely satirizing socialist realism, but as discovering a universal, collective element within it.[22] Their re-mythologization of Soviet symbols, by placing them in new contexts, connects to a larger audience than that intended for socialist realism because of the new meaning created by, for example, placing a bust of Stalin amidst grotesque figures. Any person can recognize the grotesque even if they do not recognize symbols of Soviet nationalism, so the symbol becomes comically universal to anyone. The grotesqueness of the bust of Stalin can thus be understood collectively, and yet the painting lacks the collective space of the carnival. Instead it takes place in an ambiguous setting.

The grotesque figures of the Young Pioneers with the faces of the adult versions of Komar and Melamid is the most striking aspect of the painting. This depiction is a contradiction, an impossibility in reality that brings out a comical quality to the painting. The comic brings out laughter and in this case it brings out positive laughter from the fact that the grotesque is positive, adding new meaning, new bodily forms of being. This form of laughter has an intrinsic relationship with freedom from social hierarchy and authority as those who laugh overcome their fear because laughter has no inhibitions or limitations.[23] The conquering of fear is relevant to sots art as a response to socialist realism because it allowed for the conquering of fear that was omnipresent in the totalitarianism of the Stalin era. This requires understanding what fear Komar and Melamid were trying to conquer.

TOTALITARIANISM AND SOTS ART

Hannah Arendt, a political theorist of the 20th century, is a central authority for understanding the phenomenon and consequences of totalitarianism. In her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt characterizes Stalin's regime, along with Nazi Germany, as the world's two truly totalitarian regimes.[24] One of the central aims of totalitarianism is the abolition of freedom. Totalitarianism aims to eradicate freedom

20. Mikhail Epstein, "Postmodernist Thought of the Late Soviet Period: Three Profiles," Studies in East European Thought 73, no. 4 (2021 http://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-021-09417-2), 487.
21. Margarita Tupitsyn, Sots Art: Eric Bulatov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Alexander Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, Leonid Sokov, Kazimir Passion Group, 40.
22. Boris Groys, The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond, 93.
23. M. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 90.
24. Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (Wilmington, UNITED STATES: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade & Reference Publishers, 1973) 405. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3302075.

by eliminating the plurality of humanity, our diversity of individuals. Rather, totalitarianism seeks to create a oneness of humanity that never determines its own actions and only survives to preserve itself as a species.[25] Eliminating plurality eliminates freedom in the sense that individual choice is lost. Connecting back to themes of the carnival, by eliminating plurality, a totalitarian regime also eliminates the space in which the carnival can take place. The condition for carnival is plurality as it is characterized by collective and popular experience of the comic.[26] However, the collective of the carnival differs from the oneness of being under totalitarian control as the carnival masses have individual choice to partake while the masses under totalitarianism do not.

Since totalitarianism aims at making freedom impossible, positive laughter would also be impossible. The act of laughing in a positive carnivalesque way, like any action, is a new beginning. Arendt says this ability to start anew is man's supreme capacity and is identical with human freedom.[27] As humans we can always renew life so long as our species survives as we are characterized by natality insofar as we are alive because we are born. The cyclical nature of natality brings out why the grotesque often manifests itself in contradiction of the body; the bodily element of the grotesque is positive as it distorts what is life and what is death.[28] So although the Stalinist totalitarian government sought to eliminate freedom and thus laughter, human capacity for natality constantly gives us the chance to find freedom, particularly freedom from fear of the totalitarian state.

Komar and Melamid use the aesthetic of the grotesque to fuse natality and reality by combining their childhood bodies with their adult faces. The choice to make the grotesque manipulation in this way and not the other way around, putting their childhood heads on their adult bodies, puts the focus on their adult appearances and minds over their childhood appearances and mind. Putting their adult heads on their childhood bodies eliminates the hierarchy of adult over child, yet still puts precedence to their adult selves as their heads and their minds are representative of their inner thoughts and emotions while the childhood body conveys a bodily connection to the past.

The upsetting of the mind/body hierarchy upset the social position of Stalin in the *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers*. In a distortion of the Leader Principle as explained by Arendt, Stalin's bust as an inanimate object in the painting has no freedom and no choice. Yet, he is not completely relegated to an uninfluential position. As discussed, the halo of light around the bust draws the eye and evokes religious imagery which brings to mind the idea of Stalin as the demiurge of the Soviet Union. This contradictory representation of Stalin which depicts him as both a powerless object and an omnipotent demiurge challenges Stalin's place in the social hierarchy of the painting. This juxtapositional representation brings out the ambiguity of how Komar and Melamid feel about the political environment of totalitarianism under Stalin. The painting does not take place in a carnival environment and yet its usage of grotesque aesthetic touches on the political without taking a definitive stance.

POLITICIZATION OF SOTS ART

Komar and Melamid have said about their work "'To us, Stalin is a mythical figure. We are not trying to do a political show.

25. Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 438.
26. M. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 146.
27. Ibid. 479.
28. M. M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, 19.

This is nostalgia.'"[29] If Komar and Melamid were not trying to make their art political, then they seem to have achieved this by the fact that their work of art does not have its setting in the carnival, which is inherently political, while still referencing the political by distancing themselves from it. Their grotesque imagery and nostalgic associations, though evocative and revealing, do not indicate any particular political stance toward Stalin or their childhood in the Soviet Union. Further, Stalin and politics solely occupy the background.

Though Komar and Melamid did not want their art to be political, a political interpretation is no less easy to extrapolate, given the stylistic underpinnings of sots art's connection to socialist realism and to power. In the final, stirring line of his fundamental work *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin says that mechanical reproduction created a situation in which communism responded by politicizing art, which was a response to the fascist aestheticization of politics.[30] This seems true by the way socialist realism is presented by the Party as aiming to be socialist in its form instead of making the form socialist. The latter implies that there is an objective form of art which politics can be applied to. The former instead says that socialism can be the form of any aesthetic which emphasizes why socialist realism was so interpretive, yet limited in what was an acceptable piece of socialist realism. As Komar and Melamid's work engages with the symbols of socialist realism, socialism appears in the form of sots art. The simple fact that socialism appears in the form of their work means that sots art finds itself as politicization of art, but, as I have discussed, without necessarily taking a political stance.

CONCLUSION

In an article for the New York Times in 2011, Melamid shared his revelation that "Not everything that's funny is true, for sure. But whatever is not funny is not true."[31] This quotation perfectly synthesizes all of the ideas of how the comical and the serious, the real and unreal interplay with each other to create truth anew. Together all three lenses of analysis in this essay reveal the ambiguity Komar and Melamid bring out through their use of socialist realist symbolism and grotesque imagery. Ultimately, this strange and unexpected combination of images is meant to be funny. We are meant to laugh. The Stalinist totalitarian government committed terrible crimes against humanity, the terror inflicted upon people in the 1930s only increased as political opposition dwindled.[32] How do you live in a world that doesn't make sense? It seems like the only thing left to do is laugh at the absurdity of it. This humor is the approach that comes across in Komar and Melamid's work. They remain ambiguous on their political stance on socialist realism, but they stand definitive in their belief that what is true, especially when it is so absurd, is funny. To summarize Bakhtin, when we laugh we conquer fear. *Double Self-Portrait as Young Pioneers* conquers fear of Stalin and a repressive regime, of not knowing the right stance to take, of looking ridiculous. Taking a last look at the painting, I hope you laugh.

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29. Margarita Tupitsyn, Sots Art: Eric Bulatov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Alexander Kosolapov, Leonid Lamm, Leonid Sokov, Kazimir Passion Group, 4.

30. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Illuminations : Essays and Reflections (Vol. [1st ed.] New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968) https://web-s-ebscohost-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE4MjM4ODdfX0FO0?sid=1ea0877c-160f-42a9-b5c1-98c6d5b87e78@redis&vid=0&format=EK&lpid=c09&rid=0.
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31. Charles McGrath, "Can a Picasso Cure You?" The New York Times, May 24, 2011, sec. Arts. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/25/arts/design/alexander-melamids-art-healing-ministry-in-soho.html.

32. Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 393.

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Catherine's Crimea: Geopolitics and Imperial Messianism

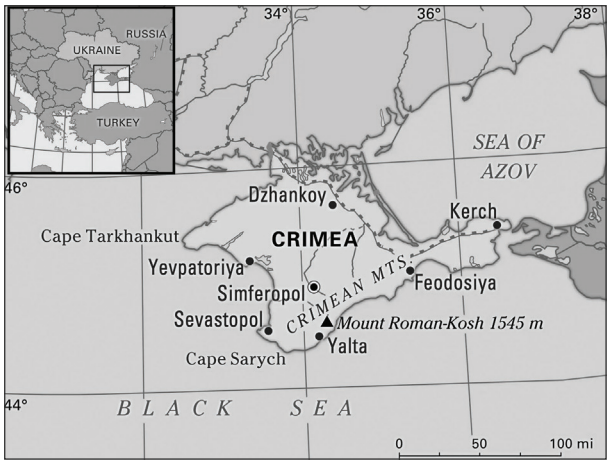
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Despite her desire to be perceived as an enlightened despot who championed individual liberty and collective well-being, Catherine II (1762-96) possessed an immense appetite for imperialist expansion and built her foreign policy primarily on territorial acquisition and political authority. Like the rulers before her, she turned toward religion to justify her reign and, although the concept of 'Moscow, Third Rome' [*Moskva, Tretii Rim*] had already emerged in the early 16th century, Catherine was first to morph this theology into state doctrine. Indeed, Catherine's late rule assumed an increasingly messianic character, in which she saw the Russian Empire as the rightful heir to Byzantium and the Russians as the 'chosen people' who would protect and bring justice to the world. In the early 1780s she thus developed a plan to weaken the Ottoman Porte, Russia's long-standing rival: conquer Constantinople and partition the Ottoman Empire (or at least its dependencies) and establish a new Greek Orthodox state in Crimea, effectively "restoring Byzantium." Such an ambitious vision came to be known as the "Greek Project."[1] The first critical task of Catherine's messianic Greek Project was to seize Crimea, which was strategically important due to its geographical proximity to the Ottoman Empire, its connections to the Mediterranean Sea via the Black Sea, and its population of Orthodox Christians, whom she sought to defend under Orthodox Christian rule. Claiming this territory and setting the stage for further developments in her Greek Project was too attractive of an opportunity for Catherine to ignore: control over the Crimean peninsula promised her geopolitical security and a clear path for messianic empire-building.

Since the late 15th century, the Crimean Khanate had been under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire, an arrangement that allowed the former to maintain a sufficient degree of internal autonomy while acknowledging the sovereignty of

1. Nicholas V Riasanovsky and Mark D Steinberg, A History of Russia Ninth ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 263.

the latter. As a vassal state, the Crimean Khanate frequently provided military support to the Ottoman Turks, most notably in their campaigns against the Russian Tsardom and Empire.[2] These devastating large-scale invasions of Russia's southern steppe culminated in a long series of Russo-Turkish wars, spanning the late 16th to early 20th century. After the first major Russo-Turkish War, the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca forced the Ottomans to grant Russia southward expansion into the Black Sea region and to recognize the independence of the Crimean Tatars.[3] The Turks were utterly humiliated by this loss of territory and prestige. The Crimean Khanate had been considered a valuable ally against the Russian Empire, but now Ottoman territorial holdings and regional influence were exhausted. However, they were not the only ones upset with this concession.



Map Courtesy of Encyclopaedia Britannica

On the one hand, Tatar submission to the Ottoman Porte had caused discord and disputes; on the other, the reorganization of Crimea into a free state only exacerbated the "disturbances, losses, and difficulties for [Russian] troops."[4] Due to fears of Russian despotism, many Crimean Tatars were unwilling to accept forced independence. Crimea remained a thorn in Catherine's side: firstly, because of its internal instability and enmity toward the Russian Empire; and secondly, notwithstanding this, because of its strategic geopolitical importance that she could not harness even after military subjugation. The Crimean Tatars remained stubborn to Russian control and persisting domestic power struggles made the southern steppe an even more volatile territory. Indeed, pillages, lootings, and raids continued into Russia until Catherine finally felt "compelled to take stern measures… [against] the harmful mob of Zaporozhian Cossacks" in 1783 and safeguard her position against both the Ottoman Turks and Crimean Tatars.[5] This decision was echoed by her advisor Grigory Potemkin, who affirmed that Crimea's location on the northern coast of the Black Sea made it a strategic buffer zone: the peninsula's rugged and mountainous terrain would grant a degree of security for Russia's vul-

2. Ibid., 144.
3. Ibid., 262.
4. Catherine II, "Manifesto on the Annexation of the Crimea, 8 April 1783," in George Vernadsky, ed. A Source Book from Russian History from Early Times to 1917, Vol. 2: Peter the Great to Nicholas I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 412.
5. "The Abolition of the Zaporozhian Sech', August 3, 1775," in George Vernadsky, ed. A Source Book from Russian History from Early Times to 1917, Vol. 2: Peter the Great to Nicholas I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 459-460.

nerable southern territories and the greater population of the *Novorossiia guberniia*.[6] Overall, taking Crimea allowed Catherine to neutralize the potential threats posed by the Crimean Khanate, and gave Russia a formidable geographic barrier against future aggressions from the Ottoman Empire.

Although securing Russia's southern borders was certainly attractive for Catherine II, the most decisive factor of her annexation of Crimea was its maritime geopolitics. Potemkin repeatedly stressed to Catherine the significance of naval security, assuring that "navigation on the Black Sea [would] be free" if the peninsula were seized by Russia.[7] Previously, the Ottoman Porte had controlled the Turkish Straits (the Dardanelles and Bosporus connected the Black Sea to the Mediterranean) and limited the size, armament, and number of Russian vessels permitted in the water at any time. Given the difficulty of entering and leaving these Black Sea ports, Russian ships were hindered from asserting their naval presence and fully participating in maritime commerce. However, Russia emerged as a leading Black Sea power after gaining access to Crimea and the Turkish Straits, which provided Catherine with significant precedence in any geopolitical maneuver she chose to make. It was now within her jurisdiction to regulate the flow of goods, to restrict the movement of naval forces between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and most importantly, to "blockade the Turks, to feed them or to starve them."[8]

Total control over the Crimean coast's warm water promised Catherine direct sea-based trade with Western European countries, a launching point for a naval fleet, and global power projection, in any season.

The Black Sea also addressed the most crucial priority of Russian geopolitics: warm deepwater ports. Although Peter the Great had opened Russia up to the Baltic Sea in 1703, these ports and waterways suffered subzero temperatures and froze during the long winter months, thereby limiting accessibility and operational capacity and compromising Russian military security. Total control over the Crimean coast's warm water promised Catherine direct sea-based trade with Western European countries, a launching point for a naval fleet, and global power projection, in any season. In 1785, Russian military leader Grigory Potemkin built the fortress of Sevastopol', a physical manifestation of Crimea's unique role as a fortified buffer zone between Russia and its neighbors. This port city would also become the hub of Catherine's new Black Sea Fleet.[9] For a landlocked country largely isolated from Western development, the Crimean peninsula's synthetic character of both coastal and continental access relieved Russia of inland sedentarism, effectively opening a gateway to the trade and international networks of littoral dynamics.

Crimean peninsula's synthetic character of both coastal and continental access relieved Russia of inland sedentarism.

Catherine II's success in obtaining control of the Black Sea region was a testament to her ambition of enhancing the

6. "Memorandum Urging the Annexation of Crimea," in George Vernadsky, ed. A Source Book from Russian History from Early Times to 1917, Vol. 2: Peter the Great to Nicholas I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 411.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Riasanovsky and Steinberg, A History of Russia Ninth ed., 263.

Russian Empire's influence and reputation on the world stage. She seized Crimea not merely apropos of the peninsula's geopolitical importance, but also of its symbolic implication for her messianic expansionist ideology. This was a rhetoric of salvation– religious as well as secular– in which she deemed Russia a beacon of civilization and enlightenment. Her characterization of the Russian Empire as the unique defender of mankind, and her sense of "[obligation] before God, before [her] empire, and before all mankind," related directly to her Greek Project and vision of a 'Third Rome,' in which she considered her empire as continuous with the great civilizations of antiquity. She tasked the Russian Empire with preserving Orthodox Christianity and Greek culture on a global scale.[10] Catherine emphasized a universalist messianic role for Russia, underscoring her deep commitment to the idea that she was divinely appointed to lead Russia and advance its interests, which included the well-being and progress not only of her subjects, but of the world's subjects.

Indeed, she was to bring peace and enlightenment to Crimea precisely through Christian rule.[11] During her tour around Crimea in 1787, she wrote a series of letters to literary critic Melchior von Grimm, describing the former backwardness of cities such as Kherson and Bakhchisarai. She portrayed the Russian Empire as the mother of civilization, having transformed the region, "where at the time of the [Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca] there was hardly a hut, into a flourishing town and countryside."[12] By highlighting the emptiness and virginity of Crimea, Catherine emphasized its potential for cultural and intellectual growth, a blank canvas for Greek scholars, artists, and intellectuals to resurrect the spirit of Byzantium. For example, Catherine praised Potemkin's construction efforts in Sevastopol', comparing it to "the fantasies of the Arabian Nights."[13] She effectively depicted the peninsula as underdeveloped and barbaric before Russian intervention, which upheld the messianic narrative of Russia's global civilizing mission: that Russian imperialism was not merely about conquering territories, but about saving these regions from the damnation of prehistory.

Crimea seemed to answer all of Russia's most critical civilizational questions, political and existential.

Crimea seemed to answer all of Russia's most critical civilizational questions, political and existential. It had the potential to both dismantle the Ottomans from their pedestal and fulfill the historical and cultural destiny of the Russian Empire. Thus, Catherine II's annexation of Crimea in 1783 was decisively predicated not only by the geopolitics of border and maritime security, but also by her self-proclaimed spiritual duty to protect and advance Orthodox Christianity. Despite her voracious palate for imperialism, Catherine's Greek Project ultimately failed to come to full fruition– a Bavarian prince became King of Greece in 1832 and Russia quickly lost its influence on the region. Nevertheless, her annexation of Crimea and southward expansion granted Russia immense status in southeastern Europe and would become the fundamental pillars of Russian-Eurasian geopolitics and eschatological state-building ideologies to come.

10. "The Abolition of the Zaporozhian Sech', August 3, 1775," 459-460.
11. Potemkin, "Memorandum Urging the Annexation of Crimea," 411.
12. Catherine II, "Letters to Grimm, 1774-1795," in George Vernadsky, ed. A Source Book from Russian History from Early Times to 1917, Vol. 2: Peter the Great to Nicholas I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 408.
13. Ibid.

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The Cultural Front in the War for Independence: Ukrainian Identity in Contemporary Ukrainian Cinema

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Ukrainian national identity has historically been subject to Russian imperial aggression not only through military conquest, but also by means of fierce cultural warfare. In the 337 years during which Ukraine was subject to foreign rule, Russia enforced sixty separate prohibitions of the Ukrainian language in pursuit of forced Russification.[1] Under the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, strict censorship of and degrading attitudes toward Ukrainian culture limited national writers, filmmakers, and artists to depictions of Ukrainian national culture as the realm of underdeveloped village life and folklore.[2] Ukrainian artistic expression was deemed suitable only for light color or humor, unworthy of being considered high art. This systematic repression of dignified Ukrainian culture and forced imposition of a Russian view of Ukraine effectively functioned to represent Ukraine's national character as undeserving of self-determination.[3] Hence, for those in the Russian imperial center––as well as the Soviet peripheries and the rest of the world––Ukrainians were represented as merely more rural and pitiful Russians: the so-called "Little Russians."[4] For much of its history, dominant cultural narratives have depicted the Ukrainian nation as nothing more than a backwards and ill-defined province rightfully belonging first to the Russian Empire, then subsequently to the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin.

Film especially has long been weaponized by the Soviet Union to enforce its imperialistic cultural agenda, playing a par-

1. Staff, Euromaidan Press. "A Short Guide to the Linguicide of the Ukrainian Language: Infographics." Euromaidan Press, 21 Sept. 2023, euromaidanpress.com/2017/02/22/a-short-guide-to-the-linguicide-of-the-ukrainian-language-infographics/
2. Joshua First, Ukrainian Cinema:Belonging and Identity during the Soviet Thaw (I.B. Taurus and Co. Ltd, 2022), 20-25.
3. Myroslav Shkandrij, Modernists, Marxists, and the Nation:Ukrainian Literary Discussion of the 1920s, (Edmonton 1992), 173.
4. Shevchuk, Yuri. "Filmmaking as Cultural Aggression," in Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication. Vol. XXXIV, no. 43, 2023.

ticularly critical role in the representation and distribution of Ukrainian identity to both domestic and international audiences. Hence, after Ukraine's independence in 1991, Ukrainian filmmakers were presented with the opportunity to re-define what it means to be Ukrainian in the eyes of the world. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the imperial narrative of Ukraine as propagated by the Russian empire and the Soviet Union continues to influence certain recent film representations of modern Ukrainian national identity – perhaps in part due to the continued persistence of this imperial narrative in the Ukrainian collective consciousness.[5] This imperial lens through which some modern Ukrainian filmmakers represent their national identity, although often touted as satire, is nonetheless occasionally ideologically aligned with existing Russian neo-colonial narratives. However, it is essential to note that many Ukrainian filmmakers in the past decade have become front-line defenders of Ukraine's war effort on the cultural front due to their successful portrayals of Ukrainian identity as fiercely independent, profoundly distinct, and strongly unified––all while still addressing the inevitable complexities that result from of centuries of suppression and Russification.

SELF-COLONIZATION IN UKRAINIAN FILM

Perhaps one of the most jarring examples of self-colonization in Ukrainian film is the popular 2015 television series *The Last Muscovite*, or Останній Москаль in Ukrainian.[6] Produced and performed by native Ukrainians educated at Ukrainian universities, this comedy show depicts the story of Valera, a distinguished, cool, and modern young man from Moscow who is forced to hide in a Ukrainian village in the Carpathians after his oligarch father is exposed for corruption. Unwillingly uprooted from his lavish life in Russia's capital, Valera must assimilate into his father's native Ukrainian village. However, despite its status as a self-proclaimed "patriotic Ukrainian-language comedy" with good audience ratings, *The Last Muscovite* portrays the Ukrainian nation and its people in a way that is aggressively colonial and directly reflective of harmful Soviet-era stereotypes and definitions of Ukrainian identity. While representations of Russia in the series are limited to scenes of nightclubs and offices in Moscow, Ukraine is depicted as a wild country, consisting solely of farms and villages, lacking basic infrastructure and technology such as roads, phones, and GPS navigation.[7] Because the series is set entirely in the Carpathians, Russia's biggest city is contrasted with only the most incredibly rural regions of Ukraine rather than being compared to its urban centers like Kyiv or Kharkiv. This further contributes to the characterization of Ukraine as grossly underdeveloped in comparison to Russia. Ukrainian villagers, clad in national garb, are frequently compared to farm animals. This comparison is achieved in two ways. This comparison is achieved in two ways. Firstly, shots of farm animals and shots of Ukrainians are frequently sequentially put between each other in the opening sequences of the show, creating the idea that the animals and the Ukrainians are two comparable species which make up the Ukrainian ethnoscape. Secondly, the series's Ukrainians often conduct themselves wildly and with a complete lack of civility. Moreover, Ukrainian culture is treated as entirely incompatible with and even threatened by modernity. The purported incompatibility is crystallized when Valera accidently topples an altar for the tokenized Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko while attempting to climb on top of it in the hopes of access-

5. Irena R. Makaryk, Shakespeare in the Undiscovered Bourn: Les Kurbas, Ukrainian Modernism, and Early Soviet Cultural Politics, (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 10–14.
6. Gorov, Semyon, eir. The Last Muscovite. Ukraine: 1+1 Productions, 2015, youtube.
7. "The Last Muscovite / Останній Москаль." PopKult, 28 Nov. 2018, popkult.org/last-muscovite/.

ing cellular service and making a phone call. *The Last Muscovite* hence propagates a narrative of Ukrainian national culture and identity as irrelevant, village-like, and wholly inferior, and therefore to be rightfully subjected to Russian national and cultural influence.

Language is another major axis along which director Semyon Gorov imposes a colonialist narrative and propagates imperial myth; *The Last Muscovite* depicts Ukrainian and Russian as mutually intelligible.[8] Throughout the entirety of the show, Valera speaks Russian to the Ukrainian villagers, while seemingly understanding every word of the Ukrainian with which they respond without any difficulty. This enforces the narrative that Russian and Ukrainian are essentially the same language, differentiated only by the social background of the character who speaks one vs. the other. Those who only speak Ukrainian are depicted as provincial and narrow-minded, while being able to speak Russian is, in contrast, a mark of intelligence and modernity. *The Last Muscovite* reaffirms this narrative through the series' only Russophone Ukrainian character: the schoolteacher and Valera's love interest, Ksenia. Ksenia is characterized by not only beauty, but also a degree of intelligence and forward-thinking which greatly supersedes that of any of the other Ukrainian characters. She is thereby the only suitable companion Valera can find to match his intellectual wit;they often engage in flirtatious Russian banter. Ksenia's exceptionalism and modernity compared to her non-Russophone peers strengthens the continuous association of the Ukrainian language with uneducated village life and, conversely, the Russian language with city living in both Russia and Ukraine alike. The show thus insinuates that development and progress for Ukrainians necessitates Russification. This logic, taken to its furthest conclusion, subliminally implies that Russian recolonization would be logical and beneficial for Ukrainians.

Another element of *The Last Muscovite* which bolsters Russian imperial interests is the manner in which Ukrainian villagers are portrayed as both obsessed with and senselessly hostile toward Russians. While Valera is driven to the village via horse carriage, the Ukrainian driver attempts to entertain him by reciting mocking anecdotes about "Muscovites." When Valera, unimpressed, asks if the driver has any anecdotes which don't involve Russians, the driver appears dumbfounded. Hence, *The Last Muscovite* insinuates that much of modern Ukrainian culture revolves around pathetic and infantile attempts to belittle Russians, and would have a limited existence without doing so. Additionally, one of Valera's first experiences in the village consisted of being tied up and kidnapped by three young Ukrainian men who do so solely because Valera is Russian and they want to show the rest of the village what they "caught." Juxtaposed with the savage and prejudiced behavior of the young Ukrainian men, Valera appears especially civilized and pragmatic. Later, Valera and one of the young men who tied him up fall in love with the same woman, Ksenia. Ksenia, however, is only interested in Valera. Though the Ukrainian pathetically attempts to woo her by copying many of the things Valera intends to do, he is painfully unsuccessful; because of this, he resents Valera. Hence, according to the logic of the show, the hostility Ukrainians harbor toward their former colonizers is written off as blind hate stemming from jealousy. This logic then serves to invalidate Ukrainian resistance to Russification by portraying said resistance as paranoid, bitter, self-defeating submission to their own inferiority. Accordingly, this idea is reflected by the underlying narrative of the show, in which Valera, who is staying with his resentful uncle, hopes to foster "unity" between the two estranged brothers, his uncle and father. On behalf of his father, Valera attempts to bond with his uncle who

8. Olga Maxwell, Senior Lecturer. "In Russia's War against Ukraine, One of the Battlegrounds Is Language Itself." The Conversation, 31 Aug. 2023, theconversation.com/in-russias-war-against-ukraine-one-of-the-battlegrounds-is-language-itself-201170.

maintains a senseless and unexplained grudge against Valera and treats him poorly, even trying to abandon him to die in the woods. Consequently, Valera ends up appearing comparatively far more open-minded and reasonable; much of the village is more sympathetic to Valera than one of their own. A clear metaphor for the rift between the two "brother nations," Russia and Ukraine, this plot line further contributes to the narrative that Ukrainian resistance to Russian influence is an unfounded betrayal of their own "brother"––i.e. their rightful Russian colonizer.

Despite the vulgarity and reckless detriment with which Ukrainians are depicted in *The Last Muscovite*, the show was coined a "truly patriotic Ukrainian series" solely because it was partly in the Ukrainian language; at the time it premiered, most Ukrainian media was produced and distributed in Russian. Hence, the term "patriotic" often goes hand in hand with any use of the "Ukrainian language," regardless of the fact that the series propounds patently distorted and infantilizing views of Ukrainian culture and national identity. Although Ukrainian characters have recognizably Ukrainian names and wear Ukrainian embroidered shirts, they are nonetheless colonial caricatures largely devoid of depth or character development.[9] The widespread propagation of such degrading, appropriated representations of Ukrainian identity prove dangerous as this continuation of Russian and Soviet propaganda instills itself within generations of Ukrainians to the effect that a young person born in Ukraine would not have any desire to relate to and identify with a distinctly Ukrainian identity. Ukrainian language and culture is then not considered relevant or appealing to audiences and hence up-and-coming filmmakers would then be deterred from making media which dignifies Ukrainian language and culture, replicating the process of self-colonization across generations. Colonial dynamics in Ukraine are unique due to the extent to which imperial narratives persist and are propagated in culture and media by Ukrainians themselves, often without any questioning among most viewers or any attempts to problematize it among scholars both within Ukraine and outside. *The Last Muscovite* continued on to have three successful seasons, the last of which premiered in 2020.

FRONT-LINE UKRAINIAN FILMMAKERS

Many Ukrainian film directors have chosen to counter both imperial narratives and narrow,outdated definitions of Ukrainian identity especially in the wake of the 2014 Maidan Revolution and subsequent emergence of war in Eastern Ukraine.[10] The conflict represented not just a territorial dispute but a question of the integrity of Ukrainian freedom and independence in light of its complex national identity. Hence, documentation of the conflict through film depicts not only the strength of Ukrainian nationalism, but also explored and expanded the idea of what it means to be Ukrainian across linguistic and cultural lines.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious and effective of these films is Akhtem Seitablayev's *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die*.[11] The 2017 film depicts the true story of five soldiers who fought to defend Donetsk International Airport, one of the most significant strategic maneuvers of the Ukrainian Army fighting against armed "separatist" groups sponsored and supported by the Russian Federation. However, what makes this film especially significant when examining the articulation and construction of Ukrainian national identity in Ukrainian film is that although the soldiers (the "cyborgs")

9. Shevchuk, Yuri. "Filmmaking as Cultural Aggression," in Images. The International Journal of European Film, Performing Arts and Audiovisual Communication. Vol. XXXIV, no. 40, 2023.
10. Haring, Melinda. "Nationalism Is on the Rise in Ukraine, and That's a Good Thing." Atlantic Council, 29 Aug. 2019, www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/nationalism-is-on-the-rise-in-ukraine-and-that-s-a-good-thing/.
11. Akhtem Seitablayev, Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die (2017), Ukraine.

share a common goal of liberating Ukrainian territory from occupation by Russian-backed "separatists," each soldier represents different political views, ages, social strata, and motivations for fighting.[12] In the film, each soldier has varying levels of degree of knowledge of Ukrainian and Russian – some speak either one or the other completely, and some speak a combination of both. They represent various levels of knowledge and connection to Ukrainian cultural history and iconic Ukrainian historical figures. They also represent different ethnicities; a Crimean Tatar later joins one of their ranks. However, the soldiers are ultimately united in their fiercely Ukrainian identity and every one of the Cyborgs is portrayed as a true patriotic Ukrainian hero, despite their differences. Hence, the Ukrainian identities of the soldiers are complex and independent of whether they speak Russian or Ukrainian, the god they believe in, the level of their connection to historic Ukrainian culture, or any other single definitive characteristic. The Ukrainian identity of the "cyborgs" in Seitablayev's film is defined by their loyalty and love for their homeland and commitment to fighting for its rightful existence as a free, democratic, and independent nation.

With Cyborgs, Akhtem Seitablayev created a film that candidly addresses what it means to be Ukrainian and what Ukrainians are truly fighting for.

This depiction of Ukrainian national identity as almost entirely contingent on progressive and inclusive civic values very effectively eludes the colonial narratives propagated by media such as *The Last Muscovite,* which instead characterizes Ukrainian identity as distinguishable from Russian identity solely through tasteless myths regarding the uncivilized and backward nature of those who speak the Ukrainian language and reside within the Ukrainian ethnoscape. The use of both Russian and Ukrainian by Ukrainian soldiers in the film as well as the broader and more accurate depiction of the complex realities that accompany a colonial past and largely Russified present renders *Cyborgs* an incredibly accurate reflection of a reality that many Ukrainians identify with. The film promotes a conception of Ukrainian national identity that is modern, inclusive, and relevant, as well as fiercely distinct and independent. Seitablayev doesn't obfuscate but rather emphasizes the intricacy and diversity of Ukrainian identity. In doing so, the film undermines imperial narratives which seek to hijack linguistic and cultural complexity within Ukraine to allege imperial subordination to Russia. With *Cyborgs*, Akhtem Seitablayev created a film that candidly addresses what it means to be Ukrainian and what Ukrainians are truly fighting for.

The emergence of the 2014 war in Eastern Ukraine as well as increasing ideological hostility with Russia also unleashed a wave of Ukrainian films which depict imagined futures for an entirely decolonized Ukraine. This wave of curiosity was sparked by the conflict's harsh reminders of the dangers of Russia's omnipresent influence. A prominent example of this mode of postcolonial representation is Valentyn Vasyanovych's *Atlantis* (2019).[13] Like *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die*, *Atlantis* exists within the context of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The story takes place in 2025, one year after Ukraine wins the war and liberates all occupied territory. Only Ukrainian is spoken in the film, a demonstration of complete victory over the residing effects of Russian imperialism. However, this victory has come at the profound cost of the livelihood of its people; the film's characters are depicted as intensely traumatized and subjected to an uninhabitable

12. Miller, Christopher. "Art of War: Ukraine Explores Donbas Conflict on Screen, in Books." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 8 Dec. 2017, www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-film-cyborgs-donetsk-airport-battlepremiere/28903701.html.
13. Vasianovych, Valentyn. Atlantis (2019), Ukraine.

environment and a failing post-war economy. Despite the dismal conditions however, the characters willingly choose to stay in Ukraine. *Atlantis* ultimately evolves into an intimate love story between two people who collect the bodies of the dead and deliver them for post-mortems. They find solace in each other as they together grapple with the consequences of a necessary war. Furthermore, Vasyanovych refrains from undermining the steep costs of winning both the territorial and ideological battles of Ukrainian self-determination. He instead argues that the Ukrainian character is distinguished by shared experiences of the struggle for independence and the undeniable value of service to the homeland. These directorial nuances render Atlantis an especially pertinent articulation of Ukrainian identity in a post-Soviet world.

Another prominent example of this mode of aspirational post-colonial representation in Ukrainian film is the 2021 coming-of-age drama *Stop-Zemlia* (Стоп-Земля in Ukrainian).[14] Written and directed by Kateryna Gornostai, the film depicts the emotional and reflective stories of sixteen-year-old Masha and her friends as they navigate the turmoils of growing up and finding their places in the world. However, the significance of Stop-Zemlia lies in the linguistic politics of the film. Despite being set in Kyiv, where both Russian and Ukrainian are spoken, all characters in the series use exclusively Ukrainian to communicate - Gornostai rejects the still dominant colonial paradigm in which Ukrainian cinema relies primarily on Russian or a combination of both Russian and Ukrainian.[15] The only hints of Ukraine's Russified past are the characters' Russian names (Maria is Masha instead of Mariyka, Semyon is Syuoma instead of Sim), as well as the periodic mistakes and corrections some characters make in their pronunciations of certain Ukrainian words. In the film, Kyiv appears in a state of transition from a former colony into complete victory over the residual effects of Russian imperialism. Through this, Stop-Zemlia imagines a new and entirely liberated reality for Ukraine without stripping away the complications of its long imperial history. In doing so, Gornostai illustrates an aspirational postcolonial future in stunning clarity––a future which people can both strive toward and identify with.

Furthermore, Stop-Zemlia demonstrates the total self-sufficiency of the Ukrainian language in a modern context. As previously discussed, Russian and Soviet propaganda often depicted the Ukrainian language, and by extension Ukrainian identity, as incapable of progress and unsuitable for modernity. This enforced an imperialist narrative which penetrated deep into Ukrainian national consciousness, resulting in many Ukrainians choosing to speak primarily Russian instead of Ukrainian. Gornostai in *Stop-Zemlia* resists this marginalization by having many of her characters explore liberal themes such as mental health, sexual identity, career choice, environmental awareness, and existential loneliness all while speaking the Ukrainian language and living in an entirely de-colonized modern Ukrainian society. In the film, Ukrainian is used for many different professional purposes as well as for casual conversation between friends, riddled with slang. Unlike many other depictions of Ukrainian-speaking characters, the teenagers in this film, unified in their use of the Ukrainian language, are introspective, multi-dimensional, and relatable. The audience is invited to identify with the characters and envision and hope for a world in which this level of widespread Ukrainian-language use is indeed reality. For these characters, the Ukrainian language and Ukrainianization is liberation.

Additionally, as the ability of a language to fully articulate and convey progressive topics can become an indication of the receptiveness of the correlated identity to modernity

14. Gornostai, Kateryna, director. Stop-Zemlia . ESSE Production House, Mar. 2021.
15. Shevchuk, Yuri. "'Стоп-Земля': Повернення Мови На Екран." Збруч, 3 Feb. 2022, zbruc.eu/node/110301.

and progress, *Stop-Zemlia* sets a precedent of Ukrainian-language cinema which directly defies the uncivilized and stagnant narrative of the Ukrainian identity which has been cultivated by the Russian imperial aggressor for centuries.[16] In doing so, Gornostai contributes to an ideological arsenal of Ukrainian-language films which refute imperialist allegations perpetuated by Russian and Ukrainian film alike to this day. This arsenal is only bound to grow.

CONCLUSION

Ukraine's history has always been influenced and characterized by Russian imperial aggression, either through direct violence, cultural warfare, or both. Often one has informed the other, as both strategic propaganda and inadvertently harmful portrayals of Ukrainian national identity to this day perpetuate a colonial narrative which attempts to legitimize Russia's brutal military invasion. During the Holodomor, the Soviet Union targeted Ukrainian cultural elites in particular, such as writers, artists, and poets. During the Holodomor, the Soviet Union targeted Ukrainian cultural elites in particular, such as writers, artists, and poets. This systematic destruction of Ukraine's cultural class was an attempt to neutralize the threat imposed on Russia's colonial order by their existence––the existence of a national cultural class indicated the reality of a refined, developed, and modern Ukrainian identity. Such an identity necessitated, and still necessitates, nationalist independence. The fate of the Ukrainian nation as a free and independent state has always rested on the free expression and development of Ukrainian national identity, especially culture such as film that represents and reaches the Ukrainian people.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, despite optimism regarding Ukraine's long deserved independence, it was evident that Ukraine was far from rid of the insidious and pervasive cultural effects of centuries of Russian imperialism. Ukrainian media such as *The Last Muscovite* serves as recent attestations to the internal colonization of many Ukrainian people. Media of this sort reinforces self-deprecating narratives that undermine efforts toward complete cultural independence and, consequently, effective decolonization. However, progress toward true liberation has been made nonetheless, especially in the last few years. In films such as *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die*, *Atlantis,* and *Stop-Zemlia,* Ukrainian film directors articulate and construct Ukrainian national identity in a way which escapes the colonial framework entirely. These films, rather than drawing upon particular Ukrainian cultural, historical, or religious tropes to define their heroes, instead create modern heroes of the present who define their identities through their strong values, irrevocably linked to the values of their nation. This approach provides a framework for resistance against the imperial tactics of appropriation and degradation of Ukrainian culture.

Film is a critical intellectual front in the war against imperialist thought and an important component of the formation of a national consciousness. Thus, the increased emphasis on national values and the articulation of Ukrainian identity in film indicates a heightened awareness among many Ukrainian filmmakers of their power to influence domestic and international conceptions of the Ukrainian national character. In light of the 2022 full-scale invasion, it is apparent that a greater appreciation regarding the significance of reclaiming the cultural narrative of Ukrainian identity has finally seeped into the Ukrainian collective consciousness, with greater measures taken to promote Ukrainian language, and a progressing environment in which self-deprecating and self-colonizing shows like *The Last Muscovite* would no longer be produced. Regardless of the military outcome of the current war, a final and crucial victory on the cultural front is well within reach.

16. Shevchuk, Yuri. "'Стоп-Земля': Повернення Мови На Екран." Збруч, 3 Feb. 2022, zbruc.eu/node/110301.

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POLITICS



A Comparative Analysis of Russian Responses to the Polish and Ukrainian Questions

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The 1863 Polish Uprising, whose goal was to liberate the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from Russian rule, provoked an ideological debate within Russia about how it should respond to this "Polish Question." Ultimately, Russian policy took a turn toward more imperial control by brutally suppressing the Uprising and imposing a stringent Russification policy on the Poles. 150 years later, Ukraine's push for independence and closer ties with Western Europe also provoked an ideological debate regarding how Russia should answer this "Ukrainian Question." Russia responded with its illegal occupation of the Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014, and a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. When viewed in this historical context, contemporary debates regarding the reasons and justifications for Russia's actions in Ukraine reflect an ongoing historical debate within Russia regarding its proper role as a great power, search for security, and self-definition as a nation-state. The Russian response to the Polish Question of 1863 can provide a useful historical framework to better understand Russia's contemporary attitudes towards the West and its answer to the Ukrainian Question of 2014.

This paper will examine the parallels between competing ideas that helped shape public opinion, cultural discourse and political action in Russia during the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the 2014 Invasion of Ukraine. Specifically, it will compare how prominent intellectuals–such as Mikhail Katkov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolay Strakhov, and Alexander Herzen–approached the Polish Question in 1863 with how President Vladimir Putin and political activist Alexei Navalny responded to the Ukrainian Question of 2014. The analysis will show that debates around the Polish Question provide valuable historical context to better understand Russia's response to similar demands for independence from Ukraine and reflect an ongoing debate in Russian society about Russia's place in the international order.

THE POLISH QUESTION

The "Polish Question" refers to Russia's response to Poland's demands for independence from Russian domination. Over the course of three partitions, Russia incorporated territory of the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth into its Empire, culminating with the Third Partition of 1795 which effectively erased the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth from the map of Europe. The Poles made several attempts at achieving independence in the early 19th Century, the last of which occurred in January 1863.

In 1863, the Russian Empire was grappling with its defeat in the Crimea; this war with the Ottoman Empire, France, the United Kingdom, and Sardinia weakened its military, drained its resources, and undermined Russia's credibility in Europe. Poles had anticipated full autonomy as a result of the reforms undertaken in Russia after the defeat in the Crimean War, but Tsar Alexander II was unwilling to compromise. Growing impatient, Polish opposition groups held democratic demonstrations, issued a manifesto calling for a national insurrection, and launched a guerilla war against the Russian military in 1863. The Polish opposition was outnumbered, poorly equipped, experienced little success and, despite drawing sympathies from Western Europe, could not convince foreign powers to provide military assistance.[1] After 18 months of Polish resistance, the Russian government squashed the Polish insurrection and enacted retaliatory policies that included mass executions, imprisonment, and exile.[2] In order to further dissuade independence movements, the Russian government implemented a stringent Russification policy that sought to eliminate elements of Polish identity: the suppression of the Polish language, education, national symbols and traditions, the persecution of Polish activists and intellectuals, and the imposition of Russian language and culture.[3]

RUSSIAN CONSERVATISM AND THE POLISH QUESTION: MIKHAIL KATKOV

While the Russian state ultimately pursued a hard-line imperialist response to the Polish Question through its use of force and violence, Russian intellectuals proposed and debated several competing visions. In 1863, Mikhail Katkov spearheaded the Russian nationalist movement, which was characterized by a desire to preserve and promote Slavic culture and Orthodox Christianity while also seeking to modernize and strengthen the Russian state. He claimed that Poland's movement for self-determination was a dangerous threat to the Russian Empire's stability and unity. Additionally, he interpreted the Russian answer to the Polish Question as proof that "the Russian nation is alive and strong," and "not a dead mass, but a living force" and recommended that the Russian Empire take action to suppress any movement for autonomy in the Kingdom of Poland.[4] A decisive show of force would remind Europe of Russia's vitality, solidify Poland's ties to the Slavic world, and effectively protect Russia's Slavic sphere of influence from Western political aggression.

His argument was predicated on the notion that, as a Slavic nation, Poland historically belongs to Russia's sphere of influence because of their common history and unique cultural identity. Katkov believed that Poland's claim to national sovereignty was a betrayal and the result of foreign manipulation, particularly from France, which was seeking to overthrow the legitimate rule of the Russian Empire. Katkov argued that as the leader of the Slavic world, the Russian state was tasked with defending Slavic culture and its sphere of influence from perceived Western aggression.

1. Kieniewicz, Stefan. "Polish Society and the Insurrection of 1863." Past & Present, no. 37 (1967): 130–148. http://www.jstor.org/stable/650026.
2. Kożuchowski, Łukasz, and Theodore R Weeks. "'Russification' As a Means to Keep the Russian Empire." Polish History - A Project of the Polish History Museum in Warsaw, 2019.
3. Ibid.
4. Maiorova, O. E. "War as Peace: The Trope of War in Russian Nationalist Discourse during the Polish Uprising of 1863." Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History. Slavica Publishers, October 3, 2005.

CHALLENGES TO CONSERVATISM ON THE POLISH QUESTION: DOSTOEVSKY, STRAKHOV, AND HERZEN

Although Katkov's position was popular among many Russian intellectuals, not all of them promoted his solution to the Polish Question. Fyodor Dostoevsky headed Vremya, a widely popular newspaper that sought to reconcile the westernizing and nationalist trends in Russian culture.[5] In a series of articles, Dostoevsky and his colleague, Nikolay Strakhov, polemicized Katkov's position. While they maintained the importance of a strong Russian state, they argued that resources would be better allocated to domestic development than imperial pursuits. Additionally, Strakhov criticized how the Russian government handled the situation and invited readers to approach the Polish Question from a Polish perspective, one where Poland rightfully views itself as "civilizationally equal to all other European nations" and thus can "hardly regard [Russia] as anything else than barbarians" on account of its repression of the Polish people.

Prominent liberal thinker Alexander Herzen also offered an opposing view to the Russian imperial initiative. He advocated for Polish independence by protesting the Russian government's policies through a series of articles in the Free Russian Press. Herzen's argument against Russian imperialism was founded on his liberal convictions, mainly the supremacy of democracy and the right to self-determination. In "The Proclamation of 'Land and Liberty,'" Herzen argues for Polish freedom because he also stands for Russian freedom; Russia and Poland are "chained by a single set of fetters" and jointly acknowledge the "absurdity" of the Russian Empire.[6] Furthermore, the imperial formation has "lived out its time" and he is "against the empire" because he is "for the people." As a "central and influential participant" in debates among the Russian intelligentsia in the 1860s, Herzen facilitated discussions on the relationship between Russia and the West, the nature of Western civilization, Russia's historical destiny, and the social, moral, and political climate of the age.[7] Despite his efforts, Russia remained steadfast in its imperial direction, with conservatives accusing Herzen of being a foreign agent seeking to foment unrest, and liberals viewing Herzen's pro-Polish stance as unpatriotic.[8]

While Russian intellectuals engaged in thorough debate regarding the Polish Question of 1863, it is clear that Katkov's nationalist perspective ultimately prevailed. The Russian government's violent suppression of the Polish opposition and attempts at destroying elements of the Polish national identity through its Russification policy align with Katkov's nationalist vision. Katkov, who has been dubbed "the opinion maker of 1863" by Andreas Renner, has also been credited with inventing this Russification policy "from below."[9,10]

THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION

Views like Katkov's live on in Russian foreign policy debates to this day, as is shown by Russia's contemporary response to the Ukrainian Question. The Ukrainian Question refers to Russia's response to Ukraine's move towards liberal democracy and independence from Russia's sphere of influence. While Russia has recognized Ukraine as an independent state since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the countries have engaged in ongoing political and territorial conflict since 2014. After the ouster of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych by a pro-Western

5. Bojanowska, Edyta M. "Empire by Consent: Strakhov, Dostoevskii, and the Polish Uprising of 1863."
6. Herzen, Alexander, A Herzen Reader. Translated by Kathleen Parthé (Northwestern University Press, 2013).
7. Offord, Derek. "Perilous Voyage: Alexander Herzen and the Legacy of the Russian Intelligentsia." TLS. Times Literary Supplement, no. 5688, April 6, 2012.
8. Pogorelskin, Alexis E. "Vestnik Evropy and the Polish Question in the Reign of Alexander II."
9. Bojanowska, Edyta M. "Empire by Consent."
10. Kofman, Michael, et al. "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Ukraine." RAND Corporation, May 9, 2017.

and pro-democratic popular movement in what is known as the Maidan Uprising, Russia annexed Crimea, resulting in a prolonged occupation and ongoing violence between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine. In February 2022, Russia launched a large-scale invasion that aimed to destroy Ukraine as an independent state. In addition to violating Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Ukrainian government has accused Russian troops of destroying civilian infrastructure and committing human rights abuses, while Russian president Vladimir Putin has relied on nationalist and anti-Western rhetoric to justify the invasion.[11]

ECHOS OF KATKOV: PUTIN ON THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION

Vladimir Putin's political ideology emphasizes Russian national identity, preserving Russian culture and values, and promoting Russian interests and influence in the global arena. Like Mikhail Katkov, Putin is highly concerned with foreign influence and considers democratic opponents "sinister agents of foreign powers" plotting to "destroy Russian statehood," "usurp power," and hand the country over to rapacious outsiders.[12]

A month after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Putin outlined the rationale behind Russia's Ukrainian policy in a speech to members of the Kremlin. In his speech, Putin emphasizes the historical and cultural factors that unite the Russian and Ukrainian people. He argues that Crimea represents Russia and Ukraine's "shared history and pride" because it is where Prince Vladimir, the ruler of Kievan Rus, adopted Orthodoxy, which "predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization, and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus."[13] Because they share Ancient Russ as a "common source," Russia and Ukraine are "not simply close neighbors," but are rather "one people." Likewise, Putin argues that Crimea has "always been an inseparable part of Russia" despite all of the dramatic political and territorial changes the Russian State underwent during the 20th Century, including the Bolsheviks' decision to transfer large sections of the "historical South of Russia" to the Republic of Ukraine, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Importantly, Putin also distinguishes between the Russian state and the Russian nation. While the Russian state exists within its internationally recognized borders, the Russian nation is a vast "ethnic group" that was divided by borders following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. By emphasizing the historical and cultural similarities between the two nations, minimizing the significance of borders, and distinguishing between the Russian State and Nation, Putin establishes an argument for Russia's historic right to claim Ukraine as within its sphere of influence and to protect it from perceived foreign aggression. He argues that, while Russia and Ukraine are officially separate entities, they are bound together by a millennium of cultural and historical ties that transcend the arbitrary nature in which the West organized the modern world.

Additionally, Putin contends that Ukraine's movement towards political and economic integration with the West is representative of Western domination and is not the result of Ukrainian self-determination. Putin claims that Western nations, led by the United States, break international law, take advantage of areas plagued by tyranny and poverty, and use force to coerce other countries into their spheres of influence. He compares Ukrainian democratization to American political intervention efforts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, referring to them as "controlled color revolutions" in which the United States imposed standards that do not correspond to these nations' cultures and way of life and then forced the necessary resolutions from international organizations to make the aggressions look legitimate. Putin further claims that "like a mirror" the situation in Ukraine reflects Western efforts to subjugate

11. Amnesty International. "Human Rights in Ukraine." Amnesty International.
12. Applebaum, Anne. "Putinism: The Ideology." London School of Economics and Political Science, February 2013.
13. Putin, Vladimir. "Address by the President of the Russian Federation." President of Russia, March 18, 2014.

less developed nations. Thus, the residents of Crimea "turned to Russia for help in defending their rights," to which Russia responded, not by illegally invading and annexing the territory, but by creating conditions so that Crimeans could "peacefully express their free will." By undermining the legitimacy of Ukraine's democracy, underestimating the appeal of Westernization, and suggesting that foreign adversaries have played a coercive role in Ukraine's post-Soviet regime, Putin argues that Russia was acting in defense of ethnic Russians when it annexed Crimea.

CHALLENGES TO PUTIN'S IMPERIALISM: NAVALNY ON THE UKRAINIAN QUESTION

Alexei Navalny was a Russian lawyer, anti-corruption activist, and political dissident who was widely considered to be the strongest opposition candidate to the ruling party in Russia. Generally seen as a pro-Western, liberal voice in Russian politics, his popularity could be attributed to his work exposing hypocrisy and corruption in the Russian government as well as his demand for fair elections.[14] Navalny was arrested and charged by Russian authorities numerous times but continued to serve as the voice of the Russian opposition through his social media presence (notably using Twitter as a medium) until his death on February 16, 2024.

In February of 2023, a series of posts were made to Alexei Navalny's Twitter account regarding Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine. Titled "15 Theses of a Russian Citizen Who Desires the Best For Their Country," the tweets outline Navanly's position on Russia's occupation of Ukraine. Navanly first argues that Putin has "unleashed an unjust war of aggression against Ukraine under ridiculous pretexts."[15] Navalny further claims that Putin is trying to turn all Russian citizens into his "accomplices" and make it into a "people's war," but the real reasons behind this operation are Russia's domestic political and economic problems. Furthermore, Putin is motivated by his desire to stay in power and shape his historical legacy as "the conqueror tsar" and "the collector of lands." While Nalavny emphasizes the Ukrainian loss of life, he also argues that Putin's war will ultimately result in military defeat and that the government is harming Russian citizens by allocating resources to this imperial initiative: "Russia is a vast country with a shrinking population and dying out rural areas. Imperialism and the urge to seize territory is the most harmful and destructive path." Further, Navalny states, "the Russian government is destroying [its] future with its own hands just in order to make our country look bigger on the map. But Russia is big enough as it is. Our objective should be preserving our people and developing what we have in abundance." Navalny's critique not only exposes the flawed motivations behind Putin's aggression, but also signals a pivotal moment for Russia.

Moving from condemnation to constructive proposals, Navalny suggests a focus on internal development and peace as the way forward, setting the stage for a detailed exploration of these solutions. According to Navalny, for Russia to recover from Putin's special military operation, it must "leave Ukraine alone," recognize its borders as they were drawn in 1991, and allow it to develop "the way its people want" because a "continuation of this war is just a tantrum caused by powerlessness, and putting an end to it would be a strong move." Navalny argues for dismantling Putin's regime through free elections and establishing a "parliamentary republic based on alteration of power through fair elections, independent courts, federalism, local self-governance, complete economic freedom and social justice." Then, Russia would be able to partner with the U.S. and Western Europe to compensate for the damage done in Ukraine, which would enable Russia to progress toward the removal of sanctions, encourage the return of young Russian professionals, restore foreign investment and economic relations with the "civilized

14. Coalson, Robert. "Is Aleksei Navalny a Liberal or a Nationalist?" The Atlantic, July 29, 2013.
15. Navalny, Alexei. "15 Theses of a Russian Citizen Who Desires the Best For Their Country." Алексей Навальный, February 2, 2023.

world, and ultimately pursue economic growth."

Navalny concludes his essay with a polemic vision for Russia's political and ideological future: "Recognizing our history and traditions, we must be part of Europe and follow the European path of development. We have no other choice, nor do we need any." By rejecting the imperial idea, supporting Ukraine's right to self-determination, promoting domestic investment and reform, and suggesting that Russia should politically and economically integrate with the Western world, Navalny outlines an alternative vision of Russia rooted in traditional Western liberal ideas.

Navalny's vision for Russia shares several characteristics with the visions expressed by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolay Strakhov, and Alexander Herzen in response to the Polish Question of 1863. Like Dostoevsky and Strakhov, Navalny implies the Russian government is behaving "barbarically." He argues that Putin is undermining the rights of a sovereign nation under "ridiculous pretenses" grounded in historical fallacies and grievances. Navalny's ideas regarding individual freedom and social progress through the promotion of democracy and the rejection of authoritarianism are similar to those expressed by Herzen. He also contends that Russia finds itself at a critical juncture in a manner that is analogous to Herzen's argument in "The Proclamation of 'Land and Liberty.'" Like Herzen and the Polish Question, Navalny implies that the Ukrainian Question can serve as a "turning point" that marks the "end of one chapter in Russian history and the beginning of another."[16] Instead of solidifying Russia's imperial identity, the situation in Ukraine has revealed the weaknesses and absurdity of the Russian authoritarian state. In addition, it can serve as a catalyst for social and ideological change because it has provided the Russian people with the necessary information to demand progress and enact political reform. Navalny's perspective ultimately echoes that of Herzen, with both advocating visions of Russian nationhood that have failed to overcome the dominant conservative, nationalist paradigm.

CONCLUSION

The Russian response to the Polish Question of 1863 provides a useful historical framework to better understand Russia's current behavior towards the West, and its approach to the Ukrainian Question. Putin's arguments for Russian intervention in Ukrainian affairs are strikingly similar to the dominant and prevailing Russian response to the Polish Question of 1863; both emphasize Russia's right to protect its Slavic sphere of influence, minimize Poland and Ukraine's appetite for Western integration, and accuse Western nations of malicious conspiracy. Navalny's response to the situation in Ukraine shares similarities with the ideas expressed by more liberal Russian intellectuals such as Dostoevsky, Strakhov, and Herzen in response to the Polish Question. Unfortunately, the ideas expressed by figures such as Navalny, Herzen, Dostoevsky, and Strakhov had a limited impact on Russian policies because they have been suppressed from larger public discourse by authoritarian regimes who espouse the prevailing imperial/nationalist perspectives.

Over 160 years, Russia has debated the degree of autonomy it is willing to tolerate in its neighbors. The similarities in the prevailing views and ultimate persistence of the imperial/nationalist perspective reflect the view that Russian rulers must control and dominate their neighbors in order to feel secure in their own statehood and maintain political power. So long as the prevailing view maintains that Russia must dominate its neighbors to feel secure in its own statehood, Russia will continue to view the liberal development of its former vassal states as an existential threat to the Russian state and its response is likely to be the same – resorting to violence or coercion in the name of its own security. Any state within its perceived sphere of influence that develops Western and democratic leaning tendencies will be viewed as a threat to the stability of a Russian regime that views democracy as a threat to its own existence.

16. Herzen, Alexander, A Herzen Reader.

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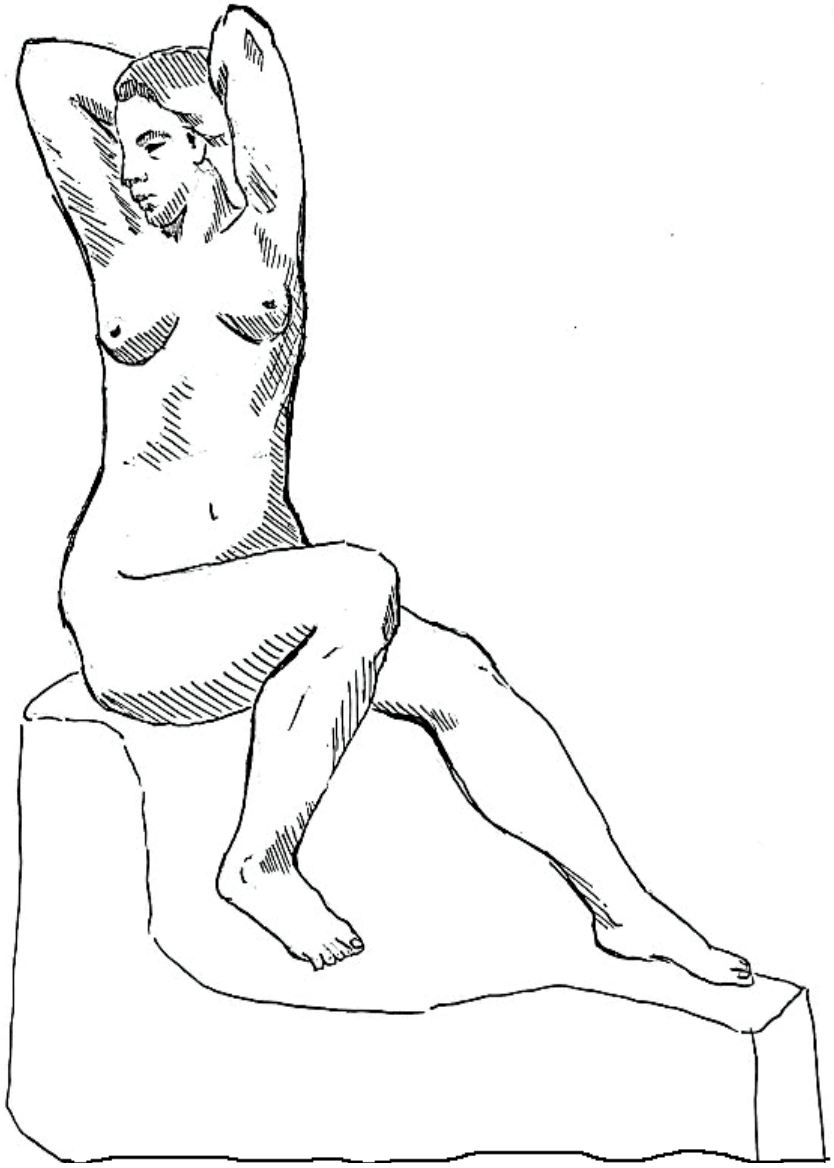
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PHOTOGRAPHY & ART



“Ryzhy in Yekaterinburg” Poetry Collection

Kat Mulligan
Concordia University



Powstanie

Windows cowered in their frames,
screams huddled in the alleyways,
and gunshots clinked glasses with the dying.
Generations of rubber boots stomped Warsaw’s spine
    out of shape.

August hoisted up the revolution like its gaudy sun
so that the young might have the fortune to die
in the summertime.
Medics dabbed the light from their brows
  into rags heavy with massacre.

Impaled by the sharp clatter of gutted magazines,
the light-headed city collapsed with its bullets.
From pinpricks and parted mouth,
its blood ran out to join the militia
  blockading the street with wounds.

Ryzhy in Yekaterinburg

In Russia,
the mountainside heaves forever.
From burnt-out sockets it blinks winter along,
as though a tear to garnish the scripts of its
ground-floor poets.

In Russia,
the hound takes scraps from gangrened palms
and plucks leftover meat from the soil's bones—
but it leaves the blue evening in the tenements,
for to live on sorrow is the poet's job.

In Russia,
the wind is a tenor caroling with sore lungs.
The swingset's ache slips into the cracks of its voice,
and in stillness when their duet is smothered
the poet culls their harmony into his soul.

In Russia,
a son dies with the youth of his father.
From grief, neither has managed to live beautifully.
The night, having strangled its only heart,
repents at the poet's graveside.

In Russia,
it is all too much to be a poet,
to wring hollow avenues into verse.
The mountain blinks more winter along,
eyes level with the stars.

Hotel Angleterre

Goodbye, my friend.
My inkpot has been turned over in the sky
and leaves none but the blood which
composes this farewell in my arm.
I write to you, katso, with all that remains of me—
the scraps fit only for a dog's mouth.

Goodbye, my friend.
St Isaac's is aflame, and Leningrad,
scored by the Neva and cross-hatched by stones,
in tatters dabs at its fiery wound.
My eyes, stale from tears, shepherd in the wandering smoke,
then constrict like water into ice.
In this night
I have only the hotel room to plead with.

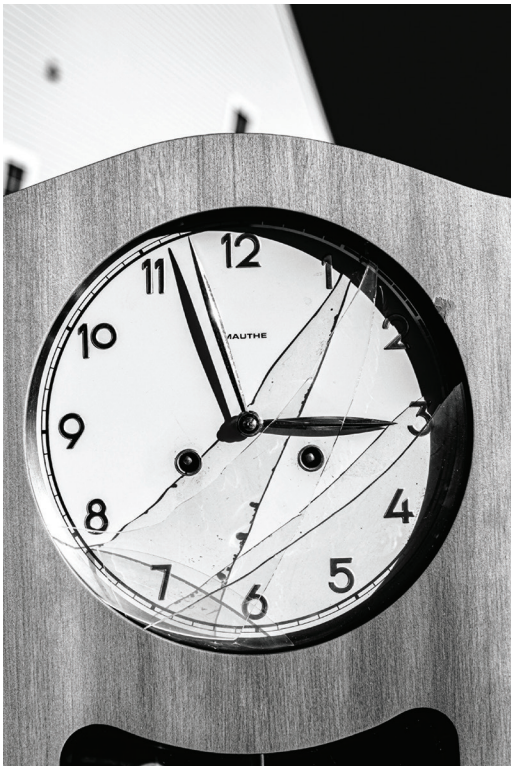
Goodbye, my friend.
With these eyes, I shall not see my works collected
by the time my soul hemorrhages in the rafters.
I shall see only the poetry which congeals in the stars,
furnishing the wombs that once evicted it.
In their matted web,
something newer than life will thumb my hollow death like a coin,
and you, my friend, will sleep well—
in our seven-room flat
white as Ryazan spring.





Kyiv to New Jersey

Maya Shkolnik
Columbia University, Columbia College





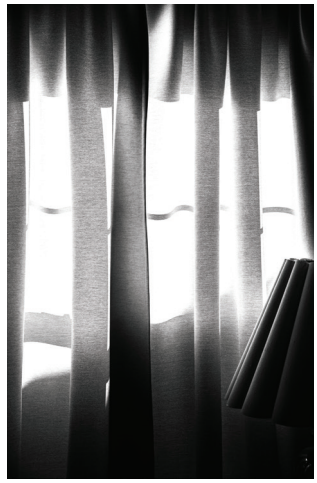


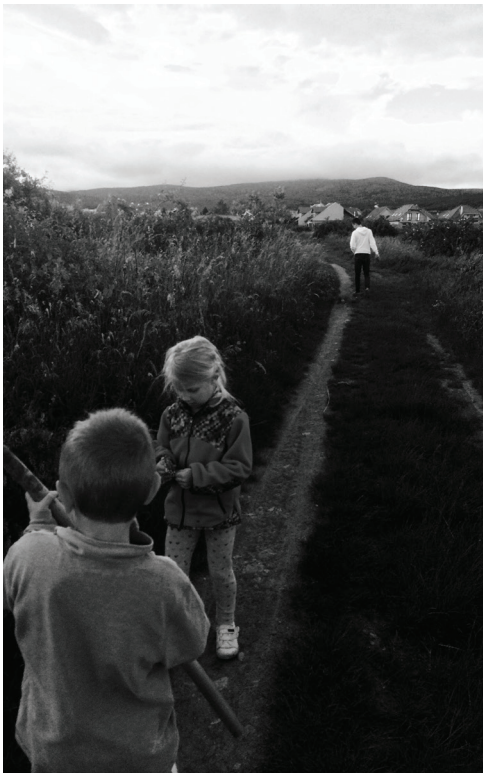




"I grew up calling my бабушка и дедушка by their first names. Rita and Vadik raised me to cherish my Ukrainian-Russian roots, which seem so far away. I wonder if New Jersey has tasted a better Olivier Salat."









Slovakia

René Strezenicky Franko
Columbia University, Columbia College



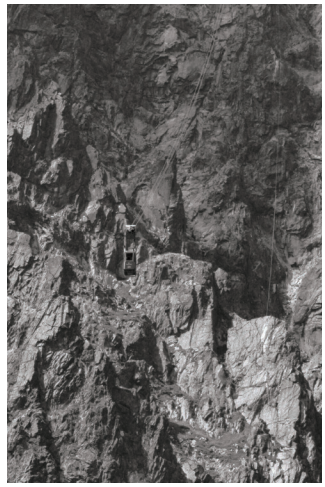




"When visiting Slovakia as a kid, my first stop was often the ancient Carpathian forests, where my family and I would forage for mushrooms and sip water from fresh springs.

But nothing says 'home' like savoring bryndzové halušky after a day in nature—a taste of Slovakia I carry with me."





LITERARY CRITICISM



The Poet Won't Die: Authorial Death in Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*

Nora Furlong
Bard College

There's a moment in "Berries," the tenth story in Varlam Shalamov's *Kolyma Tales*, when the reader is gutted and left clinging to some sick heat around their navel, while the writer strolls off. It occurs in a matter of words; Rybakov, the narrator's fellow prisoner in the Kolyma labor camp, is creeping towards a cluster of "enchanted berries" in the forbidden zone, when the "dry crack of a shot" fells him.[1] As explicit as the murder is, there is a brief inability on the part of the reader to comprehend what has just been described. The body is surveyed for a sentence, depicted as "small" as compared to the mountains, and archived by the witness as a corpse among corpses, held almost intimately by the hummocks and the designation of death. The murder is of no matter; Seroshapka, the guard, fires the second shot as protocol demands, the narrator collects Rybakov's supplies for his own use, and the prisoners are counted and sent back to the camp.

Misery sheds its histrionic connotation and is scoffed at, desecrated, and ultimately redemptive in *Kolyma Tales*; torture becomes increasingly mundane in each narrative reiteration, and the tortured becomes so acclimated that physical importance fades, and another, artistic, immortality seems attainable. This perspective begins to take effect through the rendition of horror as habitual; Shalamov's manner of writing is an act of witnessing, not glorification. There is an unwillingness or inability on the part of the narrator, and the author behind him, to add the expected pathos to the representation of the Gulag, an environment that physically and emotionally wrecked all those who were lucky, or perhaps unlucky, to live through it. The interplay between Shalamov as survivor, writer, and inhabitant of memory is the foundation for the ceaseless and appalling product that is *Kolyma Tales*, but a kind of blasé bitterness is felt throughout the work towards this very collaboration of Shalamov's selves. It is as if he is at once kicking, and screaming, and staying very still as he returns to Kolyma, as he reoccupies the emaciated and imprisoned self, a self that was stripped of identity and rendered insignificant. Both helpful and harrowing, this

1. Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, (New York: Penguin Press, 1994) 59.

delineation as a nugatory figure in the scheme of the Stalinist landscape allowed Shalamov to create narrators who take on the role of the universal and abstract inmate, and articulate their experiences as needed.

"Berries" doesn't end with the death of Rybakov. The tip of Seroshapka's rifle taps our narrator's shoulder, and the killer tells him, "I wanted to get you, but you wouldn't cross the line, you bastard!"[2] This jest finishes the piece and does so both to emphasize and negate the illustrated horror. If the story closed on the antepenultimate word, "line," the reader would be offered a kind of neatness, a metaphor of the nonsensicality of Gulag violence; Rybakov is killed for stepping over an arbitrarily created boundary, an action that could be likened to the at once capricious and methodical system of incarceration as carried out under Stalin's regime. "Line" as a conclusion also coincides with the very structure of Shalamov's description; the murder, clinically depicted, is given a mere line to occur, causing the reader's initial stupor of disbelief and rendering killing as a non-event––as something to be witnessed, taken stock of, and moved on from. But Shalamov finishes "Berries" with "bastard" because as well as attempting to portray cruelty and violence as banal, he also refuses to offer this portrayal as didactic and purposefully poignant. Leaving the reader with an admonition pokes fun at the sick feeling caused by Rybakov's murder, as if Shalamov is telling us we must get over it and get over it quickly. There can be none of the routine pity typically associated with death, for death as Shalamov offers it is the routine. Shalamov seems to hold the life of a Gulag inmate in his palm, gently turning it to catch the light, so that the clothes stolen from corpses, dogs killed for dinner, and the bitterness, the only thing that remains in the flesh, are seen. *Kolyma Tales* neither attempts to leave one wretched or informed; it is experience as experienced.

Born in 1907 to a mother who liked poetry and a father who was a priest, Varlam Shalamov claimed he lost his faith and became an atheist at the age of 13.[3] This was far before the POHO (Regional Department of People's Education) prevented Shalamov from continuing his education after graduating from the gymnasium of St. Alexander. But, if so inclined, one could say that Shalamov, from childhood, had a mark against him, a mark of affiliation with the bourgeoisie and clergy that mattered in class-conscious Stalinist Russia. Despite the newly-installed administrative measures banning or persecuting those demonstrably associated with the Orthodox church, Shalamov entered Moscow State University through an open competition in 1926. He studied in the department of Soviet Law, consumed Boris Pasternak and Andrei Bely to sate his literary interests, and became involved with a Trotsky-affiliated group. He was first arrested in 1929; some offer "reasons unknown," others point to his distribution of Lenin's "Letter to Congress" and expression of "anti-Stalin views at a demonstration" as the reason why. In any case, he was sentenced to three years of hard labor for being a "dangerous element" of society.[4]

Shalamov refused to sign his name to his conviction, a manner of resistance against "absurd accusation" reminiscent of Evgenia Ginzburg and Narodnaya Volya; he later explained this as an attempt to continue the socialist revolutionary tradition.[5] It seems the young Shalamov was aware of the role of the unjustly condemned in both a political and literary landscape, and later created and desecrated the figure of the universal convict in *Kolyma Tales*. After his release in 1931, sev-

2. Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, (New York: Penguin Press, 1994), 60.
3. Anastasiya Osipova, "The Forced Conversion of Varlam Shalamov," (Los Angeles Review of Books, 2019), 3.
4. Irina Sirontskaya, *My Friend Varlam Shalamov*, (Moscow: Russian Fund for the Humanities, 2006), 16.
5. Valery Yesipov, "Cerebration or Genuflection? (Varlam Shalamov and Alexander Solzhenitsin)," (Russkij Sever [The Russian North] No.4, 2002), 17.

eral of Shalamov's essays on literary criticism were published. He met and married Galina Ignatievna Gudz and they had a daughter, only for him to be rearrested at the inception of the Great Purge on similarly worded, arbitrary causes, this time sentenced to five years in Kolyma, the "land of white death." A ten-year sentence, added for an escape attempt and a reference to Ivan Bunin as a "great Russian writer," meant that Shalamov's incarceration lasted until 1951.

The labor experienced by Shalamov was debilitating; he reached a state of devitalization which rendered his body a *dokhodyaga*. Derived from the Russian verb доходить, "to reach," the phrase was used to describe the prisoners who were the most far gone in their state of starvation; they would soon "reach" death.[6] Upon release, "the little that was left" of Shalamov returned to a world he feared, and to which he would "add one more fear."[7] But he worked as a medical assistant, remarried, saw his masterwork *Kolyma Tales* published without his consent in Europe and the United States by way of *tamizdat*, sued those who had published it, received awards for this work, and wrote poems, autobiographies, and stories. His health deteriorated; Shalamov's former emaciation lingered, causing Ménière's disease, loss of coordination, and a heart attack. The last years of Shalamov's life were spent in an institution for elderly and disabled writers, deprived, as his friend and biographer Elena Zakharova put it, of the "right to die with dignity."[8] He died in 1982, and, upon Zakharova's insistence, was given Orthodox funeral rites. The "cathartic shame" of perestroika witnessed the publication of *Kolyma Tales* in Russian, in Russia, but Shalamov was by then dead, no longer dying. And yet…

RELIVING AND RECREATING DEATH

Shalamov, as an ex-convict and an author, acquired a kind of life after death. In a segment of his autobiographies, Shalamov describes the feeling of having "died in the mines…in 1938."[9] This cerebral death – the result of a *dokhodyaga's* 14-hour work days and constant state of malnourishment – meant that Shalamov reentered society as one who has "transcended death…[returning] to humanity as a witness."[10] The role of the writer-as-witness is examined in his essay "On Prose," wherein Shalamov relates the artist's rendition of the Gulag to the very corporal condition of the inmate, questioning whether the survivor's body can or should create. An occupation of the *dokhodyaga* state and its physical effects – pellagra, scurvy, frostbite, dysentery – warps the body into a reluctantly animated corpse, with a scabrous hide and aphasic stare, a ghost, a goner. The world that Shalamov, a rehabilitated dead man, entered after release was not a heaven or hell – he felt that he had already endured the latter – but rather for him a state of living "in spite of one's own death."[11] His paradoxical identity as a survivor, as one who has reascended from an underworld, with "newly-grown skin, bones, and muscles," was exemplified by Shalamov's struggle with "the right to write":

> *If something is to be written, then it can only be the words that the "Kolyma glove" could have written – the glove of a worker, a palm full of blisters, worn with the crowbar to the very blood, with fingers permanently bent around the shaft*

6. Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History*, (New York, Doubleday, 2003), 79.
7. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales* "An Epitaph," 311-312.
8. Sirontskaya, *My Friend* 16.
9. Harriat Hustis and Maria Mostyka, "The Starving Artist: Life, Death, and the Role of the Storyteller in Varlam Shalamov's 'The Snake Charmer' and 'Cherry Brandy,'" (The Slavic and East European Journal, vol. 58, no. 3, 2014), 469.
10. Steven Banes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton, 2011), 183.
11. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales* "An Epitaph," 311-312.

of a shovel. This glove could not have written a story. These fingers cannot straighten up to pick up a pen and write about themselves.[12]

This "Kolyma glove," the hand of the *dokhodyaga*, is a coriaceous thing. As much as this devastated flesh hinders composition, Shalamov argues that it is only this flesh that is deserving of this act of retelling; "tales of the Gulag both must and shouldn't be written," for the only worthy writers are those unable to write. In order to represent the experience, a reenactment of the condition seems necessary; Shalamov must redon the "Kolyma glove" when writing the story of the Gulag. It is a somatic occupation of memory, a manner of reliving in order to create. As insistent as Shalamov is in the quote above in denying the ability of description to both the current and recovered goner, he persisted in reinhabiting his sick self, in writing and witnessing. After having *Kolyma Tales* ignored and "demoted to the genre of testimony" in Russia, Shalamov – stating that "it is enough to die to be printed,"[13] – understood that his work was meant for posterity. In the limbo between two deaths, Shalamov, impossibly and necessarily, remember and relived, in order to create; "art" as Shalamov said, "is a way of life, not a way of understanding life…it is a document…a prose lived through like a document."[14]

Although Shalamov interacts with his text in a far different way than other Gulag documentarians, poets, and memoirists, some comparisons can still be made. A fundamental element of art produced in reaction to trauma is the quality of delay. Appearing belatedly due to conditions of censorship, the threat of exile, imprisonment, or death, this genre acts as a kind of legacy to experience, and is at once complicated by and owes its existence to memory. This means a later revival of the period, a process that often relies on the accession of memory in a corporal manner. The artist somatically relives so as to aesthetically reconstruct their experience, and the horror expresses its incessance; an old wound throbs again. Although agonizing, it accomplishes what the artist has set out to do: the art has acted as a reminder, a sudden shudder of recollection, a statement of survival.

Perhaps the most prominent example of creation through recollection is the work of Anna Akhmatova, one of the foremost Russian artists of the 20th century. When writing "Requiem," she was said to "bur[n] the paper on which composed drafts of the poem, after learning it by heart,"[15] at once a demonstration of the extremity of Stalinist oppression and the necessity of recollection. Akhmatova was forced to exist in a constant reiteration of her words, reliving the experiences that begot them and undergoing a perpetual half-memorized life of terror. She felt a responsibility as a poet and, ergo, documentarian, to bear witness to atrocity so as to later persist in the creation and revelation of it through poeticized memory. This sense of duty can be recognized in the preface of "Requiem," wherein Akhmatova recounts a conversation between herself and a woman standing in a Leningrad prison line:

"Then a woman standing behind
me, who of course had
never heard my name, stirred from
her own, though common to all of
us, stupor and asked in my ear
(there, all spoke in a whisper):
—Could you describe this?
And I said:
—I can.
Then, something akin to a smile

12. Varlam Shalamov, *Collected Works in Four Volumes* "The Glove," (New York: Penguin Press, 1972), 51.
13. Varlam Shalamov, "A Letter to an Old Friend,"(Moscow: Krasny Sever, 1966), 8.
14. Varlam Shalamov, "On Prose," (Academic Studies Press: Late and Post-Soviet Russian Literature: A Reader Volume 2, 2014) 111-126.
15. Martin Puchner, *Writing Poetry Under Stalin: Samizdat and Memorization*, (Literary Hub, 2017) 6.

slipped across what once had been her face.[16]

Akhmatova's word "describe" is a revelation of a sacrosanct aspect of her artistry; the ability to represent and evoke the emotions of a lived experience. Akhmatova, in recognition of her role, understands the succor she can, and contestably must, provide. If she is to avoid description, others will lack a nuanced understanding of the traumatic period. By describing her experience, she refuses to let the experience, and in a way herself, die.

DIMINISHING AND HABITUATING DEATH

Akhmatova's process of reliving is relevant, but this "sacrosanct aspect," is not as applicable to Shalamov's mode of creation. In Irina Sirotinskaya's "The Years We Talked," a collection of memories of her meetings and friendship with Shalamov, she recounts that, in response to a question of how people should live their lives, he "added an eleventh commandment – thou shalt not teach."[17] In keeping with his rejection of art as didactic, of art "[not having] the right to preach…[as it] neither ennobles nor improves people,"[18] one may understand Shalamov's prose as a record of experience, a witnessed life, which cannot claim inherent purpose or worth. Here, perhaps, Osip Mandelstam's lines – " I sense all that I have witnessed / And I rehearse it without purpose"[19] – are more prescient than Akhmatova's, as they convey both the weight of the artist's experience – their life being something significant enough to "sense," – as well as the understanding that an aesthetic representation, a "rehearsal" of that which has been "witnessed" is ultimately purposeless. This doesn't wholly negate Shalamov's statements on the necessity of writing one's life, statements which shouldn't be ignored in the examination of his prose, yet the unwillingness to sentimentalize is important. Suffering as rendered by Shalamov is banal and routine, and the monotony of misery at once subdues and emphasizes the horror of his illustrations.

The element of banality which so influences the cruel life experienced by the inmates in *Kolyma Tales* is most palpable in "Dry Rations," Shalamov's story of four prisoners and their work of felling trees at the Duskania spring. The task and its quota are impossible, but to the group it resembles a vacation; no morbidly grueling work in the mines and the ability to "[rest] more and [pay] more attention to the sun, the forest, and the pale-blue tall sky."[20] This bliss is tangible, yet restrained; the convicts are still controlled, most obviously by the amount of food allotted to the prisoners – the "dry rations." The title of the story is "Сухим пайком" in the original Russian, the exact translation being "By dry rations," which, as scholar Svetlana Boym explains, is an "elliptical adverbial construction indicat[ing] a mode of existence."[21] Rationing functions in the camp as a form of rationalizing terror and oppression; the convicts fuss over the cooking, giddy to prepare the food themselves despite the appallingly small portions, and a kind

16. Kemball, Robin, and Anna Akhmatova, "Anna Akhmatova's 'Requiem, 1935-1940,'" The Russian Review 33, no. 3 (1974): 303–312.
17. Sirontskaya, *My Friend*, 16.
18. Shalamov, "A Letter," 8.
19. Peter Barnes translation of Osip Mandelstam's poetry, *Poems of Osip Mandelstam*, (New Directions Publishing, 2014), 60.
20. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 41.
21. Svetlana Boym, "'Banality of Evil,' Mimicry, and the Soviet Subject: Varlam Shalamov and Hannah Arendt," (Slavic Review, vol. 67, no. 2, 2008), 89.

of "spiritual calm" is felt in this "dungeon's supreme freedom."[22]There is in the story, as per usual, a moment of intense atrocity that demonstrates the habitual acceptance of camp cruelty. A foreman visits the prisoners, and upon surveying their work, tells them that they have not fulfilled their quota and will need to return to camp, to the mines, to, in a sense, an even more pronounced threat of death. Ivan Ivanovich – the ultimate archetype – "[doesn't] ask any more questions" and hangs himself "in the tree fork without even using a rope."[23] As in "Berries," the act of killing is clinically presented and elicits only curious indifference; the speaker merely remarks that he's "never seen that kind of suicide before." As in "Berries," the visual is grotesque yet is not offered as such; Shalamov makes no attempt to permit the natural sentimental quality of death. Instead, he offers another grisly jest: "Fedya Shapov and I didn't know what to do – Ivan Ivanovich had some good foot rags that weren't torn."[24] The narrator divvies up the "dead man's clothing" between himself and the youngest convict, Fedya, while the remaining member of the group, Savelev, "just keeps walking around Ivan Ivanovich's body…"[25] He is struck by this death, a rare reaction in Kolyma. Suicide distinguishes itself as a kind of death worthy of contemplation.

In response to Ivanovich's suicide, Savelev is "forced to make decisions of his own," and he self-mutilates by cutting four fingers off of his left hand. This is again rendered as a non-event, yet the culmination of "Dry Rations" differentiates the story from Shalamov's other descriptions of violence. In an earlier conversation, seemingly innocuous as another indication of the inhumanity of camp conditions, Savelev explains to Fedya what "dressed appropriately for the season" means when written on an inmate's report:

> *'Well, they can't list every piece of summer or winter clothing you have on. If it's winter, they can't write that you were sent to work without a coat or mittens. How often did you stay in camp because there were no mittens?'*[26]

Fedya says never. The phrase is a bureaucratic expression used to cover the administration's practice of providing an inappropriate amount of clothing for the inmates based on the climate. The story moves on, and after the suicide of Ivanovich and the self-harm of Savelev, Shalamov ends with an even more horrific scene, worse because it's quieter; the narrator and Fedya return to camp, and the former, waking in the middle of the night, finds Fedya sitting and writing a letter. Looking "over his shoulder," the speaker reads, " 'Mama…Mama, I'm all right. Mama, I'm dressed appropriately for the season…'"[27] The lament of the three "Mama's" is as gutting as the hanging without a rope and the four bloody fingers in the dirt. It seems that Fedya, in Boym's words, has experienced an "initiation into the banality of evil" and now uses the oppressor's language to acquiesce to and acknowledge violence as prosaic.[28] To Shalamov, death has become so common it's comic; Fedya is, humorously enough, "dressed appropriately," for he is wearing the clothes stripped from Ivanovich's corpse. When trauma is the routine, pain becomes playful.

22. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 40.
23. Ibid, 45.
24. Ibid, 45.
25. Ibid, 46.
26. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 42.
27. Ibid, 47.
28. Boym, "Banality of Evil," 89.

AUTHORIAL AFTERLIFE

A form of immortality is attainable for the artist through their art, a form presented in "Cherry Brandy," Shalamov's "cross on the grave"[29] for Osip Mandelstam. "The poet was dying" begins the story, which examines a period of delirium experienced by a dokhodyaga whose mind is curiously aware of life seeping out of his body and of his approaching death. Mandelstam's name is never ascribed to the dying inmate, but his poem at the inception of the piece solidifies Shalamov's later testimony that "Cherry Brandy" was written to "leave a witness" to the poet's death. Shalamov was able to write this story because he himself had occupied this state; his imprisonment was largely spent as a *dokhodyaga*, "a pellagra patient of a classical, textbook kind, knight of the three 'D's' – dementia, dysentery, and dystrophy."[30] To inhabit the mind of a goner was therefore viable, but the piece's function as an ode translates it into a dual form of narrative substitution; as analyzed by Harriet Hustis and Maria Mostyka, Shalamov substitutes himself, "(a writer and poet who survived) for Mandelstam (a poet who did not), [revealing] his own unique conception of what it means to write a 'realist' prose that 'bears witness' to the truth of the camps."[31] Both the somatic and mental condition is occupied by Shalamov, and as he simultaneously relives his own dying state and imagines this state as experienced by Mandelstam, Shalamov extends a revelation. The *dokhodyaga* experiences an equilibrium of life and death, and their fundamentally contrary natures are challenged – "Life was entering into him and passing out of him, and he was dying"[32] – to present the inimitable condition of living death. This synchrony and iteration is compared by the speaker to his understanding of poetry, to the "immortality of verse, its life-giving function," and he becomes aware that he continues, and will continue, to live because of poetry:

> *Life entered by herself, mistress in her own home. He had not called her, but she entered his body, his brain; she came like verse, like inspiration….Poetry was the life-giving force by which he had lived…He had not lived for poetry; he had lived through poetry.*[33]

This revelation is tender; it arises both as a result of, and a kind of penetration through, the indifferent delirium of starvation, causing the dying poet to "[rejoice] that he had learned this final truth."[34] As in other stories, the last few lines of the piece are somewhat amusing; after the poet dies, his neighbors cleverly make the "dead man raise his hand like a puppet" whenever the guards give out bread rations, so as to get it for themselves[35]. This final image is morbidly funny. It acts as an ironic confirmation of two central motifs presented by Shalamov throughout *Kolyma Tales*: death becomes droll and dead men move.

The perpetuation of life through poetry is aided by narrative substitution; having died, the poet continues to live through the artistic representation of himself as fashioned by Shalamov. He perseveres through the poeticization of life and lives again, a fate that Shalamov perhaps hoped for himself. The dead man's hand, within the paradigm of Shalamov's "Kolyma glove," is reanimated as an allusion to the necessary process of reliving in order to create. As he redons this glove and this body of the *dokhodyaga*, substituting himself for

29. Hustis, "The Starving Artist,'" 469.
30. Shalamov, "On Prose," 111-126.
31. Hustis, "The Starving Artist,'" 469.
32. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 70.
33. Shalamov, *Kolyma Tales*, 71.
34. Ibid, 72.
35. Ibid, 75.

Mandelstam and presenting the "truth" of living through poetry, through writing, through art, Shalamov touches death. He writes as an occupier of, and a witness to, suffering, thus affirming the position of art as a testament and document. Shalamov, akin to Akhmatova, is evincing that he "can describe this, and…will."

Shalamov can and will create, while nonetheless resisting the idea of his art as educative. When faced with this rejection, it becomes difficult to situate *Kolyma Tales* in a genre; Gulag narratives, memoirs of trauma, and documentary prose are often considered to instruct as well as to record. The standards of literary description as well as the standards of literary criticism seem inapplicable to Shalamov's writing, similar to, as his friend and archivist Irina Sirontskaya puts it, how "Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and Kolyma cannot be comprehended within the structure of the psyche."[36] Yet one wants to learn from Shalamov's stories, if only to offer a kind of appreciation through recognition. Sirontskaya, as well as describing how Shalamov spurned the creation of art as the creation of some wisdom, also moderates this by relating how Shalamov "didn't simply speak, didn't think out loud – he taught, preached, prophesied."[37] This takes the pressure off a bit; one might feel rather hopeless after reading Kolyma Tales, and Shalamov's propensity for articulating himself and his experiences aids in the acquisition of the veritable, appalling, and necessary insights. His work shouldn't be understood as a scoffing at other modes of literature, at other renditions of the Gulag (except for perhaps Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who Shalamov thought of as "bogged down in the themes of nineteenth-century literature," a kind of "hell, [which] alas, [came] back!"), but as a necessary thing, an excision of trauma by writing. In his own words, Shalamov's stories "are screamed out;" they revel in the death of the novel as a genre, testify for the millions of prisoners who died in the Gulag penal system, and act as the author's lifeline.[38]

In an insistence of the non-ideological and unsentimental manner of creation, Shalamov seeks out a mode of literature that recognizes its need to "change drastically after the Kolyma," a statement reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's position that art "after Auschwitz is barbaric." [39] The conditions of cruelty as experienced by Shalamov were barbaric; the Gulag's atrocities were so great that an articulation of them compels the artist to feel at once the need to bite their tongue over what Mandelstam called this "speechless time."[40] Shalamov, however, doesn't castigate creation; he aims to offer an occupation of the human condition through art. A rendition of horror, albeit unspeakable, must be written, must be poeticized, must be kept alive. Both the act of creating and the product of creation are means of survival, of living for Shalamov; to tell a story was a way to gain favor and protection in the camp, to remember a word was a joyful indication of something from the past remaining in one's mind, to write and keep writing was a statement of sentience. His last recorded poem:

So free from earthly fuss.
I hug the ground,
Above the planet thus
I fly around.[41]

The terra firma of Kolyma, upon which Shalamov tread as a man, a prisoner stripped of identity, a ghost, and a resurrected artist, was a landscape of nonsensical violence. Released from material misery, Shalamov remains in the artistic atmosphere. Shalamov witnessed, experienced, and rendered death, and yet, lives.

36. Kemball, "Anna Akhmatova's 'Requiem,'" 303–312.
37. Ibid, 303-312.
38. Shalamov, "The Glove," 51.
39. Ibid, 51.
40. Mandelstam, *Poems*, 57.
41. Shalamov, "The Glove," 51.

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Rasskazhite Nam Skazki: Gogol's Use of Skaz, Ukrainian, and Narration in *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka I*

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INTRODUCTION

"So you want me to tell you another story about Grandad? Certainly, why not amuse you with some more….? Ah, the old days, the old days [...] Well, what am I to tell you? Nothing comes into my mind at the minute… oh yes, I'll tell you how the witches played "Fools" with my grandfather."[1] Thus does Foma Grigorievich, a narrator in Part One of Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka I* (henceforth *Evenings I*), introduce one of "his" stories, "The Lost Letter." Foma Grigorievich, however, is only one of many complex narrators within the collected tales that comprise *Evenings I*: "The Fair at Sorochintsy," "St. John's Eve," "A May Night, or the Drowned Maiden," "The Lost Letter," and the preface (a story in its own right). Each tale is narrated by a certain peasant introduced in the preface, with each narrator having their own distinct manner of speaking. Why did Gogol structure his stories through the voices of fictional Ukrainian peasants, and what was the effect of presenting Ukraine through such a lens?

Scholars have offered different interpretations of the relationship between representations of Russian and Ukrainian nationalism in Gogol's works, with some finding pro-imperial or anti-imperial elements and others finding both. For example, Edyta Bojanowska uses the histories of Russian and Ukrainian constructions of national identity and Gogol's non-canonical texts to argue that Gogol engaged with both Russian and Ukrainian nationalist movements and that his anti-imperial sentiments can only be fully understood by examining his private and redacted writings in combination with his final published works. Similarly, Yuliya Ilchuk, in her book *Nikolai Gogol: Performing Hybrid Identity*, explores how Gogol exhibited his dual national identities, both intentionally and otherwise, through his writing and portrayal of himself. Conversely, Roman Koropeckyj and

1. Nikolai Vasilevich Gogol, The Collected Tales and Plays of Nikolai Gogol ed. Leonard J. Kent and The Modern Library, trans. Constance Black Garnett (1964; repr., Random House, Inc., 1969), 77.

Robert Romanchuk argue that Gogol's representations of both himself and of Ukraine in Evenings can be viewed in conversation with the practice of American blackface minstrelsy, seen partially through his alternating identification with and distancing from Ukrainian identity.

By examining the arguments of Bojanowska, Ilchuk, Koropeckyj, and Romanchuk, I contend that Gogol's presentation of his country and people subvert but nonetheless abet the contemporary imperial narrative. Gogol's narrators, along with his word and language choices in the short stories collected in *Evenings I*, portray Ukraine as an exotic, "other" part of the Russian empire— reducing Ukrainians and their ways of life to digestible entertainment for Russian consumption. This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all the subversive or pro-imperial elements present within *Evenings I* or an exhaustive account of every aspect of Gogol's complex system of embedded narrators. Instead, I examine several instances where Gogol's narrative style and use of Ukrainian language lend to his portrayal of Ukraine as a rustic and supernatural land in ways that flatten the country's complexity in favor of Russo-centric entertainment value. I draw on Koropeckyj and Romanchuk's comparison of Gogol's works to blackface, while still recognizing Bojakowska's and Ilchuk's understandings of Gogol's underlying subversive and normative elements. Through this, I situate my own observations within recent attempts to interpret Gogol holistically while also recognizing that his pro-imperial messages often undermined the subversive ones. Bojanowska's and Ilchuk's multifaceted frameworks for reading Gogol contend that Koropeckyj and Romanchuk's views are relevant and, yet not the whole picture.

PLOT

All four stories (excluding the preface) in *Evenings I* contain mystical elements and portray Ukraine as a land where supernatural events are bound to occur. The first story in the collection, "The Fair at Sorochintsy," is set in a Ukrainian marketplace and portrays the love story of the young Paraska and Grytsko, whose marriage is forbidden by Paraska's stepmother, but still occurs through Grytsko's scheming. The other storyline in "The Fair at Sorochintsy" describes the market sellers' fear of a devil who searches for the remnants of his sold (and subsequently destroyed) jacket. A different demon, Basavriuk, appears in the next tale, "St. John's Eve," and convinces Petro to kill his beloved Pidorka's brother in exchange for money and thus persuade Pidorka's father to let them marry. At first all is well, as Petro's memory of the murder was erased by the demon, but ultimately the story ends tragically. The antagonist in "A May Night, or The Drowned Maiden" is not a demon, but instead the lecherous mayor and father of the Cossack Levko. The metaphorical devil of this story, in a rather overt expression of disdain toward the influence of Russian tsars, is villainous due to his pomposity and cruelty resulting from having served as a guide to Catherine II when she traveled through their village many years prior.[2] The true mysticism of the story, however, is the magical maiden in the lake whose interference allows Levko and his lover to wed. The final tale, "The Lost Letter," describes how Foma Grigorievich's grandfather was chosen to deliver a letter to the Tsarina but was waylaid and accidentally lost the letter to the devil. Ultimately the grandfather wins the letter back through a card game with witches and delivers it to the Tsarina.[3] Each of these stories establishes Ukraine as a place where devils, magical ladies, and witches roam and interact with Ukrainian peasants. In Gogol's stories Ukraine is fantastical, the site of supernatural occurrences rather than deep emotion.

2. Gogol, CTP, 57.
3. Ibid, 78.

CONTEXT

Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka was the work that created Gogol's popularity and reputation. The collection, published in Russian and in two parts, was originally attributed to a lowly Ukrainian beekeeper named Rudy Panko.[4] Although phrases and quotes in the Ukrainian language appear occasionally in the collection, the majority of the text was in Russian despite the origins of the supposed author. Gogol's use of Russian over Ukrainian was a well-calculated choice, but the benefits he received from writing in Russian also inherently furthered Imperial Russia's goal of developing a national identity that did not recognize Ukrainians as a distinct people. Writing in Russian was one of the best ways to better a Ukrainian writer's prospects in the Slavic literary world, as seen by how often Ukrainian writers left Ukraine for Saint Petersburg in the pursuit of success. This bias against works in the Ukrainian language is apparent in the negative reactions to Taras Shevchenko's writing in exclusively Ukrainian.[5] Additionally, Gogol undoubtedly capitalized on the trendiness of Ukraine and its culture at the time, noting in a letter that "everyone [in Saint Petersburg] is taken up with anything that is Little Russian."[6] Regardless of the increased likelihood of literary success that writing in Russian gave Gogol, it is notable that Gogol Russified the Ukrainian words in his stories by confining his usage of the Ukrainian alphabet (as opposed to the Russian one) to songs and proverbs.[7] Although Gogol had already taken care to define the Ukrainian terms in his texts, making the words accessible to Russian readers, he went a step further by transliterating them into the Russian alphabet. At every turn Gogol marginalized his usage of the Ukrainian language in favor of pandering to the Russian audience.

At every turn Gogol marginalized his usage of the Ukrainian language in favor of pandering to the Russian audience.

It should be noted that Gogol did not intend to write exclusively for the imperial center, given his complaints that "many of the local landowners [...] weren't able to find a single copy" of Evenings within Ukraine. [8]Nonetheless, he undeniably catered to a primarily metropolitan Russian audience, evidenced by his use of Russified words and his glossing of Ukrainian vocabulary. Bojanowska accurately notes that "Gogol's gospel of Russian nationalism [rang] hollow to his enamored celebration of Ukraine in his earlier stories," which, though this displeased some of his Russian readers, his works still pandered to a Russian gaze.[9] The Russians, as Koropecky and Romanchuk assert, were the "patron[s]" of Gogol's minstrel show, as seen through Panko's address to those "elite Russian reader[s]."[10]

4. Yuliya Ilchuk, Nikolai Gogol: Performing Hybrid Identity (University of Toronto Press, 2021), 48-50.
5. Ilchuk, PHI 10. Luckyj, George S. N. "Is Shevchenko a Symbol of Universal Freedom?" Comparative Literature Studies 1, no. 2 (1964): 143–151. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40245641.
6. Nikolai V. Gogol,'Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, vol 10. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR 1937-1952), 140-142.
7. Although I did not have access to a first copy edition of CTP to verify this was always the case, the online Russian copy I used preserved the Ukrainian lettering in the epigraphs, and thus likely did not Russify the Ukrainian words in-text.
8. Edyta M. Bojanowska, Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism (Harvard University Press, 2007), 5.
9. Ibid., 41.
10. Roman Koropeckyj and Robert Romanchuk, "Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol"s Dikan'ka Tales, Book 1", Slavic Review vol 62, no. 3 (2003): 538. https://doi.org/10.2307/3185805.

NARRATION

One notable element of *Evenings i*s Gogol's usage of the narrative technique skaz. The skaz characteristics of Evenings contribute majorly to Gogol's portrayal of Ukrainian culture as low-brow entertainment. Drawing on features of oral storytelling, Boris Eikhenbaum defines skaz as that which contains "elements of oral narration" where "live, oral improvisation can be discerned in written literature."[11] Skaz narratives are often presented as "actual stories narrated by specific persons," a form Ivan Turgenev and Nikolai Leskov also used.[12]

From the start, *Evenings i*s framed by a sense of authenticity due to Rudy Panko's introduction in the preface, wherein he claims to have collected the four tales from other storytellers. Although his role is mostly confined to this preface, Rudy Panko also begins "St. John's Eve" with a note regarding his encounter with the tale before introducing two other narrators who appear in the collection. One narrator, Foma Grigorievich, claims to recount his Cossack grandfather's stories "St. John's Eve" and "The Lost Letter." The other narrator is characterized only by his "pea-green suit," as mentioned by Rudy Panko in "The Fair at Sorochintsy":"that young gentleman in the pea-green coat […] whose story, I believe, you have read" in reference to "The Fair at Sorochintsy."[13] Although the narrator remains unnamed and merely implicitly mentioned within "The Fair at Sorochintsy," the story exists within the tradition of skaz in that it is established as "narrated by specific persons."[14] The narrator of "A May Night" is also unnamed, but it is likely that the man in the coat narrates this tale as well. Rudy Panko introduces only three narrators––Foma Grigorievich, the man in the coat, and a storyteller whose tales Rudy Panko "purposely omitted" from the collection.[15] The absence of Foma Grigorievich's Cossack grandfather implies that the narrator must instead have been the man in green. It is thus apparent that all four stories are narrated in the style of skaz.

Gogol's layers of narrators function as "a mechanism for drawing the reader "into the vertex of the story."[16] Through each successive layer of narrator and story, starting from Gogol himself and terminating in the fictional narrator embedded in each tale, the reader is drawn into closer and closer proximity to a fictionalized and mystified version of Ukraine. This structure mirrors what Amelia Glaser identifies as the focusing power of Gogol's marketplace setting in "The Fair at Sorochintsy." As the true author of these tales, and thus the outermost layer of narration, Gogol invites readers to observe Ukraine as a distant and mystified setting. Then, Rudy Panko and Foma Grigorievich invite readers to enter this mystical land through their use of direct speech and claims of veracity. Similarly, the narrator in green paints the scenes of his tales with rich imagery to enmesh the audience even more within genuine yet seemingly quaint elements of Ukrainian culture, such as the unpublished writings of Gogol's father. When the readers encounter the narrations of characters within the four stories, they are immersed in the characters and complexities of Gogol's magical Ukraine.

Despite differences such as the degree of narrational presence and the characteristics of antagonists in each story, all four tales share an informal manner of speech and a mode of direct reader address. This mode is established, first of all, when the narrators fail or are slow

11. Boris Eikhenbaum, "The Illusion of Skaz," trans. Martin Rice, Russian Literature Triquarterly (1975): 233.
12. Ibid, 234.
13. Gogol, CTP 6.; Gogol, CTP 34.
14. Eikhenbaum, "The Illusion of Skaz," 233.
15. Gogol, CTP 6.
16. Amelia Glaser, "Nikolai Gogol's Commercial Landscape (1829–1852)" in Jews and Ukrainians in Russia's Literary Borderlands: From the Shtetl Fair to the Petersburg Bookshop (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 37.

to recall information. Polished written works are subject to revision before being absorbed by an audience; such editing and retracting is of course impossible for a live, improvised story. As such, the stumbles of oral storytellers are frequently what distinguish them from the confidence of textual authorial voices. This difference between published and spoken works is highlighted whenever the narrators of the four tales seemingly recall information on the spot. This contributes to the illusion that the reader is experiencing stories presented orally, unedited and unrefined. For example, the narrator of "The Fair at Sorochintsy" must pause and remember when the story is set. He eventually concludes that it was "in the hot August of eighteen hundred … yes, it will be about thirty years ago."[17] In "St. John's Eve," the storyteller clarifies a statement by saying "and if I remember right," casting doubt on the certainty of his recollection.[18] Foma Grigorievich also has to search his memory, such as in "The Lost Letter" when he fails to recall someone's nickname—"damn, I can't remember his name, the devil take those days." Additionally, he hesitates, "all *I* know is," further contributing to the sense that this story is actively being recalled as it is told verbally to the reader.[19]

LANGUAGE

First-person pronouns are used throughout all the tales, such as the use of the pronoun "I" in "The Lost Letter" and "The Fair of Sorochintsy" when the narrators struggle to remember facts. "The Fair at Sorochintsy" further uses first-person pronouns with phrases such as "our travelers" and "we are forgetting."[20] In this case, the use of "we" draws the reader in, verbalizing the presence of the reader in a way even as it diminishes the individual persona of the narrator. Such pronouns are also abundant in "A May Night," seen when the narrator states, "While Kalenik is on his way *we* shall certainly have time to say something about the mayor."[21] The frequent use of "you," a second-person pronoun, in both stories has the same effect, such as when the narrator of "The Fair at Sorochintsy" vividly describes a chaotic waterfall that "*you* have no doubt seen" before questioning, "[A]re *you* not overcome by the same feelings in the turmoil of the village fair?"[22] Similarly, in "A May Night," the narrator describes the beauty of the Ukrainian night by interrogating the reader: "Do *you* know the Ukrainian night?"[23] In these cases, the use of the second-person pronoun places the storyteller and reader in dialogue, emphasizing the presence of both the narrator and the audience.

By establishing an informal style in the tales in *Evenings I* with unpretentious word choices and hallmarks of oral storytelling, the narrators are situated as less literate individuals addressing a better-educated Russian metropolitan audience. This dynamic suggests that Ukrainians are a simple and inferior people whose stories are mere entertainment for Russians rather than high-brow literature. For instance, given the period that "The Lost Letter" is set in, the grand hetmen likely sent a letter to the empress for more rights or land for the Cossacks.[24] Foma Grigorievich, however, does not concern himself with the political forces at hand, dismissing it as sent for "some reason."[25] The educated Russian audience likely understood the politics surrounding the letter;

17. Gogol, CTP 9.
18. Ibid., 36.
19. Ibid., 78 (emphasis added).
20. Ibid., 10 (emphasis added).
21. Ibid., 56 (emphasis added).
22. Gogol, CTP 12 (emphasis added).
23. Ibid., 55 (emphasis added).
24. Zoom lecture with Amelia Glaser in Swarthmore's Fall 2023 class "The Meaning of Life and the Russian Novel."
25. Gogol, CTP 2.

through Foma Grigorievich's ignorance, this audience is placed in a position of superior knowledge and power to the peasant narrator.

Additionally, the language of *Evenings I* is notably casual and at times even vulgar. Rudy Panko opens the preface by "speaking" straightforwardly to the reader, anticipating their potential outrage and apologizing if they are "annoyed at a beekeeper like [himself] addressing [them] so plainly."[26] This style of literary address is a "subversive narrative device" called a suplika, which "emerged in sixteenth-century Ukrainian officialese" before its use in Ukrainian fiction.[27] On the surface it seems as though Rudy Panko, through this suplika, disparages his literacy to a Russian metropolitan reader, describing the peasants writing as "[dirtying] their fingers with ink stains."[28] However, closer examination reveals the true subversiveness of the suplika. As Ilchuk observes, Gogol both "entertained the metropolitan audience with Panko's semi-grammatical language" while at the same time mocking the idea of Panko as a "semi-literate Ukrainian" through the intentional use of a literary device that an uneducated individual would lack the knowledge to use.[29] Bojanowska argues that by playing into metropolitan expectations, Gogol also facilitates a fight against imperial politics, as Panko's "persona of a naive bumpkin" allows Gogol, through Panko, to "defend local customs" to Russians. Panko's illiteracy and insufficient education serve as an alibi for Gogol's transgressive defense of Ukrainian culture, without which such a defense would be seen as an overt challenge to the Imperial order. Through this cloaking, Panko's perspective can be dismissed as the uninformed view of a peasant.[30] However, it should be noted that both Ilchuk's and Bojanowska's readings situate Russians as intellectually superior to Ukrainians despite any potentially anti-imperial themes.

The Ukrainian words interspersed within the four stories further contribute to the folksy atmosphere and thus the simple yet exotic representation of Ukraine. In "The Lost Letter," silly Ukrainian nicknames are occasionally used instead of Russian ones. The Ukrainian imbues the tale with a quaint, even mocking tone. Additionally, the listening maidens are described as *moloditsi*, a Ukrainian word for young women in "The Lost Letter" and *divchina* (singular)/ *divchatam* (plural) with their similar meanings in "St John's Eve" and "A May Night." Due to the rustic connotations of Gogol's select use of Ukrainian in stories that are otherwise predominantly in Russian, Gogol's frequent choice to describe young women with Ukrainian vocabulary in lieu of the Russian *devushki* suggests an image of exotic, youthful young ladies frolicking in an idyllic landscape. This image is strengthened especially in "St John's Eve" with the mention of the "black-browed girls and women" that find Petro handsome. The phrasing implies that many Ukrainian women fit the beauty standard of being dark-haired and black-browed. The explicit exceptional beauty of the Ukrainian ladies further exoticizes and fetishizes them.

Though Ukrainian words are less interwoven into the prose of "The Fair at Sorochintsy" and "A May Night," Ukrainian language is instead interspersed throughout in Ukrainian proverbs, songs, and lines from comedies and folk tales, which lend these tales a similar exotic, picturesque atmosphere. The additions from folk tales, old ballads, and "Little Russian" plays lend an air of authenticity and quaintness, particularly in "The Fair at Sorochintsy." Additionally, Ukrainian is notably present in "A May Night" when Levko sings to Ganna by a pond, further evoking an idyllic and romantic Ukrainian atmosphere.

26. Gogol, CTP, 4.
27. Ilchuk, PHI 51.
28. Gogol, CTP 3.
29. Ilchuk, PHI, 51.
30. Bojanowska, BURN, 48.

GOGOL'S MOCKERY OF UKRAINE

Though the unequal dynamic between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples is not analogous to the oppression of African Americans by white Americans in the United States, scholars Koropeckyj and Romanchuk identify a parallel between Gogol's depiction of Ukraine and the practice of blackface. Through this, they write against the trend in pro-Ukrainian scholarship to view such depictions of Gogol's solely as appreciation of Ukraine's rich history and culture. Through this lens, the informal style of *Evenings I* stereotypes Ukrainians as incapable of true, well-written literature, much in the way that the African American identity was reduced to entertainment for white landowners in minstrel shows. Additionally, though *Evenings I* is written primarily in Russian, Gogol slips on his Ukrainian overcoat to envelop the Russian reader in the atmosphere of quaint Ukraine through occasional Ukrainian words and phrases – but only insofar as it contributes to an image of Ukrainian identity as quaint and diminutive, distorting Ukrainian culture for the entertainment of Russian colonizers. Though the Russian empire suppressed Ukrainian language and culture through actions such as the 1804 ban on the teaching of Ukrainian in schools, Gogol's use of the language appealed to Russian readers in the metropole due to its mocking register and their desire to claim Ukrainian culture as their own Russian roots.[31] Unlike Gogol, Ukrainian poet and political writer Shevchenko sought to create distinctly Ukrainian literature and thus establish Ukrainians as their own people with their own non-Russian language, though he was disparaged by critics for his allegiance to his Ukrainian culture.[32]

In addition to his exploitation of Ukrainian identity for the entertainment purposes in his writing, such as in the epigraphs of his father's plays, Gogol also intentionally co-opted his heritage to capitalize on Ukraine being "in fashion" his "Cossack-inspired" hairstyle, the *khokhol*. According to his classmates, he did not wear this hairstyle before or after the success of Evenings – as the popularity of the book faded, he traded out the Ukrainian cut for "his trademark Shakespearean bob."[33] According to Koropeckyj and Romanchuk, Gogol's khokhol functioned less as a symbol of pride in his heritage and more as a Ukrainian correlative to "blackface minstrels," through the khokhol, Gogol sought to emphasize his exotic status as a Ukrainian in a way similar to the emphasis placed on blackness and anti-black stereotypes by African American performers in minstrel shows.[34] Some of Gogol's readers and critics even picked up on the performative and exaggerated aspects of Evenings. One Russian reviewer, quoted by Koropecky and Romanchuk, "[suspected] that its author was a Russian [...] and even a city dweller."[35] Ukrainian Andrii Tsarynnyi went so far as to claim that "its author was not of Ukraine" due to the author's "ignorance regarding things Ukrainian."[36]

Gogol's performative exhibitions of Ukrainian identities within his book and personal life ultimately aided the dominant, Russo-centric narrative of Ukrainian inferiority by only making space for aspects of its culture that perpetuated stereotypes, such as the trope of the uninformed peasant. While Gogol's Ukrainian interjections contextual-

31. Bojanowska, BURN 32.
32. George Luckyj, "Is Shevchenko a Symbol of Universal Freedom?," Comparative Literature Studies 1, no. 2 (1964): 145, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40245641.
33. Ilchuk, PHI 62.; Glaser, "GCL" 38.
34. Koropeckyj and Romanchuk, UiB 529.
35. Quoted in Koropecky and Romanchuk, UiB, n.6, 527.
36. Quoted in Koropecky and Romanchuk, UiB, n.15, 529.

ized Ukraine's cultural heritage and legitimized Ukrainians as a distinct people, these interjections were limited by the palate of the metropolitan Russian and the interests of the Russian empire. As such, epigraphs in Ukrainian only achieve literary value in Gogol's publications because, as Bojanowska states, it was the "translation into the Russian cultural code [that made] them relevant." Without a Russian framework, the "idiotisms of Ukraine" were seen as having "no value in themselves."[37] Gogol's use of Ukrainian and Ukrainian culture parallel the exaggeration of blackness in minstrel shows for the entertainment of white patrons who fundamentally did not respect African American culture nor identity.[38]

However, Gogol's writing and personal presentation markedly differs from blackface because his use of Ukrainian language and customs, though demeaning to Ukrainian identity, simultaneously subverted the imperial concept of Eastern Slavic unity by making legible the idea of a distinct Ukrainian identity. After all, one way to create identity is through the comparison of oneself to an "other", or as Bojanowski applies the idea, by defining "what Ukraine is by specifying what it is not" and the "Ukraine of *Evenings* is *not* Russia."[39] By refusing to write exclusively in Russian, and by representing and describing Ukrainian folk customs––even if such depictions were not completely accurate––Gogol refused to allow Russia to reduce his country to "Little Russia," a mere extension of the empire. Furthermore, as Bojanowska argues, the intentional use of the Ukrainian language was a response to "Russia's linguistic imperialism" and the idea that Russian was the "perfect and purest Slavic tongue," the language that should be spoken and written in.[40] By highlighting the linguistic and cultural distinctions between Ukraine and Russia, Gogol undermined Russian attempts to assimilate Ukrainian subjects through the suppression of "ethnic, class, gender, and other differences."[41]

CONCLUSION

Although *Evenings I* primarily amplifies Russo-centric imperial narratives regarding Ukrainian inferiority, it is nonetheless necessary to recognize Gogol's rebellion against the conflation of the Ukrainian and Russian nations. Bojanowska rightly notes that to do otherwise unfairly flattens *Evenings I* into a work with a singular message, a common pitfall in Gogol scholarship.[42] Furthermore, as Koropeckyj and Romanchuk mention, "[A] typical performance is played for many audiences."[43] Gogol's stereotypical and simplistic portrayals of Ukraine for the entertainment of Russians did not mean he could not or did not also appeal to Ukrainians and forward subtle anti-imperial arguments.

Throughout *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka, I*, though Gogol presents Ukraine and its peasants as endearing and interesting, his renderings are ultimately flat and simplistic. Instead, the text paints Ukraine as a foreign, whimsical land caricaturing its people in entertaining, and at times silly, ways. Though these caricatures stereotyped and diminished Ukrainian culture, contributing to an imperial project of subordinating Ukraine, the delineation of Ukraine as a distinct culture serves to subvert the unity of that very empire.

37. Bojanowska, BURN 80.
38. Koropecky and Romanchuk, UiB 533.
39. Bojanowska, BURN 53.
40. Bojanowska, BURN 56.
41. Ilchuk PHI 63.
42. Bojanowska, BURN 6.
43. Koropecky and Romanchuk, UiB 530.

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The Fall: Discussing Fate, Myth, and Womanhood in *Anna Karenina*

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Leo Tolstoy's portraits of women in *Anna Karenina* appear to be indivisible from his own predilections and moral alignment as the narrator of the story. Women in Tolstoy's novels often seem to exist in tropes of his own making, disconnected from the world outside his works. Consequently, Tolstoy's rendering of the ideal woman––often dubbed the "Tolstoyan woman" by contemporary audiences––is frequently dismissed as a formulaic, two-dimensional, stereotypical characterization of the female experience in nineteenth century Imperial Russia, a mere extension of Tolstoy's value system. The Tolstoyan woman thus becomes an amalgam of slippery and smooth personality traits, a woman thoroughly polished of her rough edges and callous behavior, rather than a varied individual independent from this archetype. The Tolstoyan woman adheres to the ideals of home life as dictated by the men around her, passing through girlhood and falling into the duties of marriage and motherhood with such a sudden transition that there is no tangible period of adolescence. She poses no objection to the social parameters foisted upon her, and resigns any desire for independence without protest, accepting her new role as accessory to her husband.

The exception to the rule which disproves Tolstoy's reliance on the trope of the Tolstoyan woman is Anna Karenina's character. Anna's character journey utterly shirks ideal womanhood. At first glance, Tolstoy appears to condemn Anna's adulterous depravity by writing her path through the novel as a warning to those who follow in her footsteps, vindicating those who align their moral compass with his own. From this angle, Anna's character journey represents the shadowy inverse of the uncorrupted feminine, standing in opposition to the morally upright society woman. Read superficially, Tolstoy penned the story of an immoral woman, punishing her for her wickedness through his authority as author and as the creator of the novel's omnipotent narrator. Reading *Anna Karenina* this way, the work of a man tormenting a woman for her debauchery, does both a disservice to Tolstoy's ability as a writer and reduces Anna to a puppet entirely devoid of agency. Pitting Anna against his framework of pure

womanhood as little more than a means of illustrating a binary opposition in which Anna counterbalances the ideal feminine compresses Anna's story into a digestible Tolstoyan parable–a warning, even–about what might happen if the womanly code of conduct goes disregarded. This uncharitable view of Anna, Tolstoy, and the novel itself proves questionable when Anna's narrative journey is examined in closer detail.

I suggest that Anna's plight, instead of merely acting as a juxtaposition to the model of the faithful, wholesome Tolstoyan woman, follows a different narrative formula. Her character strays from the ideal feminine, shirking the traits of the Tolstoyan woman. In doing so, Anna is swept up in the undertow of a much more forceful archetype: the mythical hero. Anna is chained to myth, and her relationship to the ideal feminine in *Anna Karenina* is colored by her trajectory away from the human and towards the fabled. How she is spoken about, how she views herself, and how Tolstoy as narrator frames her actions all point towards her place in the novel as not only not her own, but belonging to an epic tradition much larger than herself. In this light, Anna's fall from the dizzying heights of the aristocratic circles she frequents is a consequence of the inevitability of fate rather than a blunt criticism of her violations of social propriety. *Anna Karenina* is not purely Tolstoy's epic morality tale, railing against unfaithful women in favor of exalting those unsullied. Instead, Tolstoy leverages the rich narrative traditions of allegory and myth to comment on the implications of Anna's perpetual entrapment between social expectation and the imposing mythical shoes she must fill. She is placed by Tolstoy on a pedestal alongside mythic heroines and figures of biblical allegory. The only way down from such a great height is a leap and a tumble into free fall. Tolstoy's writing Anna into suicide is less an indictment of her dysfunctional approach to relationships than it is her failed attempt to escape the archetypes to which she is bound, those of the mythic woman rather than the ideal.

Tolstoy often draws on folkloric and heroic archetypes, deliberately linking Anna's character to motifs found both in epic myth and in folk stories. Anna's ultimate failure to align herself with the ideal feminine suggests that the path down which this ideal can be reached is one of restriction, rather than achievement. For the Tolstoyan woman, there is no room for misstep or error. Once a sin has been committed, there is no possibility of redemption. The fallen woman condemned to suffer at the hands of her own agency—especially if by exercising that agency she reveals truth–draws parallels to both Apuleius's story "Eros and Psyche" from The Golden Ass and the fall of Eve in the book of Genesis. Both of these characters, Eve and Psyche, are linked to Anna through the transgression of boundaries or rules in order to obtain knowledge about their relationships, to both their partners and to the wider world. Both these myths showcase portraits of women deliberately crossing the bridge from purity and ignorance into sin in attempts to understand or transcend the roles they occupy. Both Eve and Psyche suffer as a result of breaching their respective social confines. Anna is further trapped by this mythic association: the public exposure of her affair with Alexei Vronsky is a wholesale rejection of her place in society as a well-bred, married, aristocratic mother. Falling victim to scandal and social ostracization, Anna is tied to archetypal women such as Eve and

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Psyche, rather than Tolstoy's blueprint of docile womanhood. Her public rejection of the ideal feminine from her perch at the top of high society leaves Anna no choice but to forge her own path forward. Straying from the prescribed trail, Anna finds herself at the mercy of a much larger, crueler judge: parable.

The first suggestion of Anna's fate appears in a misattribution of Hans Christian Andersen's 1847 fairy tale "The Shadow," botched by society chatter and transmogrified into a nonexistent fable by the Brothers Grimm. In Andersen's original rendition, a man loses his shadow, is enslaved by it, ostracized from society for lacking a shadow at all, and then sentenced to execution by his shadowy double, who ultimately assumes the man's social role. The double then courts and marries a princess in a neighboring kingdom. The contents of "The Shadow" appear in a conversation between Anna's friends, who slander Anna and Alexei Karenin behind their backs. Through this gossip, we catch a glimpse of Anna's unsavory fairy tale fate:

'Anna's changed very much since her trip to Moscow. There's something strange about her,' said a friend of hers.

'The main change is that she's brought a shadow with her–Alexei Vronsky,' said the ambassador's wife.

'What of it? Grimm has a fable–a man without a shadow, a man deprived of a shadow. And it's his punishment for something. I could never understand where the punishment lay. But it must be unpleasant for a woman to be without a shadow.'

'Yes, but women with a shadow generally end badly,' said Anna's friend.[1]

The tale is reconstituted poorly and, despite the informality of gossipy conversation, the retelling assumes an ominous tone. The rendering shifts a rather innocuous fairy tale into the genre of parable and fable, a genre governed by the dictates of morality. Anna's social predicament is made mysterious and parabolic through her connection to the tale.[2] Furthermore, murder present in the original Andersen story is absent in conversation, turning a fairytale warning against losing one's shadow into a punishment for an unknown crime. Anna is shamelessly gawked at and gossiped about, and the gossip transforms her relationship to Vronsky from an objective account into a muddled folk aphorism. The reader is unable to do anything but join the ranks of the onlookers and partake in the spectacle, a morality play in which a woman is doggedly pursued by her nefarious shadow. It is important to note that in order to cast a shadow at all, one must first step into the light. Anna's shadow is a direct consequence of this step—she is ridiculed for leaving the safety of the shadows and casting one instead. The purpose of connecting Anna's plight with that of the protagonist in "The Shadow" is twofold. Firstly, there is an ominous flavor to the gossip. The criticism Anna receives for casting a "shadow" implies that it is a violation of social decorum for a woman to step far enough into the light to cast one. Though she exercises personal agency by stepping into the spotlight of scrutiny, Anna is relegated to following fables and is subsequently

1. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Penguin Group, 2002), 135.
2. The word in the Russian text is басня (fable, parable) rather than сказка (story, folk tale, fairy tale), which would be a better fit if the story was correctly attributed to Andersen. The Russian text of *Anna Karenina* reads: "У Гримма есть басня…" This comports with the idea that a half-remembered, misattributed story exists somehow outside of the text. Because of this it is more of a morality lesson or judgment to be applied to Anna and Vronsky than it is a physical, referenceable document with a concrete message. The gossip becomes a folk tale instead of a story not through its adherence to parabolic narrative conventions, but instead because it transcends the physical text in favor of intertextual reference.

barred from participating in her own story. She loses narrative agency because her image is warped by gossip mongers offering unsolicited commentary, and because the nature of the story itself is symbolic of her ultimate fate. Tolstoy concocts a mushy, malleable fable and applies it in a paste to Anna. Though it is rife with corrupted details and nebulous harbingers of bad things to come, the foreshadowing of Anna's unsavory fate remains clear. Secondly, the tale casts Anna and Vronsky into the roles of shadowless man and shadow, respectively. Vronsky acts as Anna's shadow, representing her venture into the socially unacceptable. This descent into the taboo is only appropriate to discuss—even behind Anna's back—in a roundabout way, in the context of fairy tales. Vronsky looms over her like a shadow; Anna's condemnation for having such a shadow suggests that her inability to halt or alter the course of her life is in part because she is already cast by those around her into the role of the irredeemable. Vronsky is distorted by society chatter as well––he is not the shadow man who kills her, as would be the case if the plot of the Andersen tale was accurately mirrored in the novel. Instead, he is repackaged as a worrying symptom of Anna's violations of the social order.

The motif of being spurned for stepping into the light continues through Anna's connection to Genesis and Eve's fall from Eden, this time in the form of "spiritual nakedness" as Anna realizes the gravity of her affair with Vronsky and is overwhelmed by shame:

"Looking at him, she physically felt her humiliation and could say nothing more. And he felt what a murderer must feel when he looks at the body he has deprived of life. This body deprived of life was their love, the first period of their love. There was something horrible in his recollections of what had been paid for with this terrible price of shame. Shame at her spiritual nakedness weighed on her and communicated itself to him. But, despite all the murderer's horror before the murdered body, he had to cut this body into pieces and hide it, he had to make use of what the murderer had gained by his murder."[3]

The notion of spiritual nudity and the bisection of Anna and Vronsky's relationship into a concrete period of ignorance and post-transgression governed by overwhelming shame is a blatant reference to Genesis 3:7: "[...] then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves." If we intertwine their paths, Eve's culpability in original sin implicates Anna as the primary instigator of her downfall–and she has taken Vronsky, the Adam figure, down with her as an accomplice.[4] The tandem fall appears both in Genesis and in the aftermath of Anna's shame. In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy frames their shame as a joint burden: "She held his hand and did not move. [...] Yes, and this one hand, which will always be mine, is the hand of my accomplice."[5] The same is true of Genesis in the idea that there must necessarily be an exile from Eden when man attempts to wield the power of knowledge like God:

"See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever– therefore the Lord God send him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken." [6]

3. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 149.
4. Genesis 3:6, New Oxford Annotated Bible.
5. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 150.
6. Genesis 3:22-23, New Oxford Annotated Bible.

Anna and Vronsky deliberately disregard social pressures and continue their affair even after exposure and realization, each neglecting to truly understand or know each other for fear of destroying the curated images of one another to which they cling so dearly. They try, even after realization, to shroud their spiritual nakedness and return to a time before awareness. Vronsky and Anna's relationship is thus defined by Anna's attempt to climb back over the garden wall, into Eden, back into shadow––even after light has already flooded in. It should also be noted that Eve's crossing from the unknown into the known is a necessary component of the story. When viewed through this lens, Anna's fall into self-awareness and mortification is necessary for the themes of her narrative. The gates to ideal womanhood have closed; in the same way that Vronsky looks at the bloodied corpse of their once perfect, passionate, ignorant love, in the same way that Adam and Eve eventually generate the rest of humanity after their exile from Eden, Anna must now decide how to proceed after her fall. Though Eve's womanhood is defined by violation, without transgression, the biblical human story would dissolve.

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Tolstoy gives Anna some awareness of the polarity between her temptation to transgress the social order and the urge to retreat back into the comfortable shadows of polite society at the very end of her role in the novel: "[...]reason was given to us in order to rid ourselves of it. So I must rid myself of it. Why not put out the candle, if there's nothing more to look at, if it's vile to look at it all?"[7] Anna's final thoughts as the train strikes her center on the acute pain of knowledge: "[...] the candle by the light of which she had been reading that book filled with anxieties, deceptions, grief and evil, flared up brighter than ever, lit up for her all that had once been in darkness, sputtered, grew dim, and went out for ever."[8] The twin motifs of illumination and extinguishment, alongside the notion that lighting the way will only ever reveal the treacherous and miserable path ahead, provides two possible interpretations: first, that it is better not to seek knowledge at all and remain in the comfort of darkness, or, second, that the light cast upon knowledge is an inevitability, and that knowledge must be gleaned at the expense of the self. Anna's mythic journey through the novel and her trajectory away from docile womanhood suggest that she follows the latter path, transforming her into something larger than herself.

This interpretation is corroborated by the introduction of "Eros and Psyche." Psyche's story is narratively and thematically similar to Anna's: Psyche is wooed by Eros, whose identity remains a secret to her––their affair operates outside the bounds of social propriety so as to be kept hidden from his mother, Venus. Psyche, like Anna, bears an illegitimate daughter with a romantic and mysterious male figure. Additionally, Psyche, like Anna, is punished by her mother-in-law for violating the terms of her relationship with Eros.[9,10] All of these

7. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 766.
8. Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, 768
9. Apuleius, "Eros and Psyche," in *The Golden Ass*, trans. by Sarah Ruden (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 160.
10. Psyche's punishment entails sorting a pile of grain piece by piece in a single afternoon. She enlists the help of ants (a fairy tale motif which occurs in other stories such as "Cinderella"), but not without first lamenting the cruelty and injustice of the predicament she caused by betraying Eros.

mythic parallels cast Anna as a variation of an archetype established by Psyche, but the specific moment of Psyche's transgression against Eros bears striking and deliberate resemblance to the image of Anna holding a candle over Vronsky's sleeping body in one of her final scenes in the novel. In Psyche's case, her quest to reveal her lover's identity, using the light of knowledge to examine Love, is thwarted by her clumsiness––oil drips from her lamp and burns Eros, causing him to wake and realize that Psyche has betrayed him. Psyche and Eros eventually make amends, and their happy ending as an Olympian couple is facilitated by Psyche's violation of trust: her duplicity is revealed, she is punished for it, but she is redeemed. Psyche eventually seizes what she pursues– she is initially spurned and punished for trying, but she is ultimately granted knowledge of Eros. She is allowed to know, tame, and live amongst Love. In the world of *Anna Karenina*, however, though Anna too seeks to satiate her hunger for knowledge, it only leads her into insecurity and jealousy:

"He was in the study fast asleep. She went over to him and, lighting his face from above, looked at him for a long time. Now, when he was asleep, she loved him so much that, looking at him, she could not keep back tears of tenderness; but she knew that if he woke up he would give her a cold look, conscious of his own rightness, and that before talking to him of her love, she would have to prove to him how guilty he was before her. She went back to her room without waking him up […]"[11]

Anna does not transgress her as explicitly as Psyche does in Apuleius' tale, and the reason for this is that Anna, despite her connection to Psyche, is disallowed from participating in Psyche's reward: love. She is trapped in the limbo of a lack of being caught and judged by Vronsky, unable to repent for knowledge she unrelentingly pursues because no one is there to judge and sentence her. Anna is condemned to an inward-turning spiral of anxiety and self-awareness without any promise of some ultimate reward for her pursuit of knowledge––whether that reward is love or even simply the knowledge itself. Anna's uncoupling from the Tolstoyan woman happens when she attempts to leverage her relationship with Vronsky as a means of escaping her constrained role in society. She indulges in the taboo of adultery, forcefully weaponizing and publicly indulging in the forbidden, sloppily forging her own path forward. However, she is never able to completely separate light from shadow in order to become the shadowless man. Anna's diversion from the archetype of the Tolstoyan woman is made possible because she careens headlong into myths of women punished for transcending or unable to escape the social framework in which they operate. Anna's first steps into the light of knowledge leave her casting ominous shadow: Vronsky. Her parallels to Genesis as the narrative gains pace illustrate that Anna is not meant to occupy the light associated with God and with Eden. She is cast out of Paradise alongside her shadow in embarrassing spiritual nudity. Finally, Anna weaponizes the light of knowledge to look upon Vronsky, illuminating her own shadow. Ultimately, she decides to extinguish the light of knowledge once and for all because it is she who has been so badly burned by stepping into it. Anna's fraught path through womanhood in *Anna Karenina* is anything but a condemnation of her transgressive actions. It is the story of a woman extricated from the fetters of social propriety, transcending one archetype and joining another. Instead of blaming Anna for her disobedience, *Anna Karenina* illustrates the necessity of her fall.

11. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina,* 752.

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