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Columbia University

the birch

A Journal of Eastern European and Eurasian Culture



Creative Writing | Literary Criticism | Culture & Affairs | Photography

Editor's Note

One recent lonely November afternoon, I found myself on YouTube, a dangerous corner of town if one has a to-do list long enough to fill a Biblical scroll. Indeed, the minutes began to drift away as I searched for episodes of reality TV shows and clips of Tom Cruise dancing on B.E.T. However, I knew that the only thing to cure my doldrums would be Dima Bilan—the mulleted, acrobatic, possibly cocaine-addicted, and thus rarely boring, Russian pop star. After thirty minutes of re-watching videos I had seen many times over, it began to occur to me that there was something to Dima besides the cute smile, bad dancing, and drum-machine beats.

Celebrity in Russia is interesting, much more so than in America. To be famous in Russia, you need charisma, the kind of charisma that will make you a legend, keep you singing until you're in your 80s and can barely stand. It is not enough to be beautiful, rich or scantily clad. That may buy you a few days in the spotlight, but not a lifetime. A celebrity in Russia must fascinate.

It is the ability to command that kind of fascination that makes *The Birch* a great publication. Putting together this issue, I found it nearly impossible to look past the cover photograph without staring, to read our creative pieces without thinking, our criticisms without wondering and our cultural pieces without debating. I look forward to the upcoming lonely afternoon when it will be my replacement for YouTube surfing.

- Ester Murdukhayeva

the birch

A NATIONAL, STUDENT-RUN UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL

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Cover photograph by Elina Galperin

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Nathan Benaich



Hannah Gould

Untitled
Неназванная

MARIA RAISKAYA
HERZEN UNIVERSITY
ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA

Я сегодня приехала с дачи.
А на даче, скажу, все, как прежде.
Туда ехала я на удачу,
Чтоб вернуться к последней надежде.
Дом стоит. Обветшал.
Все, как в детстве.
Как бы мода кругом ни менялась,
Есть надежное, верное средство,
Чтобы жизнь до конца не сломалась.
Вновь приехать сюда, в сень деревьев,
Босиком по земле пробежаться.
Горсть малины сорвать переспелой
И, в былое вернувшись, остаться.
Вспомнить все, что здесь было когда - то,
Вспомнить все,
Вспомнить всех, кто был рядом.
А на сердце печально-отрадно.
Не боясь, не отравишься ядом.
На скамеечке старой, истлевшей
Посидеть и о жизни подумать.
Пусть банально звучит:
В жизни грешной не исправить ошибок, не думай.
Мне природа прожить помогает,
В час отчаянья влить в себя силу
От шумих городских и развалин
Отпустите в Родную Россию!

От шумих городских и развалин
Отпустите в Родную Россию!

Маме посвящается

Как хорошо упасть в траву!
Среди бегущих вдаль небес
Узреть песчаную косу
И плес, и синий, старый лес.
Услышать звон колоколов,
Увидеть в небе имена...
Шуршаньем крылышек стрекоз
Вдруг пробудиться ото сна.

Русь тихая

Русь тихая и печальная
С церквями, в пучке куполов,
Прозябшая, серо – хрустальная,
Спит тихо, не видя снов.
Грустная, туманная,
Осенняя и голая,
И в отдаленье гордая
Стоит бело – колокольняя.
Избы, прогнившие, косятся
С печальной ухмылкой, завидуя,
Что им не достать до истины,
Хотя небо серо – низкое.
Бабы на крест карабкаются:
«Боженька, помилуй!

У нас ведь дети малые
Нам нечем кормить их!»
Стоят березы голые,
Прогнутые, беззащитные,
Как чистые люди новые
Стоят за свою Россию!
Поля – пожелтевшие странники;
Блестит, покосившись, купол,
Звезды одурманенные
На храмах синих проступят.
Венчались с тобой, любимый мой,
В этой церквушке старой,
И нам Росиия грустная
Хоть раз с улыбкой предстала.



Alina Kazanova

Untitled

ELANA SEPLOW
BARNARD COLLEGE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Russia,
Somewhere between now and the Neva
I am waiting for you
to slice between my shoulders with your placid gaze
your gasmasks and hydrangeas because,

Russia,
you have dislocated
me

to the point where
I do not peel back
when the dogs
run wildly over the pavement of my bloody street
and the scaffolding of my wrists
four at a time
and unconcerned.

Russia,
I am still waiting for you
stunned and sleepy
wrapped in your floral wallpaper
and soviet beige
waiting for you to rush up again
callous and capitalist
and make me pause in the cathedral

and your sun, Russia—

—your sun is unbearable.

Tired of reflecting off the Hermitage,
I am diluted by a watery stare elsewhere
and the alcoholic absurdism of your men
sitting spidered and legless in your streets
shirts open over clear bodies
in the white summer heat;

RUSSIA,
I am blinking in your unblinking sight
shedding my seams to see you.



Hannah Gould

Shashlyk in Bryansk

ALEXIOS SHAW
COLUMBIA COLLEGE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

"Are you getting bored, spending so much time in Moscow doing nothing?"

"A little, but I'm leaving soon, so it's not too bad."

"Listen, my brother runs a window factory in Bryansk. Do you know where Bryansk is? You could go spend some time there with him – he's driving there on Thursday."

I wasn't sure whether this Armenian named Aharon was serious. We had only been acquainted that morning at an Armenian church service. His tone was playful, ambiguous.

Two days later, at about four o'clock, already well into the morning, I was being driven to Bryansk, an industrial Russian city, a gem of Soviet urban planning located halfway between Moscow and Kiev that would only allure the occasional, deluded, Slavosearching tourist who's realized that Moscow is New York in Cyrillic, and Petersburg is a frosted wedding cake.

We did not pass through the city itself on our way to the window factory, where after a silent car ride we arrived for the start of the workday. Artak, Aharon's brother, slept the whole ride, and was evidently not as interested in me as his brother had been. He let me follow him on his managerial tour of the grounds nevertheless.

He shook hands, with varying degrees of friendliness, with everyone he came upon. He wore a sports jacket, this shoulder-swung businessman. He possessed sharp confidence – it was clear he wouldn't be pampering me. We climbed onto strange platforms, passed through various rooms, looked at malfunctioning machinery. I was introduced to a litany of managers, workers, supervisors, and consultants, few of whom did more than mumble a name to me before ignoring me entirely.

In the two vast, main caves of the factory, which we passed through hurriedly in a group, my only reception was a suspicious sidelong glance or two. We came into a bustling antechamber, where two barrel-bellied men began discussing malfunctioning machinery with Artak. They spoke in strange accents.

The first friendliness I received came from a tiny older man who pulled me aside from the group. He started complaining about the foreigners. "They've been here two weeks to install the new equipment and haven't done anyting! Idiots!"

"What are they? Kazakh? Tajik?"

"No! They're German!" He surprised me with his response. "We ordered German equipment and to get the insurance we had to pay the German company's employees to come install it themselves. We could do it better!"

He turned out to be an Armenian – which explained the un-Russian exuberance – in fact, the second-cousin of Artak. He had moved to Bryansk a couple months ago after losing his job in Yerevan. He had short, white hair, was built like a fortified insect, and had two furious blue eyes revolving around fiercely diametric sockets. His jaw hung low all the time in a shifty grin exposing a cemetery of gold teeth.

Mutual affection was borne out of every word we spoke. He kept hugging me and laughing at my jokes, or perhaps at my poor Russian. A common enemy united us; when he learned I was of Greek origin, his approval soared yet higher, and I pleased him by expressing my high opinion of the Armenian nation and listening to a series of anti-Turkish jokes. We'd been chatting for twenty minutes or so when he informed Artak that he'd take me around the rest of the factory. His name was Artem.

He brought me outside, where we began talking to a pretty young Russian woman whose job involved logistics. Artem did not refrain from teasing either of us. I remained polite and asked Natasha various questions about herself, the factory and Bryansk.

"Bryansk," she told me, "is called by Russians the *gorod partiz i slava*."

The city of parties and glory. I laughed vociferously at her joke, and replied, "Oh, so do the teenagers have parties in the forest?"

"Yes," she replied, very seriously, "everyone parties in the forest, of course."

I learned that *Sex and the City* is very popular among young Russian women and, according to Natasha, influences them negatively. She had just gotten married two weeks ago, to another man who worked in the factory administration. She told me that very few Russians nowadays get married in churches – too expensive, too difficult to obtain a divorce afterwards. Conversation eventually lagged and she took her leave. Artem, by this point hanging off my shoulder and muttering into my ear dirty jokes I hardly understood, decided to give me his own tour of the factories.

The first warehouse, a factory in and of itself, produced the window profiles, around which the second warehouse built a variety of windows. The machinery that made the profiles I learned, could not be turned off, and so the profile factory had to be in operation around the clock. At the second warehouse, Artem left me with the factory manager, a quiet, sleepy-eyed man with a limp cigarette arest on his lip. He was enthusiastic and showed me the process of building the frames. It was all rather complicated yet frighteningly rational, and one or two men sat at each machine, working, working. Teams of men removed from trucks forty-foot long panes of glass, which were placed onto a conveyer built and quickly, quickly cut into smaller rectangles by a blade. Others punched the new window panes through the original slice of glass and sent them forward for further work. The remaining skeletons, fragile and huge, were thrown onto an immense and growing pile of broken glass in the middle of the warehouse floor. This heap towered over all the buzzing like a slumbering behemoth.

The manager, his back aslump, lazily explained the function of each machine. The workers, all far burlier than him or me, generally chose to ignore us. He led me out a side-exit, where we smoked a cigarette and tossed pebbles in the air. We talked about this and that, until he became fixed on the topic of what languages I spoke.

"So you speak Greek?"

"Yes." This was the seventh or eighth time he'd confirmed this doubt.

Then he paused. "And do you speak good English too?" He laughed shyly.

We returned inside. I was no longer sure whether to stay with him, and if not, where to go; he seemed to be thinking similarly. I meekly followed him about, making an effort to keep pace with him, but he continued to wander, quickly yet aimlessly. He paused to observe the window panes being cut; I stood a few yards from him, hesitantly; peeking at me from the corner of his eye, he continued, made an abrupt turn at the heap of glass, made a left, right, and disappeared.

I wandered to Artak's office and twiddled my thumbs in the corner while he played computer games. He eventually shooed me away and called his driver, named Yurii, to take me on a tour of the city.

Yurii turned out to be far friendlier than I'd first imagined, though perhaps on his boss's orders. We drove and drove until we reached the oldest of the four town centers (Bryansk has four, between which is forest, and around which are factories). It was far more beautiful than I'd anticipated, its architecture certainly predating Bolshevism. We drove into a large square, in the middle of which stood a great statute of Lenin. "In every Russian city," he said, "you know you're in the center when you see the statue of Lenin."

We drove by the universals of Soviet cities: the Lenin statue, the statue to the Great War, a beautiful church or two. We chatted about, as always, about this and that. In my morning anxiety, I had quickly judged the man as aggressive, inimical.

In Russia, I was often quick to criticize – and then be surprised by – people who did not display immediate symptoms of either American or Mediterranean friendliness (which are themselves very different).

We went to an amusement park which, he told me, forms a good deal of the city's evening life. Other than a few drunks, we were alone. We reached the ferris wheel but were told by its hung-over conductor that it would not start running until the evening. Yurii payed him a couple hundred roubles, and we hopped aboard for a ride with a modest view from the top. You can't help it – ferris wheels are romantic; Yurii and I chatted about his wife and children the whole way round.

Finally, he told me, we were going to the Museum of Parties and Glory. By now I was genuinely perplexed – this Soviet city was far more eccentric than I could have expected. It hadn't occurred to me that this was a language issue. When we arrived at an enormous war memorial in a huge field, I learned that Bryansk is the city of Partisan Glory, for its guerilla resistance against the Germans during the War. We wandered into the museum and watched a rustic lights-and-sounds show depicting the street warfare of the time.

We returned to the factory as the workday was ending. Artem approached and told me that he missed me, and led me to his office, where I met his office-mate, a jolly, Russian bear-of-a-man, whose gentle smile was always moving around his enormous head. He crossed his legs when he sat so I could see his shins. He made me a coffee and then began asking me questions.

Do you own a gun? No.

Do you like Bush? The bear offered his quasi-Hegelian view of Russian history: Russia has a very specific pattern of history: revolution, then a looong period of stability, and then revolution again. We had two revolutions in the last century, so now we want peace and quiet!

Do you have a car? I told him that I didn't know how to drive.

Are the roads better in America or in Russia? The bear asked this with a smile, but perhaps too much Russian in one day had worn me out. I must have mixed up *dorogi* (roads) with *dorogie* (dear ones) and complacently replied in vague, implied favor of Russia. Considering the beloved Gogolian saying that Russia has two afflictions, *dorogi* (roads) and *dyraki* (assholes), this produced a big hoo-ha among my audience. I tried to understand or to correct, but conversation progressed to other topics. In honor of our automotive conversation, the Russian bear gave me as a souvenir a road map of the Bryansk district. "This way, you'll always remember Bryansk's roads!"

Outside a couple of men had prepared a *shashlyik* – Russian barbecue – and set a long table with ten or twelve seats. The sun was setting on a long, long day. The *shashlik* was being held for Artak and whoever else didn't live permanently in Bryansk. Artem and the jolly bear and I sat down at one end, next to a couple of the East Germans. As everyone was sitting down and the divine anticipation of cheap red meat began to rumble in our veins, a luxury SUV pulled into the driveway. A third Armenian brother, apparent co-owner of the factory, dressed in a suit and a colossal watch, got out and sat down in the seat across from me. He looked like a walrus.

We began eating.

There was salad, meat, meat, bread, cognac, vodka, and an Armenian liquor that Artem kept pouring me. All night he refilled my plate with his left hand, keeping his right arm embraced around my shoulder or on my thigh. Russian, German, Armenian all were spoken. There were many toasts, as was to be expected. The conversation eventually turned towards me. Someone asked, "What do you study in New York?"

"Literature," I answered, embarrassed.

"So do you want to be a writer or a poet?" There was a big laugh.

"None of you talk!" said Artak, "This guy's smarter than all of us! He's studying at Columbia University! He's going to be a great writer or journalist."

"You know what he said?" announced the Russian bear in a rush of joy. "He said that the roads are better here than in America!"

I could not have predicted the reaction this would cause – the table imploded from the cataclyscmic excitement of its sitters. I feebly accepted an interrogative torrent as to the specifics of my judgment.

"Tell me," asked Artem, "are you going to come visit me in Yerevan this Christmas? I'm going home for Christmas!"

"I'd love to go to Armenia!" I answered. I had learned by this point that drunken invitations to faraway places are not uncommon in Russia. But Artem was adamant.

"Come! You are going to come visit me for Christmas, I am serious," he said. He put more meat on my plate. "Come on, eat."

We feasted. Artem taught me the presumably Armenian method of eating *shashlik* with flat bread. My body and my spirit were merging into a delicate meat-vodka soup.

Artak's cousin eventually warmed up to ask me a question: "Why is your Russian so bad?" But Artem came to my defense. He learned that I was Greek and quizzed me on the history of Greco-Armenian relations. He was angry that we had not come to their defense when the Ottomans invited them six centuries ago, and a shady historical argument began between the three of us. Artem kept teasing his cousin's eating habits; his evident disdain of the big walrus put us ever more in alliance.

I tried to make conversation with the taciturn East German on my left. I asked him if he liked Bryansk, and he told me that he didn't like the living conditions. I remembered Natasha telling me that one of the Germans had been giving her trouble, requesting a room change at his hotel every night.

The lively chatter was put to an end by Artak's cousin, who began playing loud, dinky melodies on an ostentatious cell phone. The table was disgruntled. Several faces expressed disapproval of his manners. This provoked one of the Germans to remark that he hated all contemporary music, and a table-wide discussion of music ensued.

"Mozart, Bach, Beethoven," said the German, "I listen to nothing else. Gangster rap is very bad, very bad."

Artak started talking about a certain contemporary Russian band that, he said, played at concerts for forty minutes at a time without sheet music, and never used mics or any of that bullshit. The walrus, still playing tunes on his phone, offered the relativist view that all music is good depending on whether you like it. While the rest of the table continued the lively talk of music, I had to endure an aggressive interrogation he'd decided to wage about my knowledge of Greek pop. The night progressed and we drank more. One of the Russians who, until then, had only given me looks I had interpreted as unfriendly, staggered over to my seat and clinked glasses with me for a laugh.

The table was an optimistic and touching image of contemporary, cosmopolitan Russia, until it dispersed, and the crowd began its way home. I bid adieu to everyone except Artak and the driver, with whom I spent the night in Bryansk's biggest hotel. My farewell to Artem lasted several minutes. He must have been quite lonely living in Bryansk, away from his family and his country. He once more invited me to Armenia for Christmas and I began to feel nostalgic for a place I hadn't yet left, where I'd only spent a few hours. Yes, the human heart is strange and forlorn, especially in unknown places, physical and imaginative, where the fabric between worlds lies thin. Such sentimental feelings are all rather beautiful, but all rather the same. Still, it is always sad to say goodbye to something as beautiful as ephemeral friendship.

A couple of hours after the night had ended, the morning began. We left our hotel and returned to Moscow. I was dropped off in front of Kievskii train station, after a long day in Bryansk.



Elina Galperin

The Chair

JAROD KINTZ
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

I'm writing to you, who made the archaic wooden chair
look like a throne while you sat on it.

Amidst your absence, I choose to sit on the floor,
which is dusty as a dry Kansas day.

I am stoic as a statue of Buddha,
not wanting to bother the old wooden chair,

which has been silent now for months.
In this sunlit moment I think of you.

I can still picture you sitting there--
your forehead wrinkled like an un-ironed shirt,

the light splashed on your face,
like holy water from St. Joseph's.

The chair, with rounded curves
like those of a *matryoshka* doll,

seems as mellow as a monk in prayer.
The breeze blows from beyond the curtains,

as if your spirit has come back to rest.
Now a cloud passes overhead,

and I hush, waiting to hear what rests
so heavily on the chair's lumbering mind.

Do not interrupt, even if the wind offers to carry
your raspy voice like a wispy cloud.

Solidarność

VERONICA SZCZYGIEL
BARNARD COLLEGE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

not so long ago
amid muggy sweat and blazing sun
with frozen coffee, my eyes
sipped the woven chatter, thick as a tapestry.

under the red red tower, an accordion
taught the old man how to play,
sang the lyrics of yesteryears,
of times i could and would not know
when the paint of the surrounding abodes
was gray, not yellow,
graffitied and tattered and torn.
where winding cobbles,
now bursting with feet and hooves,
once shrieked silently,
a quiet echo of another era.

there it is:
the melody knows it well,
how the citizens with holes in their pockets,
dust on their shoulders, grim on their faces,
walk from store to store, finding nothing
but shelves of vinegar and loaves of stale bread.

and the prayers that cannot be said
are recited in their shadowed minds,
God, please God, where is the tipping point,
when will *we* decide what language to learn,
when can *we* sneak out of houses at dark,
live in midnight, play with phantoms,
frolic in moon beams?

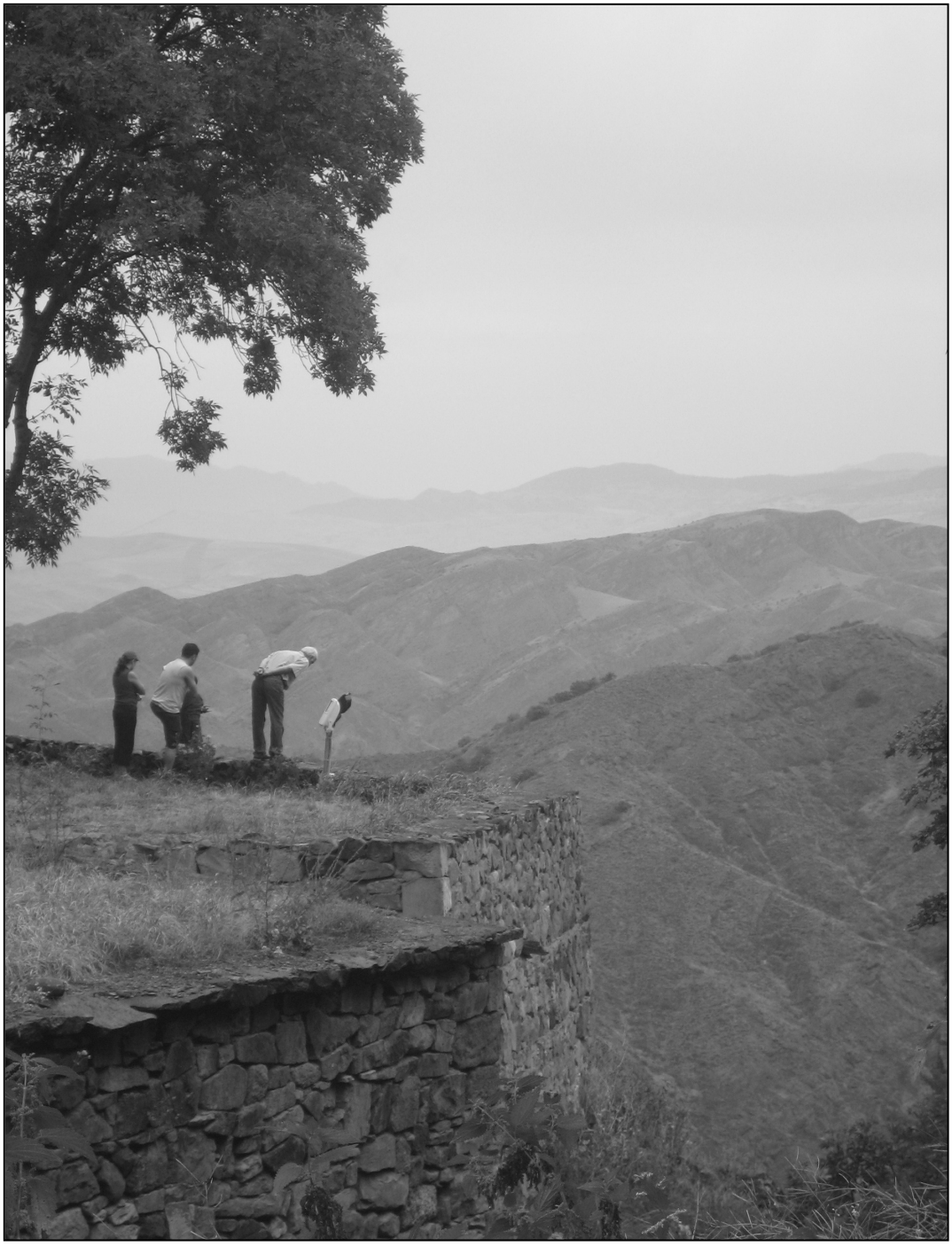
you may have us under your hairy fist now, joe,
but for how long?
one day we will rise anew like a flaming phoenix,
and then you'll never lock us in a cage again.

then, dear joe, the churches will ring
without fear, the school children will play outside,
and freedom will kiss us on our foreheads.

the song of solidarity fluttered through the air,
as I watched the old man with his toothless smile
play the accordion like an extra limb.

all around us stopped and heard,
the passersby looked up from their cameras,
the pigeons glanced down from their nests,
and the horses pulling carriages gave
a hearty neigh.

play on, old man, the sky is clear
and the world you once knew
is a typed page in my book.



Elina Galperin

A Space Between the Door and Frame

RACHEL TRAGER
COLUMBIA COLLEGE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

It is not a big request. I only ask for the inch of space between the door and the frame. Some say that in the old country, it prevented people from having private lives. But is this so wrong? Private lives are only filled with complications and heartache. And with open doors, the daytime smell of sour cream melting into thick red borscht drifted from home to home, comfortably melding into neighbors' family hours. There was a sense of togetherness then.

I try to remember the specific ingredients in this bowl that still paint the flaky lines on my hands orange and pink. No, not orange, I realize, because Samechka is allergic to carrots. Instead, it is the milky brown of month-old beef. The beef was tougher than expected. Yesterday, I stood on my legs at the kitchen counter for longer than usual, pulling apart great chunks of cow meat, skinning its bones with my teeth, sucking up its last thick threads. It reminded me of the pacifier our neighbors bought for my lapachka, my little Anna, promising that it would stop her tears, the quaking that possessed her body between nightmares. I smiled of course, as I would when accepting a cracking chocolate babka, the kind my mother used to bring her neighbors back in Russia. I didn't really know what to say. It was hard to understand a culture that manufactured plugs for Anna. But, then I learned that in America, doors stay shut because behind them, people do terrible things that must always remain hidden.

I place the soup in front of Sam. Rings of heat ease out from its red translucence, like the slow dance of a serpent, guided by his master's music.

Sam plunges black bread into the murky liquid and brings it to his mouth, red beads forming on his lips, his teeth, like red venom.

"Four legs dangling over the bed," I remember aloud, looking away. I try to block out the image of the two man legs next to the two girl legs and instead remember when I first met him while sitting on the park bench. He was Sam the American, the nice man who handed me the cucumbers I had dropped along the way and politely told me my white slip was showing.

It's not easy to get a good man in this country.

But Anna seems to have no problem. She closes her door and brushes her skinny hairless legs against fat sausage ones. She has no muscles. She never stood on her feet washing dishes all day, all night.

An image again flashes into my head. Skinny legs wrapped against the stomach of a fat man.

Anna screams from her room, slamming the door shut again. "Oh Samechka, Shimki, what does she know of closed doors? What do you know?" I ask. His face is free of creases, his eyes blank. He is like a newborn sucking a bottle. I lay my palm on his smooth hand. He says he used to be a plumber but then came into money when his grandfather died. When he swallows, his Adam's apple seems to catapult forward and then latch onto its hook again. He is a big man. He eats well, as though his family left Russia a hundred years ago, and he's been famished ever since.

Anna skitters into the room, her bony arms flailing before her, her too-short shorts baring her twiggy thighs, her fallen tank top strap revealing the birthmark on her collarbone, the one I think will one day be cancerous.

"No one cares about the doors of your past. The doors in this country are meant to stay closed," she shouts, her pearly baby teeth

The whole thing is ridiculous because they grew in me. She grew in me. Yet, even when she points her finger into my face, it does not feel like that finger is the center of the scene. Though the daughter admonishing the mother is a complete betrayal of old-world values, it is not what most disturbs me.

The soup drips from Sam's chin. He breathes heavily, his eyes plastered on Anna's erect finger.

Then I am ladling Anna soup and she is sitting next to Sam, and her shiny long legs are grazing the space where the threads of his machine-made jeans meet.

The refrigerator is cold, and the borscht is colder, but the air in the room is thick and my throat is tight, and it is getting so unbearably hot. It is like the night when they forced down our door and said, We bugged your rooms, so we know everything you're doing, but it was only a cruel show because they knew anyway. It was their job to know it all.

Black fuzz begins to block my vision like the public television channels in the middle of the night.

Anna's toe drifts against Sam's thigh. The borscht sloshes over the bowl's edge. I will scream.



Nathan Benaich

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Gatsby All in Red

The Critical Reception of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Work in the Soviet Union

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The documentation of the critical reception of F. Scott Fitzgerald in the former Soviet Union and present day Russia is considerably slim. Initially, this seems surprising given the overwhelming amount of socialist ideas promulgated by some of some of Fitzgerald's characters. However, Fitzgerald's novels were not published in the Soviet Union until decades after his death. His novel *The Great Gatsby* first appeared in 1965 and *Tender is the Night* in 1971. Some critics, however, have tried to explain the scant material on Fitzgerald in the Soviet Union by pointing to the depictions of upper-class life and decadence in Fitzgerald's work. Deming Brown, author of *Soviet Attitudes Towards American Writing,* argues that Fitzgerald was "carelessly classified as a "bourgeois aesthete" unworthy of Soviet attention. However, many Soviet critics viewed Fitzgerald's work in a positive light, arguing that his work was antagonistic towards American capitalism and bourgeois ideals.

A translation of the short story *May Day* was published in 1958 in *Amerikanskaya Novella,* the foremost Soviet journal of criticism on American literature. Soviet critics considered *May Day* to be the best example of Fitzgerald's critical view of American capitalist society. "May Day" (May 1st) was one of the most widely-celebrated holidays in the Soviet Union, named for the "May Day Riots" of 1919, when violent demonstrations against unionist, socialist, and anarchist tradesmen broke out in Cleveland, Ohio. Fitzgerald's choice of May Day as the setting was viewed by Soviet critics as indicative of the writer's commitment to capitalist critique. This view was shared by well-known Russian critic, Andrey Gorbunov, who in 1974 published a book of Fitzgerald criticism: *The Novels of F Scott Fitzgerald.* In it, Gorbunov celebrates Fitzgerald's obvious ambivalence about wealth in society.

1977 saw the publication of *The Last Tycoon* in both *Inostrannaya Literatura* and *Hudozhestvennaya Literatura's* collection, *Francis Scott Fitzgerald: Selected Works in Three Volumes*. Literary critic M. Landor writes that *The Last Tycoon* "allows one to feel the ease and mobility of the life of those who do not have to worry about their daily bread – and to feel the emptiness of this sweet life paid for by other peoples misery and work." Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby* cements this theme, with his astute summary of the behavior of the upper classes who "retreat into wealth and let other people clean up their messes."

Meanwhile, a fair deal of negative criticism was directed at Fitzgerald, much of which consisted of stereotypical anti-capitalist, anti-materialist fanfare. Literary critic Alexei Zverev

argues that Fitzgerald's heroes and plots only occupy a world of wealth and property and are completely closed-off from the harsh realities of life within capitalist society. However, this is a somewhat unfair criticism to make of a Realist author like Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald simply placed his characters in the broad stream of historical events so that their fates are tied with that of society as a whole. Also, a close reading of the texts themselves illuminates the mistakes in Zverev's theory. In *This Side of Paradise,* Amory Blaine's failure to thrive could be read as indicative of the destructive power of the "ruling classes" which Amory was brought up to imitate.

Russian literary critic Yasen Zasursky echoes this idea, stressing that Fitzgerald's writing was directly influenced by Marxist thought, an influence he saw in both *May Day* and *A Diamond as Big as the Ritz.* The critic Kovalev takes a more delicate approach, suggesting that that hero of *Tender is the Night* is "a born idealist, as a man acquainted with the communist critique of capital."

Thus it is apparent that the critical reception of Fitzgerald's work in the Soviet Union was overwhelmingly influenced by the Soviet image of American capitalist society during the Cold War period. Soviet critics identify Fitzgerald's plots as being driven by the struggle to function within an increasingly capitalist society. Fitzgerald's biography was subject to similar politically-driven interpretation. Fitzgerald's professional, and eventually personal downfall was often pointed to as yet another indicator of the ills of capitalist society.



Veronica Szczygiel

BOOK REVIEW

Re-Orienting Orientalism

Kalpani Sahni's *Crucifying the Orient: Colonization of the Caucasus and Central Asia*

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It has been thirty years since Edward Said's groundbreaking work, *Orientalism*, sent shockwaves through the world of cultural criticism, implicating the arts in Europe's Imperial domination of the Middle East. In the introduction, Said reminds the reader that his study is limited to Anglo-French-American Orientalism and that similar studies from the perspective of other European powers still need to be written. In *Crucifying the Orient: Colonization of the Caucasus and Central Asia*, Kalpani Sahni attempts to write the Russian chapter on Orientalism, cataloging over two-hundred years of Russian (and later-- Soviet) imaginings of "the Orient."

Sahni's interpretation of "Orientalism," however, wavers between a strict application of Said's definition of Orientalism and a loose interpretation that includes all ill will towards Asia under the umbrella of "Orientalism." Orientalism, as Said defined it, was the use of literature and the arts in creating a false vision of the Middle East in order to justify Imperialist exploitation. The second half of Sahni's book, which focuses on the Soviet period, makes hardly any mention of literature and focuses entirely on the Soviet Union's socio-economic policies towards its Central Asian republics and on Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Although these are very important topics that deserve attention, a reader looking for a Russian version of Said's classic will be disappointed by the absence of a cultural perspective.

The first half of Sahni's book, however, devotes a lot of time to literary imaginings of "the East," which in Russia of course also includes "the South"/Caucasus. Yet here, Sahni makes it clear that literary criticism is not her field. The only literary term she seems to know is "cliché." She projects the beliefs of the characters onto the author, labeling any writer whose work contains a character loyal to the tsar, to be in essence, pledging his or her own allegiance to the tsar. She repeatedly conflates the beliefs of the narrator and the different characters with those of the author, a mistake you would expect from an amateur literary critic, not a distinguished scholar.

If in the second half of the book, Sahni veers too far from Said's definition of Orientalism, in the first half she chains herself to it, trying much too hard to make Russia fit the Anglo-French-American model. For example, Sahni includes quotes from Russian philosopher Vissarion Belinsky on the "savagery" of the indigenous peoples of Australia, Africa, and South America. Sahni then argues that this proves that Belinsky thought Asians were barbaric and that the tzar's project of colonization would benefit them by "civilizing them." She does this again with Nikolai Dobrolyubov and to a lesser extent with Niko-

lai Cherneshevsky. Basically, Sahni thinks that in order for Russia to fit Said's model, she needs to show that Russian racism was nothing but a function of the desire for economic exploitation. Thus Even thought Belinsky and Cherneshevsky's statements are not directed towards Asia, Sahni argues as if they were, because Russia's Imperial Expansion affected Asians, not Africans or South Americans. Belinsky's statements show that while racism and more specifically, Orientalism might have originated as ways to condone Imperialism, they eventually began to take on other non-economic consequences. The only case where Sahni successfully argues that Russian Orientalism served Imperial Expansion is her chapter on the Caucasus. However, Susan Layton's *Conquest of the Caucasus Region From Pushkin to Tolstoy* is a much more erudite study of Russian Imperialism in the Caucasus.

For all of its faults, *Crucifying the Orient* does offer an impressive compendium of Russian Imperial declarations on Eastern expansion, quotes from famous Russians on the Far East and the Caucasus, and key information about Russia's relationship with the Middle East, Far East and Central Asia. Had it not positioned itself as a continuation of Said's study of Orientalism, it could have been just a well-informed resource for anyone studying Russia's relationship with its "East." Instead, it read like a collection of poorly organized factoids that were all vaguely related the concept of "Orientalism."



Elina Galperin

Pride and Punishment

Dostoevsky Indicts the Ego

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It is an age-old question whether a person's character and actions are a result of their environment or a result of their own choices. If someone commits a crime, is it their own fault or does the blame fall upon their parents, their financial situation, or the events surrounding the crime? Fyodor Dostoevsky addresses this question within his novel *Crime and Punishment.* He creates characters who commit crimes and search for the origin of responsibility. The characters thoroughly examine one justification after another and finally find that the guilt for a crime falls upon the individual. Dostoevsky also suggests through his characters that the unwillingness to admit fault often stems from the pride of the individual.

Crime and Punishment opens with the main character, Raskolnikov, considering murdering an old pawnbroker. Raskolnikov is young but sickly, handsome, intelligent, and above all proud. He is fixed on murdering the pawnbroker but has mixed motives for doing so. After going to visit her to plan the crime, he is filled with disgust for what he will do and goes into a tavern to drink. There he meets an old drunkard by the name of Marmeladov. Marmeladov looks like a retired official, but his appearance is unkempt from constant drinking. Unprompted, he sits next to Raskolnikov and launches into a long tale of his troubles. He has recently abandoned his job and his family in order to drink and tells Raskolnikov in full detail of his despicable actions. Marmeladov's monologue is presented as a mere aside, but in actuality his story explores issues also present in the main plot of *Crime and Punishment.* Both Raskolnikov and Marmeladov commit a type of crime in the novel, and are searching for where the ultimate responsibility for their actions falls. Marmeladov's attempt to blame his poor character and decisions on factors outside of his control parallels Raskolnikov's later attempt to blame his crime on his circumstances. Dostoevsky uses the results of both Marmeladov and Raskolnikov's searches to determine the validity of their justifications. He extends this conclusion to make a general point about responsibility for criminal action.

Throughout the novel, Raskolnikov considers and rejects various justifications for his crime. His original justification comes from a conversation he overhears about a month and a half before the murder. After just having left the pawnbrokers' apartment, he goes into a tavern and hears two students at the next table talking about killing the old pawnbroker. One of the students suggests, "Kill her and take her money, so that afterwards with its help you can devote yourself to the service of all mankind and the common cause." The conversation implies that murder would be justified if the spoils were distributed to the poor afterwards, so that the benefit to society would outweigh the iniquity of one murder. Later Raskolnikov receives a letter from his mother explaining

the situation at home. His sister is marrying for money and his mother and sister are living in poverty in order to send all possible money to him. The utilitarian idea of murdering the pawnbroker in order to rob her and distribute her money to the poor evolves into Raskolnikov's plan to use her money to save his sister from marriage to Luzhin and to save himself from poverty. Raskolnikov attempts to justify his crime by his and his family's unfortunate circumstances to escape acknowledging his criminal intent.

Before we learn the full details of the deed Raskolnikov is planning to perform, we encounter Marmeladov's monologue. Marmeladov degrades himself and wallows in his pitiful state, but he never directly takes responsibility for his drinking problem. He tells Raskolnikov, in reference to drinking, "Such is my trait, and I am a born brute!" Marmeladov does not say that he is responsible for drinking, but instead says that he is a "brute," "scoundrel," or "swine." He implies that he was born a scoundrel and that it is his nature to drink; he is a "victim of the environment." By saying this, he excuses himself from all accountability for his actions. Instead of the blame falling on his faculty for conscious decision, it falls on his "environment," or all the factors surrounding and involving him that are outside of his control. Thus, the responsibility never falls directly on him, but falls on his nature at birth or his impoverished circumstances. He makes these excuses with full knowledge that his actions are wrong. Marmeladov is a surprisingly intelligent and introspective character. He provides an accurate view of Katerina Ivanovna, his wife, recognizing that her fantasies are not at all based in reality and are fabricated in order to give her a feeling of happiness. He can think critically and can accurately analyze other characters, so it is probable that he fully understands the implications of his misdeeds, yet he continues to attribute his faults to the nature of his birth. Just as Raskolnikov later does, Marmeladov casts blame for his actions onto his circumstances.

Both Raskolnikov's and Marmeladov's circumstantial justifications ultimately collapse. Raskolnikov's circumstantial motivation for the crime falls through when he fails to steal the majority of the pawnbroker's money, and does not even use the small amount he manages to steal. When he confesses his crime, the judges are surprised to learn that "he not only did not remember in detail all the things he had actually carried off, but was even mistaken as to their number. Indeed, the circumstance that he had not once opened the purse and did not even know exactly how much money was in it appeared incredible." His inattention to the money shows that robbery was not his final motivation. He tells Sonya as much when she guesses that he killed Lizaveta and attempts to guess his motivations. Sonya says, "You were hungry! You… it was to help your mother?" And Raskolnikov answers, "No… I wasn't so hungry… I did want to help my mother, but… that's not quite right either." Raskolnikov's state of affairs was poor enough that it could have been a reason for the murder, but ultimately it was not.

Marmeladov's circumstantial justifications collapse as well, albeit not as clearly. When Marmeladov insists that he drinks because he is a scoundrel, the people in the tavern snigger and yawn. When Marmeladov proclaims, "I am a born brute!" the proprietor remarks, yawning, "That you are!" Marmeladov is very excited about his status as a "brute," even banging his fist on the table, but the proprietor simply agrees with him lazily. The yawn suggests that Marmeladov has told this story many times before and that the proprietor does not share Marmeladov's view that his baseness is a justification for his alcoholism. It is implied that Marmeladov's theory—that his inherent nature causes him to drink—is fabricated in order to justify himself and gain respect. Marmeladov claims that he drinks "that in drinking I may seek compassion and feeling. It is not joy that I seek, but sorrow only… I drink, for I wish doubly to suffer!" His unhealthy addiction to suffering causes, but does not force, him to drink. There are elements of truth to what Marmeladov says. It is true that he drinks in order to suffer, but he suffers in order to perpetuate his image as

a helpless lout. For instance, when he returns home and Katerina Ivanovna drags him around by his hair, he cries out that "it's not painful, it's a delight!" and even bumps his own head on the floor for good measure. Marmeladov accentuates his own contemptibility in order to make his claim that he drinks because it is his nature to do so more valid. The fact that he consciously aggravates his circumstances makes his claim that he is a victim of his circumstances invalid.

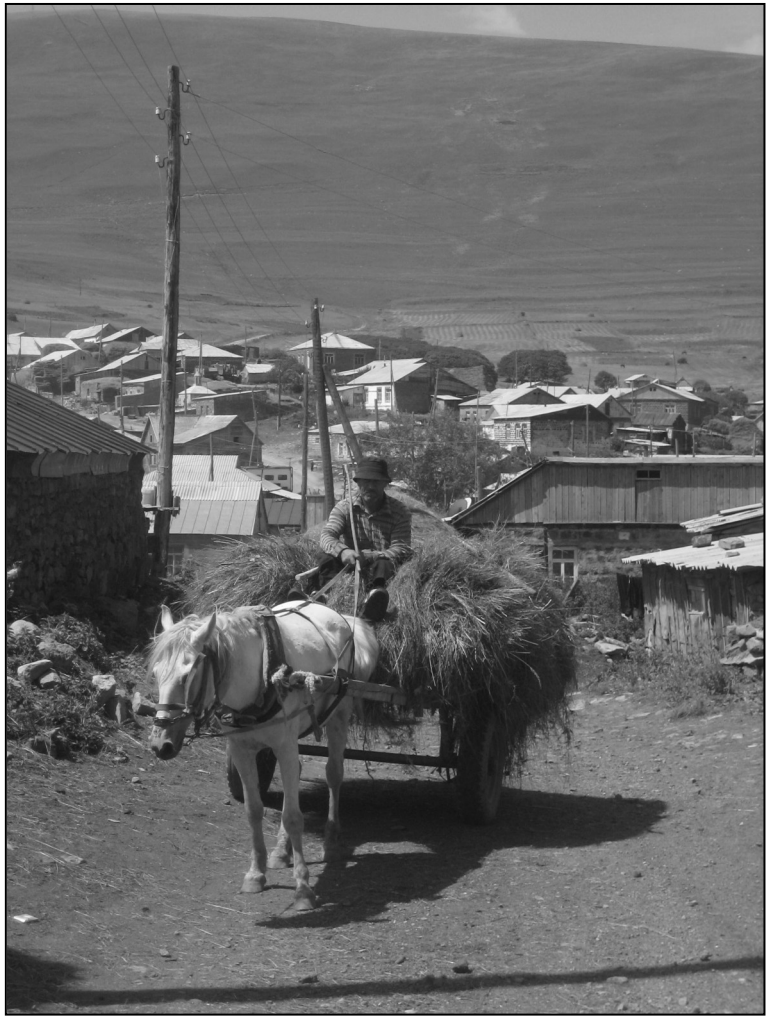
Dostoevsky tests theories by fleshing them out into characters and placing them into a model of reality. Thus, many of his characters are not meant to be real-world people, but ideas in action. Raskolnikov and Marmeladov are such characters. By having both propose different reasons for having committed their respective crimes, Dostoevsky tests their logic within the experimental space of a novel. Marmeladov's inset story serves as a second set of theoretical circumstances in which to test the idea of circumstantial justification. Through Raskolnikov and Marmeladov's failed justifications in each of their situations, Dostoevsky suggests that crime is ultimately the fault of the perpetrator and not of society. Furthermore, Dostoevsky argues that pride motivates Raskolnikov and Marmeladov to place the blame on society and not onto themselves.

Both Raskolnikov and Marmeladov are proud characters in their respective ways. Raskolnikov is "sullen, gloomy, arrogant, [and] proud." He has a high opinion of his importance and considers himself to be above other men. The culmination of his pride is his "extraordinary man" theory, and the fact that he considers himself to be an extraordinary man. He says that "if [an extraordinary man] needs, for the sake of his idea, to step even over a dead body, over blood, then within himself, in his conscience, he can, in my opinion, allow himself to step over blood." He is a nihilist, believing that existing social institutions must be destroyed. Raskolnikov overestimates his significance in this process, which is a large part of the reason he has so much trouble confessing. While Marmeladov pours out confessions of his iniquities, Raskolnikov is incapable of confessing his crime because to do so would be to acknowledge that he is not extraordinary. He only manages to confess in the end because of the knowledge that Sonya is holding him accountable; he leaves the police station without confessing and turns back only when he sees Sonya standing outside, waiting for him. Raskolnikov does not want to admit he is wrong, and he does not want to admit that he is ordinary like other men. His pride is strong and straightforward.

Marmeladov's pride, on the other hand, is much more complex. At first he seems to be humble because of his open acknowledgment of his degenerate status. He speaks openly to all of his poor moral fiber, telling Raskolnikov, almost a complete stranger, of the way his wife beats him, of how he lost his job, and of how he drove his daughter to prostitution through his alcoholism. Marmeladov's pride shows in his boasting. He does not boast of his positive qualities, but of his contemptibility. He declaims his decadence with enthusiasm, shouting that "[he is] a swine!" and "repeating without embarrassment" that Katerina Ivanovna pulls his hair and beats him, and dignifiedly listing Katerina Ivanovna's possessions that he has pawned for money to buy drink when the family cannot even afford food for the children. He is proud of his despicability. His reasoning is seemingly contradictory, which the customers of the tavern point out when they sarcastically shout, "Nice reasoning!" Dostoevsky offers an explanation of Marmeladov's seemingly contradictory behavior with his introduction of the character. He states that "in a company of drinkers, [certain drunkards] always seem eager to solicit justification for themselves and, if possible, even respect as well." Marmeladov indeed solicits justification through his circumstances and attempts to earn respect by flaunting his misconduct. He lives by the idea that the last will be made first, as evidenced by his small sermon on the "drunkard's heaven." Marmeladov claims that God will welcome the drunkards into a special heaven, saying, "Come forth, my drunk ones, my weak ones, my shameless ones!" And when the righteous ask why, God will reply, "I receive them, my wise and reasonable ones, forasmuch as not one of them considered himself

worthy of this thing." Marmeladov consciously degrades himself in order to exalt himself, displaying a type of backwards pride.

Both Raskolnikov and Marmeladov display strong pride, though Raskolnikov's is more direct and obvious. In both cases the character's pride is what keeps them from allowing the guilt to fall upon themselves. Raskolnikov does not want to admit he is an ordinary man, so he attempts to cast the blame elsewhere to avoid confession. He tries to justify his crime by his poverty and his family's situation, but in the end even he admits that his justification does not work. Marmeladov harbors a sort of twisted pride in his drunkenness and irresponsibility saying that it is his nature, which is the result of his environment, but this is also found to be untrue. Through Marmeladov and Raskolnikov's failed attempts to shift blame from themselves, Dostoevsky argues that guilt ultimately falls upon the individual who commits the crime.



Elina Galperin

The Intellectual as Sinner

Reflections on Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Collected Stories*

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As is common in the genre of literary folklore, *The Collected Stories* of Isaac Bashevis Singer feature many similar themes and recurring tropes. While his work enthusiastically idealizes Jewish culture and customs, Singer frequently juxtaposes this celebration of the transcendent with intimate portraits of the bleak and grotesque. Among the characters portrayed most critically in Singer's work are the intellectuals. Though Singer clearly delights in lingering on the flaws of his characters, his bluntly unflattering portrayal of intellectuals is still surprising in its bitterness. Rife with misguided or corrupt intellectuals whose scholarly pursuits lead to tragedy, Singer's stories seem to present intellectualism as the cause of existential confusion, rather than the solution to it. Singer's work depicts the supposedly benighted as more authentic and less inclined to sin and corruption than the pompous literati. This sharp contrast suggests that to analyze faith is to distort it; man cannot possibly grasp the ineffable, and attempting to do so consistently leads to catastrophe.

Singer's most dramatic example of the dangers of intellectualism is displayed in his tale "The Destruction of Kreshev," the story of an initially flawless Jewish girl who exhibits a rather dangerous interest in books. Because of this predilection, her father arranges a match for her with a renowned prodigy, a religious scholar who astonishes the people of Kreshev with his immense erudition. Though the two are forbidden to interact with each other prior to the wedding, Lise spends all her time imagining conversations with Shloimele, dreaming about his answers to the many questions "which had baffled her since childhood." (Singer 104) After the wedding, she and her husband become inseparable; in fact, Lise and Shloimele's exhibitions of affection are so brazen that they cause gossip. When Lise's mother chastises her for her lack of decorum, her daughter justifies her actions through scripture: "'Wasn't Jacob permitted to show his love for Rachel?' the erudite Lise asked her mother. 'Didn't Solomon have a thousand wives?'" (Singer 109) Though Lise and Shloimele are flagrantly defying traditional customs, they defend themselves with knowledge gleaned from the Torah, the very foundation of these customs.

Because they relish learning, Shloimele and Lise begin to study the Cabala together. The narrator warns that "there are some for whom it is not enough to satisfy their desires; they must, in addition, utter all sorts of vain words and let their minds wallow in passion, [and that] those who pursue this iniquitous path are inevitably led to melancholy and then enter the Forty-nine Gates of Uncleanliness," and indeed Lise and Shloimele's discussions act as something of an aphrodisiac. "Because of his great learning and his interest in philosophy [the clever Shloimele] be-

gan to delve more and more into the questions of 'he and she,'" and the resulting conversations charge their relationship with a strange sexual energy. (Singer 111) Though Lise is initially suspicious of Shloimele's attempt to deconstruct the inscrutable, he slyly manipulates her into believing that there is merit in contemplating such things, and "Lise's thirst…to absorb such revelations [increases.]" (Singer 112) Lise and Shloimele begin to stay up late at night contemplating bizarre hypothetical scenarios. Though Lise occasionally worries that she is straying from the path of righteousness, her desire for knowledge leads her to submit completely to her husband, whom she considers infallible.

Shloimele unfortunately has "grown perverse from too much thinking," and he therefore contrives to convince Lise that she is the reincarnation of King David's concubine, obligated to fulfill her destiny by uniting with Mendel, a local coachman, whom he contends is the reincarnation of King David's son and Lise's destined lover. (Singer 119) Lise at first calls her husband a heretic, warning him that he is playing with fire by "[quoting] the Talmud in answer to everything." (Singer 115) Shloimele, however, is able to exploit Lise's familiarity with scripture by reminding her that she has "often felt a compassion for Adonijah, King David's errant son." (Singer 118) He successfully convinces his own wife to enter into an affair with the depraved coachmen, and takes a wicked joy in the situation. Eventually, Shloimele is impelled by Satan to reveal the affair, thus condemning Lise and Mendel to the harsh censure of the people of Kreshev. Irretrievably dishonored, Lise takes her own life, thus prompting a series of events that lead to the destruction of the entire town, as foretold by the title.

At the beginning of "The Destruction of Kreshev," Lise is portrayed as a virtually ideal Jewish maiden. Her insatiable craving for knowledge is her one imperfection. Rather than an asset, Lise's intelligence is her tragic flaw, the solitary failing that makes her susceptible to temptation and corruption. It is her love for scholarship that leads her to doubt the validity of societal norms. Because of this, she is rendered spiritually vulnerable and Shloimele is able to corrupt her using specious religious arguments. Despite its Talmudic basis, her knowledge ultimately causes her nothing but torment.

Singer's famous story "Yentl the Yeshiva Boy" similarly portrays intellectualism as a doorway to discontentment and sin. Left orphaned, a young girl named Yentl decides to fulfill her ambition of becoming a religious scholar. In flagrant violation of spiritual law, she dons male clothing and joins a yeshiva. Though she soon falls in love with one of her fellow students, she will not reveal to Avigdor that she is female because she "could never again do without books and a study house." (Singer 155) Yentl, now known as Anshel, is convinced she cannot return to living as a woman. Yet nor is she content living as a man. Unsure as to the proper course of action, Yentl takes Avigdor's advice and decides to marry Hadass, his supremely innocent former fiancé. Yentl is aware that this is an "act of utter depravity…Her only justification [is] that she had taken all these burdens upon herself because her soul thirsted to study Torah." (Singer 159-160) In fact, Yentl is more committed to the study of the Torah than to obeying its contents, at one point confessing that she might prefer "to lose [her] share in the world to come" than to conform to the commandments and abandon her studies. (Singer 164)

Yentl eventually concludes that she cannot continue to maintain her deception and decides to leave town to study elsewhere, first revealing her secret to Avigdor and engineering a marriage between him and Hadass. After Yentl's departure, Avigdor becomes terse and withdrawn, while Hadass (still innocent of the ruse) is "ill with sorrow." (Singer 168) Avigdor and Hadass marry, but both of them have been irremediably damaged by Yentl's hoax.

As with Lise in "The Destruction of Kreshev", the desire to study the Torah ironically drives Yentl to disobey the commandments within the scripture. Though Singer's portrayal of Yentl is touched with sympathy, he nonetheless makes it clear that her ambition drives her to

commit reprehensible acts that cause much distress to her loved ones. Perhaps most importantly, Yentl herself is harmed through her arrangement: unable to live as either a man or a woman, she experiences immense spiritual and psychological torment. Though she refuses to abandon her deception, she is not capable of ever fully attaining her dream. Because she is defying the identity granted to her by God, she is condemned to live in a state of perpetual unrest.

Singer's harshest depiction of an intellectual may be that of Zeidel in "Zeidelus the Pope." An academic to the exclusion of all else, Zeidel was "untroubled by passions or the need to make a living… He hardly knew what a coin looked like, yet he was a miser and never took a poor man home for a Sabbath meal." (Singer 171) Though Zeidel is confident that he is the greatest scholar in existence, he nonetheless craves recognition of his talent. Thus, it is easy for a demon to convince him to convert to Catholicism so that he will supposedly become an honored leader and eventually assume the role of Pope. When he finds that the Christians do not immediately idolize him, he decides to turn his significant skills against Judaism "by writing polemics against the Talmud." (Singer 175) After many years of fruitlessly toiling on his treatise, Zeidel is ailing, blind and impoverished. He sits deteriorating outside of a church, sadly aware that he has "lost both this world and the world to come." (Singer 176) Indeed, he is correct; Satan greets him moments before his death. Zeidel finally acknowledges the existence of God, but it is too late for redemption and he is transported to the netherworld for an eternity of blistering torment. Though he is originally devoted to the study of religious texts, success in this arena causes Zeidel's desire for glory to prevail over obedience to God.

Throughout Singer's work, intellectuals are depicted as arrogant, malicious, sinful or confused. All the intellectuals in these stories are devoted to studying scripture. Yet, their studies threaten their faith rather than affirm it, and the pursuit of intellectual ambitions repeatedly leads to sin or spiritual corruption. Singer's intellectuals analyze the individual's prescribed relationship with God and challenge their ordained places in the world, thus perverting their own identities. Judging from Singer's work, faith is inherently founded on spirit, not logic—to subject it to examination is to violate its purity. It is not given to people to question the word of God; scripture ought to be accepted without question, and attempting to dissect it is an invitation for disaster. Singer's ideal is not religious knowledge, but unquestioning, all-encompassing faith.

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Elina Galperin



Hannah Gould

Beyond the Moustache
The Complexities of Aleksandr Lukashenko's Regime

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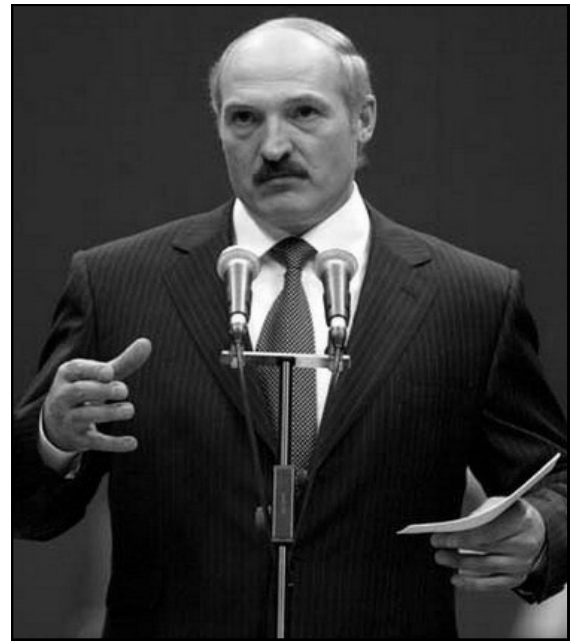
In some ways, the Western media must be thankful for Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko's antics. Due to his comically villainous appearance and a propensity for passing absurd laws regulating a vast number of fields, from fashion modeling, to the use of the title "president," Lukashenko has become a favorite subject of late night fake news show jokes and biting *Economist* editorials. The Bush administration has assisted, providing a fantastic catchphrase with Condoleeza Rice's 2005 denunciation of Belarus as "the last true dictatorship" in Europe. Unfortunately, the fascination with Lukashenko's personality quirks steers attention away from the complex, and increasingly perilous, dynamics holding his leadership in place. With a growingly united opposition and rapidly eroding relations with Russia, the government is fast approaching a new era of fragile stability. Yet, despite Lukashenko's seemingly megalomaniac control over a regime with Orwellian powers, he has consistently enjoyed wide popularity at home, since coming to power in 1994. Even his greatest critics have to admit that the president "would probably win [elections] even if he didn't rig the vote." The threat to Belarus's status quo, thus, does not necessarily come from a moralistic challenge from 'good' democracy to 'evil' authoritarianism, though that element does exist. Lukashenko is not a typical doomed autocrat facing a crisis of legitimacy, but rather a leader caught in modern political and economic turmoil that jeopardizes the future of his rule.

In the lead up to Belarus's March 2006 elections, excited Europe-watchers were salivating at the thought of a new 'denim' revolution, to join the ranks of the peaceful upheavals in Georgia and the Ukraine. For the first time, the "democratic opposition was unified behind a single candidate" – former physics professor Aleksandr Milinkevich, whose stated desire was to "get people out into the street." Unfortunately, Belarus was no Ukraine or Georgia. Lukashenko's stranglehold on the media and government made the opposition's effort almost entirely futile. One youth leader bemoaned, "in Georgia, there was no dictatorship. In Ukraine, they had pro-opposition radio stations…the level of fear and repression was much lower." Indeed, the very real risk of losing jobs or seats in the university kept post-election protests against Lukashenko's victory to a modest crowd of 10,000. Nevertheless, the opposition saw signs of hope in the dreary episode – Milinkevich compared his situation to "Poland and Solidarity not in 1989 when the Communist government crumbled under its own weight, but in the dark days of 1980, when Lech Walesa stared his campaign for dissent." For the democratic opposition, the struggle would be inevitably successful, but was currently only just beginning.

Lukashenko, however, did not seem particu-

larly worried, exclaiming that the election had "convincingly demonstrated who the Belarusians are and who is the master of [their] house." Widely interpreted as deranged, self-congratulatory raving over a fixed victory, Lukashenko's post-election high is actually more closely reflective of a general acknowledgement that "Batka," as he is known, would have been a winner even in a legitimate victory. It might have been with 50 or 60 percent of the vote, as opposed to the alleged 83% victory in this election, but the victory would have been Lukashenko's nonetheless. The president commands support amongst a wide swath of Belarusians, especially the rural population and the elderly, who see him as the country's "sole guarantor of stability." One music teacher remarked, "We don't want all that civil unrest like in Ukraine. Look at our ordered city and nice clean streets." Beyond civic order and appearance, Lukashenko's controlled, Soviet-style economy has indeed shielded Belarus from many of the shocks faced by other struggling post-communist nations. The 'Belarusian economic miracle,' as the president calls it, has seen average wage rise to $218 a month, with unemployment at 1.5% and regular, guaranteed pensions, "which have grown and are paid on time." For many Belarusians who have heard about the brutalizing experiences of shock therapy and market liberalization, authoritarianism seems to be both necessary and beneficial.

Regrettably for Lukashenko, he can do little to guarantee the future of his prized stability, as its vitality lies entirely with the choices made by Vladimir Putin and the Russian government. Belarus is a nation that does not do much trading with the outside world – its sole source of major income comes from buying Russian gas with high subsidies and selling it to European nations at market price. The system is simply not sustainable and developments over the past year have rapidly revealed Lukashenko's 'economic miracle' to be nothing more than a myth. In 2006, Belarus had to pay only $46 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas and could sell the same amount to Europe for as much as $250, making billions of dollars. After a tense standoff in January 2007,



Aleksandr Lukashenko, photograph courtesy: AP

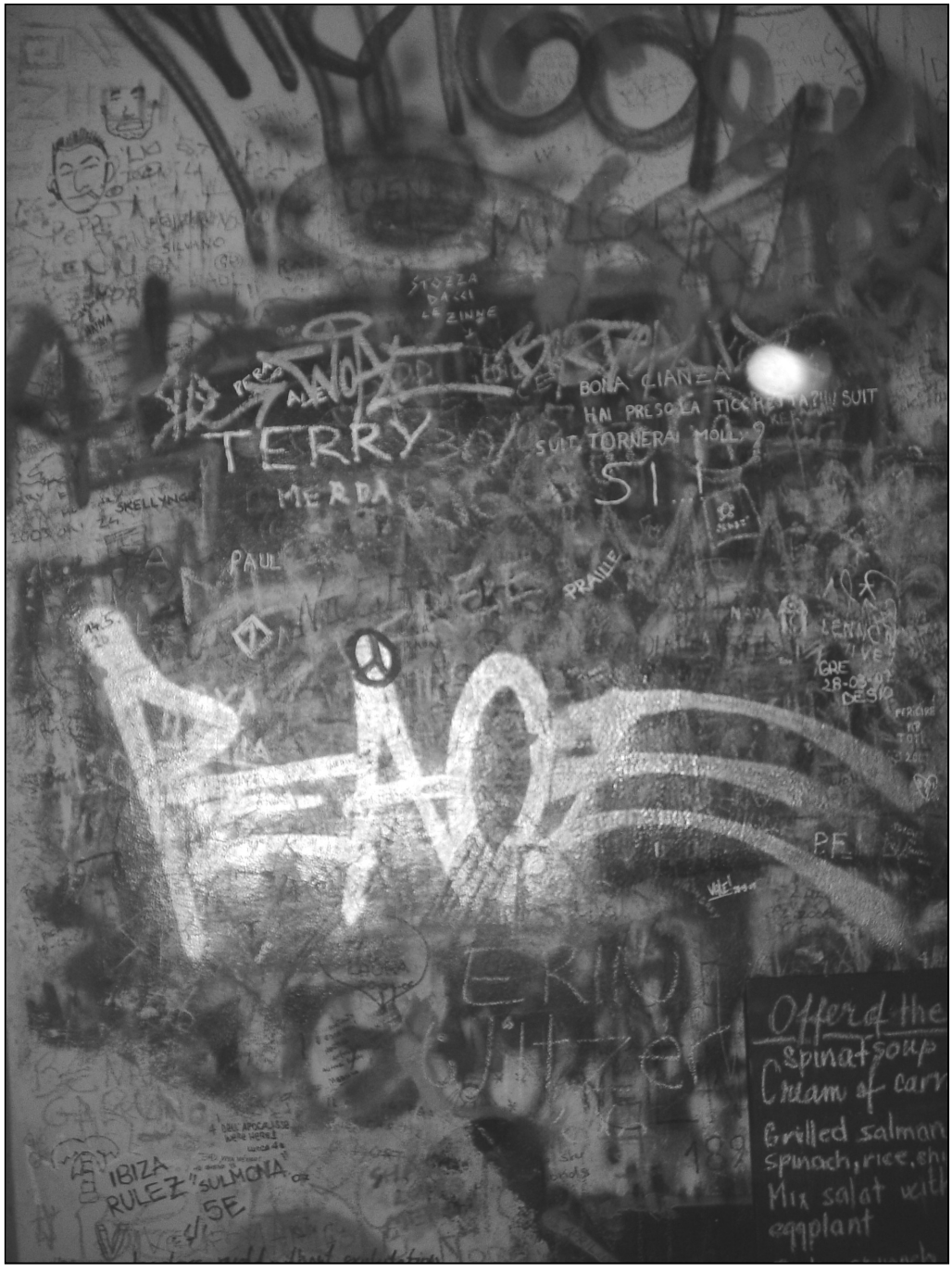
Lukashenko had to succumb to Gazprom's demands to raise the price to $100 – still less than half of what Europe paid, but a hike sufficient enough to halt the discount-dependent Belarusian economy. To make matters even more humiliating, he was also force to sell 50% of the shares in Beltransgaz to Russia. By August, the government had accumulated a $456 million gas deliveries debt and was forced to borrow heavily in order to pay Gazprom, who again threatened to shut off services. Segrei Kupriyanov, spokesperson for the Russian gas giant, simply brushed off Lukashenko's struggles. "After all, [we are] not Santa Claus," he pronounced.

However, for much of the last decade, Russia was Belarus's Santa Claus, pledging Slavic solidarity and an eventual union state, until Putin finally changed the course. Widely known to have great personal dislike for Lukashenko, the Russian president nevertheless stood besides the shady election victory in 2006 when no other Western country would, most likely due to the fear of a 'color revolution' redux. As Russia has come to realize the power of its energy empire,

however, it has also realized that it does not necessarily need Belarus. Unfortunately, Belarus needs Russia very much. Lukashenko's popular support stems from his ability to guarantee relative prosperity. Without Russia's gas subsidies, he cannot do that. The opposition forces, while humbled and struggling, nevertheless exist and are gaining, as more and more young people feel compelled to join. On the other hand, the government's elderly supporters cannot live forever, and a generation change is due to bring about massive ideological shifts. Over the past thirteen years, Aleksandr Lukashenko crafted a regime he thought was indestructible – he even had hopes of one day ruling Russia itself. However, his support and stability is balanced on a pyramid he cannot keep from toppling – Putin has the power to completely destroy Lukashenko. However, it is unlikely that Russia would go so far as to destroy the authoritarian system in general. More than gas money, the Kremlin loves regional loyalty. With Georgia and Ukraine's turns to the West, Putin cannot afford to have a free Belarus. Though Lukashenko's regime is in danger, it is not yet dead, and democracy is far from realized.

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GLOBAL TOURISM IN THE WINDOW TO THE WEST

Residents' Reactions to St. Petersburg's Reconstruction Project

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Russia is a country of contradictions and the city of St. Petersburg is chief among them. If I take home only one thing when I leave Russia, it will be this fact. Walking along Nevsky Prospect I see beautiful clothing in displays designed to tantalize the eye, pristine buildings supported by ornate columns of gods and goddesses, and cathedrals so spectacular that they shame their Italian and French counterparts. Take a few turns, however, and you enter a whole new world. The buildings are still a monument to Peter the Great's vision of his city, but many are collapsing under the abuse and neglect they have suffered for decades. These streets are the ones choked with shoppers at the open-air markets. Here you will find hidden second hand clothing stores and marginally legal music stores sporting bootleg CDs and DVDs. Average tourists do not see these places, nor do they want to. These situations are not sterile or orderly enough for most tourists' Western sensibilities, no matter how much they claim to want an "authentic experience."

The city knows its clientele and is currently undertaking a citywide reconstruction effort. Some jobs are moving quickly, while others are at a standstill. Every day at 8:45 AM I walk up Suvorovsky, one of the main streets of St. Petersburg's mainland, to school. It is impossible find a route that does not require walking under at least two scaffolds put up to help remodel a façade. I have yet to see anybody working here, but at the corner across from Smolny Cathedral, one of the main tourist attractions, the city had managed to dig up a pipe, replace it, and repair the brick sidewalk in just over 24 hours. On the other hand, glamorous Nevsky Prospect also has many standstill construction sites while the small, unknown side street I live on has been closed so its water pipes can be replaced. St. Petersburg is struggling to appease both its residents, by updating its old Soviet infrastructure, and its tourists, by remodeling its buildings to repair its look and rebrand the city in the global tourist market.

However, residents feel like they are losing out to the tourists because foreigners can pump more money into the city than can the general public. Naturally this feeling breeds a sense of resentment that public funds are being diverted to attract pleasure-seeking tourists. One evening I asked my host mother, Natasha, what she thinks about all the construction in the city. Her answer

was surprising. "The remodeled parts of the city are beautiful to walk through and the renovations of the courtyards, pointing out our kitchen window, are good for conversation. It is also good that they are remodeling the tram system since it is very old and the seats are uncomfortable. Very quickly, however, her thoughts turned negative. Her building is very old, she motioned to the rattling pipes and said, this should be taken care of first. But she knows it won't be; they are working on the facades because it makes a nice picture for the television for other countries to see. These nice pictures draw in the rich people to make deals with the city."Natasha sees the entire remodeling effort as an illusion to attract foreign investment to the city. St. Petersburg itself has also been said to be merely an illusion, a dream of Peter the Great, whose only function is to be the European face Russia shows to the world. Russia's habit of putting up a front to show the world trickles into, or perhaps comes from, everyday life in Russia. A Russian must always look their best. No matter how much money they have, Petersburgers, especially the women, will dress like movie stars. To be sure, a woman walking down the street in anything but fur and knee high boots will immediately be pegged as a foreigner.

In Thomas Seifrid's (2001) *"Illusion" and Its Workings in Modern Russian Culture,* Seifrid explores the idea of illusion in Russian society from politics to literature to mathematics. He begins by using St. Petersburg as an example of Peter the Great's desire to imitate Western Europe but to stop imitation at physical trappings, and not to adopt the spirit of those societies or the function of their cities. Seifrid also examines several pieces of Russian literature and claims that imperial Russian society was more devoted to maintaining a false sense of reality than it was to bettering its own situation. However, Seifrid ends by saying, "…what one finds ultimately in Russia…is not a sham culture suspended over reality's absence, but one …transforming into hard cultural currency the fabricated signs that it appropriates, magpie-like, from abroad-sustained by a hope in the referent's eventual advent." I doubt Seifrid intended such a literal interpretation of cultural currency but I believe St. Petersburg is again being used to imitate the wealth of the Western world in an attempt to attract and appropriate some of it. The city of St. Petersburg is repeating the most common tourist attracting technique used by tourist destinations around the globe. By cleaning up the city and bringing all its buildings in line with one stereotyped image of St. Petersburg (itself, ironically, a stereotyped image of "the West") the city of St. Petersburg is putting on a show for the rest of the world, looking richer and more modern than it actually is. The ultimate goal of this "sham," as Seifrid calls it, is for the city to eventually become what it pretends to be.

This sentiment is expressed clearly by Nina Michaelovna Filippova. Nina Michaelovna teaches Russian Civilization at St. Petersburg State University. In her class Nina Michaelovna talks about the "Big Lie" of the Soviet Era. This is the both lie that the Communist Party told its people and the lie the people told that they believed the Party. Thinking she would give an answer relating back to the Russian mindset, if there is such a thing, I asked her opinion of the renovations of the city. Her answer made references to the lies of Imperial Russia and the lies of post-Soviet Russia. What was missing but still pointedly referenced was the "Big Lie" of the Soviet Era. "It is a perfect example of Grigori Potemkin, one of Catherine the Great's courtiers. When Catherine wanted to see the people and ask them if they were happy, Potemkin went into the villages before her and passed out bread. The renovations are the same thing; the facades are all being painted so people will say they are happy. The buildings are all very pretty now but she knows how they are inside. This is the Russian answer to everything, to paint over things and that is all. Everything is done for the foreigners. Russians do not like to say they like them but are dependent on the tourists so the city repairs what they will see."

Along with the "Big Lie" comes the feeling that St. Petersburg residents are of secondary im-

portance. However, I cannot understand this view since I can see everyday public services being renovated, namely pipes and roads. My host mother draws a sharp distinction between what is done for the tourists and what is done for residents. I tried to push this point further by mentioning the slow yet steady overhaul of the city's water management. "This is normal, she said. This is good renovation. The work on the outsides [of buildings] isn't real, those aren't services. It is all for the tourists because they only like pretty, clean cities. Near Ploshad Vostanaya [the closest metro station] there used to be a building that fell apart. They are rebuilding it now but the insides are modern while the outside they are rebuilding to fit the old style."Even this new apartment building Natasha sees not as an improvement for residents but as catering to the new demands of tourists. At first I wondered what she could see was wrong with a new building with modern apartments that maintains the look of the neighbourhood. I was especially confused because she attends protests about the new skyscraper being built because it will alter the Petersburg skyline. Given her fierce defense of the traditional look of St. Petersburg, I would have thought she would be happy that some developers take the aesthetics of the city into consideration in their building plans. While writing this paper it dawned on me; she believes in preserving the city's history but is insulted by the idea of using it as gimmick for the tourism industry. St. Petersburg and its people have too proud a history to be reduced to a cheap curiosity for rich pleasure seekers.

Natasha shows a shrewd understanding of the trends of global tourism, pointing out the conscious efforts to make St. Petersburg look more "authentic." Paris has a look, London has a look, Rome has a look, and now that St. Petersburg is open to the world it too has a look. Residents are worried that this new branding campaign will be the new illusion that controls their city and potentially the life of their country. Still sensitive to what Nina Michaelovna calls the "Big Lie" from the Soviet era, St. Petersburg residents do not trust this technique that has turned countless other cities into tourist destinations, with all the accompanying social and economic problems. Somehow residents believe both that all the improvements to the city infrastructure are only for the tourists and that no real improvement is taking place at all; it is just another lie to appease any discontent. Judging from Russia's past experiences with illusion, they certainly have a right to be worried.

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Mark Krotov

The Constitution of Reality in the Cinematic Space

A Reading of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*

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In his 1979 film *Stalker*, director Andrei Tarkovsky attempts to frame an ethical vision of the world that valorizes faith, fragility and a "will to serve" over despair and uncertainty. In his landmark *Sculpting in Time*, a collection of the maestro's essays on the art of cinema, he writes of the film's title character that "[he] seems to be weak, but it is essentially he who is invincible because of his faith and his will to serve others" (181). By positing this vision in the artistic product, however, Tarkovsky exposes the limitations of his own ethos. In the director's own words, the artistic work he has created "pushes aside its own ideological frontiers, refuses to fit into the framework imposed on it by its author, it argues with them, and…even contradicts its own logical system" (41). *Stalker* is a film that does just this—it exceeds the intent of the author, revealing the tragic consequences of the director's vision through the figure of the Stalker, a character in whom the director's ethos is embodied.

For Tarkovsky, the cinematic medium is one that by its very nature resists reduction to singular meaning, refusing to serve as a conduit for any particular ethical vision. By operating with "*reality,*" it resists "structuralist attempts to look at a frame as a sign of something else" (177). Tarkovsky reinforces this principle by employing deep-focus throughout much of his film. In doing so, he refuses to centralize any particular element of the *mise-en-scène* while instead directing our attention to what the theorist André Bazin describes as the "uncertainty…built into the very design of the image" (Bazin 50). As Bazin phrases it, this "ontology" of the cinematic image creates the possibility of capturing the many contradictions and tensions situated in reality.

In the film's opening scene we are presented with an image of a man sitting alone at a table in a dark café, situated far from the camera on the left side of the image. By refusing to foreground this figure, Tarkovsky creates the possibility of what he refers to as "poetic cinema," or that which allows for associative linking derived from the "inner power…concentrated within the image" (20). Hence our attention is not only directed to this man, but also to both the somber emptiness of the bar and the possibility posited by the open door at the back of the room, from which light bleeds into the café. "The *mise en scène*, rather than illustrating some idea," he writes, "should follow life… [it] must not be reduced to elaborating on the meaning…" (25). In employing the type of *mise en scène* he establishes in the opening scene, fertile to a multitude of readings and associations, Tarkovsky succeeds in liberating the cinematic image from what he refers to as a "thought ceiling" of symbolic reduction (Tarkovsky 25).

The reality that Tarkovsky constructs in his

films, however, is not a reality unto itself that exists apart from a viewer. Unlike Walter Benjamin's vision of an author, who in his works "posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of [his] works is…concerned with his response," Tarkovsky argues that art is inherently rhetorical, an expression that is rendered "meaningless unless it meets with a response" (69, 40). *Stalker* works to establish an external unity between the interior world of its diegesis and the exterior world in which it meets its viewer: from the first shot in which an unknown figure stares at us in a café, to the second to last scene in which Stalker's wife looks at us imploringly, we are confronted with figures who gaze directly into the camera. In doing so, they momentarily transgress the internal unity of the diegesis, risking the ontological integrity of the image in order to seek entrance into the reality of the viewer's world and to thereby reinforce the film's own situation in reality.

While *Stalker* attempts to affirm its own sense of reality through external unity, Tarkovsky seeks to constitute a cinematic reality that goes beyond the limits of this principle by attempting to embed the external viewer *in* the diegetic space. Describing his films as a "mirror," he writes that it is in the cinematic space, that "aura which unites masterpieces and audience," where we "recognize and discover ourselves" (184, 43). In a scene early in the film, we find Stalker lying in bed with his family, recently awakened by a nearby train that has rattled his home. The camera pans slowly over the faces of Stalker's wife and daughter, gradually revealing the expression of each. When the camera reaches Stalker, he turns and gazes steadily in their direction. At this moment, the camera begins to pan backward along its previous track, once again revealing the objects of Stalker's gaze—the tranquil images of his daughter, who faces Stalker, and Stalker's wife. In this way Stalker underscores the role of the director, redirecting our gaze in the same way that the film redirects our gaze onto its ultimate subject—its audience, our reality as embedded in the cinematic image.

By embedding the viewer in the ontology of his picture, Tarkovsky collapses the binary of the mimetic and the real, or that which imitates the action of life (art), and the natural or real that is the thing imitated (reality/life itself). In doing so he reveals the way life constitutes itself as art—



Colin Halverston

that is to say, its reality follows the ruling principles dictated by a narrative convention through which it posits itself, underscored by Tarkovsky's situation of "reality" within the artistic, narrative space. As a narrative, *Stalker* works toward a single end, and that is the Professor and Writer's experience of the "room," that space in which their greatest desire may become known and fulfilled. The film, then, works along a path of ignorance to absolute revelation—a revelation in which Stalker places a faith that Tarkovsky so esteems.

Tarkovsky's ethical vision, embodied by Stalker's faith in the "room," is ultimately betrayed by the tragic implications that the film presents for such a space. Despite his profession of faith, even Stalker himself refuses to visit the "room" and prohibits his wife from doing so. The only figure who we learn has actually entered this space, Porcupine, begged for the resurrection of his dead brother, only to return from the "room" a wealthy man.

For Tarkovsky, however, the true tragedy of this space does not lie in the revelation of self, but in the attainment of one's desire. "Real happiness…consists…in the aspiration towards that happiness which cannot but be absolute" he writes, demarcating the *passage* toward fulfillment of absolute desire as the definition of happiness (53). "Let us imagine for a moment that people have attained happiness…at that very instant personality is destroyed" (53). The attainment of the absolute, then, becomes the moment of death. Stated in terms of narrative theory, the attainment of the end goal set forth by the film results in the closure of the narrative, the erasure of its characters. The character of Porcupine, who commits suicide, is likewise erased within a week after his return from the "room". The disintegration of the binary of art and the real, then, becomes a necessary condition for life itself. Tarkovsky exposes the grave consequences of an encounter with absolute reality and the need to construct a narrative of journey that continually works to evade its end in absolute reality. This is ultimately the reality which is posited by *Stalker*, a reality full of uncertainty and oblique roads which are a precondition for life itself—this is the tragic lesson of the "room."

The physical space of the Zone, where the majority of the film's action takes place, underscores this narrative principle by which the film is organized. While in the beginning of the film the house containing the "room" stands only a few feet away from the principle characters, to reach it by a direct route would result in instant death. The life of the film, then, like that of our lives, is constituted by a continually self-elongating journey of struggle toward the absolute. It is a narrative journey which must be repeatedly *created* in order to avoid the encounter with absolute reality, that moment in which the film's characters, as the film itself, cease to exist.

As the Writer says to the Professor about true desires, "the moment you name them, their meaning evaporates into the sun like jellyfish." *Stalker*, operating on a principle antithetical to reductive signification in both the cinematic image and general meaning, ultimately rejects the limitations of Stalker's vision, one that even he himself must ultimately deny. Acquiring an agency uniquely its own, *Stalker* transcends its author's ethical vision, positing uncertainty as an alternative to faith while rejecting the absolute reality embodied by the "room." In the act of betraying Tarkovsky's ethic and collapsing the binary between the artistic and the real, it posits the principles of narrative convention by which the film is structured as the fundamental elements constituent of "reality" itself, both on and off the screen. It is this self-perpetuating journey, structured around the evasion of absolute reality, from which the very content of life and cinematic narrative are constituted.

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Russian on the Rise

Inna Dukach discusses the role of her Russian heritage in her singing, and of Russian opera in the international opera scene

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One of the most striking facts about lyric soprano Inna Dukach, now an internationally acclaimed artist, is how gracefully she settled into her career as a vocalist. Unlike a number of professional singers and musicians, Inna was not groomed for the stage throughout childhood or even college. In fact, she considers herself to have gotten "kind of a late start" compared to many of her colleagues in the industry.

Although her fascination with music began early in her childhood in Moscow, when her father would sing romantic Russian folk songs for the family and accompany himself on the guitar, it was not until years later that Inna realized music was her calling. Now she's singing major roles with the likes of New York City Opera.

I first heard Inna sing *Sì, mi chiamano Mimì* from Puccini's *La Bohème* at a free New York City Opera concert in Bryant Park this August. She brought the kind of composed enthusiasm to the stage (and afterwards, signing autographs) that one finds in the most seasoned performers, confident in their skills, more than experienced, but still thrilled to be doing something they love, something that never gets old. When I met Inna for an interview at Lincoln Center in October, she embodied the same combination of elegance and warmth I had noticed in August**.** She had a presence**,** at once stunning and disarming**,** that struck me as so natural that I assumed Inna had worked in the opera industry for much longer than she has I was taken aback to learn that her path to the stage was actually quite indirect.

At ten, Inna left Moscow for the United States with her parents and younger brother. They landed in New Jersey and settled down in Houston, Texas until Inna was fifteen. Then her mother, Dina Dukach, found a job teaching Russian at Columbia and moved the family to New York City's Upper West Side.

After high school, Inna studied psychology and took voice lessons at Smith College in Massachusetts. Unsure about what to do afterwards, she took a few years off before deciding to pursue a career in vocal performance and enrolling as a graduate student at Mannes College of Music. Since then, she has sung in high-profile concerts and operas all over the world, with critics raving about her rich, warm soprano in publications like *OPERA NEWS*, *The New York Times*, *The Saint Petersburg Times*, and *Russian Bazaar*, among several others. Her sheer talent and perfectly pitched rapport with audiences and critics make it difficult to believe that she came to opera only after years of deliberation.

Having come of age and completed her musi-

cal training in the United States, Inna very much considers herself an American**,** but acknowledges drawing on her Russian heritage in a number of professional contexts, whether she is informally coaching her colleagues on their Russian diction or singing Xenia in Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

"The Russian language itself is not particularly conducive to great singing. You don't sing Russian in the same way you sing Italian," says Inna, referring to the difficulty of singing some Russian vowels with optimal resonance. She adds, "Some people say there's a particular Russian timbre that's darker than other languages."

Whether or not that's the case, Inna feels at an advantage among her colleagues for being a native speaker and has a much easier time with Russian and even Czech diction. She enjoys performing roles from all the great operatic traditions but, in singing Russian pieces, senses "a particular relation to and understanding of our music and characters that have been culturally ingrained in me."

As Inna and other opera-goers have observed, Slavic vocal repertoire is becoming increasingly popular in the international music



Abby Rosebrock

scene. American companies must often recruit singers all the way from Russia to perform staples like *Boris Gudonov*, Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*, and Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, and fluency in Russian is a rare professional asset for any American singer. However, Inna estimates that a number of music schools and opera training programs – which have traditionally focused on singing in German, French, and Italian – are beginning to offer their students more instruction in Russian diction, and she is impressed by the cosmopolitan approach to repertoire she has noticed among singers from the United States.

"American singers are really amazing," says Inna, "because they'll sing in every language. Give them anything – Italian, Japanese songs – and they'll do it." She has coached many Anglophone tenors on Lensky's aria from *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky's 1879 opera based on Pushkin's novel in verse, which has become a favorite audition piece for higher-voiced male singers.

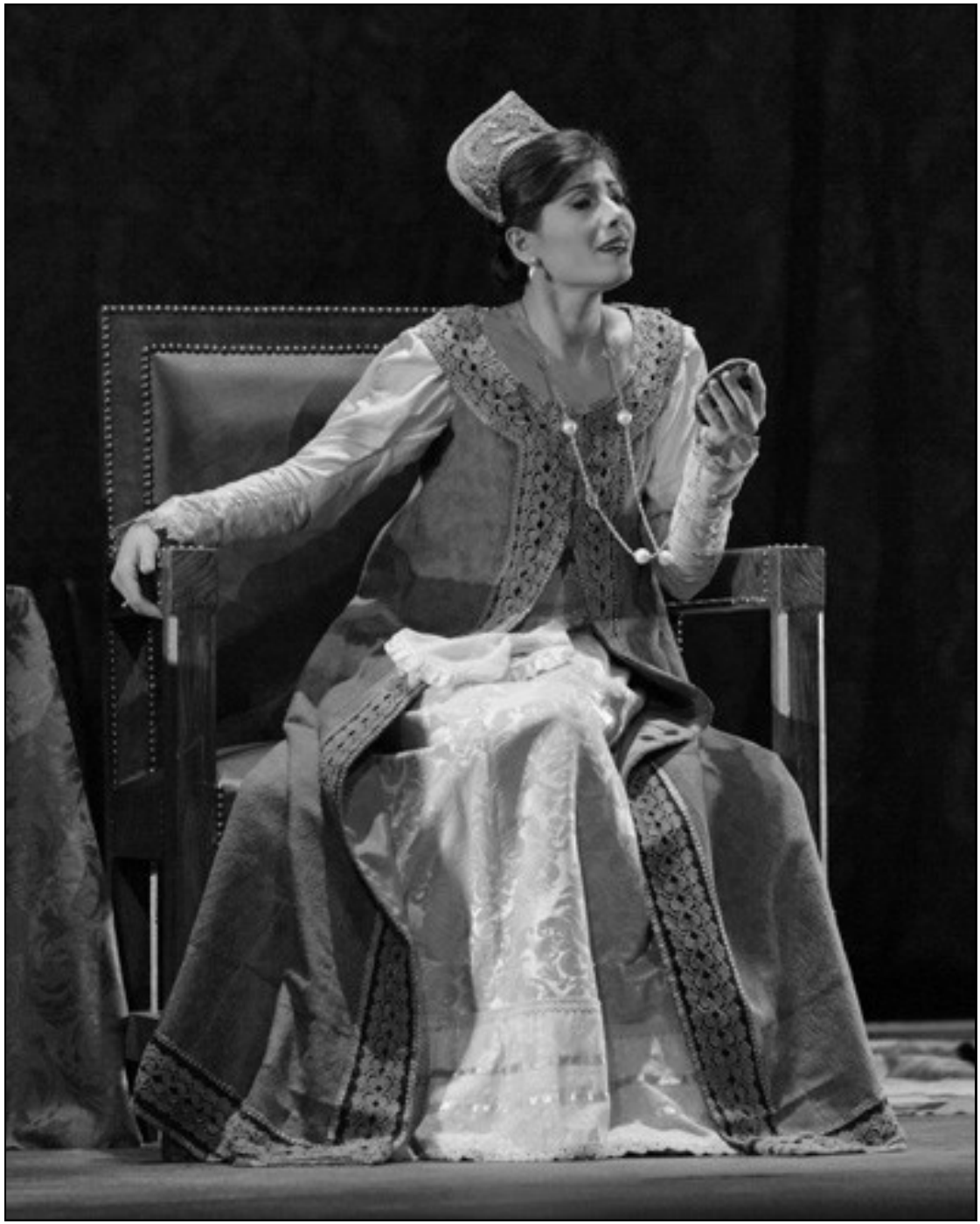
The problem of incorporating more Russian in the repertoire, then, seems to stem more from the logistical challenges of integrating less commonly sung texts than in stirring up enthusiasm among musicians. Since much of opera's popularity lies in the staying power of traditional productions, audiences' unfamiliarity with the Russian vocal tradition may also account for some companies' reluctance to perform it.

But the widespread success of *Eugene Onegin*, that Slavic vocal repertoire may have as much popular potential as all those beloved instrumental works from the same regional tradition. Singers like Inna are contributing to this end. In 2000, she sang in the Queens Public Libraries' Russian Song Recital Series and, in 2002, put together a New York City recital of songs based on Pushkin's poetry. She also gave a 2005 recital at the Museum of the Russian Renaissance in Sommerville, Massachusetts, and 2006 saw her perform Shostakovich's *Songs from Jewish Poetry* with the Brooklyn Philharmonic in New York City's St. John the Divine, as well as songs and mazurkas by Chopin at Carnegie Hall. Inna's favorite repertoire includes a number of works by Russian composers, particularly Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, and she has played Tatiana in Opéra Lyra Ottowa's *Onegin* and Xenia in San Diego Opera's *Boris*.

What would it take for more Russian and Eastern European operas to gain the canonical status of instrumental staples like Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and *Swan Lake*? One can look to *Eugene Onegin* for an answer, but Inna hesitates to give a definitive explanation for its popularity. "Is *Eugene Onegin* the best Russian opera there is? I don't really know," says Inna. "Probably not. But it has great arias, great characters, and every Russian in the audience will know [the story] by heart."

And perhaps *Onegin*, with its relatively simple narrative of unrequited love, is more adaptable to the conventions of operatic melodrama than are bulkier, larger-scale texts. But whatever the reason for its triumph, *Eugene Onegin* is likely soon to gain company at the top, as contemporary singers seem to express an increasing interest in singing in Russian. In fact, the Metropolitan Opera is scheduled to perform Prokofiev's *The Gambler* and *War and Peace* this season.

No stranger to international travel – we had to reschedule our interview owing to a last-minute gig in Nice – Inna hopes to visit Moscow again after a long hiatus, although she generally prefers warm climates for the health of her voice. She has just finished singing in New York City Opera's September run of *La Bohème* and, though she loves the role of Mimi, admits, "I feel like I need to put her away for a while." Inna is booked to sing in various venues throughout the world, with projects already in the works for 2009, including a Tatiana in Ottowa.



Inna Dukach in Boris Godunov, photograph courtesy: http://www.innadukach.com

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Program description: The Harriman Institute at Columbia University is continuing its undergraduate fellowship program. Open to Barnard College, Columbia College and General Studies students, this program is designed to provide research support on a competitive basis to juniors and seniors who have a serious interest in the post-Soviet and/or East-Central European region. It is expected that students will use the fellowship to assist them in researching and writing the senior thesis, or to complete an equivalent major research project.

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Application procedure: Candidates must submit a 2-3 page research proposal, a budget of projected expenses, a resume, an official transcript, and at least one confidential letter of recommendation (on official letterhead, with the recommender's signature across the seal of the envelope) from a faculty member who is familiar with the student's research plans. The complete application with all items enclosed should be received by **March 28, 2008** and should be addressed to:

Professor Bradley Abrams
East Central European Center
1230 International Affairs Building
420 West 118th Street, MC 3336

The packet can also be hand-delivered to Professor Abrams' mailbox on the 12th floor of IAB. E-mailed applications will not be accepted.

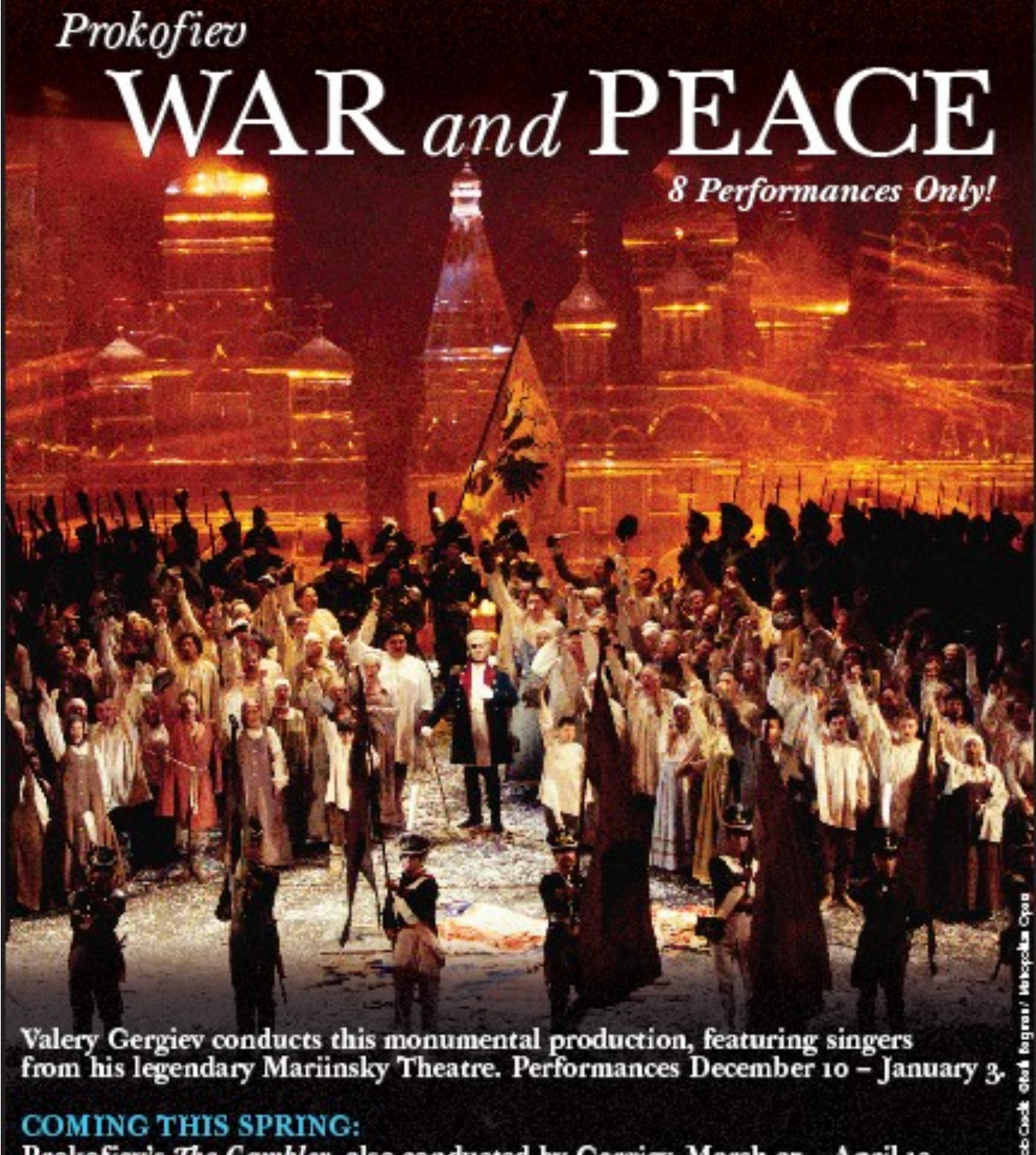
Evaluation: The proposal should describe, in as much detail as possible, what question the student's research will attempt to answer, why the question is significant, why field research is necessary to answer the question, and how the student plans to go about performing the field research required. The evaluation criteria used by the committee will include: (1) the coherence and logic of the proposal itself; (2) the likelihood that the student will be able to perform the research successfully, given the student's skill set and contacts; (3) the student's commitment to study of the region, as demonstrated by previous coursework or other experience; and (4) the student's academic achievement record.

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