THE BIRCH

Spring 2008

A Journal of Eastern European and Eurasian Culture

Creative Writing | Literary Criticism | Photography | Culture & Affairs

The Harriman Institute

Russian, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies at Columbia

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"Excuse me," one guest approached me at *The Birch's* opera event. "Could you tell me what other programs you have? You do this often, right?" "This is our first one," I replied. "Our first event."

This year was, indeed, one of great firsts, so when it came to putting together this issue, the task of living up to our growing reputation and success was daunting. Yet, in many ways, this issue seemed to build itself. Some of the stories, such as the interview with Soviet dissident Alexander Glezer, emerged from remarkable accidents. Other submissions came from students who had heard of the publication in passing and were inspired to submit their work on an impulsive whim. Sections seemed to come together in this way, almost on their own. Like with the event, it seemed to many, that the work was effortless.

Of course, nothing can be so easy. Behind the beautiful finish of this issue and the success of our event lies the extraordinary work of writers and artists, and especially, of *The Birch's* staff. Every sentence of every piece and every moment of our success from this past year has been a result of tremendous thought and tireless effort.

It is flattering, of course, to think that *The Birch* seems so fluid and easy. At the same time, it is important to remember, and to thank, all of the people whose work has made this year possible. Without their dedication and brilliance, there would be no magazine.

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THE BIRCH

A National, Student Run Undergraduate Journal

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Special Thanks

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We would also like to thank Dale Smith of Student Development & Activities, whose help and encouragement allowed us to achieve what we have this year.

Finally, I would like to personally extend my gratitude to Sierra Perez-Sparks. Her hard work, persistence and determination made it possible for *The Birch* to publish two beautiful issues and to make our first event beyond memorable.

ARTS INITIATIVE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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Honza

Sasha de Vogel (*Columbia University)*

He won't sit on the tram. We have a long way to go at 2 am, and he's been working all day, but he won't sit. Too many red seats. Instead, Honza's hung up like a curtain in front of me, wiry wrists hooked over the rail. The tram climbs up the hill to Hradčany and for a quick moment, half of Prague's lights cut through our faces, reflected in the window. The two of us appear together in a fleeting collage: the sights on the other side of the Vltava, the glass of the tram, ourselves, and the black air in between. Honza says, when he was a six, he and his friends united against an imaginary enemy—an evil man. He couldn't say much else, except that everything about him was red. Since then: orange, gray, anything—he shakes his head—but red seats. "It's been 14 years, I haven't sat in one," he says. "I'll be an old guy before I do. I'll be too old to stand before I do."

It's getting late, but I don't need to worry about gypsies or junkies, he tells me, spurting out his English words two at a time, as the tram turns down an abandoned boulevard near the train station. His stop, our stop is on the safe side of the church, he says. Sure enough, there it is at the far end of the square, squatting dark and crenellated, swathed in a net of power lines and tram cables.

"That church," Honza says, "is why I will never live in your country. They built that church before your country even existed. And when you see it, you think, hundreds of years ago they—and now—it's just—" My language fails him. He spreads his long fingers out at the end of his long arms and sighs, his eyebrows pulled into a triangle that strikes me as quasi-angelic.

"But on the other side of it, bad," he says, scowling now, "You don't go there. Dangerous."

I have no reason not to believe him. After all, what do I know about this place? He's led me to an unglossed side of the city, not meant for foreigners like me. Here, the apartment buildings are still soot-covered, with lanky potted plants drooping off of tiny cast iron balconies, cheap clothing stores and butcher shops and markets on the bottom floor. Trash has time to settle in the streets—unlike in the candy-colored Jewish Quarter, where there seems to be no litter on the polished cobblestones, and the photogenic buildings could have been hatched from an Easter egg. We walk past the hordes of night-owl kids, scrambling over the steps of an erstwhile outpost of the National Gallery. They skitter off into corner shops to buy more beer and huge bottles of grapefruit-flavored water.

In his apartment, we go out on the listing balcony, nailed on by hand, and look at his mother's tomato plant, its greening buds and swelling drops of orange. Down below, I can see a theater the neighborhood built in the space between these apartment buildings. In the dark, it looks apocalyptic, a relic of a recently demolished past, where benches could be soldered together out of sawed-off barrels in backyards.

Inside, Honza darts around the living room touching things, explaining them in a chain-smoker's dry whisper; his mother is asleep. A photo of her younger self with hot-rolled hair shaking hands with an important government official. Two deflated armchairs, covered in crumpled leather; these belonged to his grandfather. A shelf of decorative plates painted with rural scenes—from Plzen, like his family. Pictures of eight different babies, Honza among them, with perfect cupid's-bow lips. The cage where his pet rabbit sleeps.

The flat was terrible, falling apart when he and his mother moved in seven years ago. Back then, he was ashamed to live in this neighborhood, but they didn't have money for some place better. "Everything here," he gestures across the tiny room, the silhouette of his sharp elbows stretching, "We made it ourselves. No help, we do it ourselves. This place, for me, is—ah!" He gazes into the unlit chandelier, as if it were a stained glass window inscribed with his domestic mythology.

"But just wait," he says. "We still have more to do, everything will be better. This, it's nothing now. Just wait."

Honza talks about getting rich all the time, and when he does, his eyes get big and glossy, his long lashes curling into his eyebrows, anticipating some future bliss. "You'll see," he says, "just wait. I'll buy a house, and I'll buy a cottage in the country. I'm going to make big bucks!" He never says how. He doesn't have the money now to go to school, not like his friends, and he's not as smart, either, he tells me. But he could be, if I just wait.

In his room, he shows me his collection of cigarette boxes, dozens of them, and picks out some impressive American brands—very rare in the Czech Republic. Some

are set up in little displays or packed carefully into shoeboxes. Some are the kind my parents smoke. I tell him he has no idea how many empty boxes escape collectors each year—dozens, hundreds, thousands, even. So many missed opportunities, I say. He nods, smiles a bit, but I can tell that I've crossed the line. I say too much or he does, he doesn't understand or I don't. All of it means the same thing, an instant of transparency. We see through what we've talked up around ourselves.

He shows me the curtains he sewed when they first moved in, so his place wouldn't look like a squat and he could keep out the light that shines in in the mornings. We looked at his Marilyn Manson poster. And then grinning, Honza jumps up and smacks a cardboard carton on the highest shelf in his closet. "Stampky!" he says. "You know? What are they called? I collect them when I was a boy. My grandfather gave me his old ones, very rare. What are they in English?"

"Stamps?"

He slaps his hand over his face and looks at me from between his long fingers. "Stampky," he says again, blue eyes watching.

But now he's going to show me something else, something great, he promises, and he sits down at his computer. Do I know, he wonders, Michael Jackson? Of course, I tell him, who doesn't know Michael Jackson? No one is better, Honza says. We will watch a video. He sits down at an old, boxy computer and opens a file. Soon, Michael Jackson is performing "Remember the Time," squeaking and moonwalking across a polished stage.

In the corner, by Honza's bed, a little glass-fronted cabinet hangs on the wall. Inside, sea shells and toy cars, delicately arranged on little shelves, pinecones and matchbooks, playing cards, a pompom wearing a tiny plastic top hat, a piece of bamboo stalk a few inches long. All stuff he collected when he and his mother had to move to Italy for a year, when he was six. When they came back, they lived in Mala Strana, across the river from Old Town Prague. Back when it was locals only, he says, no tourist shit. Now he hates it, his old neighborhood transformed into a movie set, nothing left of what he used to know. It was a simple life then; he almost snarls when he talks about the neighborhood now.

The glass reflects his face. Wallpaper with a boyish, woodland-hunting motif lines the back of the case. "Everything important here. If I could be seven, six, five forever—" and his eyes roll upward, searching.

Michael Jackson pulls his hat down over his face and struts across the stage. We sit down on the couch that is brand new this year.

Honza says, "What are you doing here, pretty American girl, here, in my flat? I was born 100 kilometers from here. And you were born a few thousand kilometers."

He holds my hand.

"How did you get here? Why do you have to leave?"



Scilla Bennett



Alex Wang

Rented House

Yelena Shuster (*Columbia University)*

Down and Out in ….

I

Rented house, Pine Mountain Lake, California, eight in the morning. A series of grouchy wake-up calls from downstairs. Nino, our coach who organized this all-girls gymnastics camp, had come out of her room to address a hungry seven-year-old. Nino's body was covered in spandex and her eyeballs protruded from a tense face.

Nino: "*Tolstaya Dura! Sumashechaya!* Are you joking? Sneaking a cauliflower or drinking water before exercising? What, you want the rolls in your butt to double? Quickly get in line! *Dura Malinkaya!*"

I spent an entire teenage summer starving in gymnastics camp, a Russian variant to the US fat camp, having been sent off by caring parents who believed losing weight was one of life's main agendas. There were about twenty of us, as young as seven and as old as seventeen, who were crammed into four bedrooms with the magic of inflatable mattresses and intimate sleeping conditions. Sneaking food in our bras, cat fights, desperate calls home, itchy sunburns, pretending bouts of fainting, clogged toilets, and rare moments of camaraderie made up the environment in our cabins.

My corpulent roommates were all Russian immigrants slowly adopting the American lifestyle. Our two hour breaks were spent watching *The Young and the Restless,* the older girls braided the hair of the younger while discussing the latest love rhombus. But our coach could not have been more steadfastly European. Under her rule, our existence was reduced to exercising and starving, drinking tea, and cursing the *Durniye Americansi.* The Stupid Americans were also to blame for high prices and our obesity. She derided our needs ("luxuries!") and was a machine running on discipline without the help of oil to loosen her rigidity. Originally from Georgia, she had a boyish cut and a scratchy voice that made her all the more intimidating.

Nino also had trouble grasping the American concept of lingerie. She went commando in her shirts, exposing her full womanhood. What had happened was clear: she only brought one bra with her for the trip, and when it got lost, she didn't feel it was necessary to buy a new one. We would start stretching; she would bend down to touch her toes, and we would be able to see all through the armpit holes of her tank top (sans spandex). This was not so much terrifying as it was hilarious. A small revenge for those of us privy to Victoria's Secret.

We were fed three times a day, but weren't allowed sweets (including sugar in our tea) or seconds of anything. For growing girls, this was torture. We would hide candies in our laundry, underwear, and any other place we assumed she wouldn't look. When visiting the beach (which involved a complicated maneuver of flexibility as all of us were forced to fit into two cars), we would tell our coach we were buying water, and buy candy as well, which we'd hide in our dank towels. Then, we'd sneak into the public restrooms and let the foul smell fill our nostrils while we gobbled our goods. One girl's mother worked in the camp as the Arts and Crafts teacher, and out of pity supplied us with an extra supply of dry cereal. We treated the girl as a goddess.

Collecting sticks of gum also became an obsession. The incessant chewing relaxed us, it was a cheap way of obtaining temporary sugar, and most importantly—it was permitted. Once, a girl gained a pound instead of losing one. Our coach searched every room for assumed cheating of her system and discovered our smuggled supply of gum. She blamed the weight gain on her negligence in permitting us this luxury and forbade us

to buy it from then on. That was a dark day.

The heat made living conditions unbearable. Sometimes our sneaked chocolates would melt in our clothes only to be discovered after sitting on the splits and hearing an uncomfortable splat. The shame was not as bad as the feeling of mashed chocolate against your spandexed upper thigh.

II

Life in the bedroms. My fellow prisoners, for instance. Large, oily-haired girls with made-up faces trying to cover their erupting pimples, each having her own story to tell.

Anna was cold and unreceptive, but tried to make you believe otherwise by painting her lips and nails an inviting, vibrant red. She used to work at Sees Candies in the rich district of downtown San Francisco. Due to her caring and fastidious behavior towards her products, she was promoted to Assistant Manager in less than a couple of months, a record of some sort in that store's history. But her caring nature grew into lust, and she was fired for eating all the samples intended to entice future customers.

Or there was Masha, a short, rat-faced girl with skinny legs always covered in her favorite skort. Like Greek columns, her legs overshadowed the rest of her body. She had this way of closing her eyes and turning her face away from you when she talked, as though she were fully concentrating on her next thought. Once during break time, we were all gathered in one room imitating Nino's swan dive to her toes (bras intact), when Masha stood up and began her eye flutterings. Here we knew to listen. She spoke of a romantic experience she had during her many travels.

"*Devachki! Lyubov eta patresaishayi vyesh.* At 15, I experienced this love, and consider myself a woman ever since. The moment I am describing to you is one of utter bliss, and I hope you all have the opportunity to experience such gratification."

Here she turned to us, and we saw her eyes light up.

"I had come to Africa for some sightseeing. I had befriended a gorgeous man of nineteen, usually wearing nothing more than a loincloth and a bandanna."

Here she licks her lips.

"It all boiled down to one night. He took me to this beautiful forest clearing near his cabin for a moonlit picnic. *My girlfriends all warned me about the whole AIDS epidemic, but I trusted his immune system.* There we were, getting real comfortable, when out of the corner of my eye, I spotted the most enticing piece of chocolate in his picnic basket. This was the moment of choice, and as soon as I felt the sugary content melting in mouth, I knew I had made the right decision. *Devachki, ya bila vlublina!* Without a second thought, I ripped open the chocolate wrapper and savagely began my attack, chewing every piece a bit more violently than the last. He looked at me with disgust, but bite after bite caused such stimulating effects that as I speak to you now, my mouth waters for its familiar, sensual taste."

She finished her story there, leaving us all salivating for that piece of chocolate.

III

I starved at Nino's gymnastics camp for two summers. One day, I found that I had only three pounds left to lose before reaching my parents' ideal weight for me. That day we got lost on our way back from our morning aerobics workout. We would sneak into school playgrounds that had been closed for the summer and train in their yards. Each girl brought her own clubs, rope, ribbon, and hoop to practice her routines. I was never the athletic type and found our four-hour practice sessions exhausting—a confession that earned me the nickname of *dokhlaya kuritza*. I must have looked like a dying chicken in training, and Nino broadcast the clever simile to the girls in the spirit of boosting morale through name-calling. We walked an extra two miles out of the way on an empty stomach early in the humid morning. By the last mile, one girl shouted "*Blyad, Nu shto eto takoyo?!*" and bravely took off her shirt. Others followed suit, and we soon became a band of half-

naked women parading the Pine Mountain Lake roadways with our "*Blyad!*"s and jiggling layers of flesh.

After that extra workout, I knew I had lost enough weight to escape. I had written to my parents, and they responded with unending vigor of how proud they were that they no longer have to feed "our little *tolstiy* pudge-ball." It is wonderful seeing your weight on the scales and realizing that you can now be permitted to obtain a social life. I walk to school with a slight sway of the hips I no longer have to condemn. When my friend asks if I want a bite of her sandwich and I reply with, "No thanks, I'm not hungry," she believes me. I have the right to giggle in public when a cute guy approaches me, because I know he's not asking to get a bite of my supersized Big Mac.

The jeering by the women doesn't end, however—only the reason changes. They teased me before because I was fat; they tease me now because they're jealous I'm not anymore. Life, in short, becomes slightly more bearable.

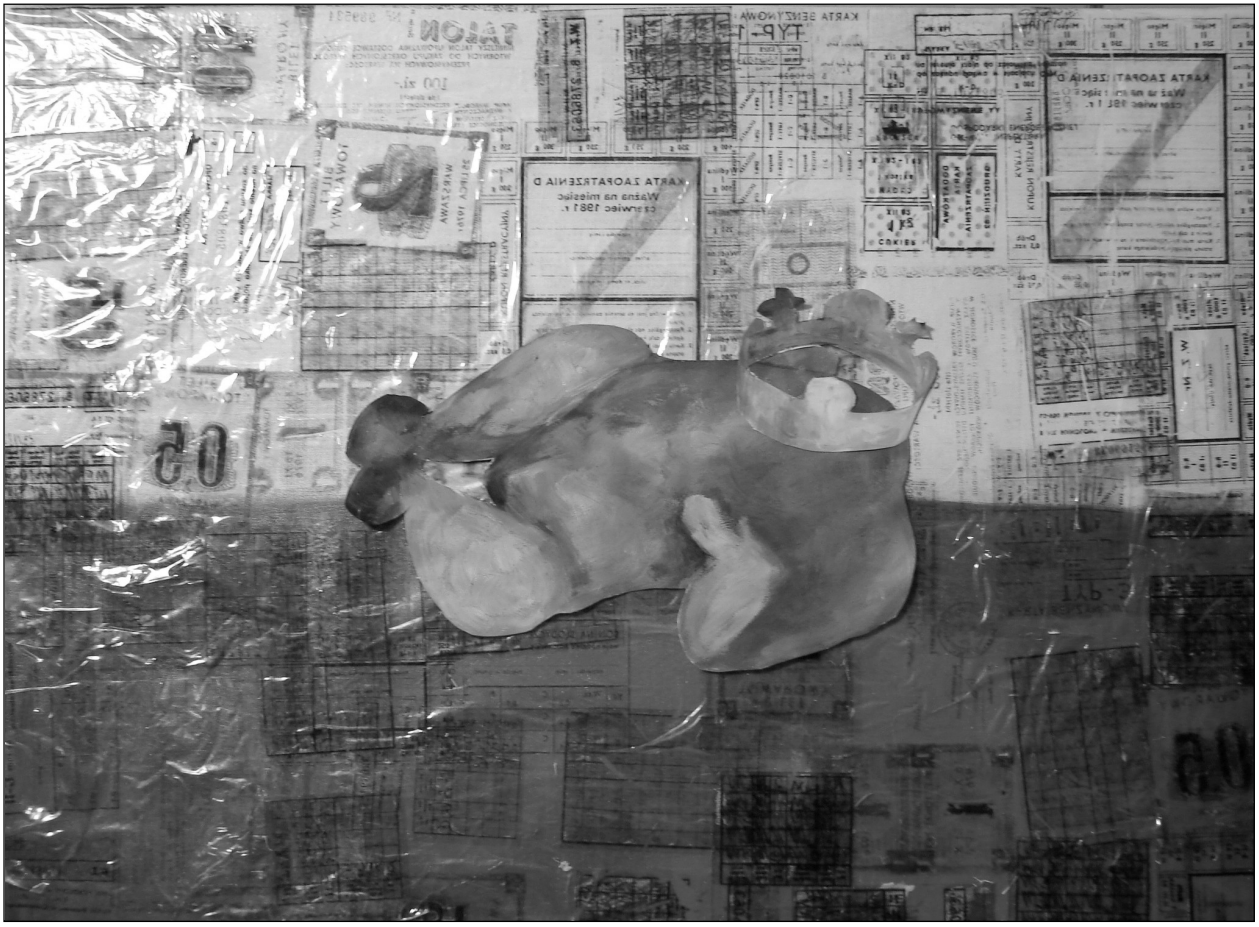


Joanna Lis

Kartiki I Bony

Joanna Lis (*University of Florida)*

Original Artwork
Dimensions: 22" x 36"
Materials: tape transfers, photo copies, acrylic paint and glaze.



This painting is a commentary on the economic conditions of Communist Poland. While there was an abundance of food rations, for most people in 1970s Poland, there was nothing to eat. In this piece, these socioeconomic difficulties are symbolized through the cooked poultry (or eagle) wearing a crown behind a backdrop of ration tickets – eliciting an impression of both the visceral and intellectual hunger felt by the Poles. The society was one that longed for social change, as complicity gave way into a form of civil disobedience – in the guise of Workers Defense Committee and the Solidarity movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

Beautiful Girls: A Taganrog Diary

Nick Slaughter (*University of South Carolina*)

This is Taganrog, a provincial city on the Azov Sea. Anton Chekhov was born here in 1860. I live with a family in a small apartment. The son is my tutor and occasionally my translator. The daughter works in Rostov-on-the-Don two hours away and visits on weekends. Her name is Dasha.

My first conversation with the father occurred while we were watching television. Two young Russian women in swimsuits appeared on the screen. The father turned to me and said with a thick Russian accent, "Beautiful girls."

In school, we're reading Chekhov's story "The Beauties." Great beauty, Chekhov thought, has a momentous and terrible effect on the human soul. In Chekhov's lifetime, beauty still connoted purity and truth. There was no cynicism about it.

One Friday night I came home late to the apartment. Dasha and her mother were both waiting for me and getting ready for bed. Nobody I know in Russia cares much about personal space, and Dasha was standing only inches from me in a small gown. "I know you have an excursion planned for tomorrow," she said. "But after that I want to speak with you and ask you questions."

"Good, tomorrow then." I said goodnight and went to bed, where I slept little.

On Saturday, I dragged myself through the city on a required tour with my schoolmates. Then evening came. I almost didn't recognize Dasha as she awaited me beneath the shadow of a tree. For hours we walked the same streets I had just toured that afternoon. Dasha and I talked about childhood, about our differences. We laughed and argued, looked away from one another in silence and then resumed our talk again. Every so often she would smile.

Once, Dasha spoke of the young Russian women she knew, the way they felt desperate to be slim and beautiful.

To retell the entirety of our conversation, to get lost in the details—Chekhov would never do that. I will only recount that I didn't follow everything she said but felt compelled to tell her she was beautiful.

Dasha is modest. She just replied, "Thank you."

In the evening, Taganrog is not a city of lights. Only the most traveled areas are illuminated. Dasha and I walked mostly in darkness as night settled in. It felt very late when Dasha looked at her watch and said it was time for her train. That night she was returning to Rostov-on-the-don.

We met her brother at the Rostov-Taganrog shuttle station. He and I saw Dasha off. I said a polite goodbye and promised to see her next weekend.

It is Tuesday morning and I sit silently in Russian class. The other students are discussing "The Beauties."

Chekhov writes: "Whether it was envy of her beauty, or that I was regretting that the girl was not mine, and never could be, or that I was a stranger to her; or whether I vaguely felt that her rare beauty was accidental, unnecessary, and like everything on earth, of short duration; or whether, perhaps, my sadness was that peculiar feeling which is excited in man by the contemplation of real beauty, God only knows."

I think of Dasha working her in her other city. What work does she do there? Where does she go in the evenings? Whom does she see?



Laura Smetana



Ilona Potiha

Irina in Blue Velour

Abby Rosebrock (*Columbia University)*

Irina with small hands threads
a gel through black-brown curls,
ties up the fistful.

Hairs
at their roots pull taut the milk-
white encircling her face.

Cheeks and chin three
knots of bright dough.

Lips
the strawberry of hard candy.

Even her whining is kind, splashing
our walls.

She is our short-armed
Jewess, a Mother of Christ gilded
in the window, pondering wry
and crass things in her heart.

Zalew Zembrozycki

Hannah Gould (*Barnard College*)

Fall and later fall are two entirely different seasons in Lublin, Poland. One is decorated with fire-colored leaves; the other is the greyest grey you will ever see. One is a time for young families and shy lovers; the other is empty, except for the occasional drunk with a cigarette. Neither is warm, but one feels warmer. Fall is the soothing twilight at the end of an effervescent summer day. Later fall is the hundredth day of eternity.

Zalew Zemborzycki is the home of later fall.

I had only been in Lublin for a couple of weeks when Mateusz, a friend of a friend, first asked me to join him for a walk around Zalew Zemborzycki, Lublin's man-made lake. We walked in the grey air and talked. I took pictures, a hobby inspired by my strange new surroundings: oppressively grey and sprawling apartment complexes, *mały fiats,* graffiti-covered kiosks, unpronounceable street names.

Zalew Zemborzycki, the "fake lake," as dubbed by Mateusz, is amorphously shaped. Its outline on a map might look like a melted hexagon, or a large slab of dough, spread out with a rolling pin. A walking path hugs and occasionally fuses with the curvy shore line—sometimes dirt, sometimes concrete, sometimes grass, sometimes sand. It meanders over hills and around playgrounds, up to the door of a dingy pub, and around white plastic picnic tables chained to the ground near greasy fish stands. *Smażona ryba* only three *złoty*.[1] A wild forest begins at the shore line and thickens as it stretches out for miles in every direction. The sky is reflected in the lake, or perhaps the lake is reflected in the sky. It is impossible to tell; they are the same shade of grey.

During my year in Poland, Mateusz and I made regular trips to the lake: on a Saturday or a Friday or a Tuesday, because he was bored or I was restless, after finishing an exam or before beginning a research paper. We would often go in the late afternoons, after *obiad,*[2] which his mother, an unassumingly brilliant literature professor, would prepare in her closet-sized kitchen. *Barszcz czerwony*, *kotlet*, *ziemniaki*, *mizeria*, and *sernik* for dessert.[3] After filling our stomachs, Mateusz and I would drive to Zalew to get some air and a bit of exercise. We would complain about American teenagers and Polish neo-Nazi thugs and laugh at ourselves for sounding like eighty-year-old grouches.

On cold, winter weekends, Mateusz and I would meet early and would spend the day painting at an abandoned factory on the outskirts of the city. Mateusz and his friend Marchin were the core of the old-school Lublin graffiti artists. Marchin, a graduate student in psychology, worked with traditional designs—explosive bubble letters, highlighted and outlined, cryptically spelling out a nickname or a catch-phrase. Mateusz, on the other hand, was a geometrical writer. His abstract murals were comprised entirely of lines and dots or concentric rectangles. Upon arriving at a jam sight, Marchin and Mateusz would stake out a wall away from the crowd of teenage boys, many of whom couldn't paint but came along for the excitement of breaking windows and trashing storerooms. Then the two artists would fill twenty-or-so square feet of cold concrete with a joint mural. With paint from spray cans and buckets, tin scrapers, foam rollers, and a complementary color scheme, Mateusz and Marchin would fuse their distinctive styles. After the graffiti jams, which generally broke up with the arrival of the *policja*[4] and our hurried escape over a chain link fence, we would reconvene at Zalew with a couple of *Perła* beers to discuss the Lublin graffiti scene.

The lake was a perfect setting for our talks. The plain backdrop it provided neutralized our differences. At Zalew, it didn't matter who was a sixteen-year-old Californian and who was a twenty-five-year-old Polish Ph.D. student. It didn't matter whose English was bad or whose Polish was worse. It didn't matter who had money, who had a visa, who was brilliant, who was in love. We could walk around the water, calmed by the setting's lack of exceptionality, and use the wrong English preposition or the wrong Polish case ending.

Mateusz had, and still has, a special relationship with Zalew—a relationship that I grew to understand and adopt for myself. Many people would pass right by Zalew Zemborzycki. Or else, they would mock its splotchy grass, murky water, unkempt path, and junky playgrounds. At first look, it's easy to let Zalew's dinginess distract one from its quietly remarkable spirit. But Zalew, just like Poland, is tenacious. Sometime a place feels passive; sometimes it cannot be otherwise. But Zalew survives, as does Poland—in this old and scholarly history professor; in that simple, wooden Catholic Church; in this abandoned factory, damaged and decorated by the same group of people. That sense of survival is what gives Zalew its signifi-

cant place in Mateusz's heart and in my memory.

Mateusz knows that Zalew is not perfect. He can comment on its lack of sophistication, criticize its litter and dirt, make fun of its regular crowd of drunks who sit along the shore with dark brown bottles and idle fishing poles. It's impossible to live in such a place without laughing occasionally—at the place itself, and at yourself for living there. But underneath the self-deprecation, Mateusz loves Zalew as he loves Poland: his perfectly cracked and worn home. It has been trampled on and shot at and stolen and stolen back and stolen again; but it still stands, still belongs to the Poles. Zalew Zemborzycki: a physical manifestation of pride, ironic and serious, in what one refuses to acknowledge as broken.

FOOTNOTES

1 Fried fish *only three* złoty (the Polish currency, equivalent to approximately one fourth of the American dollar).

2 lunch (the main meal of the day, typically taken around three o'clock in the afternoon)

3 Red beet soup, cutlet, potatoes, cucumber salad, *and* cheesecake *for desert.*

4 State police, which replaced Communist-era *Malicjia,* or military police



Joanna Lis

The Populist Moment in Russian Literature

The Writings of Nikolai Chernyshevsky

Jennifer Wilson (*Columbia University)*

The Russian Populist movement grew out of the democratizing efforts of the Decembrists in 1825 and the Peasant Socialist movement that had been championed by Russian thinkers like Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinsky. Like these earlier movements, the Russian Populists were intensely critical of the Tsarist state and were thus interested more in a political revolution than in an economic revolution. Following Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, there was increasingly less faith in the resilience of the Russian state and consequently, a political revolution seemed less unimaginable. The Populists believed that the peasant *mir*, the village commune, was a perfect example of a free and democratic society based on socialist principles. They believed that mir-mentality was inherent to the Russian people's moral fiber, and thus, the transformation from capitalism to Socialism would be less violent in Russian than in the West.

Perhaps the most influential figure in the Populist Movement was Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-1889). Chernyshevsky was born to a priest father and a mother of some fortune, making him a *raznochinetz*, someone of mixed-class birth. Many of those involved in the Populist movement came from this raznochinetz class. Thus Chernyshevsky was beheld as an ideal leader, unlike earlier revolutionaries like Herzen and Belinsky whose aristocratic origins paved the way for Chernyshevsky to usurp their status as the preeminent revolutionary thinker of the era. Chernyshevsky's core beliefs, which were later elaborated in *What is to be Done?,* are: that science would bring about social progress, that the peasant commune was the model society that all revolutionaries should fight for, and that rational thinking would produce the best outcomes for both the individual and society-- or in other words, that the pursuit of self-interest would ultimately benefit society on the whole. However, one of Chernyshevsky's most well-known and lasting intellectual contribution was made in the field of Aesthetics.

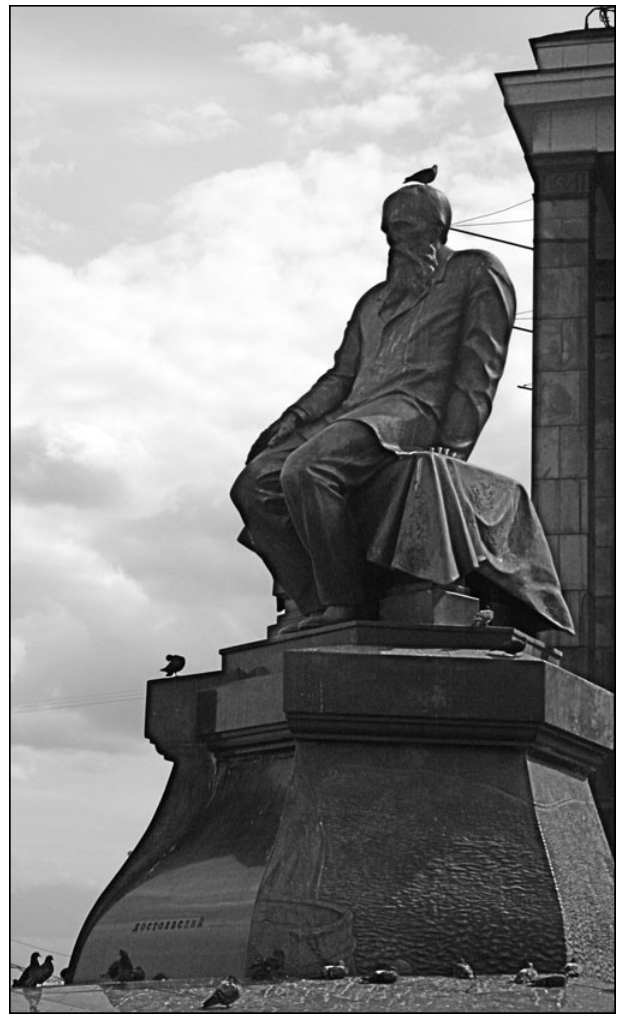
Chernyshevsky's essay on art was actually his first major work. Begun in 1853 and published in 1855, Chernyshevsky's *The Aesthetic Relations of Art and Society* would prove to be one of the most influential contributions to Aesthetics by a Russian, shaping the lives and work of Russian and Soviet artists for over a hundred years including most famously Vladimir Nabokov, whose novel *The Gift (Dar)* contained a scathing critique of Chernyshevsky. Chernyshevsky wrote *The Aesthetic Relations of Art and Society* as a critique of Idealist aesthetics, which subordinated reality to art, arguing that only in the world of art can true beauty exist. Like the Idealists, Chernyshevsky agreed that art was a substitute for the phenomelogical world, but Chernyshevsky argued that art was subordinate to reality, not vice-versa. Chernyshevsky regarded the Idealist aesthetics as not only incorrect, but dangerous as they placed the possibility for happiness and harmonious existence in the realm of art, and thus outside of the social realm. Chernyshevsky argued that art should be a mirror image of reality. However, Chernyshevsky argues that the artist should not just passively reproduce reality, but that the artist should explain the reality he portrays as well. Chernyshevsky believed that artists should "judge" the reality he or she presents and thus create, "a manual for life." Chernyshevsky believed that art should provide the radical "new men" of the sixties with guidelines for social praxis, both in terms how they should think politically and how they should behave and interact with others. Chernyshevsky provided an example of how such art should function with his novel *What is to be Done?* In it, he portrays the lives of the radical new youth, or more correctly, how their lives should be in order to bring about radical change.

What is to be Done? was written in reaction to Ivan Turgenev's novel, *Fathers and Sons.* Turgenev's novel, like *What is to be Done?,* depicted the new youth of the sixties, most infamously in the character of Bazarov. Bazarov, a believer in scientific truth, a raznochinetz, and fierce critic of romantic love was viewed as emblematic of the radical new generation's ideals. However, Chernyshevsky thought Bazarov was a caricature of his friend and fellow Populist Nikolai Dobrolyubov. Furthermore, Chernyshevsky took issue with the supposed incompatibility of rational thought and romantic love that was suggested by Turgenev's

novel. In *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov's love for Odintsova reads as not merely as a love affair, but as Bazarov's downfall as a man invested in pure reason, a rational approach to life removed from emotional and seemingly irrational impulses. Some argue that Bazarov's death is a suicide, brought on by a sense of failure over having fallen in love and thus having betrayed the revolutionary ethos he used to stand for. In *What is to be Done?*, Chernyshevsky sought to "correct" Turgenev's portrayal of the new revolutionary generation by showing how romantic love could function within a framework of rational egoism.

The main characters of *What is to be Done?* are Vera Pavlovna, an emancipated "new woman" who has escaped her greedy mother's home to pursue a life of social usefulness and rationalism, Lupokhov, the man who rescues her from her mother and initiates Vera Pavlovna into the revolutionary ethos of the sixties, and Kirsanov, who takes Vera away from her loveless marriage to Lupokhov. Lupokhov and Kirsanov are both prime examples of the "new man." They are both born as raznochintsy, they both study medicine, and they both believe that self-interest is both rational and ultimately good for the whole of society. Vera Pavlovna represents the "new woman;" she rejects bourgeois marriage by refusing to be married off to wealthy man and devotes her life to the revolutionary movement, establishing sewing collectives and eventually pursuing the even loftier goal of studying medicine. Important here is that Vera's rejection of a loveless marriage to a wealthy suitor allows her to pursue a life that will benefit society on the whole. Thus, Chernyshevsky exemplifies his belief in "rational egoism," that is that the self-interest will yield progress for all of society. However, the marriage between Vera and Lupokhov is similarly loveless. Chernyshevsky presents Vera and Lupokhov's marriage as a manifestation of the common misconceptions about love within a socialist society. Vera and Lupokhov's marriage is completely lacking in romance; they do not share the same bed, they almost never kiss. It is only when Vera leaves this loveless marriage based on purely rational thought and not self-interest does she finally begin her truly revolutionary work with the collectives and eventually-- medicine. Chernyshevsky believed that love and labor complimented one another. He argued that love promoted creativity and productivity-- and thus, only once Vera entered her marriage to Kirsanov (which was based on self-interest) does she become her most productive.

What is to Be Done? serves the purpose of instructing the new revolutionary generation to follow the tenets of Chernyshevsky's political thought: self-interest is for the benefit of society, science is a noble and essential discipline for the good of society, and collectives and commune -based societies are the most perfect form of existence. Later, in Notes from the Underground, Fyodor Dostoevsky would famously argue against Chernyshevsky's belief in the goodness of rational egoism by suggesting that rational thought enslaves human beings.



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Exposure and Consciousness

Natasza Goerke's Portrayal of Gender in "The Return"

Jodi Greig (*University of Florida*)

Tackling subjects like philosophy, religion, and identity with an absurd but refreshing light-heartedness, Natasza Goerke scrupulously avoids moralizing in her short stories, instead playfully probing the processes behind these weighty metaphysical topics. Occasionally bizarre to the point of incomprehensibility, her stories nevertheless raise important questions about phenomenology and the construction of social reality. In her short story "The Return", Goerke scrutinizes the origin and nature of gender relations. Goerke manipulates the Polish language to awaken within the reader an awareness of the superficiality of gender, experimenting with the creative power of language and linguistics in gender formation, undermining the traditional male-female binary and thereby forcing a separation of gender and identity. Certain aspects of Judith Butler's theories on the performative nature of gender and the subversive power of "drag" may be utilized in order to decode and interpret these processes of gender production in "The Return".

In an attempt to expose the theatrical nature of gender, Goerke endeavors to communicate the exteriority of gender and gender relations. Goerke uses words like "role", "performance", "stage", and "mask" repeatedly throughout the story, as well as having the narrator liken herself to an "actor" in regard to her femininity. The narrator exclaims, "My true form delighted me, and I moved in it as freely as an actor trying out a new type of experiment" (Farewells, 35). The key to the paradox in this sentence lies within the words "true" and "actor". Truth is generally accepted as inherent and unable to be "acted" (because acting is often conceptually synonymous with lying). By presenting this contradiction, Goerke endeavors to portray the demolition of the division between reality and performance, collapsing them into one and the same. This is exactly what she attempts to expose – society tends to regard gender as an inherent indicator of reality rather than focusing exclusively on its performative nature. Through this exposure, subversion of the notion that gender is inherent is accomplished. In addition to the collapse of gender identity and performance, the body is no longer presented as a basis for identity, but rather as a tool which is used to enact femininity. The narrator, in an attempt to further perfect her performance by mimicking the women around her, says, "I observed their cunning professionalism, how they used their bodies to operate" (Farewells, 35). Goerke presents the body as a medium through which gender is produced, or as a site for cultural and social signification. On the topic of the body, Butler has similar views, writing, "Words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (Gender Trouble, 185). Here, Butler indicates that the body is the site for signification that creates the illusion of a cohesive identity. Similarly, Goerke's presentation of the body as a vehicle for gender signification alludes to that same illusory characteristic of gender performance, as it is enacted on and through the body, creating an "identity" which can be acknowledged by others.

The notion of gender as a creative act is prevalent all throughout "The Return". Gender is not a static, lifeless mask which the narrator dons, parroting the women she is observing. Rather, the narrator is presented as constantly tweaking her performance in order to perfect it. Goerke writes, "He gracefully applauded my various performances, which, in turn, inspired me to bravely develop new creations." (Fractale, 123). Her use of the word "creation" indicates that she is not only superimposing an already solidified conception of gender on herself but rather is producing it through her language and actions. Goerke concretely represents gender as a process rather than a pre-existing role which one learns to assume. This idea of gender as a process is similar to Butler's theories on gender, as she explains that the term *woman* is "a becoming" rather than a construction which can begin or end. Butler writes, "As an ongoing discursive practice, [woman] is open to intervention and resignification", meaning that even in its seemingly most concrete form, gender is constantly being manipulated and maintained. (Gender Trou-

ble, 45)

Despite their similarities, however, Butler and Goerke seem to differ on one very important aspect of gender performativity dealing with this aspect of process. Butler denies the existence of a pre-existing subject, claiming that the entirety of the individual *is* a constant process. In contrast, Goerke, while also presenting her characters as performances, painstakingly protects the concept of a pre-existing subject. This is seen in her emphasis on the fact that gender and identity are so completely separated that gender is a conscious performance devoid of the personal, and that the coherency of the narrator's identity is left intact, even when her façade of femininity is dissolved.

Butler's theories can also be used to illuminate Goerke's philosophies. Within "The Return", the theory of constitutive acts gains a definite linguistic basis. Butler employs the use of a radical re-reading of the doctrine of constitution to bolster her argument for gender performativity, writing,

> Though phenomenology sometimes appears to assume the existence of a choosing and constituting agent prior to language (who poses as the sole source of its constituting acts), there is also a more radical use of the doctrine of constitution that takes the social agent as the *object* rather than the subject of constitutive acts" (Performative Acts, 519).

Whereas Goerke protects the existence of the subject, she also emphasizes the genesis of identity and social reality in language. The story is told through the medium of language – meaning is conferred and processes exposed through it. The Polish language, which is heavily invested in a gendered verb system, linguistically creates and perpetuates the social reality of the gender binary. Thus Goerke's story could be said to generate a theory of linguistic constitutive acts, in which language produces identity.

Perhaps the most innovative and revolutionary tactic of Goerke is her manipulation of Polish in order to expose gender as a social construct. The most obvious indication, which is presented immediately in the first sentence, is Goerke's use of the first-person masculine past tense as the narrator's voice. The first line of the story reads, "Wiedziałem, że znowu jestem kobietą" (Fractale, 122). The ending –łem indicates the masculinity of the subject. However, the sentence translates as "I knew that I was once again a woman". This juxtaposition of masculine language and the assertion that the narrator is a woman creates instant confusion for the Polish reader. The content and language are completely contradictory. Throughout the story, Goerke uses this technique to indicate the voice of her narrator. She employs a similar tactic later on by referring to a woman with a "large, masculine body, and it was clear that her performance as a man was flawless" (Farewells, 37), using the third person feminine past tense. Goerke, playing with very foundations of Polish linguistics, undermines perhaps the most ingrained, deep-seated institution of the gender binary in Slavic society – the language. Goerke reveals how Slavic languages, through their gendered past-tense verb system, are invested heavily in and rely upon the gender binary. Her manipulation of language creates a complete disconnect between gender and identity, exposing the unconscious assumption of the reader that gender is inherent and indicating its pervasiveness in society. Language, as the creative force driving reality according to the constitutive theory of linguistic acts discussed earlier, is exposed as the function through which the gender binary is crystallized. Butler's theories on the subversive nature of "drag" perform much the same function. To summarize her position on drag, Butler writes,

> As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman"… it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency.* (Gender Trouble, 187)

"The Return", then, becomes, essentially, a linguistic drag show – a parade of tactics and techniques which undermine the unconscious production of gender, revealing gender to be a socially constructed notion and artificially created identity. Both drag and Goerke's short story expose gender as performative and hence destroy the required unconscious participation to perpetuate it.

"The Return" is a rich text from which many questions of gender and identity arise. Though Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity may help elucidate some of the processes examined throughout the story, Goerke situates women in Poland and other Slavic countries as being uniquely located within a system that relies heavily on gender constructions perpetuated by gendered language. The acceptance of gender relies on its unconscious performance, and in describing its contingencies, she generates a consciousness within the reader of the performative nature of gender.

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In the Cage

A Feminist Analysis of Vaculik's *The Guinea Pigs*

Victoria Stephanova (*University of Washington*)

As is often the case in our contemporary world, the society depicted in Ludvík Vaculík's novel *The Guinea Pigs* is organized on the basis of rigid gender roles that relegate women to an inferior status. Eva, the narrator's wife, is a one-dimensional character. She has a limited range of human interests, traits and capabilities. As the narrative progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that her life is confined and shaped by conventional expectations of women. The title of the novel comes from family's pet guinea pigs who the author uses in various ways throughout the novel to represent gender dynamics in patriarchal societies.

The narrator's household is a microcosm of society at large. The family has a clearly defined hierarchical structure. Vašek, the narrator, is the head of the family while Eva and his two young children are virtually powerless. He often ends his workday at the bank "in a bad mood." Although he calls himself a "banker," he is essentially a servile clerk who is sometimes subjected to humiliating treatment at the bank. As soon as he comes home, however, the emasculated narrator regains some power by asserting his dominance over his wife and sons. Vašek disrespects Eva, abuses the boys and makes the decisions for the family. In this way, he fulfills the traditional role of the domineering husband/father figure.

More importantly, the narrator has a visibly negative opinion of the opposite sex. His views are exemplified in the following passage:

> "The guinea pig is pretty fortunate not to have gotten into the hands of… one of you little girls. Little girls are the worst things there are nowadays. They don't have anything to do, they have practically nothing to worry about all day, and so when they want to take care of somebody, they can do more harm than good, thanks to their obtuse mothers… when it comes to mothers, obtuse means decorative, lazy and common... I'm concerned about which of you, you giggling little know-nothings… are the ones our boys are going to marry… I can well imagine what would have happened if the guinea pig had been given to one of you little girls of the age of Pavel instead of to him. You would cuddle it, you little silly ones, you'd squeeze it and pet it and snuggle it until… it would quit eating… its eyes would fade and finally they would go out completely. We know what would happen next: you would take it and, tearfully, mournfully… you would bury it and be forever carrying flowers to its grave. On the other hand, Pavel's attentions are responsible" (21).

The paragraph above has three noteworthy characteristics. First, the "little girls" are a representation of the narrator's impression of women in general. These "little girls" eventually become "obtuse mothers" who raise another generation of "giggling little know-nothings." From the narrator's standpoint, females are irrational and overly sensitive. Apparently, they are too "silly" to take care of an animal properly and he is certain that they would all mourn the loss of a companion "by carrying flowers to its grave." Second, the narrator implies that women take advantage of male hospitality without providing any useful services in return. The "little girls" and their idle, dull-witted mothers cannot maintain their carefree lifestyles unless they have material support from the men in their lives. He is thus worried about the prospect of seeing these supposedly parasitic females marrying his sons. Third, the narrator reveals a personal belief in male superiority by drawing a sharp distinction between the "little girls" and Pavel, his younger son. Pavel, by virtue of being a male, is "responsible" while the "little girls" are no better than the guinea pigs they always smother.

At the start of the novel, the narrator describes his sons in detail but says very little about his wife, Eva: "My wife, whom the boys, true to their Nature, prefer to call Mom, is named Eva. She is a teacher, but there's no harm in that." This exemplifies her insignificance to him. Furthermore, on the sole occasion when Eva expresses her thoughts on a philosophical issue, the narrator dismisses them, noting that "as usual she's not entirely right." Since "she's not entirely right," he sees no reason to value her opinions: "Christmas was coming, and we were trying to get presents together. I thought of a guinea pig… Eva re-

jected the idea… most resolutely; she said that they made her sick, and so on the very next day I set out to buy a guinea pig."

Vašek first takes interest in the guinea pigs when he learns that they are the secret behind another bank employee's happiness. For the narrator, the guinea pigs are more than just "pets." Shortly after he brings the first guinea pig home, it becomes the primary object of his control. In the passage below, he reveals his feelings of powerlessness:

> "...a man can be a prince or the merest of the prince's non-devoted slaves. In a modern state [a man] can be the President or the merest of his non-voters… The position of a poor sap like that, at the bottom stratum of the social structure, is typified by his absolute helplessness… The one at the bottom is unhappy because he has to obey everybody… But if he finds that he has at least one creature even lower than himself, the world takes on an entirely different aspect" (10-11).

This "poor sap" is an unmistakable characterization of the narrator. As a petty bank clerk, Vašek is "at the bottom stratum of the social structure." Although he exerts a high degree of control over his family, he feels more powerful when interacting with the guinea pigs. He can decide when they eat, sleep, and mate. Eventually, he begins to torture them during his "experiments."

The position of the guinea pigs vis-à-vis the narrator parallels the subordinate status of women vis-à-vis men. To begin with, women living under a system of male rule have the experience of being caged in; their mobility is restricted by an oppressive social structure that is perpetuated and reinforced by men. This invisible cage is made up of a complex network of arbitrary gender roles, social norms, and stereotypes that deprive women of their autonomy. Similarly, the guinea pigs literally live in a world that is both constructed by men and serves the interests of men. These submissive creatures mainly exist to provide entertainment and companionship to Vašek and his sons. The boys build an elaborate cage to confine the animals in a location where they can be monitored and controlled with ease. The narrator never has to worry about them escaping because after all, the "guinea pig is not an inquisitive creature." The pets essentially accept the situation that is imposed upon them from the outside.

As this essay has shown, the narrator's family is a miniature replica of the male-centered world around it. Both Vašek and Eva behave according to traditional gender roles. The latter is portrayed as a devoted wife/mother who spends most of her time in the kitchen; this is the essence of her existence. Eva's husband, on the other hand, is the undisputed head of the household. As if asserting his dominance over his family members were not enough, the narrator begins to keep guinea pigs in the family's home. He controls every aspect of the animals' lives, turning them into a symbol of women living in patriarchal societies. Like one of Vašek's powerless pets, the woman is not treated as an autonomous being. She lives in a cage that is constructed and maintained by men, and whose existence ultimately benefits them.



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"I've Become a Mother"

A Reading of Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*

Suneal Bedi (*Swarthmore College*)

Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate* is a vivid novel that spans the lives of many individuals throughout WWII. Grossman does an impressive job demonstrating the depth of family relationships and how these relationships are molded in times of war, especially in her treatment of the relation-ship between the characters of Sofya and David. Sofya is a German Jewish women. She is a middle-aged doctor who has no apparent family in the novel. David is a young Ger-man boy who has lost his mother in the war. Sofya and David meet on a crowded freight train headed to a concentration camp. There is, however, a kind of ironic beauty in the dark miserable freight train. Typically war is blamed for tearing families apart, but Grossman uses the relationship between Sofya and David to articulate the creative ability that war has to build relationships out of nothing. Through their relationship, Grossman shows how war can foster closeness between strangers that can rival the bond between mother and son.

At their first meeting on the train, Sofya immediately singles David out. She bumps into him in the night, and David does not say a word or make a movement, which catches her attention and evokes her sympthay. Sofya offers the boy her damp piece of cloth to suck water from. This moment parallels the bonding that occurs between mother and child during breast-feeding, and thus, presents Sofya as a mother figure.

It is the complete randomness of war that has brought two individuals so well suited, together. Sofya and David immediately foster an unspoken trust. War creates dire situations that isolate people, and at times the only source of comfort is human interaction. Sofya has only given David some water and asked him his name. Yet still, he holds her hand and only her hand as they leave the train. He has no real reason to trust Sofya. Here, Grossman presents his dual cri-tique of war. War divides people up. It separates and destroys families, but in doing so it brings together those strangers who are alone.

Like David needs Sofya for maternal comfort, she too needs him to bring her closure. Grossman articulates Sofya's love of the boy in the following passage:

> "She had always love children, but David evoked some special tenderness in her that she had never felt before… She had wanted to weep, to hug him, to smother him with kisses like a mother kissing her child."

Her maternal instinct goes further. Grossman explains that, "shame made her want to hide the maternal feelings welling up inside her." Of course, David himself also feels this attachment to Sofya. He "always watched anxiously if she [Sofya] moved to other side of the wagon and calmed down when she was near him." The SS soldiers calls for doctors and surgeons when all the prisoners get off the train. We are told that Sofya does not speak up, knowing quite well that it could save her life. She herself questions why she did not volunteer. Grossman wants the reader to understand Sofya's sacrifice for David. She feels as if staying with David and dying with him is her duty as his 'surrogate' mother.

Sofya finds comfort in David. She finds comfort in having someone to love even though he is a complete stranger. She hugs David by his shoulders and Grossman notes, "never before had she felt such tenderness for people." When her grip on little David's hand begins to weaken, she immediately jostles her body and does what she can to get closer to him. The reader has to assume that Sofya does this for not only David's sake, but also for her own. She too does not want to die alone.

David dies before Sofya. She is left caressing his body as she gasps for air. The scene is shocking and ridden with pain. However, the last thought of Sofya is not about the war or death. Sofya thinks, "I've become a mother." The imminent death of both Sofya and David has unexpectedly created a mother-son relationship that is arguably as strong as any other. It is through this 'fatally destined' relationship that Grossman shows the unique ability of war to create a family and the dreadful ability to destroy it within minutes.

The Birch Opera Event: A Photo Essay

Photography by Kevin Honnoll (*New Hampshire Technical Institute*)

On March 13, 2008, The Birch held its very first event in anticipation of The Metropolitan Opera's production of Sergei Prokofiev's The Gambler. Almost one hundred students, professors, visitors and guests enjoyed a great night of Russian food, music and culture.

Simon Morrison (Princeton University), a preeminent Prokofiev expert, delivered a fascinating lecture about the opera. The audience was also treated to captivating performances of musical selections by the Russian Chamber Choir of New York's Hanna Malytskaya and Valery Golodinskiy (accompanied by Inna Leytush). The night was capped off by a raffle for two premium tickets to The Metropolitan Opera's production of Verdi's Ernani.

The event will be featured in Telekanal Kultura's upcoming special on Russian culture in America. The Birch is honored to have hosted such illustrious speakers and performers and is thrilled about the success of our event.
















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Suprematism and Malevich's "Black Quadrilateral"

Jeffrey Blevins (*Amherst College*)

The art world in Russia at the close of the first decade of the 20th century was unprecedentedly innovative. Playing off the French symbolists (Delacroix in particular) and expressionists, Russian painters had begun producing works of unparalleled scope and ingenuity. Art for art's sake defined the zeitgeist, and no style was more informed by this trend than that of the Suprematist paintings, with their focus on non-objective shapes, colors, and lines. Malevich was the primogenitor of this Suprematist phenomenon and served as the flagship for the movement from 1913 through the decade to follow.

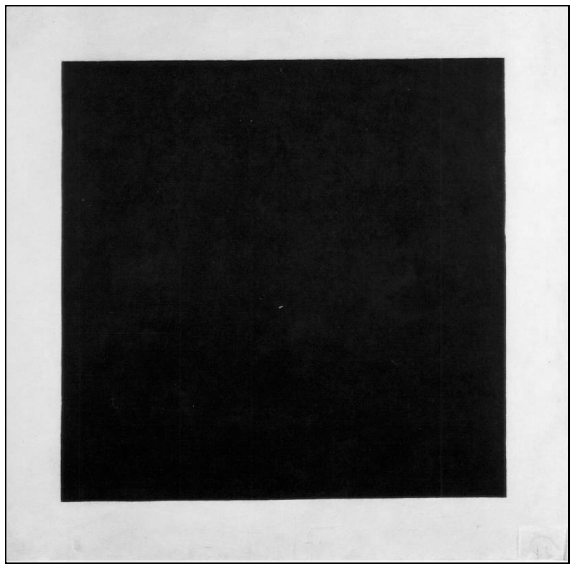
In the new miracle there is no
sun, no stars. The light of Paradise
has gone out.
The era of the new beginning has dawned.
(Malevich, "Kor re rezh. . .", c.1915 (1978))

Malevich presented Suprematism to the world as an inherently paradoxical art movement. This paradox is explored in the day/night dichotomy of "Kor re rezh" and the reconciliation of these contraries, simultaneous death and life, eclipse and revelation, night and day, would be central to the Suprematist artistic philosophy. The Black Quadrilateral is the apotheosis of this paradoxical vision, a painting that manages to be simultaneously black, yet white; iconic, yet iconoclastic; mind-numbingly enigmatic, yet simple to the point of banality; symbolic, in its blackness, of a void-like nothingness, yet also of an infinite everything; the collusion of all traditions, the color of all colors, and yet satirical of its audience and heritage. This essay explores its roles, as well as the Suprematists' roles in art history.

Malevich's metaphoric conception of Suprematism as a night sweeping over all of art was particularly applicable to Futurism, the dominant movement of the time. According to Stepanova, Suprematism was "the stage after cubo-futurism in the world art movement was revealed by non-objective creation." However, despite Stepanova's rhetoric, the future for Suprematism was one still tied to Futurism, as the Futurist obsessions with temporality, normality, sublime kitsch, the rejection of traditional aesthetics and art, were precursors to the Suprematist visions of eclipse and darkening. But while Suprematism represented a movement undeniably related to Futurism, the former was decidedly more iconoclastic, stripped down, and elemental than the latter. The stasis of Suprematist art, and the "repose" of the shape paintings, is wholly antithetical to Futurist conceptions of pure movement and their paintings which burst and tremble with action. The Black Quadrilateral would be the death-stroke of Futurism.

Futurism was only Malevich's first target. He wrote that the avant-garde styles, Suprematism particularly, spoke to a greater realism than the styles of the Renaissance and Greek artists: "the realism of the twentieth century is much greater than the idealistic forms found in the aesthetic experience of the Renaissance and Greek." If audiences were to gain insight into this Suprematist realism, they would have to rely on their first automatic sensations and aesthetic instincts regarding the relationship between shape and color, leading to an intuitive idea of the purpose and function of the artwork: "[a painting's] surface gives us a visual sensation that at first glance is hardly perceptible. One should not ask for more." Realist ideology was engaged by Suprematists at a 'trans-rational' level, avoiding the deleterious effect on artistic experience of consciousness, and the unavoidable mental expectations for art created by previous exposure to works of the canon. Thus Suprematism, with its insistence on economy, comes off as sterile and dry. It is difficult for audiences to engage with art which attempts to destroy meaning, to overthrow and kill art-history, and even to rewrite the laws of beauty, shunning even abstract and modern trends in painting. Thus, when Malevich describes The Black Quadrilateral in terms of its economy, it becomes frighteningly iconoclastic.

Malevich's point that the colored squares were *realistic*, termed later as "transrational realism," was the pri-



Kazimir Malevich, Black Quadrilateral, image courtesy Wikipedia.

mary argument in his denial of the Western artistic tradition. The Suprematists as well as other avant-garde movements considered this pictorial tradition to be rooted in savagery: "After beginning with the savage's depictions of the deer, the lion, and the fish, painting resolutely preserved the savage's testament and […] aspired to express nature as pictorially as possible." All objective art was rejected as banal. Yet Malevich did not decry the cave drawings themselves, instead claiming a kinship between them and Suprematist squares "as an element the suprematist [sic] square corresponds to the drawn line, used by man in prehistoric times to express his sensation through repetition, not that of ornament, but of rhythm." Suprematism embraced primitive images, but rejected the pictorial tradition they spawned. The Black Quadrilateral was a return to this foundational level, an attempt to remake art from square one.

But the Suprematists never were the unstoppable eclipse of all artistic traditional which Malevich's poetry imagined. Instead they were a logical result of the avant-garde. The Suprematists have, in fact, so fooled their critics and audiences into thinking that they were artistic automatons, with no precursors or forebears, that one frequently encounters such statements as: "This exhibit [of The Black Quadrilateral] represented a denial of not only tradition but also the most contemporary in art." Such opinions are misleading; Suprematism was fundamentally a product of the modernist zeitgeist, not an unforeseeable, isolated phenomenon. The Black Quadrilateral truly was "the logical and legitimate consequence of the preceding stages of painterly creation."

If we take this as true, can Symbolist definitions of beauty be applied to Suprematism? Baudelaire, the Symbolist primogenitor of many of the avant-garde movements which collectively generated Suprematism, once wrote of a certain symbolist system of beauty: "Beauty is made up, on the one hand, of an element that is eternal and invariable … and, on the other, of a relative [sic] circumstantial element … contemporaneity, fashion, morality, passion." Did Suprematism follow this two-chambered system, or was it something totally different? Baudelaire's "an element that is eternal and invariable" referred to a beauty based on contemplation and the recognition of "correspondences": art as an intellectual focal point, hiding mysterious connections to a metaphysical reality. The elemental core of invariable beauty was a metaphysical entity and 'fashion' was the symbol, the image on the canvas, which led to a communion with this entity ("you may identify the eternally subsisting portion as the soul of art, and the variable element as its body").

The Suprematists rejected the Symbolists' objective, pictorial, symbols, thus doing away with Baudelaire's "allusion" and "mystery." Yet one can still perceive a thread connecting Symbolism and Suprematism in the fact that neither the Symbolist nor Suprematist painters portrayed reality per se. The Symbolists used objective creation as a gateway to meta-cognition, and the Suprematists denied objective creation altogether: "Only with the disappearance of a habit of mind which sees in pictures little corners of nature, Madonnas and shameless *Venuses, shall we witness a work of pure, living art.*" Malevich here wrote something which both Symbolists and Suprematists could have positively agreed upon. The traditional artistic forms and their traditional functions were dead for both groups. The new movement was towards a higher level of understanding and was beyond nature. The conceived realm of metaphysical forms could be contacted via art. So, while the Suprematists disregarded the Symbolist rhetoric calling for philosophical engagement with art, they shared a common goal with the Symbolists: forsaking nature for higher truths.

Suprematism also directly relates to Symbolism with regard to the second chamber of Baudelaire's system of beauty, "contemporaneity, fashion, morality, passion." Symbolism was one of the first art movements which accorded commercial art a position among high art. Mallarme expounded on the beauties of dresses, the art of jewels, proclaiming, "*Decoration!* Everything is that in the world." The Suprematists also had no qualms using their art, or any art, as decoration, even as patterns on china

sets and coffee mugs: "In one sphere something which was considered abstract, non-objective, proved useful." This Suprematist commercialism was related not only to the Symbolist reverence of fashion but also to the Futurist reverence of kitsch, their manufacturing of books on wallpaper and papers which were chosen because they would disintegrate over time. This revelry in the mutability of art was stomachable by the iconoclastic Suprematists, who often conceived of their art as functioning in two ways: "Suprematism at one stage has a purely philosophical movement cognizable through color; at a second stage, it is like form that can be applied and that can create a new style of suprematist [sic] decoration."

In many ways The Black Quadrilateral itself served as a symbol, a symbol of all symbols. This view which is not necessarily contrary to Malevich's philosophy: "They [the squares] have acquired further meanings […] black as the mark of the revolution . . . white as pure action." He was more than eager to accord his paintings symbolic meaning, but his symbolism avoided natural imagery, imagery which had become like a dead-weight anchor to reality. Furthermore, the teleology of their movement ended in the total destruction of all composition, even basic shapes and lines, in completely blank canvases, the white of "pure action." In 1917 Malevich founded "White Suprematism," with the birth of White on White, a canvas simply painted white. As Marcade points out, this is the difference between zero and nothingness, the move beyond The Black Quadrilateral. The different approaches towards Suprematism which we have discussed thus far—Suprematism as economy in art, as infinity, as iconoclasm, and as symbol—found their apotheosis with White on White. The move towards whiteness was, in fact, the apotheosis of the entire Suprematist ideology: "in actual Suprematism only black and white remain. All degrees of energy in the material derive from them and, in other worlds, there will come a time for new materials devoid of color and tone." This vacancy of color and tone was the true achievement of the Suprematist movement as it was an achievement of pure artistic economy, pure non-objectivity. White on White was the stage with which Suprematism ended; it was the ultimate realization of the Suprematist call for communion with art for art's sake:

> The square frame with white was the first form of non -objective sensation. The white field is not framing the black square, but only the sensation of the desert, of non-existence, in which the form of the square appears as the first element of non-objective sensation. It is not the end of art, as people suppose even now, but the beginning of true essence.

Suprematism went beyond all preceding art movements, setting the stage for the Constructivists who would follow in their tradition. The Suprematist shape paintings offered a new beginning to art, a return to the basics of the cave drawing, a destruction of the chains of objectivity. Their colors and shapes renewed awareness of the mechanics of painting, of canvas textures, brush strokes, color use, and "art for art's sake." Their flagrant iconoclasm would influence generations of pioneering avant-gardists in the search of new and powerful forms of expression. The night of Suprematism as imagined by Malevich thus cycled into day, and indeed from that back to night, "the new beginning has dawned." Suprematism will forever remain the supreme realization of 20th century Russia's avant-garde ambitions.

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All the Things She Said:

Unexpected Palatalization in English Music by Native Russian Singers

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The purpose of this linguistic study is to find the existence (or lack) of an unusual palatalized consonant[1] in English songs as performed by the native Russian singing duo, t.A.T.u. By unusual, I mean a consonant which would not normally be palatalized in standard American English, a dialect in which there are no noticeable linguistic markers making it recognizable as another more specific dialect of English in North America. This project stems from the observation that native Russian speakers, especially those with non-native English language understanding, are often heard palatalizing consonants which would be palatalized in Russian but not in standard American English. To examine whether this phenomenon carries over to music sung in English by native Russian speakers, t.A.T.u's songs "All The Things She Said" from their album *200 km/h in the Wrong Lane* (2002) and "Cosmos (Outer Space)" from their album *Dangerous and Moving* (2005) were analyzed. The original hypothesis was that unusual palatalization would occur less in the latter song because it was recorded at a later date, after the singers had more exposure to the English language. However, while the data did not fully support this hypothesis, there are some outside factors which may have led to this unexpected outcome.

The group t.A.T.u was an ideal group to analyze because they have been very successful in the United States, and as a result have been able to record two albums in English. This allowed for many songs from which to choose. Two songs were chosen, and were each recorded at different times: the first before any major exposure to the United States, and the second after becoming more familiar with the American English language. The two songs analyzed were chosen because they both had high frequencies of the environment in question, and most of the other songs did not. The environment examined is where a labial, dental, post-alveolar[2], or velar consonant occurs before a high front vowel[3], which also can occur in the Russian language. The vowels examined include /i/[4], /e/[5], and /ɛ/[6], which occur in both Russian and English[7], and the high front vowel /ɪ/[8]. Although [ɪ] does not occur in Russian, it is very close to the Russian vowel /ɨ/[9] according to Avanesov (49). For this study, consonant clusters were not examined, nor any environment where the vowel is immediately followed by a nasal, due to the possible effect of nasal raising[10] on palatalization. Furthermore, only the verses, and not the choruses, were examined so that distinct palatalization by each singer could be identified.

Upon analyzing these songs, it was surprising that the occurrences of unusual palatalization were about even for both songs (see Table 1). In "All the Things She Said" (2002), there were five tokens for the unusual palatalized variable out of a possible 28, giving a frequency of 17.9%. Similarly, in "Cosmos (Outer Space)" (2005), there were again five tokens out of a possible 31, giving the close frequency of 16.3%. Therefore, according to this quantitative analysis, the three year difference between the two songs did not have a major effect on the occurrences of unusual palatalization.

In the first song, four of the five tokens occurred in /fi/ environments (e.g. ***fee****l*), which is not surprising as palatalization can often be heard here in Russian. The fifth token occurs in a /fe/ environment (e.g. ***fa****ce*). This occurrence is described by Jaye Padgett very simply, "The palatalization contrast before *e* is very limited," (189) meaning that in native Russian words /e/ is only preceded by palatalized consonants. Hence, this token too can be expected.

In the second song, three of the five tokens again occur in /fi/ environments (e.g. ***fee****lings*). The fourth occurs in a /ɹi/ environment (***rea****ch*). It is possible that this occurrence is due to extra stress being placed on the /i/ as the singer tries not to pronounce the English /ɹ/ as the Russian /r/, combined with the following consonant being the lateral /l/ (*real-*). All of this may contribute to the unusual palatalization of this token. The fifth occurs in a /tɛ/ environment (e.g. ***te****ll*). Palatalization would not be expected here in English, but, as mentioned above, in native Russian words /t/ is always palatalized before /ɛ/.

While Table 1 shows evidence that a greater familiarity with the English language does not, in this case, greatly effect unusual palatalization, it is possible that there is more to it than this. Upon examining the data more

closely, it can be seen that there is a difference between the frequency of unusual palatalization for each member of the duet. According to their website, the first member, Lena, has had knowledge of English since before their first English album was recorded, and she speaks quite fluently in her interviews. In the first song, she uses unusual palatalization two of the five times, and a total of two of a possible fifteen environments (13.33%). In the second song, she has four of the five tokens, and a total of four of nineteen possible environments (21.08%).

Yulia, on the other hand, became familiar with English from an English professor at Moscow State University shortly before recording the first album. In the first song, she has three of the five tokens, and this is out of a possible thirteen instances of the environments for her verses (23.08%). In the second song, she only has one of the five tokens, out of a possible twelve environments (08.33%). In sum, the frequency of unusual palatalization in English songs increased for Lena, but decreased for Yulia.

As a result of the frequency differences between the two singers, a question of cause is raised, in which a sociocultural analysis is appropriate. While it cannot be determined from the available information exactly why Lena's frequency of occurrences increased while Yulia's decreased, a few possibilities can be put forth. First, it is very possible that Yulia used unusual palatalization less in the second song because she had been learning English during that time academically, and therefore had a more technical focus on the language. Lena, however, was already familiar with English and used it very comfortably, thereby allowing her native Russian linguistic attributes to be more prominent in her speech.

Also, while working with an instructor, such as Yulia was, people usually become more familiar with them and bend to the accommodation theory. Trudgill writes on how this affects singers as follows:

This [accommodation theory], briefly, attempts to explain temporary or long-term adjustments in pronunciation and other aspects of linguistic behaviour in terms of a drive to approximate one's language to that of one's interlocutors, if they are regarded as socially desirable and/or if the speaker wishes to identify with them and/or demonstrate good will towards them (143).

It is also possible that because Lena had more possible environments in her verses each time, this allowed for more uses of unusual palatalization.

After a careful quantitative analysis, the data as presented in Table 1 shows that the hypothesis was mildly supported. That is, slightly less unusual palatalization was found in 2005 as compared to 2002. However, the difference was not as much as expected. Socioculturally, the change in Yulia's speech may support the hypothesis if more tokens can be found in another song. Also, the lack of a substantial amount of tokens for the unusual palatalization variable may be a result of any English speech coaching during the recording of their music. Without coaching, they would likely include more instances of this variable. It would be interesting in future research to analyze an interview or concert performance with the girls using the same environments. The frequency of the unusual palatalization variable would most likely increase, especially for Yulia because she gained a familiarity with English more recently than Lena, and the tendency to naturally rely on Russian linguistic characteristics would remain strong for her.

Table 1

	"All the Things She Said" (2002)	"Cosmos (Outer Space)" (2005)
CV	23 (82.1%)	26 (83.7%)
$C^{j}V$	5 (17.9%)	5 (16.3%)
TOTAL	28 (100%)	31 (100%)

Table 2

	"All the Things She Said"	"Cosmos (Outer Space)"
Yulia	3 (60%)	1(20%)
Lena	2 (40%)	4 (80%)
TOTAL	5 (100%)	5 (100%)

FOOTNOTES

1. Palatalized consonant: during production of the consonant, the main flat part of the tongue is raised to the hard palate at the front of the mouth behind the teeth
2. labial: production utilizes the lip(s); dental: production utilized the teeth; post-alveolar: production places the tongue near or on the alveolar ridge (directly behind the top teeth); velar: production places the back of the tongue against the velum (soft part of the back of the roof of the mouth)
3. produced in the upper front part of the mouth
4. front close vowel, such as in "keep"
5. front mid-close vowel, such as in "cake"
6. near-front open-mid vowel, such as in "ten"
7. Basic Russian language knowledge such as this is taken from my own personal knowledge and experience with this language.
8. near-front near-close vowel, such as in "pin"
9. central close vowel, as in Russian "ты"
10. nasal: /n/, /m/, and /ŋ/ as in "ri*ng*"; nasal raising: raising the vowel closer to the place of the following nasal for ease of articulation, common occurrance

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Laura Smetana

Victors and Victims

Justifying the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union Through Film

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Ballad of a Soldier, released in 1959 in the midst of Nikita Khrushchev's reign, is a love story between a Russian soldier and a girl he meets on a train, set during the "Great Patriotic War." The film was one of the last productions of the period known as the 'Second Thaw,' during which the abolition of the Terror freed artists to begin to redefine Socialist Realism.

The film opens with a middle-aged woman standing at the end of a country road. The narrator announces that she is waiting for her son, Alyosha, who has died in the war. The viewer is taken to the heat of battle, where Alyosha, a tank spotter under heavy fire, is ordered to retreat from the charging German army. Singled out by a German tank, he desperately sprints into a barren landscape. The camera films the nightmarish chase upside-down, giving the pursuit a disoriented and frightening tone. Eventually Alyosha makes his way to an anti-tank rifle and with two shots destroys two tanks. When he is subsequently offered a decoration for his heroism, Alyosha requests instead a six day furlough to return to his peasant village to help his mother fix her roof. On the way, Alyosha helps a one-legged soldier get home to his wife, helps a family recently rendered homeless by a German bomb, and, when his train is attacked by planes, saves the passengers from the flaming wreck.

All the elements of this opening sequence can be viewed as a sweeping historical allegory, in which Alyosha's confrontation with the tank represents the Great Patriotic War; his retreat on foot from the German juggernaut is symbolic of the Red Army's retreat, while Alyosha's unlikely victory, won with two unlikely rifle shots, alludes to the Soviet rally at Moscow and eventual victory over the Third Reich. His journey home hints at the maternal authority of the Soviet Union over the Eastern bloc in the post-war period, and the image of his mother conjures up ideas of Russian family and heartland.

A victory against seemingly impossible odds, and against an enemy who is more a force of dread than a human being, this interpretation of Alyosha's victory implies a justification of the conflict made by the Soviet Government during and after the war. The Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov argues that, regarding the significance in contemporary Russia of the victory in the Great Patriotic War: "The idea that mass losses were inevitable and that the millions of victims somehow 'go without saying' are a constituent element of the general semantic complex of national exploits and general heroism." Along these lines, Chukhrai's decision to film the battle scene *in medias res* discourages a consideration of the conflict's causes. *Ballad of a Soldier* is typical of Soviet war films, which fulfill a need to justify a war that need not have been so costly and could have even been avoided. Contrary to the history posited by such films, the massive loss of life was not solely the fault of a German invader, but was largely caused by Stalin's political bungling and his disregard for the human cost of the war.

Announcing the German invasion in his radio address to the Soviet people on June 22, 1941, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov drew on the history of the Napoleonic Wars: "Our people responded to Napoleon's campaign in Russia with the Patriotic War, and Napoleon was defeated and ultimately destroyed…The Red Army and our whole people will once again conduct a victorious Patriotic War for the Motherland, for honour, for freedom…" Molotov avoided overtly socialist or Stalinist language, a practice that would remain in place in Soviet propaganda until the end of the war. Thus Molotov dictated the ideological framework of the war as a nationalist one. Chukhrai's choice of a Russian peasant as the hero of *Ballad of a Soldier* further implies that the war was justified as a test of Russia's mettle. At the film's end, the narrator proclaims that Alyosha "was a soldier and we will remember him as such. A Russian soldier." By dehumanizing the Germans and portraying them as a dark force, exemplified by the tank in *Ballad of a Soldier*, the justification of the war became an affirmation of the Russian people rather than an effort to maintain the socialist government. In a twist of logic, Molotov's labeling the conflict as a "Patriotic War" made victory alone the reason for fighting, rather than any ideological or material agenda.

The glorification of the Russian people was a popular theme in Soviet wartime propaganda. Alexander Tvardovsky's poem "Vasilli Terkin," the most popular piece of music in the Soviet Union during the war period, celebrates the Russianness of the peasant soldier. The poem emphasizes the "small motherland," making the Russian village, rather than the city or the factory, the center of Soviet life. While the lack of reference to either Stalin or the Party would have meant curtailment of the poem in the High Stalinist era, Tvardovskhy's poem signifies the war-born myth of the Russian soldier which would eventually displace the myth of the Revolutionary or Civil War soldier – so much so that former Kulaks and NEPmen, who were terribly persecuted by Stalin's government in the 1930s, were able to find social rehabilitation in the post -war Soviet Union by touting their service records.

Many important historical questions undermine *Ballad of a Soldier*'s glorification of the Soviet Union during the war. The most glaring example is the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, which was essentially an agreement signed in 1939 as to how far the Third Reich and the Soviet Union could extend their imperialistic agendas over Eastern Europe. Moreover a historical interpretation of the invasion needs to question Stalin's leadership rather than the mass heroism of the Russian populace. Stalin was warned of the German invasion on numerous occasions but failed to act. Both his own and foreign intelligence services warned him that Germany was planning an invasion. Stalin was even given the date and time of the invasion by German diplomat von Schulenburg, but still did nothing to prepare.

Portraying the "Great Patriotic War" as a test of the Russian people, making it myth, justifies millions of deaths that were the result of poor leadership. The myth of the war as a test of the Russian people should be seen for what it was: Stalin and the ruling clique covering their tracks after an incompetent and unethical foreign policy led them into an incredibly costly war.

Come and See, released in 1985 (a month before Gorbachev came to power), is based on the book by Ales Adamovich, which is a collection of different accounts of the German occupation of Belorussia during Second World War. In the film, Flyora, a fourteen year old boy, is abandoned by a band of Belorussian partisans setting out on a campaign. Flyora returns to his village only to learn that his entire family has been murdered by the German army. He later has the chance to watch the Germans do to another village what was done to his own: the Germans and their collaborators force the villagers into a barn and set it on fire, throwing hand grenades and Molotov cocktails through an aperture in the barn's wall. They laugh and carouse, while a German lady accompanying the invaders eats a lobster, and the German commander strokes his pet Loris, an exotic primate native to south-east Asia.

The horror is cut short when the partisan band arrives in time to ambush the German horde. A collaborator begs for his life; the German commander claims he had nothing to do with the massacre; another German soldier claims that he is proud of what he did, and that "not every race has a right to exist." The partisans dispose of their German prisoners and the film ends with a caption stating that almost 630 Belorussian villages were destroyed under the German occupation.

By portraying the Soviet people as victims, the conflict becomes a just war, elevated beyond historical debate. Unlike *Ballad of a Soldier*, the war is not a test of the nascent state, but a crime committed against the people of the Soviet Union. The human qualities given to the Germans are essential to understanding the enemy as criminals, not a mechanical force. In that sense, the war was not on par with a natural phenomenon—like a plague of locusts, or a hurricane—but instead a malicious act, willed into existence with human foresight. While *Ballad of a Soldier* is vague as to the real human cost of the war, *Come and See* embraces civilian suffering. As Gudkov argues, "people's view of themselves as victims of aggression gave them a steadfast confidence in their own integrity and human superiority, as confirmed by Victory in the war."

Klimov's rendering of the Germans, though a later interpretation of the conflict, is also rooted in the propaganda of the "Great Patriotic War." The film capitalizes on a song called "Holy War," which is played when Flyora finds the partisans in the woods. The song, composed in 1941, employs religious and nationalist themes to justify fighting the Germans: "We shall rebuff the murderers / Whose high ideals would choke, / The ravishers, the plunderers, / Tormentors of the folk." This hatred, epitomized by the "Kill the German" propaganda campaign launched in 1942, presumes a great injustice. The depiction of the vicious acts of the Germans in Klimov's film rekindles feelings of outrage and disgust in the viewer toward the German occupation.

The German officer's declaration of the German "mission" to destroy the Slavic race helps the viewer excuse the Russians as they execute their prisoners of war. It is true that Hitler claimed that "this war will be very different from the war in the West. In the East brutality itself is of benefit for the future," and that the partisan war "gives us the opportunity to exterminate all those who rise up against us." Nevertheless Klimov uses the

crimes of the Germans to justify the war and he avoids explaining *why* the war was being fought. In the film's final moments, Klimov places war guilt squarely on German shoulders with a montage of stock footage of the Holocaust, Hitler, and the German war machine, all of which is accompanied by the music of Wagner. Following the montage, the "Lacrimosa" from Mozart's *Requiem* is played, mourning the fate that has befallen Belorussia.

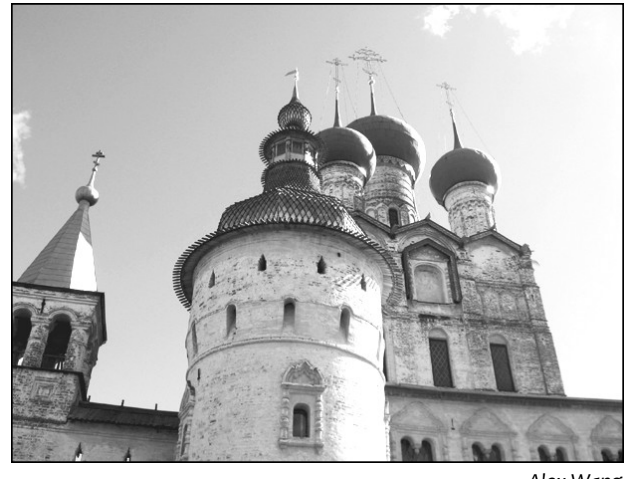
But the idea of the Soviet people as the victims of the German army is again not completely informed by historical fact. In the invasions of Poland in 1939 and Finland in 1940, the Soviet Union was the aggressor on an imperialistic jaunt. If anything, these invasions portray the Soviet people as allies of the Germans, particularly in the case of the invasion of Poland. To justify the war in terms of the victimization of the Soviet people therefore does not make much sense, since the Soviet Union itself victimized many of the areas it occupied. The Soviet Union deported thousands of Poles to work camps in Siberia; in the Katyn forests near Smolensk, Stalin, under the advisement of Lavrentii Beria, had 14,736 Polish officers shot to death and buried in mass graves.

Once the Germans have been captured by the partisans, a Russian collaborator pathetically begs for his life, offering to burn his German companions alive. The film's portrayal of the collaborators as mentally unstable, weak, and cowardly – at times less sympathetic than its portrayal of Germans – fulfills an ulterior political agenda. During the war, most Soviet collaborators were nationalists from the non-Russian republics, although they were a small minority. With his focus on the wickedness of collaborators, therefore, Klimov obliquely undermines the nationalist movements of non-Russians. The accusation of collaboration was a useful excuse in 1944 for the Soviet Union to deport hundreds of thousands of Crimean Tartars, Chechens, Kalmyks, Cherkess, Karachai, Balkars, and Kabardins from their homes. In this sense, the Russian nationalism seen in *Ballad of a Soldier* has a parallel in *Come and See*. In *Ballad of a Soldier*, the war was a test of the *Russian* people; in *Come and See* the suppression of the non-Russian national movements is tacitly justified.

Ballad of a Soldier and *Come and See* deal in justifications rather than explanations. Instead of addressing the Stalinist regime, its foreign policy and its mistakes, both films opt to reinforce state propagated myths about Gudkov argues that today, "Memories of the war are required above all to legitimate a centralized and repressive social order." This argument explains the importance of the Great Patriotic War in Russia during the war itself and throughout the history of the Soviet Union. The justifications offered by these two films encourage the populace to rationalize violence without having to run the risk of criticizing the state, whether it be that of Stalin, Khrushchev, Gorbachev, or Putin.



Alex Wang



Alex Wang

The Spectacular Story of the Two-Faced Man

Alexios Shaw and Ester Murdukhayeva (*Columbia University*)



Ester Murdukhayeva

On alternate Sundays in Jersey City, when the mid-week traffic has been stripped from the bland annex to the big city across the Hudson, a trickle of fur coats and hats bobs up the stairs to a large brownstone, hinting at something gentler and more profound – history, or perhaps just nuance.

The exhibition openings, a bi-weekly affair at America's only Museum of Contemporary Russian Art, are staged on the sun-drenched second floor of the townhouse. The walls of the three large rooms are lined with paintings, most of them abstract, by Eastern European artists. Among the canvasses float a few middle-aged visitors, all well-dressed and dutifully engaged with the artwork. A short older man in a blazer stands in the threshold of one of the galleries surveying the visitors, cool and unaffected as if this all were deeply significant laundry.

Alexander Glezer talks in a modest, low drumble, and before anyone has noticed he's begun speaking, tells a spectacular story, rich with detail, methodical in its narration. His manner, simultaneously detached and affectionate, could soothe the most poisoned modern soul.

"When I was in school, I didn't go to the Tretyakov once. All those Shishkins!"

His rowdy friend, Edward Ziouzine, a sixty year old Russian emigre artist who lives in the neighborhood, is quicker to profile Glezer: "This is a very important and courageous man that you're talking to! He was a great art collector and critic in the Soviet Period, became very famous, and then he founded this museum, but he won't tell you any of this himself – he's very humble!"

Indeed Alexander Glezer was perhaps the greatest art collector-activist and critic of "unofficial art" in the Soviet Union during the 1960s and 70s, when the second avant-garde movement in Russian art was in full swing. Unofficial art was the term given to any art that did not conform to the standards of Socialist Realism – since 1932, the only sanctioned art in the Soviet Union. The works of nonconformist artists were largely displayed in private apartments to foreigns visitors and dissident Russians. Their success and eventual worldwide fame was dependent on organizers and activists such as Glezer, who would collect paintings and set up exhibitions.

Glezer himself is a poet, not a painter. He made a second vocation of helping to promote and display the works of Russian artists; this has been his life's work for over forty years, even if changed circumstances have stripped his activism of its dissident glory.

Glezer talks about the most dramatic moments of his activist career meticulously, and without hyperbolic effects in his manner or narration. He explains how he first became involved in the unofficial art scene: "In 1966, I was visiting a friend and saw a painting by Oscar Rabin. The painting had such an effect on me that I went that same day to see the artist and offered to hold a personal exhibition for him. I was working as an engineer and was in charge of running a club and its calendar. Rabin refused to have a personal exhibition because he believed all artists needed support. Two thousand people came to the general exhibition we decided to organize, and within two hours, so did the KGB – to shut us down. I got angry and bought a three room cooperative apartment. In 1968 when the Thaw ended, I opened in the apartment a Museum of Unofficial Russain Art. Foreigners and Soviets were coming in huge numbers. Instead of selling anything, I'd distribute artists' numbers to potential buyers. The powers, they didn't like me, so by 1970, the press had begun to slander me, to paint me as a 'two-faced man.' First they wrote that I had three cars – then they wrote I had three wives!"

When he says something funny, Glezer laughs and expects you to laugh. But otherwise, he undertakes the retelling of the defining moments of his public life with a historical fastidiousness that seems contrary to his congenial disposition.

"We eventually decided to hold an outdoor exhibition in the Belyayevo urban forest in the outskirts of Moscow," he continues, now approaching the topic that brought him directly into the spotlight of the international press: the Bulldozer Exhibition of 1974. "On the morning of the exhibition, Rabin and I were held by the police, while the artists gathered in the park. After we were released, we ran to the park, only to see the area full of police cars, dump trucks, and bulldozers. We raised several paintings above our head and started walking through the vacant lot in protest – then three bulldozers came rushing towards us. Rabin jumped onto the jaws of one bulldozer, hanging onto a blade with his hands and folding his legs into the mouth of the bulldozer so they wouldn't get cut off. It turned out that they'd given the men driving the bulldozers, as they give soldiers at the front, a hundred grams of vodka so that they wouldn't be afraid to charge."

The episode quickly became an international scandal. Foreign journalists present at the exhibition reported violence and abuse by police forces. The embarassment led the Soviet government to sanction a subsequent exhibition of unoffical art, this time held in Izmailovo, another forest outside Moscow.

"Still," he continues, "the papers warned Russian artists not to go to this kike exhibition. They wrote that it wouldn't be pleasant to their parents. In response, Rabin and I attacked Socialist Realism and Soviet state in foreign newspapers, and sent an open letter to Russian newspapers reporting saying that the same people who had run us over with bulldozers were committing massacres in 1937.

"Given what I'd done, it wasn't surprising that on the morning of the Izmailovo exhibition, I was followed and stalled by KGB cars." He was followed to the park, where police forces monitored fifteen thousand attendees, as well as the boisterous organizer.

"One officer grabbed me and took me into a phone booth with him. Photographers surrounded us. I told him, 'If you don't let me go right now, I will break this glass.' 'If you do, you'll get to years in jail for hooliganism!' He begged me to take pity on him: 'If I let you go, I will be fired. If you cause a scandal, I'll also be in trouble. I have a family to take care of.' I said to him, 'I have my own family and I don't pity them, so why should I pity your family?' After a few minutes of this nonsense, the phone rang. He

threatened me, 'It's my boss from the KGB, he'll be here in five minutes.' I answered him, 'In one second, I will break this glass.' 'It's special glass, you'll just break your hands.' 'I won't use my hands, I'll use my face. Imagine what kind of photograph that will make.' So he let me go."

After 1976, when the Soviet Union relaxed rules and the period of unofficial art more or less ended, Glezer remained in Moscow until 1979, continuing to expand his collection, which included at various points the work of Ernst Neizvestny and Vladimir Nemukhin. Finally, Glezer explains with his unremitting detached air, the government responded to his persistence with a memorandum:

"I was writing a book on unofficial art and was arrested at an exhibition. They threw me in jail primarily to scare me, so I broke the windows with my fists, tried to escape to the roof. They threw me into a cell, and filled it up to my knees with water. I crawled up a little ladder so I was perched against the ceiling, and I demanded a doctor. I asked her, 'Did you take the Hippocratic Oath?' She paused, then said, 'I did.'

"They sent me to the KGB headquarters, where they told me I could leave the Soviet Union, or be arrested. My artist friends, including Rabin, told me that it'd be better to leave, that I could help them from abroad. I told the KGB that I'd leave if I could take my paintings with me.

"'So how many paintings do you want to take?' an officer asked me. '500,' I said. 'Well, you have a big appetite, don't you?' 'No, just a big collection.' He said, 'Okay. 10.' I said, '490.' He asked, 'What's going on?' I said, 'We're arguing.'

"He got angry and turned to page three of one of my books of poetry – he started to read a line about the corpse of Russia lying on the Red Square. 'This is anti-Soviet poetry!' he claimed. 'No, they are not anti-Soviet,' I said. 'They what are they then?' 'My feelings.' He started reading some more. 'And what are these?' 'My thoughts.'

"Finally he asked me, 'Are you an enemy of the Soviet state?' 'Yes.' 'Are you an enemy of the KGB?' 'Yes.' 'Are you going to leave the country?' 'Once you've given me my paintings.'"

He has finished his story. His hands folded on the table, the attic of the Museum where he has led us to listen to him speak seems awfully small and cloistered.

After his confrontation with the KGB, Glezer went into exile, founding a Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Paris in 1979 and this one in Jersey City in 1980.

"When I was leaving Moscow, Rabin yelled to me 'You're not leaving us, you're our captain.' My mission was to help these artists become famous and to write about them. I had the museums, I wrote articles in magazines, and by 1991, I'd staged staged 161 exhibitions, in my home and in museums, in the US Senate."

In his spare time he rewrote his book on unofficial Soviet art, *Contemporary Russian Art*, and composed his 1980 autobiography, titled *A Two-Faced Man* in tribute to his persecutors. Reading either of these is very much like listening to him speak; accounts of certain of the most dramatic of these stories are reproduced almost verbatim in all three.

He is unideological and unopinionated when it comes to views on art, except that art must be free. His explanation for being a poet-art collector is similarly laissez-faire: "I'm a poet, but, you see, I'm basically for fairness. When I saw the paintings of Rabin and others, I saw spectacular art that deserved to be famous. I just wanted to help them. And when they closed our exhibitions and ran us over with bulldozers, then I began to hate Soviet power.

"Art can't be political, so not much has changed for Russian artists since 1991 except that now they're more free to show their work. Artists have no affect on popular opinion – only writers and journalists have that, which is why they were and continue to be oppressed. For the poet, however, everything has changed. I used to be an anti-Soviet poet, but political poems don't seem to write themselves anymore. But, you know, if I was living in Russia now, I'd probably write political poems still. Against Putin."

Glezer's experiences have made him acutely conscious of how political circumstances change the function and the popularity of art. "The role of the museum didn't change until about 1993, when I was putting up exhibitions in in Russia, in Moscow, in St. Petersburg, in Vladivostok, in Nizhny Novgorod, and so on. Everywhere, young artists came to me and said, 'Your artists were run over by bulldozers, but they've become famous. No one cares about us, help us.' This is why I began to show current artists, who had come of age during *perestroika* and *glasnost*. But I'll always be attached to the unofficial artists of my own age. Now that many of their works are on the market, many catalogs write 'Glezer collection, Glezer collection.' Not one of these paintings did I ever own! It's just become a keyword for the movement."

The paintings of this current generation of Russian artists, whom Glezer labels the third wave of the Russian avant-garde, have become the main source of material for the bi-weekly exhibitions at the museum. But without either the revolutionary abstraction of the 1920s avant-garde, or the dissidence of the 1970s nonconformists, it is hard to imagine contemporary Russian artists as a united political or artistic movement. That might be explained in the book Glezer is currently writing, *Three Eras of the Russian Avant-Garde*. Glezer is still writing, still working, with

the same impassioned, meticulous devotion that turned him into a dissident star in the late 1960s. He tells stories, and then, though less garrulously, quietly attends to new projects; thus he escapes the sad fate of being a man of the past.

Glezer starts dejectedly wading through a discussion of the financial difficulties facing the museum. He eventually wanders to the topic of Russia and exile. When he first arrived in America, he used to head to Brighton Beach to drink and find company to soothe his loneliness.

In 1988, Glezer tried to return to Russia, but was held up in the Moscow airport because his name was on a KGB blacklist. He digresses, telling us how he achieved this vaulted status – a 1979 protest where he threatened a KGB to burn an effigy of Brezhnev and lead a spontaneous international protest in every major capital against the Soviet regime – and one realizes just how rich and finely textured a tapestry of tales his younger days must be. But he cuts this story short.

"In 1988, I wrote a poem:

> To return, to return to Russia
> Just for a moment, to see,
> To lie in Vaganskovo, somewhere.
> Heated by the land of home,
> I am completely at rest.

These were the kinds of poems I was writing, not knowing I'd return to Moscow in less than a year."



Scilla Bennett

Let Them See Us!

An Examination of Poland's Post-Communist Gay Rights Movement

Christopher Krupa (*Wayne State University*)

Despite the enormous amount of research and interest in the development of Poland's post-Communist society, little is known specifically about the history of Polish homosexuals and their long struggle for equal rights. Though Poland's gay rights movement is complex and unique, it is still in its infancy and struggles to change public perceptions.In 1989, Eastern Europe experienced dramatic political and social changes that have since acted as a catalyst for advancing human rights throughout Poland. However, for all of Poland's progress in civil and political liberties since then, the parliamentary elections of 2001 and 2005 have changed the composition of Poland's legislative body and resulted in a staunchly conservative government who were intent on leading a cultural change and vowed to "re-instill moral values" in Polish society. The proposed homophobic legislation that followed has reinforced Poland's climate of intolerance and discrimination, limiting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals as well as threatening the political and civil rights of all Poles. The spread of intolerance in Poland has become an international concern and stands in direct opposition to the European Union's basic principles. In August of 2007, I traveled to Warsaw to discover the causes of Polish homophobia and its steady increase in recent years.

The fall of Communism brought to Poland's mostly closeted homosexual population a feeling of hope and optimism for the future. Government restrictions had been loosened and homosexuals, for the first time, felt comfortable enough to publicly organize and exploit what would be a short-lived moment of perceived social equality and minority tolerance. The political thaw led to an immediate increase in the number of GLBT organizations throughout Poland, from the country's urban center of Warsaw to smaller rural communities.

This early collection of organizations received a tremendous amount of media coverage, the majority of which was negative and portrayed the movement as more of a spectacle than a legitimate campaign for equality. Nevertheless, the media exposure increased awareness of homosexuality among average Poles and acknowledged the existence of Poland's first sexual minority. The exposure brought the issues of homosexuality, religion, family values and social equality to dinner tables, coffee shops and television talk shows across the country. In spite of the negative media coverage, this new movement appeared to be gaining support and momentum as various gay rights groups began to mature and coordinate their efforts. However, the euphoric optimism and confidence that immediately followed the fall of Communism had quickly faded as the frightening realities of homophobia in Poland began to surface.

Until the 1970s, homosexuality was never criminalized, persecuted or even publicly acknowledged in Poland as it was in many other Communist countries. Because of the government's refusal to recognize homosexuality, a "don't ask, don't tell" policy had eventually developed among closeted homosexuals; an unspoken policy that had resulted in generations of self-suppressed Polish homosexuals content with living parallel lives; in which they studied at university, established a career and even raised families as heterosexuals, all the while regularly escaping to what were recognized as gay-friendly, cafes, apartments, parks and public restrooms in a precarious attempt to explore and release their pent-up sexuality.

However, as the gay rights movement began to build, these secret double lives that had taken years to develop were suddenly jolted by the new movement of, what were seen by some as, "radical, outspoken" homosexuals. The new activists who had brought homosexuality into the public dialogue had inadvertently shaken the double lives of Polish homosexuals and disrupted the carefully constructed façades that had taken them generations to fabricate.

Poles were introduced to homosexuality much like they were to capitalism—quickly and unapologetically, a "shock therapy" approach that created enormous hostility and criticism in both cases. The eruption of homosexuality

in the public dialogue created a huge backlash against these secret "adapted" homosexuals who had struggled to fit into the prevailing social norms. What was once an unspoken agreement between homosexuals and Polish society was now the subject of a great debate. No longer were two old women who lived together thought of as "old maids" or "widowed sisters." Anyone who had not followed the traditionally accepted path was suspect, and eventually, homosexuals became a major target of hate groups and skinheads. Violent attacks and intolerance had left older homosexuals feeling betrayed and angry. As a result, they condemned the new, young breed of gay rights activists and their entire movement, choosing instead to continue living their fabricated and secret—yet peaceful—lives.

Having made little progress politically and lacking support from both heterosexuals and now even other homosexuals, the gay rights movement of the early 1990s slowly burned out, fading into the background of Poland's collective subconscious and remaining dormant for a decade before being awakened in 2001.

In 2001, a liberal government ruled Poland and things were going well for the young nation, both politically and economically. However, according to Robert Biedroń, President of *The Campaign against Homophobia*, Poland was also on two distinct and separate courses, one political and one social. Left, liberal politicians who had been elected into office intended on slowly transforming Poland into a progressive nation, more align with Western Europe and other EU nations. However, this stood in stark contrast to the way in which Poland's homogenous, conservative society (90% of which are Catholic) envisioned Poland's future.

When asked about the way's in which gays are perceived in Polish society, Biedroń responded: "If you read the extensive study conducted in 2001 by Lambda Warsaw [a GLBT support organization] it clearly states that 80% of Polish people disapprove of homosexuality. That should tell you something about this country and the high level of discrimination we face."

This disconnect of ideals became apparent as social and political tensions began to rise during President Kwaśniewski's second term in office (2000-2005), culminating in an entirely new conservative government by the time Kwaśniewski left office in 2005.

The years that followed 2001 brought a sudden social shift that gradually threatened the basic rights of Polish homosexuals. Equality marches had repeatedly been banned and where they weren't, the police often failed to provide protection for gay and lesbian protesters from violent counter-demonstrations by such anti-gay organizations as "The All Polish Youth". Furthermore, it was not uncommon to hear leading politicians use threatening language and make incendiary, hate-filled speeches intended to arouse their conservative constituency and encourage discrimination against homosexuals[2].

The US State Department has labeled Poland as the eighth worst country for homosexuals (U.S. Department of State, March 6, 2007), the only country in Europe to receive this alarming designation and the only nation outside of the Middle East and Africa. The causes for Poland's unique situation and sexual conservatism are likely connected with its long tradition of Catholicism and, ironically, Communism. The Catholic Church is notorious for condemning homosexuality and does so regularly through its rightwing conservative mouthpiece, "Radio Marryja". However, the connection between Poland's social conservatism and its history of Communism, on the other hand, is much more complex.

Poland emerged after the fall of Communism as a fairly poor and uneducated country. The devastating economic policies implemented by Poland's Communist government stifled any development of a "working middle class" which would have afforded a greater percentage of the population access to education, as it did in many other European countries. Additionally, in most Western cultures, liberal views towards sex and sexuality emerged as a result of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, a revolution that never penetrated the iron curtain of Communist Poland. These events, coupled with Poland's rapid transition to capitalism and introduction to Western culture, depict a country in which rural and urban populations are both equally religious, conservative, intolerant and generally unacquainted with homosexuality.

Despite these setbacks however, Poland's gay community (centered in Warsaw) is growing steadily in Krakow, Gdansk, Poznan, and Wroclaw, as seen by the opening of numerous gay bars, clubs, restaurants and the continued activism of several NGOs, most notably *Lambda Warsaw* and *The Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH)*. While marriage is still limited to heterosexuals, the country's legal framework, at least on paper, is tolerant and protective of homosexuals and gay life. Tolerance of sexual and other minorities is slowly increasing among younger Poles and the open borders of the European Union are helping to accelerate the spread of Western travelers and ideals, social equality and an awareness of ethnic and sexual diversity. Also, in 2007, resolutions issued by the *European Union's Council on Human Rights*[4] have brought international attention and criticism to Poland's treatment of homosexuals by condemning discriminatory

statements made by various Polish public officials (Kowalska, 2007).

Despite these improvements, the lives of homosexuals in Poland remain extraordinarily difficult. Opinion polls consistently show 89% of poles oppose gay marriages, 90% are opposed to gay adoption, 89% of Poles consider homosexuality an "unnatural" act and only 34% believing it should even be tolerated (Polish Public Opinion Research Center, 2005).

Yet, there seems to be hope for progress. The most recent governmental crisis in the fall of 2007 and subsequent early parliamentary elections have demonstrated the Polish electorate's desire for social accord. The new government has put a long-awaited end to the inflammatory rhetoric of extremes practiced by the Kaczyński brothers[3] and has instituted a new era of Polish political politeness and respect. Even so, fear still exists among some GLBT activists that this new form of governmental decorum is simply an attempt to clean up Poland's tarnished international image. Nevertheless, speaking a language of tolerance, the nation's new leaders can give one hope that the expansion of GLBT rights, as an indispensable part of overall social equality, will be an important component of this government's policy.

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FOOTNOTES

[2]"If a person tries to infect others with their homosexuality, then the state must intervene in this violation of freedom." Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, then Prime Minister, 3 October 2005

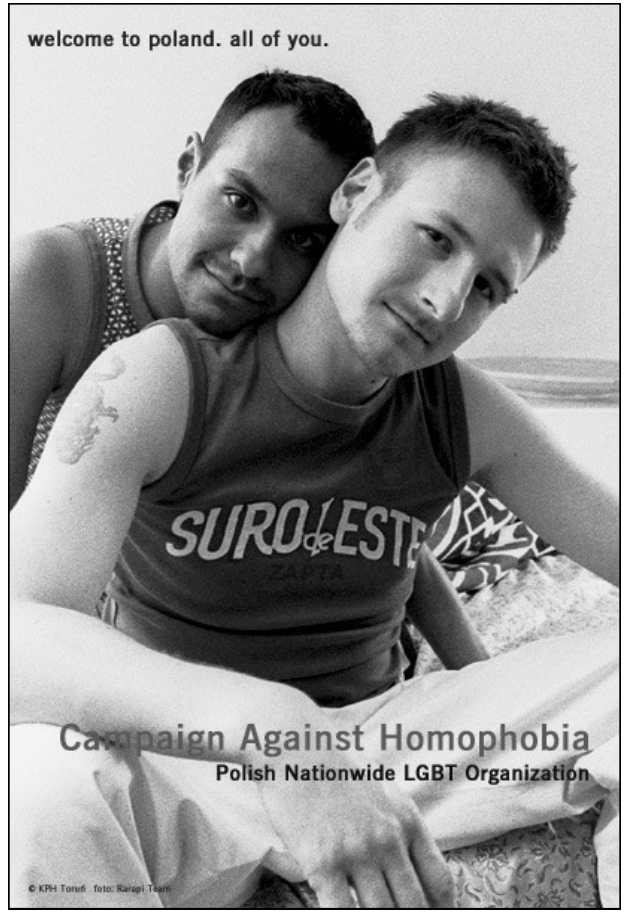
"If deviants begin to demonstrate, they should be hit with batons." Wojciech Wierzejski, Deputy of the Sejm (Polish National Assembly), 11 May 2006

"Homosexual practices lead to drama, emptiness and degeneracy." Teresa Łecka, new director of the National In-Service Teacher Training Centre, 9 October 2006

"We'll do to you what Hitler did with Jews" members of All Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska) counter-demonstrating during 2005 Poznań Equality March

[3]President Lech Kaczyński and former Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński are identical twin brothers

[4]On 18 January 2006 European Parliament issued the resolution on homophobia in Europe. It stated the definition of homophobia and condemned hatred and cases of violent attacks against GLBT people. It urged the member states to fight homophobia through education campaigns in schools and in the media, as well as through administrative means. It also urged the Commission to consider the use of criminal penalties in cases of violation of human rights. (Kowalska, 2007)





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