the birch

a journal of Eastern European and Eurasian culture



Columbia University Winter 2009

creative writing ▪ literary criticism ▪ culture & affairs ▪ photography

editor's note

2009 was a remarkable year in its own right. But it was also a commemorative year, the 20th anniversary of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe. Twenty years have seen incredible changes in the region—and incredible diversity. There's wealth, poverty; freedom, repression; democracy, autocracy. The transition, like a fat Russian novel, has been filled with contrasts.

So too for our journal. As students make their own transition from this semester to the next, *The Birch* pauses and gives you a look at the work of undergraduates from all over the U.S. and abroad. It is just a sliver, a snapshot. But I hope it offers a sense not just of the diversity of the region, but also of the students now studying it, whether they do it through a textbook or a camera lens.

As the commemoration continues into next year, check in with *The Birch* now and then on our Web site, www.thebirchonline.org, as we celebrate the extraordinary time. Enjoy the anniversary, and enjoy the issue.

Rebekah Kim

the birch

a national, student-run, undergraduate journal

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special thanks

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ARTS INITIATIVE AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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cover photo by: katarina batina (Kocani Orkestar playing a show at the Lazaretti, a popular concert venue outside the city walls of Dubrovnik)



Ishevsk, Russia
alana holland



Moscow, Russia
casey ann o'malley

My Neighborhood

Rachel Hastings

My neighborhood is a microcosm of Petersburg as I have seen it so far. It is a Petersburg of crumbling Victorian-style buildings and speeding Soviet sedans, broken bottles and flowerpots on windowsills, dented metal doors and imposing granite façades. It is a place where forbidding exteriors hide cozy flats within, and where even the mundane gives insight into the lives of the people who make the neighborhood their home.

The door to my building is in a little concrete courtyard where young men loiter, smoking and chatting. Along the alleyway to my street is a one-story café with several tables outside—their bright blue Baltika umbrellas serve as my signal to turn when I am walking home. At first I thought the café had fallen on hard times, as I never saw anyone through the smudged windows, and piles of trash tend to accumulate outside its doors. One night, however, I went home around 9:30 to find illuminated strands of white Christmas lights hanging from the umbrellas, casting a cheery glow on the small groups sitting at tables outside. It simply had not occurred to me that Russians keep different hours than I.

Farther up the street is a small corner park next to a church. In the mornings as I walk to class, it is usually deserted, save for a young couple I have seen kissing passionately on a bench, and the occasional dog-walker. In the afternoons, it is livelier. Children play while their mothers stand and chat. A man can often be seen lurking in a corner, swigging something from a bottle. Once, I saw a mother and daughter sitting together on a park bench with matching shopping bags and frizzy, bright magenta hair, waving their hands frantically as they spoke.

Stray dogs wander around, always the same size and vaguely wolf-like. They are mangy and beaten down, pathetic, yet potentially dangerous. I never quite know what to do when I see one. I usually settle for walking past quickly, hoping not to attract its attention. People walking pets, on the other hand, seem to stick with the smaller varieties. One poor canine was dressed in a blue doggy jumpsuit, complete with green ruffles.

The humanity I see in my neighborhood is just as diverse. Clad in tight jeans and coated in makeup, chain-smoking, stiletto-wearing women strut past on super-model legs. Babushkas hobble behind them on swollen ankles, their thin gray hair pulled back in tight buns, their clothing matronly and practical. Young and old men alike gather on corners and around shops selling liquor, seemingly eager to fulfill all the stereotypes about Russians.

On the surface, the one thing that unites these people is their scowl. I often wonder what it is that makes them so sullen—the infamous Russian weather? Dwelling on the futility of life and the inevitability of death? Petersburg seems to me a city of dark history and dark people, which leads to the inevitable chicken-or-egg question. Have the attitudes of its citizens been shaped by the events the city has seen, or have

their attitudes somehow brought about these events? Perhaps the two simply collude in some sort of vicious circle.

There is one girl, about my age, whom I pass almost every day on the way to school. She's short by Russian standards and always wears jeans and the same army-green jacket, accessorized with the distinctive white cords of an iPod. For a few days, I sensed that there was something different, something comforting and vaguely American about her, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. One morning, it hit me. She always smiles. Not at me or at anyone else, but to herself. This would be nothing out of the ordinary at home, but here it is bracing, like the cold wind off the Neva.

Scowling or smiling, these ordinary Russians are enigmatic to me. I cannot read their stories on their faces, nor can I guess how they spend their days. I can, however, watch them disappear through dark archways into shadowy courtyards, and match faces to the façades they live behind. The buildings themselves reflect the tensions of my neighborhood, and of St. Petersburg at large. Some have a kind of faded elegance, with carved windowsills sporting granite faces and flowers. Their original beauty is hidden by cracks and grime, and their metal doors are secure against unbeknownst threats. Gutters spew puddles of brownish water next to the buildings, and rubbish blows about in the breeze. Perhaps as a result of the Soviet legacy, no one seems to feel enough ownership for these structures to take proper care of them, so they are left to be ravaged by wind, rain, and grime.

Time has not only ravaged buildings in this city. An ancient couple who passed me the other day, faces drained of blood and colored with a strange grey-green pallor, seemed positively ghostly. I wondered if they were dying remnants of Leningrad's past, consumed by memories of siege, famine, and desperation. Perhaps they have been here, wandering the streets, since Peter the Great first set foot in his city.

The future is visible as well, bound up inextricably in the past. On the first day of school, the future was out in full force—hordes of schoolchildren bound for the classroom, carrying armloads of flowers. Some were decked out in designer suits, with slicked-back hair and leather briefcases. Others were dressed more simply, in sweaters and slacks, but still clearly in their best attire. Girls wore dresses, skirts, and inevitably stiletto heels. The younger ones walked arm in arm with their mothers, the others in chattering groups with cell phones in one hand and bouquets in the other. Even the youngest teen girls looked as if they had walked straight off a movie set, with their heavy makeup and designer purses. If this is the future, I'm not sure what it means for the city. It seems oddly incongruous against the backdrop of gentle decay and ruin.

I am constantly observing these people and can't help but wonder if they ever look back at me. Do my neighbors see me as just another blonde, blending in with the hordes that walk these streets? Or do my messy hair, my low-heeled shoes, my less-than-stony expression give me away? Perhaps the watermelon vendors don't notice me, or see me only as another potential customer. But perhaps they see what I am painfully aware of—the fact that I can never fully grasp the intricacies of this city. Maybe they sense that I will never be more than a visitor who will, one day, vanish through the window of St. Petersburg, back into the West whence I came.

Souvenirs

Julia Alekseyeva

There is the one-morning surprise of Odessan snails,
the refusal of watermelons,
that word *America* and how dry
and confounding it tastes in my mouth.

In my uncle's garden I smell potatoes being reaped
and clutch onto grandmother sleepily,
apron-cheeked and fading slowly.

Here the line for radioactive milk is long,
spiderly.
It holds an iota of an ion isotope
in breast, in lung, in neck, and hair.

Of all else I am unafraid,
even *Baba Yaga*
hiding chicken-footed in the forest.

Of course, I have never seen the forest,
only Kiev—its blossoming lilacs,
strawberry balconies,
sun-mottled dirt.



outskirts of Astrakhan, Russia
olivia lynn crough

Camp Green Cove for Girls

Julia Phillips

1.

Anya's mother wanted her to arrive prepared. We were supposed to use slang, to spend the ride down to Green Cove reminding her of everything American—pop bands, foods, sneaker brands. Her mother had asked us to take care of her, so when we drove down through Virginia and she changed into her bathing suit, I crawled over the back seats and blocked the rear windshield with my body. "Excited to go swimming?" I asked her as I watched the cars behind us turn on their blinkers and turn off the highway. I listened to her zip her backpack. "Oh, very," she said, the syllables deep in her mouth, her tongue making the "r" something foreign and wonderful.

While we waited in the grass, the old man spent some minutes on the dock, balancing tall candles so we could swim. Anya shook the bugs off her bare legs. The old man swayed and Alex said he was drunk. Maybe he was, I couldn't tell anything in the dark, but as he stumbled toward the water with his candles and lighter, I put out my hand and called a warning to him. "I don't see very well," he explained, and knelt again to the wet wood to place another candle there. My father had given us the old man's phone number before we left but had said nothing about his drinking, nothing about his eyes. Anya hadn't said anything to him but her name.

On the lake's opposite side, fireflies burst into light and Anya pointed and asked, "What are those?"

"Fireflies," I said, "Lightning bugs. They're insects that glow. You don't have those in Russia?"

"We have them," she said, "but I have never seen so many, so big, at once." Above the far trees the sky was flashing white and grey. Once we'd made our way out of the grass and past the line of low flames, I pointed up and said to her, "See that lightning?" "It is like…" she said, "people taking pictures," and held her hands up next to her face to mime a camera for me. I nodded.

The old man made us promise to shout if anything happened. He peered through the night and gestured to where inner tubes and a beach ball floated dimly near the opposite shore. In the candle-light and the hot sweeping dark we took off our shoes and T-shirts and stood wavering at the dock's edge. "You go," Alex said, and I touched Anya's back: "You!" She screamed and hopped back. The old man's dog pushed into the water from the shoreline and swam, snuffling and grass-covered, out in front of us. "One—two—three!" Alex and I shouted and faked a step forward. Anya hopped in place. "What if there is a monster under there!" she said. The dog barked, halfway across the lake already.

I crouched and dipped my hand in. "It's warm," I promised her, "it's so warm." I slipped off the dock into the lake. Above us, the tall clouds flickered with lightning. The water was silky and smelled fresh like that day's rain. Anya jumped in and when Alex followed, smashing onto his back, we both shrieked and turned our faces from the wave he sent up.

The old man's dog kept barking. I called to Alex and we swam to each other and kissed, our mouths tasting like lake water. The dog swam over too and circled us, panting, its thin legs moving

frantically. “Anya?” I called. She shouted, “This is the first really crazy thing I have ever done!” Her accent split her words into all their odd and lonely parts. Alex and I laughed and the sky lit up white. Underneath the water the dog’s claws ran across my lifted legs and I shouted back to Anya, “Come here and I’ll pull you on the inner tube.” Anya lifted her thin arms and started over, and we swam to meet her in the middle.

2.

The waitress stood over our booth with her pen ready. Anya looked away from her to us. “A Dr. Pepper,” she said slowly, and the girl began to scribble her order down, but Anya wasn’t done: “Can I have one?”

“Sure,” Alex said.

“And an orange juice?” she added. I smiled. “You can have whatever you want,” I said. After the girl tucked her pen back into her apron and left, Anya said quietly, “I love American orange juice.”

For dinner she had both Caesar salad and a hot dog so she got too full to finish her fries and I scooped them gladly onto my plate. Our waitress had snuck a gummy worm into her platter next to the bun and pale lettuce leaves and Anya picked it up with two small fingers. “Why is this here?”

“Because she likes you, I guess.”

“But why?”

I shrugged. “She thinks you’re cute. Try it, it’s sour.”

“I know,” Anya said. She put the blue half in her mouth for a minute then drew it back out. “Can we get ice cream?”

“We can do whatever you want,” Alex said.

At the ice cream shop down the block, Anya ordered lemon sorbet and a raspberry smoothie. We walked slowly through a parking lot and past a tiny jungle gym to a patio where a group of men was setting up instruments. Alex pointed out the drums to her and she stood, an ice cream in both fists, to watch them assembled. I licked my chocolate cone until she jumped and I jumped too.

“Byelka!” she said. “How is that in English again?” We all said “squirrel” at the same time.

“They’re so cute,” she said, and I shook my head in disgust. “They’re just rats with fluffy tails,” I said.

“They’re not,” Alex said, “They’re cute. I don’t know why you hate them. They’re marsupials.”

I scoffed. “Have you ever seen a squirrel with babies in a pouch? They’re rodents. Besides, marsupials only live in Australia.”

He thought in silence about squirrel pouches. “An’,” he said, “what do you think?”

She was still looking at the drum set and drinking from her smoothie, the lemon sorbet running sticky down the back of her other hand. “What?” she said.

“Is a squirrel a marsupial or a rodent?”

“A marsupial is like a kangaroo,” I explained.

She considered this. “I think,” she said, “it is not either of those, but it is the other thing.” We accepted this and watched with her as the band finished setting up.

3.

We turned off the radio as we got closer and the mountains started to interfere with the signal. The highway in front of us curved into stone and green and tall woods. In the silence, Anya said from the back seat, "Will you miss me?"

"Of course we'll miss you," I said, "of course we will."

She leaned back against the leather and folded her arms. "You'll forget all about me."

Alex half-turned so his seatbelt strained against his shoulder. "How could we forget you?" he said, his eyes wide. "We'll miss you so much."

"We'll cry," I said, "every day." She laughed unhappily. This had been the wrong thing to say so I became serious again: "We love having you here, we're going to miss you so much. I bet you're going to forget us, though."

"No," she said, "I'm going to hate it. I just know I'm going to hate it."

I ran my hands over the steering wheel. Alex kept looking at her, half his body pressed into the side of his seat, his neck bent awkwardly. She looked down at her cell phone and then dropped it to the floor of the car. As we turned around another bend, the phone slid back to collide with her bags.

"What activities will you take this year?" I tried.

"Oh," she said and sighed. "Weaving. And swimming."

"Riflery?" Alex asked and held up one hand in the shape of a gun.

She smiled. "Maybe. I did that one year."

"And archery?" I asked.

"Definitely archery."

"I bet all your friends can't wait to see you." She sighed again. In front of us, the mountains cast long shadows across the land. After a few miles she said, "Will you come into camp with me?"

"Alex will carry all your bags to your cabin," I said.

"And we'll tell the counselors that they have to let you eat as much candy as you want," he said.

"And stay up late."

"And watch *High School Musical*."

"They don't let us eat candy," she said sourly.

We turned off the highway and followed the road past three stoplights and a Baptist church. Signs for the camp started to appear as the houses thinned out. We turned left, past a waterfall, off the paved road and onto pebbles.

At the last turn-off I rolled down my window and gave her name to a smiling girl with a clipboard. "Cabin 8," the girl said, and waved at the darkened backseat. Anya didn't say anything.

"Look at this place!" Alex said, pointing out the window at tree houses and winding streams. "An', you didn't say how beautiful it was here. Sophia and I are just going to stay forever, you better watch out." I drove slowly up the hill and parked at the edge of a field where a couple counselors sat in shorts. They jumped up as we opened our doors. "Anna!" one shouted. Another few girls came out of the trees, smiling. "Anna!" they said.

While Alex opened the trunk I nudged her. "See how much they missed you!" I said. Be happy, my little girl, have all the soda you want and let your words slide off the very tip of your tongue like a native's would. Let the girls at summer camp braid your waist-length hair. Call your mother when you're allowed this Sunday and tell her we kept you safe for all hundred fifty miles of highway.

Alex lifted out her duffel bag. She looked at us. "I want to go back to Russia," she said.

A January Evening Watching Over Me

Olga Zeveleva

A January evening watching over me,
Beneath the domes of ice and frozen blue,
I stand unharmed, I stand unseen.
Loved by the earth, but not by you.
You stay removed, not coming fore;
Like death, so uncontainable and near…
Yet nonetheless—so marvelous and dear,
Like dreams of peace at times of war.

I understand that You may have
So many others just like me,
And that my toilsome roads and paths
Will not embellish what You see.
But I will find and fashion words; I will
Devote to you each day,
Like skies explained by birds of prey,
Like grain that's come to know the mill.

Tonight on Christmas Eve, a star
Will spill on candles from up high,
We'll blend together from afar,
And He'll accept, and He'll reply.
And He will lead us down the aisle with bated breath;
Beneath the arc, a secret will be given:
That nothing in the world is fortune-driven,
That our existence does not end with death...

Январским вечером храним
Под ледяными куполами
Стою невидим, невредим
Любим землею, но не вами
Вы постоянно в стороне
Как смерть близки и неподвластны...
Но тем не менее прекрасны
Как сны о мире на войне

Я понимаю, что у Вас
Таких как я довольно много
И не украсит Ваших глаз
Моя нелегкая дорога
Но я ищу, ращу слова
Вам посвящаю каждый вечер
Как объяснивший небо кречет
Как хлеб, познавший жернова

Сегодня ночью Рождество
Звезда рассыплется на свечи
И мы сольемся в одного
И Он возьмет, и Он ответит
И поведет нас под венец
У алтаря откроет тайну,
Что все на свете не случайно
И смерть для жизни не конец...

poem by Yury Shevchuk
English translation by Olga Zeveleva

Solipsism

Erica Weaver

I had lunch today with one of my many souls—
a tradesman from St. Petersburg, who spoke often of his love
for fresh linen
in a heavy, Russian accent, and we talked

Of philosophy—how different
and similar our lives were;
how we both loved breaking

warm bread in our hands,
And I wondered what McCarthy
might have said, had he spotted
us through the window,
laughing softly over the tinkle of forks,
and very much enjoying our speculation

of whom—or what—
we might next become.



Crimea, Ukraine
iryna dzyubynska



road repair in Alexandrov, Russia
brinna boettger

To Dream or Not to Dream

The Philosophical Quandary of Platonov's *The Foundation Pit*

Diana Bruk

Written in the late 1920s, *The Foundation Pit* was not published in the Soviet Union until 1987, although it was available in the English-speaking world by 1969. The novel's censorship should be enough to guarantee it a place in the pantheon of anti-Soviet literature, but Platonov's ambivalent attitude toward Soviet ideals is uniquely dual because it centers on the emotional aspect of the Soviet experience, revealing philosophical quandaries inherent to the Russian consciousness. The workers' ardent excavation of the foundation pit exemplifies a poignant paradox: they dig a physical hole to fill a greater spiritual one. By focusing on a handful of these workers, Platonov outlines the emotional incentive behind the revolution: the desire to escape the overwhelming alienation of a vast country; to find a sense of community through collective thought, consciousness, and activity; and to attain immortality by erecting Soviet ideals. Ultimately, these ideals are simply illusions—Nastya, the symbol of the Soviet future, is destined to die, the building that they are preparing to erect will never come to being—but Platonov does not harbor any resentment over this state of affairs. In fact, the tragedy of the novel is that both he and his characters are vaguely aware of the illusory aspect of these ideals, but indulge in them anyway because it gives them a reason to live. Even though Nastya embodies the totalitarian outlook on life the Soviet Union cultivated, and even though she must die, caring for her is worthwhile because it gives life purpose. As such, while *The Foundation Pit* paints the Soviet era in tragic, gloomy, disillusioned colors, it cannot truly be called anti-Soviet because it does not lay blame on the state so much as the human condition itself.

Within the novel, the envisioned building represents the utopian dreams of the Soviet state, and the foundation pit symbolizes its hopeful promises:

> As he said this, Chiklin looked down calmly and thoughtfully and plunged all his strength into his spade, Voschev too began to dig deep into the soil; he was now ready to admit that children might grow up after all, that joy might become thought and that the man of the future might find peace in this solid building, that he might look from its high windows onto a world that lay stretched out and waiting for him down below. Voschev had already managed to annihilate thousands of rootlets, blades of grass, and little earthen shelters belonging to hard-working insects, and now he was down in the unyielding clay. But Chiklin had outstripped him; he had long ago abandoned his spade and taken a crowbar to break up the solid rock underneath. Chiklin couldn't understand this old order of nature, but he was doing away with it anyway.[1]

The pit represents the dual nature of Soviet ideals, and the sacrifices it requires. In order to erect the building, they must first eradicate the

earth, and Platonov describes this process as representing the obliteration of the old world, of everything that is ancient, organic, and most natural. His opposition of the "hard-working" insects and the "unyielding" clay shows a predisposition toward the old world rather than the new one, but the description aptly reveals the virtues of both sides. The earth is pure, animate, even maternal, but, as evident from Voschev's homeless wanderings in the beginning of the book, it does not provide a comfortable place to sleep or dream. The building will ensure comfort and safety but is artificial—like the cement, it is man-made and unyielding, cold and unfeeling as stone. This juxtaposition then reveals the predominant philosophical question of the book, the underlying question of the Soviet era itself: Is it better to be happy in a fantasy, or miserable in reality? Does the happiness of indulging in illusions justify the expenses illusions demand? Man should strive for reality and be content with it, but, for Platonov, the human condition's tragedy is that one will always seek illusion, with all its emotional, physical, and intellectual repercussions.

In the passage above, Chiklin digs with greater zeal than any of the other characters, which is significant because he represents the dual nature of the new Soviet man. Of all of the characters, he is the most brutal in his treatment of the kulaks in the process of collectivization, yet he is the most tender in his paternal—or maternal—treatment of Nastya, the proletariat's hope. Wholeheartedly entrenching himself in digging the foundation pit, Chiklin completely absorbs Communist propaganda because he is not a contemplative individual. In order to fully ensconce oneself in illusion, then, one must eschew the thought process, or else live in perpetual self-denial. Voschev, Chiklin's foil, also exhibits this idea, as he is constantly ridiculed or reprimanded for his uncontrollable propensity for contemplation. "The State," the factory management reminds him, "has given you an extra hour to do your thinking in—you used to work eight hours, but now it's just seven. What if we all suddenly got carried away thinking—who'll be left to act?"[2] In order to live solely in illusion, one must obliterate thought, a concept Platonov, as a philosopher, cannot reconcile himself with. Yet thought is dual in nature as well, repeatedly shown to be just as much of a burden as it is a gift. Voschev is not any happier than Chiklin for thinking; in fact, contemplation is largely what prevents him from ingesting the ideals that he genuinely wants to believe in, and what disables him from attaining a sense of collectivity and thereby ridding himself of the alienation that plagues him throughout the text. Then the bliss of ignorance or the inherent value of knowledge are the two options man possesses, and once again, the question of which is ultimately better is largely a rhetorical one.

Whatever the slogan, the Soviet emblem remains the same: a leader, preferably Lenin, stretching his hand toward a future only he can see, with an enormous sun barely over the horizon behind him. This iconic image represents the "dawning" of a new age, that moment when darkness has disappeared but the day remains a promise. This serves as apt symbolism, since the workers at least subconsciously realize that, should they find themselves about to be rewarded for their struggles and suffering, they will be faced only with disappointment and disillusionment. Thus, they want to strive for the manifestation of Soviet ideals without ever reaching them. The subconscious recognition of their own anguished states is revealed through their constant declarations that they are cultivating a future they will not live to see, through Voshchev's promulgation of "I keep thinking that somewhere a long way away there's something special, something wonderful we'll never

get to, while all I ever do is feel sad,"[3] and perhaps most compellingly through Prushevsky's unique ontological quandary. Having realized that life is without purpose, Prushevsky decides to commit suicide; but by creating this motivation, his life acquires a level of meaning. Ironically, death becomes his incentive for life, so he repeatedly detains the moment of suicide, knowing the end must exist but always be out of reach to ensure any *joie de vivre*. Happiness can only be achieved through the struggle for it, and must therefore be unreachable; otherwise we lose what motivates our daily lives. To Prushevsky, "life seemed best when happiness was unattainable, when it was just something the trees rustled about, or that a band serenaded in the Trade Union Park."[4]

The same can be said for other abstract ideals, such as freedom, brotherhood, and of course, romantic love. Prushevsky exemplifies this concept when Chiklin leads him to survey the corpse of Nastya's mother, and he is uncertain whether she is the woman who once walked passed him in his youth, the one he has dreamt of all these years. "'This isn't the woman I saw when I was young. [...] Or maybe it is—I never recognized people I loved once I'd got intimate with them—I just yearned for them from a distance.'"[5] As with love and happiness, the abstract ideals promised by the Soviet state—the obliteration of loneliness, the establishment of a collective consciousness, the forging of a better world—are believable only so long as one never reaches them. The infamous linguistic defeat that characterizes so many of Platonov's sentences, then, symbolizes the inescapability of the human condition—the way our own desires, our own language, our own inherent urges leave us with nowhere to go.

Despite its altogether stygian tone, *The Foundation Pit* remains optimistic in its relatively benign portrayal of death. Within the text, death is viewed as a release: the emancipation of the spirit from the decaying body in which it is trapped. Moreover, it may be the only true realization of the promises of the state, as the dead attain the immortality and collectivity that the workers of the foundation pit long for but never actually obtain in waking life. While the deaths of Safronov and Kozlov are meant to be read with pity, their deaths are simultaneously presented as acts of nobility and relief, as Chiklin demonstrates when he speaks to them in facetious, conversational tones, saying to one, "Lie easy mate—you can afford to be dead!"[6] The idea that a valorous existence will secure everlasting tranquility reveals some of Platonov's lingering Christian principles, but this attitude toward death also illustrates the aforementioned philosophical quandary when compared to the thoroughly terrifying end granted to the kulaks. Is it better, one wonders, to die with certainty and have all the peace that this entails, or to be floated off to sea, to an unknown ending, but one with a minute chance of survival? The language of both scenes, while not decisive, suggests a preference for the former option. Safronov and Kozlov are lucky in the sense that they die believing in the ideals of the state, and never have to face the shattering of life-affirming illusion in store for their comrades. In the philosophically complex world of Andrei Platonov, it seems it is better to die than face disillusionment, and that it is better to die well than live badly.

Notes

1. Andrei Platonov, *The Foundation Pit*. Trans. Robert Chandler and Geoffrey Smith. (London: The Harvill Press, 1996) 19.
2. Platonov 4.
3. Platonov 93.
4. Platonov 64.
5. Platonov 67.
6. Platonov 88.

Madness and Moral Depravity

An Analysis of Ludmilla Petrushevskaya's *The Time: Night*

Kristen Blyth

The award-winning Russian playwright and novelist Ludmilla Petrushevskaya is renowned for her bleak, grotesque, and blackly comical literature. She specializes in perplexing plot structures that provide little self-analysis and force the reader to interpret the work's purpose and meaning. Her 1992 novel *The Time: Night*, a meta-diary of sorts, contains the personal journals of both its protagonist, the poet Anna Andrianovna, and her daughter Alyona. From within Anna's rambling and often irrelevant musings on family, love, and poverty emerge strong themes of insanity and deterioration brought on by the dysfunction of established Russian social structures. Petrushevskaya inverts 20th-century cultural conceptions of motherhood and patriarchal family structure to emphasize the failure of the Russian government to provide for its people, and to underline the internal decay of the Soviet Union as a whole.

Among feminist issues under consideration in the Russian socioeconomic arena throughout the 1900s, the topic of motherhood proved prominent. The "glorification of maternity and reaffirmation of women's traditional familial duties"[1] cited by Helen Goscilo first gained heavy cultural momentum under Stalin's "Big Deal" propaganda push of the 1950s. Desperate to repopulate Russia after the devastation of World War II and bolster a declining birthrate, the Soviet government launched a demobilization campaign to promote women's return from wartime duties to domestic and maternal social roles. The pronatalist trend intensified throughout the later Khrushchev and Brezhnev years, in which the state emphasized the dangers of abortion, "maintaining it was women's duty to reproduce […] and providing incentives for women to give birth."[2] The period in which Petrushevskaya penned *The Time: Night*, throughout Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost era of the late 1980s, extended the emphasis to "the upbringing of children and the creation of good family atmosphere."[3]

Unfortunately, this ubiquitous pronatalist movement bore severe economic consequences. The "double burden" of working mothers combined with a floundering economy and pervasive unemployment led to widespread poverty and the general neglect of Russia's youngest generation. Petrushevskaya experienced many of the horrors described within her works while growing up alongside Stalin's purges: an absent father, crippling poverty and social ostracization, single motherhood with three children and no steady job. Within this context, Petrushevskaya indirectly examines both cultural idealizations of maternity as well as the darker, harsher reality in *The Time: Night*.

The account centers on Anna Andrianovna's struggle to support her institutionalized grandmother, recently incarcerated son, preg-

nant daughter, and grandson. Anna, a paranoid and irrational poet, spits out her narrative in a first-person stream of consciousness with rambling digressions and nonsensical internal associations, using run-on sentences that can extend for several pages. As a mother, Anna displays a strikingly contradiction between selflessness and neurotic distrust and manipulation: she describes her daughter Alyona as "my beauty, my quiet little nestling who was such a comfort to me,"[4] yet repeatedly calls her "deranged"[5] and tells her, "You should have had [your baby] scraped out […] you slut!"[6]

Although Anna appears to care for her children, she suffers from a crushing desire to constantly feel wanted and needed (and therefore indispensable). If they demonstrate autonomy or self-sufficiency in any way, she laments, "They didn't need my love."[7] Anna cites the need to "protect the children"[8] as a justification for her well-intentioned, yet suffocating mothering. Consequently, her offspring grow up to be emotional and maturational cripples: Alyona sleeps with any man available to reinforce her flagging self-esteem, and Andrei psychologically abuses his mother while draining her of food and money. Anna therefore "creates the selfish monstrosities that devour her,"[9] failing to protect her progeny and condemning them to the same life of dependency, poverty, and misery.

Anna describes her mother's treatment of her as an adolescent in an analogous manner: "My mother herself wanted to be the sole object of her daughter's love […] she wanted to […] take the place of everything and everyone else […] imagine the nightmare!"[10] Attacking inadequacies in others but blind to her own, Anna embodies Petrushevskaya's established pattern of cyclical maternal failure. *The Time: Night*'s three main female characters, Sima (Anna's mother), Anna, and Alyona, all maltreat and manipulate their offspring to create emotional monstrosities even more psychologically twisted than they are. Petrushevskaya thus inverts the glorification of motherhood as an "emancipation"[11] or realization of "essence and destiny,"[12] by portraying the role through what Helen Goscilo characterizes as "self-sacrifice unmasked as […] sadistic, egomaniacal control and vampirism, all in the name of love."[13]

This depiction serves as a metaphor for the greater failure of the Soviet Union to care for its citizens. Initiated by the pagan Slavic concept of "Мать Сырая Земля" (Moist Mother Earth), contemporary society refers to the nation simply as "Mother Russia"—an abstraction materialized in traditional matryoshka (nesting) dolls, which serve as symbols for fertility.[14] Petrushevskaya's blatant criticism of motherhood tears down the cultural idealization of maternity to highlight Mother Russia's collapse, which resulted in nationwide economic struggle and governmental repression throughout most of the 1950s to 1980s.

Parental failure is not the only cyclical aspect of the novel: psychological instability is also evident in each of the three central female characters. Institutionalized for paranoid schizophrenia, Anna's mother Sima most explicitly manifests the ailment. Anna recounts her gradual descent into insanity: "The months went by and she kept laying her teeth out on the sideboard, where they'd fallen out of their own accord."[15] Alyona too displays unambiguous signs of paranoia: "You spy on us and go calling the police […] then you have to go steal Sasha's military service card and put it back again on purpose!"[16] Anna, while not consciously recognizing her own schizophrenic tendencies, betrays such qualities through internal dialogue: she contradicts herself, interprets innocent interactions with others as subversive attempts to manipulate her, and often jumps to conclusions (if a family member is unexpectedly absent, she

assumes his death). The family members all verbally emphasize each other's mental instability: "My mother's completely bonkers,"[17] "she's sick, she'll crush your fingers, she's completely mad!"[18]—but never in themselves. *The Time: Night*'s female characters toil through life blaming and manipulating others, struggling to survive in a world of horror and moral depravity, while remaining ignorant of their own contributions to the pandemonium.

Petrushevskaya's male characters stay uninvolved in this vicious cycle. The men of *The Time: Night* are conspicuously marginalized: most lack names. The only significant male character, Andrei, is a freeloading, self-centered criminal who hurls himself out of a window to punish his wife for an offensive remark—yet his mother dotes on him and continually excuses his behavior. Upon Andrei's return from prison, Anna removes his shoes and cooks him a hot meal; he reciprocates with "Shu-u-ut up! Bitch!" to which she responds, "You're home again, my sunshine! Light of my whole life!"[19] Other men—mostly illegitimate fathers of Alyona's children—rape, commit adultery, steal, and abandon, utterly without consequence. Anna comments on the authoritative effect of men in her life: "Ah the force of a man's hand!—at his bidding it can push you down, pull you up, pin you to the spot."[20] Yet she also recognizes their recurring desertion: "You look back on your life and the men run like milestones through it."[21] *The Time: Night*'s psychologically ill women instinctively know not to expect monetary or emotional assistance from the men.

Anna cites poverty as a central reason for the women's insanity: "Every member of our family's been a bit twisted […] it's poverty that does it of course."[22] Lack of male support contributes heavily to their destitution. Socially encouraged to reproduce, yet saddled with an insurmountable "double burden" of work and child-rearing, Russian women are driven to delirium while men escape with no responsibility.

Throughout the tangled and tortuous descent into horror and insanity that is *The Time: Night*, Petrushevskaya blackly condemns numerous aspects of Russian culture that were instrumental in the decay of social stability and the eventual fall of the Soviet Union. Her dismissal of maternal paradigms and stark denunciation of male abandonment ultimately emphasize the importance of unity and compassion, within both the family and the nation as a whole.

Notes

1. Helena Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 8.
2. Barbara Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004) 233.
3. Engel 252.
4. Ludmilla Petrushevskaya, *The Time: Night* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1994) 65.
5. Petrushevskaya 96.
6. Petrushevskaya 132-33.
7. Petrushevskaya 68.
8. Petrushevskaya 118.
9. Josephine Woll, "Minotaur in the Maze: Remarks on Lyudmila Petrushevskaya," *World Literature Today* 67 (1991): 129.
10. Petrushevskaya 121.
11. Engel 252.
12. Goscilo, *Dehexing*, 10.
13. Goscilo, "Ludmilla Petrushevskaya," *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 285: Russian Writers Since 1980*. (Detroit: Gale, 2004) 227.
14. Goscilo, *Dehexing*, 32.
15. Petrushevskaya 78.
16. Petrushevskaya 42.
17. Petrushevskaya 39.
18. Petrushevskaya 126.
19. Petrushevskaya 56.
20. Petrushevskaya 15.
21. Petrushevskaya 63.
22. Petrushevskaya 119.



Levoča, in the Spiš Region of Eastern Slovakia
annie kennington



Nuselský Most, Prague, Czech Republic
maeve pendergast

Fantastically Rational

Science and the Supernatural in Odoevsky's *The Sylph*

Aimee Linekar

As much as literature may aspire to transcend, it is often difficult to separate literary creation from its historical and social context. Case in point: the fantastic. Those who have sought to define the genre temporally do so not simply out of sloth, but because it is so intimately linked with the philosophical concerns of its historical context. Man's struggle with the concepts of truth and reason may be timeless, but according to historico-philosophical theorists of the fantastic such as Pierre Georges Castex, the hesitation of the fantastic is the incarnation of man's inability to reconcile his experience of the world with the rationalism, empiricism, and positivism of the post-Enlightenment 19th century. Other interpretations, however, offer broader analyses of this historical environment beyond the triumph of reason, arguing that the fantastic embodies a general sense of alienation from religious belief systems, from societal and political structures, or even from the self.

Highly bureaucratic and "backward" compared to her Western European neighbors, 19th-century Russia resists classification as a truly post-Enlightenment society—which challenges Castex's reading of the Russian fantastic as a reaction to Enlightenment ideas. Alexander Polunov, however, states that Alexander I espoused French Enlightenment ideals, and that even Nicholas II's reactionary regime gave rise to "enlightened bureaucrats" who "worshipped" science and sought to prepare Russia to absorb the changes taking place in the West.[1] The Soviet philosophical historian P. S. Gratsiansky detects signs of scientific Enlightenment in Russian literature "long before the 1760s."[2] Science, reason, and other Enlightenment thinking had reached the Russian intelligentsia and literati by the genesis of the first fantastic works in the 1820s and 1830s. As evidenced by the contradictory historical analyses, however, the country had yet to come to terms with this new philosophy, and the tension borne of this unresolved relationship may well have provided impetus for the birth of the fantastic.

Odoevsky's *The Sylph*, the tale of a mentally disturbed nobleman who believes he has unlocked the secret of how to invoke a supernatural creature, exemplifies this troubled relationship with the rational. The protagonist's spiritual unease and "spleen" can be seen as symptoms of his alienation from the positivist notion that all is knowable. In bitterly rejecting learning (here, in the form of a book) as a deceptive seductress unable to fulfill promises of absolute truth, the protagonist concludes that "you read on and see only soap bubbles—you feel that awful sense that has plagued scholars throughout history: that of searching and not finding!"[3] The protagonist's philosophical preference for the irratio-

nal also emerges here in his lexical progression from sight, the most reliable sense, to feeling, an intangible one, as his argument strengthens. For Mikhail Platonovich, the irrational and the inexplicable, not the verifiable, lead to truth.

The futility of deductive reasoning is further expressed in his later remark that "true happiness can only be achieved through knowing everything or nothing, and since the former is still not humanly possible, we must choose the second."[4] Mikhail Platonovich scoffs at the idea of a modern age of Enlightenment, affirming that the limits of learning and knowledge are still unconquered, and, perhaps, unconquerable. How could a single generation hope to traverse the gulf separating human consciousness from truth? Worse, approaching this truth threatens man's very nature. In an explicit and all-encompassing indictment of Enlightenment principles, Mikhail Platonovich expresses his hope that he might "put down this good-for-nothing Enlightenment [prosveshchenie], which only […] runs counter to man's internal, natural impulses…"[5] The voice of rationality, in this case the posthumous publisher of the scholar's notes, is ill-equipped to rise to reason's defense, as his contributions to the fragmented narrative carry no more authority than those of the protagonist.

Beyond *The Sylph*, there are indications in other fantastic works that the genre is a manifestation of alienation from the rational. Voices of logic are often relatively absent or undermined. Fantastic protagonists generally belong to the practical or artistic spheres. Mikhail Platonovich is labeled a poet; in Chekhov's *The Black Monk*, Kovrin is a philosopher; meanwhile, in *Shtoss* and *The Portrait*, Lermontov and Gogol opt for artists. Where reason and science are given a voice, it is frequently through a doctor incapable of dispensing more than an irrelevant Latin taxonomy of illness and a prescription for country air, quackish potions, or morphine.

This literature inverts the values of its time by consigning the scientific and rational to the periphery, just as its society condemns the madman or the mystic to the asylum. As science is rejected, the supernatural, anathema to rationalism, is installed at the very heart of the fantastic's celebration of otherness. While not a pure literature of the paranormal, the fantastic embraces duality (and dual explanations), hesitation, and doubt. The ultimate rebellion of the fantastic may lie in this limbo, where multiple explanations have equal currency and no one interpreter has a monopoly on truth.

However, to view the fantastic and the rational in direct opposition is to oversimplify. Science and empiricism do not exclude doubt; on the contrary, scientific endeavor grounds itself in theories of probability. This is precisely what distinguished the age of reason from the previously uncontested dominance of religion-based philosophical frameworks. The investigative spirit of rationalism can be seen through the fantastic's constant self-interrogation in an effort to account for the apparently inexplicable—as Bessière explains, "It seems more accurate to view the fantastic as a study of different types of rationality, conducted from a rationalist point of view."[6]

A re-examination of *The Sylph* reveals that in his denunciation of Enlightenment thought, Odoevsky's protagonist in fact condemns "prosveshchenie"—a philosophical revolution of bourgeois thought—rather than "prosvetitel'stvo"—a scientific Enlightenment based on rationalism. His revulsion is primarily provoked not by features of the latter, but by those of the former: the "ambition," "jealousy," "vanity," and "avarice" of the new urbanites.[7] At one point, Mikhail Platonovich even makes a convincing case for the conjugal nature of the supernatural and the scientific, arguing that the seemingly magical is the scientific in infancy:

many ideas that "seemed incredible in the eighteenth century [...] have been borne out as true by new discoveries."[8]

Thus we see that *The Sylph* is not unilaterally anti-science, but rather that it proposes extending rational principles to their natural conclusion. If, as Mikhail Platonovich points out, mythical dragons turn out to have been real in the form of dinosaurs, how can we discount the possibility of alchemy or apparitions without putting them to the test? This reconciliation of the fantastic and the rational is even apparent lexically, as he refers to his attempts to invoke the sylph in highly scientific terms, explaining that he "repeated [his] experiment."[9]

Furthermore, if fantastic literature simply manifested alienation from the scientific and the rational, we might reasonably expect it to promote the religious domain as an alternative. However, as Bessière remarks, it is a literature "often full of religious […] borrowings, yet which also parodies all belief."[10] The religiously symbolic ritual of marriage cures neither Mikhail Platonovich nor Chekhov's Kovrin. *The Black Monk* equates the religious with the imagined. In Mikhail Zagoskin's *Unexpected Guests*, the elderly protagonist goes through the motions of religious observance, yet swiftly accepts the existence of the mystical after what may have been a drunken hallucination. In a literature of lost noses, apparitions, and cat-bridegrooms, other, more conventional—yet equally irrational—beliefs are hardly presented as superior or more credible.

If it is not an expression of alienation from the rational, then what else might the fantastic be reacting to? Retinger casts more light upon the question with his definition of the fantastic tale as "the struggle of the repressed […] against higher powers."[11] This definition leads us to consider fantastic tales as allegories of socio-political oppression. Nineteenth-century Russia was, after all, a hyper-stratified and repressive autocracy that spurred the proliferation of revolutionary thought. Despite literary censorship, themes of social stratification emerge from several of Gogol's fantastic tales as well as Dostoevsky's *The Double*. Chekhov's portrayal of megalomania in *The Black Monk*, meanwhile, might well be seen as a critique of those who view their positions of authority as God-given—in other words, of the tsarist yoke itself. Monleón goes so far as to argue that almost any supernatural element can be interpreted as a representation of alienation from unnatural, inhumane societal structures:

> It is clear that a correspondence exists in history between the way people envisage the law of the physical world and the way they see the law of society. Thus when supernaturalism finds a voice in cultural production, it may certainly refer to […] a social supernaturalism.[12]

As we have seen, then, the opposition of the individual with a supernatural other in 19th-century Russian fantastic works can be read allegorically as a struggle against a number of "higher powers": the contemporary philosophy of rationalism, timeless frameworks of religious and superstitious belief, or even the prevailing socio-political hierarchy.

However, there is one more level upon which we might understand the genre, reconciling these three external oppressors as projections of an inner alterity. The supernatural entity may in fact be best interpreted as an avatar of the other within: the underlying groundswell of insecurities, complexes, and base or irrational urges that each of us attempts to suppress. Does the universality of such a portrait not contradict the assertion that fantastic literature specifically describes 19th-century epistemological disenchantment? Not entirely. While this genre of otherness may speak to many generations, it

is difficult to imagine another time when philosophical and socio-political conditions might coincide to precipitate such a literature of dichotomy, disturbance, and desire.

All translations are the author's own.

Notes

1. Alexander Polunov, *Russia in the Nineteenth Century: Autocracy, Reform, and Social Change, 1814-1914*. Ed. Thomas C. Owen and Larissa G. Zakharova. Trans. Marshall S. Shatz. (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2005) 43.
2. P.S. Gratsiansky, *Politicheskaia i pravovaia mysl' Rossii vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984) 35-6.
3. Vladimir Odoevsky, "Sil'fida." 7 Nov. 2009. <http://books.rusf.ru/unzip/add-on/xussr-xx/odo011.htm?1/4>.
4. Odoevsky 1.
5. Odoevsky 1.
6. Irène Bessière, *Le récit fantastique: la poétique de l'incertain* (Paris : Larousse, 1974) 59.
7. Odoevsky 1.
8. Odoevsky 1.
9. Odoevsky 1. My emphasis.
10. Bessière.
11. Irène Bessière, *Le conte fantastique dans le romantisme français* (Paris, Grasset, 1908) 10, citing Joseph H. Retinger.
12. José B. Monleón, *A Specter is Haunting Europe : A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 18.



Pskov Kremlin, near the border between Estonia and Russia
william howe



Moscow, Russia

Neorealism as Triumph of the Inanimate in Zamyatin's "The Cave"

Jasmine Henry

The vivid and ultimately triumphant role of the inanimate in Yevgeny Zamyatin's "The Cave" illustrates the bold departure of neorealism from the literary traditions of symbolism and realism. Zamyatin sought to create a dream-like parallel universe without traditional hierarchical structures, in which "the sun is an atom, the planets are molecules."[1] Neorealism offers a new examination of reality, more lifelike than any preceding portrayals of human experience and interactions. In the dark, frigid cave that is Martin and Masha's Petersburg apartment, material objects are assigned significant, active roles in the progression of events. These objects ultimately prevail over the protagonists.

Zamyatin approached art as an infinite spiral. He postulated that all art forms could be defined as affirmation, negation, or the negation of negation. In his view, these forms were inherently sequential, with neorealism being the most authentic, as it reflected a natural progression from the presage of the Russian traditions of realism and symbolism. By using the accomplishments of its predecessors, neorealism achieved the most accurate analysis of reality. Writers like Zamyatin deliberately blended the tangible elements of realism with the fantastic, challenging the absurdist nature of symbolism.

Realists such as Gorky, Bunin, and Chekhov sought to write characters and situations



casey ann o'malley

as they were in life. The examination of a setting with a "naked eye"[2] resulted in literature that mirrored life. In contrast, symbolists such as Valery Bryusov and Fyodor Sologub acted as "fluoroscopes,"[3] looking beyond the mundane to the intangible. They were guilty of fixation upon the fantastic and death as the negation of life. Neorealism's distorted portrait departed from these methods and depicted life as a dreamlike state that reflected the "synthesis of the fantastic and of daily reality."[4] Through the negation of the excessively intangible and the confines of the concrete, one could form truly challenging and original art in accordance with the significant cultural upheaval of the era.

Neorealism's bold departure from what Zamyatin regarded as the "erstwhile traditions of Russian prose"[5] provides a more engrossing experience for the reader than voyeurism in realism or escapism in symbolism do. Zamyatin transports the reader into the cluttered, frigid apartment with a detailed initial description of its strange contents. He deliberately designs an environment in which "every detail is palpable, everything has its measure, weight and smell; everything is bursting with juice like a ripe cherry. And yet, out of rocks, boots, cigarettes, and sausages, we have the phantasm, the dream."[6] The calculated description of inanimate objects within a neorealist text lends a new sentience to the items, resulting in a text that is both more engaging and believably imaginative than anything before.

"The Cave" depicts the last days of Martin and Masha, a couple struggling to maintain their morality and civility in the harrowing cold of a Petersburg winter during the Russian civil war. In a last attempt at survival, Martin steals wood from a neighbor's excessive supply. When the neighbor notices the missing logs, he demands that they be returned. The couple is left hopeless. Any possible redemption of the act has been cremated with the logs. Martin allows Masha to consume their only phial of poison, and we are to assume he succumbs to the cold. Zamyatin got his inspiration for the story in the winter of 1919, while he was sharing watch duty with a "frozen, half-starved Professor,"[7] who expressed that he'd rather "die than steal."[8] From this man's desperate attempt to maintain morality, Zamyatin created a fantastically realistic portrayal of the clash of necessity and morality in the face of abject poverty.

The initial description of the contents of Martin and Masha's bedroom reveals how far the couple has fallen from a cultured life of comfort into desperate poverty. The unusual combination of objects salvaged from the past and carried into the present offers a vivid metaphor for the compilation of realism and symbolism into neorealism. Zamyatin transports the reader into a frigid, desperate reality, causing the reader to feel sympathy for the protagonists. Ultimately, the reader achieves a sense of intimacy with them, effectuated through a distinctively intricate description of the couple's background and circumstances: "In the cavelike Petersburg bedroom everything was just as it recently had been in Noah's ark: clean and unclean creatures—flood-confounded. Martin Martinych's desk; books, stone-age flat cakes resembling pottery; Scriabin's Opus 74; a flatiron; five potatoes lovingly scrubbed white."[9]

By referencing Noah's ark, Zamyatin assigns a distinct animism to the objects and innovatively illustrates the irreparable loss of a former civilization. Martin and Masha consciously preserve these items, or "creatures," while retreating to the bedroom. The inclusion and ignition of Scriabin's Opus 74 does not merely signify the characters' lost participation in the arts. This distinctly atonal opus was Scriabin's last work, written during his descent into insanity. This carefully selected soundtrack for the short story illustrates the pandemonium of the situation and foreshadows the ultimate demise of the

protagonists. Scriabin's mystical and idiosyncratic compositions were a prominent part of the Russian symbolist movement, and the kindling of the opus for warmth is a scarcely concealed metaphor for Zamyatin's opinion of symbolist art as adverse to de facto existence.

Zamyatin was deliberate in the presentation and constitution of the laundry list of items salvaged by Martin and Masha. In his conception of neorealism, he sought to combine an initially curious collection of objects that "are welded by synthesis […] and the rays issuing from these pieces always meet at one point; the pieces always form a single whole."[10] The upheaval within the frigid Petersburg apartment, which serves as a more fantastic microcosm of the surrounding societal upheaval, calls into question even the most fundamental assumption of man's dominance over object. The result is a distinctly uncomfortable and unresolved challenge to assumed hierarchical structures, delineated by the possession or non-possession of sentience.

The most significant reconsideration is given to the cast iron stove in the apartment, which becomes a triumphant antagonist in Martin and Masha's struggle for life: "And in the middle of this Universe—its god: a short-legged, rusty-red, squat, greedy cave-god: a cast iron stove."[11] In the neo-Universe of the protagonists' frigid apartment, the stove is a third, more powerful character, a voracious "god" given the distinct image of an unattractive male villain. Its central position in this Universe is realized through multiple means: paying homage to the hungry god, Martin and Masha forget about religious holidays and relinquish precious sheet music and letters to feed the stove. This burning of the letters and music illustrates some remaining dominance of man over object, but it remains a form of homage to the cast iron stove. In the end, Martin is forced to commit the unspeakable—theft of firewood—as a form of ultimately deadly sacrifice to the hideous god.

The final victory of object over man is seen in the conflict that arises between Martin and Masha over the vibrantly blue phial of poison. The poison serves as a key to a dignified death, and Masha loses any remaining semblance of civility through her increasingly frantic demands for the phial: "Mart, if you still love me… Please, Mart. Remember! Mart, dear!"[12] Her distraught begging departs sharply from her former attempts to maintain gentility and her indignation with Martin for neglecting to observe societal or religious conventions, such as her saint's day. Her importunity demotes her position to beneath that of object, enabling the final triumph of the inanimate.

Zamyatin's adherence to neorealism as a natural synthesis of symbolism and realism allowed him to create a distinctively authentic parallel universe in which even the most basic assumptions of man's dominance over object are challenged. Through a blend of elements, which includes the concrete details of realism and symbolism's absurd dismissal of reality, Zamyatin achieves an unprecedented authenticity and allows for a new degree of intimacy for the reader.

Notes

1. Yevgeny Zamyatin, "On Synthetism," *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*. Ed. and trans. Mirra Ginsburg. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 85.
2. Zamyatin, "On Synthetism," 85.
3. Zamyatin, "The Cave," *Russian Stories*. Trans. Gleb Struve. (New York: Bantam Books, 1961) 291.
4. Zamyatin, "The New Russian Prose," *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*. Ed. and trans. Mirra Ginsburg. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) 106.
5. Zamyatin, "The New Russian Prose," 100.
6. Zamyatin, "On Synthetism," 86.
7. Zamyatin, "On Synthetism," 85.
8. Zamyatin, "On Synthetism," 85.
9. Zamyatin, "The Cave," 293.
10. Zamyatin, "On Synthetism," 87.
11. Zamyatin, "The Cave," 293.
12. Zamyatin, "The Cave," 311.

Beginnings in Endings in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*

Robyn Jensen

Chekhov wrote the play *The Wood Demon* in 1889, but after its poor reception he reworked it into *Uncle Vanya*, published in 1897. Although it retains certain elements from *The Wood Demon*, *Uncle Vanya* is significantly different. Unlike the end of *The Wood Demon*, in which lovers are happily united, none of the love plots in *Uncle Vanya* comes to fruition. Instead of having an affair with Astrov, Yelena leaves for Kharkov with her husband Serebryakov, whom she does not love. Vanya's love for Yelena is unreciprocated, as is Sonya's love for Astrov. In his dissolution of all romantic plot lines, crystallized in the final moment of the play as a niece—not a lover—comforts Vanya, Chekhov undoes *The Wood Demon*'s happy ending. However, while nearly all the characters at the end of *Uncle Vanya* are grief-stricken, Chekhov challenges the audience to see that the end is not tragic.

Astrov is a hard-working doctor, but it is his dedication to forestry that is crucial and, simultaneously, jeopardized by romantic love. In Act Three, Astrov shows Yelena his maps, which illustrate the deterioration of the district over the last fifty years. While woodlands once covered half the district, they are now barely visible on the map. Astrov explains to Yelena the momentum of the destruction: "What we have here is basically a picture of gradual but unmistakable decay, and the way things are going it won't take another ten or fifteen years to complete."[1] By planting trees now, Astrov positively shapes the future of the district. Yelena, however, is uninterested in the doctor's maps which detail the increasing eradication of the district's flora and fauna. While she does not actively destroy the trees herself, she is unconcerned with rebuilding the ruins, and destruction ensues through her passivity.

The ruins from Yelena's destructive passivity extend beyond the forest. Astrov, Vanya, and Sonya all insist that Yelena's boredom and idleness are infectious. They treat Yelena's languor as a contagion that has rendered them all hopelessly inert and incapable of performing the necessary and productive work that occupied their time before her arrival. Astrov cites her presence as the reason he has neglected his duties of late. "You infected all of us with your idleness […] I was infatuated with you and didn't do a thing all month. And meanwhile people have been falling ill, the peasants have let their cattle graze in the woods I was planting […] And I'm convinced that if you'd stayed on, the destruction would have been enormous."[2]

Yelena's departure at the end of the play can then be seen as a blessing, instead of as a tragic act that prevents her from attaining love. Chekhov gives us reason to believe that, were Yelena to succumb to Astrov's entreaties to stay with him at the end of the play, Astrov would

never return to medicine or the woods. This would have serious repercussions for the district, since, as Astrov tells Yelena in Act One, his orchard and nursery are the only ones for miles. In addition to caring for his own land, Astrov has taken charge of the state-owned forest near him because the old forester is no longer capable of performing his duties. If Astrov were to give up revitalizing the woods, there would be no one to continue his work.

Chekhov gives the audience no reason to doubt that Astrov, Vanya, and Sonya will continue to work after the curtain falls. While many characters in Chekhov's plays preach the benefits of hard work, they often find it exhausting and unfulfilling once they actually engage in it. For example, in the beginning of *Three Sisters*, Irina's naïve perception of the glories of work bespeaks the fact that she has never toiled. It is not surprising, then, that come Act Two Irina's job at the post office does not measure up: "I've got to find another job. This one's not right for me. It has none of the things I'd hoped for, dreamt about."[3] Vanya, Astrov, and Sonya are some of the few Chekhovian characters who actually enjoy working. Astrov describes the pleasure he derives from the practice of cartography: "When I'm all in, completely exhausted, I drop everything, rush over, and spend an enjoyable hour or two with my maps […] But it's a pleasure I don't indulge in very often."[4] Even when weary from his work as a doctor and forester, Astrov is not content to sit idly. He finds relief by engaging in another type of work. Sonya and Vanya, too, try to impress upon Yelena that nursing the sick and running the estate can bring pleasure, despite the hard work they require. Before the professor and Yelena arrived, Sonya, Vanya, and Astrov worked steadily and productively, and they will continue to do so after the couple leaves for Kharkov at the end of the play.

While Yelena's departure from the estate ensures a return to work, it also leaves her love affair with Astrov unfulfilled. However, this need not be seen as tragic, not only because Astrov returns to work, but also because Chekhov has buried hints throughout the play that Astrov and Yelena's union would not be a happy one. Throughout *Uncle Vanya*, characters respond to threads of earlier conversations so that they are in perpetual dialogue, even when not on stage together. This structure gives the audience insight into the true nature of characters' relationships with each other, and it ultimately allows the audience to make an evenhanded judgment about the play's seemingly tragic end.

For instance, instead of having Astrov and Yelena speak to each other directly, Chekhov places first Astrov and then Yelena in conversation with Sonya. Astrov speaks about Yelena in confidence to Sonya, praising her beauty but criticizing her idle nature: "But all she does is eat, sleep, go for walks, and charm us with her looks. She has no obligations. Everyone else works for her… Isn't that so? And an idle life can never be pure."[5] When Astrov vacates his role as Sonya's interlocutor, Yelena fills his space, offering her view on the cause of Astrov's impurity. Having extolled Astrov's work as a doctor and forester, Yelena says: "Oh, he drinks and he can be a bit crude, but what's wrong with that? In Russia a man with talent can never be pure […] Anyone who struggles day after day in conditions like those will have a hard time keeping pure and sober till the age of forty."[6] She believes his hard work impinges on his ability to have a pure life, while he considers her idleness to be the source of her impurity. Astrov and Yelena are not privy to each other's opposing view on the relationship between work and purity, but Chekhov allows the audience to see that these characters are ill-suited for each other. The observer entertains a privileged position in that he or she is able to see the unrealized love affair at the end of the

play in a more realistic light than the characters, who, in living the drama, are aware of only a fraction of what has been revealed.

Chekhov also encourages the audience to see that there is no great love lost when Yelena leaves Astrov in the end. Astrov himself maintains that he loves no one and can only be aroused by beauty. He says to Sonya: "I think Yelena Andreevna could turn my head in a day if she felt like it… But that's not love or affection…"[7] Nor does Yelena claim to be in love with Astrov. In their last scene together, Yelena confesses her feelings to Astrov: "Why hide it? I was a trifle infatuated with you."[8] Yelena's admission recalls Tatiana's confession of love for Onegin in the last scene of Tchaikovsky's opera *Evgenii Onegin*: "Why hide it? Why dissemble! Ah! I love you!..."[9] In 1888, Chekhov had become acquainted with Tchaikovsky, whom he considered to be the second greatest artist in Russia after Tolstoy. Given his reverence for Tchaikovsky's work, it is possible that Chekhov intentionally alters Tatiana's words to undercut audience expectations. The contrast to *Evgenii Onegin* enhances the anticlimactic effect of Yelena's confession of infatuation instead of love. Chekhov explores a scene of final parting in which there is no tragedy because the couple experiences nothing beyond superficial feelings for each other.

The non-tragic nature of the final scene is particularly evident when contrasted with the endings of other Chekhov plays. For instance, *Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov's final play, depicts the devastating effects of idleness and inaction on a family and its estate. Had the infectiously idle Yelena remained in *Uncle Vanya*, a true familial tragedy could have arisen. Vanya and Sonya's estate, robbed of its once-prodigious workers, would fall apart, financially ruining the characters. Chekhov plants the seeds of tragedy with the characters' repeated cry that Yelena has brought a plague of inertia, but that tragedy does not come to fruition here.

Chekhov also ends several of his plays with characters destroying nature. In *Three Sisters*, Tusenbach, aware that he may soon lose his life in a duel, takes comfort in a conception of death that is like a withered tree; it is still a part of life because it sways in the wind. Moments after Tusenbach receives the fatal shot offstage, Natasha needlessly plans to cut down the very trees through which Tusenbach imagined a connection to life after death, which creates a stark vision of the future. And in *Cherry Orchard*, the chopping of an ax rings throughout the play's final moments, as Anya's unanswered plea at the end of Act Three to plant a new orchard hangs in the air. *Uncle Vanya*, however, culminates in a return to work, bringing with it the birth of new trees. The ending is the beginning of new life.

Notes

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3. Chekhov 144.
4. Chekhov 93.
5. Chekhov 83.
6. Chekhov 87.
7. Chekhov 85.
8. Chekhov 109. Original Russian: "Больше мы с вами уже никогда не увидимся, а потому—зачем скрывать? Я даже увлеклась вами немножко.» in Anton Chekhov, "Drama na okhote. P'esy." (Moskva: Biblioteka Vsemirnoi Literatury, 2009) 581.
9. Original Russian: "Зачем скрывать? Зачем лукавить! Ах! Я вас люблю!..» in *Evgeniĭ Onegin: libretto P. Chaĭkovskogo i K. Shilovskogo po odnoimennomu romanu v stikhakh A.S. Pushkina.*(Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Muzyka," 1979) 283-84.



Puhachiv, a village in Zhytomyr, Ukraine
catherine m. stecyk

Nationality Against the National

The Implications of Linguistic Identity as a Political Tool in Moldova

Shelby Fields

Moldova has existed as an independent nation-state since August 27, 1991. However, the legacies of the past Soviet and Romanian occupations remain vivid components of persisting political and cultural debates as the nation tries to reconcile with the ghosts of its history. While nation-building plays a key role in Moldova's past, it is also very much a part of its present. Seeking legitimacy and authority in Europe and the post-Soviet space, Moldova has attempted to display an authentic identity that ethnically, linguistically, and historically differentiates Moldovans from both Romanians and Russians. With obvious political and economic incentives, modern nation-builders have overemphasized and manipulated parts of this alleged authentic identity in order to further their political agendas. In doing so, political and intellectual elites have tried to force upon Moldovans and the global audience an identity that has been exploited in such a way that it is not a true representation of the culture or interests of the Moldovan people.

The History of Language Policy and Suppression in Soviet Moldova

Populated by peoples of Romanian decent, Moldova has been a country in flux. During its history, Moldova has been part of the Romanian, Ottoman, Russian, and Soviet empires, and throughout these various transitions, the Moldovan population has been subject to domination and manipulation by the ruling power. This history of domination has given modern Moldovans a distinct sense of historical identity and has provided grounds for their claim to a unique linguistic identity.

Although Moldovans are ethnically Romanian, the two groups had separate histories for centuries before part of Moldova was briefly annexed by Romania from the 1920s to 1940s. Over time, this separation fostered a Moldovan identity that was not purely Romanian. Despite Russian, Soviet, and Romanian domination and suppression, by 1930 Moldovans still referred to themselves and their language as Moldovan. This early self-differentiation from occupiers held the first vestiges of Moldovan nation-building, separate from Romanian and Russian agendas.

From 1924 to 1944, the area now known as Moldova was split between the USSR and Romania. During this time, Romanian authorities enforced educational and economic policies to emphasize Moldovans' Romanianness and equalize them culturally with Greater Romanians. Simultaneously, in the Soviet part of Moldova, the MASSR (Moldavian Autonomous

Soviet Socialist Republic), Romanian-speaking bourgeoisie elites were removed from power under korenizatsiya cultural reforms. When the two halves were reunited in 1944 as the MSSR (Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic), Russification policies, which were particularly stringent due to enduring resentment between Romania and the USSR after World War II, were put in place to reverse any Romanianization that had taken place in the preceding decades.[1] In particular, Soviet nation-builders attacked the population's language, the most noticeable connection between Moldovans and their Romanian "fatherland," to eradicate traces of Romanianness from the MSSR.

Moldovans have spoken what linguists define as a dialect of standard Romanian (hereafter referred to as "Moldovan"), which had to be altered in order to disguise the connection to Romania. The alphabet was changed from Latin to Cyrillic script; Russian words were integrated into the Moldovan vocabulary; and speaking Russian was mandatory.[2] The Soviets went so far as to title the Moldovans' dialect "Moldovan" to reinforce the separation from Romania.[3] Nevertheless, the vast similarities between Romanian and Moldovan could not be denied. However, traits inherited from Russification, such as Russian vocabulary used in the Moldovan vernacular and various spelling differences, are clear examples of the Russian linguistic legacy and are used as evidence in the argument that there is a unique Moldovan language.

Seeking a Post-Soviet Linguistic Identity

On August 31, 1989, as Moldovans prepared to employ their self-determination and vie for independence from Soviet oppression, a language law was passed that declared Romanian the official language and reinstalled the Latin alphabet. The symbolic value was twofold: on the one hand, it displayed self-determination and represented breaking away from Russian domination; on the other hand, it symbolized a return to Romanian roots and suggested a possible future reunification, a position supported by pro-Romanian radicals. Most importantly, however, the declaration of Romanian as the national language recognized that Romanian and Moldovan were equivalent, thus contradicting the foundations of the Soviet-constructed Moldovan identity. Following the passage of this law, standard Romanian became compulsory for government officials and replaced Russian as the mandatory language requirement in schools.[4]

This law was short-lived, however. The elections of 1994 resulted in a new language policy found in Article 13 of the Constitution of Moldova, which asserted a Moldovan linguistic identity:

> 13.1 The national language of the Republic of Moldova is Moldovan, and its writing is based on the Latin alphabet.
> 13.2 The Moldovan State acknowledges and protects the right to preserve, develop and use the Russian language and other languages spoken within the national territory of the country.
> 13.3 The State will encourage and promote studies of foreign languages enjoying widespread international usage…[5]

Declaring Moldovan the official language, this new law re-established a separate Moldovan identity. Also, the idea that Romanian was equivalent to Moldovan had been completely removed. However, the absence of Romanian as a minority language alongside Russian leaves a conspicuous ambiguity.

In the years following the ratification of the new constitution, the Moldovan population split into pro- and anti-Romanian reformist camps. First, pro-Romanian reform arose through the increasing popularity of classes in standard Romanian, quickly superseding the originally dominant Russian courses in both high schools

and universities. Conversely, anti-Romanian governmental officials used the new constitution as a justification to ban the word "Romanian" from schools and other public institutions. Anti-Romanian reformers have also pointed to spelling variations that use the Latin symbols most closely related to the symbol in Cyrillic and therefore appear to come from a Slavic, rather than Latin, root. [6]

The sociolinguistic theory of social stratification, which can be applied to examine the internal conflict within Moldova, suggests that certain speech styles are consistent throughout a class or social stratum. For instance, the various Moldovan dialects are primarily spoken in villages and rural areas, while standard Romanian is most common in cities. Similar to the Russian language hierarchy during the Soviet era, Romanian is typically the language of administration and business. Likewise, although Moldovan and Romanian are mutually intelligible, standard Romanian is considered the characteristic language of upper-class intelligentsia and elites, despite the state's promotion of Moldovan.[7] Therefore, Moldovan is seen as a substandard language for the uneducated, a perception which creates tensions between Romanian and Moldovan speakers.

Romanian journalist Vitalie Dogaru addresses this issue further by discussing the phenomenon of "language skill loss" that resulted from Russification and has seriously strained the relationship between Moldovans and native Romanians living in Moldova. This occurrence was caused by the language reforms put in place by the Russians during the Soviet era, which mandated the study of Russian. However, by the time Moldova adopted Romanian as the official language in 1989, many Moldovans had not achieved full fluency in Russian; at the same time, they had lost fluency in Moldovan. Consequently, this part of the population was left without the ability to speak either language fluently or correctly. This problem has become more complicated because of Romanians' "tendency towards (hyper)correction" when the language is not spoken properly.[8] Although programs have been developed to teach the correct use and pronunciation of the language, embarrassment has merely increased resentment toward the native Romanians.[9]

Despite this resentment, many Moldovans see the debate as futile and agree with the linguists and academicians who have determined that a distinct Moldovan language does not exist.[10] The politicization of this ongoing issue has created tensions across borders. While presidents of both countries still say that the relationship between Moldova and Romania is friendly, Romania's refusal to recognize Moldovan as a legitimate language has caused political, economic, and social tensions since 1994. For example, in 2003 native Moldovan Vasile Stati published the Moldovan-Romanian Dictionary in Chisinau after Ion Iliescu, the Romanian president at the time, had announced that he would not recognize Moldovan as a language until there was a dictionary to prove it. However, once Stati's dictionary was released, linguists confirmed that while the dictionary proved variations in vocabulary, it failed to prove a difference in linguistic structure.[11] This event, like many others, made a mockery of Moldova's pursuit of a linguistic identity and reinforced cross-border tensions.

Also in 2003, external conflicts arose when the two countries' presidents met for the final negotiations of a treaty to strengthen economic ties. Both sides felt it was necessary to increase economic cooperation. However, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin refused to sign the treaty until Romania recognized a separate Moldovan culture, origin, and language. He presented a new draft of the treaty "'cleansed' of all references to a common history and lan-

guage" and missing several other parts referring to cultural cooperation in order to "draw a line between Moldovan and Romanian culture."[12] Though business, educational, and cultural exchanges were said to benefit from such a treaty, the resulting deadlock increased cultural, political, and economic tensions and reinforced a solid border between the two states.

Covering the summit in his article "Romania, Moldova Tongue-Tied Over Treaty," Razvan Amariei quotes former Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Severin as saying, "I think the two states should have a special relationship and that Moldova's integration into the EU should be a Romanian goal."[13] Romania's refusal to recognize a unique Moldovan identity and Moldova's unwillingness to negotiate with Romania until this recognition happens keeps this goal from being realized. However, Voronin's eastward political leanings may suggest that such a relationship was not in his top political interests. In this case, the state is exploiting the Moldovan identity to further its political agenda, in order to maintain a barrier to the West.

Implications and Analysis

There is no question that Moldovans now and throughout history have tried to assert a linguistic identity. In many ways, the history of Moldovan language oppression under various dominating powers has elevated the importance of language as an expression of Moldovan autonomy and independence. Likewise, on some level individuals are able to understand their culture through the use of their language. According to Matthew H. Ciscel, the difference between a language and dialect in sociolinguistic terms is not based on structural or historical "languageness," but on the speakers' own belief that what they are speaking is either a dialect or a language.[14] Consequently, the definition becomes political or social and merely operates behind the guise of a purely linguistic issue.[15]

Using Ciscel's argument, matters of sociolinguistics are inherently political and social matters. However, while the people see the primarily social importance of language, nation-builders have utilized the political power of language. By claiming to have social factors driving their linguistic policies, political elites gain symbolic power which they can use to define and impose reality.[16]

The fact that the elites who now implement and encourage Moldovan language policies are typically standard Romanian-speakers is another symptom of the abovementioned disconnect. By not abiding by the politics they promote, the elites perpetuate the need for Moldovans to study standard Romanian in order to be hired to official positions in the cities, and thus maintain the social stratification theory of sociolinguistics. Moldovan language policies are simply another way of unnecessarily standardizing the multiple dialects of the region in order to further nationalist goals, instead of a genuine attempt to politically reinforce a component of identity that is important to the people. In addition, the energy spent on the ongoing linguistic debate has taken the government's attention away from important issues, such as developing international relationships to help improve the abysmal Moldovan economy, the poorest in Europe.

Although Moldova has had a history of Russian, Romanian, and Soviet nationalist policies, the current nation-building situation is unique in Moldovan history because it is promoted by a Moldovan ruling class instead of an external power. However, by appearing to enforce a linguistic identity that promotes the people's interests, the political elite has used the continuing linguistic debate to further the administration's agenda. By exploiting the national linguistic identity at its convenience, the government has manipulated the people and ignored their inter-

ests and pressing needs. Though linguistic identity is important to many Moldovans, the identity that has been imposed and reinforced from above has actually hindered progress in the state and resisted the national interest.

Notes

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vokzal
shant krikorian

Russian Nationalism and Its Effects on Regional Stability

Eli Keene

The results of the 1993 Russian State Duma elections left the international community shocked. The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, a political party with an ultranationalist agenda led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, won 22.8% of the vote, making it the election's top performer. Zhirinovsky was painted by both Russian and Western media as a "clown," someone to be ignored, yet his vision for his country had undeniable appeal.[1] The LDPR would hold the parliamentary lead for the next two years.

Though Zhirinovsky and his party have largely faded in popularity, winning only about 8% of the vote in the 2007 State Duma elections, the ultranationalist sentiments they showcase have anything but disappeared. A 2006 Amnesty International report cited two polls in which 53% of respondents "supported the phrase 'Russia for the Russians,'" and 42% "stated that they would support a decision to 'deport representatives of certain ethnic groups' from their region."[2] The domestic implications of such attitudes are clear, as violent, ethnically motivated crime still plagues Russia, even with the weakening of ultranationalism in the political sphere. More worrisome, however, is the possibility for such widespread fervent nationalism to contribute to international destabilization. And though it is highly unrealistic to assume that nationalism could ever be the sole cause of international conflict in the area, the strength of Russian xenophobia could very well provide popular support for further regional disputes, especially as former Soviet republics begin to solidify their autonomy.

Understanding the connection between nationalism and Russia's relations with neighboring states requires an examination of the recent history of ethnic relations in the former Soviet Union. The USSR was always dominated by Russia, both in politics and image. And while ethnic Russians by far outnumbered any other population, the 1979 Soviet Census did include "about one hundred different ethnic groups."[3] Although Russian migration to Central Asia and the Caucuses was already underway in the 19th century, the formation of the Soviet Union was largely responsible for initiating widespread contact between ethnic Russians and other populations. With Russia established as a developed destination for citizens of the outer republics, the influx of immigrants that accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union and its migration controls should come as no surprise. The Russian government had until recently welcomed these newcomers. In 2008, an estimated 7 million people immigrated to Russia, about 4 million of whom did so illegally.[4]

While the Russian government may have largely supported a greater inflow of potential laborers due to the country's shrinking birthrate, it is not difficult to understand the cultural threat as perceived by ethnic Russians. Turning back to Zhirinovsky, it is clear that his purported platform centers on preserving "Russianness." "If non-Russians want to live in Russia," he claims, "they have to adopt our ways […] If they can't or don't want to do that, they should leave."[5] This corresponds to Zhirinovsky's understanding of Russia's "last bid for the South," a plan in which Russia would expand its borders south to India, uniting the numerous populations that

inhabit the area under the Russian language and Christianity, assimilating them into the Russian identity.[6]

Thus, the perseverance of Russian ultranationalism and xenophobia is not simply rooted in economic or military worries, but also in the idea of cultural superiority. Though the collapse of the Soviet Union decimated Russia's economy and loosened its military dominance, these weaknesses had largely disappeared by the turn of the century. The reminder that ethnic Russians were losing their cultural and political preeminence, however, remained. Russians saw their cities fill with more ethnic minorities, their linguistic dominance in former Soviet Republics fade, and territories such as Chechnya make a bid for political and cultural independence.

It is important to note that this feeling of nationalism—claims of ethnic superiority and calls of "Russia for Russians"—leads to a desire not for closed borders, but for regional domination by the Russian people. This sentiment serves as an integral part of Zhirinovsky's "last bid for the South. […] Russian will be spoken from Kabul to Constantinople. […] Before too long [the citizens of the former republics] will come begging to be part of Great Russia again."[7] These ideas are often reflected in public opinion, which widely supports maintaining territory that can in any way be claimed as Russian. For example, only 12.5% of respondents to a 2004 survey on the Russian military presence in Chechnya claimed that preserving Russia's territorial integrity was not a factor in their view on the war[8]—this, despite the fact that Chechnya, though with no legal authority to do so, had declared independence in the final days of the Soviet Union, a move made by a multitude of other states; and despite the fact that the latest Russian census shows the republic's population to be 93.5% ethnically Chechen.[9]

Questions of nationalism's role in Russia's foreign affairs inevitably arise in the latest example of regional territorial disputes, the conflict over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the summer of 2008. What was the underlying Russian interest in wresting these republics from Georgian control? The answer, of course, is not a simple one; the Caucuses have long been strategically important for a variety of economic and military reasons. But to claim that Russia's interest in the region was purely material and strategic would also be a mistake. Through an examination of Russia's involvement in the region, it becomes clear that nationalist sentiment must also have added fuel to the fire of preexisting international tensions. And while public opinion may not necessarily have directly contributed to the rise of armed conflict, it does provide the international community with a way to gauge popular sentiment toward future actions in matters of regional instability.

An underreported fact regarding the explosion of armed conflict in 2008 was that the Russian military had long been stationed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as peacekeeping forces. This set the stage for active Russian involvement in the area, something that the Georgian government resented. Tbilisi noted that the peacekeepers had become something akin to border guards, thereby threatening Georgia's perceived sovereignty.[10] There would be nothing overly striking about the presence of Russian troops, however, were it not for Russia's simultaneous policy of "passportization." This policy, which began in force in 2002, granted Russian citizenship to thousands of South Ossetian and Abkhaz residents, something again perceived by Tbilisi as a threat to its sovereignty.[11] Naturally, the combination of armed protective forces with encouraged assimilation of previously Georgian citizens led South Ossetia and Abkhazia to look less like regions in a state of disputed independence and more like territories of the Russian Federation.

The policy of passportization, though seeming to run contrary to the idea of "Russia for Russians," actually fits this model of national-

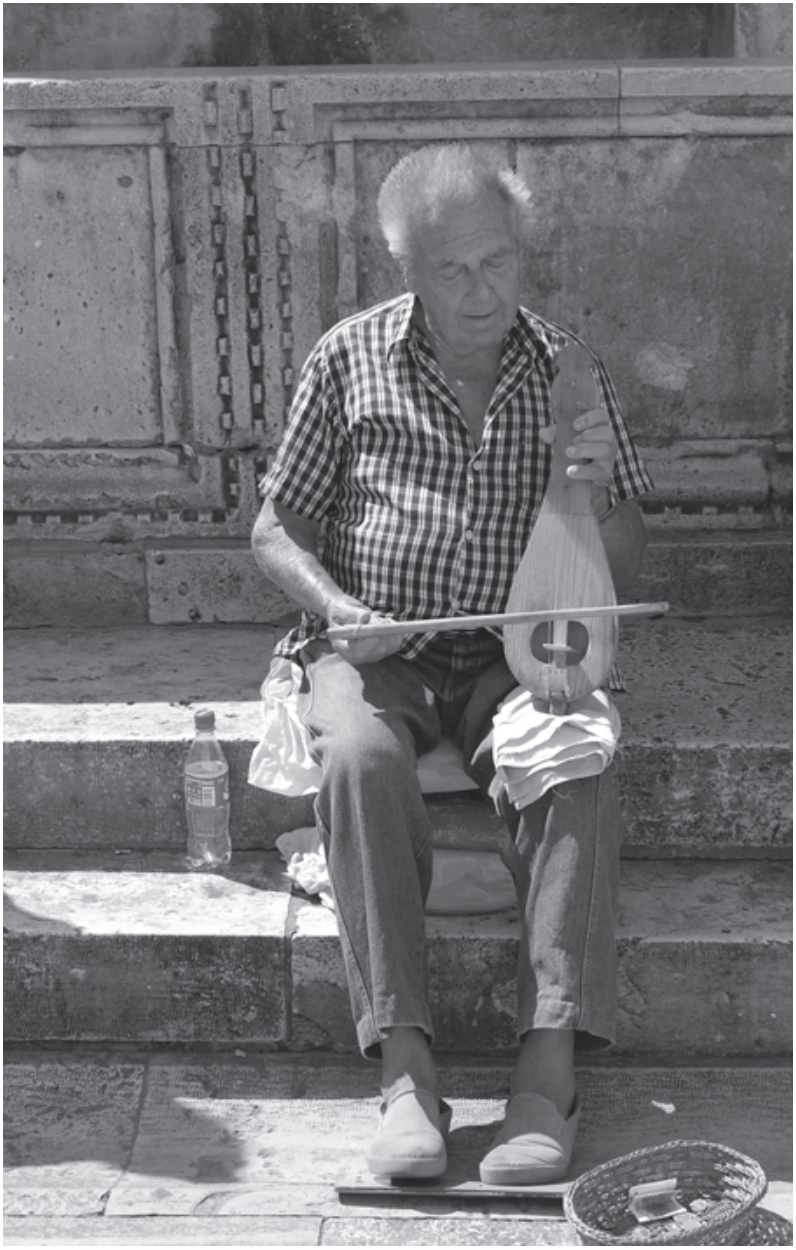
ism quite well. These Russified peoples would undoubtedly be met with hostility in ethnically Russian cities such as Saratov, where 57% of respondents to one poll expressed hostility toward ethnic minorities from the Caucasus.[12] Nevertheless, they are officially welcomed into the Russian Federation as populations desiring to "become Russian." These paradoxical attitudes are reminiscent of Zhirinovsky's idea that citizens of the former republics would beg to be allowed to join Great Russia.

Russian attitudes toward the conflict in Georgia also reflect nationalistic attitudes toward territorial integrity and expansion. One survey, conducted by the Russian independent polling group Levada-Center, showed that most Russians thought the two breakaway republics should either join the Russian Federation or become officially independent countries (35% and 40%, respectively), and only 6% believed they should again become part of Georgia.[13] The high percentage of respondents who believed that the republics should remain officially independent is significant. It must be noted that the lasting existence of autonomous republics with combined populations of about 300,000, located on the southern border of a country with a long history of aggressive expansion, is somewhat unrealistic. The fact that many citizens of these republics already carry Russian passports only makes their independent existence less feasible. The belief in these republics' autonomy, however, does reflect the nationalist idea that Russia should be able to dominate its neighbors, while simultaneously keeping ethnic minorities at a distance.

The run-up to the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia was too complex to reduce to a single cause. Yet the policy of passportization does present Russian nationalist sentiment as a contributing factor to the hostility. Indeed, there seems to be significant evidence pointing to the possibility of Russian xenophobia as a popular motivator for aggressive reactions in past, current, and future territory disputes across the former Soviet Union. As such, politicians such as Zhirinovsky and his numerous successors to the ultranationalist cause, as well as the general state of nationalist beliefs held by the Russian people, should not merely be discounted as radicalism. Instead, the prevalence of ethnically motivated crime and the significant support for ultranationalist platforms can be seen as an important marker for the international community; it is an indication that the Russian Federation will continue to use aggressive force in order to maintain its perceived territorial integrity and expand its regional influence.

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Hercegovina
katarina batina

Polish Labor Migration in the 21st Century

Jūle Mare Rozīte

People have always migrated if they deemed the situation in the target country more beneficial than that in the country left behind. A primary reason for relocation is the pursuit of work. Migrant workers not only affect the countries in which they arrive, but also impact the employment patterns of the countries they leave behind. The governments of these countries have had to adjust to a part of their population leaving or others coming to fill the empty spaces.

Poland in particular has, in the years following its accession to the European Union, seen a large-scale emigration of its working population. While emigration itself is not a new phenomenon for Poles, the current situation is unique, not only because of the opportunities afforded by the accession, but also in regards to the current economic crisis. The global nature of today's crisis may, in fact, have a positive effect on Poland's economy, as the weakening of traditionally strong economies may slow the massive out-migration originally caused by the disintegration of the USSR.

In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, unemployment officially did not exist. Due to the structure of the Soviet employment system, enterprises employed more people than was necessary. This was called labor hoarding, a process that kept wages low.[1] This system had both strengths and weaknesses. While it offered job security and social benefits, labor productivity was low and had little impact on wages, and international migration was limited.[2]

In the 1990s, as Central and Eastern European countries entered the international market, workers looked to Western Europe for employment opportunities. The situation was very different from what it was before liberalization, as domestic restrictions on migration were "replaced by restrictions imposed by potential host countries."[3] Prior to Poland's accession to the EU, Germany, the U.S., and Southern Europe were favored in terms of Polish migration, whereas after accession, the UK rose to the top of this list.[4] This was largely due to the UK, Ireland, and Sweden having the most relaxed laws regarding immigration from new member states.[5] The UK was also chosen as a destination due to the dominance of English.

Migration is a natural process in modernizing economies, and the migratory trend now seen in Eastern Europe already played out several decades earlier in other parts of the continent.[6] Travel also plays a major part in determining migration patterns within Europe. Joining the EU improves local economies and job prospects, but it has also made it even easier to travel and work abroad.[7] Treaties such as the Schengen Agreement have opened up internal borders and made travelling between certain countries much easier, as visas are generally no longer required. The emergence of low-cost airlines such as Ryanair or Easyjet has also made travelling a much more feasible option by eliminating the financial obstacle. One no longer has to be rich to travel,

which benefits seasonal workers traveling back and forth between their home and work countries.

The increased mobility and new opportunities provided by EU accession also causes different "brain distribution" effects. "Brain gain" and "brain drain" describe what happens to the human capital in a country when migration becomes a viable prospect. Both older and newer EU member states must now wait and see which of the brain distribution effects will influence them—that is, whether their labor markets will attract human capital (brain gain), or whether their young and well educated population will be tempted to emigrate, leaving gaps in the domestic labour market (brain drain).[8]

The World Bank Report states that "the marked increase in the number of available jobs was likely to contribute more to the fall in unemployment than labor out-migration. […] What labor out-migration actually did is contribute to skill shortages and associated wage pressures in most sending countries."[9] Skill shortages have a major impact on the home countries. Vacant jobs in companies cannot always be filled by the unemployed, as they lack the necessary skills.[10] The effect of emigrant workers is different for different sectors. In medical care, emigrating workers are a much greater problem for the home country than, for example, in information technology. Medical personnel have to be in the same place as their patients to provide care, and if the trained doctors or nurses have largely emigrated, the country encounters problems in providing necessary help for its inhabitants. For the IT industry, on the other hand, proximity is not a requirement and emigration does not undermine the existing industry.[11]

One suggested solution to balance out skill shortages is to open up the domestic labor market to immigration so that workers from other countries can fill the vacancies left by those who have emigrated. Though this might have a positive short-term effect, eventually the best solution, as suggested by the World Bank Report, is to encourage emigrated workers to return to their countries of origin. Encouraging immigration into Poland from countries outside the EU is only a quick fix and does not address the root of the problem. Many leave because of dissatisfaction with a lack of funds for equipment or poor working conditions, not just the low wages.[12]

Migration patterns are easily influenced by changes in both local and global politics and the economy. The current global financial crisis has naturally affected both Poland and the European countries to which Polish migrants have moved. Unemployment figures are on the rise in advanced economies, which in turn decreases the demand for migrant labor. As migrant workers find it more difficult to secure employment abroad, this decreases the remittances they are able to send home to their families.[13]

Another reaction to the global financial crisis is that workers have begun to return to their countries of origin, finding that pay abroad might not necessarily be better than at home. The Polish government is aware of this trend and is trying to encourage workers to return. Labor Minister Joanna Kluzik-Rostkowska describes the measures the government has taken; these include "a two-year exemption from paying income tax and contributing to disability pension and labor funds," as well as the reduction of old age pension contributions "by a third for those who work in firms employing fewer than nine people."[14] She does, however, concede that much more needs to be done to make circumstances advantageous enough for workers to agree to return, naming "family policy and the labor and housing markets" as fields that need improving.[15]

The Polish government has adopted many methods to reach out to emigrant populations. In the UK, for example, Polish embassies, as well as other meeting points for Polish expatriates, such as churches, will function as centers where workers can receive information about the labor

market and other practical information concerning planning a return to Poland. The Polish government is concerned enough to have launched advertising campaigns in Britain in an attempt to reach out to workers to encourage them to return home.[16]

The general consensus of literature written about migration and the European Union seems to be that no clear conclusions can be drawn or predictions made concerning long-term effects of accession and migration, as it is still too early to determine if recorded trends are permanent or transitory. The current economic climate in Europe and the world has thrown previous predictions off track, and it is difficult to say how migration patterns will progress in the future. As the economic downturn is an ongoing phenomenon, and not much time has passed since the Central and Eastern European countries joined the EU, no clear answers can be given and trends can merely be documented. It is, however, possible to look back at past crises to see if anything can be learned, or situations avoided, while taking into account the relatively new phenomenon of globalization.

It seems that accession to the EU has opened up the Western European countries to citizens of Eastern Europe, providing them with more employment options than ever before, while simultaneously improving the labor markets at home. The appearance of improved job opportunities within the EU was an immediate, tangible change, and thus the reaction was large-scale emigration. In today's economy, this could lead to a slow rebalancing of emigration and immigration patterns as domestic conditions slowly improve and the effects of more long-term EU policies begin to be felt. By affecting Western European countries as well, the global financial crisis could catalyze a more drawn-out return of emigrant workers to Poland, bringing with them the positive experiences and skills they amassed abroad. There is, however, still speculation that as the financial crisis affects Central and Eastern European countries, workers might choose not to return, or to return only to re-emigrate as soon as conditions abroad improve sufficiently.

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Alexandrov, Russia
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a village in the republic of Udmurtia, Russia
alana holland

Authoritarianism and Architecture

A History of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior

Anna Kats

Popular legend has it that in 1837, when Moscow's Convent of St. Alexius the Man of God was demolished to make room for a new church, the senior nun cursed the location such that "nothing would stay firmly at this place."[1] Her words, in many ways, have proven true: several architectural national monuments, constructed at the site of the former convent, have failed to survive the location. In each case, the edifice was erected by the ruling regime to assert its authority.

The first such structure was the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Initially intended to commemorate the 1812 defeat of Napoleon, the cathedral was completed in 1882 as a monument to tsarist autocracy. It was demolished by Stalin in 1931 to make room for the Palace of Soviets, a conceptualized structure that failed to take any shape and instead made room for Europe's largest outdoor swimming pool. In the post-Soviet era, the pool has been replaced by a reconstruction of the original cathedral, updated to serve the propagandizing needs of the post-Soviet Russian government by asserting a connection to the tsarist past.[2] There is a link between the differing forms of the monument constructed on this historical location and the differing forms of the Russian state: ruling regimes have determined the forms and purposes of the monument in all its manifestations, from the original Cathedral of Christ the Savior to its post-Soviet reconstruction.

The original Cathedral of Christ the Savior was a product of the political contexts in which it was conceived and constructed. Tsar Alexander I originally envisioned the cathedral as a political reminder, "decreeing that a 'church will be built in the name of Christ the Saviour' in Moscow to thank God for saving the 'Fatherland' from 'ruination.'"[3] The church would "commemorate the men who had lost their lives in 1812," and the architect Alexander Vitberg was hired to construct the edifice.[4] Vitberg's vision was political: its grand "architectural scale […] was to signify the […] leadership of Russia in the post-Napoleonic world."[5] The Cathedral was to affirm Russia's powerful new orientation toward Europe as a monument that would rival the continent's greatest religious structures.

This "first attempt to build a national cathedral-monument" never made it to completion. After the death of Alexander I in 1825, the new tsar, Nicholas I, removed Vitberg from the project.[6] Tsar Nicholas found fault with Vitberg's Eurocentric plans, asserting that the cathedral could be "meaningful only if built according to national (traditional Russian) architectural forms."[7] Thus, this regime change was instrumental to the Cathedral's changed form; while Alexander I's regime had asserted its political power by defeating Napoleonic France, Nicholas I's regime legitimized autocratic rule by promoting "official nationality."

Official nationality was based on the principles of "Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality."[8] The "historical past" was of great importance to this doctrine because it provided the source of "national" identity and the legitimacy of Rus-

sia's rulers. Thus, Vitberg's plan for a cathedral oriented toward Europe was scrapped and a second design contest was held for a cathedral form that accorded with the new tsar's desire for a national architecture. Historian Richard Wortman notes that Konstantin Thon's winning plan emphasized "the monarchy's ties to the historical past," and that Thon's design for the cathedral, constructed by 1882, was "the principal architectural expression of the official nationality doctrine" promoted by the regime of Nicholas I.[9]

When the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917, the former tsarist system was destroyed, and the Cathedral of Christ the Savior suffered the same fate. The atheist regime of the newly created Soviet Union "wanted to strike at the very heart of Orthodox religiosity by demolishing what the people regarded as their main cathedral."[10] On December 5, 1931, Christ the Savior was razed to make room for the Palace of Soviets. It is notable that, while their political ideologies were different, the Soviet authorities acted much like the tsarist government, which had demolished a medieval convent in 1837 to make room for the original cathedral.[11] By destroying a monument so closely associated with the tsarist regime and its political power, the Soviets asserted their own political power over their perceived enemies.

The Palace was meant as a "symbol of Communist global hegemony."[12] The chief engineer of the Palace proclaimed in 1939, "In the eyes of the U.S.S.R. this structure will symbolize the triumphs of Socialism and the Stalin Constitution […] the emancipated labor and art of the whole Soviet Union will be monumentalized in this Palace."[13]

The competition for the Palace design closed in 1933. The winning design was:

> the purest example of the gigantomania of Stalinist architecture […] At 416 meters the palace would have been the tallest building in the world at that time […] But the country was "spared"—the project was a monstrous failure. The foundation was not completed until January 1938 […] everything came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of war in June 1941. Steel girders were torn down for war materiel and the site [was] abandoned.[14]

After the war, national monumentalization reflected the cessation of Soviet political aspirations for international domination. Such aspirations were diverted by "shortages and the rise of the Iron Curtain, and a general loss of the revolutionary impetus of the early Soviet Period" that defined Soviet politics of the postwar years.[15] Given the sobering effects of the sacrifices made for victory in World War II and the increasingly apparent excesses of Stalinism, there was no remaining capacity for the idealism that had dominated early Soviet ideology. During the Khrushchev thaw, it was undesirable to continue with Stalin's Palace of Soviets.[16] An expensive endeavor resulting from early Soviet idealism that ultimately proved untenable, the Palace was never constructed. Thus, this second attempt at architectural monumentalization was also initiated and terminated due to regime change.

Both the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the never-realized Palace of Soviets failed to create a national monument on the space of the former convent; the site was covered over in 1957 and then turned into an enormous heated swimming pool soon after.[17] Such was the "geographic symbol for the failed Communist endeavor, a pit serving ironically as the 'highest' and 'biggest' achievement of the 'new society.'"[18] The pool not only failed to glorify the Communist endeavor as the previous Soviet regime had intended the Palace of Soviets to do; the pool was testament to that very failure. In attempting to build a monument to the glories of Communism, the Soviet government achieved the exact opposite: a monument to the failure of early Soviet Communism's ideological plans.

The idea of restoring the Cathedral of Christ the Savior arose in the late 1980s, the direct result of yet another change in political power. The Soviet regime was crumbling: "In 1988-89 when Gorbachev's policy of glasnost had allowed the airing of many controversial subjects, the idea of rebuilding [the cathedral] occurred simultaneously to different people."[19] Andrew Gentes notes that "liberals generally favored the reconstruction of some sort of cathedral […] They saw the destruction of the cathedral as another in the long list of atrocities committed by the Soviet regime."[20] This liberal outlook considered the reconstruction of the cathedral necessary to coming to terms with the Soviet past. The final form of the reconstructed Cathedral of Christ the Savior, however, took on a different meaning as this liberal perspective was replaced with a more conservative post-Soviet Russian regime. "Government tutelage took the project out of the hand of civic organizations and meant it would be realized in the most grandiose dimensions for the benefit of the new leaders of Moscow, Russia, and the church," explains Gentes.[21] This recent manipulation of the cathedral harks back to the tsarist and Soviet efforts to assert the power of the state through the architectural monument.

The post-Soviet Russian authorities have asserted the power of their state by reconstructing Christ the Savior as a link to the perceived stability and power of the tsarist past. Svetlana Boym observes: "Moscow restorative nostalgia is characterized by a megalomaniacal imagination that recreates the past as a time of mythical giants."[22] Nostalgia for the supposed glory of the tsarist past has been turned into an image of glory in post-Soviet Moscow by reflecting that nostalgia onto the reconstructed cathedral, and thus onto the post-Soviet Russian state. In the post-Soviet context of the cathedral, "nostalgia became a defense mechanism against the accelerated rhythm of change and economic shock therapy."[23] The new cathedral represents an attempt to gloss over Soviet history and establish continuity between pre- and post-Soviet Russia.[24] This affirmation of continuity refers back to a comfortable past so as to deflect attention from the failures of the ruling regime in post-Soviet Russia. In the post-Soviet period, the edifice



Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow
david tolbert, jr.

serves to gloss over the difficulties of life in contemporary Russia.

While the forms of the architectural monument have changed with new regimes in Russian politics, the purpose of the edifice has largely remained static. Each manifestation of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior has aimed to assert the authoritarian aspirations of the political regime that constructed its own form of the architectural monument. The original cathedral's design explicitly affirmed tsarist autocracy, while the Palace of Soviets portrayed an attempt to "create a neoclassical behemoth" to "reflect the philosophy that architecture should hold the proletariat in a perpetual state of awe,"[25] much as Stalin's cult of personality and terror held a perpetual grip on the Soviet proletariat until his death. It is only the swimming pool, which can be seen as a renunciation of Stalin's excesses on the part of the Khrushchev regime, which does not propagate authoritarianism. Today's reconstructed cathedral connects the post-Soviet regime to a venerated period of past stability, creating nostalgia for a mythical past that aims to disguise the more difficult conditions of life in post-Soviet Russia. The history of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in these various forms suggests that past and present Russian rulers have understood monumental architecture as a powerful and public means of reinforcing state authority and ideology.

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