

**Nostalgia and the Myth of “Old Russia”:
Russian Émigrés in Interwar Paris and Their Legacy in Contemporary Russia**

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Part I: Interwar Émigrés and Their Literary Contributions

Introduction

The Russian Intelligentsia and the National Question

While most people look to the classic Russian authors, such as Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Pushkin, in order to try to understand Russia, one cannot forget the substantial contribution to Russian literature given by interwar émigrés. These émigrés hold a particularly fraught place within Russian literature, as they both affirmed their devotion to the continuation of Russian literature abroad while noticeably distancing themselves from the historical trajectory their homeland was taking in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. While the émigrés came from different backgrounds, moved to different lands, and adhered to various schools of art and thought, they all contributed to the Russian national literary canon. The majority of those who emigrated were either from the aristocracy or the intelligentsia. These were people with either apolitical leanings, who could not tolerate the ultra-political nature of the new Soviet regime, or whose politics put them in direct conflict with official Soviet ideology. With uncertainty in the air, some artists fled, and others were thrown out of the country. These artists, composed of painters, novelists, poets, actors, as well as ballerinas, offer a particularly captivating picture of this emigration. Because of the nature of their professions, there is a wealth of sources from which to gauge the social, political, and cultural currents of the émigré community. The majority of émigrés fled to France, Germany, and China. (Sabennikova, p. 156) My research will focus on those emigrants who fled to Paris because this is where the heart of the Russian emigration was, and Paris was home to a group of émigrés that was one of the largest around the world. The rich history between

the Russian and French states explains much of this emigration, particularly because France was the source of cultural and social norms for the Russian aristocracy for a substantial amount of time. The sheer size of the émigré group in Paris, however, is not the main reason for which it is so important to the Russian literary canon. It is important for the way in which it preserved and imagined pre-revolutionary Russia, thereby creating the myth of “Old Russia.”

This myth is steeped in notions of what it means to be Russian. This question of identity is tricky, particularly in English, because there are two ways to render the English word “Russian” into the Russian language. *Rossiyanin* carries a civic or territorial connotation, i.e. the Russian Empire, whereas *ruskii* denotes Russian blood and nationality. To render the situation more complex, one can be *ruskii* and not be *Rossiyanin* or be *Rossiyanin* but not *ruskii*. These questions of nationality and ethnicity are not only very complex and at times heated, but the very notions themselves change depending on what culture is viewing the dilemma. As Benedict Anderson states in his cornerstone work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (p. 6). This quote points to two very important traits of nationality: firstly, it is a socially constructed concept, which, however, does not detract from its “realness,” and secondly, there are many different styles in which a nation can be imagined. The concept of time is extremely important in determining nationality because it can determine who people let in their group. The French, for instance, nowadays do not consider people from Burgundy and the Loire Valley of separate nationalities because a sufficient amount of time has passed to allow collective memories to form linking Burgundians and people of

the Loire under the banner of “French.” While ethnicity (i.e. bloodline/kinship) is often thought the most representative trait of nationality/nationalism, language, religion, and other cultural dimensions can be just as important in representing a nation.

In light of the national question, this thesis aims to uncover the way in which Russian émigrés in Paris imagined “Old Russia” and in return how these imaginings aided in constructing notions of Russian nationality and informed Russian nationalism. Furthermore, I will show how their legacy has continued to shape and structure the national question in contemporary Russian through various media, specifically literature and film. More specifically, I look at the role that Russian émigrés played in defining (and in their minds preserving) the culture of “Old Russia.” I focus primarily on the artistic community of émigrés including novelists and poets, as well as painters because I believe that this group of people in particular captures and preserves best the thoughts and feelings of “Old Russia.” More importantly, however, I argue that the creation of the “myth of Old Russia” would be impossible without the émigré community in Paris precisely because it offered them a permanent (at the very least more permanent) abode in which they could settle down and continue their work; in addition, much of the culture of “Old Russia” was heavily influenced by French intellectual thought. Writers and poets will constitute the largest part of my research in part because many of the most well known émigrés, especially those who went to Paris, were authors. Writers, like the other members of the artistic émigré community, form part of the intelligentsia, a ‘class’ that came to fruition in nineteenth century tsarist Russia. The Soviet intelligentsia differed considerably from the intelligentsia who fled after the Bolshevik revolution. The intellectuals who fled were “aristocratic in spirit, poor in means” (Boym, p. 67).

Therefore, they offer a clear picture of the culture and beliefs of “Old Russia,” and its aristocracy. In fact, many members of the intelligentsia were also from noble families.

Anthony Smith writes, “The modern world has become inconceivable and unintelligible without nations and nationalism” (p. 106). Indeed, nationalism is a term that is indispensable in any analysis of Russian émigré literature, or Russian literature in general. While many may view this as a negative term, I like to think of the concept as simply extant. Namely, nationalism is a phenomenon that exists, and as for anything that exists, it may have its positive and negative representations. Olga Maiorova defines Russian nationalism in particular as, “those beliefs and discursive practices that take the Russian people as their primary object of devotion and concern” (p. 28). This definition not only presents the concept of nationalism in moderate terms, but it also distinguishes between nationalism and support for the government of Russia at a given time, i.e. patriotism. While these two -isms have coincided before, they often did not, particularly among the Russian intelligentsia. However, one has to take care not to lump all members of the Russian intelligentsia under one roof. There are Westernizers, Slavophiles, and Pan-Slavists, as well as various permutations and nuances in the groups above. These three categories, however, set up the academic battlefield in terms of the national question.

It should be noted that nationality and nationalism were not very important concepts until the idea of nation-states arrived in Western Europe. Until the concept of the citizen came about during the Enlightenment, there were kingdoms, realms, and sultanates composed of various ethnic groups, none of which played a civic role in daily life. Instead rulers reigned through primogeniture and a claim to *le droit divin*. If divine

right and birth therefore determined leadership and prestige, there was no reason for the concept of the nation. When Western intellectuals challenged these long held traditions, ethnic communities could begin to envision themselves as the entitled rulers of a particular state. It was the Russian intelligentsia who, having correspondence with Western intellectuals, particularly French and German, introduced notions of nationalism into the Russian Empire. Up until then, Russian rulers controlled a vast territory composed of myriad ethnic groups. Even large majorities of the nobility were either Polish or German. French was the language of the court and even the language of the intelligentsia that would later promote Russification of the empire. As Maiorova points out in her book, *From the Shadow of Empire*, the year 1812, being the year in which the French army was expelled from Moscow, played a huge role in defining the Russian nation because it was a chance to highlight that Russia was better than the West. It also served as a break in Francophilia, at least in theory. While official rhetoric turned to Russification, French remained an important language for the aristocracy, and even the intelligentsia until the October Revolution in 1917. Maiorova states:

Nationalism always seeks to highlight a national community's uniqueness and continuity. In an era of fundamental change under the obvious influence of Western European models, this impulse ran rampant...(p. 11).

So while undoubtedly influenced by their Western contemporaries, Russian intellectuals strived to highlight the uniqueness of the Russian nation in spite of and because of this influence. Perhaps because of Western influence, which was greatest in large urban centers, the "*prostoi narod* [common people] came to be seen as the truest exemplars of the Russian national character" (Perrie, p. 28). However, this has an ironic

quality to it. The “common people” were the most uneducated and the least concerned with the concept of Russian nationality. The works of intellectuals praising the common people’s *russkost*’ (Russianness) would have been inaccessible and, furthermore, unreadable by the majority of peasants. Dostoevsky, whose ideas had some of their origins in Slavophilism, belonged to the reactionary social organization called the *Pochvennichestvo*, (Return to the Soil), later in his life, but he was still a fluent speaker of French, as befitted his birth into the nobility. He often intermingled French language into his novels, such as in his autobiographical work *Igrok* (*The Gambler*), and he was an accomplished translator from French to Russian. As his audience was the educated community of intellectuals in Russia, this bilinguism is hardly surprising. However, it is ironic that someone belonging to an extremely anti-Europeanist organization would consistently use French in his works. This dynamic highlights the complex relationship between the Russian intellectuals and Western Europe. Dostoevsky, and his philosophy, would come to influence many of the ideas of the émigrés, most notably Nikolai Berdyaev, and the East-West dichotomy is ever present in their works.

The Émigrés and Their Role in Russian Literature

In order to have a complete understanding of the trends of Russian nationalism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one has to look at the Russian émigrés. More specifically, one has to look at those members of the *intelligentsia* who left Russia, many of whom made the difficult decision never to return to their native land. Not only were they greatly influenced by Russian nationalists, such as Dostoevsky, but also they managed to preserve a very traditional form of Russian literature with them abroad. While there were many different people from various social strata who left Russia in the

wake of the Bolshevik Revolution, the intelligentsia in particular plays a big role in society, particularly Russian society. The first notions of an intelligentsia rose up in the 19th century, in the current territory of Poland, although at the time the land was under the control of Imperial Russia. Following the definition of Hegel, the intelligentsia is composed of those people in “the circles of educated, professionally active people, who were regarded as a group able to become the spiritual leaders of the whole society” (Kizwalter, 242). Furthermore, intellectuals are a “subcategory of the former [*intelligentsia*] that includes only those who serve as culture-bearers and the custodians of the tradition of creative and critical thinking about society’s problems” (Andryczyk, p. 5). These definitions highlight the political, social, and cultural role taken up by the intelligentsia. Falling directly into this category are novelists, poets, painters, and the like. Many members of the Russian intelligentsia took this calling very seriously, and it is for this reason that an analysis of Russian nationalism would be incomplete without delving into the topic of intelligentsia artists. All the émigrés in Part I are important figures not only for their position among the intelligentsia, but, by being first-wave emigrants, they felt most keenly the loss of “Old Russia”; ergo, they are the only Russian émigrés who truly carry in their works the necessary elements needed to define what is meant by “Old Russia.” Furthermore, while there are other émigrés who are perhaps better known, such as Vladimir Nabokov, the author of *Lolita*, the émigrés discussed in this thesis are underdeveloped. They therefore are deserving of more scholarship in light of their literary contribution to the Russian canon.

The complex East-West relationship, as well as the difficulty inherent in determining the characteristics of *Russkost*’ (Russianness), are both social and political

dilemmas with which the émigré community in Paris were concerned and well aware.

One major component used in highlighting the exceptionalism of the Russian nation is its religious and apparent eschatological character. In my first chapter, I will analyze the émigrés Nikolai Berdyaev and Vladislav Khodasevich, along with his wife, the poet and author, Nina Berberova, in order to highlight this character/trope of the Russian nation.

Berdyaev was a Russian religious philosopher in the vein of Dostoevsky, and therefore, he presents very traditional and well-founded cultural ideas found throughout “Old Russia.” The poetry of Khodasevich and the philosophical work of Berdyaev, *Russkaya Ideya (The Russian Idea)*, portray a longing for the divine on earth and introduce the reader to the eschatological concept found throughout Russian literature and art.

Furthermore, Berdyaev’s conception of the divine on earth is compounded with the idea of the Russian *muzhik* (peasant), another trope common to Russian national discourse.

Nina Berberova’s autobiography, *Kursiv Moi (The Italics are Mine)*, is an important work because Berberova was in correspondence with the large majority of émigré Russians in Paris after the Bolshevik revolution, and her autobiography will reveal the dynamics and personal stories of many émigrés, thereby personalizing the nationality debate.

Berberova’s autobiography also helps one to understand the life and struggles of Khodasevich more clearly.

My second chapter will begin with an analysis of Ivan Bunin’s *Zhizn’ Arsen’eva (The Life of Arseniev)*. This highly autobiographical book will not only give insight into Bunin’s personal life and philosophy, but it will also highlight certain concepts found within the émigré nationalist rhetoric of the interwar period. Natalya Goncharova was an avant-garde painter who ended up working for the *Ballet Russes* while in Paris. She

carried abroad a strongly Russian character in her work, and in particular, several of Goncharova's paintings are categorized as *neo-primitivist*; in this sense, they harken back to a more "organic" form of Russianness, which again reflects back to the notion that the Russian *muzhik* is representative of the Russian nationality. Her paintings not only reflect the philosophy of Berdyaev, but they are also consistent with Bunin's preoccupation with nature and death.

My third chapter will be an analysis of two Russian émigrés who decided to return to Soviet Russia after a brief interlude in Paris: Marina Tsvetaeva and Alexsei Tolstoi. I am particularly interested in why both of these émigrés decided to return to their homeland, when many did not, as well as why Tsvetaeva's return ended so tragically, while Tolstoi returned to Soviet Russia and gained renown. I believe that part of the answer to why Tsvetaeva's return ended so tragically in suicide has to do with the fact that she was unwilling to truly change her philosophy in regards to Russian nationalism, whereas Tolstoi was able to reassess the Russian nation in light of the Soviet rehabilitation of Russian Imperial History. My analysis of Tsvetaeva is concerned primarily with her poetry. For Tolstoi, I will be looking exclusively at his novel, *Peter I*. This novel is an important key to understanding how Tolstoi became so popular in Soviet Russia despite his noble background. Through the novel, Tolstoi was able to use the tsar Peter to propound the communist ideal while giving it a historical anchor.

While the people, events, and periods in this thesis vary considerably, they are all linked by a common thread—the desire by the Russian intelligentsia to define the Russian nation under the shadow of Western intellectual influence. In particular, the role of those intellectuals who immigrated to Paris after the Russian revolution of 1917 has set

the tone for their contemporaries' notions of Russian nationality/nationalism.

Furthermore, their legacy continues to shape such notions among Russia's contemporary intelligentsia in the disciplines of literature and cinematography. While the academic debates on the exact nature of Russian nationalism will undoubtedly continue to rage indefinitely, it can be said with confidence that the Russian émigré community in Paris has earned itself a special and distinct role in the history of these debates. In Part II, I will focus specifically on the legacy of these émigrés in contemporary Russia, and how a strong nostalgia for pre-Revolutionary Russia has led to the enhanced interest in and rehabilitation of the émigré artists.

Chapter 1

Russia's Eschatological Quest: Longing for the Divine

Religiosity of any sort is a singular trait of Russianness, and while the majority of Russian intellectuals would identify with the Orthodox Church, there are some, such as Khodasevich, who were Catholic. While the Orthodox Church was a large influence in pre-revolutionary Russia and has regained its eminence in contemporary Russia, the official Russian Orthodox Church has not always been the religious focus in literature and philosophy. The official church is often seen as corrupt and too friendly with the government; however, the Orthodox religion is nonetheless a focal point for Russian nationalist discourse. Opposition to, or alliance with, the Catholic Church has long been a trait of Russian religious thought. Vladimir Solov'ev, best known for his *Divine Sophia* or the *Eternal Feminine*, long sympathized with Catholicism, and he converted at the end of his life. Therefore, the Orthodox Church is not the defining characteristic of Russianness; rather, the defining characteristic is a longing (*stremlenie*) for the divine. (Berdyayev) This longing breaches any official church boundaries.

In this chapter, Berberova's *The Italics are Mine* sets the stage on which the émigré community in Paris fought its inner crisis. Namely, the estrangement (*ostranenie*) felt by the émigrés in the absence of their homeland forced them to look elsewhere for comfort. Many times this solace was sought in the divine, and this thematic element is found both in the poetry and critical writings of Khodasevich, as well as in the philosophy of Berdyayev.

Berberova-Khodasevich: The Young and the Old

While in essence I will treat the works of Nina Berberova and Vladislav Khodasevich separately, an understanding of their works cannot be attained without acknowledging their many years together as a married couple. They were at the same time one and yet very different from each other. Berberova was born at the turn of the century, 1900, while Khodasevich was born in 1886. Despite their close bond together, they were from two generations. The fourteen-year gap in age is enough that while Khodasevich felt very acutely the loss of the Old Russia, Berberova's loss was less clearly defined. While Berberova was young and felt a certain freedom in this youth, Khodasevich was constantly in spiritual torment, leading in his last years on earth to a waning of poetic drive and will. I will not focus on Berberova the *poet*, but rather Berberova the *memoirist*. In particular, her autobiography *Kursiv Moi (The Italics are Mine)* provides a strikingly honest representation of not only herself, but also the other émigrés in general; this is despite her claim that "This book is about myself, not about other people" (p. 3). Through her recollections, one can truly gain an understanding of the circumstances into which the émigrés found themselves thrust at the beginning of the 1920s.

Berberova and the Moral Crisis of the Émigrés

In the years of the Russian Civil War, Nina Berberova moved to the south of Russia like many other members of the intelligentsia and aristocracy, as this was where the White Army had its stronghold in its fight against the Bolsheviks. (Berberova) It was in the midst of this war that the end of the Old Russia began to become ever more clear. As Berberova puts it herself,

The sense of an imminent end began to appear—not so much a personal one but a kind of collective abstract one, which, however, did not impede one’s way of staying alive; it was not a *physical* end certainly, . . . but perhaps a *spiritual* end. (p. 143, italics in the original)

This quote not only points to the collective nature of the ‘end,’ but it also points to the forthcoming spiritual conflict that would besiege the majority of Russian émigrés, not the least of all being Berberova’s own husband. The decision to leave Russia was difficult. Berberova and Khodasevich moved around Europe a lot before finally settling down in Paris. Return to Russia always seemed to be a viable option; that is until Khodasevich found out that his name was on a list of authors not permitted to enter Russia or to be forced to leave. (Nikolai Berdyaev, discussed in the following section, was among those deported to Germany in 1922.) Even then, in the face of governmental opposition, it was hard to accept the life of an émigré. Berberova states, “we didn’t go to Paris, because we feared Paris—yes, both of us feared Paris—and emigration. . . . We were afraid of not returning, the finality of our fate, and the irrevocable decision to remain in exile” (p. 200). This fear points not only to the anguish felt at the deprivation of one’s homeland, but it also highlights the role that Paris had to play for the émigrés. It is as if Paris held a special *spiritual*, or at least mental, power over the émigrés. It was in Paris that the East-West conflict in the souls’ of the Russians’ reached its peak. Suddenly, the French culture with which many, if not most, of the intelligentsia grew up seemed strange and incomprehensible to them. Berberova states that French, “the language that, though I knew it, suddenly seemed not at all like the one taught to me in childhood” (p. 214). The *mal du pays* felt by Berberova and the émigrés quickly turned into, as Baudelaire coined

it, the *mal du siècle*. This woe and sense of the loss of homeland turned into the defining factor of émigré literature.

Berberova's autobiography sheds light on the complexity of the émigré position and the difficulty in defining it. Each émigré has a different story to tell, and each had various political/social views. While at first glance, it may seem that the intelligentsia and the aristocracy would have gotten along quite well in émigré France (or any émigré city), as they both enjoyed a life of relative ease in Russia, this was not the case. The aristocracy continued to live a life of relative ease, while the intelligentsia was in utter poverty. Even more disheartening were the fractures within the émigré community. Berberova was particularly aware of this tragedy. She says,

It was not the split between the intelligentsia and the people, but the split between the two parts of the intelligentsia that always seemed to me fatal for Russian culture. The separation between intelligentsia and the people was much less pronounced than in many other countries...when the intelligentsia is severed in two to its foundation, then the very hope disappears for something like a strong, spiritual civilization uninterrupted in its flow, and a national intellectual progress, because there are no values that would be respected by all. (p. 172)

The split was mainly caused by politics; namely, traditional conservative émigrés versus the avant-garde liberal émigrés, many of whom supported communism. This failure is perhaps the most demoralizing aspect of émigré life abroad. Politics entered into literature in a way that was unprecedented and which cleaved friends and family apart. The decision to be on the 'right' or the 'left,' or the decision to remain or to return were

momentous and life altering decisions. There was indeed a great moral crisis for these émigrés; namely, “Khodasevich said he could not exist without writing, that he could write only in Russia, he could not exist without Russia, but he could not live or write in Russia” (p. 215). However, Khodasevich continued to write and to live. In addition, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, the Symbolist poet and Russian religious thinker in exile, says, “I am also here and not there, because Russia without freedom does not exist for me. But... What good is freedom to me if there is not Russia? What can I do with this freedom without Russia?” (Berberova, p. 242). There seemed to be no good choice in this dilemma. However, both Khodasevich and Dmitry Merezhkovsky stayed and died in Paris, plagued with the desire to be in Russia but choosing their own freedom. As Berberova states in her autobiography, many who returned were killed in repressions or ended their life with suicide. (Yet they had their homeland). This crisis posed a difficult choice indeed for the émigrés.

Khodasevich: Preserving the ‘Old Russia’ in a New World

In Berberova’s *Italics*, she quotes an unfinished poem of Khodasevich in which he writes, “But I have packed my Russia in my bag,/And take her with me anywhere I go” (p. 147). Khodasevich had the conviction that the émigré community had a mission. This mission was to preserve as much of the Old Russia as possible, and for Khodasevich, this task was especially important for the young generation of émigré artists who fled Russia before being able to complete their education. Khodasevich felt the weight of this burden ever more clearly because he was married to a poet of the younger generation. Although Vladimir Nabokov described Khodasevich as “modern-day Russia’s best poet,” to some (i.e. conservative nationalists) it would seem that

Khodasevich is the antithesis of *russki dukh* (*the Russian spirit*); he was born from Polish parents, baptized Roman Catholic, and never converted to Orthodoxy. However, it is clear that for Khodasevich himself, as well as for Berberova, his background in no way prevented him from feeling a spiritual connection with Russia. Berberova states, “he, who had in himself not a drop of Russian blood, was for me the personification of Russia” (Berberova, p. 224). This understanding of Russianness points perhaps to the superiority of *dukh* (spirit) over *krov'* (blood).

The suffering of the émigré community in Paris is most evident in the poetry and life of Khodasevich. He was constantly depressed, tortured by the loss of homeland, and often contemplated suicide. While Khodasevich continued to produce good work while abroad, he was severely critical of himself and his talents. As David Bethea points out, “the word-seeds that once fell into the ‘black earth’ of a still vital Russian poetic tradition are cast, in Khodasevich’s last collection, onto the alien pavement of European cities” (p. 277). Khodasevich feared oblivion; he feared that all was being lost and that after he was gone there would be no one to ensure the continued preservation of Russian culture. Furthermore, the preservation of “Old Russia,” i.e. traditional Russia, was also part of a greater fear for Khodasevich; namely, he lived in “an era that was in the middle of losing its spiritual light” (Demadre, p. 771). Khodasevich’s fear of losing “Old Russia” is therefore deeply intertwined with a fear of modernity. Just as the romantic poets of France in the wake of the Industrial Revolution opined the destruction of nature, Khodasevich opines the destruction of the intelligentsia and a bygone era. Yet, in both instances, the poet is utterly powerless, at least in a physical sense. The soul is still a powerful agent in mediating with the world and overcoming its “now:”

Walk over, jump over
 Fly over, cross over—in any way you like
 But break away: as a rock from the sling,
 As a star running wild in the night.
 You lost it yourself, now look for it...
 Only God knows, what you mumble to yourself
 searching for your pince-nez or keys.¹

This poem (1921) reflects Khodasevich's frustration in his current era. The use of the prefix *pere-* “brings us to a sense of passage, of transgression, of an escape away from this world toward others” (Nivat, p. 317). The poem is unclear in defining what was lost—perhaps this is a reference to the loss of “Old Russia.” Regardless, it is up to the poet, and to all of us, to find it. Furthermore, the majority of the verbs in the poem are in the imperative; namely, Khodasevich views himself as a mentor. It is likely that he is imploring the younger generation of poets to “break away” from their current era and not to get swept away by the influence of Western European culture.

Vladislav Khodasevich was also an important figure in trying to find a common link between émigré and Soviet literature. A group of émigrés, including Viktor Shklovsky, an émigré writer in Berlin, (whom Khodasevich credits with the original idea) and Maxim Gorky, author of the famous Soviet Work *Mother*, worked with Khodasevich to create a journal in which both Soviet and émigré authors could read one another freely; in such a way, “Western ideas were to make their way into Russia and Russian ideas

¹ Pereshagni, pereskochi,/ pereleti,—/no vyrvis': kamnem iz pere—chto khochesh'prashchi,/zvezdoi, sorvavsheysya v nochi.../sam zateryal, teper' ishchi.../Bog znaet, chto sebe bormochesh'/ishcha pensne ili kluchi

were to make their way into the West” (Bethea, p. 269). This effort was plagued with many difficulties, including Soviet censorship and financial problems. Perhaps the most difficult aspect, which would lead to the failure of the journal, was Gorky’s faith in the Soviet Union and his decision to return to Soviet Russia. This decision by Gorky was not only a heavy blow to Khodasevich in the fact that they were great friends, but it was also the end of the dream of “a Russian literature that was free from interference and that was read and appreciated” (Bethea, p. 271).

As a result, Khodasevich became increasingly pessimistic and judgmental toward Soviet literature as he grew older. In his “*O Sovetskoi Literature*” (On Soviet Literature), Khodasevich lays down what he believes to be the failures of this literature and the impossibility of it to survive. It is not simply censorship that is the problem, but the Soviet brand of communism in particular that is the death of its literature. He states “There is no genuine life in Soviet literature. There is nothing serious or sincere to observe, and there is nothing to follow in it” (p. 2). Furthermore, Khodasevich blames the false sense of happiness and the lie promulgating that the Soviet Union has achieved the final goal of socialism for Soviet literature’s stagnation. He asserts “It stands that there is nothing for the Soviet author to do because for himself and for his readers (as he imagines them) there is no longer anything to wish for and no longer anything about which to worry” (p. 6). Khodasevich wrote this critical article in 1938 only a year before his death. It shows a man at the brink who realizes that his dream of preserving “his” literature is close to extinction. Even if Russian literature continues to survive abroad, free from the influence of Soviet communism, it will undoubtedly be influenced by Western Europe. Therefore, in the mind of Khodasevich, all one can hope for is the death

of Soviet literature and the fall of the Soviet Union. It is only in this atmosphere free from authoritarianism that Russian literature can return home and truly flourish.

Berdyayev's Apocalypse

For Berdyayev, the concept of the *narod* (the people, namely peasants) and the *iskanie Tsarstva Bozh'ego na zemle* (the search for the Kingdom of God on earth) go hand in hand. They in fact form part of the basis of the *Russkaya Ideya* (The Russian Idea). Berdyayev believes not only that true Orthodoxy is to be found among the peasants, but he also believes that the eschatological element found in this hunt for the Kingdom is a particular Russian occurrence (*osobennoe russkoe yavlenie*). Peasants play a particularly important role in the Russian Idea for Berdyayev. Berdyayev early on in his work separates the members of the intelligentsia that supported the Tsar and the members that supported the people. He says that the members of the intelligentsia who supported the people “felt their own guilt in the presence of the people and wanted to serve them” (p. 38). This group of the intelligentsia, of which Berdyayev could be considered to be a part, recognized something special and particularly Russian in the people. Berdyayev is particularly occupied with the difference between the freedom of the body and the freedom of the soul that separates the Russian peasant from a Westerner who would, at first glance, be considered free. In his view, the soul's freedom is much more important. He says, “The Russian peasant is much more an individual than the Western bourgeois, even though he is in serfdom” (p. 67-68). The acclamation of the peasant to a spiritual level formed part of the movement of *narodnichestvo* (populism, although this term is difficult to translate and means much more than the Western notion of populism). Berdyayev states, “At the base of this [*narodnichestvo*] lay a faith in the people as the

defenders of truth” (p. 104). This movement therefore was much more than a desire for the welfare of the people. It placed in the people’s hands the elements of salvation and truth.

Berdyayev was firmly convinced that even the most atheist of Russians had within them elements of godliness. He defends this argument with the idea that all within Russia are preoccupied with the days to come, the revelation of Heaven on earth. He says, “I cannot imagine Russia and the Russian people without these searchers (*iskatelei*) of God’s truth” (p. 197). Berdyayev even goes so far as to posit that the Bolsheviks fall in line with this Russian Idea because the “Messianic idea of Marxism, linked with the mission of the proletariat, was connected with and identified with the Russian Messianic idea” (p. 242). Namely, just as Berdyayev argues that Russia is set apart by its strive to reach the end of times, in which there is a singular point to be reached, the Bolsheviks do not stray from this Russianness because they too look to a singular end. Berdyayev states clearly that the Russian idea is “an eschatological address to the end [of times]” (p. 246).² It is perhaps this nature of Russian culture propagated by Berdyayev that makes one think twice about the relation of Soviet literature to the Russian Idea. As seen earlier in the critique of Soviet literature by Khodasevich, Soviet writers promulgated the idea that the end had been reached and that all were happy in the Soviet Union. While this proclamation is clearly a lie, it differs sharply from the characteristics of Berdyayev’s Russian Idea. Before defending the Bolsheviks as falling under the fold of the Russian Idea in having a “Messianic idea,” Berdyayev states, “There is always a striving toward something endless. Russians always have a thirst for a different life, a different world—

² *Russkaya ideya—eskhatologicheskaya, obrashchennaya k kontsu*

there is always a lack of satisfaction with that which is” (p. 194). This quote indicates that while Berdyaev may defend the Bolsheviks’ striving for a communist utopia (a singular end), it would be impossible for him to defend Bolshevik policy. In addition, Berdyaev was a friend of many Soviet leaders before being expelled, and it is therefore understandable that he would sympathize in some way with Bolshevik ideology, if not with the regime. If, as Khodasevich posits, the end has been reached in Soviet literature (albeit falsely), then there is something extremely un-Russian in the communists’ assertion of this end. This assertion is ever more un-Russian in the fact that it is completely devoid of any spirituality, not to mention the fact that repression and violence were wide spread during the Soviet period; this aggression against humanity was known or at least guessed by Berdyaev. The Kingdom of God on earth is supposed to bring peace and happiness, not violence and death. Of course, while the communist leadership of the Soviet Union may not have upheld the Russian Idea, it would be false to assume that this Idea was not preserved in the Russian peasantry throughout the Soviet period.

Conclusion

The loss of homeland led the émigrés to a spiritual crisis. While they were free to write what they wanted to write, they could not easily find ways to publish their works, and they had in a sense lost their muse, Russia. Despite the sadness and horror felt at the loss of Russia, Khodasevich, Berberova, and Berdyaev managed to continue writing in Paris. In fact, their spiritual crisis connected them in a very intimate way. Their aspiration for the divine was an element of their Russianness that no government could take away, and therefore it became for them their hope. Hope that despite the fact that return to Russia was impossible, there was a future to look forward to, perhaps not in this life, but

the next. Ivan Bunin and Natalya Goncharova, while they share with the émigrés in this chapter a preoccupation with the divine future, are more struck by the loss of Russian *priroda* (nature). It is this aspect of Russianness that they wish to depict and share with Westerners.

Chapter 2

Nature, Death and the Peasant in Russian Literature and Art

Out of all the émigrés, the trope of the Russian peasant and the Russian *paysage* is most clearly depicted in the works of Ivan Bunin and Natalya Goncharova. These two thematic elements are focal points for Russian national discourse because, as highlighted with Berdyaev, the peasants are seen as the guardians of Russian truth. Bunin and Goncharova also express a concern with a spiritual future; however, unlike Khodasevich, Bunin did not believe in the afterlife, and therefore, his fear of death and oblivion was more pronounced, at least internally. Bunin's novel is an effort to preserve traditional Russianness, not only in the tropes and archetypes used in the novel, but in the very fact that it is written in the classic realist style. Goncharova's artwork, while deviating largely from traditional art, still evokes traditional elements that would have been appreciated by the more conservative members of the émigré community.

Bunin's Ghosts: Nature and the Fear of Death

Ivan Bunin is perhaps the most important figure of the Russian émigré scene, though perhaps not the best known, at least not to Western readers. He was the first Russian to win a Nobel Prize in literature—a deep disappointment to Soviet Leaders—and, as a lover of classical Russian literature, he carried on the great tradition of Russian realism and romanticism with him to France. His only novel, *Zhizn' Arsen'eva* (*The Life of Arseniev*), was published over the course of many years, but written entirely in emigration. While not an autobiography per se, the fictional work contains many autobiographical moments and truths from Bunin's life. Although the novel does not refer at any point to the Bolshevik Revolution, nor does it overtly mention the fact that

the main character is in exile in France at the moment of writing, it still evokes and reflects the feelings, often of anger, frustration, and loneliness, felt by Bunin while abroad. While it would be erroneous to classify Bunin as an avid political nationalist, the ideas expressed in *The Life of Arseniev* clearly point to the fact that Bunin believed Russia to be one of the greatest countries in the world and one very dear to him. It is also clear, however, that the Russia he describes in the novel is no longer to be found. With this thought in mind, I will analyze the novel in terms of how he describes Russia, while then relating the seemingly unconnected obsession with death to the fall of Tsarist Russia.

Nature (*priroda*) plays an extremely important role in Bunin's novel. At the very beginning of the novel, Arseniev says, "I was born...in the village, in my father's country estate" (Bunin, p. 411). From his very first moments in the world, Aleksei Arseniev is surrounded by nature. Much of his childhood is spent wandering the fields around his father's estate, and the majority of it is spent in solitude (*odinochestvo*). While at first solitude might seem like a bad situation, Arseniev says,

The world expanded before our eyes, but it wasn't people, or humanity that attracted to itself our attention—it was the plant and animal life more than anything. And what's more is that our favorite places were those where there weren't any people. (p. 421)

Arseniev, and his family, are one with nature. It appears to Aleksei that the countryside is just as much a part of his family as his siblings and parents are. It is even more interesting to consider that fact that the word *priroda* contains within itself the word *rod*, which can be translated as kin, or bloodline. It is nature that helps Aleksei to come to

the understanding that he is Russian. On his way to the gymnasium by train, Aleksei stares out the window, taking in all the fields and homes. He says,

Undoubtedly, it was namely on this night that it was first grounded into my consciousness that I was Russian and lived in Russia... and I suddenly felt this Russia. I felt her past and present. I felt her wild, frightening, and yet captivating singularity, as well as my own blood relation to her. (p. 453).

This passage not only reflects the power of nature, but it also highlights the collective aspect of nationality. While each person has his or her own moment in which they are conscious of belonging to a group, it is necessary to have a collective, a community, for nationality, and therefore nationalism, to exist. It is only through traveling across the Russian countryside that Aleksei becomes conscious of a world outside of his own backyard—a world composed of various people, places, and landscapes, but nonetheless bound together by the simple notion that they are in Russia.

Furthermore, the portrayal and role of nature in Russian literature is not limited to Bunin. For many of the classical poets, such as Alexander Pushkin, nature, and the “wild, frightening, and yet captivating” (Bunin) aspect of it made many appearances in their works. However, Bunin did carry on this great trope of Russian literature into exile, and the prominence of nature in his novel is solid evidence of the effect it had on him and his understanding of the Russian nation. It would be a long and arduous process, and furthermore an unnecessary one, to count the number of times Bunin describes the way the sun shone or made its slow journey around his house, the way the wind hit his face as he stepped outside, or the way the sky looked at sunset. Suffice it to say that each of these

details of nature, sometimes described in extremely diligent detail lasting a full paragraph or even a page, highlight for Bunin the Russia that he knew and loved. It was for him a land that “a European person could not even imagine” (p. 440). This line affirms the notion for many Russians that there is a special, “organic” quality to the Russian people, which shapes them and makes them unique, and furthermore incomprehensible to others.

It is evident from reading the novel that the concept of death both amazed and frightened Bunin; however, it is unclear whether he was more terrified of his own death or the death of everything that he knew. For Bunin, the concept of death was an extremely religious one, and he struggled to make sense of death in light of his understanding of God. Aleksei says in chapter 10 of book 1, “I already knew and, even half fearful, felt, that all on this earth must die...especially during the Lenten holiday” (p. 428). He feels this fear during Lent in particular because “even the Savior himself died” (p. 428). Although Aleksei understands the inevitability of death and, with this, the concept of immortality (*bessmertie*), it still frightens him. It frightens him because he knows that one day all he knows, including himself, will be gone. He feels this fear especially when his brother is arrested and taken away from the family on charges of conspiring in a socialist plot. Back at home he visits the Monastery’s cemetery. There he reflects on the lives of those now dead, and says,

I crossed myself in front of the gates, all the more intensely feeling that with every minute I became more sorry for myself and my brother—that is, I loved myself, him, father, and mother more than ever...I fervently asked the saints to help us; for, no matter how painful, no matter how sad it can be in this incomprehensible world, it is nevertheless beautiful, and

we nonetheless frightfully want to be happy in it and love one another. (p. 482).

Despite the fear, Aleksei, and therefore understandably Bunin, have an intense desire to live life. Aleksei is obsessed with travelling and seeing things with his own eyes, in order to write better poetry. Poetry is a means by which Aleksei cannot only confer his feelings so that others can see and take part in them, but it is also a way to preserve himself after death. Part of Aleksei's obsession with writing poetry is an intense desire to become famous and well known. When he is contemplating "what to start with to write down his own life," he comes to the conclusion that it must at the very least start with something about Russia. He wishes to "give an understanding to the reader to what country [he belongs]" (p. 608). Ergo, Aleksei not only wishes to preserve himself in writing but also his *rodina*. Because *The Life of Arseviev* was written completely in exile, the text offers a window through which one can see the true sentiments Bunin felt toward Russia, especially the way he viewed its culture and the loss he felt in leaving it.

The character of Lika, the girl with whom Aleksei ends up falling in love with at the end of the novel, was not based upon any real woman in Bunin's life. This being the case, she undoubtedly represents something in Bunin's life. Aleksei and Lika often fight, they have many misunderstandings with one another, and at one time or another they both feel the desire to see other people and things. In the end, Lika leaves Aleksei unexpectedly and without letting him know where she is going. He later finds out that she went home with a sickness and died a week later. He ends the novel saying,

Not long ago I saw her in a dream—the single time in my long life without her. She was the same age as she had been then—in the time of our shared

life and shared youth—but there was already in her face the charm of a withered beauty...I saw her hazily, but with such a power of love, happiness, and bodily and spiritual proximity that I have never felt towards anyone. (p. 650).

This description is reminiscent of Bunin's feelings toward Russia. For him, in the wake of the October Revolution, Russia is dead. For Bunin, Soviet Russia is a mockery of his homeland. He cannot and will not return. Just as Aleksei sees Lika in the dream as she once and always was when they were together, Bunin wants to envision the Russia that he knew. Through the character of Aleksei, Bunin manages to convey to the reader exactly what Aleksei speaks of in the novel. Bunin makes clear to the reader that he is Russian, and he paints for the reader a picture of the Russia he knew and loved, thereby giving it, and himself within it, an element of immortality. This immortality was an important aspect of the émigré mission to preserve the culture of "Old Russia" because if "Old Russia" were embedded in the works of these émigrés, it would be accessible to all generations to come.

The Primitive Russian in Goncharova's Art

Nataliya Goncharova is an interesting figure among the émigrés in Paris. She was not as active in the circle of émigrés, judging from the fact that Nina Berberova mentions her only once in the entirety of her memoirs and has very little to say about her. This lack of information of course could be due to personal reasons, but it may also point to the obscurity of Goncharova during her time abroad. She, along with Alexander Benois, worked on sets for the *Ballets Russes*. Most art historians consider her to be an avant-gardist and this categorization would explain Goncharova's absence from the literary

circles of the likes of Berberova. The majority of Goncharova's most famous art works

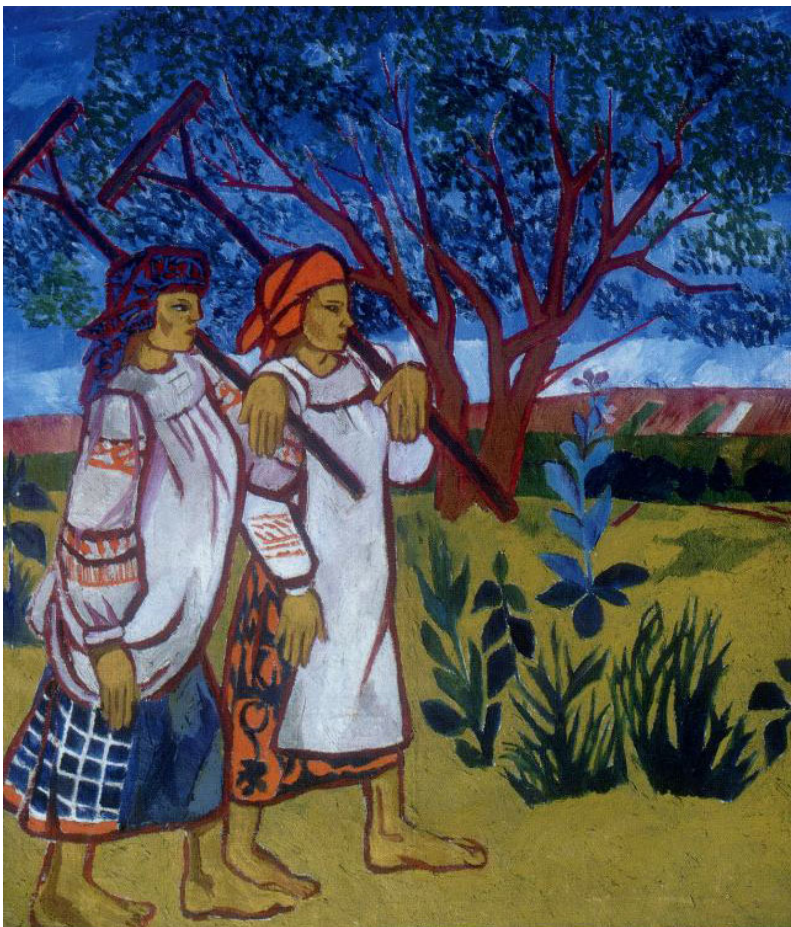


Figure 1-*Baby s grabliami*

were produced before she went to Paris. This was a result of the difficult lives lead by the émigrés in Paris. The majority of them, at least the writers and painters, were in utter poverty; therefore, while in Paris, Goncharova had to focus on surer ways of making money, and she turned to designing sets and costumes. However, the pre-exile work of Goncharova deserves attention and still



Figure 2-*Krest'yanki*

carries within it the underlying characteristics of her work. Much like Berdyaev, Goncharova has a particular focus on the peasantry and the divine. The first two

paintings shown in figures 1, *Baby s grabliami (Peasant Women with Rakes, 1907)* and 2, *Krest'yanki (Peasant Women, 1910)* are particularly interesting representations of the peasantry. First, they portray only women. Second, these women are shown as hard workers and in this sense, Goncharova portrays peasant women as the backbone of Russian society. They are shown *bosikom* (barefoot), an aspect that enhances the notion of the strength and perseverance of these peasant women, as they have acclimated to the harsh Russian countryside enough to walk around without any protection. The women are also clothed in traditional garments. These garments recall the idyllic and traditional notions of the *malorusskie*, a term which designates Ukrainians. The *malorusskie* were seen as a more primitive form of the Russian (*velikorusskie*). This dichotomy is made ever more clear by the literal translations of these two terms; *malo* means little, while *veliko* means great or grand. While at first this designation seems to evince a derogatory nature (and for many it was and continues to be), the *malorusskie* were very respected among parts of the Russian intelligentsia. Bunin was in awe of them, and judging by Goncharova's artwork, it appears that she was too. The peasant represents in her paintings the organic nature of Russian culture; it is a peasant steeped in the nature of the *Russkaya Ideya*. The term *baby* is in fact a term that is used among peasants themselves. It comes from a shortening of the word *babushka* (grandmother). The term not only is a designation of peasantry, but in using the term for the title of her painting, Goncharova "throws [herself] down and wants to join with the earth and with the peasantry" to use Berdyaev's phraseology. (Berdyaev, p. 122).³

³ *Russkii genii...brocaetsya vniz i khochet slit'sya s zemlei i narodom*



Figure 3-*Arkhistratig Mikhail*

Goncharova does not stray away from the eschatological nature of Russian culture. This trend is highlighted in her painting “*Arkhistratig Mikhail*” (*Michael-Leader of God’s Army, figure 3*). It is not simply the divine theme of the painting that makes it so special, but rather its apocalyptic nature. In the book of Revelation, it is the Archangel Michael who will come down from heaven at the end of times to lead God’s army and defeat Satan and bring about the New Jerusalem. In the

painting, Michael is blowing a trumpet and holding aloft the word of God. These are symbols of the new world to come, when truth and harmony will reign. Therefore, Goncharova’s paintings fall directly in line with Berdyaev’s Russian Idea in that they not only portray the eschatological nature of the Russian, but they do so in evoking traditional notions of the Russian peasantry; in particular, they portray the peasantry as the hard-working backbone of Russian society in which there is to be found true devotion and the true organic nature of Russianness.

Conclusion

What one sees in the artistic work of the Parisian émigrés is a desire to hold on to something on the verge of being lost, at least from their point of reference. While the

members of the intelligentsia were influenced by Western ideas and philosophy, they strive to highlight the singularity of Russian culture. The peasant and the divine play a particularly grandiose role in these émigrés' portrayals of traditional Russian culture. Bunin, Berdyaev, and Goncharova all highlight the importance of the peasantry, and they can be seen as defenders of the common people. These essential aspects of the Russian Idea, lost during the majority of the Soviet period, would slowly find their way back into Russian society thanks to the life and work of these émigrés. In October of 2013, an exhibit entitled *Natal'ya Goncharova: Mezhdue Zapadom i Vostokom* (*Natal'ya Goncharova: Between West and East*) opened in the Tret'yakov Gallery in Moscow. This opening highlights the renewed interest in émigré art and how the legacy of the Parisian émigrés is continuing to insert itself into contemporary Russian culture. In the next chapter, I will discuss two returnees to Soviet Russia, Marina Tsvetaeva and Aleksei Tolstoi. While they were once émigrés themselves, their works differ in substantial ways from those of the émigrés discussed in the previous two chapters in terms of style and content. They are also important figures in the attempt to reconcile émigré and Soviet literature, a process that is becoming more evident in contemporary Russia.

Chapter 3

Tsvetaeva's Tragedy and Tolstoi's Triumph

While the figures in the past two chapters left Russia and made the difficult decision never to return, Marina Tsvetaeva and Aleksei Tolstoi (no direct relation to Lev' Tolstoi) decided to return to their *rodina* (homeland), which had transformed into a socialist state. While Aleksei Tolstoi returned rather early to Soviet Russia in 1923, only five years after he left in 1918, Marina Tsvetaeva returned on the brink of war in 1939. Tolstoi came to sympathize with the Bolshevik cause despite the fact that he fought in the White Army during the Russian Civil War. Receiving a warm welcome upon his homecoming in 1923, Aleksei Tolstoi went on to become a successful Soviet writer hailed by many, including fellow returnee Maxim Gorky. His most notable work to this day is his novel *Petr I* (Peter the First, 1929-34), which Gorky called "the first real historical novel of the Soviet age" (cover page, Tolstoi). Meanwhile, Marina Tsvetaeva received no such praise from Soviet officials upon her return to Russia or in the ensuing days until her death. She had trouble finding someone to publish her works in Russia, and her daughter and husband were arrested not long after their homecoming. Although Tsvetaeva longed for her homeland the entirety of her absence from Russia, Russia showed no sign that it had missed her at all. The only seeming similarity between Tolstoi and Tsvetaeva is their decision to return to Soviet Russia. They both could not resist the call to return to the Motherland although Tsvetaeva resisted the call much longer. It is in fact the differences between the fates of Tolstoi and Tsvetaeva, more than their similarities, which shed light on the literary situation in the Soviet Union and what one needed to do as an émigré in order to be "returned to the fold" so to speak. While many

have tried to simplify the Soviet realist novel, there are actually many nuances to what could be written and the political and cultural symbols used. Katerina Clark contends that the Soviet realist novel is bound by a master plot and, “If a novel [Soviet realist] is to be written to the cannon, this master plot controls the most crucial moments of the novel—its beginning, climax, and end” (p. 5). She goes on to mention that rather than the Soviet novel taking on a class struggle characteristic, the master plot was more shaped by a coming to consciousness. (Clark, p. 15-24). This process is seen very well in Tolstoi’s *Peter I*, as the reader watches Peter grow from an impetuous young boy to a skillful leader and ruler. Tsvetaeva’s poetry was noticeably lacking this element of “consciousness,” and it is for this reason that she could not successful be incorporated into Soviet literature.

The Intimacies and Ideologies of Marina Tsvetaeva

The life of Marina Tsvetaeva was, like that of many Russian poets, quite tragic. Nina Berberova describes in her autobiography how Tsvetaeva’s material situation in emigration was very poor; it made matters worse that “as a poet in emigration, she had no readers, [and] there was no reaction to what she wrote” (Berberova, p. 202). However, Tsvetaeva’s tragedy lies not in her material poverty and her lack of readers. There were countless poets and artists in the same predicament who did not end their lives in suicide. Yet again, neither does her tragedy lie in her suicide. The tragedy lies in the fact that for Tsvetaeva her suicide was in a sense inevitable. Berberova writes,

His [Sergei Esenin’s] end was unwarranted. Tsvetaeva, on the contrary, moved towards it her whole life, through her trumped-up love for her husband and children, through her poems praising the White Army, her

image of the hump borne so proudly, the scorn for those who did not understand her, humiliation transmuted into a proud mask, through all the fiascos of her infatuations and the ephemeral nature of the roles she assigned herself. (p. 204)

Compounded to these tragic happenings in her life, Tsvetaeva, much like Khodasevich, struggled to live in her era. Again, like Khodasevich, this struggle stemmed from a desire to return to Russia, as well as an internal spiritual crisis. In one of her letters, Tsvetaeva writes, “Maybe my voice corresponds to the epoch, but not I. I hate my century” (Lartseva, p. 13). Perhaps Tsvetaeva hoped to find solace in her homeland, and for this she returned to Soviet Russia. However, the Russia to which she returned offered no solace because it was not the same Russia that she left. In turn, it offered no cure to her spiritual crisis. The best place to look in order to understand this crisis is her poetry. Tsvetaeva’s poems are often of an extremely personal nature and they “convey the intimate aura of her own unfortunately turbulent life” (Pashovich, p. 1).

The beginning of Tsvetaeva’s poem *Tebe—cherez sto let* (To you—in a hundred years) is rather indicative of the nature and possible cause of her spiritual crisis. It begins,

To you, having been born
 After a century, as I respire,--
 From the very depths, as condemned to death
 With my own hand—I write:

--Friend! Do not look for me! There’s a different style!
 Not even the old remember me. (Tsvetaeva, p. 34)

This beginning highlights two distinct natures of Tsvetaeva's tragedy. First, there is a fear of becoming obsolete. She writes to someone being born a hundred years later, and she tells him that if he looks among the writers of the preceding century, he will find no mention of her. Not even the old, who might have been alive contemporaneously with her, will remember her. This fear of becoming obsolete is coupled with the theme of death. She is writing this poem "as condemned to death with [her] own hand"; this phrase is a chilling foresight into her coming suicide. Unlike Khodasevich, who turned to critical writing and running émigré newspapers after his poetic talents "dried up", Tsvetaeva had no such talents to fall back upon. In one of her poems, Tsvetaeva writes, "This century of mine is my poison, this century of mine is my harm,/this century of mine is my enemy, this century of mine is my hell" (p. 13).⁴ Like a poison, her century did kill her, even if the death was brought about by her own hand. The poem in its original Russian (given in the footnote) is even more evocative of Tsvetaeva's struggle with her century. While the repetition and word choice come across quite well in the English translation, what is lost is the rhythm and harshness of the ending consonants. The succinctness of the Russian phrasing and the repetition of the voiceless consonants *k* and *t* at the end of words (i.e. *vek*, *vrag* and *yad*, *vred*, *ad*) are evocative of frustration and anger—frustration and anger at her era and at the fact that she is not appreciated within this era by her peers.

Tsvetaeva's homecoming was not successful in part because of her spiritual crisis, i.e. her fear of becoming obsolete, but it was also due in part to her inability to accept and condone repression. When she returned to Soviet Russia, she was met with repression. Perhaps she expected repression, but hoped for the best. In a letter of hers from the year

⁴ *Vek moi-yad moi, vek moi-vred moi,/vek moi-vrag moi, vek moi-ad*

1934, she explains why she hates the Soviet Union. She says, “I hate [the Bolsheviks] because they can (such as always was) deny Boris Pasternak access to his favorite Marburg, or me to my birthplace of Moscow.” She goes on to speak of the senseless sentencing and murdering of people by their own “brothers” as “an abomination to which I would submit in no place, as to any organized violence in general” (p. 12-13). The aura of repression surrounding the Soviet Union finds its way into her poem “The Soul”:

The soul, not knowing bounds,
 The soul of a flagellant and of a fanatic,
 Anguishing under the lash.
 The soul—toward a meeting with the executioner,
 Like a butterfly in its cocoon!
 The soul, not having swallowed the offense,
 That they don't burn more witches.
 How tall and black they burn
 Smoking under the sackcloth...
 The shrieking heretic,
 A sister of the Savanarali—
 A soul worthy of the bonfire! (p. 47)

While this poem is dated as written in 1921, it was compiled with many other poems in 1940. Although this poem is rather enigmatic, the prosecution of heretics is clearly visible. This imagery is possibly a reflection of Tsvetaeva's feelings toward Soviet censorship and repression. Tsvetaeva claims that the “soul” is worthy of the bonfire. The repressors are not destroying insignificant people. They are martyrs and

worthy of the fire. There is of course pain in martyrdom as evidenced by the “shrieking heretic,” but these martyrs are welcoming of the pain. They are “flagellant[s]” and “fanatic[s].” Tsvetaeva can be considered to be herself one of these flagellants. In the end, it is possible that expecting repression upon returning to Soviet Russia, she decided to face it anyways in order to die in her homeland. Viewed in this way, she welcomed death as the only way through which she could overcome becoming obsolete; namely, death offered her martyrdom, sainthood, and therefore a way to be remembered. This sentiment reminds one of Bunin’s fear of becoming obsolete, and it confirms that this fear is a central component of the Russian émigré.

Unlike Tolstoi, who seems to have been able to reconcile himself rather early on with the repression of the Bolsheviks (at the least their ideology), Tsvetaeva could not bring herself to be content within a system that destroyed its writers and its “brothers.” Moreover, she did not receive the recognition and fame in the Soviet Union, as did Tolstoi. This disparity in recognition could be due to the fact that while Tsvetaeva’s poems were extremely personal and intimate, the works of Aleksei Tolstoi could be used to advance the socialist ideal.

Stalin the Great? *Peter the First* and Soviet Historiography

Aleksei Nikolaievich Tolsoi certainly lives up to his namesake and the general trend of Russian novelists as a whole with his work *Peter the First*. He worked on this historical novel for two decades and after over 700 pages, having died before he could finish the novel, he had only described half of the Tsar’s life. *Peter the First* not only describes the person of Peter Alekseevich Romanov in all his contradictory nature, but it also paints a detailed picture of Petrine Russia and the immense social and cultural

upheavals taking place at this time. It is no coincidence either that Tolstoi chose to write a historical novel on Peter the Great in particular when he had a host of Romanovs from which to choose. Peter was the only Tsar that could be used to fulfill both the need of the Bolsheviks to create a solid historical basis for their coming to power while at the same time not straying from Bolshevik ideology. As Kevin Platt states, “the Soviet political establishment increasingly sought to mobilize popular support by means of a novel, largely russocentric vision of the past, in which the legitimacy of the Russian Empire translated in mystical fashion into the legitimacy of the Soviet Union” (p. 48). Tolstoi fulfilled this duty with his novel, as well as with his other artistic mediums in which he described Peter I.

Peter I not only serves to link the Russian imperial past to the communist present, but it serves to legitimate Stalin and his vision. Peter is portrayed as a clever, energetic, and yet despotic ruler who is willing to go to any costs to bring modernization to his country, even if this means the extermination of those who would contradict this vision. This portrayal sounds incredibly close to any objective description of Joseph Stalin. Despite the despotism and cruelty of Peter, the reader is still led to believe in the novel’s protagonist and to forgive him of his faults because, after all, he is leading his country to an ultimate goal. In the novel, Peter is attracted early on to the oddities and exoticism of the West. His interest ostensibly begins with his first encounter with Francis Lefort:

Lefort went on, shaking his curls:

“I can show you a water-mill which grinds snuff, pounds millet, works a weaver’s loom and raises water to a huge barrel. I can also show you a mill-wheel turned by a dog running inside it...I shall show you a telescope

through which you can look at the moon and at seas and mountains on it.

At the apothecary's you can see a female infant preserved in spirit: its face is ten and a half inches across, its body is covered with hair and it has only two digits on its hands and feet."

Peter's eyes grew rounder and wider with curiosity. (Tolstoi, p. 69)

Peter is not simply interested here in Western culture, but he is awed by the technology and the inventions of the West. Throughout the novel, Peter becomes more and more cynical of the "backwardness" of his country. Peter says ' "Better to be an apprentice in Holland than a Tsar here." ' He goes on to think that "It was as if claws were tearing at his heart, so sharply did he feel remorse and resentment at his own people, the Russians... The enemy was invisible, intangible, the enemy was everywhere; the enemy was in himself" (p. 223). This passage not only highlights the intense desire felt by Peter to bring his country to modernization, but the invisible enemy alluded to in the quote is reminiscent of Stalin's invocation that Russia was beset not by foreign enemies but by enemies within—the *vragi naroda* (enemies of the People). These enemies of the people were believed to be saboteurs of industrialization and progress. Therefore, the parallel Tolstoi makes is very apt.

Peter the Great is not only representative of Stalin but also of the communist man in general. Although Peter is Tsar, Tolstoi does not present him as a man infected by "bourgeois decadence." Tolstoi makes an effort to highlight Peter's industriousness and craftsmanship. It is historical fact that Peter was a carpenter, but in choosing to focus on this aspect of Peter the Great, Tolstoi strengthens the ties linking Peter to the proletariat worker and the communist cause. At one point Natalia Alekseevna, Peter's favorite sister,

says, “The Tsar is straining to the utmost to pull us out of the abyss...He robs himself of sleep and food; with his own hands he saws planks and drives in nails, he risks his life under bullets and cannon-balls—all to make human beings of us” (p. 619). Natalia’s praise of Peter points out his involvement and activeness in bringing about the modernization of Russia. Peter is very much a man of the people and an exemplar of hard work, and these are both qualities that would have been highly praised under Stalin. Furthermore, Peter is seen carousing with peasants and people of low birth throughout the novel. He is comfortable with the *prostoi narod* (the simple people), and he does not look down upon peasants and merchants.

Following from the fact that Tolstoi aims to use history as an affirmation of the Bolsheviks and their ideology, he does not present “Old Russia” in his works in the same way as the other émigrés. In fact the Russia at the center of his novel is the antithesis of old, traditional Russia. While “Old Russia” lurks in the background throughout the novel, it is used mainly as a point of reference for the modernization that is taking place. The East-West debate for Tolstoi is flipped on its head. While Berdyaev praises the Old-Believers and conservative Orthodoxy as guardians of traditional Russianness, they are ridiculed by Tolstoi and portrayed as barbaric, superstitious, and irrational. The character of Prince Roman Borisovich Buynosov represents traditional conservative discourse that would have been opposed to Petrine reforms:

The Prince made an effort to reason it out: what was the cause of this calamity? Was it because of their sins? In Moscow they were whispering that a Deceiver had come to the world: that Catholics and Lutherans were

his servants, that foreign goods bore the stamp of Antichrist. That the end of the world was at hand. (p. 339)

This one paragraph carries a lot of weight and meaning because it presents several tropes of traditional discourse in one fell swoop. There are the themes of the Antichrist, the Catholics as enemies of the Orthodox people, as well as the eschatological character of traditional Russianness as spelled out by Berdyaev. The following passage also reveals these same tropes while at the same time portraying them in a hysterical and irrational manner:

“Soon you won’t be allowed to speak Russian, you wait! Roman and Lutheran priests will come and re-baptise the whole nation. The townspeople will be handed over to the foreigners in perpetual bondage. Moscow will be given a new name: Deviltown. The old books have revealed that Peter is a Jew of the tribe of Dan.” How was it possible not to believe such rumours when, on the eve of Epiphany, the merchant Revyakin’s clerks suddenly began to report—running along the rows of shops—the great and terrible sacrifice for the redemption of the world from Antichrist that had just taken place? Near Lake Vyg several hundred dissenters had burned themselves alive. The sky had opened above the conflagration and made visible the glassy firmament and a throne supported by four beasts, and on the throne the Lord was seated...A dove flew down from the throne, the fire died out and a sweet fragrance arose on the site of the burning. (p. 465)

While Tolstoi presents the first part of the story as truth (he had just earlier described the dissenters burning themselves), the last part of the story is portrayed as hyperbole and excess. In addition, the elder Nektary who was in charge of the burning was caught escaping out the back of the burning building after having convinced the whole village to lock themselves inside and burn themselves. (p. 462) Another example of the elder's hypocrisy was when he was seen eating honey in the middle of the night while forcing all his followers to fast severely. (p. 452) So, while Tolstoi makes use of tropes describing traditional Russianness, in the end, he does so in order to critique its irrationality and backwardness. In such a way, the East-West battle seen in the works of the other émigrés is preserved, yet turned upside-down. Tolstoi's portrayal of "Old Russia" as backwards fits in very well with Soviet ideology, as the Bolsheviks saw themselves as bringing Russia out of the dark ages.

Conclusion

Both Marina Tsvetaeva and Aleksei Tolstoi provide a counter-story to the main, or at least traditional, émigré discourse. While Tsvetaeva shares much in common with the traditional émigrés such as Khodasevich and Bunin, particularly because of her internal struggle to conform to her century and her fear of oblivion, she also diverges quite drastically from this central dialectic. Her poetry is of a much more personal nature than Khodasevich. Of course, Khodasevich drew upon intimate moments in his life in order to create poetry, but he was much more concerned with the search for divinity in his poetry than with earthly experiences. Tsvetaeva was also a modernist, and as such, she broke away from traditional poetic forms that would have been sacred to earlier Russian poets. Tolstoi's break with the traditional émigré discourse is much more clearly

delineated. While himself being born into the nobility and fighting for the White Army, the “Red Count” quickly changed his ideology and found a way to make his writing fit the Soviet cause. In choosing to write on Peter I, Tolstoi confirmed the East-West dichotomy in his discourse while clearly positioning himself in opposition to traditional émigré notions about the qualities and constitution of “Old Russia.” The legacy built by both groups of émigrés—those of traditional ideology and those of non-traditional ideology—would come to affect the post-Soviet dialogue in literature and film.

Part II: The Émigrés Return

Introduction

Nostalgia's Role in Contemporary Literature and Film

Nationalists within Russia today are on a mission to bring back the Empire, whether it is in a literal sense or in the more cultural sense of returning to the “true” Russian soul. At the same time, Vladimir Putin is attempting to reconcile ideological differences between Russian émigrés and communist cultural figures by stressing the inherent *russkost*’ (Russianness) of both groups. He is quoted in Nikita Mikhalkov’s documentary film, *Russkie bez Rossii* (*Russians Deprived of Russia*, 2003), as saying “We are children of one Mother.” Perhaps this attempt at reconciliation stems from the fact that certain Russians are nostalgic for Soviet times while others pine for the “Russia that was.” Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two types of nostalgia in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*: restorative and reflective. As the names suggest, restorative nostalgia’s goal is to recreate, to *restore*, what was lost, whereas reflective nostalgia is enamored by the loss and longing for what once was. Reflective nostalgia loses its purpose if what was lost returns because one can no longer long for it. As Boym states at the beginning of her chapter on reflective nostalgia, “reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (p. 49). The nostalgia of Russian émigré writers in Paris was particularly restorative, and this nostalgia has found its way back into post-Soviet Russia. Greta Slobin argues, “the émigré sense of its ‘sacred’ mission, combined with postcommunist nostalgia, appeared to inspire a longing for an impossible return to some version of a ‘misty’ prerevolutionary Russia” (Slobin, p. 523). This “sacred mission” was to preserve Russian culture and bring it back to Russia

whenever the Bolsheviks fell. Just as the émigrés' wish to return to the pure Russia was at times paradoxical since Russian elite culture was heavily influenced by French Enlightenment and other Western intellectual thinking, so too have the post-Soviet regimes in Russia had to struggle with highlighting Russian cultural uniqueness while in turn borrowing culturally from Western intellectuals; therefore, post-Soviet nationalists have had to rely on the myth of pre-Revolutionary Russia in order to continue their rhetoric promulgating the exceptionality of the Russian culture. In such a way, the "sacred mission" of the émigrés has found its way back into elements of Russian society. Stanislav Govorukhin, another Soviet and contemporary Russian filmmaker, and Nikita Mikhalkov are both conscious of the mission of the émigrés and their particular importance in preserving the myth of pre-Revolutionary Russia. In addition, Mikhalkov continues to be an ardent supporter of Vladimir Putin despite widespread opposition to him among the contemporary Russian intelligentsia.

Reflective nostalgia is more closely related to the nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Many Russians may think fondly upon their Soviet childhoods, particularly those of the previous generation, but few would actually want to return to those days. Although this type of nostalgia certainly exists in Russia, restorative nostalgia is much more promoted by the state and its film industry. However, this is not to say that the Soviet era had no part to play in bringing back the myth of pre-Revolutionary Russia. The Village Prose Movement of the post-Stalin period celebrated more organic, Eastern forms of Russian culture, and this movement was one with which both Govorukhin and Mikhalkov would most likely have been familiar.

Nostalgia's role in literature is perhaps more nuanced than in film. While there has certainly been an increased interest in the traditional tropes of Imperial Russia in the contemporary writings of Russian authors, one should not take this interest as a sign that a restorative nostalgia is widespread in literature. Many of the social and political problems that were evident in Imperial Russia are evident in Putin's Russia, and, as a result, the Imperial background could be seen to represent a way to distance oneself from a direct critique of Putin's regime. Nonetheless, the reemergence of Imperial Russia as a setting in contemporary literature is an important phenomenon. Moreover, Mikhail Shishkin, one of the authors who I will be analyzing, is extremely opposed to Putin and his policies, and it is clear from reading his works that many of the critiques he levels at Imperial Russian society are just as relevant today. However, he has personally admitted that classic Russian writers, in particular Ivan Bunin, have influenced him and his writing. (Taplin) More specifically, in his work, *Vsekh ozhidaet odna noch'* (*One Night Befalls us All*), one can clearly see the influence of Bunin in the book's autobiographical, first person narrative.

In chapter 4, I will analyze Shishkin's historical fiction novel *Vsekh ozhidaet odna noch'* (*One Night Befalls us All*) and Boris Akunin's mystery novel *The State Counsellor*. Shishkin's first-person novel, written in the form of a letter, is set at the very beginning of the 19th century. Akunin is an extremely popular novelist in Russia, and he has chosen to set all of his novels in Imperial Russia. Analyzing the two novels together, I will highlight the ways in which they share many of the same thematic elements. The East-West dichotomy is one of these thematic elements, and its presence in neo-realist prose signals the revival of the émigré legacy in contemporary Russia.

In my final chapter, the medium of analysis switches from literature to film. The filmmakers Stanislav Govorukhin and Nikita Mikhalkov take center stage in the portrayal of nationalism through film. The legacy of the Russian émigrés, especially those who went to Paris, shaped the way in which both Govorukhin and Mikhalkov portray the Russian nation in their films. For instance, Mikhalkov, much like Mikhail Shishkin, has admitted to being influenced by Ivan Bunin and his émigré legacy in Paris. Mikhalkov and Govorukhin illustrate Imperial Russia in a positive light, highlighting the true *russkost* of its inhabitants, while trying to debunk the myth that Soviet Russia was the only hope for Russian modernization. I will begin with an analysis of Govorukhin's documentary film *Rossiia, kotoruyu my poteryali* (*The Russia We Lost*). This documentary strives to educate the Russian population in regards to their national history, while also being a critique of Soviet times. Next, I will analyze three films directed and/or produced by Mikhalkov. First, *Sibirskii Tsiriul'nik* (*The Barber of Siberia*) highlights the society of late Imperial Russia under Tsar Alexander III, while at the same time serving as a warning against the dangers of American capitalism in the present day. *Russkie, bez Rossii* (*Russians Deprived of Russia*) is a documentary film with several episodes that follow the lives of Russian émigrés in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution. The final, and most recent, film of Mikhalkov that I will analyze is another documentary called *Chuzhaya Zemlya* (*Foreign Earth*), which illustrates the slow, yet steady depopulation of Russian villages. This film highlights once again the notion of Russian peasants and Russian "earth" as indicative of Russianness; ergo, the film affirms the "organic" nature of Russianness.

Ch. 4

“Old Russia” in Contemporary Literature: The Moral Dilemma and the Reemergence of the East-West Debate

With the end of the Soviet Union, works that were formerly banned returned, and interest grew in what was “before”—that is, pre-revolutionary Russia. Censorship loosened and authors could now portray what they wanted with whatever backdrop they wanted in their books. I will be analyzing in this chapter two of contemporary Russia’s most famous authors, Boris Akunin, the pseudonym of Grigorii Chkhartishvili, and Mikhail Shishkin, the latter of which is less known to English speaking readers. In particular, Akunin’s book *The State Counsellor* and Shishkin’s novel *Vsekh ozhidaet odna noch’* (*One Night Befalls us All*) are important works in analyzing the return of “Old Russia” in contemporary literature. These two novels, while different in style, share two key themes: a main character who rebels against the amorality of Russian society and suffers as a result and the resurgence of the East-West debate. While these thematic elements are indeed contemporary problems, both authors choose to portray and analyze them through the historical novel. This device not only signals the reemergence of an interest in “Old Russia,” but it also points to a continuity in the moral, social, and political problems facing the Russian state and society.

Erast Fandorin is a popular name in Russia and outside it for those who follow Akunin’s novels. He is the main character in many of Akunin’s works, and he represents a Sherlock Holmes style detective. He is full of eccentricities—a stutter, jade rosary beads to help him concentrate, as well as a fascination with Japanese religion—,but his greatest attribute is his commitment to morality. In this regard, Fandorin is very similar to the narrator of Shishkin’s *Vsekh ozhidaet odna noch’*, Aleksandr L’vovich Larionov. The

two characters are thrown into the midst of Russian bureaucracy, and as a result are faced with questionable actions and a tough moral dilemma—to blend into society and follow a status quo which seems to go against every moral fiber in their bodies, or to stand up for their beliefs and risk alienation and demotion. The Russian as defender of morality is a central trope in Russian cultural thought that is in many ways connected to the East-West dichotomy. While the West is seen as decadent and dying,⁵ Russia is seen as the “Third Rome” and the upholder of true faith. While the people around the main characters may be corrupt and amoral, both Shishkin and Akunin present a defender of morality as their main hero.

To Conform or Not to Conform

In both Akunin’s and Shishkin’s novels, the heroes are set within an amoral framework and represent an alternative to this framework. Fandorin is constantly surrounded by impetuous officials who pay no attention to the formalities of the law. At a police raid in which several suspected terrorists are caught, Fandorin uses the position he has to set an example. When Lieutenant Colonel Burlyaev orders everyone to be taken away, Fandorin retorts, “I will not allow you to take anyone away. I came here especially to see whether the provisions of the law would be observed during the operation. Unfortunately, you have disregarded them” (p. 72). While the Lieutenant Colonel is taken aback, as these men and women are clearly dissidents, Fandorin simply states that he is “on the side of the law” (p. 72). Of course, Fandorin is faced with more complex moral dilemmas after this police raid. One of the young women at the raid, Esfir, takes an interest in the State Counsellor, and an amorous relation begins between the two of them.

⁵ See Alexander Dolinin’s article *Gibel’ Zapada: K istorii odnogo stoikogo verovaniya* (The Downfall of the West: To the History of One Tenacious Belief, 2010)

Fandorin resists the temptation to use Esfir to find out information about potential terrorist activities, but his relations with her are questionable in the first place. While Fandorin represents the highest standard of morality in Akunin's novel, he is still faced with the problem of separating his personal life from his professional life.

Fandorin's biggest moral dilemma comes at the very end of the novel. The Combat Group has been eliminated, along with Prince Gleb Grigorievich Pozharsky (a high ranking official from St. Petersburg), and therefore, Fandorin is due for a promotion. Before presenting himself to the Governor General of Moscow, Fandorin wrote a full briefing on the treachery of Pozharsky. However, the Governor General calls Pozharsky's treachery "little pranks" and has Fandorin's briefing destroyed. In the end, Fandorin says, "I am afraid, Your Highness, that I have decided to leave the state service... Private life is more to my liking" (p. 300). Fandorin's choice is representative of the situation facing all of Russia's officials and bureaucrats. Conforming to the "norms" of questionable tactics and immoral practices will gain prestige and rank, while standing up for morality and being an individual leads to demotion and scorn in the eyes of others.

Shishkin's Larionov is faced with many similar dilemmas. Larionov's first employment is in the army, training new recruits. All of Larionov's colleagues use violence and fear in order to get the recruits to behave, but Larionov wants to be different. He says, "I got fired up and started to prove exactly how everything should be in the army, and I was taken to show by personal example that respect for the human individual would produce results" (p. 24). Larionov's attempt to prove that respect is the most effective method in training new recruits is not very successful. When his superior tries to convince him to give up his humanistic tactics and uses the informal "you" with

him, Larionov responds, “Among officers, it is taken that they speak to each other with the formal ‘you’” (p. 25). For his insubordination, Larionov is given 5 days in prison. While most would consider this a huge punishment, Larionov finds solace in his solitude and civil disobedience. He says, “In short, prison for me was sweet and peaceful because I was convinced that I needed to live in accordance with my conscience and not with the leadership” (p. 26). While he eventually leaves the army, Larionov continues to work within the government apparatus in Kazan’; therefore, he cannot escape fully from the amoral workings of Russian leadership. Following the usual trope in classic Russian literature, Larionov suddenly feels a strong urge to leave the city for the quiet and peaceful countryside. He pines, “In this winter, I lived with the single aspiration to run away to the village. To exist in the city, where fear reigns...and all conversations are about conspirators, investigations, forthcoming trials, and executions, was more than I could handle” (p. 45). The fact that this longing to be in nature has found its way back into contemporary literature is evidence not only of its cultural significance and the return of “Old Russia,” but it also highlights the continuity of Russian culture through time.

The East-West Debate Reemerges

The return of “Old Russia” could not be complete without the rebirth and reinvigoration of the East-West dilemma. The loudest proponent of “Russianness” in Akunin’s novel is the traitor Gleb Grigorievich Pozharsky, who, incidentally, is portrayed by Nikita Mikhalkov (a figure in my next chapter) in the film adaptation of *The State Counsellor*. Prince Pozharsky is from a long line of high-blooded ancestors, and he is very proud of this fact. When Fandorin reveals to Pozharsky that he knows of the latter’s treachery, Pozharsky is not fazed in the least. He proudly states that he “is the man who

can save Russia.” Furthermore, he says, “I make no distinction between myself and Russia. After all, Russia was founded a thousand years ago by one of my ancestors” (p. 287). Pozharsky is a perfect example of Russianness because he so intricately embodies the East-West debate with Russia. He masquerades as an enlightened European, but he cannot fully rid himself of the amoral aspects inherent in his questionable tactics. When Rahmet, a terrorist in the Combat Group, is detained and claims that he is not afraid of torture, Pozharsky responds, “Oh, come now... What torture? This is Russia, not China. Do tell them to untie him, Pyotr Ivanovich. This Asiatic barbarity really is too much” (p. 110). The very words “Asiatic barbarity” reveal clearly the dichotomy within Pozharsky’s mind. Namely, that which is Eastern is barbaric, while that which is Western is enlightened, moral, just.

Despite the underhandedness of Pozharsky, there are those in Akunin’s novel who honestly wish to see the modernization of Russia take place without using amoral methods and without distracting from “Russianness.” Smolyaninov, a young Lieutenant in the gendarme corps, poses a question to his colleagues after the interrogation of Rahmet. He states,

The way we work isn’t right gentlemen. He [Rahmet] should be put in prison, but we wish to profit from his viciousness, and you even shake his hand. Of course, I understand that we shall solve the case more quickly that way, but do we want speed, if that is the price to be paid? We are supposed to maintain justice and morality, but we deprave society even more than the nihilists do. It is not good. Well, gentlemen? (p. 116)

Fandorin and Smolyaninov seem to be the only two people in the novel who share the conviction that the State should be an example of morality to the people. Similarly to Shishkin's Larionov, these two characters do not get very far in changing the status quo in government by their moral example. They are all met with scorn and a lack of understanding. Akunin and Shishkin share the sentiment that morality does exist in Russia, and that there is an alternative route to what can be seen as backwardness and "barbarity." They set up their main characters as examples, not only for the other people within the novel, but also for the readers in particular.

Aleksandr Larionov is a zealous proponent of the civilization of Russia. Not only the bureaucracy, as discussed earlier, appalls him, but he also feels pity for the peasants and the unfortunate who toil in poverty and destitution. While working with the army in the countryside bringing in recruits from the peasantry and trying to bring education to these lands, Larionov tells his colleagues, "The idea to civilize our wild country is equal in scope only to the conceptions of Peter [the Great], and can only belong to a great soul" (p. 26). He goes on to write,

Aleksandr [the First] placed in front of himself the grand and noble task of pulling our fatherland once and for all out of the darkness and dirt... In order to build roads here, build normal human homes, begin to manage them, not to deplete the very fragile earth in vain—in short—to Europeanize Russia, there were needed so many methods and power that the task could only be fulfilled through the use of the military machine. Because when everything is decided with an order, to not go through with that order was in no way possible. (p. 26)

Larionov's personal recollections of the situation in Russia point to many different aspects of the East-West dichotomy. There is the striving for civilization and enlightenment, yet this task cannot be fulfilled with "Western" means. It is not scholars and philosophers who go out into the countryside in order to educate and "Europeanize" the population; rather, the military, under the orders of an autocrat, is needed to bring the country out of the darkness. Therefore, Larionov's remarks reveal the singular nature of Russian enlightenment, as propounded by the State, as well as by Slavophiles. Namely, Russia cannot become a civilized country while adhering to Western style democracy because this is not Russia's destiny. This idea has held true since the time of Peter the Great, even through the years of communism, and is being advocated by Putin today. Russian nationalists today, radical or not, stress this singular feature of Russian culture and governance because, to this group of people, Russia combines the best of East and West, thereby making Russia a great nation. This idea that Russia plays a pivotal role between East and West is something that Berdyaev promulgated and that has its origins in 19th century Russian philosophy. Aleksei Khomyakov, a religious poet who together with Ivan Kireevskii founded the Slavophile movement, believed that Russia is destined to become the "center of a new, higher culture" in place of the West. (Dolinin, p. 30) Furthermore, this higher culture was not to be a democracy, but rather a "Theocratic Empire" (Dolinin, p. 37). So, while Russia is an empire, it will be one of the Orthodox faith. This idea perfectly illustrates why Russians see themselves as bridging the gap between East and West because they bring the Christianity of the West into harmony with the non-democratic nature of the East.

Conclusion

Boris Akunin and Mikhail Shishkin are very important contemporary writers not only due to their popularity, but also due to their role in bringing back classical neo-realist literature to Russia. Along with this genre, they have revived traditional tropes and notions of pre-revolutionary Russia: nature, the peasant, honor, enlightenment, and autocracy to name a few. The books do not fully support this notion of pre-revolutionary Russia. Both Akunin and Shishkin have sharp criticisms of bureaucracy, corruption, and to some extent the autocracy. Larionov at one point in the novel is completely ashamed to be Russian because of the actions of the government towards the Polish rebels. He says, “Never before had I scorned myself so much for the fact that I am Russian, for the fact that my fatherland—is the fatherland of butchers—for the fact that my language—is the language of conquerors” (p. 70). Despite the fact that this is a sharp criticism of Russia, it does not detract from the trope that it carries. Many great classic writers, such as Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoi, spoke out against capital punishment and the violence of the autocracy. It is this conviction against unnecessary violence, in fact, that makes Larionov’s self-hatred so Russian. While contemporary Russian literature presents a moderate view of pre-revolutionary Russia, the chapter to follow highlights how contemporary post-Soviet film has taken the notion of “Old Russia” to a new level. It is characterized by a sharp criticism of communism and a desire to return to “Old Russia.” Furthermore, it is mostly, if not fully, devoid of criticism for pre-revolutionary Russia, setting the culture of “Old Russia” up as the ultimate aim for the future.

Chapter 5

Restoring Traditional Russia through Post-Soviet Film: Nostalgia, Reconciliation, and the Quest for the Russian Soul

Contemporary Russian cinema has played a central role in recasting notions of the Russian soul. As recent scholars have shown, post-Soviet cinema in particular has tried to focus in on what the Russian soul means in the wake of communist collapse. Birgit Beumers' work, *Russia on Reels: The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema*, treats this problem in particular. Rising from anti-communist rhetoric common to the 1990s is an intense nostalgia for pre-Revolutionary Russia—a time and a place that virtually no one living remembers and therefore for which no one should, in theory, have nostalgic feelings. However, a thought or an idea is sufficient to bring about a longing for that which cannot be obtained. Two filmmakers in particular, Stanislav Govorukhin, a member of the Duma, and Nikita Mikhalkov, the famous director, producer, and former head of the Russian Filmmakers' Union, have led the charge in portraying this nostalgia. Despite the fact that both of these filmmakers were prominent directors in the Soviet era, after the fall of communism, they have worked to reshape their image. While Govorukhin and Mikhalkov draw from cultural tropes in the wake of communism's collapse, the origins of the search for the Russian soul go back centuries. This quest is so pervasive that it has made its way into the less academic spheres of life. There is an anecdote that says that Russians are simply Asians wearing European business suits. Short and to the point, this anecdote points to a deeper conflict that has plagued Russian intellectuals for centuries while at the same time highlighting the continuing racist dichotomy used by some of these Russians: namely, attempts to define the true nature of the Russian soul (*russkaya dusha*) have been centered on balancing Western intellectual influences from

Europe with the more rural and exotic Asian components of Russian culture. Inherent in this dichotomy is the notion of Oriental despotism mixed with European enlightenment. By combining these two seemingly opposing cultural ideologies, Russian intellectuals have made the case that their culture is exceptional because they combine the best elements from both. Certain Slavophiles contend that Russia is the focal point of Slavic heritage, and likewise, Govorukhin tends to focus on the achievements and intellectual prowess of Imperial Russia, while Mikhalkov tends to focus on the more traditional, Eastern aspects of Russian culture that he believes to define true Russianness (*russkost'*). Of course, Slavophiles are not the only intellectuals who make up the intelligentsia, today or in the past. Rifts between Slavophiles, Pan-Slavists, and Westernizers continue to set up the academic battlefield in determining the nature of Russian culture and how much outside influence should be allowed to shape it. This debate was particularly poignant among émigré Russians after the 1917 revolution, as they struggled to keep their culture alive while away from its heartland.

Rewriting History with Govorukhin

Govorukhin's film *Rossiya, kotoruyu my poteryali* (*The Russia We Lost*, 1992), released in the midst of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was undoubtedly one of the first films in post-communist Russia that heavily criticized the Soviet regime and attempted to restore a positive impression of pre-Revolutionary Russia. The documentary provides a brief history of Russia, while providing an analysis that uses nationalist rhetoric to continue the trope declaring the uniqueness of the Russian culture. It is important also to note that Govorukhin does not forget the historic ties between Russia and France. This dynamic is crucial to understanding the drive behind restorative nostalgia that began in

the late 80s and continues to this day. Friendship with France and the cultural influence of the French intelligentsia are two crucial factors without which a nostalgic understanding of Tsarist Russia would be impossible, or at least drastically changed. Within the first twenty minutes of the film, Govorukhin turns to Paris and takes a look at the Bridge of Alexander III. He says, “This is the Bridge of Alexander III in Paris. A sort of gesture regarding Russia’s relationship with its friend, France.”⁶ Govorukhin also visits the cemetery Saint-Geneviève-du-Bois and looks upon the tomb of Ivan Bunin. He highlights the fact that there are 8,000 Russian graves in the cemetery, yet 22,000 Russians are buried within. Like the Bridge of Alexander III, this cemetery marks the little bit of Russia that lives in Paris. It seems no coincidence that Govorukhin and later Mikhalkov choose to go to Paris in order to search for the “Russia that was lost,” when there are many other places in the world to which the émigrés fled (Berlin, China, and Prague to name a few). This choice highlights the incredible role Paris played in preserving the culture of “Old Russia.” It was not simply a place to which the émigrés fled—the historic ties between France and Imperial Russia made it the *only* place where the émigrés could truly hope to succeed in their “mission” of preserving the culture of “Old Russia”; at the same time, the historical dynamic provides the foundation for the mythmaking currently present in Russia today. Therefore, while émigrés do not feature as prominently on screen in Govorukhin’s film as they do in Mikhalkov’s *Russkie bez Rossii* (*Russians Deprived of Russia*), their legacy and cultural heritage shape the film and are central to an understanding of its critique of Soviet Russia.

⁶ Eto most Aleksandra tret’ego v Parizhe. Nekii zhech Rossii po otnosheniyu k družestvenoi Frantsie

Govorukhin splits his film into three parts. The first part gives an overview of the history of pre-Revolutionary Russia, highlighting the modernizing advances made in Tsarist Russia well before the rise of communism. In pointing out modernization in pre-Revolutionary Russia, Govorukhin tries to destabilize the Soviet myth that Tsarist Russia had produced a backwards and primitive culture that needed to be eliminated. The Bolsheviks claimed that “*kommunizm-eto sovlast’ + elektrofikatsiya*” (Communism is Soviet Power plus electrification), according to a popular poster from the 1920s (Emel’yanov). Govorukhin argues that the land reforms of Nicholas II’s prime minister from 1906-1911, Petr Stolypin, had already brought electricity to the villages by the early 1900s. The second part of the film offers a portrait of key figures in Russia leading up to the revolution, including Stolypin, Lenin, and the members of the royal family. In this part of the film, Govorukhin calls into question the myth surrounding the persona of Lenin, while attempting to repaint the royal family into an average, good-natured family to which anyone can relate. Govorukhin shows home videos from the royal family, as well as letters from Aleksei Nikolaevich to his mother in order to bring the audience closer to an understanding and sympathy with the royal family and their later fate under the hands of the Bolsheviks. In the third and final part of the film, Govorukhin aims to reveal the various crimes of the Bolsheviks against the citizenry of Russia.

While Govorukhin relies on archival evidence and film shot throughout the twentieth century, he still manages to give an ideological twist to his story. As a key supporter of the myth of pre-Revolutionary Russia, he uses letters, film, and diaries to convince Russians of the legitimacy of his argument that the Russia that was lost, that is Tsarist Russia, was the true Russia. Namely, he says, “The history of Russia was written

by its murderers.”⁷. Govorukhin tries to dispel notions that communism brought any real modernity to Russia, thereby portraying the “modernizing” of the Bolsheviks as an unnecessary process that often occurred with a great cost in human life. He argues that literacy rates were already 70% under Tsar Nicholas II. Govorukhin continues to make many comparisons between Tsarist rule and Communist rule in Russia, and he argues that Tsarist rule did much more good for the country than the communists ever did. He underlines the military glory of the Tsars and how Nicholas II rode into battle himself to lead the troops during World War I. He then goes on to show footage of the atrocities committed by the Red Army during the Finnish and Great Fatherland Wars. Many soldiers were executed as traitors to the Soviet Union because of suspicion of collaboration with the Nazis or simply by retreating during a battle. In making these comparisons, Govorukhin belittles Soviet power to little more than a band of bloodthirsty barbarians. In doing so, Govorukhin upholds the opinion among many émigrés that Soviet Russia was a time and place where Russian culture died. As Boris Zaitsev said in a letter to the Bunins, “God knows what will happen to Russia. But I believe that it will survive and straighten itself out, though you and I may not live to see this” (Marullo, p. 85). The battle for the survival of Russia written in this letter highlights the seriousness with which many émigrés viewed the threat of Bolshevism and its deleterious effects on Russian culture.

Like Mikhalkov in his documentary *Chuzhaya Zemlya (Foreign Earth)*, Govorukhin emphasizes the particular importance of peasant life for Russian culture and how this core segment of Russian society was destroyed by Soviet power. He praises

⁷ Istoriya Rossii napisanna ee ubiitsami

Stolypin's land reforms and lauds the functionality of Russian agricultural communities before collectivization in the 1930s. He then juxtaposes the rural modernization policies of late Tsarist Russia with the phrase, "The most monstrous crime of the Bolsheviks was the robbing and the destruction of the village."⁸ Life for Russian peasants was never particularly cheery, even after Alexander II freed the serfs and Stolypin initiated his reforms. However, peasants had longed been used in nationalist and intellectual circles as an archetype of the purity of Russian culture, as discussed earlier with the works of Berdyaev, Bunin, and Goncharova. This is hardly surprising considering that peasants made up close to 80% of the Imperial Population at the end of the 19th century. In fact, Olga Maiorova points out in her book, *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855-1870*, that "the press began to propagate the idea that, with peasant emancipation, Alexander II was poised to accomplish the historical mission of freeing and empowering the Russian people" (p. 16). With this myth in mind, it is easy to see how the mistreatment of peasants under Bolshevik rule can be construed into an attack on the Russian people and therefore the purity of Russian culture.

***Priroda*⁹ and the Russian Soul**

Nikita Mikhalkov began making films in the 1960s. While his cinematographic milieu mostly consists of feature films, he has transitioned ever more toward documentary filmmaking since the fall of the Soviet Union. What characterize his works are that they are imbued with the myth of pre-Revolutionary Russia—nationalistic

⁸ Самым чудовищным преступлением Бол'шевиков было ограбление и уничтожение деревня

⁹ Nature, wilderness

sentiments for his country and a clear support for a return to what he believes to be true Russianness. Mikhalkov was elected as president of the Russian Filmmakers Union in 1997, and in 2000 he became the president of the Moscow International Film Festival. He is the most powerful film director in Russia, and because of the attention he receives, he remains a divisive figure. His films, not only those he directs but those in which he acts or narrates, are perfect examples of restorative nostalgia in action. There are three films that I will look at because I believe them to be critical to understanding Mikhalkov's political and cultural goals in regards to what it means to be truly Russian according to him. These three films are *Siberskii Tsiriul'nik''* (*The Barber of Siberia*), *Russkie bez Rossii* (*Russians Deprived of Russia*), and his newest documentary *Chuzhaya Zemlya* (*Foreign Earth*), which aired on state-run Russian television during the fall of 2013.

While Mikhalkov does not consider Govorukhin to be a serious filmmaker, it is likely that he was nevertheless influenced by *Rossiia, kotoruyu my poteryali* (*The Russia We Lost*). Like Govorukhin, Mikhalkov attempts to focus on the “organic” nature of the Russian culture. Namely, nature and the Russian countryside feature heavily in Mikhalkov's films. *Siberskii Tsiriul'nik''* (*The Barber of Siberia*) came out in 1998 with the tagline “on russkii, eto mnogoe ob'yasnyaet” (He's Russian, that explains a lot). (Norris, p. 33) The story revolves around a young cadet, Andrei, who falls in love with an American woman, Jane, who has come to Russia in order to use her beauty to persuade the Grand Duke to support the invention of a business partner. This invention is a machine that would harvest trees in the Siberian wilderness at a record rate. The machine, the literal Barber of Siberia, is a symbol of the destructive influence of American capitalism and globalization on Russian culture. Mikhalkov portrays the Siberian

wilderness as evocative of the purity of the Russian soul. He highlights the Russianness of his characters in *Barber* by their language, their soul, and the setting in which he places them. He sets his story in the later portion of Tsarist Russia under the regime of Alexander III, and this choice of timeline is no small matter because it reveals Mikhalkov's belief that this period is evocative of *rusски dukh* (the Russian spirit). Likewise, Mikhalkov presents several aspects of the Russian elite culture, which he believes to be representative of *russkii dukh*. There are aristocratic balls, tsarist processions, a duel, and a wonderful scene in which Mikhalkov highlights the cultural traits of Russian *maslenitsa*, an elongated Russian Mardi Gras. While *maslenitsa* hails back to pagan Russia, all the other aspects of Russian elite culture were Western European inventions. During the celebration of *maslenitsa* there is drinking and fist fighting by shirtless men on the ice, but there is also forgiveness and joy. At the end of the film, East trumps West, and this ending highlights Mikhalkov's position on the East-West debate of the Russian soul. Namely, the more "organic" form of Russian culture resides in its eastern aspects. Andrei marries his Russian love and settles down in rural Siberia, in the purity of the Russian wilderness. Jane, the American who Andrei loved, realizes too late her mistake. She does not get to partake of the secrets of the Russian soul. In one of the most striking scenes of the film, the Tsar Alexander III speaks to the Russian troops, a crowd in which Andrei is included. Mikhalkov himself plays the Tsar, and this scene affirms the glory of the Russian Empire, while at the same time stressing the importance of strict, yet possibly "benevolent" authoritarian rule. The idea of "enlightened autocracy" has been a trope of Russian intellectual rhetoric for centuries,

and many point to the Varangian origin legend of Rus' as proof of Russia's call to an autocracy that is nonetheless willed by the people.¹⁰

It is also important to note that the original title in Russian is *Sibirskii Tsiriul'nik*'. Today in Russia, barber would be translated by *parikmakher*. In fact, this word derives from the French word *perruque*, which means wig. Mikhalkov deliberately uses the word employed in Tsarist Russia, *tsiriul'nik*', a word free from Western influence. He literally *restores* the usage of the old word, thereby harkening back to "the good old days." Linguistic purity is no stranger to the Russian language. One of the main fears of the émigrés in Paris, and throughout the diaspora, was that the true, traditional Russian language was going to be lost or defiled by the Bolsheviks. It is true that the romantic, alexandrine verse of Pushkin describing the beauty of Russian nature gave way to the more free verse poetry of Mayakovsky evoking the new proletariat order. While Pushkin was eventually, and rather quickly, reabsorbed into the Soviet literary canon, the general shift in poetry from traditional realism to Soviet realism was a huge blow to the more conservative elements of the Russian émigré community. Pushkin is an interesting case because of the fact that he spoke French as his first language. It is therefore not surprising that he was one of the first to use the word *parikmakher*. However, he is still viewed as the epitome of Russianness, and most intellectuals in Russia choose to ignore or forget his French qualities for the sake of national rhetoric. The desire to diminish the French aspect of Pushkin's heritage is once again evidence of the Russian soul caught between East and West. Vladislav Khodasevich argues, "The nationality of a literature is created by its language and its soul, and not by the territory in which it occurs, nor by the

¹⁰ See Ch. 2 in Maiorova's book *From the Shadow of Empire* for more on the Varangian origin legend

mode of life reflected therein” (Khodasevich, p. 2).¹¹ His argument gives life to émigré literature and affirms its Russianness.

“We are children of one mother”

Mikhalkov takes a personal interest in the legacy of Ivan Bunin, the leader of the émigré community in Paris. He says that when he was younger he read a quote from Bunin saying, “We are not in exile—we are on a mission.”¹² Mikhalkov tells us that he did not understand what these words meant until he stepped foot in Paris. The fact that Mikhalkov was not “enlightened” until reaching Paris highlights the fact that Paris still has a large role to play today in shaping the myth of “Old Russia.” It was here in Paris, in fact, that Mikhalkov was inspired to have Andrei in *The Barber of Siberia* be a cadet. This inspiration reveals a paradox—one that has been ever-present in the Russian attempt to define its soul. *Barber* is a film that lauds the pureness of the Russian nationality; however, one of the main tenets of the film was based upon an experience of Mikhalkov in Paris. Despite the paradox, this occurrence is not unusual. Russians have long drawn inspiration from Paris, while then turning around and claiming that their culture is entirely “unique” and “pure.” Forgetting parts of the past in a nostalgic fashion is necessary, even essential, to creating the notion of national identity. Furthermore, it is impossible to define oneself or one’s nation without referencing and differentiating it from another.

Inspired by this French-Russian intercultural exchange, Mikhalkov decided to trace the lives of those who fled Russia in the wake of the Russian Revolution. One

¹¹ Natsional’nost’ literaturny sozdaetsya ee yazykom i dukhom, a ne territoriei, na kotoroi protekaet ee zhizn’, i ne bytom, v hei otrazhennym

¹² My ne v izgnanii, my v poslanii

episode of the series is entitled *Versal'skie Kadety (The Cadets of Versailles)*, which follows Mikhalkov to Paris as he interviews the sons of émigrés who studied in military academies that were formed in order to replicate Russian education overseas. These academies were one of the many ways in which Russian émigrés in Paris managed to preserve their culture. By interviewing former cadets and visiting their old school, Mikhalkov does a great job of showing the role Paris played in preserving the culture of “Old Russia.” In the beginning of the film, he states, “It [France] is not just a country, which hosted emigrants—it’s a country that found in itself the wisdom and the strength to help them preserve in themselves that Russia [Imperial Russia], which they managed to take with them.” The school for these young Russian boys was founded as a way to teach them the true Russian ways. They were raised in a military fashion, while learning Russian literature and history. What they were truly being trained for was that day when they would return to Russia, in order to bring that true Russianness back to their country devastated by Soviet power. While many did not return, the presence of these institutions is evidence enough of the desire to preserve true Russianness.

Mikhalkov visits the tomb of Ivan Bunin at the Saint-Geneviève-du-Bois Cemetery in Paris. He points out that Putin came and laid an icon on his tomb. Mikhalkov continues, saying “It’s not the fact that Putin in particular laid it here—it’s the fact that a current president of Russia understands the meaning and the significance of the lives of the people who rest here.”¹³ Putin’s gesture reaffirms the “mission” of the émigré community to preserve their Russianness—traditional pre-Revolutionary Russian culture—and transfer it to their homeland when the Bolsheviks were gone. Albeit

¹³ Delo ne v tom, chto Putin, a delo v tom, chto prezident Rossii cegodnyashchnei ponimaet znachenie i smysl' zhizni vsekhn lyudei, kotorye zdes' pokoyasya

posthumously, the émigrés succeeded. Putin claims, “We are children of one mother.” Putin’s statement does more than reaffirm the émigré “sacred” mission. As stated earlier, it attempts to reconcile the ideological differences between émigrés and Soviets by stressing the inherent Russianness of each group. This attempt at reconciliation is a bold move ideologically because it tries to bring together intellectual groups who each considered the other to have strayed from the true Russian culture.

Mikhalkov shows his attention to detail in pointing out some linguistic phenomena in the speech of the Russian émigrés. While showing off some pictures in an old photo album, one of the Russians uses the term “rozgaven’e,” an old term that means the “first meal after a fast.” Mikhalkov is taken aback by this term, as this is a word that has been “lost” in contemporary Russia. At one point when the Russian émigrés are planning on leaving the house, they get up from the table, say “edem,” and then “ura!” (let’s go and hurray!). Mikhalkov notes that in Russia today a simple “yes” or “okay” in English would be heard instead of “ura.” In drawing attention to these details, Mikhalkov is pointing to the beauty of the Russian language of “Old Russia.” This “linguistic nationalism” would become an element in Mikhalkov’s *The Barber of Siberia*, and I would go so far to say that Mikhalkov was inspired by these emigrants in Paris to portray the beauty of the language of Tsarist Russia.

Peasants and the Mystery of the Russian Soul

In his newest documentary film, Nikita Mikhalkov explores the extinction of Russian villages. Mikhalkov entitles his new film *Chuzhaya Zemlya (Foreign Land)*. The title highlights the fact that the Russian countryside is becoming more and more foreign to the average Russian citizen. There is one man who rides around with Mikhalkov who

has chosen to abandon the village to find better prospects in urban Russia. Although he still has the know-how to work the land, he states, “my children know nothing.”

Mikhalkov portrays an interesting nationalism throughout the film. He laments the fact that Russians are beginning to rely on foreign countries more and more for food imports. In this sense, he adheres to a very protectionist economic policy. He also points out the fact that masses of Chinese immigrants are filling up the land to work on it, many of these immigrants being illegal. While it is not entirely overt, Mikhalkov displays a xenophobic rhetoric in describing this phenomenon. He wonders why Russians have let “their” land fall into the hands of “others.” This “us” versus “them” mentality is evocative of nationalism.

Mikhalkov focuses on the pride Russians should feel for their countryside. He highlights the relationship between the peasants and the land, and he personifies the land in saying that it “feeds him [the Russian].”¹⁴ Mikhalkov also points to the fact that many of Russia’s greatest poets and thinkers have come from the village. He visits a monument to Vvedenskii, a Russian physiologist; this monument is in the middle of deserted land. Mikhalkov wonders why this monument, which was built because the people “had pride in him [Vvedenskii]”¹⁵, is now left with no one to see it. Later on in the film, he says, “what has to occur in the soul of a person, if he can simply throw everything away and run from his native land—what is driving him away from here?”¹⁶ Again, the Russian soul takes center stage in the problem to be resolved. The soul is the driving force of man, and Mikhalkov wants to know what is happening in that soul to make Russians

¹⁴ Ego kormit

¹⁵ Im gordyasya

¹⁶ Chto dolzhno proiskhodit’ v dushe cheloveka, esli on mozhet vot tak vse brosit’ i bezhat’ s rodnoi zemli—chto ego gonet otsyuda?

leave the villages. Just as he showed in *Barber*, the Russian countryside has a mystical quality to it. It is there where Russians gain the knowledge of that mystery. As discussed in chapter 2, Ivan Bunin grew up in the village and was awed by its power and mystery. The Soviet Village Prose movement following the Thaw of Khrushchev also hearkens back to traditional Russian notions of village life, and in this sense, Soviet and Émigré literature were not so far apart. In his novella *Poslednii Srok*, Valentin Rasputin shows how “Russians are an agrarian race, a people most at home in the world when they are truly on and of the native earth” (Peterson, p. 83). In such a way, the reconciliation of Soviet and Émigré culture is made easier because both are in many instances drawn to the wonders of the Russian wilderness. If the Russian soul is found in the wilderness as Mikhalkov argues in *Barber*, then one can successfully argue that both Soviet and Émigré literature are deserving of a place in the national Russian canon as they both contain the necessary elements of *russkost*.

Mikhalkov shows a desire to rediscover the mystery of the village. At the end of the documentary, he calls the police, fire department, and the ambulance with the village phone, and he asks them all to help him save the dying village. Of course, the operators do not have any patience with this philosophical meaning of “death,” and the police operator asks if Mikhalkov is drunk. Once again, Mikhalkov displays a perfect example of restorative nostalgia. He does not simply lament the loss of villages, but he wants them to return. He wants Russians to come back to the countryside, in order that it stays their *rodnaya zemlya* (native land) and does not become *chuzhaya* (foreign).

Conclusion

Film has been an important medium in promoting a restorative nostalgia for pre-Revolutionary Russia. Whether through aggressive anticommunist sentiments or fiery patriotism, directors have tried to portray pre-Revolutionary Russia as the true Russia, where one can find the true essence of the Russian soul. As is the case with all mythmaking, certain events and facts have been left out or obscured in the process of *restoring* Tsarist Russia. Only the good is remembered of the Tsars, not the bad.

The role Paris played in shaping this myth must not be forgotten. It was the memory of writers such as Ivan Bunin, driven away and forgotten by the Bolsheviks, with their “sacred mission” to preserve their *russkost*, that persuaded directors such as Nikita Mikhalkov and Stanislav Gorvorukhin to try to restore the “purity” that was lost in 1917. The cultural exchanges between Russia and France offer a striking example of that battle between what Berdyaev calls “two origins—the Eastern and the Western” (Berdyaev, p. 14).¹⁷ In a sense, Mikhalkov, Govorukhin, and all those involved in *restoring* the “Old Russia” are trying to win this battle by proclaiming the triumph of the East. The purity of the Russian soul resides in the countryside, in the Russian language, and in all the secrets of Russian culture that cannot be comprehended by “outsiders.” In the quest to define their *natsional'noe samosoznanie* (national identity, literally self-awareness), Russians are turning to myth and nostalgia. Yet, there is still a desire to reconcile the faults of Soviet times by recognizing the cultural achievements that stemmed from this era, such as the Village Prose movement. All countries are guilty of this mythmaking and share in a struggle to define who they truly are. As the French philosopher Ernest Renan says,

¹⁷ Dva nachala, vostochnoe i zapadnoe

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is the present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (Renan, p. 52).

These memories do not have to be entirely factual. In fact, if they were, pride in one's nation would probably not exist. The purity of the Russian soul therefore does not lie in the truth behind it, but rather in the nostalgic memories that create it and the desire of the Russian people to adhere to the values perpetuated by this collective memory.

Conclusion:

The Future of the Russian Soul

While this thesis has explained the particular role played by Russian émigrés in Paris in imagining and creating the myth of “Old Russia,” the phenomenon of harkening back to historical processes itself is anchored in deeper and older historical roots, and it will continue to shape Russian social, cultural, and political thought. Russian nationalism and exceptionalism have come to the forefront in the current political crises in Ukraine and the Crimea. A recent article in the New York Times highlights the continuing importance of the Parisian émigrés in contemporary politics. David Brooks argues, “To enter into the world of Putin’s favorite philosophers is to enter a world full of melodrama, mysticism and grandiose eschatological visions.” He goes on to contend that Putin’s political agenda is rooted in Berdyaev; namely, “Citing Berdyaev, he [Putin] talks about defending traditional values to ward off moral chaos.” Brooks article not only calls attention to the contemporary relevance of Berdyaev’s philosophy, but it also highlights an important aspect of global politics. The West cannot hope to contend and work with Putin’s Russia without understanding the historical, philosophical, and literary foundation of Putin’s politics. It is not only Putin, however, as evidenced by the last two chapters of this thesis, who is leading the effort to revive traditional cultural norms in Russia. The Orthodox Church has regained prestige in post-Soviet Russia, and has re-implemented itself as a factor in politics. Russia’s controversial anti-gay propaganda law was long sought out by the Orthodox Church, and it is seen as a moral victory over iniquity. The Church, furthermore, has its own TV station and is involved in many film projects. While the majority of Russians do not go to church, as is the case in most of Europe, many still

identify heavily with the Orthodox faith. This tendency harkens back to Berdyaev's conviction that religiosity and a striving toward the divine is central to the Russian soul.

Russia finds itself in a similar position to that which it was in at the end of the 19th century. It strives to modernize, but it does so in a fashion alien to Western Europe and the United States. Moscow is wealthy, Internet and TV are widespread, and social media plays an important role in the daily lives of most Russians. However, from a Western viewpoint, Russia is still a backwards land. In Western media, Putin's Russia is portrayed as a homophobic and misogynist land; from Putin's perspective, however, he is simply defending moral truths and traditional values. In light of recent global events, such as the civil war in Syria and the Ukrainian Revolution, Putin has attempted to assert Russia's importance in the international arena. Using the rhetoric of Western democracy and appealing to the language of international law, Putin builds a Western foundation for Russia's political actions, while at the same time holding on to the peculiarities of Russian governance.

The East-West dichotomy has always been and will continue to be a central dilemma for Russian politics and culture. The current discourse surrounding this dichotomy was heavily influenced by the Russian émigrés in Paris and recast from their legacy by contemporary writers and filmmakers. The peasant as a symbol of true Russianness promulgated by Bunin, Goncharova, and Berdyaev has found new life in Mikhalkov and Govorukhin. The spiritual and eschatological elements of the Russian soul portrayed in the works of Khodasevich, Berberova, and Berdyaev have made their way into contemporary Russian politics and profoundly shape current events. The fact that Marina Tsvetaeva and Aleksei Tolstoi have been accepted into one whole and

complete Russian national literary canon despite their political and ideological differences is evidence of the conviction of contemporary Russians that there has always been a continuity in Russianness, even during the Soviet era when it was deemed lost. The legacy of these Russian émigrés must be understood in order to grasp the political, social, and cultural events occurring in Russia today. It not only reveals the complexity of the convictions of many Russians, but it is evidence of the perseverance and continuity of the discourse shaping Russian nationalism. If “Old Russia” could survive nearly 80 years of exile, then its rebirth in post-Soviet Russia underlines the fact that it will not disappear any time soon.

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