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**THE CRANE, THE SWAMP, AND THE MELANCHOLY:
NATURE AND NIHILISM IN SOVIET ENVIRONMENTAL
LITERATURE AND LAW†**

DOUGLAS LIND

I. INTRODUCTION

Here in the West, the entire seventy-year history of the Soviet Union carries an assortment of negative images. As to the environment, the Soviet image is one of ecological degradation—of large-scale natural resource depletion and rampant environmental despoliation. Justification for this view abounds, for the environmental record of the U.S.S.R. is indeed a sorry one.¹

† On March 25, 2009, the *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* hosted a panel discussion entitled “God and Godlessness in the Environment.” A version of this paper was presented at that event.

1. See, e.g., PHILIP R. PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN THE SOVIET UNION (1991) [hereinafter PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT] (detailed study of the problematic state of the environment in the final years of the Soviet Union, emphasizing air pollution, water quality problems, and natural resource depletion); DOUGLAS R. WEINER, MODELS OF NATURE: ECOLOGY, CONSERVATION AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN SOVIET RUSSIA 149 (1988) [hereinafter WEINER, MODELS] (observing how, during the Soviet era, especially the period of Joseph Stalin’s first Five-Year Plan, “[r]esources were exploited with an intensity never before seen in Russia”); Elena Nikitina, *Perestroika: How it Affects Soviet Participation in Environmental Cooperation*, in THE SOVIET ENVIRONMENT: PROBLEMS, POLICIES AND POLITICS 115, 118–22 (John Massey Stewart ed., 1992) [hereinafter THE SOVIET ENVIRONMENT] (discussing the Soviet environmental record in three critical areas, ozone depletion, climate change, and transboundary air pollution, and the policy reforms initiated during Perestroika); Jonathan D. Oldfield & Denis J.B. Shaw, *The State of the Environment in the CIS*, in EAST CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE FORMER SOVIET UNION: ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY 173, 175 (David Turnock ed., 2001) (discussing the environmental legacy of the Soviet Union as inherited by the current twelve-member Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.), noting especially the significant levels of water and air pollution, and reporting that as of the early 1990s an estimated sixteen percent of C.I.S. territory was seen as “having an acute ecological situation”); Zeev Wolfson, *The Massive Degradation of Ecosystems in the USSR*, in THE SOVIET ENVIRONMENT, *supra*, at 57, 57–63 (general overview of ecosystem destabilization and natural resource degradation in the U.S.S.R.); cf. Kathleen E. Braden, *US-Soviet Cooperation for Environmental Protection: How Successful are the Bilateral Agreements?*, in THE SOVIET ENVIRONMENT, *supra*, at 125, 125 (discussing the “dis-

From its inception in 1922, the Soviet Union formulated its environmental policy atop Marxist-Leninist political philosophy. Soviet Marxism saw little inherent value in nature. Karl Marx had perceived the human/nature relationship strictly in anthropocentric terms. “[N]ature,” he wrote, “taken abstractly, for itself—nature fixed in isolation from man—is *nothing* for man.”² Still, Marx posited an original state of intimacy with nature from which humans had become alienated.³ The alienation had come about because of capitalism and the institution of private property.⁴ To Marx, communism offered a “*genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature” by eliminating private property rights and creating a wholly new political structure.⁵ Yet the reconciliation of humans and nature projected by Marx, along with Friedrich Engels, was by no means a return to an idyllic pre-industrial state of ecological harmony. Rather, the resolution came through domination. Communism would mark the zenith of human society, the locus of “man’s *real* nature.”⁶ And with communism, Engels added, “[t]he whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of Nature.”⁷

Corollary to projecting human mastery over nature, Engels thought that humans could for the most part exploit the natural environment at will without serious threat of untoward consequences. Nothing, he surmised, “is impossible to science.”⁸ On his view, “science increasingly makes the power of nature subject to man,”⁹ making the “productive power at mankind’s disposal . . . immeasurable.”¹⁰ V.I. Lenin shared this

mal record of the Soviet bloc with respect to the environment” and comparing the strikingly strong “convergence of United States and Soviet societies in terms of environmental damage,” despite the two countries’ different economic systems).

2. KARL MARX, *ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHIC MANUSCRIPTS OF 1844*, at 165 (Martin Milligan trans., Prometheus Books 1988) (1844) [hereinafter MARX, 1844 MANUSCRIPTS] (emphasis in original); cf. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in THE MARX-ENGELS READER 382, 382 (Robert C. Tucker ed., W.W. Norton & Co. 1972) (1875) (identifying nature as a “source of use values”).

3. See MARX, 1844 MANUSCRIPTS, *supra* note 2, at 65, 74–77.

4. See *id.* at 75–81.

5. *Id.* at 102 (emphasis in original).

6. *Id.* at 111 (emphasis in original).

7. Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, in THE MARX-ENGELS READER, *supra* note 2, at 605, 637; accord *id.* at 639 (“Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master—free.”).

8. Frederick Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, in MARX, 1844 MANUSCRIPTS, *supra* note 2, at 171, 198.

9. *Id.* at 192.

10. *Id.*; accord *id.* (nature offers “immeasurable productive capacity”); cf. *id.* (“The productivity of the soil can be increased *ad infinitum* by the application of capital, labor and science.”); *id.* (“[O]ver-populated’ Great Britain can be brought within ten years to produce a corn yield sufficient for a population of six times its present size.”); *id.* at 198

technocratic attitude toward nature. Declaring that "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country,"¹¹ Lenin, like Marx and Engels, viewed natural resources as commodities to be used toward the beneficial end of social and economic development. However, Lenin seemed to recognize that nature possesses qualities and organizational complexities that human technology can neither overcome nor replicate.¹² He accordingly warned that natural resources must be protected from overexploitation and pollution. "[I]n order to protect the sources of our resources," he wrote, "it is necessary to enforce adherence to scientific-technical laws and to the principle of rational exploration."¹³

The Soviet Communist Party followed these architects of communism in pursuing a rational scientific approach to nature.¹⁴ The environmental policy it imposed on Soviet society was grounded firmly in the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, especially the dogmas of collective ownership and centralized economic planning.¹⁵ Under that ideology, the Party strove headstrong for the transformation of society through industrial development, agricultural expansion, and economic growth, irrespective of environmental impact.¹⁶ Soviet environmental policy, that is, reflected what one scholar has labeled the "Soviet environmental images"—a "preoccupation with transforming nature, a devotion to

("[I]t is absurd to talk of over-population so long as . . . no more than one-third of the earth can be considered cultivated, and so long as the production of this third itself can be raised sixfold and more by the application of improvements already known.").

11. V.I. LENIN, *Report to the Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets, December 22–29, 1920*, in 31 COLLECTED WORKS 516 (Moscow, Progress Pub. 1965) (emphasis omitted). This popular slogan of Lenin's has been restated and translated several ways. See, e.g., WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 22 ("Socialism equals nationalization plus electrification.").

12. See, e.g., V.I. LENIN, *The Agrarian Question and the "Critics of Marx,"* in 22 SOBRANNYE SOCHINENIYA 453 (3d ed. 1965) ("To replace the forces of nature with human labor, generally speaking, would be just as impossible as replacing the *arshin* [a traditional Russian measure of length] with the *puđ* [a traditional Russian unit for determining weight]. . . . Both in industry and in agriculture man may merely avail himself of the actions of nature's forces, if he knew these actions.").

13. V.I. LENIN, 31 SOBRANNYE SOCHINENIYA 478 (4th ed. 1967).

14. See, e.g., I. TIMEKIN, PRIRODA, OBSHCHESTVO, ZAKON 49 (1976); WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 121–31; CHARLES E. ZIEGLER, ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN THE USSR 154–61 (1987).

15. See ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 154.

16. Accord V.V. Zagladin, *Global'nye Problemy o Sotsialist'nyi Progress Chelovechestva*, 4 VOPROSY FILOSOFII 94 (1983); see ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 161 (claiming that environmental protection in the Soviet Union was treated as a low priority by both the Communist Party's central leadership and nearly all bureaucratic organizations); see also ROGER MANSER, FAILED TRANSITIONS: THE EASTERN EUROPEAN ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT SINCE THE FALL OF COMMUNISM 16 (1993) (noting that contradictions in the U.S.S.R. between economic growth and environmental protection resulted in much ecological destruction).

blind industrial growth, and boundless confidence in the ability of science and technology to resolve any environmental problem."¹⁷

This attitude toward nature reached its apogee in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. The first of Stalin's Five-Year Plans, promulgated in 1928, called for the most rapid industrialization possible¹⁸ and set ambitious targets for the country's agricultural collectivization campaign.¹⁹ Exploitation of natural resources was not only treated with disinterest but was implicitly sanctioned.²⁰ Under what has since been labeled the "Bolshevization of philosophy and science,"²¹ the Five-Year Plan manifested Stalin's distrust of theoretical science in favor of applied or "home-grown practical" science.²² Theoretical ("bourgeois"²³) science was unacceptable to Stalin, for fundamental scientists tended to posit theoretical laws that assumed natural limitations to both agricultural and industrial growth. Stalin renounced all such scientific and natural constraints. Instead, he gave primacy to practical, applied science,²⁴ which could

17. ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 154.

18. See SHEILA FITZPATRICK, *THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION* 116–17, 130–33 (2d ed., Oxford Univ. Press 1994); PRYDE, *ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT*, *supra* note 1, at 17.

19. See FITZPATRICK, *supra* note 18, at 132; WEINER, *MODELS*, *supra* note 1, at 121 (discussing the "breakneck pace of the collectivization campaign," typified by the All-Union Central Executive Committee goal to increase the Soviet grain harvest by 35% over the period of the First Five-Year Plan). *But cf.* FITZPATRICK, *supra* note 18, at 132 (noting that in its initial version the First Five-Year Plan did not anticipate wide-scale collectivization of agriculture).

20. See MARSHALL I. GOLDMAN, *THE SPOILS OF PROGRESS: ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION IN THE SOVIET UNION* 47–52 (1972) (observing how the Soviet government consistently made no effort to account for the social cost of natural resource exploitation and environmental pollution); PRYDE, *ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT*, *supra* note 1, at 149 ("[Under] the anti-preservation, utilitarian philosophies of the Stalin era, . . . such activities as logging in the Central Forest reserve and exotic game breeding at Askania-Nova were not only permitted but encouraged."); WEINER, *MODELS*, *supra* note 1, at 149 (noting that during the first Five-Year Plan, resources "were exploited with an intensity never before seen in Russia").

21. See WEINER, *MODELS*, *supra* note 1, at 130.

22. *Id.*

23. See Paul R. Josephson, *Soviet Scientists and the State: Politics, Ideology, and Fundamental Research From Stalin to Gorbachev*, in *THE POLITICS OF WESTERN SCIENCE* 103, 103 (Margaret C. Jacob ed., 1992) ("The most important factor in the history of Soviet science was the imposition of Stalinist policies in the 1930s. This led to the ideologization of science and the belief that socialist science existed as distinct from bourgeois science.").

24. Stalin distinguished the "acceptable" from the unacceptable in science according to his "doctrine of the primacy of practice." WEINER, *MODELS*, *supra* note 1, at 233. That doctrine held that "all scientific doctrines had to accord with, if not justify, the specific social and economic policies of the [Soviet] regime." *Id.* See also *id.* at 130–31 (noting Stalin's preference for "practice," i.e., practical success in Soviet economic and industrial development, over theoretical science); Josephson, *supra* note 23, at 108 ("Stalinist policies of science required rationalized, comprehensive, centralized plans for

accommodate the dizzying pace of economic growth, industrial expansion, and agronomic advances he had prescribed in the Five-Year Plan.²⁵ In this way, Stalin desacralized and transformed nature in Soviet ideology. Contrary to Marx, who had conceived of communism in part as a means to reconcile humans and nature, Stalin viewed nature as a hostile foe prone to inflict great harm unless subdued and dominated.²⁶ “*The great transformation of nature*” thus became the environmental slogan of Stalinism,²⁷ a leitmotif of exploitation and transformation, where ostensibly useless aspects of the natural environment were to be converted, through marvels of engineering and practical science, into beneficial commodities for the growth of industry and agriculture.²⁸

The Stalinist Bolshevization of nature clearly represents the predominant position the Soviet Communist Party took toward natural resources and the environment, especially during the Stalin and Khrushchev years.²⁹ It may also accurately depict the attitude of most citizens of the U.S.S.R.³⁰ Yet the Communist Party’s demands for conformity did not wholly quell some very contrary undercurrents of environmental thought in Soviet society. As early as the late nineteenth century a progressive environmental movement was stirring in Russia.³¹ After the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, but before the formal creation of the Soviet state five years later, V.I. Lenin ushered through several pieces of quite

scientific research to contribute to the growth of industrial production, and renewed struggle against the bourgeois specialists.”).

25. See, e.g., WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 130, 168, 232–33 (noting the almost mystical faith Stalin held in the power of applied or ideologically driven science to achieve the targets for growth articulated in the five-year plan); Josephson, *supra* note 23, at 104 (“[U]nder Stalin, new policies were introduced to harness science to the machine of industrialization.”); *id.* at 111 (recounting how Stalinist “[e]conomic planners and party officials required that research have applicability for the ongoing superindustrialization effort”); cf. PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 245 (observing that Stalin viewed nature as “merely a challenge for the engineering profession”).

26. WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 168, 234–35; accord PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 245 (noting that Stalin saw nature as “an annoying obstacle that must be decisively defeated”).

27. WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 169 (emphasis added).

28. *Id.* at 168–69, 233–35.

29. See PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 14, 245.

30. See ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 39–44 (noting that while certainly there were exceptions, most Soviet citizens ascribed generally to the official Soviet political attitude toward nature, including the belief that under proper socialism, “the scientific-technological revolution can be utilized to solve all major problems”). There was general confidence among the Soviet people that socialism could handle most environmental difficulties that would arise, and that progress in science and technology would resolve any problems that would defy socialist solutions. E.V. KLESOVA, PRIRODI I CHELOVEK 22–29 (1979); Zagladin, *Global’nye Problemy o Sotsialist’nyi Progress Chelovechestva*, *supra* note 16, at 94. See generally BORIS KOMAROV, THE DESTRUCTION OF NATURE IN THE SOVIET UNION (Michel Vale & Joe Hollander trans., M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1980) (1978).

31. See WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 7–15; ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 7–8.

visionary environmental legislation.³² Passage of such legal initiatives ended and their enforcement regressed with Stalin. Not until the 1960s did the Soviet Union begin anew to enact laws protective in any meaningful way of the environment and natural resources.³³ As in Western Europe and the United States, the middle third of the twentieth century was for the U.S.S.R. a period so focused on industrial and agricultural growth that politicians and lawyers remained mute and indifferent to the mounting avalanche of environmental problems. Still, hints of environmental concern persisted among Soviet intellectuals, just as among their counterparts in the West. A number of prominent Soviet scientists, ranging from geographers to field biologists and zoologists, held visions of ecological sustainability very contrary to the practices and positions endorsed by the Communist Party and the Five-Year Plans.³⁴ Certain philosophers and social theorists likewise contributed to the bold

32. See, e.g., ON LAND, Decree of 9 November 1917, SU RSFSR 1917-18, no. 1, text 3; ON FORESTS, SU RSFSR 1918, no. 42, text 522; ON HUNTING SEASONS AND THE RIGHT TO POSSESS HUNTING WEAPONS, SU RSFSR 1919, no. 21, text 256; ON HUNTING, SU RSFSR 1920, no. 66, text 297. Also during Lenin's period of leadership, the Soviet government began to set aside national nature reserves or *zapovedniki*. WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 25-30. The idea for a nationwide program of *zapovedniki* had been first proposed, literally in the midst of the Bolshevik uprising, by the distinguished scientist Veniamin Petrovich Semenov-tian-shanskii. The proposal came in Petrograd at a conference sponsored by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society's Permanent Conservation Commission, from October 30 to November 2, 1917. *Id.* at 21. The *zapovedniki* were set aside as "absolutely inviolable" protected areas for ecological research and preservation of critical habitats and rare species. See DOUGLAS R. WEINER, A LITTLE CORNER OF FREEDOM: RUSSIAN NATURE PROTECTION FROM STALIN TO GORBACHEV 36-39 (1999) [hereinafter WEINER, LITTLE CORNER]; accord BARBARA JAN-CAR, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN THE SOVIET UNION AND YUGOSLAVIA: STRUCTURE AND REGULATION IN FEDERAL COMMUNIST STATES 50-51 (1987). Over time, they came to acquire even greater significance as "rare physical and social spaces in the Soviet Union that had largely escaped the juggernaut of Stalin's 'Great Break.'" WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra*, at 38. The *zapovedniki* should not be confused with national parks in the American sense. A *zapovednik* was not meant to be a tourist attraction, but strictly a nature reserve. Philip R. Pryde, *The Environmental Basis for Ethnic Unrest in the Baltic Republics*, in THE SOVIET ENVIRONMENT, *supra* note 1, at 11, 12. The first Soviet national park was the Lahemaa Park in Estonia, commissioned in 1971. *Id.* See generally Zigurds L. Zile, *Lenin's Contribution to Law: The Case of Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment*, in LENIN AND LENINISM: STATE, LAW AND SOCIETY 83, 83-84, 86-96 (Bernard W. Eissenstat ed., 1971) (discussing the influence of Lenin on environmental protection).

33. See, e.g., Joan DeBardeleben, *The New Politics in the USSR: The Case of the Environment*, in THE SOVIET ENVIRONMENT, *supra* note 1, at 64, 65 (noting that during the Brezhnev era a good deal of environmental legislation was passed, although implementation was sparse); Zile, *supra* note 32, at 83 (observing that beginning in the late 1950s "deterioration of the natural environment became a matter of national concern" in the Soviet Union).

34. See, e.g., WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 1-6, 28-31, 39-82, 137-90, 201-39, 250-87, 312-73, 384-99, 404-28.

counter-current of environmental thought that eddied throughout the Soviet years.³⁵

Alongside the legal, scientific, and philosophical realms, literature provided another significant channel of ecological thought in the Soviet Union. Nineteenth century tsarist Russia witnessed an astounding rise in the influence of literature as a genre for social critique. Writers such as Dostoyevski, Pushkin, Gogol, Herzen, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Chekhov created what British historian Geoffrey Hosking has aptly characterized as the Russian "tradition of the writer as an 'alternative government.'"³⁶ Some significant literary works of that era reflect the ecological consciousness nascent in Russia at the time.³⁷ This tradition of literary activism carried over to the twentieth century and the beginnings of the Soviet Union. The Soviet NEP period,³⁸ 1921–1928, was a time of great creativity in Soviet literature.³⁹ From the agony of the Civil War to the socio-political merits of the emerging collectivist state, Soviet writers of the 1920s reflected on and critiqued the pressing events of their time and

35. *Id.* at 12–14, 79–80, 161–90, 312–39, 399–401, 404–28.

36. See GEOFFREY A. HOSKING, *THE FIRST SOCIALIST SOCIETY: A HISTORY OF THE SOVIET UNION FROM WITHIN* 408 (2d ed. 1992).

37. See, e.g., ANTON CHEKHOV, *THE WOOD DEMONS: A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS* (S.S. Koteliatsky trans., 1926) (1899). Chekhov expressed chagrin over the rate of deforestation in Russia by having his protagonist, Khrushchev, exclaim:

Cut forests when it is a matter [of] urgency, . . . but it is time to stop destroying them. Every Russian forest is cracking under the axe, . . . the abodes of beasts and birds are being ravaged, rivers are becoming shallow and are drying up, wonderful landscapes are disappearing without a trace. . . . One must be a barbarian to . . . destroy what we cannot create.

Id. at 36–38.

38. The NEP ("New Economic Policy" (*Novaya ekonomicheskaya politika*)) period followed the brutal and divisive Russian Civil War. Under the leadership of Lenin, the period was marked by pragmatic measures, including limited private economic activity, to heal divisions and stimulate the economy of the developing Soviet state. See FITZPATRICK, *supra* note 18, at 93–119.

39. See MAX HAYWARD, *WRITERS IN RUSSIA: 1917–1978*, at 55 (1983) ("In many ways, this earliest [NEP] period in Soviet literature was its finest."); ROBERT A. MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL: SOVIET LITERATURE IN THE 1920's* vii (1968) [hereinafter MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL*] (calling the 1920s "one of the richest and liveliest periods in Russian literature"); GEORGE REAVEY, *SOVIET LITERATURE TO-DAY* 16–17 (1947) (describing the NEP period as a time when a new generation of writers formed literary groups around artistic themes and debated the intersection of literature and politics); GLEB STRUVE, *25 YEARS OF SOVIET RUSSIAN LITERATURE* xvii (new & enlarged ed., George Routledge & Sons 1944) [hereinafter STRUVE, *25 YEARS*] (noting how the NEP period "brought to life private publishing companies, enlivened the literary and bookselling activities in general, and helped to create a relatively greater freedom of artistic work"); Helen Muchnic, *Literature in the NEP Period*, in *LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION IN SOVIET RUSSIA 1917–62*, at 28, 28 (Max Hayward & Leopold Labedz eds., 1963) (calling the NEP period "the most outspoken, the most varied and experimental period in Soviet literature, the Russian phase of that exuberant literary revival which characterized the Twenties in the West").

the political direction of their country. In that literary realm, like a "Siberian mammoth,"⁴⁰ stands the imposing figure of Vsevolod Ivanov.

Discovered by the prominent writer and political theorist Maxim Gorky and promoted by the influential editor and critic Aleksandr Konstantinovich Voronsky, Vsevolod Ivanov has to rank as one of the more colorful twentieth-century writers of fiction.⁴¹ Kazakh-Russian by birth and largely uneducated, Ivanov as a young man lived a life of adventure and intrigue before becoming a major Soviet writer in the early years of the U.S.S.R. The author of numerous novels, short stories, and plays spanning nearly fifty years,⁴² Ivanov's career could serve as a case study in government control of artistic creation. His early works, including those of interest here, were widely acclaimed and earned Ivanov fast regard among critics as a fresh, bold, and highly talented writer of philosophical intricacy.⁴³ But, as Stalin imposed increasingly stern ideological demands on Soviet writers starting in 1927, Ivanov began to conform his work to fit the Communist line. For that reason, Western critics and scholars have largely disregarded him.⁴⁴

But ignoring Ivanov not only impoverishes our understanding of Soviet literature—of its blossoming in the decade after the Bolshevik revolution only to fade in the decades thereafter under the chill and censorship of the Communist Party—but also arrests our grasp on the history of environmental ethics and the mindset behind Soviet environmental law and policy. From 1921 to 1927 Ivanov amassed a prodigious literary output, including several novels or novellas and many short stories.⁴⁵ These works brought him immediate fame and remain the works for which he is most celebrated. They also contain some of the most artistically expressive and philosophically complex, if not disturbing, writing about the human/nature relationship in twentieth century literature.

40. Valentina G. Brougher, *Vsevolod Viacheslavovich Ivanov, in RUSSIAN PROSE WRITERS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS* 161, 164 (Christine Rydel ed., 2003) [hereinafter Brougher, *Ivanov*].

41. Biographical studies in English of Ivanov's life include WOLFGANG KASACK, *Ivánov, Vsevolod Vyacheslavovich, in DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, at 151 (Maria Carlson & Jane T. Hedges trans., 1988) [hereinafter KASACK, *Ivánov*]; STRUVE, 25 YEARS, *supra* note 39, at 27; VYACHESLAV ZAVALISHIN, *EARLY SOVIET WRITERS* 227 (East European Fund, Inc. 1958); Valentina G. Brougher, *Introduction to VSEVOLOD IVANOV, FERTILITY AND OTHER STORIES* xiii (Valentina G. Brougher & Frank J. Miller trans., 1998) [hereinafter Brougher, *Introduction*]; Brougher, *Ivanov, supra* note 40, at 161.

42. For a complete list of Ivanov's works, see Brougher, *Ivanov, supra* note 40, at 161–63.

43. See, e.g., MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL, supra* note 39, at 128–30; Brougher, *Introduction, supra* note 41, at xiii–xiv, xvii; Brougher, *Ivanov, supra* note 40, at 163.

44. See Brougher, *Ivanov, supra* note 40, at 164, 172.

45. See *infra* notes 73–78, 101–07 and accompanying text.

From Ivanov come vivid, beautiful images of pastoral landscapes. His pen captures the austere sublimity of the Siberian/Central Asian steppe. He depicts in elegant, expressive prose the powerful, even mystical relationships that bonded that vast land with its peasants and villagers. Yet for every landscape bedecked in warmth, sublimity, and joy, Ivanov painted a nature cold and destructive, fixed on torment, indifferent to human suffering and devastation. His early stories thus mark an important juncture in the development of environmental thought. Ivanov crafts a distinct "landscape ethic," at once topophilian and nihilistic: humans are bound irrevocably to the land, a bond through which the land (i.e., nature) determines attitudes and values, molds strength of character, and furnishes hope, joy, and flourishing in life; yet it is a bond that indentures, as nature stands as a fickle province enjoining moral weakness, condemning humanity to a life fragmented without purpose or pity, and dispensing with blithe indifference agony, despair, and death.

This ethic (or *metaethic*) never appears expressly as a philosophical postulate in Ivanov's stories. Until now, he has never been read as setting forth an environmental ethic *per se*. Critics have long emphasized the naturalism of his stories, often characterizing it as romantic or ornamental. Aleksandr Konstantinovich Voronsky, the editor who published several of Ivanov's stories in the early 1920s, described his work as evoking a world of "joyfulness . . . where everything is suffused with powerful, primitive vitality, with beauty, with virginal immaculacy and purity, where people, like the nature surrounding them, are pristinely whole and healthy."⁴⁶ Yet to British literary scholar Gleb Struve, Ivanov's early writings, while "full of ornamentalism and local colouring"⁴⁷ and reflective of a writer with "an instinctive zest for life,"⁴⁸ present a world less joyful than morose. Struve wrote:

One of Ivanov's chief characteristics is his lyrical pantheism, his sense of nature and of man's fusion with it. There is a touch of romantic primitivism in it. Ivanov likes to dwell on subconscious emotions, on the meaninglessness and aimlessness of life and of human behaviour, of which the motive forces are often obscure and inexplicable. There is behind it a tragic note, a fundamental pessimism.⁴⁹

46. See MAGUIRE, RED VIRGIN SOIL, *supra* note 39, at 131.

47. STRUVE, 25 YEARS, *supra* note 39, at 28.

48. GLEB STRUVE, RUSSIAN LITERATURE UNDER LENIN AND STALIN 1917-1953, at 66 (1971) [hereinafter STRUVE, LENIN AND STALIN].

49. STRUVE, 25 YEARS, *supra* note 39, at 28.

Other critics have agreed with Struve. Robert A. Maguire, for example, characterized Ivanov's work as "fundamentally cynical, nihilistic, and despairing."⁵⁰

The contrast here between the critics—one finding joy, beauty, and vitality in Ivanov's romantic primitivism while others stress his tragic vision of human life and purpose—underscores the paradox that imbues what I offer here as Ivanov's environmental ethic. It is an ethic of human dependency on nature or, more specifically, *landscape*. Across several stories published from 1922 to 1927, Ivanov sets forth the fortunes of human life as beholden to landscape. Where the landscape (nature) is fertile, comforting, rich, and abundant, human life can breathe the scents of joy, beauty, and vitality. Yet nature, in Ivanov's works, has no interest in human well-being. Landscapes now beautiful and serene are wont to turn brutal and harsh. No landscape cares whether it nourishes or devastates its human inhabitants. Through its eyes of bland indifference, nature views human life as meaningless and irrelevant.

Ivanov's landscape ethic, in other words, is highly and unqualifiedly nihilistic. He apotheosizes nature only to devalue it. He paints bucolic landscapes with jocund inhabitants only as a backdrop to reversal of fortune. To understand this ethic and how it foreshadows Soviet environmental law and policy we must canvass several of Ivanov's stories from the 1920s. Yet before doing so, the author and his life, itself worthy of a novel, warrant consideration.

II. IVANOV

Ivanov was born in 1895 in what is now the Shyghys Qazaqstan Oblast of present-day Kazakhstan.⁵¹ His mother was Kazakh (Polish-Mongolian), while his father, a mine worker turned village schoolteacher through disciplined self-education, was a Russian consumed by wanderlust and liquor.⁵² The family lived poor and moved often. Ivanov received little formal schooling, though under his father's tutelage he read great literature from an early age. Edgar Allan Poe and Jules Verne, read in his youth, remained among his major literary influences.⁵³

Following the ways of his father, Ivanov as a young man traveled extensively throughout Central Asia and Siberia. He worked (or per-

50. MAGUIRE, RED VIRGIN SOIL, *supra* note 39, at 133; Robert A. Maguire, *The Pioneers: Pil'nyak and Ivanov*, in MAJOR SOVIET WRITERS: ESSAYS IN CRITICISM 221, 244 (Edward J. Brown ed., 1973).

51. See VERA ALEXANDROVA, A HISTORY OF SOVIET LITERATURE 31 (Greenwood Press 1970) (1963); Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

52. See MAGUIRE, RED VIRGIN SOIL, *supra* note 39, at 131; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164; Maurice Friedberg & Robert A. Maguire, *Introduction to 2 A BILINGUAL COLLECTION OF RUSSIAN SHORT STORIES* 7, 23 (Maurice Friedberg & Robert A. Maguire eds., 1965) [hereinafter Friedberg & Maguire, *Introduction*].

53. Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvii.

formed) an array of itinerant jobs, including typesetter, circus magician, sword swallower, sailor, singer of couplets, and fakir.⁵⁴ During these wanderings he first tried writing poetry and plays. Wherever he could gather an audience he would perform.⁵⁵ Throughout his life Ivanov looked back fondly on these late-teen roving. He considered the villages and landscapes of Siberia and the Central Asian steppe his "universities," and he came back to them recurrently for the settings of his fiction.⁵⁶

In 1915, a local newspaper in western Siberia published Ivanov's first story, *On Holy Night (V sviatuiu noch)*.⁵⁷ Several other stories soon followed. In 1916, Ivanov sent some stories to Maxim Gorky who published two of them in 1918 in his second *Anthology of Proletarian Writers (Sbornik proletarskikh pisatelei)*.⁵⁸ A long friendship between the two writers began. With Gorky's encouragement and help, Ivanov moved to Petrograd in 1921.⁵⁹ There he became associated with a group of literati known as the Serapion Brothers (*Serapionovy brat'ia*).⁶⁰ The group, which included such notable writers and critics as Konstantin Fedin,⁶¹ Lev Lunts,⁶² Nikolai Nikitin,⁶³ Elena Polonskaia,⁶⁴ Mikhail Slonimsky,⁶⁵

54. See ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 31; KASACK, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 41, at 151; STRUVE, LENIN AND STALIN, *supra* note 48, at 64; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164; Friedberg & Maguire, *Introduction*, *supra* note 52, at 23.

55. Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

56. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xv.

57. See STRUVE, LENIN AND STALIN, *supra* note 48, at 64; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

58. ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 31; Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xv-xvi; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

59. See ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 32; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

60. See KASACK, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 41, at 151; Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvi; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

61. For biographical and critical assessment of Fedin's work, see WOLFGANG KASACK, *Fedin, Konstantin Aleksandrovich*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 102; ERNEST J. SIMMONS, *RUSSIAN FICTION AND SOVIET IDEOLOGY: INTRODUCTION TO FEDIN, LEONOV, AND SHOLOKHOV 9-87 (1958)*; STRUVE, *25 YEARS*, *supra* note 39, at 33-42; Ruth Wallach, *Konstantin Aleksandrovich Fedin*, in *RUSSIAN PROSE WRITERS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS*, *supra* note 40, at 88.

62. See, e.g., WOLFGANG KASACK, *Lunts, Lev Natanovich*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 227; ZAVALISHIN, *supra* note 41, at 224-27; Gary Kern, *Lev Natanovich Lunts*, in *RUSSIAN PROSE WRITERS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS*, *supra* note 40, at 234.

63. See WOLFGANG KASACK, *Nikitin, Nikolai Nikolayevich*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 269; Victor Peppard, *Nikolai Nikolaevich Nikitin*, in *RUSSIAN PROSE WRITERS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS*, *supra* note 40, at 254.

64. Polonskaia, a poet, was the only female member of the Serapion Brothers. See WOLFGANG KASACK, *Polonskaya, Yelizaveta Grigoryevna*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 315.

65. See WOLFGANG KASACK, *Slonimsky, Mikhail Leonidovich*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 382; STRUVE, *25 YEARS*, *supra* note

Nikolai Tikhonov,⁶⁶ and Mikhail Zoshchenko,⁶⁷ would meet evenings and discuss the importance of individual freedom and political neutrality in creative writing.⁶⁸ Ivanov came to them a person of mystery. Unlike them, he hailed from the peasantry, lacked much formal education, and distrusted intellectuals.⁶⁹ His very appearance—rounded-face highlighted by protruding eyes and curious smile, and stocky build often bedecked in a knee-length white bearskin coat he made himself—spoke to them of wildness and the exotic.⁷⁰ The Serapions nicknamed Ivanov their “Siberian mammoth,”⁷¹ reflecting the intrigue the vast and largely unknown land east of the Urals held for them, and testifying to their respect for his enormous ability—a talent that captivated them as mysterious, primal, and untamed.⁷²

From 1921 to 1923 Ivanov published four short novels or *povest*.⁷³ *The Partisans* (*Partizany*, 1921),⁷⁴ *Armored Train 14-69* (*Bronepoezd 14-69*, 1922),⁷⁵ *Colored Winds* (*Tsvetnye vetra*, 1922),⁷⁶ and *Azure Sands* (*Golubye peski*, 1923).⁷⁷ He also wrote numerous short stories including the collection *The Seventh Shore* (*Sed'moi bereg*, 1922).⁷⁸ These works brought him immediate recognition and popularity. Critics lauded how he depicted the Siberian landscape using rich, colorful imagery and un-

39, at 55–56; Margaret Tejerizo, *Mikhail Leonidovich Slonimsky*, in *RUSSIAN PROSE WRITERS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS*, *supra* note 40, at 419.

66. See WOLFGANG KASACK, *Tikhonov Nikoláy Semyónovich*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 421.

67. See, e.g., WOLFGANG KASACK, *Zóshchenko, Mikhail Mikháylovich*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 490; STRUVE, 25 YEARS, *supra* note 39, at 69–76; Gregory Carleton, *Mikhail Mikhailovich Zoshchenko*, in *RUSSIAN PROSE WRITERS BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS*, *supra* note 40, at 475.

68. For a discussion of the literary and political significance of the Serapion Brothers, see ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 20–21; WOLFGANG KASACK, *Serapion Brothers*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 354; STRUVE, 25 YEARS, *supra* note 39, at 32–33; ZAVALISHIN, *supra* note 41, at 224–29.

69. See MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL*, *supra* note 39, at 134; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

70. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvi.

71. *Id.*; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164.

72. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvi–xvii; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 164–65.

73. A “*povest*” is a Russian prose genre of works somewhat longer than a short story but lacking the dramatic structure of a novel. WOLFGANG KASACK, *Póvest*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 318.

74. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *PARTIZANY* (St. Petersburg, Kosmist 1921).

75. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *ARMORED-TRAIN 14-69*, in EVGENY ZAMYATIN, *THE ISLANDERS & VSEVOLOD IVANOV, ARMORED-TRAIN 14-69* (Frank Miller trans., Ann Arbor, Trilogy 1978).

76. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *TSVETNYE VETRA* (St. Petersburg, Epokha 1922).

77. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *GOLUBYE PESKI* (Moscow, Krug 1923).

78. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *SED'MOI BEREG* (Moscow, Krug 1922).

sual metaphors.⁷⁹ They praised how he grasped the flavor of life and distinctive dialect of the region's peasants, artisans, and nomadic laborers.⁸⁰ The principal setting for these novellas and short stories was Siberia during the devastation of the just ended Russian Civil War. The war had brutalized the country, especially Siberia.⁸¹ Brother had fought against brother in savage combat; scores of peasants had left their villages and farms to become partisans; and the opposing forces, both the Bolshevik Red Army and the anti-Bolshevik Whites, had spread terror throughout the country with random atrocities, mass arrests, and perfunctory summary justice.⁸²

Ivanov wrote of the Civil War from his own rather unusual experience. He had served in a Red Guard unit on the Siberian front; yet he had also worked as a typesetter for a White general.⁸³ This political ambivalence and mixed allegiance comes across in his stories. *Armored Train 14-69*, Ivanov's most acclaimed work, details the stratagems of a Red guerrilla unit ordered to somehow stop a White armored train as it rushes through a remote and forbidding Siberian landscape. The train ultimately is brought to a halt through the highly improbable solution of a single man lying across the tracks and sacrificing himself.⁸⁴ Though the Reds prevail, Ivanov presents the showdown as much from the standpoint of the White soldiers aboard the ill-fated train as from the Red guerrillas'.⁸⁵ The novella, which Ivanov adapted for the theatre in 1927, became an immediate classic of Soviet and socialist folklore.⁸⁶ Yet the critical acclaim was punctuated with concern that the author did not show enough enthusiasm for the Communist Party and Bolshevik revolutionary cause. This concern muted the official response to Ivanov's works throughout the 1920s.⁸⁷

79. See MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL*, *supra* note 39, at 130–31; Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvii; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 165.

80. Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvii; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 165.

81. See, e.g., FITZPATRICK, *supra* note 18, at 70–78.

82. *Id.* at 75–78; ANDREI SINYAVSKY, *SOVIET CIVILIZATION: A CULTURAL HISTORY* 219 (Joanne Turnbull trans., 1990).

83. See ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 32; STRUVE, *LENIN AND STALIN*, *supra* note 48, at 64; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 165.

84. See IVANOV, *ARMORED-TRAIN 14-69*, *supra* note 75, at 86–97.

85. See ZAVALISHIN, *supra* note 41, at 227 (“In Ivanov’s perceptive portrayals of national types he depicts both the White officers and the Red guerillas as capable of selfless heroism.”).

86. See ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 32; MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL*, *supra* note 39, at 135–36, 140–41, 146; ZAVALISHIN, *supra* note 41, at 227; Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xiii–xiv; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 163.

87. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xvii–xxi; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 165, 167.

The early years of Stalinism marked a period of severe Communist Party restrictions on intellectual freedom.⁸⁸ Writers who refused to obey the demands of the Party's censors often found it impossible to publish. Some were sentenced to penal exile; others disappeared or even died mysteriously. Intellectual success for a writer of fiction in Stalin's U.S.S.R. required adapting to the new genre of "Socialist Realism,"⁸⁹ where art in all forms became a vehicle for, as Gorky put it, "the liberation . . . of the working masses from the yoke of property and the rule of the capitalists."⁹⁰ Ivanov adapted. Until his death in 1963, he remained a prolific and well-read Soviet writer largely by suppressing his avant-garde tendencies in favor of works that fit the ideological demands of the new order. Among the works that gained him greatest favor with Soviet critics were a collection of stories about Stalin's first Five-Year Plan, *Tales of Brigade Leader M.N. Sinitsyn (Povesti brigadira M.N. Sinitsyna, 1931)*;⁹¹ a biographical novel about a Bolshevik civil war hero, *Parkhomenko*

88. See, e.g., ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 23–27 (discussing the repression on literature that began with Stalin); EDWARD J. BROWN, *RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE THE REVOLUTION 166–75* (rev. & enlarged ed. 1982) (describing the political censorship of the First Five-Year Plan and throughout the 1930s); ORLANDO FIGES, *NATASHA'S DANCE: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF RUSSIA 447–80* (2002) (detailing how under Stalin artistic creation became a tool for social engineering); REAVEY, *supra* note 39, at 17–19 (describing how the First Five-Year Plan ushered in a very restrictive period for Soviet writers); STRUVE, *25 YEARS*, *supra* note 39, at 86 (noting that in 1929 certain influential socialist critics began to insist on "compromising art and literature within the scope of the Five-Year Plan," under a campaign amounting to the "forcible proletarianization of literature"); Edward J. Brown, *The Year of Acquiescence*, in *LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION IN SOVIET RUSSIA 1917–62*, *supra* note 39, at 44 (discussing how the year 1930 presented a critical juncture in the move toward doctrinaire demands for conformity from Soviet writers).

89. On the important Soviet movement known as "socialist realism," see KATERINA CLARK, *THE SOVIET NOVEL: HISTORY AS RITUAL 3–45* (1981); C. VAUGHAN JAMES, *SOVIET SOCIALIST REALISM: ORIGINS AND THEORY* (1973); WOLFGANG KASACK, *Socialist Realism*, in *DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917*, *supra* note 41, at 388; REAVEY, *supra* note 39, at 18–24; SINYAVSKY, *supra* note 82, at 114–19; STRUVE, *LENIN AND STALIN*, *supra* note 48, at 256–313. Socialist realism was defined by the Union of Soviet Writers of the U.S.S.R. as follows:

Socialist Realism, being the fundamental method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, it demands of the artists a truthful, historico-concrete portrayal of *reality in its revolutionary development*. In this connection, the truthfulness and the historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal must take into account the problem of *ideological transformation and the education* of the workers in the spirit of Socialism.

See REAVEY, *supra* note 39, at 19–20.

90. MAXIM GORKY, *On Themes*, in *ON LITERATURE 214, 225* (Julius Katzer & Ivy Litvinov trans., 1973). See generally FIGES, *supra* note 88, at 447–77 (discussing the attitude in the early years of the Soviet Union to use art in all its forms to engineer society and human behavior).

91. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *POVESTI BRIGADIRA M.N. SINITSYNA* (Leningrad, Izd. piatileti v Leningrade 1931).

(*Parkhomenko*, 1938–39);⁹² some writings themed on World War II, e.g., the novel *On the Field of Borodino* (*Na Borodinskom pole: Rasskazy 1939–1943*, 1944);⁹³ and the biographical novels, *Meetings With Maxim Gor'ky* (*Vstrechi s Maksimom Gor'kim*, 1947)⁹⁴ and *We Go to India* (*My idem v Indiiu*, 1960).⁹⁵ During World War II, Ivanov worked as a war correspondent for the Soviet Information Bureau (*Sovetskogo Informbiuro*) as well as for two newspapers, *Izvestiia* (*News*) and *Krasnaia zvezda* (*Red Star*), writing human interest stories about the war.⁹⁶ He accompanied the Red Army into Berlin at war's end and was present at the official German surrender. After the war, he attended the Nuremberg trials as a reporter.⁹⁷

For much of his career Ivanov thus conformed his writing to mollify the watchful eyes of the Soviet censors. Nevertheless, certain themes outside the preferred topics of socialist realism kept his interest: Eastern mysticism and the occult; mythology and legend; Russian history and folklore; philosophical questions concerning the nature of reality and the complexity of the human condition; and, most significantly, the environmental ethic that landscape determines the course of human character and life.⁹⁸ Ivanov returned to these themes frequently in his later writings, many of which were withheld from publication until after his death.⁹⁹

Critics uniformly regard Ivanov's writings from 1922 to 1927 as his best.¹⁰⁰ The nihilistic naturalism that places him importantly at the

92. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, PARKHOMENKO (rev. ed. Moscow, Voenizdat 1951) (1938–39).

93. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, NA BORODINSKOM POLE: RASSKAZY 1939–1943 (Moscow, Sovetskii pisatel' 1944).

94. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, VSTRECHI S MAKSIMOM GOR'KIM (Moscow, Molodaia gvardiia 1947).

95. Vsevolod Ivanov, *My idem v Indiiu*, in 7 SOBRANIE SOCHINENII (Moscow, Gos. Izd. khudozhestvennoi literatury 1960).

96. See Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 170.

97. *Id.*

98. Ivanov's most important works covering this range of topics from the 1930s until his death in 1963 include *POKHOZHDENIIA FAKIRA* (Moscow-Leningrad, Gosizdat 1934–35), translated as *THE ADVENTURES OF A FAKIR* (New York, Vanguard 1935), revised as *I LIVE A QUEER LIFE: AN EXTRAORDINARY AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (London, Lovat Dickinson 1936); *EDESSKALA SVIATYNTIA* [THE SACRED OBJECT OF EDESSA] (written c. 1946) (Moscow, Sovetskii pisatel' 1965); *VULKAN* [VOLCANO] (written 1962), published posthumously in *IZBRANNYE PROIZVEDENIIA* (E. Krasnoshchekova ed., Moscow, Khudozhestvennaia literatura 1968); *KREML'* [THE KREMLIN] (written c. 1929), published in censored form as *UZHINSKII KREML'* [THE KREMLIN ON THE UZHGA] (Moscow, Khudozhestvennaia literatura 1981); *Y* (written c. 1932), published as *Y: ROMAN* (Sharl' Burg ed., Lausanne, Switz., L'Age d'homme 1982).

99. See Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 167–72.

100. See, e.g., ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 31–32; MAGUIRE, *RED VIRGIN SOIL*, *supra* note 39, at 146; Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xiii–xiv; Friedberg & Maguire, *Introduction*, *supra* note 52, at 23–24.

front edge of twentieth-century environmental philosophy and literature comes from that period in the form of several short stories: *The Child* (Dite, 1922),¹⁰¹ *Empty Arapia* (*Polaia Arapiia*, 1922),¹⁰² *How Burial Mounds are Made* (*Kak sozdaiutsia kurgany*, 1924),¹⁰³ *The Field* (*Pole*, 1925),¹⁰⁴ and *Fertility* (*Plodorodie*, 1926).¹⁰⁵ These stories figured prominently in the esteem Ivanov enjoyed through much of the 1920s. Critics applauded his craftsmanship and increasing talent in developing deep psychological studies of character and complex, highly structured plots and storylines.¹⁰⁶ Yet the stories also sparked rebuke.

In 1927 Ivanov republished two of these stories (*The Field* and *Fertility*), along with seven other previously published works, in a thin volume titled *Mystery of Mysteries* (*Tainoe tainykh*).¹⁰⁷ Soviet critics quickly censured the collection.¹⁰⁸ While the stories had been greeted with praise when published separately, their literary value became lost on critics of the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP; *Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisateli*)¹⁰⁹ when they appeared together.¹¹⁰

As a collection, the stories became curiously threatening. Likewise, upon reexamination, concern surfaced over the earlier stories *The Child*, *Empty Arapia*, and *How Burial Mounds are Made*. The RAPP critics were

101. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *The Child*, in FERTILITY AND OTHER STORIES, *supra* note 41, at 17.

102. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *Empty Arapia*, in FERTILITY AND OTHER STORIES, *supra* note 41, at 3.

103. Vsevolod Ivanov, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, in 2 A BILINGUAL COLLECTION OF RUSSIAN SHORT STORIES, *supra* note 52, at 321.

104. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *The Field*, in FERTILITY AND OTHER STORIES, *supra* note 41, at 113.

105. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, *Fertility*, in FERTILITY AND OTHER STORIES, *supra* note 41, at 150.

106. See, e.g., MAGUIRE, RED VIRGIN SOIL, *supra* note 39, at 129–33, 137–38, 145–47; Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xviii–xix; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 165–67; Friedberg & Maguire, *Introduction*, *supra* note 52, at 23.

107. VSEVOLOD IVANOV, TAINOE TAINYKH (Moscow-Leningrad, Gos. izd-vo 1927).

108. See STRUVE, LENIN AND STALIN, *supra* note 48, at 66; STRUVE, 25 YEARS, *supra* note 39, at 29; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 166–67.

109. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP) was formed in 1928, roughly concurrent with the adoption of Stalin's first Five-Year Plan. The association aimed to monitor and, as necessary, coerce writers into furthering the development of the Soviet state through their literary works. See ALEXANDROVA, *supra* note 51, at 25–27 (describing the virtual terror imposed on writers by the RAPP critics); FIGES, *supra* note 88, at 471–74 (discussing the repressive tenor of the RAPP); WOLFGANG KASACK, RAPP, in DICTIONARY OF RUSSIAN LITERATURE SINCE 1917, *supra* note 41, at 327 (providing a brief history of the RAPP); REAVEY, *supra* note 39, at 17 (noting how by 1929 the RAPP critics had established themselves as “dictators in the literary field and insisted that it was the immediate duty of writers . . . to ‘report’ on the achievements of the [Five-Year] Plan”).

110. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xviii–xx; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 167.

disturbed by Ivanov's dark images and complex associations. They perceived his characters as unsettling, his plots and settings as disquieting.¹¹¹ The socially responsible Soviet writer was to use literature as a tool for educating the people in the spirit of socialism while projecting a rosy future for the Soviet Union as a modern industrial nation.¹¹² Ivanov instead set his stories in traditional village and farm landscapes. He presented characters who were troubled psychologically, if not deranged, and driven by uncontrollable biological and instinctive desires, frequently against their own self-interest, toward violent and anti-social conduct. His stories were morose, typically ending in death or imprisonment.

Under pressure from the RAPP critics, Ivanov redirected his talent toward more socially responsible themes.¹¹³ This acquiescence brought the development of his landscape ethic to an abrupt halt. Still, what he accomplished from 1922 to 1927 deserves to be recognized for its contribution to environmental thought. Read independently, the five stories we will consider appear quite disconnected. Each presents a very distinct storyline. Yet considered together, they reveal the tenor of Ivanov's nihilistic landscape ethic. Further, they presage what became under Stalin the Soviet approach to environmental law and policy. For Ivanov's landscapes present humans as nature's subjects, morally weak and physically vulnerable before the environmental conditions and contours of landscape that determine their fortunes and mold their characters. Yet by seeking to dominate and transform nature, Ivanov's protagonists think they can invert the subjugation. Such was the aspiration of Stalin's great transformation of nature. The at best prosaic success of Ivanov's characters, underscored by the meaninglessness of their efforts, foretold the futility of Stalin's program. To see that, we must examine the stories carefully, one-by-one.

III. THE CHILD

Mongolia is a wild and joyless beast! The rock is a beast, the water is a beast; even a butterfly, even it schemes to sting.

One knows not what kind of heart a Mongolian has.¹¹⁴

From these opening lines *The Child* presents a haunting vision of landscape and a troubling picture of human character. The storyline is simple. It is the Russian Civil War, a remote outpost in the Mongolian steppe. A small detail of Red partisans schemes to preserve the life of a young child, the orphaned infant of a White officer they just killed. The

111. Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xviii–xx; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 167.

112. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xix–xxii.

113. See Brougher, *Introduction*, *supra* note 41, at xx–xxiii; Brougher, *Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 167–68, 170, 172.

114. IVANOV, *The Child*, *supra* note 101, at 17.

soldiers kidnap a nursing Kirghiz woman to be a wet nurse to the child. The woman manages, during the abduction, to bring along her own infant. For a time she feeds both children. But the soldiers, who have taken quite a fancy to the winsome Russian child, become alarmed that the Kirghiz infant is looking more robust and putting on greater weight. Suspicious that the woman is giving more care to her own baby, the soldiers place the Kirghiz child in a torn sack and take him into the desert where they leave him to die.

The title *The Child* obviously represents a double entendre for Ivanov. Indeed, the story throughout represents a masterpiece in the art of double meaning. "Mongolia," Ivanov begins, "is a wild and joyless beast"—wild and joyless is the land ("[t]he rock is a beast"), the water ("the water is a beast"), and the animal life ("even a butterfly, even it schemes to sting").¹¹⁵ Against such a landscape Ivanov suggests human nature must also be beastly: "One knows not what kind of heart a Mongolian has."¹¹⁶ The implication here, however, is fulfilled only insofar as Ivanov writes that the Mongolian "wears animal skins."¹¹⁷ Beyond that, the fact that they have "taken to living far away from the Russians" makes the nature of the Mongolian heart an epistemic uncertainty.¹¹⁸ Not so the Kirghiz heart. Ivanov immediately extends the link between landscape and human character to the Mongolian steppe's Kirghiz population: "One knows what kind of a heart they have—mica-like, worthless, transparent through and through."¹¹⁹

Still, the link Ivanov draws between human character and landscape goes far deeper than these beginning lines suggest. As the story unfolds, it is not the moral character of Mongolians or Kirghiz that proves to be beastly, but that of Russians. The region held about fifty Russians—the Red Guard Partisan Detachment of Comrade Selivanov. Pursued relentlessly out of Siberia by White partisans, the detachment had braved rugged terrain and endured conditions that made them "healthy and strong peasants."¹²⁰ Those among their number who were "excess weakness" had died crossing the mountains; those who survived had become "vicious, like wolves in the spring."¹²¹

The Mongolian steppe reminded the Red partisans of their Siberian homeland—the steppe around the Irtysh River. The sandy soil, stubborn grasses, broad, searing sky resembled their home; yet "[e]verything [was] different, not [their] own, unplowed, and wild."¹²² The similarity

115. *Id.*

116. *Id.*

117. *Id.*

118. *Id.*

119. *Id.*

120. *Id.*

121. *Id.*

122. *Id.* at 18.

only increased their homesickness. The difference—the wildness—combined with being away from their women made them coarse and ever more weary. At times, they would ride their horses across the steppe chasing down Kirghiz women. “And the Kirghiz women, sighting the Russians, would lie down submissively on their backs.”¹²³ The peasants found it repulsive; they knew it was wrong—“[l]ike sinning with cattle.”¹²⁴ Yet they could not resist. Their characters had become scorched and beastly, just like the joyless landscape of alien Mongolia.

Within the partisan detachment was an apparent contradiction to the landscape: Afanasy Petrovich, the paymaster. A man with a petite, beardless, rosy-cheeked face, Afanasy Petrovich would often take to crying and whimpering like a child. Only his strong legs and transformation when on horseback into a stern, angry man separated him from the “excess weakness.”

Afanasy Petrovich was part of the detail that ambushed the White officer. With two other men he lay prone in a gully watching the approach of a horse-drawn cart with two White officers aboard. Sniveling, Afanasy Petrovich pled, “‘No need, guys. . . . Better take ‘em prisoner. . . . Hold off on killing.’”¹²⁵ The others did not hold off. Like the Mongolian landscape, the hearts of the peasants had hardened into rock—vicious, amoral, and beastly. Afanasy Petrovich railed at one of the shooters: “‘You’re a monster and a bourgeois. . . . You have no feelings, you bastard.’”¹²⁶ Afterward, they found that one of the two officers was a woman. A search of the cart revealed the tiny baby. Immediately smitten, Afanasy Petrovich rode back to the outpost in the confiscated cart, cradling the baby. He sang:

Nightingale, nightingale, sweet little bird

Little canary

Mournfully sings¹²⁷

Remembering his home and family, the child Afanasy Petrovich and the child of the ambushed White officer cried softly together.

Back at the outpost the partisans soon realized they had no food for the baby. Another detail, again including Afanasy Petrovich, was dispatched to steal some cows from the Kirghiz. Having secured what they needed in a Kirghiz village, the detail was about to leave when Afanasy Petrovich remembered they needed a nipple. He began ransacking yurts in search of one. Finally, quite inadvertently, he stumbled upon a nipple—a young woman in a yurt with a baby beside her. Suddenly, child-like Afanasy Petrovich became a frenzied monster with no feelings.

123. *Id.*

124. *Id.*

125. *Id.* at 20.

126. *Id.* at 21.

127. *Id.* at 22.

It was Afanasy Petrovich alone who kidnapped the Kirghiz woman. It was Afanasy Petrovich who raised the alarm about the Kirghiz child gaining more weight than the Russian baby. Afanasy Petrovich, tender and sensitive, the gentle butterfly among the wild partisans of alien Mongolia, accused the "foul" Kirghiz mother of "[t]rickery" because her child, "the yellow-mouthed bastard,"¹²⁸ was more hale in appearance than "his" child, the Russian orphan he named Vaska. Alone, Afanasy Petrovich took the Kirghiz child from his mother and abandoned him in the steppe. Childlike Afanasy Petrovich, given to sniveling, to crying in a thin voice, abandoned the innocent child in a landscape where "shifting, flowing, and scorched sands raced along and cried in a thin voice."¹²⁹ Like the others, from the "mica-like, worthless" Kirghiz¹³⁰ to his "scorched-faced and scorched-hearted" partisan comrades,¹³¹ Afanasy Petrovich had been absorbed by the Mongolian landscape, where "even a butterfly, even it schemes to sting."¹³²

IV. *EMPTY ARAPIA*

The sun, fat from overeating, settled on the trees. The clouds stuck out their fat protruding stomachs.

Lands gnawed bare. From the sky to the earth—a thin-ribbed wind. From the sky to the earth—thin hungry dust.¹³³

Empty Arapia depicts a horrific tale of starvation, death, and cannibalism. A severe drought grips the land. In an unnamed and lawless village, the Fadeev family tries against hope to survive. The unthinkable befalls them; the unimaginable become their chosen actions. They cook rats, gnaw for nourishment on their sheepskin clothing, and lick their own vomit. The Fadeev grandmother, left to care for her infant grandson, drops the boy. Too weak to lift him, she can do nothing to fend off the rats. Distrust runs so high in the village that rumors spread about the Fadeevs eating the baby themselves.

"From the sky to the earth—thin hungry dust."¹³⁴ Just as the landscape "blazed in dust-filled shaggy stuffiness,"¹³⁵ the Fadeevs, like their neighbors, metamorphose into dust. With "hands . . . like dust" they gather rats.¹³⁶ Weeping in anguish at the loss of her baby boy, Nadka, the Fadeev daughter, gasps for air through her "mouth, narrow and dry,

128. *Id.* at 29.

129. *Id.* at 22.

130. *Id.* at 17.

131. *Id.* at 22.

132. *Id.* at 17.

133. IVANOV, *Empty Arapia*, *supra* note 102, at 4.

134. *Id.*

135. *Id.* at 6.

136. *Id.* at 5.

stretched like a whip across her dust-covered face."¹³⁷ Inside, their hearts and strength of character come to match the ghastly pallor of their skin. None in the family can even muster the strength to wash the floor of the child's blood. Nadka trembles, "'Oh Lord! . . . Why couldn't [the rats] have eaten the old woman?'"—her mother.¹³⁸

Beneath a "head overgrown with dusty hair,"¹³⁹ Miron, the elder Fadeev son, eats little but remains large and meaty-looking. The villagers take notice. Miron hides. He hides during the day from the "people's eyes, eyes nakedly greedy for meat."¹⁴⁰ At night he sleeps with open eyes. Night like day is dry and oppressive. By night, as by day, the land "run[s], turning into sand."¹⁴¹ Throughout the night, as over the day, "[t]he trees [make] a knocking sound with their dry white bones. The land [makes] a knocking sound with its dry bones."¹⁴² Her own "bones, dry like sandpaper,"¹⁴³ Nadka huddles by night next to Miron to protect him. Still, he cannot lose weight: "[F]labby meat hung from his bones like wet sand, [though] his bones, as if suspended in sand, were dying away."¹⁴⁴

Then an old woman, Yefimia, arrives in the village telling of an unsettled land with abundant fields for the taking, where, "[i]f you sow, it rains for three weeks in a row."¹⁴⁵ Through a wrinkled voice, soft, strange, and haunting, "[d]ry like the day,"¹⁴⁶ Yefimia would solace the wretched peasants with flowery images of a promised land. "'Whoever gets there first will get a piece of land closer to home. The grass there is perfect for bees and honey. Grain ripens in three weeks.'"¹⁴⁷ Empty Arapia.

Like their neighbors and those from other villages, like the rats and the birds, the Fadeevs begin the journey to Arapia. Their desperation only increases. The landscape becomes ever more dry, even more dusty. The woods of the steppe-forest catch fire, enveloping "the birdless sky in an orange shroud."¹⁴⁸ Dust hangs over the dried-up river bed. "The whole earth is sand. Blue sands. And the sky is blue sand."¹⁴⁹ Those peasants-turned-pilgrims who are strong enough pull bark from trees and

137. *Id.*

138. *Id.* at 6.

139. *Id.* at 8.

140. *Id.*

141. *Id.*

142. *Id.*

143. *Id.* at 6.

144. *Id.* at 8.

145. *Id.* at 7.

146. *Id.* at 9.

147. *Id.*

148. *Id.*

149. *Id.* at 10.

“gnaw[] with crumbling gray and yellow teeth.”¹⁵⁰ The weak and lame draw together in fear. Sallow-faced children fight and scratch each other for no reason other than despair, “[t]heir thin yellowish blood resembl[ing] dust.”¹⁵¹

One by one the Fadeevs fall away, lost or dead. Only Miron and Nadka stay together. Daily they grow weaker, yet they push on for the land of Arapia. Neither they nor anyone else knows the way: “Distant lands, empty, uncultivated fields of Arapia! Which paths to take, which roads?”¹⁵² Four strangers, fellow travelers to the promised land, begin to trail Nadka and Miron. Miron is awoken at night by someone feeling his legs. Nadka comforts him, rubbing his back with a “gentle inaudible hand.”¹⁵³ By morning, contorted, famished, she dies. Miron drags on. The four strangers, three men and a woman, follow. “Blue sands.”¹⁵⁴ The earth, the sky, the whole landscape becomes blue sand. Against that landscape, the human “soul freezes over, freezes over in blue ice, which doesn’t melt.”¹⁵⁵

Desperately weak, Miron hides under a cart, digging in its spokes for tar to eat. The strangers crouch under a cart nearby. Miron closes his eyes into the flicker of a dream—a field of grain, the dull eyes of a cow, the sharp face of a wolf. Opening his eyes he finds the woman has crept next to him, hammer in hand. She winks. Miron, too weak to resist, shoves sand in his mouth and screws up his eyes, knowing the end.¹⁵⁶

V. HOW BURIAL MOUNDS ARE MADE

“Who buries people in rivers? No matter how you look at it, they’re still baptized. You should bury them in a grave, and if you don’t know how, then you shouldn’t start killing them in the first place.”¹⁵⁷

Unlike the other stories under consideration, *How Burial Mounds are Made* takes the form of a first-person narrative. It begins on a hillside overlooking the sea. The narrator listens to a friend, an archeologist and poet, describe the setting before them. The sea holds the remains of a Greek city destroyed by the ancient Scythians. Beneath their feet the hill too encases the decay of battle. A burial mound.

150. *Id.*

151. *Id.*

152. *Id.*

153. *Id.* at 11.

154. *Id.* at 10.

155. *Id.*

156. *Id.* at 16.

157. Ivanov, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 335.

The scene leads the narrator to recollect a time when he was a young citizen commissar assigned to a remote Siberian station during the Civil War. It was the winter of 1919. He had just recovered from typhus. The weather was bitter cold; the entire region was overcome by cold and disease. The Provincial Executive Committee ordered him to build a burial mound. Eight thousand corpses, regional casualties of the war, had been gathered and dumped at the station. The Committee secretary explained: "The warehouses at the station are jammed full. Corpses are lying on the tracks. Spring isn't far off. The corpses must be buried within three weeks, or else decay will set in and there'll be a real danger of epidemic."¹⁵⁸ To the young commissar, the secretary cast a gelid countenance. Through a voice clipped and telegraphic, he evoked a character as benumbed as the frigid Siberian landscape. "The cleanest thing [about] him was his revolver."¹⁵⁹

Upon receiving his orders, the commissar began his undertaking. He first directed the dynamiting of a huge pit. But the land, frozen clay mixed with layers of sand, "contorted and twisted like a rope, slithered like mud" and denied any hope of entry.¹⁶⁰ Thoughts of digging the hole more slowly with shovels and the backs of several hundred men were quickly dismissed, for the crypt had to be enormous. Days passed. Fear of thaw and epidemic increased as the tall stacks of frozen, naked human bodies remained. Dogs took to snatching shanks; sentries, fearing disease, took to shooting dogs.

The commissar then directed that dynamite charges be placed on a nearby frozen river. He had become convinced that the corpses could be buried under the river's thick ice, if only they could blow open a hole. This plan underway, the ice cracking yet not yielding, a stranger appeared. Glushkin, a once and would-be contractor, came to see the commissar with challenges to his engineering and his ethics. "I've heard tell you want to pollute the river, and so instead of an epidemic some other disaster may befall us," quipped the little man with curly red hair and beard.¹⁶¹ "Who buries people in rivers?" he demanded to know; "You should bury them in a grave, and if you don't know how, then you shouldn't start killing them in the first place."¹⁶²

At Contractor Glushkin's recommendation, the commissar adopted a new plan. Glushkin knew of a deep sand pit nearby. They could remove the snow that filled it, insert the corpses, then cover them with clay and sand mixed with snow. During a sharp cold spell, but with spring advancing, they undertook the plan. The snow was thick and

158. *Id.* at 327.

159. *Id.*

160. *Id.* at 331.

161. *Id.* at 335.

162. *Id.*

heavy; the earth became darker and thicker the deeper they dug. Contractor Glushkin, though "a very pathetic sight" among men with his merry red curls; tenuous, hairy little smile; and silly, knee-length goat-skin coat,¹⁶³ seemed oddly in union with the land. The only unity the commissar and others at the station had with the land was icy combat. Toward the landscape, that endless frozen steppe, as toward each other, they acted with cold indifference if not contempt. Contractor Glushkin was different. He and the landscape worked in harmonious cooperation. As the digging progressed, "Contractor Glushkin flitted around as if he were peeling an egg and not the earth, with his fluttery fluffy chatter and his fluttery syrupy thoughts."¹⁶⁴ He alone expressed any sympathy for the eight thousand: "It's really a crying shame, maybe they fought for an easy rest too, so let's carve out a good resting place for them in the ice, Boss Commissar."¹⁶⁵

Finally the sepulcher was complete. Incarcerated bourgeois were brought from the House of Correction to move the corpses. The earth and the bodies—nature and humanity—collided with each other in clamorous disarray. "The corpses clanked like metal or dry lumber. The earth was like metal. And as the two clanked and banged against one another, fingers, legs, frail baby heads bounced off the corpses."¹⁶⁶ In this maelstrom the commissar strangely grew contemplative: "It was then that I came to understand the fragility, all the ecstasy of the living human body!"¹⁶⁷

The race against spring was narrowly won. But as the earth thawed, the burial mound heaved and settled, swelled and cracked open, over-spreading the dreary station with noisome decay. Under the commissar and Glushkin's direction, workers fighting the stench filled the crack with clay and drove a truck laden with bricks over it until it settled firmly. Atop it they planted a black log cross.

The commissar left, only to return in reminiscence, as on the hillside with his archeologist/poet friend. Yet on that Scythian burial mound years later he could not help but ponder the similarities between that ancient warrior civilization and his own. Centuries separated them, yet just as the sea below the Scythian kurgan would "still cast[] up amphoras filled with rotted black grain,"¹⁶⁸ so too, he imagined, must the fetid odor of civil war still permeate the landscape of that dolorous winter. He recalled how he had envisaged the future of his burial mound as he left that grim and desolate station—

163. *Id.* at 339.

164. *Id.*

165. *Id.*

166. *Id.* at 341.

167. *Id.*

168. *Id.* at 323.

The log will soon fall over and rot away. First a buzzard will perch on it. And then, on the remains of it, an orange butterfly, which in our parts is called a gravegoer. Feather grass will cover the burial mound. Of an evening the clouds will be fine, dry and orange like the dust from the wings of the butterfly.¹⁶⁹

Now on the Scythian kurgan, listening respectfully to his learned friend, the once-commissar added a nihilistic postscript to his reminiscence: "And a thousand winters from now some young archeologist and poet will dig open the burial mound and—will understand nothing!"¹⁷⁰

VI. THE FIELD

Then Milekhin went into the field and saw the dense green slope. From the top, the observation spot where he was standing, the plowed field resembled a green Kolomensk tablecloth. All around it were burnt black tree stumps that looked like glasses of brick tea.

"Would you just look . . .," Milekhin said to himself with awe in his voice . . .¹⁷¹

The Field is Ivanov's most hopeful story in this set. Death is not a theme, and the influence of landscape on human character comes across most positively, suggesting that flourishing in human life can be achieved through harmony with nature. Yet the story still takes a tragic course.

Nikolay Milekhin, a soldier in the Red Army, deserts his unit. The early thaws and warming March sun accentuate the gloom of his barracks, making him yearn for fresh air. He fabricates a story to secure a four-hour leave. Once outside, the feel and crunching sound of snow beneath his feet, the silent ring of icicles melting, the graceful flight of a gull made him feel "warm, satiated, and joyful."¹⁷² The joy brought fond remembrance of his farm; "It's going to be a good harvest," he thought.¹⁷³ Yet once outside, the yen for a few hours in fresh air grew into a desire to go home to the farm for a few months. He stowed away aboard a train.

Soon after returning home the plowing season began. Ebullient with the coming of a quiet and wet April, Milekhin and his wife would chime, "What a blessing;" "What wonders!;" "It's going to be a good harvest."¹⁷⁴ Buds erupted on the trees, reeds replaced ice on the lakes. And Milekhin plowed. "The plow bounced briskly as it cut through the black earth. . . . The plowshare sparkled, Burko's damp hide also spar-

169. *Id.* at 343.

170. *Id.*

171. IVANOV, *The Field*, *supra* note 104, at 118.

172. *Id.* at 113.

173. *Id.* at 115.

174. *Id.* at 117, 118.

kled, and it seemed to Milekhin that the earth was parting by itself—it was tired of lying fallow.”¹⁷⁵

It seemed no time passed before the sowing began. The sun shone warm. The bird-cherry tree came into full bloom. The seed grain fell uniformly on the moist earth. The field promised opulence. “And for some reason it never occurred to Milekhin that in Omsk, in the second platoon, rifle No. 45.728 lay by his bunk, and that he was not Uncle Kolya at all but Nikolay Milekhin, a soldier of the Red Army.”¹⁷⁶ Still, “slight pangs” of culpability would puncture his sleep.¹⁷⁷

From atop the dense green slope Milekhin would stand in wonder. The field was a marvel, a landscape of comfort and abundance. Yet for Milekhin, love of the land, and the springtime relish he took in the field’s rich promise, was not to grow into a bountiful harvest. Before the sowing was finished, a police constable arrived. Milekhin was brought before the provincial military tribunal on charges of desertion. He offered no defense. In its decree, the tribunal ruled: “[F]or absence without leave from the Red Army in a time of intense battle with the enemies of the Socialist Fatherland, one-half of his real and personal property is to be confiscated on behalf of the state.”¹⁷⁸

VII. FERTILITY

And the crane, and the swamp, and the melancholy—all this was pointless, meaningless.¹⁷⁹

The most powerful of Ivanov’s stories discussed here, *Fertility* combines the lush landscape of *The Field* with the devastation of human character found in *The Child* and *Empty Arabia*. The story’s protagonist, Martyn, suffers a mundane existence. A rotund idler, wont to spending working hours daydreaming prostrate in the hayloft, whose boat needs repair it never gets, Martyn attracts little but ignominy and ridicule from his family and neighbors. His wife, Pelageya, “a small, sickly, and emaciated woman who looked like a prematurely hatched baby chick,”¹⁸⁰ would take to screaming at him so venomously as to frighten even herself. His son, Alyoshka, showed him no respect but only the assurance that as soon as he was old enough he would take over the farm and relegate Martyn to the hard, cold sleeping bench. To the villagers, most

175. *Id.* at 118.

176. *Id.*

177. *Id.*

178. *Id.* at 119.

179. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 155.

180. *Id.* at 150.

of whom were self-righteous "Old Believers,"¹⁸¹ Martyn, who was "as difficult to fill . . . with piety as . . . to fill a barrel with spit,"¹⁸² was an unappreciative and disagreeable pariah.

When he could pull himself off the hayloft, Martyn would take refuge in the hills. His village sat in a bowl-shaped valley, the Kok-Tash, surrounded by high glacial peaks. Getting to the hills required a good trek. Martyn would have to pass through the entire village, then the cemetery and pine grove. Beyond the pines came a birch glade. The draw known thereabouts as the Holy Ravine came next, followed by the hills. Martyn loved it there in the foothills of the glacial rise. Away from the nagging of his wife and the reproach of his neighbors, he could relax with his thoughts and dream of treasure. Buckthorn bushes would tangle his knees; spider webs would stick to his face; orange-capped mushrooms would litter the grass at his feet; and Martyn would overflow in rapture. Reading the sky for signs of good harvest, listening for secrets of treasure in the pecking of a woodpecker, he would breathe omniscience. "It seemed to him that he understood his life, that he understood all his needs, that he understood everything he had to do . . ." ¹⁸³

One morning his horse, Serko, came untied and ran off toward the hills. Martyn ambled after him. His dawdling pursuit interrupted by a nap and a wrong turn, Martyn eventually ascended a narrow, steep path that opened into an unfamiliar small ravine. He slipped and fell. To his surprise the ground was cold and wet. He had stumbled upon a stream, hardly a foot wide. "That a brook was flowing here seemed a big violation of order to [Martyn] . . ." ¹⁸⁴ He puzzled over its origin and pressed on to find it. The unfamiliar ravine led into a birch grove. Martyn continued to track the stream. He emerged from the birch grove and stopped cold, aghast. A swamp.

Martyn well knew there were no swamps on the mountain slopes above the Kok-Tash Valley. Yet here before him lay "a swamp, an honest-to-goodness swamp with little mounds overgrown with pungent-smelling sedge." ¹⁸⁵ Struggling, he clogged through it. Churning muck gripped his feet. Eventually, the swamp ended at another small brook. Martyn pulled himself from the mire to trace the brook's upstream flow. As he did so, a bird, startled by his presence, rose from hiding in the swamp and ran awkwardly into flight. A crane.

Martyn followed the brook up into the boulders. He climbed higher and higher until the swamp became obscured by fog. The stream

181. Old Believers are devout members of a separate sect of the Russian Orthodox Church who continue to follow liturgical practices and rituals that the mainstream church hierarchy abandoned in the mid-1600s. See FIGES, *supra* note 88, at 152–53.

182. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 152.

183. *Id.* at 153.

184. *Id.* at 154.

185. *Id.* at 155.

led him to a point atop the highest hill where he could survey the divide created by the ridge of hills. To one side lay the Kok-Tash Valley and his village, to the other the uninhabited Talas Valley. No one could live in the Talas Valley because the glaciers had long inundated it with icy cold streams that pooled on the valley floor into a formidable river. High above Martyn caught a view of the Tilyashsky cliffs, gateway to the glaciers, the "unexplored ice fields, eternal frosts, and death."¹⁸⁶ It was then Martyn saw that an enormous rock mass had broken off one of the Tilyashsky cliffs. "What wonders!" he chortled, as he gazed at the newly formed wide cracks and broken shards of ice, realizing he had discovered the location from which the "undiscovered brook gushed toward freedom."¹⁸⁷ Exhilarated but calm, he hurried downhill. In a meadow he found Serko and meadowsweet in bloom.

Martyn spent the next few days at rest in the hayloft. Spring was advancing, the days were warming. "Everything," he mused, "was as it should be: a light wind during the blossoming, clear weather, and good grain taking form in the stalks. There was the smell of warm straw and dry earth, sparrows played in the dust, and the quail were tapping out 'bobwhite, bobwhite.'"¹⁸⁸ Then one morning Martyn set off again for the hills. To his surprise, the swamp had become quite deep. The brook beyond it was a great deal wider. Landmarks he had noticed previously were now submerged. The cracks he had spied in the cliff had expanded into a broad crevasse. Dread crept over him. The sun seemed to beat hotter by the moment and he knew the real heat of summer was soon to come. "What heat!" he thought. "That glacier's melting there . . ."¹⁸⁹ Just then, a "big piece of ice, the size of a barrel, broke off with a metallic ring and, rocking back and forth, was carried off to the hills by the current."¹⁹⁰ Martyn froze in horror: a river was going to form in the valley, the Kok-Tash. He ran down the mountain as "a feeling of melancholy settled deeper and deeper in his soul, like those layers of ice."¹⁹¹

Back in the village Martyn gave warning. The villagers disregarded him. Crestfallen, he became ever more glum. Then Antip Skorokhodov, the scripture reader, paid him a visit. Martyn and the parson were hardly on good terms. Skorokhodov viewed Martyn as querulous and lazy; Martyn saw the scripture reader as a religious pretender and envied him for his tall, plump, attractive wife. In no time they were exchanging barbs. Skorokhodov accused Martyn of witchcraft, to which Martyn retorted, "[Y]ou fat-bellied devils. . . Why can't you understand that

186. *Id.* at 156.

187. *Id.* at 157.

188. *Id.* at 159.

189. *Id.* at 160.

190. *Id.*

191. *Id.*

the village will be flooded?’¹⁹² Suddenly, Skorokhodov grew uneasy and spoke more softly, but earnestly. “Now you’ve started traipsing through the mountains, and I understand you. . . . You’re just using the water to divert people’s attention, but your main thought is gold. . . . Take me with you to look for gold.’¹⁹³ Appalled, Martyn rebuked the parson for thinking of gold when the village was imperiled. Skorokhodov retreated testily. As Martyn watched him shamble away, “it was hard to tell if he was a priest, a merchant, or a sorcerer. His jacket was long, and so was his hair. In one hand, he had a bunch of herbs and roots, and in the other, a whip.”¹⁹⁴

The next time Martyn ventured into the mountains, he found Skorokhodov hiding in wait in the Holy Ravine, prospecting shovel in hand. He implored Martyn to show him the auriferous vein. Martyn protested but let the scripture reader follow him to the swamp. Skorokhodov was unimpressed. Martyn chided, “This should be dearer to you than gold, you narrow-minded blockhead. The stream flows into the valley, and the valley is like a saucer—no inflow, no outflow. You just try dripping water into a saucer . . . dripping and dripping . . .”¹⁹⁵ Soon he realized his entreaties were wasted on the greedy parson who could think only of gold. Humoring him, Martyn told Skorokhodov to plant his shovel here and there. Every spot where the shovel entered the earth it clanged against rock less than three feet beneath the surface. Finally, the parson complained that there was no gold to be found. “‘And there never was,’ Martyn said getting up. ‘Let’s go home. I thought I’d use my strength to divert the water, but now there’s nothing else to do but blow it up. You should have a talk with the elders.’”¹⁹⁶

Skorokhodov said nothing. Some days later, however, Martyn confronted several village elders and persuaded them to accompany him into the mountains. Riding in Martyn’s cart, the elders admired the fields and the warm morning sky. They took delight in the sweet fragrance of the spring flowers and the early bloom of the buttercups. Then, much to their alarm, before they even left the valley, a large pool of water blocked the path. Beyond it, a gurgling, racing stream had fretted a channel “directly through devout Sidor Labashkin’s field.”¹⁹⁷ Martyn guffawed, “Now choose a name for the river! You’ve got to christen it, you old devils!”¹⁹⁸ The elders sat silently; Sidor Labashkin wept softly, childlike.

In the coming days the village elders consulted regularly. They even included Martyn in their deliberations, as disagreeable as they found

192. *Id.* at 165.

193. *Id.*

194. *Id.* at 166.

195. *Id.* at 167.

196. *Id.* at 168.

197. *Id.* at 174.

198. *Id.*

him. Some peasants harvested their wheat early, fearing loss of the entire crop. Measuring rods stuck in the small lake near the village showed its level to be rising daily. With Martyn as guide, a team of elders ventured into the hills to view for themselves the swamp and the origin of their travails in the Tilyash cliffs. Eventually, the elders reached the same conclusion Martyn had drawn: their only salvation was to blow up the lowest of the ridge of hills, Deer Ridge, so as to divert the glacial waters away from the Kok-Tash and into the godforsaken Talas Valley. A delegation sent to the city found two contractors who agreed to perform the work. Yet the price they demanded was more than the elders wanted to pay.

Soon thereafter rumors spread that Antip Skorokhodov, the preacher, had discovered a gold deposit near the swamp. People from the city flocked to the village. They camped alongside the roads and bought provisions from the villagers who promptly raised the price of bread and milk threefold. Groups of devout elders started journeying to the city, ostensibly to sell gold, but in truth to sell cattle and falsehood. There was no gold. Still, the villagers were flush with new-found wealth. More prospectors arrived from the city. And no one seemed to care much about the rising water in the lake. When Martyn tried one day to check the level, Mitry Savin, one of the lead elders, quickly yanked out his measuring pole. "Don't make God angry, Martynka," he quietly warned.¹⁹⁹

The summer wore on. Prospectors from the city continued to dig away in the hills. Most fields in the valley were harvested early. The water-level in the lake continued to rise, now nearly flooding the village. On some streets the water reached the spokes of wagon wheels. And Martyn became even more outcast, ever more melancholy. The villagers, even those once cordial, refused to speak to him. For the elders had connived a plan and they feared Martyn would ruin it. The elders had tricked the prospectors from the city into dynamiting Deer Ridge under the pretense that it would reveal gold deposits. Martyn well knew what the dynamiting would bring: "The [elders] would just look at the icy stream flowing down into the Talas Valley, only exchange crafty glances, laugh at the stupid city folk, and then go their separate ways. Later the city folk would leave as well and only the inaccessible Tilyash cliffs would be left, and beyond them, the glaciers . . ."²⁰⁰

The day for the dynamiting arrived. Nearly everyone from the village had taken to the hills for the spectacle. Martyn went too, creeping along at a distance by himself. Only the rustling of the birch trees cut the silence of the cemetery as he passed through. Continuing on, he followed his "nameless icy stream [that now] rushed through the fields and through the Holy Ravine, like a silvery blue knife cutting the val-

199. *Id.* at 181.

200. *Id.* at 184.

ley."²⁰¹ At the swamp he felt a pain in his heart, distress for himself but also for the swamp and the stream that "seemed to sense its final hours and rushed down the mountain with a plaintive din, foaming and snorting like a horse and neighing loudly in the birch groves."²⁰² Yearning for appreciation, some small parcel of thanks, yet ostracized and hated more than before, Martyn felt consumed by melancholy and a desire to cry.

Instead of continuing into the hills and joining the others, Martyn decided to stay by the swamp. Aspen trees shook tremulously while the pungent aroma of "drunken satiety" rose from the swamp.²⁰³ "Martyn sat down on a fallen aspen tree and lowered his feet in the stream. A green lizard began to rush around dazedly on the pebbles between his feet. He maliciously broke off its tail with his heel. . . . And the trees in the swamp kept banging and banging against each other"²⁰⁴

Martyn's discomfit intensified. Perhaps, he thought wistfully, the villagers will stop beside him on their way down the mountain and express appreciation for all he had done. Suddenly, "an oily-sounding rumble reached him from the glaciers. The stream seemed to quiver and then began babbling even more loudly."²⁰⁵ Like the aspens, Martyn quavered uncertainly. Like the landscape of his refuge, he seemed to writhe and gurgle. "You won't blow up a damn thing!" he said to himself spitefully. "It would be better if you were washed away, like wood chips! You're only smoking up the sky. . . ."²⁰⁶

Just then Martyn saw someone approaching. Rushing through the aspens came Yelena, the scripture reader's wife, and her young son. "Her face shone with rosy pleasure, . . . and her flaxen, *bylina*-like braids were terrifying, like the glaciers. Like a thorny wild rose on a pitchfork, but dressed in crimson."²⁰⁷ She and her boy were hurrying to join the celebrants. "What did you sit down on the log for?" Yelena asked. "I thought you were a water or a mountain spirit. Are you still sorcer-ing?"²⁰⁸ Martyn lied that he had hurt his ankle. Yelena offered to help him. As she kneaded his ankle Martyn's torment only increased. He "caught sight of the nape of her neck—plump, pink, slightly damp—and of her strong shoulders."²⁰⁹ Her movements and care only called for pity, yet to Martyn she became the personification of his mistreatment, the source of his misery and suffering. The flow of the stream began to recede; the glacial waters were already veering toward the Talas Valley.

201. *Id.* at 183.

202. *Id.*

203. *Id.* at 184.

204. *Id.*

205. *Id.* at 184–85.

206. *Id.* at 185.

207. *Id.*

208. *Id.*

209. *Id.* at 186.

The diversion was successful; the swamp, the brook, the landscape of Martyn's importance was to be no more. "[S]haking all over from fright and an incomprehensible joy,"²¹⁰ he struck Yelena and struck her again. Her boy howling in terror, Yelena suffered in rape the full force of Martyn's anguish.

The attack finished, Yelena and her boy ran off. Martyn sat again on the log. "A vast silence hung over the empty bed of the stream. A crimson aspen leaf appeared to be slipping along the pebbles that weren't dry yet; . . . but everything was without sound, and everything was in vain."²¹¹ The village men, descending from the hills, stopped in a tight cluster before Martyn. Skorokhodov stepped forward. Martyn murmured, "Well, go ahead, hit me."²¹² Skorokhodov asked why and stood uncertainly. Someone in the crowd prodded that the preacher should teach Martyn a lesson for all the gold he had lost them. "'Yeah, for the gold!' Skorokhodov shouted suddenly. 'You sorcerer. How much money on account of you!'"²¹³ The pummeling began. It began with the fists of several men. Martyn "bellow[ed] like a calf."²¹⁴ The beating grew to a frenzied demolition. The men stomped on Martyn's stomach until it "made a cracking noise, [and] a muddy liquid flowed out of his mouth."²¹⁵ One bald old elder jumped on his head, "slipping off of it, as if it were a wet rock."²¹⁶ Finally, his temple crushed by blows from a rock and his fingers bitten off, Martyn expired.

Devoutly, the Old Believers stretched out Martyn's corpse and placed his arms cross-like on his chest. "'We've all sinned together, we'll answer all together,'" said the bald old man, crossing himself.²¹⁷ And the Kok-Tash Valley came to be "filled again with a fertile silence."²¹⁸ Geese honked and the moon shone over its abundant fields. Everything continued "pointless, meaningless."²¹⁹

VIII. LANDSCAPES OF NIHILISM

Nature cruel in her cheerfulness; cynical in her sunrises.²²⁰

The landscapes of Vsevolod Ivanov: landscapes where even butterflies scheme to sting, where even the dust is thin and hungry, where

210. *Id.* at 187.

211. *Id.* at 188.

212. *Id.*

213. *Id.* at 189.

214. *Id.*

215. *Id.*

216. *Id.*

217. *Id.* at 190.

218. *Id.*

219. *Id.* at 155.

220. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *THE WILL TO POWER* 448 (Walter Kaufmann ed., Walter Kaufmann & R.J. Hollingdale trans., Vintage Books 1968) (1888).

burial mounds are built senselessly and continuously over the ages; landscapes of awe-inspiring dense green fields, of meaningless swamps and pointless fertile lands—these are the landscapes in the stories of Ivanov. They are landscapes fecund with literary force, rife in philosophical meaning. They are the landscapes of a potent yet somber environmental ethic. Ivanov presents human life as inextricably intertwined with nature. The land determines the course and destiny of his characters, as individuals and in society. Their attitudes and values are formed, reformed, heightened or debased by the landscapes around them. The land establishes how they act toward one another just as it shapes the moral strength or weakness of their characters.

Many writers, to be sure, have crafted naturalistic tales or philosophical treatises emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans with nature. Yet few writers of fiction or philosophy have bound humans, their destiny, and the moral fiber of their characters as tightly to the natural world as Ivanov. And few, if any, have depicted that bond in hues as nihilistic.

Nihilism represents the idea that human existence is ultimately without purpose and devoid of justified values. First popularized in the nineteenth century by Ivan Turgenev in his 1862 novel *Fathers and Sons*,²²¹ nihilism is most often associated with the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. According to Nietzsche, the conviction underlying nihilism is that “of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes.”²²² Nihilism, that is, assumes a cosmic valuelessness or “nothingness”²²³ resulting from the realization that the values we humans posit as bedrock for our lives are fundamentally without warrant. Existence accordingly becomes untenable, for the feeling of valuelessness entails there is no true aim, end, or unity to life. As Nietzsche put it, “*That the highest values devalue themselves*”²²⁴ leads to the con-

221. See IVAN S. TURGENEV, *FATHERS AND SONS* (Lucy M. Cores rev. & ed., Constance Garnett trans., Walter J. Black 1942) (1862).

222. NIETZSCHE, *THE WILL TO POWER*, *supra* note 220, at 9; accord HANNAH ARENDT, *1 THE LIFE OF THE MIND: THINKING* 176 (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1977) (1971) (characterizing nihilism as a creed that presents a “danger inherent in the thinking activity itself,” by demanding that “[a]ll critical examinations . . . go through a stage of at least hypothetically negating accepted opinions and ‘values’ by searching out their implications and tacit assumptions”); ALEXANDER NEHAMAS, *NIETZSCHE: LIFE AS LITERATURE* 71 (1985) (describing the “fundamental assumption” of nihilism as “that if some single standard is not good for everyone and for all time, then no standard is good for anyone at any time”).

223. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS* 68 (Richard Polt trans., Hackett Publ’g 1997) (1889).

224. NIETZSCHE, *THE WILL TO POWER*, *supra* note 220, at 9 (emphasis in original).

clusion of philosophical nihilism “that all that happens is meaningless and in vain.”²²⁵

Nihilism so understood resonates throughout the stories of Ivanov. His environmental ethic posits unity with nature—with landscape—as the highest value for human life. Only through harmonious interaction with nature do any of his protagonists achieve even a mite of happiness or some degree of ethical understanding or growth. Recall Nikolay Milekhin from *The Field*. No sooner had he left his dreary barracks than the feel, the sights and sounds of winter melting into the promise of spring made him feel “warm, satiated, and joyful.”²²⁶ Back home in his field, he rejoiced exuberantly in the blossoming of the landscape (“What a blessing”²²⁷) and the feel of “the earth [seemingly] parting by itself” in a mystical union of human/nature harmony and resplendence.²²⁸

Likewise Martyn, the tragic figure of *Fertility*, found the scant pleasure he took in life in his solitary journeys into the hills above the Kok-Tash Valley. Outcast by society, a stranger among even his own family, Martyn would glow with an inner calm amid the bramble, the pungence, and the austere vistas of his mountain refuge. It was as if in the valley below he was dead wood, pecked endlessly into opprobrium by his neighbors and family. But “a dead piece of wood is a dead piece of wood, and not a man.”²²⁹ In the hills, shadowed by the Tilyashsky cliffs, the pecking of the woodpecker and the sublime voice of the landscape transformed Martyn into a man with dreams of treasure and a sense of self. In those hills “[i]t seemed to him that he understood his life, that he understood all his needs, that he understood everything he had to do.”²³⁰ Just as the glacial waters made the swamp more buoyant daily and continually replenished the stream in its “gush[] toward freedom,”²³¹ Martyn absorbed from the mountain landscape a sense of wonder and a zest for freedom that left him invigorated and joyful.

The effect of landscape on human character in *How Burial Mounds are Made*, insofar as it is positive and affirming, takes a more subtle course. Contractor Glushkin, like Martyn, “a very pathetic sight” in the society of men,²³² assumed a vital, effusive character when left free to work the landscape. He dug into the earth “as if he were peeling an egg.”²³³ “[F]litt[ing] around . . . with his fluttery fluffy chatter and his

225. *Id.* at 23.

226. IVANOV, *The Field*, *supra* note 104, at 113.

227. *Id.* at 117.

228. *Id.* at 118.

229. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 167.

230. *Id.* at 153.

231. *Id.* at 157.

232. Ivanov, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 339.

233. *Id.*

fluttery syrupy thoughts,"²³⁴ Glushkin seemingly engaged the land into partnership toward the unified goal of building the burial mound. Yet his harmony with the landscape curiously found its greatest expression in the form of sympathy for the 8,000 corpses. Until the end of the story it was only Glushkin, a pathetic social misfit, who expressed any ethical concern for the nameless dead: "Who buries people in rivers? No matter how you look at it, they're still baptized. You should bury them in a grave;"²³⁵ "It's really a crying shame, maybe they fought for an easy rest too, so let's carve out a good resting place for them in the ice, Boss Commissar."²³⁶ As for the commissar, he approached the task of building the burial mound with an engineer's stoicism. Only at the end did he reveal a sense of morality. The fury of corpses and pit coming together in sepulchral perpetuity awoke in him an appreciation for the value of human life: "It was then that I came to understand the fragility, all the ecstasy of the living human body!"²³⁷

The Field, Fertility, and How Burial Mounds are Made thus each present characters who attain some level of happiness or growth in ethical understanding as a result of their interconnection with the landscapes around them. To that extent, these stories affirm unity with nature as a positive value—indeed, the highest value—for human life. Yet for Ivanov, harmony with nature, with landscape, is an ephemeral value. Landscape provides the cradle not only of human happiness but of our despair. It is a value that devalues itself, revealing life to be meaningless and without purpose. In *The Field*, for example, Milekhin took such unqualified joy in the blossoming of his farm landscape that he fell oblivious to his military deserter status. When the police constable arrived, Milekhin accepted his arrest with vacant resignation. Ironically, his profound happiness caused the destruction, the punitive appropriation, of the very landscape that produced it. Yet this irony only underscores the depth of Ivanov's nihilism. For as Nietzsche argued, the nihilistic artist is an "enem[y] of sentimental emotions," a cynic who perceives "[n]o justice in history, no goodness in nature."²³⁸ The nihilist regards nature as "cruel in her cheerfulness; cynical in her sunrises," and prefers not to disguise or conceal her "magnificent *indifference* to good and evil."²³⁹ Such an out-and-out nihilism infuses Ivanov's landscape ethic. We see this quite starkly and without qualification in the first two stories we considered: *The Child* and *Empty Arapia*.

234. *Id.*

235. *Id.* at 335 (citation omitted).

236. *Id.* at 339.

237. *Id.* at 341.

238. NIETZSCHE, *THE WILL TO POWER*, *supra* note 220, at 448.

239. *Id.* (emphasis in original).

From its opening sentence ("Mongolia is a wild and joyless beast!"²⁴⁰) and attendant implication that humans living in a wild and joyless land must have hearts to match, *The Child* entwines human nature with landscape in a forbidding and unsettling way. The Mongolian landscape Ivanov paints is truly joyless—a smoldering, "unplowed, and wild"²⁴¹ alien landscape where "[t]he sands smoked under the sun,"²⁴² where "the grasses in the steppe" had been burned by the sun,²⁴³ where "the very horizon swayed with the rosy dust of the sands,"²⁴⁴ where everything was cruel and beastly: "rock . . . water . . . even . . . butterfly."²⁴⁵ Against this landscape, Ivanov suggests that humans will come to have hearts that are "mica-like, worthless, transparent through and through"²⁴⁶ and characters that are "vicious, like wolves in the spring."²⁴⁷ The one exception appears to be Afanasy Petrovich. The whimpering paymaster seems to have a moral character that rises above the landscape. He entreated his fellow partisans not to shoot the White officers and upbraided one afterwards: "You're a monster . . . You have no feelings, you bastard."²⁴⁸ He embraced the orphaned infant with mournful song and tears of sympathy. Yet Afanasy Petrovich succumbed to the landscape. In kidnapping the Kirghiz woman and then taking her child into the desert to die, the once-childlike and morally innocent Afanasy Petrovich acted from a character scorched and debased by the joyless landscape. Like the others, the landscape had hardened his heart into rock: vicious, monstrous, and amoral.

Empty Arapia similarly presents a cruel landscape that educes equal cruelty in human character. The landscape offers nothing but "[l]ands gnawed bare. From the sky to the earth—a thin-ribbed wind . . . —thin hungry dust."²⁴⁹ Within this landscape, the pilgrims in search of the promised land of Arapia gnaw bark from trees, become ever more ghostly thin-ribbed, and metamorphose into dust: "hands . . . like dust;"²⁵⁰ "dust-covered face[s];"²⁵¹ "head[s] overgrown with dusty hair;"²⁵² "thin yellowish blood resembl[ing] dust."²⁵³ Human nature, in Ivanov's world, fully mirrors the natural landscape. Where "[t]he whole earth . . .

240. IVANOV, *The Child*, *supra* note 101, at 17.

241. *Id.* at 18.

242. *Id.* at 19.

243. *Id.*

244. *Id.*

245. *Id.* at 17.

246. *Id.*

247. *Id.*

248. *Id.* at 21.

249. IVANOV, *Empty Arapia*, *supra* note 102, at 4.

250. *Id.* at 5.

251. *Id.*

252. *Id.* at 8.

253. *Id.* at 10.

[a]nd the sky is blue sand,"²⁵⁴ the human "soul freezes over . . . in blue ice, which doesn't melt."²⁵⁵ As Miron Fadeev learned to his horror, a landscape that only devours produces humans who devour each other.

The Child and *Empty Arapia* thus impart Ivanov's nihilism in blunt relief. No "sentimental emotions" sully these stories. Consistent with Nietzsche's recipe for nihilistic art, the stories present absolutely "no goodness in nature," only landscapes cruel, cynical, and "magnificent[ly] *indifferen[t]* to good and evil."²⁵⁶ The stories stand as masterpieces of this artistic vision of nature. Still, it is *Fertility* and *How Burial Mounds are Made* that show the truly radical edge to Ivanov's nihilism. Nietzsche characterized the "thorough-going nihilist"²⁵⁷ as one who not only perceives everything as in vain and pointless, and who decries all values as empty and "deserv[ing] to perish," but who actually "helps to destroy" them.²⁵⁸ That Ivanov is "thorough-going" in this sense comes across most evidently in *Fertility* and *How Burial Mounds are Made*. Those stories match *The Child* and *Empty Arapia* in portraying nature as blithely indifferent to the torment, misery, and moral depravity that humans experience in reflection of her landscapes. Yet unlike *The Child* and *Empty Arapia* (but like *The Field*), *Fertility* and *How Burial Mounds are Made* depict nature with a degree of goodness and value. As noted above, they offer characters that experience at least some happiness or ethical growth by virtue of their interconnections with nature. Yet each story ends in destruction—the devaluing of nature as meaningless, the ruin of happiness, the emergent insight that everything is without point or purpose.

The parallel destructions of the swamp, the stream, and of Martyn in *Fertility* stand at the apex of Ivanov's nihilistic imagery of human bondage to landscape. Like Milekhin from *The Field*, Martyn exulted in the sanctuary of his chosen landscape. Alone in the hills above the Kok-Tash Valley he would suppress his discontent and leprous reputation beneath dreams of treasure, an appreciation of nature's wonder, and a bold sense of self-worth. Yet his transformation was transient and ultimately catastrophic. He received no reward for warning his fellow villagers of the impending flood. The elders only ostracized him further as they conspired to divert the glacial waters. Their plan worked. Yet as the swamp receded and the stream dried up, so did Martyn recoil and die. The stream "seemed to sense its final hours and rushed down the mountain with a plaintive din, foaming and snorting like a horse and neighing

254. *Id.*

255. *Id.*

256. NIETZSCHE, THE WILL TO POWER, *supra* note 220, at 448 (emphasis in original).

257. *Id.* at 18.

258. *Id.*

loudly in the birch groves."²⁵⁹ The swamp emitted the scent of "drunken satiety" as its "trees . . . kept banging and banging against each other."²⁶⁰ Mirroring his landscape, Martyn plaintively cursed his neighbors and his fate. "[F]oaming and snorting," as it were, he maliciously smote nature, breaking off the tail of the green lizard; "banging and banging" against the malevolence of his neighbors and the callous indifference of nature he raped Yelena, the pastor's wife. Quivering like the aspen leaves he sat waiting for the village men to tear into him as they had Deer Ridge. When the beating began, he loudly "bellow[ed] like a calf,"²⁶¹ just as the stream, after the dynamiting, "began babbling even more loudly."²⁶² And just as a "crimson aspen leaf appeared to be slipping along the pebbles that weren't dry yet" as the stream gurgled toward silence, the bald Old Believer pounced on Martyn's head "slipping off of it, as if it were a wet rock" just before he gasped his final breaths.²⁶³ The hills, the swamp, the glacial stream. This was the landscape of Martyn's happiness, the only goodness and value in his life. As it expired so did he, leaving "everything . . . without sound, and . . . in vain."²⁶⁴

As with Milekhin from *The Field*, Martyn's destruction came not from the landscape itself, but from other people. The climactic devastation (deaths) in *The Child* and *Empty Arapia* also followed from human evil, not that of nature, despite the brutality of the landscapes in those stories. The thematic difference between the stories lies in the fleeting appearance of happiness resulting from unity with nature in *The Field* and *Fertility*, compared with nothing but bleak misery in the indiscriminately harsh landscapes of *The Child* and *Empty Arapia*. *How Burial Mounds are Made* occupies a curious middle ground. The story's sepulchral landscape produced neither happiness nor misery. Contractor Glushkin enjoyed an odd harmony with the landscape he carved open, yet even with his "fluttery syrupy thoughts,"²⁶⁵ he was hardly a figure of joy. The commissar struggled against the frozen landscape but was in no sense miserable. They both, especially Glushkin, exhibited some compassion for the 8,000 remains of wasted human life. In that respect, *How Burial Mounds are Made* connects landscape to the moral quality of human character in a positive way missing in the other stories.

Yet the singular contribution of *How Burial Mounds are Made* is otherwise. The story adds a final element to Ivanov's nihilism: *the nothingness of human understanding*. Atop the Scythian kurgan with his archeologist and poet friend, the once-commissar reflected on the bitter-

259. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 183.

260. *Id.* at 184.

261. *Id.* at 189.

262. *Id.* at 185.

263. *Id.* at 188-89.

264. *Id.* at 188.

265. Ivanov, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 339.

ness of landscapes, the human propensity for warfare, and “the primitive art of the burial mounds.”²⁶⁶ His reflection adds not only a postscript to how he had envisioned the effect of time on his burial mound (“a buzzard,” “an orange butterfly,” “[f]eather grass”²⁶⁷) but the summital terminus to Ivanov’s environmental nihilism. Across the five stories we have considered, Ivanov debunks just as he posits nature as the highest value for human life. The happiness humans enjoy, if any, and the moral quality of our characters, high or low, are determined by landscape. Some landscapes are bucolic (Milekhin’s field; Martyn’s hills); others are beastly and joyless (*The Child*); dry, dusty, and consumptive (*Empty Arapia*); or cold and impenetrable as metal (*How Burial Mounds are Made*). In the fashion of nihilism, Ivanov offers his characters happiness and comfort only as a fleet road to tragedy. His pastoral landscapes quickly fade into stygian and brutal domains. That nature to which Ivanov assigns value he in turn renders valueless and destroys. In his nihilistic world, the sounds of nature are eerie and foreboding (“The trees made a knocking sound with their dry white bones;”²⁶⁸ “And the trees in the swamp kept banging and banging against each other”²⁶⁹); the look of nature is cold and threatening (“The earth was like metal;”²⁷⁰ “Beyond the cliffs lay the glaciers: unexplored ice fields, eternal frosts, and death”²⁷¹); the principal gifts of nature are dust and despair (*The Child*; *Empty Arapia*); and even that in nature which appears most harmless, beautiful, and gentle—the butterfly—“schemes to sting”²⁷² and dances jocosely on the graves of pitiful humanity (*How Burial Mounds are Made*).

Against the cold, the dust, and the knocking, Ivanov could have offered hope. He did not. More than frost or dust, the truly eternal in his nihilistic ethic are nature’s “magnificent indifference”²⁷³ and humanity’s instinctive cruelty and ignorance. *How Burial Mounds are Made* confirms this “thorough-goingness” of Ivanov’s nihilism. The once-commissar begins his narration listening respectfully to his friend’s learned discourse on ancient history. Yet the commissar’s reflection on the burial mound of his own past makes him hear the disquisition as no more than intellectual gibberish. His conclusion is Ivanov’s for humanity’s fate. A thousand years hence “some young archeologist and poet will dig open the burial mound[s]”²⁷⁴ of our own barbarity, and the sea will “cast[] up

266. *Id.* at 323.

267. *Id.* at 343.

268. IVANOV, *Empty Arapia*, *supra* note 102, at 8.

269. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 184.

270. IVANOV, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 341.

271. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 156.

272. IVANOV, *The Child*, *supra* note 101, at 17.

273. NIETZSCHE, *THE WILL TO POWER*, *supra* note 220, at 448 (emphasis in original).

274. IVANOV, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 343.

amphoras²⁷⁵ in memory of us too. Nothing will have changed. Humans will still shed tears for their own children as they murder the children of others with "scorched-hearted" indifference.²⁷⁶ Faced with brutal landscapes, people will cannibalize each other without a tincture of remorse. Landscapes and women will be raped in "pointless, meaningless" pursuit of wealth and recognition.²⁷⁷ And nature will bang against itself, dust thin and hungry will stifle hopes and dreams, and humans still "will understand nothing!"²⁷⁸

IX. NIHILISM FROM SOVIET LITERATURE TO LAW

The landscape ethic of Vsevolod Ivanov thus presents a somber, nihilistic vision of the human condition. As noted above, by the late 1920s Ivanov bridled the gloomy tendency of his fiction under pressure from the RAPP critics.²⁷⁹ He began to write works that promoted the modernization and industrialization of the U.S.S.R. and whose characters were less unbalanced and antisocial.²⁸⁰ Yet the works of Ivanov we have considered stand in a peculiar relationship to the Soviet attitude toward environmental law and policy that emerged under Stalin's First Five-Year Plan. For just as Ivanov plaited the destiny of humans with landscapes hostile and forbidding, so too did Stalin view nature as a cruel adversary.

Ivanov's stories subject humans metaphorically to the imprisonment of nature. Landscape doggedly determines his characters' fortunes. The bitter steppe of *The Child* converts the meek paymaster Afanasy Petrovich into a scheming monster; the desertification of the landscape in *Empty Arapia* turns pilgrims in search of an elusive promised land into cannibals; in *The Field*, Milekhin's uncontrollable lust for the fecund spring soil leads to the confiscation of the very land he cherished. The only recourse Ivanov offers from nature's bondage is for humans to invert the subjugation, to become themselves master of the landscapes that have enslaved them. *How Burial Mounds are Made* thus finds the misfit Contractor Glushkin flutter in curious harmony with the frozen steppe as he carves it into a massive sepulcher. And in *Fertility*, the village elders use trickery and the engineering scheme of dynamiting Deer Ridge to redirect the renegade glacial stream away from their Kok-Tash Valley into the uninhabited Talas Valley.

Stalin likewise sought to vanquish nature. His First Five-Year Plan initiated the attitude that persisted in the Kremlin until the 1960s that

275. *Id.* at 323.

276. IVANOV, *The Child*, *supra* note 101, at 22.

277. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 155.

278. Ivanov, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 343.

279. *See supra* text accompanying notes 88-113.

280. *See Brougher, Ivanov*, *supra* note 40, at 167.

nature is merely "an annoying obstacle that must be decisively defeated."²⁸¹ Stalin's response to nature's oppression parrots that of Contractor Glushkin and *Fertility's* Old Believers. His byword "the great transformation of nature"²⁸² stood for the platitude that the environment could be dominated, transformed, and redirected by feats of modern engineering to serve human ends.²⁸³ This shibboleth left as its mark diversion, desiccation, and ecosystem disturbance.

Beginning in the early 1930s and continuing for decades, the U.S.S.R. undertook a series of major projects of environmental transformation. Many, as in *Fertility*, involved the redirection or other modification of natural waters, often with devastating ecological effects. The Don and Kuban Rivers, each of which flow through Southwest Russia into the Sea of Azov, were diverted for irrigation purposes.²⁸⁴ The diversions made the shallow Azov so salty as to seriously degrade its water ecosystem and reduce its fish catch by over two-thirds.²⁸⁵ Likewise, at the border of the then-Kazakh and Uzbekh SSRs, Soviet engineers diverted water in such quantities for cotton irrigation from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers, the main sources of fresh water for the Aral Sea, that the sea became so saline that it could support almost no fish populations at all.²⁸⁶ Once the world's fourth largest lake,²⁸⁷ the Aral Sea has lost roughly half its surface area and volume,²⁸⁸ becoming in the process a brine and toxic shadow of its natural state.²⁸⁹ Engineered reduction of stream inflow to the beautiful alpine Lake Sevan in Armenia decreased

281. PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 245.

282. See WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 88; WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 169.

283. See WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 88–93; WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 168–69, 233–35; ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 24–36.

284. See PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 58, 89.

285. See *id.* at 58, 88–89; Ihor Stebelsky, *Ukraine, in ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS IN THE FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS* 141, 153 (Philip R. Pryde ed., 1995); V. Kametsev, *The Fish of Our Table*, LITERATURNAYA GAZETA, Sept. 12, 1984, at 10; D. Tolmazin, *Black Sea—Dead Sea?*, NEW SCIENTIST, Dec. 6, 1979, at 767.

286. See, e.g., WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 415; Michael Wines, *Grand Soviet Scheme for Sharing Water in Central Asia is Foundering*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 9, 2002, at A14, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D03E4DA1F3BF93AA35751C1A9649C8B63&sc=8&sp=8&pagewanted=all>. See generally PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 221–26 (providing detailed overview of the Aral Sea desiccation problem).

287. PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 221; David R. Smith, *Kazakhstan, in ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS IN THE FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS*, *supra* note 285, at 251, 266.

288. See PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 221–22; WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 415; Smith, *supra* note 287, at 266–67.

289. See, e.g., WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 415; Smith, *supra* note 287, at 266–67. See generally CREEPING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARAL SEA BASIN (Michael H. Glantz ed., 1999).

the lake's volume by over forty percent and lowered its level roughly nineteen meters.²⁹⁰ The diversion, undertaken for hydropower generation and irrigation for agricultural expansion,²⁹¹ left a desiccated lake with reduced fish catches,²⁹² an altered lake hydrobiology,²⁹³ and an accelerated eutrophication process.²⁹⁴ Lake Issyk-Kul', in the former Kirghiz SSR, the world's second largest mountain lake,²⁹⁵ similarly had its water level reduced substantially due to extensive diversion for irrigation.²⁹⁶ Most notorious is the White Sea-Baltic Canal, completed in 1933.²⁹⁷ Reminiscent of *How Burial Mounds are Made*, the canal was channeled hurriedly under extreme conditions through ice and rock, largely using prison labor.²⁹⁸ Yet it netted minimal economic or transportation benefits.²⁹⁹ Very unlike Ivanov's story, then, which depicted a

290. See REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, LAKE SEVAN ACTION PROGRAM 2 (1999); REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAM 10 (1999); Arevhat Grigoryan, *Sevan, A Reflection of Armenia's Ecological Problems*, available at <http://www.hetq.am/eng/ecology/0501-sevan.html>; Armen L. Velesyan, *Armenia*, in ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS IN THE FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS, *supra* note 285, at 221, 229.

291. See R.H. HOVHANNISYAN, OZERO SEVAN VCHERA, SEGODNYA [LAKE SEVAN YESTERDAY, TODAY] 8 (1994); REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, LAKE SEVAN ACTION PROGRAM, *supra* note 290, at 2–3; Velesyan, *supra* note 290, at 229.

292. See REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, LAKE SEVAN ACTION PROGRAM, *supra* note 290, at 18–19; Douglas Lind & Lusine Taslakyian, *Restoring the Fallen Blue Sky: Management Issues and Environmental Legislation for Lake Sevan, Armenia*, 29 ENVIRONS: ENVTL. L. & POL'Y J. 29, 45–46 (2005); K. Savvaitova & T. Petr, *Fish and Fisheries in Lake Sevan, Armenia, and in Some Other High Altitude Lakes of Caucasus* (FAO Fisheries Technical Papers, T385, 1999), available at http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/DOCREP/003/X2614E/x2614e13.htm.

293. See HOVHANNISYAN, *supra* note 291, at 233–58; Lind & Taslakyian, *supra* note 292, at 42–46.

294. REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, LAKE SEVAN ACTION PROGRAM, *supra* note 290, at 2, 17–19; N. Legovich, *Changes in the Qualitative Composition of Phytoplankton in Lake Sevan Due to its Water Level Lowering*, 12 BIOLOGICAL J. ARMENIA 31, 31–42 (1968).

295. W.B. Lyons et al., *A Preliminary Assessment of the Geochemical Dynamics of Issyk-Kul Lake, Kirghizstan*, 46 LIMNOLOGY & OCEANOGRAPHY 713, 713 (2001).

296. See JANCAR, *supra* note 32, at 174.

297. On the history of construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, see CYNTHIA A. RUDER, MAKING HISTORY FOR STALIN: THE STORY OF THE BELOMOR CANAL (1998); THE WHITE SEA CANAL: BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW CANAL BETWEEN THE WHITE SEA AND THE BALTIC SEA (M. Gorky, L. Auerbach & S.G. Firin eds., London, John Lane 1935); Mikhail Morukov, *The White Sea-Baltic Canal*, in THE ECONOMICS OF FORCED LABOR 151 (Paul R. Gregory & Valery Lazarev eds., 2003).

298. See ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 26; Morukov, *supra* note 297, at 159–61. The White Sea-Baltic Canal project proceeded at such a hectic pace that at times over 100,000 prisoners were working on its construction. See Oleg Khlevnyuk, *The Economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930–1953: The Scale, Structure, and Trends of Development*, in THE ECONOMICS OF FORCED LABOR, *supra* note 297, at 43, 46; Morukov, *supra* note 297, at 159.

299. See ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 26; Morukov, *supra* note 297, at 161–62.

construction project aimed at burying 8,000 unfortunate casualties of war, construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal caused the unnecessary death of scores of forced laborers for little end other than a show of Stalin's bellicose chauvinism.³⁰⁰

Concern over the ecological state of the country's water resources appeared in the U.S.S.R. by the late 1950s.³⁰¹ Beginning in 1956, the Soviet Union enacted some significant environmental measures,³⁰² including legislation to protect its water resources.³⁰³ Yet the government's approach to resource management remained highly technological, offering solutions to environmental problems through engineering even greater dominance over nature. The devastating effects of Lake Sevan's desiccation, for example, were well known by 1960.³⁰⁴ Soviet scientists responded to the lake's swift deterioration by proposing a second-order diversion project—the building of a tunnel to divert water from the Arpa River to replenish the lake for that diverted from its natural inflows.³⁰⁵ This solution, the Arpa-Sevan Tunnel, became operable in 1981.³⁰⁶ A few years later, the Soviet government implemented the same strategy to address the desiccation of Lake Issyk-Kul', constructing dams and a tunnel to divert water into the lake from a nearby river.³⁰⁷

Just as the village elders in Ivanov's *Fertility* sought to rectify their environmental threat by diverting the glacial stream, the Soviet scientists and engineers thus saw the reconfiguration of rivers as a sound solution to their own self-engineered environmental problems. The Soviet political reforms of the 1980s, however, forestalled the most grandiose of the

300. See, e.g., ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 26 ("Completed in only twenty months by the Hydrological Planning Agency of the NKVD (using largely prison labor), the canal's central purpose was political—to impress the citizenry with Stalin's and the Party's ability to achieve impossible victories over nature."); Morukov, *supra* note 297, at 159 (noting that over 1,400 convict laborers died in the canal's construction during 1931 alone, the first year of the building process).

301. See, e.g., HOVHANNISYAN, *supra* note 291, at 9; WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 356–61; Zile, *supra* note 32, at 83.

302. See GOLDMAN, *supra* note 20, at 30 (noting how from 1956 to 1960, the U.S.S.R. adopted at least ten criminal code provisions and nineteen executive decrees addressing conservation in the then-Russian Republic alone).

303. See, e.g., PRINCIPLES OF WATER LEGISLATION OF THE U.S.S.R. AND THE UNION REPUBLICS, PRAVDA, Dec. 12, 1970, at 2–3, reprinted in GOLDMAN, *supra* note 20, at app. C; RUSSIAN REPUBLIC LAW: ON CONSERVATION IN THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC, PRAVDA, Oct. 28, 1960, at 2, reprinted in GOLDMAN, *supra* note 20, at app. B.

304. See HOVHANNISYAN, *supra* note 291, at 9; M. Meybeck, M. Akopian & V. Andreassian, *What Happened to Lake Sevan? [sic]*, available at <http://www.limnology.org/news/23/sevan.html>.

305. REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, LAKE SEVAN ACTION PROGRAM, *supra* note 290, at 7; Lind & Taslakyian, *supra* note 292, at 34, 87; Meybeck, Akopian & Andreassian, *supra* note 304.

306. See Lind & Taslakyian, *supra* note 292, at 34; Meybeck, Akopian & Andreassian, *supra* note 304.

307. JANCAR, *supra* note 32, at 174–75.

river diversion plans, a massive scheme to divert north-flowing rivers in Siberia away from the taiga and send them southward to water the Central Asian steppe. Extolled by its advocates in the 1970s and 1980s as "the project of the century,"³⁰⁸ this far-reaching plan, were it to have been fully implemented, would have eclipsed anything undertaken during Stalin's campaign to transform nature. The plan called in part for rerouting several rivers for purposes of agricultural irrigation in the steppe and the southern part of European Russia.³⁰⁹ In this respect, it merely continued the longstanding Soviet desire for agricultural expansion. Yet the river rerouting plan contained a more substantial ecologically-driven objective. The Soviet managers sought to use the north-flowing rivers to protect and preserve the nation's threatened but invaluable inland seas, the Caspian, the Azov, and the Aral.³¹⁰ A report underwritten by the prestigious Gidroproekt Institute in 1967 called the situation facing those seas "urgent."³¹¹ To avert their further ecological decline, the authors of the report issued an exigent call for even further environmental transformation:

The preservation of these unique water bodies, which are of primary importance for the fishing, navigation, chemical industry, and other branches of industry and for the conservation of the natural environment, is possible by partially diverting the flow of northern rivers located in the European part of the country into the catchments of the Caspian and Azov Seas, and those from West Siberian rivers into the Aral Sea.³¹²

While preservation of the inland seas in principle easily rallied support from the Soviet people, the river diversion scheme took the conquest of nature too far. Opposition led by several prominent scientists, rising to the level of what has been called a "revolt of the experts,"³¹³ galvanized unprecedented environmental activism in the U.S.S.R. and curtailed the plan's progress.³¹⁴ By summer 1986, in the first full year of Mikhail Gorbachev's leadership of the Communist Party and less than four months after the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown,³¹⁵ further progress on

308. See WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 414.

309. See, e.g., PHILIP R. PRYDE, CONSERVATION IN THE SOVIET UNION 82-83 (1972); WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 414-15; ZIEGLER, *supra* note 14, at 18.

310. E.g., PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 228-29; WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 415.

311. N.V. Razin & G.G. Gangardt, *Utilization and Conservation of USSR Water Resources*, 1 HYDROTECHNICAL CONSTRUCTION 497, 504 (1967).

312. *Id.* at 503.

313. WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 420.

314. See *id.* at 418-23.

315. On the history of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, see SVETLANA ALEXIEVICH, VOICES FROM CHERNOBYL: THE ORAL HISTORY OF A NUCLEAR DISASTER (2006); W. SCOTT INGRAM, THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR DISASTER (2005); R.F. MOULD,

the river diversion project officially was halted.³¹⁶ In the end, the elephantine plan received only the most modest implementation.³¹⁷

The diversion scheme of the Old Believers in Ivanov's *Fertility* faced only the opposition of the curmudgeonly Martyn. Elder Mitry Savin's stern warning, "Don't make God angry, Martynka," was enough to silence him.³¹⁸ Emboldened by the political and environmental turmoil of the mid-1980s, the anti-diversion coalition in the Soviet Union fared better than Martyn. Yet the scuttling of the northern river rerouting project, coming as it did on the front-end of the Soviet Union's collapse, does little to hide the parallels between Ivanov's dark nihilism and the U.S.S.R.'s legacy of environmental transformation.

Ivanov's landscapes portray humans as morally frail subjects, enfeebled in body and spirit by the harsh conditions of reality coming from their relentless sovereign master, nature. Only by inverting the master-servant relationship, by coming to dominate and transform nature, do his characters think they can avoid the wretched fates nature, in its sublime indifference, has cast for them. Stalin thought the same. Nature untamed was to him wasteful, inefficient, and hostile.³¹⁹ His nation contained the vast, forbidding landscapes that formed the settings of Ivanov's stories. To subdue those landscapes and transform them, even at the expense of desiccating lakes and diverting rivers, was to triumph over nature, not to destroy resources of intrinsic natural value.

Yet for Stalin's Soviet Union as for Ivanov's protagonists, the conquest of nature led only to shallow gratification and a discordant armistice. The success of *Fertility's* Old Believers in diverting the surging glacial stream resulted only in "pointless, meaningless . . . fertile silence."³²⁰ The once-commissar in *How Burial Mounds are Made* came to realize, from viewing the pointless burial mounds of ancient times, how tragic and meaningless was his own grim experience in transforming nature. Humanity, he reflected, had learned nothing from centuries of senseless barbarism.³²¹ That lesson emerges as well from the Soviet Union's history of environmental management. The U.S.S.R. did transform the Central Asian steppe into a region renowned for cotton growing.³²² It did increase agricultural productivity by a good margin in the

CHERNOBYL RECORD: THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF THE CHERNOBYL CATASTROPHE (2000).

316. See WEINER, LITTLE CORNER, *supra* note 32, at 426–27.

317. See *id.* at 414–28 (providing a detailed history of the plan to reroute the north-flowing rivers and the controversy it generated).

318. See IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 181.

319. See PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 245; WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 168, 234–35.

320. IVANOV, *Fertility*, *supra* note 105, at 155, 190.

321. See *supra* text accompanying notes 168–70.

322. See, e.g., WINES, *supra* note 286.

areas irrigated by its desiccated mountain lakes.³²³ Yet its conquests over nature left in their aftermath environmental despoliation and the philosophy that the need to overcome inhospitable landscapes justifies any level of brutality to humans and nature alike.

The environmental legacy of the Soviet Union's seventy-year history thus looms every bit as nihilistic as Ivanov's landscape ethic. Ivanov posited nature as the highest source of value for human life.³²⁴ Yet he did so only provisionally. The unifying theme of his landscape stories is the nihilistic devaluation of nature.³²⁵ Likewise, Marx had perceived value in nature and saw communism as, in part, a way to reconcile the alienation of humans from it.³²⁶ Stalin, however, disparaged nature as an annoying but redoubtable adversary liable to impose great injury unless vanquished and transformed.³²⁷ As such, Stalin transformed nature in communist ideology even more fully than he converted the Soviet Union's physical landscapes.

It has been said that the U.S.S.R. assumed in general a nihilistic attitude toward law.³²⁸ Stalin's great transformation of nature propelled the control and management of the environment to the forefront of that nihilistic legal agenda. By the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, however, it was the ideology of Soviet Marxism more than anything that the nation's environmental history had debased. For that history of environmental transformation underscored the pointed moral of Ivanov's *How Burial Mounds are Made*: the nothingness of human understanding. Stalin's campaign to vanquish and remake nature left not just a bequest of desiccation and diversion, but a testament to the delusion of human domination over nature. Where Marx had envisioned communism as the curative for the alienation of humans from nature, Stalin turned it into a forge for solidifying that alienation. Thus, in the end, the Soviet great transformation of nature debunked communist ideology itself. Engineering the transformation of nature on the Soviet scale proved to be a "primitive art [just as that] of the burial mounds."³²⁹ Brining the Azov Sea drove away the cranes. Desiccation reduced the once-grand Aral to a receding swamp. Today those seas stretch pallidly across ghostly landscapes as if thalassic burial grounds of ignominy. We can only imagine

323. See, e.g., HOVHANNISYAN, *supra* note 291, at 8; REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA, LAKE SEVAN ACTION PROGRAM, *supra* note 290, at 3.

324. See *supra* text accompanying notes 226-37.

325. See *supra* text accompanying notes 238-78.

326. See *supra* text accompanying notes 2-6.

327. See, e.g., PRYDE, ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, *supra* note 1, at 245; WEINER, MODELS, *supra* note 1, at 168, 234-35.

328. See P.I. STUCHKA, *Culture and Law*, in SELECTED WRITINGS ON SOVIET LAW AND MARXISM 195 (Robert Sharlet et al. eds. & trans., M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1988) (1928).

329. See Ivanov, *How Burial Mounds are Made*, *supra* note 103, at 323.

how melancholy and meaningless will be the stories of the human condition found in the amphoras that someday those seas will cast up in memory of our time.

