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Melancholic Identities, *Toska* and Reflective Nostalgia

Case Studies from Russian and Russian-Jewish Culture

edited by
Sara Dickinson, Laura Salmon

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Preface

Sara Dickinson (University of Genoa)

This book examines several aspects of the feeling that we often refer to as 'nostalgia' as it is manifested in Russian culture or, more precisely, on the margins of Russian culture. The writers and artists considered in this volume all operate on the periphery of a dominant imperial, Soviet, or Post-Soviet cultural system, from which vantage point they look 'inward' towards a central core with various degrees of longing. In their artistic production, these authors contend with a form of nostalgia that is not simply produced by the passage of time (as in maturation, aging, regret for a bygone childhood), but also by the recognition of and meditation on their own marginal status – the result of factors ranging from gender, ethnicity, and religion, to politics, imprisonment, emigration or other varieties of existential isolation. Indeed, the works analyzed herein were born of musings on the experience of social or psychological marginalization: for these authors, sentiments of longing give rise to reflection as well as to concrete texts that grapple with or embody the resulting feeling of nostalgia in various ways. The overlapping fields of artistic production considered here – prose, poetry, drama, music, visual art – illustrate this sentiment's generative power.

The nostalgia that interests us may also be described with the Russian word *toska*, which describes a state of 'anguish' or 'longing' that can exist without any precise object and that we take as a synonym for "reflective nostalgia", as outlined by Svetlana Boym (2001: 49 ff.). Boym distinguishes between a "restorative" (conservative, nationalist, ideological) nostalgia that is directed towards an idealized and even imaginary past, and a more "reflective" longing for something elusive and ineffable to which full or direct access is impossible. As this volume illustrates, the process of thinking deeply not only about the past, but also about one's own sense of nostalgia or state of historical alienation engenders rich insights about the nature of existence and identity. While the continued contemplation of one's own existential alienation serves to renew and nourish sentiments of melancholy and anguish, it is also true that marginality has often been accepted and even embraced as the essential condition of identities felt to be liminal or divided.

The introductory chapter by Laura Salmon (*Chronotopes of Affectivity in Literature. On Melancholy, Estrangement, and Reflective Nostalgia*) outlines in greater detail the relationship between reflective and restorative nostalgia to-

gether with other key terms that underlie our study. Specifically, Salmon provides justification for the linkage of reflective nostalgia, *toska*, and *melanxolija* to the Russian case studies and related problems of Russian identity discussed in this volume. Drawing from the field of cognitive sciences, she defines 'feelings' as 'secondary emotions' or 'cultural constructs' that result from our reflections on emotion, from our conscious awareness and processing of brute emotional impulses. That feelings can be chronic, i.e. repeated and characteristic of a given individual, and also shared, or common to multiple individuals, means that they are important for the establishment of both personal and group identity, be it national, ethnic, religious, political, or other. Salmon also provocatively superimposes Yuri Slezkine's contrast between dominant "Apollonian" cultures and marginalized "Mercurian" cultures (Slezkine 2004) onto Boym's distinction between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgias. Nostalgia for Boym (2001: XVI) is "the symptom of our age" as is the pervasive influence of Mercurian culture for Slezkine. The liminal condition epitomized by the Jew's role in Western society, in other words, entails a forceful apprehension of marginal status that is ultimately 'reflective' and thus 'flexible', subjective, ironic, and non-ideological. Mercurians, like reflective nostalgics, are both aware of their difference and celebrate it; indeed, Salmon argues, in such cases, an ongoing and self-conscious state of melancholic reflection constitutes one's essence.

In the second chapter, *Aleksandra Xvostova, Nikolaj Karamzin and the Gendering of* Toska, I address the emergence and evolution of *toska* in eighteenth-century letters, long before the lexeme *nostal'gija* was literary currency. The history of *toska* reveals the gradual association of that sentiment with notions of femininity over the course of the century: male writers tended to associate *toska* with female literary personages and, during the sentimentalist era, with women writers. Indeed, struggles over the 'ownership' of this emotion and the right to express it helped to define a Russian tradition of women's writing as well as the contrasting position of the male literary establishment. Aleksandra Xvostova's emphatic declamation of *toska* in the mid 1790s, following in the wake of earlier reiterations of the sentiment by poet Ekaterina Urusova, attracted both the interest of readers and the misgivings of writers such as Nikolaj Karamzin, whose promulgation of fashionable "feminization" aimed to appropriate women's expression of emotion rather than encourage it. A short-lived cult of literary *melanxolija* fomented by Karamzin and Vasilij Žukovskij at the beginning of the 1800s – and sustained by the social conservatism of that era – undid many of the previous era's gains by wresting despondent sentiment away from women writers.

Laura Quercioli Mincer's chapter, *Nostalgia and Creaturality in H. Leivick's* The Golem, describes the role of nostalgic longing in the life and work of the renowned Yiddish writer. Leivick's drama *The Golem* develops out of a discomfiting notion found in Jewish tradition that God is absent or indifferent and from man's resulting yearning for a different relationship with a deity who would be more accessible and responsive. Leivick's nostalgic inclinations were also shaped by his passage through a period of revolutionary fervor, his conse-

quent arrest (in the tsarist era), incarceration, and later emigration, as well as by childhood experiences of alienation and anguish – moments teased out of his biography by Quercioli Mincer and seen to echo in his *magnum opus*. A conviction that return into the embrace of one's creator or parent is impossible – since it will invariably be either refused or ineffectual – underlies the Golem's pathos and tragedy. Ostracized from human society by virtue of his essential otherness, this homunculus represents his human creator's own inadmissible feelings of hatred and violence and thus embodies the reflection and refraction of man's sins onto the surrounding world. The Golem's sense of eternal and irrevocable estrangement from his own existence renders him a personification of nostalgia itself.

In the subsequent chapter, *Regret for the Time of Heroes and Existential* Toska *in Vladimir Vysockij*, Mario Alessandro Curletto addresses the problem of nostalgia in the work of the famous Russian singer-songwriter. Vysockij's determined search for heroes, a thread running through several of his songs, leads him to idealize environments in which heroic feats may still be performed. He is drawn to contexts that are characterized by their sharp contrast from the unmitigated grayness of daily life, including settings of extreme climate and geography (the mountains, the tundra, the steppe) and past eras, most notably World War II. Heroic feats are gestures of simple selflessness, of putting others first, of forgiving comrades for their very human errors, and performing actions designed to benefit a greater cause. Vysockij's songs also point to the impermanence of heroic gestures, which necessarily conclude with a return to bleak quotidian reality and with the reinstatement of longing for another, subsequent opportunity to soar above it. Heroism, for Vysockij, is also a means of overcoming social alienation or distance to achieve moments of communion and shared understanding with other members of the human race. Performance offered him an opportunity to consummate a bond with the community as well; it also furnished an alluring and longed for escape from daily routine, a temporary cure for the nostalgia that beset his existence, and through music he offered the same experience of respite to his Soviet listeners.

Laura Salmon's second chapter, entitled *Melancholic Humor, Skepticism and Reflective Nostalgia. Igor' Guberman's Poetics of Paradox*, explores the '*gariki*' produced in thousands by émigré poet Igor' Guberman. Constituting a genre invented by Guberman himself, the *gariki* consist of rhymed quatrains that tackle issues ranging widely from prison, drinking, and sex to the contradictory nature of God. When Guberman addresses feelings, *toska* is the primary exemplar: his brief texts illustrate the existential condition of marginality felt by a Russian Jew from the now nonexistent Soviet Union living as an émigré in Israel. Guberman writes with poignancy, skepticism, and humor, confirming a sense of identity that retains its drollness despite being irrevocably fractured and consequently imbued with melancholic feeling. Salmon situates the *gariki* within the larger historical context of Russian Jewish identity and a tradition of writing and reflecting upon the paradox of eternal non-belonging. Guberman's verses elaborate an awareness of his own liminal condition from the perspective of a philosophical skepticism, leading him to acknowledge – with wry melancholy – the paradoxical nature of human life.

Irina Marchesini's *The Presence of Absence. Longing and Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Art and Literature* plumbs the relationship between post-Soviet identity and memories of the pre-Soviet past addressed in the work of several contemporary artists and writers. The specific works that she examines testify to complex and ambivalent feelings of regret for the 'traumatic' loss of the Soviet Union, understood not simply as a political entity, but also – and primarily – as an affective, personal, and domestic reality, the background for daily life and familial routines. Marchesini discusses how the installations of Il'ja Kabakov, Sergej Volkov, and Evgenij Fiks offer up to viewers concrete objects from the Soviet era in order both to suggest the long-lost past and to provoke specific modes of relating to and even interacting with memories of that time. The exhibited objects call forth a nostalgic response from viewers by jogging their recollection of intimate spaces from the past that were imbued with political images and concepts; these installations also encourage viewers to reflect upon the character of their own nostalgic feelings. A similar process of recalling and reacting to Soviet-era memories may be found in the autobiographical writings of Andrej Astvacaturov, where the summoning of an absent past is again mediated through material objects, their anachronistic presence enabling a multi-layered perception of bygone and present epochs. In Astvacaturov as well, distinctions between temporal eras and between private and communal spheres are blurred to provide a foundation for post-Soviet identity.

We are grateful to the University of Genoa for a grant that made possible the writing and publication of this volume. We would also like to express our deep gratitude to Antonio Prete, Laura Olson Osterman, Ruth Curd Dickinson, and members of the "Studi Slavistici" Board (Firenze University Press), particularly Nicoletta Marcialis, Giovanna Brogi Bercoff, and Alberto Alberti, for valuable help in the conceptualization of our overall project during the initial stages and for subsequent improvements to the finished product. For specific advice on the individual chapters that follow, we extend warm thanks to:

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Chronotopes of Affectivity in Literature. On Melancholy, Estrangement, and Reflective Nostalgia

Laura Salmon (University of Genoa)

> The virtue of the stranger is to show the paradoxical quality of stereotyping, the traces left within it by its efforts to annul the dilemma between open and closed thinking.
>
> Michael Pickering

1. *Affectivity in Literary Studies*

For centuries, Western culture has looked upon emotions and feelings "with fear, suspicion and disdain" (Vinickij 2012). If the human mind generally has been excluded from the interests of medicine and biology (Damasio 2006: 255), literary studies have also traditionally considered feelings to lie beyond their purview (Vinickij 2012). Insofar as feelings "form the base for what humans have described for millennia as the human soul or spirit", they have been taken into account primarily by religion and philosophy, and only recently by psychology (Damasio 2006: XXVI). And, while literary criticism overcame a traditionally anti-psychological stance in the post-romantic era (Etkind E. 2005: 26), feelings are still rarely the object of systematic literary investigation even today:

> [...] affective experience is both fundamental to the writing and reading of literature, yet tends to be largely *de trop* for literary critical modes that have constituted themselves by necessary kinds of metaphysical exemption or division (Hughes 2011: 6).

The role of affectivity in the literary text received thorough attention only at the end of the nineteenth century in the field of psychoanalysis, when Sigmund Freud underlined the relevance and centrality of emotion in specific works of literature, thus contributing to rethinking the function of art in general and of literature in particular. Psychoanalysis itself originates in literary myths and narratives, and assumes the priority of natural language in the expression of emotion. Focusing on the mechanisms of sublimation and substitution, Freud provided a functional model of art as "an escape from or substitute for unacceptable or uncomfortable parts of reality" (Dissanayake 1992: 91) that still serves as a guideline for most scholarly works treating the psychology of literature[1]. Nevertheless, there are two principle reasons that a psychoanalytic approach (whether Freudian

[1] The psychoanalytic approach would seem to constitute roughly 80% of all scholarly production in the field of the psychology of literature (Argenton, Messina 2000: 23), while experimental psychology shows scarce interest in criticism, tending to use literary texts as thematic corpora for the classification of clinical concepts (*Ivi*: 24).

or not) has been so poorly integrated into literary study: it requires extra-literary scholarly competence and it tends to be applied only to the thematic or autobiographical aspects of a text, with disregard for its formal features.

The formal and structural characteristics of literary texts later became the exclusive object of study for the Russian formalists, who declared psychology and feelings alien to the 'science of literature'. Although Boris Ejxenbaum (1924: 324) argued that art is a stylization of feelings, he also programmatically established that "*there is not, and cannot be* a place for the reflection of any psychic experience" in a work of art (emphasis in original). Russian formalism's profound effect on both Western humanities and Slavic studies long hindered any serious attempt to investigate the psycho-emotional aspects of literature. In general, such theoretical rigidity has led to literary criticism's self-isolation from "modern thought" and "literature itself" (Boyd 2009: 384). In Alexander Etkind's words:

> [...] the Formal School in Russian literary and linguistic studies was anti-psychological. From that point of view, the dreams of the heroine described by Puškin in *Evgenij Onegin* were considered a means of deceleration of the *sjužet* similar to the descriptions of nature; the reflections about love by Tolstoy's characters were included in the same category of events as their remarks on agriculture. In any case, the Formal School elaborated no specific method for reflecting on such reflections (Etkind A. 2005: 10).

Mixail Baxtin was the first theorist close to formalism and structuralism who considered the literary text to be a reflection of the author's affective world. A dialogic intermediary between psychology and formalism, Baxtin (1981: 254) claimed that any textual interpretation should approach the author as both a biographical person (*outside* the text) and a creator (*inside* the text). Borrowing the concept of 'spacetime' from physics, biology and physiology, Baxtin transformed it into the 'chronotope', which he specifically intended as an element of cohesion between a text and the emotionality of the author[2]:

> In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values. Abstract thought can, of course, think time and space as separate entities and conceive them as things apart from the emotions and values that attach to them. But living artistic perception (which also of course involves thought, but not abstract thought) makes no such divisions and permits no such segmentation. It seizes on the chronotope in all its wholeness and fullness. Art and literature are shot through with chronotopic values of varying degree and scope. Each motif, each separate aspect of artistic work bears value (*Ivi*: 243).

Thus, while Baxtin elaborated a dynamic "historical poetics" in keeping with the traditionally central role of history in the interpretation of literature

[2] Baxtin's conception of the 'chronotope' was particularly influenced by the theories of the brilliant Russian physiologist Aleksej Uxtomskij (cf. Ponzio 2002: 24-25, Diddi 2009).

(Bak 1995), his dialogic representation of narrative's 'internal' and 'external' dimensions also legitimized the direct involvement of psychology in literary criticism. Baxtin greatly influenced Soviet and post-Soviet literary theory and his model of the mutual relationship between author and text resonates in the concept of 'psycho-poetics' introduced by Efim Etkind[3]. Literature, Etkind claims, expresses the synthesis of thought and speech at the highest level of complexity – not merely representing knowledge, but constituting a territory of psychological discovery:

> Literature is the most powerful instrument of psychology: it goes deeper and deeper into intimate life, revealing new and previously unknown spaces. But it would be a mistake to think that literature follows science [...] Poetry and literature in general anticipate science, opening a path to the unknown – not only to what has never been studied before, but also to what as yet has been inconceivable (Etkind E. 2005: 364).

Literary texts actually form an immense corpus of data that is useful for studying both how the intimate world of feelings behaves on a textual level and how feelings (the cultural constructs of affectivity) and ideologies (cognitive rules) might affect 'literary mood'. While the search for coherent ways of representing the relationship between poetics and affectivity is just beginning, it is clear that a mutually dependent relationship exists between the following components:

- an author's dominant "structure of feeling", i.e. "the social experience that only seems to be individual and personal, but in fact has some definite, shared features" (Johannisson 2011: 10);
- the "mood" of a specific author, i.e. "all individual differences that form consistent patterns of emotional reactivity" (Davidson 1994: 55);
- the author's poetics.

The circular relationship among these factors is particularly evident in "reflective nostalgia", a specifically melancholic and ironic mood that Svetlana Boym (2001: 49-55) opposes to the more serious and dramatic "restorative nostalgia". While restorative nostalgia aims with ideological conviction towards a future that will recover the past and restore a rigid national identity and a 'pure world' that has supposedly been lost, "*re-flection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis" (*Ivi*: 49; emphasis in original).

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[3] Particularly, in the essay *The 'Internal Person' and the 'External Discourse'. (Studies on Psychopoetics of Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*), E. Etkind (2005: 26) analyzes how the inner world of the hero is represented by "external discourse", explicitly extending literary investigation to the field of psychology. A detractor of theorization and taxonomy, E. Etkind deliberately (and unfortunately) eschews any attempt to establish a coherent pattern in the relationship between mood and poetics, providing only coordinated, but separated case studies (*Ivi*: 27).

Before addressing the topic of the melancholic and nostalgic mood in verbal art, we will attempt to generally define terms such as 'emotion', 'feeling', 'mood' and 'affective style'. While none of these words "refers to a distinct class of events, neatly separated from the others", nevertheless, "distinctions exist that are worth making" (Frijda 1994: 59). Indeed, the impressive progress of cognitive science over the last few decades allows us to use terms relating to the sphere of affectivity with a higher epistemological consistency and to better understand the complex mechanisms that any definition implies. Although cognitive science and literary study have very different aims, one striving to understand how the human mind works and the other how texts work, much benefit can be derived by exploring the insights and perspectives of each. Clarifying the concepts of human affectivity is essential in order to formulate hypotheses about the relation between chronotopes, moods, and narrative styles; it will also help us to understand the interrelation between individual and universal features in the way that humans express affectivity.

2. *Concepts and Definitions of Affectivity from Cognitive Sciences*

In the last decade of the twentieth century, neuroscientific research inseparably linked affectivity to cognition in general and to rational thinking in particular, concluding that "feelings are as cognitive as any other perceptual image" (Damasio 2006: 159). In the brilliant *Descartes' Error*, Antonio Damasio develops a theory of brain-body communication based on scientific evidence demonstrating that affectivity is a human faculty of extraordinary complexity that has evolved in purely physical terms:

> I don't see emotions and feelings as the intangible and vaporous qualities that many presume them to be. Their subject matter is concrete, and they can be related to specific systems in body and brain, no less than vision or speech (*Ivi*: 164).

New scientific data, Damasio argues, diminish neither the status of feelings in the arts, nor their value to human beings (*Ibidem*). Rather than merely "reduce ethics or esthetics to brain circuitry", he aims "to explore the threads that interconnect neurobiology to culture" (*Ivi*: XX). 'Culture' can be defined as a social, collective, and interactive response to all processes of externalization of the brain's internal representations. In the words of Jean-Pierre Changeux (2004: 50):

> L'hypothèse est que les rapresentations internes du cerveaux, leur externalization et leur mise en commun entre cerveaux individuels au sein du groupe social et leur éventuel stockage dans des mémoires non cérébrales seraint à l'origine de l'évolution culturelle.

The fact that individuals communicate through affectivity means that it is one of culture's most fundamental components. Even when emotions and feel-

ings seem to be under rational control, they affect human choices, preferences, and aversions. Moreover, since emotions help us to *classify* the surrounding world (persons, events, objects, memories), they constitute the cognitive means by which we evaluate our experiences, a "combination of a *mental evaluative process*, simple or complex, with *dispositional responses to that process*" (Damasio 2006: 139; emphasis in original)[4]. Since not all affective responses to experience are equally involved in cultural interaction, it is necessary to make conceptual and terminological distinctions between them. "What is a feeling?" asks Damasio (*Ivi*: 143),

> Why do I not use the terms 'emotion' and 'feeling' interchangeably? One reason is that although some feelings relate to emotions, there are many that do not: all emotions generate feelings if you are awake, but not all feelings originate in emotions (*Ibidem*).

More generally, emotions can be distinguished in two categories – primary and secondary. Primary emotions, regardless of their source, are completely instinctive: a response of fear, for example, is not controlled by culture since it can be triggered by objects or animals that one has neither known nor seen before (*Ivi*: 131-134). Secondary emotion occurs when one has the experience of *feeling the emotion* itself. A secondary emotion thus forms "systematic connections between categories of objects and situations, on the one hand, and primary emotions, on the other" (*Ivi*: 134). It is these secondary emotions that are properly 'feelings' and their characteristic feature is the subject's "combined" or joint perception of two "images" or types of input – one of the subject's own physical body and one of "something else" taken from the subject's life experience (*Ivi*: 145):

> The essence of sadness or happiness is the combined perception of certain body states with whatever thoughts they are juxtaposed to, complemented by a modification in the style and efficiency of the thought process [...]. When negative body states recur frequently, or when there is a sustained negative body state, as happens in depression, the proportion of thoughts which are likely to be associated with negative situations does increase, and the style and efficiency of reasoning suffer [...]. A feeling about a particular object is based on the subjectivity of the perception of the object, the perception of the body state it engenders, and the perception of modified style and efficiency of the thought process as all of the above happens (*Ivi*: 146-148).

In other words, while primary emotions are automatic responses, feelings are *cultural constructs* that "translate the ongoing life state in the language of the mind" (Damasio 2003: 85).

Human feelings can be organized into three major types (cf. Damasio 2006: 149-150):

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[4] In his two books on emotions, Joseph LeDoux (1996, 2002) reviews neuroscientific research in the field and argues that emotions are the means used by the human brain to evaluate any stimulus.

- simple emotion-based feelings that originate from the five basic emotions (happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and disgust);
- more complex emotion-based feelings "that are subtle variations of the five mentioned above; euphoria and ecstasy are variations of happiness", for instance, while "melancholy and wistfulness are variations of sadness";
- "background feelings" that correspond "to the body state prevailing *between* emotions" and that constitute a general mood:

> When background feelings are persistently of the same type over hours and days, and do not change quietly as thoughts contents ebb and flow, the collection of background feelings probably contributes to a mood, good, bad, or indifferent (*Ivi*: 151).

Richard Davidson (1994) more clearly explains the concept of 'mood', distinguishing it from "the nature of the antecedent events":

> Emotions appear to be precipitated by events that are perceived as occurring quickly and without warning, while mood may be more likely to follow events that are perceived as occurring over a slower time course [...]. Moods can also be produced in a cumulative fashion over time. For example, a series of mild negative interactions (each of which might initially elicit a negative emotion) might cumulatively produce a negative mood over the course of a day. Similarly, a series of mild positive events can together result in a positive mood over time (*Ivi*: 53).

Moods are defined by Nico Frijda (1994: 60) as "nonintentional states" insofar as they are not object-focused. Yet, when a mood becomes "a salient enduring emotional quality displayed in a variety of situations and distinguishing one class of people from another", it becomes a "chronic mood" (Kagan 1994: 74), i.e. a culturally significant condition:

> Chronic moods can result, for example, from membership in a particular social group, a decade of academic failure, or repeated social rejection. These chronic moods bias a person to react to incentives in a particular way. Folk theory, as well as research reports, make distinction between acute states and chronic mood (*Ivi*: 75).

The concept of 'chronic mood' coincides perfectly with Davidson's idea of "affective style" (Davidson 1994: 53). Unlike 'temperament', which seems to be partially regulated by genetics, 'affective style' emerges as the dominant mood in a person's life experience: it is "the entire domain of individual differences that modulate a person's reactivity to emotional events" (*Ibidem*).

An understanding of affective styles and chronic moods would seem to be essential for fully examining the relationship between a dominant mood and thematic-stylistic preferences in a given artist's oeuvre in order to find possibly recurring patterns. Styles and moods are indeed "products of appraisals of the *existential background* of our lives" (Kagan 1994: 84; emphasis in

original), i.e. the mind's response to personal experience (one's *history*) and to the subjective way this experience has been categorized and interpreted (one's *story*). In the relationship between stories (narrative) and history (experience) we can begin to see how background feelings might affect literary style. The specific style and conceptual framework of any given creative representation reveals the ways in which authors react to their own *humor* or mood[5]. Style thus differs from *form* and *techniques* since it reflects the interrelation of these with the author's affective mood and worldview.

The synonymous concepts of 'affective style' and 'chronic mood' would seem compatible with the "structure of feelings" proposed by Karin Johannisson (2011: 10-11) in *A History of Melancholy*. This tome offers a model for the study of feelings from the perspective of social and cultural studies by analyzing the historical development of the melancholic mood in Western culture, literature, and cinema. As Johannisson argues, specific feelings and the chronotopes of their expression can be investigated with a certain degree of objectivity: "Feelings are affected by history", she writes, and "humans live in a precise time, which becomes their dwelling" (*Ivi*: 8-9).

That human affectivity is influenced by specific historical, geographic, and cultural environments clearly does not suggest that culture can be equated with 'nationality' or 'national language'. Generally speaking, we can find within a given culture contrasting background feelings and different words to express them; moreover, the same words can refer to different feelings, since "no two discrete emotional episodes are exactly alike" (Lazarus 1994: 332). Scholars working on such problems must inevitably decide for themselves whether to emphasize similarities or differences in the study of emotions, feelings and moods (*Ibidem*). That said, humans do share experiences with others beyond the limits of their own native cultures, and literature powerfully demonstrates how feelings, simultaneously individual and universal, are cross-cultural.

3. *Individuality and Universality in Affective Terminology*

Steven Pinker (1997: 365) claims that even though cultures differ "in how often their members express, talk about, and act on various emotions", this fact says nothing about what people feel – indeed, "the evidence suggests that the

[5] It is worth mentioning that 'humor' is a Latin word primary meaning 'fluid'. A relationship between humors (body fluids) and melancholy was postulated in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621 (cf. Burton 1989) and since mood was already thought to involve the inner state of the body, its bond with the word 'humor' is clear. In almost all European languages the word 'humor' refers to laughter, but in the Romance languages is the main term for 'mood' (e.g., Italian '*umore*', French '*humeur*', Spanish '*humor*', etc.). As Luigi Pirandello (1995: 59) indicates in *On Humor*, humor is by no means a literary *genre*, but rather a "quality of expression", a *style*. Pirandello's intuition can be generalized *mutatis mutandis* – mood refers strictly to the chosen style of an author.

emotions of all normal members of our species are played on the same keyboard". Certainly, 'national' differences can be detected in the ways emotions and feelings are externalized and in the ways that different stimuli act upon individuals to elicit emotions and feelings, but they are not inherent in any innate and predetermined capacity of a particular language. It is simply not the case, in other words, that a native speaker of one language is able – purely by virtue of being a native speaker of that language – to express personally felt emotions and feelings better than native speakers of other languages. For instance, while any Russian can theoretically experience the feeling or mood described in Russian by the word '*toska*', it is not the case a) that any given Russian will necessarily experience this feeling, b) that a Russian must experience '*toska*' more deeply than, say, an American, or c) that this feeling should be expressed more clearly in Russian words than in English. The occurrence of some terms or expressions in a specific language differs simply because social and moral habits, constraints, and values differ in diverse national environments. There are, of course, country-specific differences in linguistic behavior, but these do not reflect corresponding differences in feelings experienced. Cultural demonstrativeness can widely vary, in other words, but gives little clue as to the nature of actual feelings themselves. Neuroscientists recognize that emotion by country-interaction effect exists, but is relatively low (cf. Sherer 1994: 174). Differences in anticipated behaviors might result from unusual situations that can stem, for example, from "the perceived morality of the situation, the expectation of the eliciting event, and the perceived causes of agency" (*Ivi*: 175).

According to Roman Jakobson (1987: 433; emphasis in original) "languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *can* convey". In other words, all human languages can potentially represent the same referent equally well, at least when such exists in the physical world of the speaker's experience. If there is no kiwi fruit, the word for kiwi fruit will not be available until it appears – whether as a piece of fruit, an image of the fruit, or a borrowed word. Yet feelings are not tangible objects nor are they specific to nations, geographical spaces or languages. Human words for feelings are produced by human reflection on the same in a process of finding words that can serve to externalize internal affective states. Such reflection is required even when concepts, experiences or feelings are socially unpleasant and when speaking about them is considered impolite. Indeed, literature frequently assumes the task of violating socio-psychological taboos.

It is one thing to claim that Russians tend to talk of sadness more than Americans, and quite another to claim that the Russian word '*grust'*' ('sadness') describes a feeling that is specific to Russian culture and that there is no way in English to express this 'uniquely Russian' feeling. In fact, as linguistic relativism would have it, all languages represent conceptual worlds that are more or less untranslatable, since they are strictly linked to the national culture of the speakers of that language, to their national way of thinking, to a supposedly culturally specific psychology. Such a view suggests not only that Russian words for affective states are untranslatable, but also that feelings themselves are 'un-

translatable' into another culture[6]. For instance, as Aleksej Šmelev (2001a: 9-10) writes in his introduction to a (translated) volume by Anna Werzbicka:

> The feelings expressed by the Russian words *radost'*, *grust'*, *toska*, are significant precisely for Russian culture and for Russian language in particular. On the contrary, in English, there are no precise equivalents for *grust'* and *toska*, but there are words such as *sadness*, *melancholy*, *spleen* and *nostalgia*, which characterize feelings that are somehow close to *grust'* and *toska*, but, however, not identical. What I've said doesn't mean that a native of Anglo-Saxon culture can't feel *grust'* or *toska*, but that the feelings corresponding to these terms are not distinctly expressed in that culture.

The conviction articulated here that some Russian words represent feelings that are nationally specific results from two ingenuous and falsifiable presuppositions: first, that there exists within the Russian language a one-to-one correspondence between single lexemes and isolated feelings[7]; secondly, that the universalism which adherents of nationally specific feelings so aim to discredit requires in any way a one-to-one correspondence of single affective lexemes across languages[8]. In her work on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym (2001: 13) sharply

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[6] The literature of cultural relativism is interminable: Anna Wierzbicka is presently the leading figure in this line of inquiry, and her approach "a eu beaucoup de succès chez plusieurs linguistes russes, comme Rylov, Černiavskaja, Tar Minasova, Tarlanov, Padučeva, Zaliznjak & Levontina" (Gebert 2012: 105). In Lucyna Gebert's words (*Ivi*: 103), Wierzbicka believes that "la langue reflète et encourage la tendance, dominante dans la culture russe, à envisager le monde comme un ensemble d'événements incontrôlables et incompréhensibles". For a basic introduction to arguments in support of certain feelings and concepts being specifically Russian, see Šmelev 1997, Wierzbicka 1999, Harkins, Wierzbicka 2001. A useful criticism of the contrasting position of rigid universalism, based on Paul Ekman's postulate that particular facial behaviors are universally associated with particular emotions, may be found in Barbara Rosenwein's synthesis of arguments and counter-arguments (Rosenwein 2010: 2-10).

[7] If Russian had precise lexemes for every Russian-specific feeling, how could we explain the hendiadys '*grust'-toska*' attested in Russian folklore (as in the idiom: "A busy person is not gripped by *grust'-toska*")?

[8] That such relativistic analyses are sometimes based on superficial or incorrect assumptions may be seen in Šmelev's introduction to another Russian translation of Werzbicka's work. Amidst a series of overtly simplistic examples we find there the claim (Šmelev 2001b: 10) that English 'you' is not as "informal" as the Russian pronoun '*ty*', yet he misses the fact that English 'you' historically corresponds to Russian '*Vy*' (rather than '*ty*'), while 'thou' (which did once correspond to Russian '*ty*') is no longer used. In point of fact, levels of formality in English are not achieved by simply changing pronouns, but by altering the addressee's proper name, changing one's intonation or gaze, and so forth. According to the postulates of cultural relativism, all words of all languages are demonstrably culture-specific, including 'please', 'thank you', 'bless you', 'see you', and so on. The real problem is that languages express the exact same content but do so asymmetrically: the equivalence between any two 'units' needs to be measured at a functional, rather than lexical level (cf. Salmon 2006).

criticizes the naiveté of the culturally relativistic illusion that words expressing 'longing' should be unique and untranslatable:

> While each term preserves the specific rhythms of the language, one is struck by the fact that all these untranslatable words are in fact synonyms; and all share the desire for untranslatability, the longing for uniqueness. While the details and flavors differ, the grammar of romantic nostalgias all over the world is quite similar.

The inaccuracies and contradictions inherent in theories of the unique specificity of certain Russian words and concepts has been explicitly unmasked by Evgenij Zareckij (2007). As he points out, for example, cultural relativists consider Russians to be more 'fatalistic' than the British simply because the word '*sud'ba*' has a higher occurrence in Russian texts than does 'destiny' in written English. Such a conclusion disregards the fact that the English word 'fate' is also used in the same semantic contexts as 'destiny' and '*sud'ba*', and that texts translated from English into Russian contain the same frequency of '*sud'ba*' as do untranslated Russian texts. Moreover,

> The supporters of A. Werzbicka, who ascribe to Russians fatalism, a belief in destiny and in chance, never attempt to strengthen their hypotheses on the basis of statistical data. Whether or not the British really use fewer impersonal constructions than Russians (since they believe more in themselves and less in destiny) should be confirmed by sociological opinion polls. Such polls do exist, yet they tend to confirm the opposite. For example, in 2005 the Russian National Center for Public Opinion Research published data that demonstrated 35% of Russians believe in destiny[9]. On July 21 of the same year, the British newspaper "The Sun" published the results of an opinion poll carried out by the organization Populus Limited, according to which 68% of the population believes in destiny – almost twice as many as in Russia[10]. Analogous data for the US are missing, although an opinion poll from 2000 does affirm that 75% of Americans believes that they are predestined to end up in heaven and another 1% think they will finish in hell[11]. In consequence, we can argue that in the US at least 76% of the population (75+1) believes in destiny since predestination is indeed the same thing.

Finally, if a given language were incapable of hosting the affective states, moods, and feelings had by others, if humans lacked the empathetic capacity to

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[9] *Navstreču Xellouinu: vo čto verjat rossijane*, "Vserossijskij Centr Izučenija Obščestvennogo Mnenija. Press-vypusk", 2005, 326 (31.10.05), cf. <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=1915> (cf. Zareckij 2007).

[10] *Fieldwork: April 8-9 2005. Published in The Sun, June 20 & 21 2005*, "Populus Limited", 2005, <http://www.populuslimited.com/poll_summaries/2005_06> (cf. Zareckij 2007).

[11] H. Taylor, *No Significant Changes in the Large Majorities Who Believe in God, Heaven, the Resurrection, Survival of Soul, Miracles and Virgin Birth*, "The Harris Poll. A Service of Harris Interactive", 2000, 52, cf. <http://www.harrisinteractive.com/vault/Harris-Interactive-Poll-Research-NO-SIGNIFICANT-CHANGES-IN-THE-LARGE-MAJORITIES-WHO-2000-09.pdf> (cf. Zareckij 2007).

share or imagine the experiences of those who speak other languages, if culture-specific differences impaired our ability to understand literary texts from the spacetime (chronotope) of other cultures, no non-natives of Russian or English would be able to read Dostoevskij or Dickens:

> It would not be possible to read and enjoy literature from a time remote to our own, or from a culture that was profoundly different from our own, unless we shared some common emotional ground, some deep reservoir of assumptions, with the writer (McEwan 2005: 11).

4. *Melancholy, Reflective Nostalgia,* Zadumčivaja Toska

In the view of Svetlana Boym (2001: XVI), nostalgia is a cross-cultural sentiment that expresses and is "coeval to modernity itself"; it is, in other words, "the symptom of our age". In the context of Euro-American and, particularly, Russian culture, she finds two different and contrasting "ways of giving shape and meaning to longing" (*Ivi*: 41), identifying them with the terms "restorative" and "reflective nostalgia". Restorative nostalgia, the desire for an object that is "available and somehow collective" (*Ivi*: 44), transcends strictly personal memories and transforms individual longing into a form of national belonging (*Ivi*: 15). An inclination towards restoration opposes cultural manifestations of subjectivity or intimacy (*Ivi*: 43) to constitute an institutionalized form of regret for a ostensible former era of wholeness. At the same time,

> What drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing, but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition [...]. *Restoration* (from *re-staure* – re-establishment) signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for the restorative nostalgic is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot (*Ivi*: 44-45, 49; emphasis in original).

Nostalgic longing for an era prior to some presumed 'contamination' is typical of all nationalisms. In Russian culture this is a recurrent feeling that routinely appears in narratives about national origins: the contamination of a pure, 'prelapsarian' Russian world resulting from contact with Western culture is the 'original sin' that restorative nostalgia aims to eliminate. The desire for restoration is firmly based on a Manichean worldview in which a mythical restorative future will revive a mythical past.

Reflective nostalgia represents a contrasting form of regret: private, intimate, definitively anti-dramatic. It is a nostalgic longing without ideology, "more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude", longing that "cherishes shattered fragments of memory" (*Ivi*: 49). Reflective nostalgia, being aware of contamination in

both external and internal spheres, represents a variety of self-analysis that has been diverted, to accept a reality that is "defamiliarized". If restorative nostalgia "takes itself dead seriously", the reflective variety "can be ironic and humorous" (*Ibidem*). The latter

> reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one other, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection [...]. This type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. Nostalgics of the second type are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruin or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future (*Ivi*: 49-50).

Boym holds that a reflective mood emerges from incongruities between reality, reason, and feelings; reflective persons, she argues, "are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance" (*Ivi*: 50). Such is the peculiar condition of the literary author, who manages an existential mood by means of artistic expression, whose melancholic 'creative style' reflects a melancholic 'affective style'.

Existential, psychological, and cultural reflectiveness is not expressed by a single, unique language, but rather through style, it is a way or mode of looking at experience and narrating it. The English term 'reflective nostalgia' itself, coined by the Russian Jew Svetlana Boym, an émigré in the United States, expresses a state of mind or affective style that is intimately linked both with the English lexeme 'melancholy', and the Russian lexemes '*melanxolija*' and '*toska*'. The relationship between these terms bears review.

The *Oxford Dictionary of British and World English* (2015) defines 'melancholy' as "a feeling of pensive sadness typically with no obvious cause", i.e. a sentiment of longing that is both reflective and lacking in clear motivation (or a precise object)[12]. The Russian term '*melanxolija*' was similarly defined by the famous Russian lexicographer Vladimir Dal' in 1882 as '*zadumčivaja toska*' (Dal' 1979, II: 315), literally 'reflective nostalgia'. As for '*toska*', the two most reliable and highly regarded Russian dictionaries of the previous two centuries (Dal' 1979 and Evgen'eva 1984) describe this polysemic term as indicating a hybrid feeling, whose basic elements may include sadness, depression, angst, grief, languor, ennui, and longing[13]. '*Toska*' in Russian can

[12] In the monumental Oxford Dictionary (2015: online version), the original, obsolete and physiological or medical meanings of 'melancholy' are followed by a second definition that includes a reference to 'humour'; the third is: "Sadness, dejection, esp. of a pensive nature; gloominess; pensiveness or introspection; an inclination or tendency to this".

[13] Specifically, Dal' (1979, IV: 422) defines '*toska*' as "*Stesnenie duxa*, *tomlenie duši*, *mučitel'naja grust'*, *duševnaja trevoga*, *bespokojstvo*, *bojazn'*, *skuka*, *gore*, *pečal'*, *nojka serdca*, *skorb"*" ("Mental stress, languor of spirit, tormenting sadness; heartfelt angst, unrest, fear, ennui, grief, sorrow, gnawing of the heart, affliction"); in Evgen'eva

refer to a specific feeling of lack and/or loss if and when accompanied by a complement with the preposition '*po*' to indicate nostalgic longing *for something* or *someone*[14].

Further insight on the correlation between 'reflective nostalgia' and 'melancholy' appears in Boym's comparison of the reflective nostalgic mood with Freud's definition of 'melancholia':

> Freud made a distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is connected to the loss of a loved one or the loss of some abstraction, such as a homeland, liberty or an ideal [...]. In melancholia the loss is not clearly defined and is more unconscious. Melancholia doesn't pass with the labor of grief and has less connection to the outside world (Boym 2001: 55).

Boym's view is consistent with that of Johannisson (2011: 20), who defines 'melancholy' (on the basis of Swedish term '*melancholi*') as a complex affective state that blends diverse feelings, ranging from objectless longing to anguish and ennui. Her 'melancholy' is also pensive and thus can be linked to Dal's '*zadumčivaja toska*' and to Boym's 'reflective nostalgia':

> Together with concomitant feelings of longing and angst, melancholy belongs to a high form of grief, i.e. to a state of mind characterized by ambivalence [...]. It generates a space where the intimate "Self", consciously or not, can find refuge. Melancholy and its concomitant feelings almost always reveal a conflict between the individual and the surrounding world [...]. Melancholy also has a liminal nature and, though it historically represented a form of psychic distress, is difficult to define. It is the totality of moods and states of mind that have arisen in diverse combinations and in diverse situations with diverse individuals (*Ivi*: 8, 20)[15].

Johannisson explicitly argues that melancholy is not only a 'liminal feeling' but it is also the direct expression of the condition of a feeling of marginality:

(1984: 389), we find '*toska*' equated with "1. *tjaželoe gnetuščee čuvstvo*, *duševnaja trevoga*; *grust'*, *unynie*; 2. *skuka*, *unynie*, *carjaščie gde-libo*, *vyzyvaemye odnoobraziem obstanovki*, *otsutstviem dela*, *interesa k okružajuščemu*; 3. *To, čto vyzyvaet u kogo-libo sostojanie duševnogo tomlenija*, *sil'noj skuki*" ("1. A heavy feeling of oppression, heartfelt anxiety; sadness, dejection; 2. ennui or dejection prevailing somewhere in something and triggered by the circumstance of monotony or by a lack of activity or interest in the surroundings; 3. that which provokes in someone a condition of heartfelt languor, of strong boredom").

[14] Interestingly, the Russian word '*nostal'gija*' may be intended by native speakers to mean 'nostalgia for the homeland', otherwise known as '*toska po rodine*', which is a subset of '*toska*' (Dal' 1979, IV: 422); thus, one can interchange '*nostal'gija*' with '*toska po rodine*', but not with '*toska*' alone. On the origins of the term '*toska po rodine*', see Dickinson 2015.

[15] In the Russian translation of the book by Johannisson (2011: 8), which is the version considered in this paper, as 'concomitant feelings' of melancholy, the word '*toska'* was used in translating Swed. '*längtan*', which is close to English 'longing'.

> The distinguishing feature of liminal states of mind may be found in their oscillation between health and illness, but also between adaptation and rebellion. They lie exactly at the boundary between the personal and social spheres (*Ivi*: 20).

In fact, melancholic *toska* is a complex feeling of incongruity and dissonance, a permanent sense of liminality in a world where, as the famous Russian song has it, "all is not the way it should be" (Vysockij 1999, I: 164).

5. *Melancholic Identity and Mercuriality*

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Boym (2001: 16) asserts, the "melancholic sense of loss" characterizing modernity "turned into a style". Insofar as the world of words can offer an alternative to the 'real' world, a place where feelings can be elaborated and stylized, expressions of reflective nostalgia can paradoxically constitute a meaningful response to absurdity and to the nonsense of reality, an active process of 'disillusionment'. The greater one's tendency to melancholic reflection, the richer a concomitant sense of irony that hinders any impulse towards a dramatic worldview and more 'serious' writing. In short, when a melancholic mind begins to reflect upon itself, the outcome is *melancholic humor*.

A 'feeling of marginality' constitutes the stable background sentiment of particular categories of people that share a fragile sense of identity and a disposition towards a paradoxical 'de-idealized idealism'. These are people experiencing 'intimate exile', their existence characterized by a permanent state of internal marginalization and consequent yearning for the 'Self'. Since this overly aggrandized 'Self' is at home both nowhere and everywhere, the object of their reflective longing "is not really a place called home", but a "sense of intimacy with the world" (*Ivi*: 251). A persistently 'reflective mood', or state of pensiveness, makes thoughts and feelings themselves the sole 'homeland' for such unstable Selves.

'Melancholic identities', the subject of this volume, belong to reflective 'nostalgics' that are somehow strangers to themselves. Their reflectiveness tends to prize the evidence of diversity found in culture and in cultural memory – an approach that contrasts with that of restorative nostalgia:

> the other is not merely a representative of another culture, but also a singular individual with a right to long for – but not necessarily belong to – his place of birth (*Ivi*: 337).

In other words, melancholic identities actually represent social and psychological 'difference' and do so by sharing not a specific language, but certain background feelings that emerge from historical and personal narrative. While melancholy can be expressed with variable gradations depending on its *Zeitgeist* (Johannisson 2011: 9), it also reveals shared patterns that link its subjects in what Rosenwein (2010: 11) has called an "emotional community":

> Emotional communities are largely the same as social communities – families, neighborhoods, syndicates, academic institutions, monasteries, factories, platoons, princely courts. But the researcher looking at them seeks above all to uncover systems of feeling, to establish what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them (for it is about such things that people express emotions); the emotions that they value, devalue, or ignore; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.

Whatever their national provenance, people who feel themselves to be 'different' belong to a community that is not ethnically or nationally specific, but international, supranational, or even hyper-national, cosmopolitan, and fundamentally hybrid. Whatever specific linguistic or cultural elements are at stake, a melancholic affective style is marked by pronounced *reflectiveness*: it is nostalgic, critical, humorous, and/or ironic, expressing distance or estrangement from a dominant and more serious ideology, from the very cliché of nationality itself. Albeit in various gradations, reflectiveness is a state or condition of exaggerated and recurring 'regret for the Self', that might in Russian be called '*toska po sebe*'. The pensiveness that characterizes marginal identities thus often takes the shape of an ambivalent 'longing for belonging', a sentiment which simultaneously expresses both yearning for and, ultimately, rejection of belonging or, more generally, of any definite ontology, ideology, or dogmatic position. Melancholic identities reflect the sense of marginality or estrangement proper to border zones or physical and psychological diasporas, and are characterized by longing that aims by no means at the actual past, but at "the past the way it could have been" (Boym 2001: 351).

Boym's theoretical framework dovetails nicely with the illuminating historical paradigm brilliantly outlined by Yuri Slezkine's in *The Jewish Century* (Slezkine 2004). The overlap of the two models is astonishing, especially as both authors mainly devote their attention to Russian and Russian-Jewish history and culture. Slezkine's representation of modernity would seem to constitute a logical extension of Boym's cultural analysis of nostalgic feeling that goes backward and more deeply into the historical past.

According to Slezkine, human cultures can be divided into two types that reflect the symbolic contrast between the classical gods Apollo and Mercury. 'Apollonians' belong to those cultures rooted in a stable land that serves as their main point of reference: they stand for territory, stability, national identity, and physical dominance. 'Mercurians' are comparatively 'nomadic' in the sense that, wherever they live, they remain outsiders and experience a "permanent state of ambivalence" (*Ivi*: 36). Whereas Apollonians are strong and build strong countries, Mercurians are physically weak, and against Apollonians can offer only wisdom and knowledge (*Ivi*: 12)[16]. Mercurians thus "create concepts and

[16] Slezkine's catalogue of Apollonian qualities includes solidity, firmness, toughness, decisiveness, earnestness, simplicity, inarticulateness, and courage, while the Mercurian traits are restlessness, changeability, doubt, self-reflection, irony, cleverness, eloquence and cowardice (Slezkine 2004: 212).

artifacts", they "use words, concepts, money, emotions, and other intangibles as tools of their trade" (*Ivi*: 24, 28)[17].

The sphere of feelings, like that of concepts and words, is thus typically a 'Mercurian zone', an intimate realm that contrasts with the Apollonian world shaped by physical domination. For many reasons, all 'diversities' and 'strangenesses' share in their marginalization a 'feminine' quality or sense of weakness that Apollonians feel as a 'threat for masculinity' despite its contradictory appeal. Mercurians oppose wit to weapon (*Ivi*: 24); they "break the rules" of tradition, particularly the social rules "regulating sexual life and the sexual division of labor" (*Ivi*: 10-11), and "assign more visible and economically important roles to women than do peasants and warriors" (*Ibidem*). Despite physical fragility, they are mentally strong and emotively alluring. Mercurians do not constitute a proper national group, but an emotional community bound by shared estrangement.

The quintessential representatives of modern mercuriality, Slezkine argues (*Ivi*: 39), are the European Jews, "the scriptural Mercurians of Europe", who "came to represent Mercurianism and modernity everywhere". In particular, as he demonstrates throughout his book, the fundamental cultural mutation that defined the modern age occurred among the Russian Jews. The Russian Empire was indeed the birthplace of many Zionist and Communist heroes, and thus "the cradle of much of modern Jewish mythology" (*Ivi*: 4). Yet a paradox lies at the core of Russian-Jewish mythology – and identity. To combat autocracy and Russian orthodoxy, the two sacred pillars of nineteenth-century Russian (Apollonian) self-representation, Jews wielded the 'Puškin faith', a new, secular and 'cultural religion' that was conceived as a means for Mercurians' assimilation into the dominant culture[18]. Russian secular literature, with its undisputed hero, Puškin, was closely tied to a Jewish sense of exile and rebellion. Jews became 'Russians' and assumed verbal art as their primary (Russian) value (*Ivi*: 159), their focus on classical Russian literary culture symbolically embraced the spirit of opposition that reflective-melancholic art could provide against the conservative and 'restorative' tendencies of Apollonian culture:

> After the nineteenth century, Russian literature became a form of civic religion. Yet the cosmopolitan ideal of a 'republic of letters' is foreign to Russian culture. Rather, there is a Russian Empire of letters, and the writer is a subject of that empire, Hence the exile is a cultural transgression that threatens a writer's very survival, both physical and spiritual (Boym 2001: 257).

In Boym's view (*Ivi*: 251), Russian Mercurians are typical examples of "reflective nostalgics", those who *reflect* on both Self and Other, who "see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts". 'Exile' and 'Diaspora' can be understood in both their literal and figu-

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[17] It is significant that Mercury is the patron of writers and Mercurians the "people of the written word" (Slezkine 2004: 29).

[18] On the history of the Russian Jews and their relationship with Russian culture, see also my article on Igor' Guberman in this volume.

rative sense; neither notion can be defined simply as mere distance from one's homeland, because, as Bronislava Volková (2008: 175) puts it, exile is "multifaceted and can be considered from many different perspectives". In his *Essay on Distance*, Antonio Prete (2008) analyzes how different forms of concrete (physical) or psychological (affective) 'exile' are expressed in literary texts – and how literature itself contributes to the holistic understanding of the feelings that are generated by lack, loss, and distance. At the same time, he points out, our 'loss' of native or affective space is also the loss of the time that we have spent there (Prete 2008: 83). But there is a form of nostalgic estrangement not considered by Prete that emerges from the work of both Boym and Slezkine: this is a form of longing for the very state of estrangement that is represented by an ambivalent or 'split' identity. In this context, ambivalence itself paradoxically becomes a positive value and this feeling of 'split identity' turns into a mood of permanent longing for an existential 'homeland' which gradually becomes ambivalence itself. Such a nostalgic mood is widely shared by those individuals in which a diasporic identity has been developed and reinforced. In Boym's words:

> Diasporic intimacy is possible only when one masters a certain imperfect aesthetics of survival and learns to inhabit exile. The immigrants cherish their oases of intimacy, away from the homeland and not quite in the promised land (Boym 2001: 336).

The pensive and funny-though-poignant mood of diasporic artists serves as an antidote against any kind of restoration, as a paradoxical form of 'hypernationalism'. As Sergej Dovlatov wrote:

> Мой приятель художник Шер говорил:
>
> – Я наполовину русский, наполовину – украинец, наполовину – поляк и наполовину – еврей...
>
> Вот какой был уникальный человек! Из четырех половин состоял... (Dovlatov 1983: 11)[19].

People 'of four halves' can speak multiple languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Yiddish, German, and so on), their identities taking shape in a world of words that is rife with representations of diversity, a supranational 'territory' designed for the preservation of the Self, i.e. of strangeness itself, that quality essential to diasporic identity (Slezkine 2004: 19). A Russian-Jewish sense of diasporic estrangement finds its direct reflection in Russian verbal art. Russian would seem to be the most 'Mercurian' of the available languages since it is the most ambivalent of the 'usurper's' tongues, the official language of the Apollonian state, but also the idiom of Puškin. Insofar as Russian Mercurian identities are imperfectly Russian, they are also typically Russian, representing the hybrid, melancholic, and 'dark' side of Russian culture that has traditionally

[19] "My friend the painter Šer would say, 'I'm half Russian, half Ukrainian, half Polish and half Jew...'. Now that was a unique individual! Made of four halves...".

been marginalized – and often scapegoated – by official Apollonian culture. Apollonian Russian culture has tended to favor a nationally oriented restorative approach to cultural identity and to imagine a 'purely' Russian mode of existence uncontaminated by foreign 'germs'[20]. This 'drastic Russia' promulgates a restorative ideology that, through mystification, negates real historical change and the feelings that such engenders: "Restorative nostalgics don't acknowledge the uncanny and terrifying aspects of what was once homey" (Boym 2001: 251).

'Drastic Russia' is well known outside of Russia, its image having become so pervasive abroad that Western culture sometimes partially and sometimes completely ignores the fact that active reflection is a constant presence in Russia's creative border zones. Both critics and readers have traditionally paid more attention to Russian classical literature's more forceful expressions of feeling and ideology, i.e. to the Apollonian texts that while 'dramatic' frequently hide within their pages the elements of irony and paradoxicality produced by hybridity, tokens of the cross-cultural contamination of Mercurian melancholy that is characteristic of Russian literature and art. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, Boym (2001: 5) notes, "Russian soil proved to be a fertile ground for both native and foreign nostalgia". Joseph De Maistre once famously declared "grattez le Russe et vous trouverez le Tartare"; we might also argue 'grattez le dogme russe e vous trouverez la mélancholie, l'ironie et le paradoxe'. Twentieth-century Russian art has frequently concealed a melancholic affective subtext of intimacy, ambivalence, and rebellion under the restorative surface of the 'direct' text. Indeed, it is precisely the reflective variety of nostalgia that is best expressed by 'melancholic' artists with the notion of Russian '*toska*'. In short, Russian culture is characterized by a peculiar fracture that stems directly from the selfsame 'rebellious adaptation' (to use Johannisson's words) required for survival in 'drastic Russia'.

6. *Conclusions*

This volume demonstrates how a melancholic, reflective, and liminal mood takes shape in the work of various Russian and Russian Jewish authors. A persistent 'feeling of marginality' with respect to the dominant strains in Russian culture produces a background sentiment of melancholy that, together with a sense of suspended and liminal identity, affects the style of their artistic expression. Melancholy, a form of 'pensive longing' that can be expressed in Russian as '*zadumčivaja toska*', is a response to these artists' sense of estrangement and existential hybridity, of their emphatic affectivity, a response to the pressure

[20] The success of 'cultural nationalism' in contemporary Russia closely resembles that of nineteenth-century Slavophilism. It probably reflects, as Gebert (2012: 109) suggests, the "désir désespéré de la difference, de la spécificité russe par rapport à l'Occident représentant le danger de l'omologation dans un monde globalizé".

of drastic Russia's Apollonian values. As we have seen, according to Svetlana Boym (2001), Russian culture contains two different nostalgic modalities that are based on contrasting attitudes towards the nature of personal identity, the homeland, the past, and the future. These modalities coexist within a given subject in different gradations, but remain radically opposed from both the cognitive and existential point of view.

Boym's restorative modality corresponds to the values that Slezkine defines as 'Apollonian' (strength, confidence, faith, and nation), while the reflective approach to reality reveals a Mercurian emphasis on incertitude, art, and exile. Mercurian culture produces 'melancholic identities', people "wavering between adaptation and rebellion" (Johannisson 2011: 20).

Melancholy results from the externalization of one's own intimate rebellion against the Apollonian establishment. Much as restorative nationalists define the source of corruption, decay, and decline as being external to a 'Russian self', so do they perceive a reflective and melancholic state of mind to be a 'foreign danger': after all, ambivalence is infectious and Apollonian culture has "little patience for ambivalence" (Boym 2001: 34). Melancholic expression represents exactly what restorative Apollonians consider to be dangerous for the status quo. If restoration entails a process of de-estrangement, or purification and return to the supposedly unadulterated origins of an idealized Russia, reflection is the response of the 'adulterated' and estranged Russians, including the Russified Mercurians, who live as exiles at 'home' and as Russians in exile.

In her work on nostalgia, Boym also discusses the concept of '*Ostalgie*', a phenomenon of post-Soviet art and literature characterized by a longing for Soviet identity (*Ivi*: 57-82). Here again, she argues, what appear to be voices calling for restoration are in fact echoes of exile experience, of the existential condition of 'supranational exile' that was possible even within the Soviet Union. An experience similar to that of forced emigration or exile has befallen those post-Soviet Russians who were born in the Soviet era: the personal narratives of these 'chronotopic orphans' are not properly characterized by regret, but persistently evince a reflective, melancholic mood. In addition to the traditionally recognized works from the Russian official canon, i.e. from the more serious Apollonian tradition, Russian literature and art also host narratives of a community that is essentially and existentially diasporic:

> Newly collected memories of exile and acculturation shift the old cultural frameworks; even Russian or Soviet souvenirs can no longer be interpreted within their "native" context. Now they are cipher for exile itself and for a newfound exilic domesticity (*Ivi*: 336).

In short, Russian melancholic narratives might be characterized by the following paradox: the more Russian authors feel themselves to be in a border zone characterized by reflection and complex, multifaceded identities, the more they feel a sense of emotional integrity. Opposing national integrity, such emotional integrity "requires flexible, nonrigid personalities capable of reacting emotion-

ally, of experiencing anxiety, guilt, and hostility, when these are appropriate and legitimate responses to life experiences" (Frank 1954: 32). Melancholy is that affective style which is capable of transforming a multivalent identity into an integral sense of being and the uncertain space of exile into an existential *terra firma*.

Резюме

Лаура Сальмон

Хронотопы чувств в литературе. О меланхолии, отчужденности и "задумчивой тоске"

Исследование роли и типологии человеческих чувств в художественной литературе отнюдь не простой вопрос. Проанализировав определение таких понятий как 'эмоция', 'чувство', 'настроение', основанное на данных когнитивных наук, аргументируется, с одной стороны, универсальность человеческих чувств, а с другой связь 'чувства' и 'настроения' с художественным *хронотопом*. В частности, раскрывается значимость предложенного Светланой Бойм (2001) противопоставления двух типологий 'ностальгии' – "реставрирующей" vs. "задумчивой". Бойм показала, что 'тоска' – чувство сугубо амбивалентное, зависящее от *настроения*, от общей идеологии и от психологического состояния автора. 'Ностальгия' может высказаться в форме либо монологической идеологии, либо парадоксального экзистенциального чувства. Последнюю типологию тоски можно в сути своей отождествлять с понятием 'меланхолия', связанным в свою очередь с понятием 'идентичность/самосознание'. Задумчивая/меланхолическая тоска объединяет общину людей, страдающих от экзистенциальной амбивалентности. Юрий Слезкин (2004) называет их "меркуриалами". В лоне русской литературы 'меркуриальное' чувство меланхолии проявилось особенно изысканно и глубоко, в частности и благодаря влиянию русско-еврейской культуры.

Aleksandra Xvostova, Nikolaj Karamzin and the Gendering of *Toska*

Sara Dickinson (University of Genoa)

1. *Introduction*

At the height of sentimentalism in 1796, Aleksandra Xvostova published a small book entitled *Otryvki* (*Fragments*) that contained two short sketches, *Kamin* (*The Fireplace*) and *Ručeek* (*The Rivulet*), both of which might be described as elaborations on the theme of *toska.* She combined this sentiment with various gloomy relatives to weave an emotional fabric of those "doleful humors" that were especially prized by the sentimentalists, an emphasis that undoubtedly contributed to the book's acclaim[1]. While Xvostova's text is likely to strike today's readers as peculiarly heavy-handed – in part because we have become unaccustomed to the sentimentalist era's expressivity and in part because it is *so* very thickly laden with suffering and dismay – her work enjoyed considerable popularity in its day. Before its inclusion in *Otryvki*, *Kamin* had already been published in a journal and circulated in manuscript; according to one contemporary (Runič 1896: 309), it was a "delightful trifle" that could be found "on all of the tables in both salon and office and that everyone read with pleasure"[2]. *Kamin*'s first editor lauded the text's "spirit of Ossianic grief (*gorest'*)" together with the "tenderness and profundity of melancholic feelings" that the authoress renders so "correctly" and with "inexpressible pleasantness" (Podšivalov 1795: 68), while such established literary figures as Mixail Xeraskov and Nikolaj Karamzin were said to have been "pleasantly surprised" by

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[1] Based on a new regard for emotions and, particularly, for '*čuvstvitel'nost"*, or 'sensibility', sentimentalism tended toward melancholic themes from its very origins. In the words of 'Ju. Podol'skij' (Jurij Ajxenval'd), "since sentimentalist writers listened keenly, as it were, to the beating of the human heart, they were particularly prone to apprehend among the other feelings that made up the content of inner life a range of doleful (*skorbnyx*) humors – sorrow (*pečal'*), sadness (*grust'*), disappointment, *toska*. That is why the complexion of many sentimentalist works is *melanxolija.* It was with her sweet streams that feeling (*čuvstvitel'nye*) souls were fed" (Podol'skij 1925: 764 ff.). In 1794, the *Dictionary of the Russian Academy* explicitly defined "*čuvstvitel'nost"* as "the quality of a person who is moved by the unhappiness of another" (cf. Page 1985: 395). As M.A. Arzumanova notes sentimentalism had detractors from the 1770s on (Arzumanova 1964: 197); the journalist N. Straxov lampooned the fashion for emotional excess in 1791 by offering an infallible technique for would-be authors: "take 175 alas's, 200 ah's, 4 poods of sighs, 7 buckets of tears, from 20 to 30 daggers and several bottles of poison that the novel's heroes can guzzle" (quoted *Ivi*.: 200).

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, all of the translations in this article are my own.

it (Makarov 1830: 20). For memoirist Filipp Vigel' (2000: 119), *Kamin* and *Ručeek* were "two flowers, two forget-me-nots", an evaluation corroborated by readers: the volume *Otryvki* was printed in an unusually large number of copies for the era (2400) and was republished several times over the course of the next 50 years (Makarov 1830: 20; Zirin 1994: 291-292).

This article, which began as an attempt to understand what *toska* meant for Xvostova and what literary and historical reasons led her to emphasize it. It is hardly surprising that *toska* became especially prominent in an era when emotivity, particularly that tending towards the gloomy, was highly valued. Less obvious is the association between *toska* and femininity that gradually unfolded in eighteenth-century Russian letters to reach a peak in sentimentalist literary debates, in part through Xvostova's own efforts. To begin with, the nature and quality of Xvostova's *toska* was unusual even in the sentimentalist era. While Xvostova's renown was undoubtedly enhanced by her gender and by the notoriety of her elite social position[3], her sheer emotional expressivity also intrigued readers as an audacious affective gesture. As will become apparent, Xvostova's literary *toska* was distinct from the model of Karamzin and the other male writers who set the era's tone – a divergence that may be understood not simply as a particular stage in the evolution of either sentimentalism or literary *toska*, but also as a stage in the relationship between the expression of despondent feelings and more general issues of gender circulating at the time, especially the feminization of Russian literature that occurred in the sentimentalist era. This article will contextualize Xvostova's *toska* in a larger literary debate involving gender and the 'ownership' of personal emotions that occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, wherein *toska*, a forceful sentiment closely identified with the experience of women, played a significant role.

After a brief characterization of Xvostova's anguish-ridden text (part two), we outline the evolution of *toska* in eighteenth-century Russian letters (part three) as it became an increasingly feminine emotion. Linked first with female literary personages and with a disquieting absence or lack of the masculine, *toska* was tied in the later sentimentalist era to actual women, women writers, and women's writing. Part four explores in greater depth the gender issues at stake in late eighteenth-century Russian literature, particularly the problem of feminization, a literary fashion in which the male literary establishment adopted 'feminine speech' as a new model towards which the evolving literary language could be directed[4]. Particular attention will be paid to the views expressed in Karamzin's *Poslanie k ženščinam* (*Epistle to Women*, 1795) with regard to gender, emotion, and artistic expression (cf. Karamzin 1966). Part

[3] Besides being the niece of poet Mixail Xeraskov, Xvostova was related to the powerful Trubetskoj clan and through her husband had links "with all of the Counts Šeremet'ev" (Vigel' 2000: 119).

[4] On feminization, see, for example, Hammarberg 1994, 2001, 2002; Vowles 1994, 2002; Rosslyn 1996, 1997; Heyder, Rosenholm 2003.

five situates Xvostova's reiterative *toska* in a tradition of eighteenth-century women's writing by considering the precedent of Ekaterina Urusova. The gendered quality of *toska* and Xvostova's own literary daring are further attested in a comparison between her work and the female discussions of elegiac sentiment that followed in her wake (part six). The terms on which *toskovanie* subsequently fell into decline as it ceded ground to *melanxolija* – however briefly and for some writers, but not all – will be taken up in part five as well. Ultimately, the connection between *toska* and women's writing both enhanced Xvostova's popularity and guaranteed her later obsolescence, since it was deeply intertwined with sentimentalist anxieties about the relationship of femininity to the male self.

2. Toska *in Xvostova and in Karamzin*

Though described by her first editor as a bearer of "melancholic feelings", Xvostova in *Otryvki* largely avoids the term *melanxolija* per se, preferring more traditional lexemes such as *toska*, *pečal'* (sorrow)*, gorest'* (grief), and the verbal forms *toskovat'* (to suffer *toska*) and *toskujuščij* (suffering *toska*)[5]. The contemplation and expression of these feelings – achieved via a first-person female perspective – constitute the basic theme of both texts, which convey an elegiac mood through a series of affecting scenes that are both vague and very emotional, reiterating ideas of sadness, anguish, and longing. In *Kamin*, the narrator waxes despondent because she is misunderstood by society and alienated from it. "*Radosti! – Gde oni?*", she exclaims:

> Печали! – Печали тут – тут, со мною, глубоко в сердце, и вместе с кровью текут в жилах моих [...]. Горести! вечность, неизмеримость, степь дикая и необозримая, где бедный странник не находит ни сени для отдохновения, ни капли воды для утоления несносной тоски своей! (Xvostova 1796: 11)[6].

In *Ručeek*, earthly existence remains similarly bleak as the narrator mourns the death of her father. Fate and despair push her to a state near death, which she is ready to embrace as welcome solace, only to draw her back again:

> Судьба неумолимая, судьба не насытившаяся еще слезами моими, оттолкнула меня от края желанной мною пропасти; [...] – велела жить, – велела еще

[5] The word 'melanxolija' appears but once in *Otryvki* near the conclusion of *Ručeek* (Xvostova 1796: 47): "*Pečal' zametila menja pri roždenii, i melanxolija sebe prisvoila*" ("Sorrow marked me at birth and melancholy took me as her own").

[6] "Joys! Where are they? [...] Sorrows! Sorrows are here with me, deep in my heart, and flow with the blood in my veins [...]. Sadness! An eternity, an immeasurable expanse, a wild and endless steppe, where the poor wanderer finds neither shade in which to repose, nor a drop of water to slake his intolerable toska!".

тосковать, чувствовать, и бросила опять в печальной мир сей, сердечными слезами моими окропленный (*Ivi*: 37-38)[7].

Given that Xvostova wrote in Karamzin's heyday and in a clearly sentimentalist vein, a comparison of her texts to his was inevitable and some of Xvostova's contemporaries even suggested that he had heavily edited her work[8]. *Otryvki* distinguishes itself from Karamzin's writing of the same period, however, in both the quantity and quality of its *toska*. Quantitatively, words built on the root *tosk-* comprise roughly one out of every 300 words in *Otryvki*, far more than what we find in Karamzin's work from the late 1780s through the mid 1790s, i.e. those years in which he would have been able to influence her text[9]. Indeed, Karamzin was generally wary of unrestrained sentiment and despite a clear interest in "comprehending the nature of emotions, the subtle shadings of feeling" (Kočetkova 2013: 214) and his well-known melancholic leanings[10], he produced very few texts in which the word *toska* or the root *tosk-* appears more than once or twice. The densest or most often repeated occurrence of *tosk-* in Karamzin's oeuvre is in the stylized historical tale *Natal'ja, bojarskaja doč'* (*Natal'ja, the Boyar's Daughter*) from 1792, where it appears in not one word out of every 300, as in Xvostova, but in only one word out of 1344 (cf. Karamzin 1964)[11]. Moreover, Karamzin's *toska* is far from solemn, but corresponds to the gener-

[7] "Implacable fate, yet unsated by my tears, pushed me back from the edge of the precipice I desired [...], ordered that I live, that I continue pining and feeling, and threw me again into this sorrowful world, watered by my heartfelt tears".

[8] D. P. Runič (1896: 309), for example, characterizes *Kamin* as "imitative of Karamzin's style", while Vigel' (2000: 119) notes – and refutes – widespread claims that Karamzin assisted Xvostova in the composition of *Otryvki*.

[9] My calculations for Xvostova are based on the online texts of *Kamin* and *Ručeek* provided by the Corinna Project at the University of Exeter (cf. Xvostova 1796), while statistics regarding the incidence of *tosk-/toska* in the work of Karamzin and the other writers discussed here have generally been culled from the academic editions of eighteenth-century literature available online at the Russian Virtual Library (cf. *Russkaja virtual'naja biblioteka*, <http://www.rvb.ru/18vek/>). Since the intriguing data available on the site of the National Corpus of the Russian Language (*Nacional'nyj korpus russkogo jazyka*, <ruscorpora.ru>) conflict with the word counts that I have been able to ascertain myself, I have not used them in this article. That said, the site does helpfully corroborate several of the general points that I make here, such as the increasing use of *toska* over the course of the eighteenth century, and the sudden appearance and short-lived popularity of *melanxolija* at century's end.

[10] Dmitrij Blagoj (1931), for example, avers that "the 'imprint of melancholy' [...] comprises the most characteristic feature of all of Karamzin's writing".

[11] It is true that the proportion of *toska* in Karamzin's shorter works, where the term appears but once in the midst of only two or three hundred words, statistically surpasses that found in Xvostova, but this article focuses on examples of *toska*'s emphatic repetition. As noted, the highest incidence of repeated *toska* in Karamzin appears in *Natal'ja*, where the root *tosk-* occurs nine times. The second highest, which is found in Part Four of *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (1791-1801), marks a sharp decline: in the *Literaturnye pamiatniki* edition's 115 pages of fine print (Karamzin 1984: 273-388), the root appears only seven times.

ally humorous and ironic tone of his exaggeratedly sentimental tale. As Gitta Hammarberg points out, *Natal'ja* parodies both sentimentalist excess and sentimentalism in general, signaling the maturation of this literary current together with its imminent demise (Hammarberg 1991: 207). Indeed, Karamzin's levity underlines a conviction that such earnest effusiveness was quickly becoming passé. Sentimentalism's leading light, in other words, was already making gentle fun of *toska* in 1792 – before Xvostova had even begun to write her text.

We should also note that by steeping *toska* in irony and humor, Karamzin undermines its potential suitability for the expression of his own feelings or for those of the text's cultivated male narrator. For all of his interest in 'feminine' language, he uses the term *toska* in *Natal'ja* largely to characterize the distress of the female protagonist, which results when she is separated, alternately, from her father and from her lover[12]. Karamzin's distaste for emphatic or reiterative *toska* can be corroborated elsewhere. While his oeuvre clearly demonstrates that he had no objection to earnest expressions of elegiac sentiment, Karamzin preferred single instances of *toska* to the more repetitive use favored by Xvostova – at least when not jesting.

It has been suggested that Karamzin tended to shy away from strong emotions beginning in the early 1790s, when he abandoned an early infatuation with epic and tragedy for the lighter and more lyrical forms that subsequently became his forte (cf. Cross 1968: *passim*)[13]. We might also link his judicious use of *toska* to the fact that the pathos of unbridled anguish was inappropriate for Karamzin's cultural role in the 1790s. As a prominent trendsetter and literary spokesman for sentimentalism and feminization, he played a key role in promulgating the new fashion by which male writers adopted for their literary work a linguistic register associated with the salon, the boudoir, and, at least in theory, the linguistic praxis of women. Certainly, an accession of emotion was characteristic of both sentimentalism and feminization, but the emotions in question were ideally gentle and restrained. Proponents of feminization held that if men were to write as women spoke or ought to speak[14], their feelings should be delicate and delicately expressed. What then are we to make of *toska*'s emphatic repetition in Xvostova? What is the precise 'flavor' of the literary *toska* that Karamzin uses only sparingly and she so assiduously underlines? A brief review of the eighteenth-century literary contexts in which *toska* was used – and sometimes forcefully reiterated – will help us to better understand both why Karamzin later turned away from *toska*, but also why Xvostova did not.

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[12] *Toska* occurs six times in reference to Natal'ja's emotions, twice in connection with the distress of her father after she disappears, and once in her lover's explication of his own feelings; it does not appear in reference to the emotions of the narrator.

[13] On the decrease in Karamzin's tolerance for sentimentalist effusion during the 1790s, see also Arzumanova 1964.

[14] The journalist P.I. Makarov, admitting that Russian women's speech was inadequate to serve as a literary model, concluded that "therefore we must sometimes write as we ought to speak and not as we speak" (cf. Hammarberg 1994: 108).

3. *The Emergence and Gendering of* Toska

While the term *toska* is attested in Old Russian (Sreznevskij 1912: 1057; Lunt 1970: 76), it was not commonplace in literary texts prior to the middle of the eighteenth-century. The root appears only once in the *Sobranie stixotvorenij* (*Collected Poems*, 1956) of Antiox Kantemir, for example: he preferred to describe dejection in other terms, such as '*pečal'*' (sorrow), which occurs over forty times in this volume, '*skorb'*' (grief) – nine occurrences, '*gore*' (woe) – five, or '*gorest'*'(grief) – five. His single use of '*tosk-*' occurs in a facetious line containing the verb '*toskovat'*' ('to pine' or 'to languish') in a 1740 poem on the subject of writer's block: "*Skučen vam, stixi moi, jaščik*, / *desjat' celyx* / *gde vy let toskuete v teni* / *za ključami!*" (Kantemir 1956: 216)[15].

Both quantitatively and qualitatively, Kantemir's *toska* would seem but a distant cousin to Xvostova's: while hers relates primarily to emotional suffering, his has distinct physical overtones. Humorously attributed to an inanimate subject, Kantemir's *toska* is closer to physical comedy than to pathos or existential anguish. It is characterized by a desire for action that is rendered impossible by specific material constraints (the writing cannot leave the drawer), illuminating a notion of confinement or constraint found in the Old Russian version of this word[16] and retained, as we will see, even in the more abstract and moral *toskovanie* of later eighteenth-century texts, wherein impulses or urges that are almost physical are contrasted with concrete barriers that require their frustration.

Glimmers of *toska*'s future importance as a loftier literary sentiment begin to appear in the work of Kantemir's contemporary Vasilij Trediakovskij, who employs it with the seriousness and force of subsequent sentimentalist writers. Known for his translation and adaptation of foreign literary models replete with bold 'new' emotions such as love (Reyfman 1990: 85, 87), Trediakovskij clearly links '*tosk-*' which appears four times in his *Izbrannye proizvedenija* (*Selected Works,* 1963), with the context of classical and European *amour*[17]. We find the term in the titles of two love poems from 1730 (1963: 91) – "*Toska ljubovnicyna v razlučenii s ljubovnikom*" and "*Toska ljubovnikova v razlučenii s ljubovnice-ju*" ("The Anguish of a Lover Parting from His Lover", "The Anguish of a Lover

[15] "Dull for you, my poems, is the drawer where you've been languishing for an entire ten years, in darkness, behind lock and key".

[16] Sreznevskij (1912: 1057) indicates that Old Russian instantiations of *toska* (*tŭska*) include both physical and moral shadings, ranging from 'constraint' or 'oppression' (*tesnenie*, *pritesnenie*), to 'woe, sorrow' (*gore*, *pečal'*), to 'agitation' or 'anxiety' (*volnenie*, *bespokojstvo*). While he defines the related verb *tŭsknuti* as 'to be dispirited' (*byt' udručennym*) (*Ibidem*), it can also be used reflexively (*tŭs*[*k*]*nutisja*) to signify 'to hurry', 'to strive', or 'be ready for' (Lunt 1970: 76), concepts suggesting a physical sense of urgency.

[17] My calculation of *toska*'s occurrence in Trediakovskij is based on the severely abridged 1963 edition; examining the full texts of longer works such as *Ezda v ostrov Ljubvi* (*Voyage to the Isle of Love*) or *Tilemaxida* might produce quite different results.

Parting from Her Lover") – a pair of verses otherwise written in French and addressing, respectively, the distress of the male partner and of his beloved on the occasion of their ineluctable separation. The fact that the woman's name is Phyllis (Philis) and that the man is setting off by ship allows us to identify the described event as the tragic parting of Phyllis and Demophon[18]. Trediakovskij's verses thus both illustrate a process of cultural adaptation (from classical literature via French) that bore much fruit in eighteenth-century letters and proposes one of the specific settings in which subsequent literary *toska* was most often to be invoked in Russia, namely in classically inspired scenes of adieu between exalted and eminent lovers. Indeed, the *toska*-enriched farewell of Phyllis and Demophon was itself later taken up by Trediakovskij's rival Lomonosov.

In his *Novyj i kratkij sposob k složeniju Rossijskix stixov* (*A New and Brief Method for Composing Russian Verse*, 1735), Trediakovskij initiated the enduring connection between *toska* and the elegy. After explaining in what this genre consists, he offers an example of elegiac hexameter in several lines of his own making. Based on Ovid's classical precedent, Trediakovskij's first-person lament describes the sentiments of a bereft male lover, who, having learned of his dear one's death, suffers the torments of "intolerable [*nesnosnaja*] *toska*" (Trediakovskij 1963: 400). The fifth lexeme in a woeful series – after "*beznadeždie, mjatež, gorest' i pečali*"[19] – *toska* adds pleonastic emphasis.

Trediakovskij's oeuvre also provides an instance of comic *toskovanie* in the unfinished comedy *Evnux* (*The Eunuch*, 1752), the 'transposition' of a Latin comedy by Terence. The notion of *toska* is absent in the original text and thus forms part of the emotional adornment that Trediakovskij himself adds to the drama. He uses it to characterize the feeling suffered by a male personage, Phaedria (Fedrij), when his courtesan girlfriend unexpectedly refuses to allow him into her home. As a result, Phaedria both "yearns for her" ("*po nej toskuja*"), a sentiment laced with physical desire, and wonders how to best get revenge (*Ivi*: 164). While the addition of unsatisfied and unrequited desire increases the emotional complexity of Trediakovsky's *toska* with respect to Kantemir's, Phaedria's anguish again derives from a vigorous clash between inner desires and external constraints, the courtesan's closed door recalling the recalcitrant wood of Kantemir's desk. Phaedria himself is not "the eunuch" referenced in the play's title, but his difficulties with the courtesan do hint at an emasculation of sorts in the unresolvable conflict between his yearnings and his actual possibilities. *Toska* is the lover's emotional response to the 'impotence' forced upon him by thresholds that he cannot cross.

Mixail Lomonosov took *toska* still more seriously, multiplying its appearances, increasing its density, and raising it to the status of a literary concept thoroughly permeated with the classical spirit. In Lomonosov's work we begin to see re-

[18] While 'Phyllis' is also a hallmark of the idyll, serving in Virgil's *Eclogues*, for example, "always as a stereotypical love-interest name" (Jones 2013: 99), it suggests the beloved of Demophon when coupled with a male lover's departure by sea.

[19] "Hopelessness, perturbation, grief and sorrows".

peated or reiterative *toska*: seventeen of the nineteen occurrences of '*tosk-*' found in his *Izbrannye proizvedenija* (*Selected Works*, 1986), are distributed among only three works: six instances appear in each of two tragedies, *Tamira i Selim* (*Tamira and Selim*, 1750) and *Demofon* (*Demophon*, 1750-1751) and five in the unfinished epic *Petr Velikij* (*Peter the Great*, 1760)[20]. Clearly, he used emphatic *toska* to signal an elevated literary style.

Lomonosovian *toska* is also more feminine. While three of the four instances of *toska* found in Trediakovskij's *Izbrannye proizvedenija* had belonged to men, all six occurrences of the root in Lomonosov's *Tamira i Selim* describe the actual or potential sentiments of Tamira herself, now suffering separation from her beloved, now the moral torment provoked by the fact that he is the political and military enemy of her own father. In *Demofon*, *toska* similarly characterizes a sentiment experienced largely by women and directly or indirectly provoked by their love for men with whom they are geographically, politically (and thus ontologically and tragically) incompatible. Male characters in the play do not explicitly experience *toska,* but are occasionally threatened with it as a form of revenge by the women whom they have betrayed. As repayment for the tribulations that Demophon and his friend Polymestor have caused to Phyllis and Ilione, they will be forced to suffer the emotion that has heretofore been the women's own lot: "*No ty* [...] *sam počuvstvueš' tosku*" ("Now you, too, are going to feel some *toska*"), declares Phyllis to Demophon, while her girlfriend declares to Polymestor, who had thought her dead, that she has been saved solely "*čtob tebja toskoj terzat'*" ("to tear you apart with toska") (Lomonosov 1986: 405, 410). In point of fact, *toska* in Lomonosov often 'rends' or 'rips' its subject, suffusing the lexeme with a sense of distinctly physical agony that, in this context, again suggests emasculation.

The dramas of Aleksandr Sumarokov followed Lomonosov's lead in associating reiterative *toska* with the genre of tragedy and with feminine sentiment: in *Xorev* (1750), set in ancient Kyiv, all five occurrences of the sentiment describe the feelings of women (Sumarokov 1957: 321-364), while in *Semira* (1751), ten or eleven of thirteen references to *toska* are experienced by the eponymous heroine and only two or three by her lover (*Ivi*: 366-423). In both tragedies, *toska* accompanies the compulsory separation of enamoured couples required by a combination of political discord and foreignness. In the third and much later *Dimitrij Samozvanec* (1771), the root appears only twice, but assumes familiar contours: it is used once in reference to the feelings of the heroine, Ksenija,

[20] *Tosk-* in *Petr Velikij* refers mostly to an 'epic' sentiment suffered by the Russian people. The remaining two occurrences found in Lomonosov's *Izbrannye proizvedenija* appear in an elaboration of Psalm 34, written between 1743 and 1751, wherein a first-person voice laments the ill-use of his fellows (*Nanosjat mne vraždu i zlobu,* / *Čtob tem mne za dobro vozdat'* / *I bednyj dux moj i utrobu* / *Dosadoj i toskoj terzat'* [They inflict upon me enmity and malice / To thus repay me for my kindness / And rend my poor spirit and vitals / with vexation and *toska*]), and in the speech of an inconsolable Dido – another classical farewell – in lines translated from the *Aeneid* in 1747 (Lomonosov 1986: 189, 442).

forced to leave both her father and her beloved, and once in Dimitrij's threat of what his rival Parmen will be made to suffer in Hell, namely spiritual hardships and physical injuries that again hint at bodily laceration: "*Za derzost' budeš' tam ty mučit'sja voveki,*" Dimitrij declares, "*Gde žažda*, *glad*, *toska i ognennye reki, / Gde skorb' duševnaja i neiscel'nyx ran*" (*Ivi*: 463, 429)[21].

Arguably, a sort of 'emasculation' is the women's general fate in these texts as well since the *toska* attributed to them inevitably results from the female personages' separation from their menfolk, i.e. when they lose or are otherwise cut off from the defining virility of fathers and lovers. Thus, men's writing casts women as suffering *toska* precisely because they yearn to be reunited with what emerges as an essential – and paradoxically masculine – component of the ostensibly feminine self.

A coexisting version of a *toska* that was more lyrical and 'male' emerges in Sumarokov's verses from the late 1750s and 1760s. Though often contextualized in genres such as the elegy or song and garnished with pastoral elements, the *toska* in these verses is nonetheless ostensibly suffered by the male poet himself, rather than by a heartsick woman or an Arcadian shepherd (although instances of these also occur)[22]. Rendering what are presumably his *own* sentiments in the register of his own voice, the poet pines and languishes when a love interest refuses to reciprocate his feelings, for example (because she is absent, dead, or simply indifferent), or at the hands of a cruel society that has alienated and ostracized him – a favorite theme for Xvostova as well. As Sumarokov puts it in *Protivu zlodeev* (*Against Villains*, 1759)[23]:

> Во всей жизни минуту я кажду
> Утесняюсь, гонимый, и стражду,
> Многократно я алчу и жажду.
> Иль на свет я рожден для того,
> Чтоб гоним был, не знав для чего,
> И не трогал мой стон никого?
> Мной тоска день и ночь обладает.
>
> (Sumarokov 1957: 82)[24]

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[21] "For your impudence you will suffer eternal torment there / With thirst, hunger, *toska*, and fiery rivers, / With grief of the soul and wounds unhealed".

[22] Sumarokov wrote various lyrics from a woman's point of view, such as the elegiac *Gde ni guljaju, ni xožu...* (*Wherever I wander, wherever I walk...*, 1765; cf. Sumarokov 1959: 269-270) or the heroide *Osnel'da k Zavloxu* (*From Osnel'da to Zavlox,* 1769; *Ivi*: 165-167), a further elaboration of the character Osnel'da from his tragedy *Xorev*.

[23] Readers and critics have sometimes credited *Protivu zlodeev* to Sumarokov's daughter, the poet Ekaterina Knjaznina (cf. Ewington 2014: 34-35n), an evaluation perhaps encouraged by the verse's pointed expression of *toska.*

[24] "In all my life I am every minute / Oppressed, persecuted, I suffer, / Oft do I hunger and thirst. / Or was I born onto this earth / To be persecuted without knowing why / Or whether anyone has been touched by my lamentations? / *Toska* takes possession of me day and night".

At times Sumarokov's lyrical *toska* is even stripped of its object or cause, and thus, while it continues to "rip" and to "wrench" the poet, we are not always exactly sure why. In the 1768 sonnet "*Na otčajanie*" (*On Despair*), for example, *toska* has no precise object and thus verges on the purely existential. Despite its emotional vagueness, however, such *toska* remains physically specific, preserving the legacy of the classically styled contexts articulated by Lomonosov in proposing additional scenarios of carnage: "*Žestokaja toska*, *otčajanija doč'*! [...] / *Terzaj menja*, *toska*, *i rvi moi ty členy*" (*Ivi*: 171-172)[25].

Sumarokov's lyrical *toska* represents a new evolution of this emotion in the Russian context that more obviously points toward its later manifestations in the sentimentalist era. At the same time, Sumarokov is not the direct predecessor of Xvostova, since his *toska*, however personalized, is neither feminine nor emphatically repeated. For examples from mid century of reiterative *toska,* we must look to Sumarokov's junior colleague Denis Fonvizin. Notwithstanding his later infamous excoriations of Francophilia, Fonvizin in the 1760s was happily reveling in French-inspired literary anguish. His appreciation of this sentiment's compelling pathos is evident in *Korion* (1764), for example, the 'reworking' of a comedy by Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gresset, in which *toska* makes eighteen explicit appearances. Thirteen of these have no equivalent in the original French text, but represent embellishments that Fonvizin himself chose to add, evidently following the lead of Lomonosov and Sumarokov in equating this lexeme with literariness. As in Sumarokov's lyrical verses, *toska* here primarily afflicts the male protagonist and contains an aura of physical suffering and dismemberment, evident in the declaration made by Korion in the throes of suicide: "*Terzajus'*, *mučus'*, *rvus' ljutejšeju toskoju*..." (Fonvizin 1959, I: 41)[26]. At the same time, Fonvizin's *toska* has little direct connection with Sumarokov's lyricism or with that later found in Karamzin: the first-person anguish which he relishes is not his own. Indeed, Fonvizin left the emphatic repetition of *toska* behind in the 1760s and the fact that he had overused it before Karamzin had even been born likely contributed to its later lack of appeal. Elsewhere, as we have seen, reiterative *toska* occurs primarily in the context of tragic drama, where it is largely a feminine emotion. The sentiment continues to be associated with the female gender – and with its ostensibly masculine core – in the later work of writers such as Majkov, Xeraskov, Knjažnin, Krylov, and Kapnist. When expounded lyrically, as in Sumarokov, to represent the first-person sentiments of the poet himself, the lexeme *toska* is used much more sparingly. Indeed, I have been un-

[25] "Cruel anguish, daughter of despair! [...] / Tear me apart, anguish, and rend my limbs".

[26] "I am torn, tormented, rent by the most cruel anguish...". Interestingly, there is another more physiological sense of the word *toska* that refers to bodily suffering or the pain associated with illness. It appears as such in Fonvizin's later travel writing (cf. Fonvizin 1959, II: 570), for example, and in Sumarokov's fable "*Volk i žuravl'*" (*The Wolf and the Crane*; 1957: 245): "*Volk el – ne znaju, čto*, *– I kost'ju podavilsja*, / *Metalsja on toski, i čut' on ne vzdurilsja*" ("A wolf was eating I don't know what and choked on the bone, / he writhed in *toska* and almost lost his mind").

able to find any subsequent male writers from the eighteenth-century literary canon[27] who repeat *toska* with anything close to Xvostovian tenacity, i.e. no other texts by established male authors who use *toska* more than once or twice in a single literary work – before Karamzin.

4. *Feminization and* Toska*: Karamzin's* Poslanie k ženščinam

The term *feminizacija* ('feminization') was apparently coined by Viktor Vinogradov (1935: 216) to describe Puškin's rejection of it[28]. More recently, scholars have probed the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in this eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century "literary cult of the woman" (*Ibidem*), beginning with the fact that it involved a notion of the feminine that was idealized and even invented on the part of the male literary community in order to serve as an appropriate role model in what was an "ultimately male enterprise" (Hammarberg 2001: 219). Women's widely touted cultural influence was little more than theoretical, in other words, since feminization "did not authorize women to step outside socially prescribed feminine roles" (Engel 2004: 19). For women themselves, this new cultural trend embodied at best a continuation of the status quo, and arguably even a 'backlash' from an earlier period in which women such as Catherine II and Ekaterina Daskova, however exceptional, had been prominent and powerful cultural figures (Vowles 1994: 40). In the era of feminization, women were sentenced to "the cultural periphery" and often denied the right "to participate in the cultural production of signifying practices as a subject" (Heyder, Rosenholm 2003: 53-54). Their role in the literary process, if any, "was thought to be as inspiring Muses, appreciative audiences, exemplars of refined speech, or as discriminating arbiters of good taste in literary matters", while men "continued to monopolize literary production, their repertoire now expanded to incorporate a feminine, emotional component" (Rosslyn 2000: 408).

Karamzin obliquely addressed the link between femininity and *toska* in his 1795 *Poslanie k ženščinam* (*Epistle to Women*), a verse that stands as an appropriately paradoxical statement of his position vis-à-vis feminization, gender, and sentiment[29]. Karamzin perceived *toska* not simply as a 'feminine' sentiment that male authors might sport as a fashionable salon badge or apply to the feelings of their female personages: it was also suggestive of women themselves and of the threat to masculinity that women, and especially women's writing, could

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[27] By 'canon' I intend the authors available in the eighteenth-century collection of the *Russian Virtual Library*.

[28] As Puškin himself put it in a personal letter, "*ja pišu dlja sebja, a pečataju dlja deneg, a ničut' dlja ulybki prekrasnogo pola*" ("I write for myself and publish for money – not in the least for the smiles of the fair sex"; cf. Vinogradov 1935: 217).

[29] On *Poslanie k ženščinam*, see also Heyder, Rosenholm 2003: 56; on Karamzin's ambivalent approach to "women" as both addressees and models of language, see also Hammarberg 1994 and Vowles 1994; on feminization, see note 5.

represent. His poem demonstrates how such ontological 'translation' or slippage between textual and actual women could occur and how it could be used to distance women further from the male literary establishment.

Thinly veiled as 'the Poet', Karamzin asserts his devotion to the "gentle sex" ("*o nežnyj pol!*") and explains that he chose to become a writer in order to "please" women and to earn their praise (Karamzin 1966: 178). His goal, the apex of literary achievement, is to be recognized by them for his wide range of expressive talents as well as his artistic and psychological finesse – in terms that he preemptively indicates:

> [В]место острой шпаги,
> Взял в руки лист бумаги,
> Чернильницу с пером,
> Чтоб быть писателем, творцом,
> Для вас, красавицы, приятным.
> Чтоб слогом чистым, сердцу внятным,
> Оттенки вам изображать
> Страстей счастливых и несчастных,
> То кротких, то ужасных;
> Чтоб вы могли сказать:
> 'Он, право, мил и верно переводит
> Всё темное в сердцах на ясный нам язык;
> Слова для тонких чувств находит!' (*Ivi*: 170)[30].

Karamzin's verse charges women with being a mainstay of emotional support for male literary activity, but also specifies that artistic creation is an exclusively masculine endeavor. Women feel, but men alone are responsible for the public voicing of sentiment. The Poet presents himself as the rightful spokesman for female emotion in part through the appropriation of *toska* itself, a gesture that illustrates in microcosm both the feminization of the poet and the marginalization of the poetess that Karamzin's verse more generally performs[31]. The

[30] "Instead of a sharp sword, / I took in hand a sheet of paper, / An ink pot with pen, / To become a writer, a creator, / Who would for you, my beauties, be pleasing. / That I might in a pure style intelligible to the heart / Depict for you the shadings / Of passions happy and unhappy, / Now gentle, now fearsome, / That you might be able to say: / 'He is really quite a dear and faithfully translates / All that is obscure in the heart into a language clear to us; / He finds the words for delicate feelings!'".

[31] There are also two instances of non-feminine *toska* in Karamzin's *Poslanie*, both of which link the sentiment of anguish with psychical and physical degeneration, and thus arguably with degrees of emasculation (Karamzin 1966: 172, 176). The first appears in didactic lines about an allegorical type who represents paranoia: "*I sej bezumnyj čelovek* / *S toskoju na časax provodit ves' svoj vek*" ("And this irrational man / spends his entire life standing anguished guard"); the second is a comment on the rightfulness of women ministering to the afflicted: "*S kakoju krotost'ju ix golos uveščaet* / *Boljaščix ne roptat' na boga*, *no terpet'!* / *Kolena prekloniv, odna u neba prosit* / *Im zdravija ili... spokojnogo konca*; / *Drugaja pitie celebnoe raznosit* / *I laskoju živit toskujuščix serdca*" ("With what gentleness their voices exhort / the ailing to not grumble at God, but en-

relevant lines open with the Poet declaring his "love" for spending time with female friends and recounting the pleasurable activities that he enjoys in their company, but close in a very different key as these ostensibly shared pastimes are divided into distinctly gendered realms:

> Но всё, но всё еще люблю
> В апреле рвать фиалки с вами,
> В жар летний отдыхать в тени над ручейками,
> В печальном октябре грустить и тосковать,
> Зимой перед огнем романы сочинять,
> Вас тешить и стращать! (*Ivi*: 178)[32].

The poet and his female companion(s) are together in April, and, in the absence of indications to the contrary, it would seem that they also sit beside streams together in summer and commune in October anguish. Their conjoint activity does not extend beyond the autumn, however, since 'she' does not participate in the winter writing of novels, but has already been relegated in that season to the role of enthralled reader. Indeed, even the penultimate stage of autumnal *toska*, though presumably shared, is also already gendered since "suffering sadness and *toska*" fuels literary creation only for the Poet. It is he, who turns feeling into art, while his friend, helpmeet and muse, experiences emotion, but does not produce texts, being limited to the reception and appreciation of his expression. *Poslanie* thus argues for the male interpretation and publication of female sentiment by both explicitly associating women with *toska* and preventing them from expressing it. Indeed, the feelings of his erstwhile playmate serve as raw material for his poetry. And at the conclusion of these quoted lines, the poet imposes upon her specific standards of comportment that redirect her gentle appreciation of nature and the seasons to a focus on his own verses.

What feelings exactly does the Poet's female friend experience? "Sadness" and "*toska*", as well as those emotions that are later provoked by the art that he wields to alternately "comfort and terrify" her. Sometimes his versifying demonstrates the able expression of fearsome sentiments ("passions happy and unhappy", etc.), sometimes the revelation of still darker emotions ("all that is obscure in the heart"). Indeed, her "terror" would seem to derive in part from the Poet's expression and externalization of the latter, i.e. the feelings found "*v serdcax*" (a phrase that can mean both 'in the heart' or 'in our [women's] hearts'), her own previously "obscure" and poorly understood emotions. It is these that the Poet threatens to unmask from one moment to the next as he swings unpredictably from succor to intimidation.

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dure! On bended knee, one woman asks the heavens for their health... or peaceful end; / Another distributes healing nourishment / and with kindness animates the hearts of the anguishing").

[32] "I still, I still love / To pluck violets with you in April, / To find in the heat of summer shady repose beside a brook, / In sorrowful October to suffer sadness and *toska*, / In winter before the fire to compose novels / That comfort and terrify you!".

The qualms felt by the Poet's companion might also stem from his preemptive silencing of her. By summer, his April friend is only implicit presence since she herself has been "faithfully translated" – or suppressed – by his 'art'. It is quite conceivable that the fear Karamzin attributes to his female friend also reflects the "obscure" and unacknowledged sentiments of the Poet himself, the rhymed triad *toskovat'-sočinjat'-straščat'* suggesting various couplings and interconnections between 'anguish', 'writing', and 'terror'. Among these is perhaps the notion that if women were to write about their *own* fears and anguish, men would not be able to continue speaking for them; if men are to write 'as women', women's own expression needs to be quashed so that they can proceed unhindered.

In a sense, of course, the scenario described by Karamzin in *Poslanie* offers little that is new. The patriarchal configuration of eighteenth-century letters, like that of society at large, meant that male writers generally spoke for and sometimes as women. And the Poet's female friends share much with the constructions of femininity seen in the tragedies of Lomonosov or Sumarokov: Karamzin, too, construes masculinity as an integral part of feminine identity, its loss a threat to their health and happiness; his female personages are similarly constituted around a masculine core, serve as bastions of admiration for their men, and risk being reduced to vessels of anguish or terror in the eventuality of separation from them. But Karamzin's programmatic verse also takes particular care to explain and illustrate precisely how women could be marginalized, rather than empowered, stifled rather than encouraged. According to its explicitly gendered division of emotional labor, women are chosen to experience feelings and men to assign and express them.

Karamzin's *Poslanie* helps us to see how men's writing employed female personages, together with 'actual' women (presumably real, but idealized under the auspices of feminization), to assuage male fears of gender confusion or 'emasculation'. Although women in the sentimentalist era were denied access to male-dominated forums of creative expression with renewed vigor, the ranks of women writers nonetheless continued to very gradually increase and it is not mere chance that feminization became increasingly fashionable as women writers became more visible. In fact, the "literary cult of the woman" proposed women as pledges – or hostages – for the stability of male writer's own masculine identity during his forays into the language of the salon and boudoir. "Much as sentimental writers were interested in their 'dear', 'sweet', and 'tender' women companions, they were also interested in their own male integrity" (Heyder, Rosenholm 2003: 54).

5. *Urusova and Reiterative* Toska

As we have seen, women had been cast in the role of tragic heroines and made to suffer *toska* by decades of masculine literary production long before they themselves entered the literary arena in substantial numbers. How did women writers negotiate the suggestion that they were to feel anguish rather than to write

about it? The conquest of the female lyric voice was no mean achievement, and Xvostova's *Otryvki* contrasts sharply with Karamzin's *Poslanie* in illustrating a woman's capacity to describe forceful first-person emotions as strongly as its author seems to have felt them. Her emphatic first-person assertions of anguish and other strong sentiments were an important step towards the literary affirmation of women writers. A precedent for such daring may be seen in the verses of Ekaterina Urusova, a poet from the previous – and first – generation of Russian women writers. A cousin and literary associate of Xvostova's uncle Mixail Xeraskov, Urusova was undoubtedly acquainted with Xvostova and may even have encouraged her literary endeavors, as did the general climate of the Xeraskov home (Zirin 1994: 284). Xeraskov's wife Elizaveta Vasil'evna was a published poet, and both Xeraskovs encouraged young writers and held cultural gatherings in their home. Moreover, Xeraskov had publicly encouraged Urusova's writing in a verse epistle that contains, in Ewington's words, "a refreshingly broad range of possibilities for her poetic gifts." (Ewington 2014: 61)[33]. Specifically,

> Rather than limiting her to the tender pastoral genres – though he does include them – [Xeraskov] suggests that she could write epic verse like Homer, sing the glory of Russia like M.V. Lomonosov, enlighten her readers with didactic verse, and – unheard of for a woman – write for the stage as a tragedian [...] or a comedian (*Ibidem*)[34].

With her cousin's blessing, Urusova broke from what were generally understood – both in her day and for years to come – as appropriately feminine genres. In 1777, she published *Iroidy* (*Heroides*), an unusually lengthy and serious production for a woman writer. Invented by Ovid and named after the Greek word for 'heroines', the heroides genre was widely imitated in eighteenth-century Europe; it generally consists of male poets adopting a first-person female voice to deliver impassioned monologues. The protagonists are thus constructed as pointedly feminine, but produced by male 'ventriloquism' and thus 'marginalized' by the obvious discrepancy between their concerns – which are inevitably linked to unhappy relations with men and despondently expressed – and those of the male author. Urusova, too, designs her *Heroides* as a series of lyrical speeches delivered largely by women bereaved in love. While she keeps these female personages at some remove from her own experience by assigning them specific names and personal histories, Urusova's gender nonetheless allows her to powerfully assume the mantle of female *toska* as if she were speaking in her own voice.

Urusova also deserves special note as Xvostova's predecessor for her liberal distribution of *toska.* She seasons *Heroides* with fifteen references to the

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[33] I am particularly grateful to Amanda Ewington, who generously shared with me multiple ideas and archival notes, as well as her important collection of eighteenth-century women's poetry (Ewington 2014) before publication and in searchable electronic format.

[34] Xeraskov's poem prefaced one of Urusova's publications in 1773; on that verse and her response, see Ewington 2014: 60-61, 72-77.

sentiment, for example, only one of which refers to a masculine personage (Urusova 2014: 220). *Toska* appears twice in connection with the feelings of Zeida, betrayed by her husband, but remaining steadfast in her devotion to him (*Ivi*: 160); three times by Rogneda, cruelly misused by Prince Vladimir and grieving on both her own behalf and that of her son, who is Vladimir's would-be heir (*Ivi*: 192-204); and three times by Ofira in response to her lover's betrayal, as in her declaration that "*Toska, otčajan'e terzajut grud' moju*", or "*Snedaema toskoj ljuboviju gorju*" (*Ivi*: 222, 232)[35]. In the final monologue by Klijada, who is separated from her lover by a tyrannical father aspiring to a more auspicious match, Urusova brings the cycle's classical note closer to the social and literary preoccupations of eighteenth-century Russia. Klijada's dramatic speech also brings the cycle closer to a potentially more lyric timbre in its proclamation of female anguish. She uses her moment in the spotlight to speak three times of her own *toska* (*Ivi*: 266, 268, 270), before resolutely reaching out to a larger community. By soliciting the sympathy of other sufferers in her audience, she augments both the range and force of her affliction:

> А вы! сраженные любовною тоскою.
> Стените обо мне! взрыдайте вы со мною!
> И чувствы страстныя ко жалости склоня,
> Скорбящу, страждущу, представьте вы меня!
> В отчаянье, в тоске, и в плаче погруженну (*Ivi*: 270-271)[36].

Written by a woman and expressing first-person feminine emotion, Urusova's *Heroides* claims female 'ownership' of feminine, first-person *toska* twenty-odd years before the publication of Xvostova's *Otryvki*. Urusova replaces the heroides genre's traditional imitation of female speech with an example of feminine empowerment, transforming women's suffering into self-affirmation and suffusing self-affirmation with epic power. Her verses demonstrate that women's writing could celebrate strong emotion, assume *toska* as a first-person sentiment, and reiterate it at will. Autobiographical or lyrical *toska* belonged to her cousin's niece however, Aleksandra Xvostova, whose writing implicitly – and provocatively – demonstrates that expressing one's very own 'personal' *toska* was not a male prerogative.

Xvostova's choice to so emphatically reiterate *toska* may be explained in part by cultural context. In the era of feminization, as male writers strove to write 'like women' by imitating in their texts the rhythms of women's salon speech, women who wished to enter the literary arena were asked to adopt a

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[35] "Anguish and despair tear at my breast; Consumed by anguish, I burn with love". As indicated, I have used Ewington's translations for Urusova, Turčaninova, and Dolgorukova, although my emphasis on the occurence of particular words has sometimes led me to alter them slightly and to leave *toska* untranslated.

[36] "And you! Those struck down by *toska* in love. / Lament me! Weep together with me! / And inclining your passionate feelings toward pity, / Think of me bereaved and suffering; / Mired in despair, in *toska*, and in tears".

similar approach, i.e. to model their writing on an idealized version of how they themselves ('women') supposedly spoke or communicated. To become serious writers, in other words, they were encouraged to redouble the tangible evidence of 'femininity' in their work. Indeed, as Ewington notes, Russian women's writing in this period exhibited "an emotional intimacy and specificity that surpassed the conventional 'tearful' literature of male Sentimentalist writers" (Ewington 2014: 15). Xvostova's *Otryvki* is a clear and even extreme example of how women's writing could stress emotionality to great acclaim. The right to articulate "sadness and *toska*" could be plucked from the hands of the male literary establishment like an April violet, Xvostova suggests, and these sentiments strewn throughout feminine texts unreservedly, a gesture that was capable of sowing "terror" – and despair – among some of her masculine contemporaries. Exceptional for her literary expressivity, Xvostova went beyond the demure and understated role that was sketched out for society women in the 1790s to offer women writers a model for the articulation of female *toska* as she simultaneously gave impetus to male writers' *melanxolija.*

6. *Gender,* Toska *and* Melanxolija

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were an era of great change in the shaping and definition of gender. As suggested, Catherine's reign had represented a relatively progressive era with respect to women's social roles (and gender identity in general) and women in the 1770s or 1780s had sometimes enjoyed more freedom of expression than was the case during the following reigns of Paul, Alexander, and Nicholas. The literary guidance for the fair sex contained in the Xeraskov's epistle to Urusova, for example, is far more empowering than that suggested by Karamzin's later "*Poslanie*". It has also been argued that Russian culture was dominated by a melancholic mood in this period, specifically from the late 1780s to the 1810s (cf. Vinickij 2011: 19)[37]. As we have seen, this temper or inclination was expressed through various lexemes and sometimes the choice between them was gendered. Even more dramatically than Xvostova's *toska,* the fashion for *melanxolija* reflected this gendered context.

The word *melanxolija* itself, translatable as either '*melancholy*' or *'melancholia*', was rare in eighteenth-century literary discourse prior to Karamzin. The term had initially differed from *toska* in referring to a condition considered to have pathological overtones and began to attract literary attention only at century's end. Karamzin himself preferred *melanxolija* to *toska* and took firm steps to establish its place in the pantheon of Russian literary sentiments. With-

[37] In Vinickij's words, "The authors of the Age of Melancholy did not simply write sad works about sad things [, but] comprehended their own sorrow, and sorrow in general, as an aesthetic, philosophical, and even mystical problem" (Vinickij 2011: 19). On the melancholic turn in Russian letters, see also Vinickij 1997, 2007.

in Karamzin's own oeuvre, the frequency of the root *melanxol-* overtook that of *tosk-* during the 1790s and specifically in *Pis'ma russkogo putešestvennika*, which contains seventeen instances of *tosk-* and 26 references to *melanxol-*. A closer look at the specific contexts in which Karamzin uses *toska* demonstrates that he continued to associate the sentiment with Greek tragedy and pining shepherds, as had Sumarokov and Fonvizin. Although Karamzin had used *toska* lyrically in earlier verses[38], he does not do so in *Pis'ma* and, as we have seen, *Natal'ja, bojarskaja doč'* confirms that he grew to regard *toska* as less appropriate for the first-person voice of the elite male writer or his narratorial analogues. The lexeme *melanxolija*, with its sophisticated veneer of the cultural import, was more agreeable and it remained slightly ahead in Karamzin's oeuvre after 1800.

Melanxolija even served as the title of an important verse (1800-1802) in which Karamzin reworks several lines of an excerpt from Jacques Delille[39]. In this poem, he makes explicit a predilection for *melanxolija* by characterizing it as a subdued and pleasurable state into which the more strident sentiments of "grief ('*skorb'*") and "*toska*'" are aestheticized and tempered:

> О Меланхолия! нежнейший перелив
> От скорби и тоски к утехам наслажденья!
> Веселья нет еще, и нет уже мученья;
> Отчаянье прошло... (Karamzin 1966: 260)[40].

Melancholy delights in "*mečtoj, odnoju mysl'ju – slovom*!" ("dreaming, thought alone, the word"; *Ivi*: 261), the third element in this list – "the word" or literary expression – being Karamzin's own notable addition to Delille's source text (cf. Kočetkova 2013: 216). With "the word", he emphasizes the aestheticization of experience offered by poetry, the "pleasurable enjoyment" that literature provides in the respite or distance from more agitated and boisterous feelings.

How closely do the views expressed in this elaboration of Delille illustrate Karamzin's own? The fashionable nature of its theme – *melanxolija* – and the recognition of Delille implicit in Karamzin's selection of this excerpt for publication (particularly on the background of his long-standing practice of introducing imported bits of European literature into Russian tradition) suggest that he

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[38] An example of Karamzinian lyrical *toska* appears in the 1788 verse "*Vesennjaja pesn' melanxolika*" (Karamzin 1966: 66-67).

[39] Karamzin's poem is the "imitation" of an excerpt from Delille's *L'imagination* that was published in 1800 (*Fragment [...] sur la Mélancholie*) in the Hamburg *Spectateur du Nord.* Although Delille's entire poem did not appear until 1808, he had begun working on *L'imagination* in the 1780s and the fragment selected by Karamzin had also appeared (with errors) in the 1800 *Mercure de France* (Kočetkova 2013: 211-212).

[40] "O, Melancholy! The most delicate modulation / From grief and *toska* to pleasurable enjoyment! / Happiness does not yet exist, and torment is no more; / Despair has passed...".

not only agreed with the poem's content, but wished to use Delille's authority to clarify his own views. In fact, *Melanxolija* returns to some of the ideas that Karamzin had touched upon in *Poslanie k ženščinam*, recounting again, for example, the passing of the seasons. In this later verse, personified *Melanxolija* herself emerges and flourishes precisely where women themselves had faded in *Poslanie*. *Melanxolija* prefers "solitude" to society, "gloomy nature" over summer's exuberance, "pale" and "declining" autumn. In the midst of winter revels, she remains aloof, her "merriment" is "falling into meditative silence and casting a tender glance at the past" ("*Veselie tvoe – zadumavšis', molčat' / I na prošedšee vzor nežnyj obraščat'*", Karamzin 1966: 261). In *Melanxolija*, women themselves no longer participate in or even spectate as the Poet 'modulates' *toska* into *melanxolija.* The sentiment of anguish that he had shared with his female companions in *Poslanie* is purged of their involvement and interference. *Melanxolija* herself has become the Poet's muse and women are excluded from their intimate communion.

In point of fact, women *were* largely excluded from the experience of *melanxolija* – or at least from its expression. Indeed, if *toska* tended to be perceived as a feminine sentiment, *melanxolija* was primarily a masculine emotion, and there were specific problems related to women's expression of it. Rarely found in women's texts, *melanxolija* occurs only once in Xvostova and only once again in Ewington's entire volume of eighteenth-century Russian women's poetry (2014), namely in the title of a 1798 poem by Anna Turčaninova, *Otvet na neodobrenie melanoxoličeskix čuvstvovanij v stixax* (*Response to a Rejection of Melancholy Feelings in Poetry*; Turčaninova 2014). Predating both Karamzin's *Melanxolija* and Delille's source text, Turčaninova's poem gives evidence of a broad social debate on the topic of women's expression of unhappiness and despair. Symptomatically, however, neither *melanxolija* itself nor *toska* appears in the actual verse. Explicitly framing her theme as the difficulty of representing personal (and especially despondent) emotions in verse, Turčaninova argues for the right to express these by doing just the opposite, i.e. by enumerating a list of inanely cheerful topics about which she would rather not write:

Мне советуют унылых
Мыслей не внушать перу –
И от чувствий сердцу милых
Душу удалять свою.

Петь, настроив звучну лиру,
Резвость юных страстных дней,
фимиам курить кумиру,
С правдой прятаться своей.

В игры с Грацьями пускаться,
Их забавам подражать,
Голосом Сирен прельщаться,
С Юнгом слез не проливать.

Нет! ... воздушный представляет
Замок мысль такая мне;
В ней мой дух не обретает
Пищи свойственной себе
(*Ivi*: 364-365)[41].

Turčaninova's poem calls attention to the issue of women's silencing by illustrating that very problem. A paradoxical statement about what cannot be said, her verse indicates that women's struggle to author their own *toska* – a word that she does not use in her poem – continues.

A more forthright exposition of feminine despair – and one that emphatically uses the term *toska* – appears in a brief elegy on the death of her sister written by Elizaveta Dolgorukova in 1799. Eschewing *melanxolija,* the poet reiterates the more traditionally feminine *toska* five times: "*Postignula menja toska i učast' slezna*", for example, "*Den' vsjakoj novoju toskoju menja razit*", "*Tak grud' moju toska užasnaja terzaet*" (Dolgorukova 2014: 370-375)[42]. Dolgorukova's vigorous first-person voicing of women's anguish and her repetition in this context of the word *toska* follow the precedent set both by Urusova's verses and Xvostova's prose. Dolgorukova's lyrical component is less audacious than Xvostova's, however. Explicitly rather than implicitly autobiographical, it justifies its own emotivity by providing concrete motivation for it.

Another woman to take up emphatic *toska* was the poet Anna Volkova, who drew her inspiration directly from Xvostova. Writing after Karamzin's reworking of Delille, she nonetheless ignores any suggestion that admission to the literary elite would better be achieved through effusions of *melanxolija*. In 1807, Volkova published a poetic reelaboration of *Ručeek* which displays remarkable enthusiasm for *toska*: while 25% longer than Xvostova's text, her poem manages to maintain the high density of *tosk-* found therein, achieving one word in 233 as compared to Xvostova's one in 225. Within an existing tradition of women's writing, Volkova's sentiment deserves note as first-person expression, although the lyrical timbre is not her own. Indeed, by refashioning Xvostova's text and drawing attention to the voice and emotions of her predecessor, Volkova creates a verse that resembles a *heroide* featuring Xvostova herself. In this way, Volkova's *Ručeek* not only corroborates the link in Russian letters between *toska* and femininity, but also celebrates both female literary tradition and women's entitlement to the experience and expression of sentiment.

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[41] "They advise me to not incite my pen / To despondent thoughts – / And to distance my soul / From feelings dear to my heart. / To sing, tuning the sonorous lyre, / The frolics of passionate youthful days; / To burn incense before idols. / To hide away with my truth. / To join in the Graces' games, / To imitate their amusements, / To be enchanted by the Sirens' call, / To not shed tears with [Edward] Young. / No! ... I consider such thoughts / Mere castles in the air. / In them my soul cannot obtain / The nourishment that sustains it".

[42] "*Toska* and a deplorable fate have befallen me"; "Each day strikes me with new *toska*"; "Thus, my breast is torn by terrible *toska*".

In 1808, the debate over feminine melancholy took an unexpected turn when Vasilij Žukovskij published an essay on the subject in *Vestnik Evropy* (*The Herald of Europe*). Žukovskij was Karamzin's successor as editor of that journal, as well as a first generation romantic whose translated and original verse was thick with *toska, melanxolija*, and other forms of humoral dejection. The essay that he published under the title of *Melanxolija* was ostensibly written by "Karolina P.", however, an unknown and possibly fictitious woman[43]. Apparently French, since she writes of her adolescence in the Ancien Régime and her struggles during the Revolution and afterwards, Karolina may well have been invented by Žukovskij himself. Certainly, her essay allows him to participate in the exchange between Karamzin and Delille on the subject of melancholy[44], an opportunity that he exploits with relish, showcasing his own views on the topic by undergirding Karolina's fourteen-page essay with an eight-page footnote (Karolina P. 1808: 164-171).

Whether or not Karolina's text was in fact a translation from French, it takes part in the Russian discussion of melancholy's merits, responding to Karamzin's reworking of Delille, in addition to the French source text[45]. In the context of this implicit debate on women's 'ownership' of despondent emotions, Žukovskij deserves note for his judgment that *melanxolija*, in vogue for several years among male writers, was now appropriate for feminine sentiment as well; he does so by chiding and correcting the matter-of-fact Karolina. She herself does not demand the right to claim melancholy as her own, but professes never to have experienced it, an affirmation echoed in the article's provocative subtitle, "*Sočinenie ženščiny, kotoraja nikogda ne byvala v melanxolii*" ("The Composition of a Woman Who Has Never Felt Melancholy"; *Ivi*: 161). Karolina's refutation of the commonly held notion that love and melancholy are inextricably linked (*Ivi*: 164), incites Žukovskij to claim that she properly understands neither: "that feeling which you took for love, seems to us nothing but a strong desire to please [...]," he notes reprovingly: "we consider [what you call] true love to be true co-

[43] "Karolina P." should not be confused with the writer Karolina Karlovna Pavlova, who was well known in the 1840s, but only one year old in 1808.

[44] On the evolution of Žukovskij's ideas on melancholy with respect to those of Karamzin and various other writers from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see, especially, Vinickij 1997. Žukovskij may also have contributed a translation of Madame de Genlis's tale *Melancholy and Imagination* to *Vestnik Evropy* in 1803 (*Ivi*: 150).

[45] To begin with, the comment "'*Melanxolija*', *govorila odna umnaja ženščina*, '*est*' *vyzdorovlenie goresti*" ("'Melancholy', said one intelligent woman, 'is the curing of grief'", Karolina P. 1808: 172) recalls the characterization found in Karamzin (and absent in Delille) that melancholy is "*pervyj skorbi vrač*" ("the first doctor of grief"), although the attribution of this comment to an "intelligent woman" may suggest a third source, perhaps one shared by Karamzin and Karolina P. The verse quotation that follows, however – "*I materi svoej pečali vid imeet!*" ("And has the look of her mother, sorrow", *Ivi*: 173) – is taken from Karamzin's *Melanxolija*, and not from Delille (1837: 131) who had spoken instead of Melancholy's father ("*fille du malheur, elle a des traits de lui*").

quetry" (*Ivi*: 164, 166). *Melanxolija* is not limited to the purview of male emotion, he suggests, and sensitive women ought to be familiar with it.

Karolina does assert her right to feel powerful emotions, and recounts an eventful life that has included many of them, but not *melanxolija.* Nor does the Russian term *toska* – being neither topical, nor by 1808 needed to translate the French word *mélancholie* – appear in her text. Indeed, Karolina has little patience for melancholic inclinations, which she views as a pretentious charade. She admits to having once sought melancholy, but she survived a juvenile romance without encountering it, and thus left it behind as one of youth's distractions when she moved on to face life more concretely. "The griefs (*goresti*) that we can call by name, those of whose impressions we are aware do not in the least comprise Melancholy" (*Ivi*: 163), Karolina avers:

> I have never possessed either desire or sorrow (*pečal'*) without knowing exactly what I desired or why I felt sorrow; I never remember having been happy without knowing the source from which my happiness issued and my tears have always had a motive that was well known to me. Melancholy may be branded a luxury, an excess of sensibility, the poor usage made of that by those who don't know what to use it for. As for me, I've always known to what I should apply my sensibility; I have been *busy* in all states of life, and often too unhappy to give in to melancholy (*Ivi*: 174; emphasis in original).

Neither *toska* nor *melanxolija*, Karolina's essay suggests, is appropriate for feminine feeling, whether public or private. In rejecting these sentiments, she arguably refuses emphatic despair and thus the emotive 'progress' made by Urusova and Xvostova. Clearly, the terms of women's participation in male-dominated literary discourse have shifted. While Xvostova's groundbreaking display of emotion had channeled the force of powerful sentiment – presumably personally felt – into an act of writerly self-affirmation, the text of "Karolina P." serves largely to demonstrate how femininity itself could actually lose touch with the emotional perceptiveness once so characteristic of the 'gentle sex'. Admittedly, Karolina's supposed shortcomings are not strictly literary: her 'inability' to grasp the true nature of either love or melancholy results from struggles that were existential rather than artistic in nature. Nonetheless, Žukovskij keeps her at a healthy – and reassuring – distance from writerly problems. What possible connection could a woman who does not even understand love or melancholy have with literature? Women may feel melancholy, but he does not indicate that they should take up the pen to share such feelings more widely. It is interesting to note that Žukovskij himself preferred *toskovanie* to *melanxolija* per se, despite Karamzin's leanings, and later that same year – and in the same journal – published a verse entitled *K Nine* (*To Nina*) that reappropriates emphatic *toska* for the lyrical voice of the male poet.

A diminution over time in what the male literary establishment held as appropriate for women's expressiveness might also be gauged by the editor's introduction to Volkova's *Ručeek*. At the first publication of Xvostova's *Kamin* in 1795, it will be recalled, her editor lauded that text for its "spirit of Os-

sianic grief" and "profundity of melancholic feeling" (Podšivalov 1795: 68), while Volkova in 1807 was credited merely with "knowing how to pour out in light and pleasant verse the tender feelings (*nežnye čuvstvovanija*) to which the female heart is always more attuned (*sposobnee*) than the male" (cf. Volkova 1807), despite having maintained her predecessor's enthusiasm for reiterative *toska*. Gloom was an integral part of Volkova's text as well, though her editor settles on "tenderness" as the dominant note, suggesting that only this quality had retained its appeal for women's writing twelve years later.

It is tempting to think that the commentary by Xvostova's editor might be related to what Karamzin's Poet set as his own goal in "*Poslanie*" in 1796. Indeed, it seems quite plausible that the articulation of his poetic aims, which appeared a year after *Kamin* and in the same year that Xvostova published her *Otryvki*, responded, at least in general outline, to her work and to the cultural environment in which it was so well received. Differently put, Xvostova's literary success may have influenced, again in broad terms, the rejection of women's authorship found in "*Poslanie*" and the later purging of women's *toska* or elegiac feeling in *Melanxolija*. *Poslanie* encourages women writers to disregard Xvostova's model and become avid and attentive readers of men's writing, the Poet's account of silencing his female companion arguably attempting to wrest from Xvostova and other female authors the laurels bestowed upon them for "profundity of melancholic feeling". Seen in this light, Xvostova's *Kamin* appears as a rare instance of actual female expression providing a standard for the 'feminized' literary style that male writers sought, albeit a standard to be disavowed, challenged, negated, and retroactively erased.

Various scholars (cf. Arzumanova 1964: 210; Cross 1968: 48) have indicated that the general emotional tenor of Karamzin's work changed notably over the course of the 1790s, a development that may have been sparked, at least in part, by women's writing. Indeed, as this article illustrates, the lexical tools that Karamzin used to achieve an elegiac mood also underwent revision in that decade, his predilection for *melanxolija* perhaps encouraged precisely by this sentiment's distinction from the *toska* – now too emphatic and feminine – proclaimed in Xvostova's *Otryvki*. M.A. Arzumanova (1964: 208) has also credited Xvostova and, implicitly, her reiterative *toska* with influencing Karamzin's writerly trajectory. In her view, Xvostova was one of several epigones whose admiration for Karamzin led her to enthusiastically emulate him, "not only fully copying, but also significantly reinforcing his weak sides and transforming them into templates [*štampy*]". Her emotivity, Arzumanova suggests, was symptomatic of her desire to write like Karamzin, a widespread impulse that paradoxically led to emphatic sentiment's general fall from grace. These imitators wrote so badly, in other words, that their efforts spurred Karamzin away from sentimentalism and from what he characterized as its "frequently feigned tearfulness" (*Ivi*: 207).

While justly highlighting Karamzin's rejection of the extreme emotivity found in Xvostova, Arzumanova leaves unanswered questions of how exactly we might usefully define Karamzin's 'weak sides' in the middle of the 1790s – or what these might have been to Xvostova. As subsequent women's writing reminds

us, what Karamzin himself or established critics may have later judged as 'weak' was not necessarily regarded as such by other writers, many of them women, because they wrote from a different perspective and often for a different audience. While the fact that Xvostova overused Karamzinian stylemes helps to explain her emphatic quality in general, it does not illuminate her use of reiterative *toska* per se, which, as this article demonstrates, has no precedent in Karamzin. Moreover, describing Xvostova as a Karamzinian epigone obscures our appreciation of the artistic problems that she faced, how these are related to gender, and how they are connected to Urusova's precedent as well as to Karamzin's. Xvostova's emotiveness was not simply a degenerate form of Karamzin's, in other words, but also an expression that was marked as gendered and that attested to the significance of women's writing and women's ownership of emotion.

7. *Coda:* Toska *in Winter*

As we know, Karamzin turned away from literature in the first decade of the nineteenth century to issues of the Russian state and its history. History's appeal may have lain partly in what he perceived as an opportunity to overcome the effeminate passivity of salon and boudoir and to inculcate Russia's past – and perhaps his own – with a story of virile (self)-affirmation. And, as Dmitrij Blagoj (1931) has perceptively noted, Karamzin's ventures in historiography illustrate a continued concern with problems posed by the passage of time, and with the sentiments of regret that contemplations of the past engendered. In both literary and historical texts, in other words, Karamzin ruminated elegiacally, revealing an "imprint of melancholy [...] conditioned not only by the transience of the present and anxieties about the future, but also by *toska* about the past" (*Ibidem*). His lyrics display a persistent "mood of decline" as well (*Ibidem*) and it is ultimately a quotation from *Melanxolija* – about the cycle of seasons – that illustrates for Blagoj the essence of Karamzin's art:

> 'приятнее всего' ему 'не шумная весны любезная веселость, не лета пышного роскошный блеск и зрелость, но осень бледная, когда, изнемогая и томною рукой венок свой обрывая, она кончины ждет' (*Ibidem*)[46].

This quotation unexpectedly allows us to link Karamzin's historiography with the gendered imagery of seasonal waning shared by both *Poslanie k ženščinam* and *Melanxolija*. The narration of time's passage in the latter resurrects the specter of female companions from the earlier verse, women who themselves seem personifications of the seasons as they succumb to autumnal *toskovanie* and the doom of imminent wintry death. In *Poslanie*, as we know, these women friends

[46] "'most pleasant of all' for him is 'not the loud and amiable merriness of spring, nor the lush, luxuriant brilliance of summer's ripeness, but pale autumn, when, failing, she tears off her wreath with a languid hand and awaits her end'".

disappear, dissolving into the Poet's 'translation'; in *Melanxolija*, the new muse supplants them and their *toska*, while 'the word' (*slovo*) appertains exclusively to the poet. When read together with *Poslanie*, the later *Melanxolija* thus seems to record the death of the Poet's female friend or human muse that is carried out through his poetic assimilation of her. It also registers the pleasurable sense of regret with which he contemplates their shared and bygone past.

The elderly Urusova had meditated on winter death in quite similar terms. In a verse entitled *Vesna* (*Spring*) from 1796, she relies on the same well-worn trope of seasonal change to transform a fairly standard discussion of time's passage into a "confrontation not only with her own death, but [also] with being an old woman in a society that valued youth and beauty in women" (Vowles 1994: 49):

> Где забавы, игры, смехи?
> Вы исчезли, утекли!
> Осень мрачная настала;
> Вслед за ней зима течет...
> Безвозвратно я увяла;
> Смерть меня у гроба ждет
> (Urusova 2014: 274-275)[47].

The dismal atmosphere is strikingly similar to Xvostova's and, while some consolation appears in spring's renewal, the Poet nonetheless concludes on an ambiguous and disquieting note, dramatically announcing that she wishes to break off her speech altogether:

> Но не будь, мой дух, отважен;
> Удержись!.. прерви свой глас! (*Ibidem*)[48].

Her gesture is quite forceful and surprising. These lines, written in the same year that Xvostova published *Otryvki* and Karamzin *Poslanie*, simultaneously express melancholic feeling and seem to acknowledge Karamzin's suggestion that women's expression of feeling be quelled. Nonetheless, by 1796, Urusova had distinguished herself as both serious writer and advocate of women's authorship: she possessed not only an unusual "self-conscious awareness of [her own] womanhood" (Kahn 2013: 340), but also the conviction that she represented woman writers in general (Ewington 2014: 68). Indeed, as we have seen, the problem of how exactly to articulate melancholic sentiment was a pressing issue for women writers in general and Urusova's lines give voice to the problem of *toska*'s inexpressibility found later in Turčaninova and in Dolgorukova.

As noted, the fashion for *melanxolija* per se was relatively short-lived in Russian letters, though interest in the lexeme and sentiment of *toska* proved en-

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[47] "Where are amusements, games, and laughter? / You have vanished... passed by! / Gloomy autumn has arrived. / Winter comes after it... / I have withered irrevocably; / Death awaits me by the grave".

[48] "But my spirit, be not bold! / Refrain!.. Cut short your voice!".

during. Urusova herself returned to the connection between *toska* and difficulties of authorship in a verse from 1796 on the topic of writing poetry:

> В такой-то обитаю
> Я скучной стороне;
> Везде тоску встречаю,
> И все постыло мне
> (Urusova 2014: 288-291)[49].

Urusova's characterizations of difficulties with expression did not prevent her from writing for two more decades, her work displaying "an increasing confidence in her own gifts tempered by a growing introversion and melancholy that reflects general literary trends" (*Ivi*: 60). Xvostova, too, continued to write, though without achieving the same popularity as she had with *Otryvki*. Like other women writers in the early nineteenth century, both continued to feel *toska*: a longing to liberate poems from the drawer, a yearning to close doors in the face of social duties and expectations, pining for an era (past? future?) in which they would be able to freely express their own ideas and sentiments. In which literary contexts *toska* was used, to what extent it preserved a link with the feminine, and where or how often it was reiterated remain topics for further study. We do know, however, that emphatic *toskovanie* was a feminine activity in eighteenth-century Russian letters and that the enthusiasm with which it was embraced by women writers (such as Aleksandra Xvostova) helped to encourage male writers (such as Nikolaj Karamzin) to select *melanxolija* for their own elegiac discourse.

Резюме

Сара Дикинсон

Александра Хвостова и Николай Карамзин – гендеровые аспекты тоски

Главной целью настоящей работы является толкование понятия 'тоска' в русском литературном дискурсе восемнадцатого века и сентиментализма в частности. В художественных текстах исследуемой эпохи лексические ссылки на 'тоску' указывают на становление связи между этим чувством и представлением о женственности, кульминацию которой представляет краткое произведение Александры Хвостовой *Отрывки* (1796). Во многом благодаря преобладающим 'эмотивным мотивам', книга Хвостовой пользовалась популярностью среди своих современников, занимая значительное место в традиции женской словесности. Кроме того, столь же важное место *Отрывки* занимали и в литературных спорах о 'феминизации' литературы, касавшихся как сочинений таких писателей как Николая Карамзина и Василия Жуковского, так и современных писательниц. Последние же боролись за признание женского приоритета в переживании и выражении сильных эмоций.

[49] "I now reside / In such a dull place; / I encounter *toska* everywhere / And all has gone cold for me".

Nostalgia and Creaturality in H. Leivick's *The Golem*

Laura Quercioli Mincer (University of Genoa)

Some forms of Jewish-Russian nostalgia find their full expression in one of the all-time masterpieces of Yiddish theatre, *Der goylem* (*The Golem*), by H. Leivick. In this work, the Golem, a man-made creature based on an ancient Kabbalah legend widespread in several Central European countries, takes on openly messianic features, its helpless creaturality[1] and hopeless existential loneliness reflect the Jewish longing for God. It is also true that the blank verse of Leivick's drama contains a more direct political goal, and that an echo of the Russian revolution and of the ethical issues it raised can easily be perceived here. More generally, a 'nostalgia of the absolute' pervaded Leivick himself, who, over the years became through self-creation the symbol of a spirit that would prevail over the oppression reigning in society and history. In line with the tendencies of Neo-Romanticism, revived in Yiddish literature by Leivick himself, he persistently embodied this spirit or character in a blend of art and life in which each of these elements fed upon the other. Similarly intertwined in his work were the nostalgia of Eastern European Jewish culture, a Russian and revolutionary longing, and Russian *toska*.

1. *Jewish Nostalgia:* Gaguìm – *The Awareness of an 'Elsewhere'*

In order to better interpret the peculiarities of Jewish-Russian nostalgia, it may be useful to analyze how the Hebrew and Yiddish languages encode this multifaceted feeling. The lexeme used to indicate what we currently translate as 'nostalgia' has uncertain origins in Hebrew. The lowing of cattle that walk towards the rock on which they are to be sacrificed (Samuel I, 6:12) and the bellow of the ox that is compared to the 'daring words' of Job (Job 6:5) are the only two examples found in the Bible of the root '*gah*' ('wailed', 'cried'), from which '*gaguìm*', the Jewish word used for nostalgia supposedly derives. From '*gah*' also come homophonic derivatives expressing craving, or the melancholy fluttering of ducks, or the action of digging, perforating. And nostalgia – as

[1] 'Creaturality' refers to the sentiments of the 'creature' (the created) towards the creator.

hopeless and strong for the people of the desert as it was for an animal walking towards a death that implied no resurrection – was certainly capable of 'digging' into the soul of those who suffered from it.

In the *Talmud*, which was written several centuries later, the root '*gah*' takes on two meanings to express an explicit feeling of nostalgia and wistfulness. It can be found in two passages of the *Shabbat* treatise (39a and 66b), where it is used in different situations to refer to the longing of a father for his son and that of a son for his father. The primordial wailing of a nature devoid of any hope or consolation thus takes on the form of a conscious, fully rounded human feeling. In the father's nostalgia for his son, and in that of the son for his father, we can glimpse a reference to the idea of absence *par excellence*. This is human nostalgia for God, perhaps the ultimate expression of the 'awareness of an elsewhere' which, according to Jankélèvitch (2013: 5), is the foundation of and precondition for the feeling of nostalgia[2]. And it is perhaps in this complex setting that we can identify the specific characteristics of 'Jewish nostalgia', i.e. in the overlap of yearnings for one's mythicized childhood (the communion – also physical – with our parents' bodies), for one's homeland, and for God, a God that in Hebrew is also called *Makom*, Place.

2. Benkshaft*: The Yiddish Culture of Nostalgia*

Modern literary culture in Yiddish developed with incredible speed in the second half of the nineteenth century and, over the course of just a few years, evolved from a tradition featuring interesting, but marginal works into one of the leading literary phenomena in Europe. Because of the circumstances in which it developed, modern Yiddish literature seems to be pervaded by nostalgia.

The Yiddish term '*benkshaft*' (or '*benkenish*'), from Middle High German '*bangen*'[3], refers less to nostalgia for Zion than to regret for a more recent past, whose idealization is largely the result of a conscious cultural (self-)creation inspired by and embodied in the shtetl. The Central and Eastern European Jewish hamlet, cast as a close-knit community where every life has its own place and meaning and enjoys an uninterrupted vital bond with tradition, not only comprises one of the essential *topoi* in the work of the founding fathers of modern Yiddish literature, but also figures pervasively in the reception and evaluation of this literature. *Benkshaft* is a nostalgia specific to Ashkenazi Judaism that marks its entrance into modernity – 'modernity' being precisely the loss of ties and tradition whose devastating impact was quite effectively illustrated by the catastrophe

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[2] Or perhaps nostalgia originates with God searching for man, as in the moving call "Adam, where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

[3] The meaning of *bangen*, as reported in the Grimm brothers' *Dictionary* (1838), is 'concern, fear, anxiety'; only as a fourth meaning do we find the synonyms '*sich verlangen*, *sich sehnen*' ('to feel nostalgia, a burning desire for something or someone').

of the First World War; it is also, in Allison Schachter's words, "intimately linked with a newly forming Jewish cultural nationalism" (Schachter 2006: 91). A feeling of nostalgia coupled with the same basic theme, i.e. with the vision of Ashkenazi culture as the bearer of universal human values, can also be found in currents of thought that developed in Central and Eastern European Jewish culture in the late nineteenth century and are effectively summarized in the title of David Roskies' important book, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Roskies 1999)[4].

In the early twentieth century, Yiddish cultural *benkshaft* finds expression in two different tendencies, both shaped by external events as well as by changes occurring within Jewish society in Central Eastern Europe. In just one generation, traditional Jewish culture detached itself from the world of its fathers, a process that in the surrounding society had unfolded quite differently and over the course of several decades. At the same time, a powerful Jewish longing for acculturation and integration into that surrounding external world met increasingly with an impenetrable wall of ethnic nationalism and anti-Semitism, sentiments which were soon to reach their international apotheosis. Quite often the Jews had to face a world where, as Ola Watowa (1990: 22) wrote several years later, "there was no way out to be seen, no future". It was almost a foregone conclusion that the Bolshevik revolution – which promoted internationalism and equality – would represent the hopes of the Jewish people, at least until its openly totalitarian shift at the end of the 1920s. It was also fairly predictable that among individuals whose childhoods were still deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, such hopes would assume forms of messianism, one of the most original and (problematically) distinguishing elements of Jewish thought. As summarized by rabbi Arthur Green (1999: 161),

> The claim has often been made that modern Jews who lost their faith in God did not as easily lose their faith in messianic redemption. The various movements for social progress that have attracted so many Jews, including Socialism and Communism, may be seen as forms of secular messianism.

Early twentieth-century Jewish messianists shared with their Aryan comrades and masters (such as Bakunin or Proudhon) a deep nostalgia for the precapitalist past, a feeling that Michael Löwy (1981: 6) defines as "romantic-nostalgic". It is significant that Löwy in *Rédemption et utopie* considers such themes with an approach similar to that later used by Svetlana Boym (2001): Jewish secular messianism, he writes, includes a restoring current, aimed at the restoration of a lost golden age, and a utopian current, aimed at the creation of an unprecedented social order[5]. These two currents are intertwined, however,

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[4] A variety of nostalgia for the shtetl and a re-evaluation of its culture and existential marginality is shared today by anti-nationalist intellectuals and those highly critical of Israel as a state project, such as Daniel Boyarin in the United States and Moni Ovadia in Italy.

[5] Here Löwy refers to Gershom Scholem, who identified three forces in Judaism (conservative, restorative, and utopian), under whose influence messianism develops (cf. Scholem 1995). For this information, I am grateful to Silvano Facioni.

each including elements that belong to the other, and both pervaded with the same 'deep nostalgia'. He finds, for example, that the early rabbinic concept of Hebrew '*tikkun*' ('fixing' or 'repair', often 'of the world' ['*tikkun olam*']) "highlight[s] the purely Jewish aspects of a political and existential stance – which means restoration, repair, and reform at the same time – [and thus] epitomizes the dualism of messianic tradition" (Löwy 1981: 6).

As noted, the *benkshaft* of the European Yiddish world also expressed itself in two different currents: indeed, when not 'channeled into' a messianic utopia, *benkshaft* referred to a diffuse mood or feeling deriving from the inability to take action, from energy that had no way of being released, from the impossibility of planning a different future, the *fin-de-siècle* melancholy of those who have been trampled on by history and know they are strangers wherever they go.

3. *Messiah in Chains*

'H. Leivick'[6] is the pseudonym of Leivick Halpern, born in 1888 in the Belarusian town of Igumen (renamed Červen' in 1923), approximately 50 kilometers from Minsk. He was the eldest of nine children and the biography of his early years is the typical biography of people living in a shtetl: poverty and lack of privacy (all the children in his household slept together in one room), a discontent and violent father (whom Leivick would later describe in a poem entitled "*Der beyzer tate*", "The Evil Father"), and the iron discipline of the '*kheyder*', the traditional school[7]. Later came the *yeshive* in Minsk, whose enlightened headmaster allowed the students to study Hebrew grammar, a lay subject and one that was disliked[8].

During the 1905 Revolution, Leivick joined the Bund, the supranational and Yiddishist Jewish socialist party, which had been founded in Vilna in 1897. Although he had already made his debut as a promising author in Hebrew, once he joined the revolution, Leivick decided to abandon the sacred idiom and shift to Yiddish, the language of the deprived masses – and it was in Yiddish literature that he later made his mark as one of its greatest representatives. In 1906, Leivick was suspected of subversive activity and arrested by the tsarist police; during the trial – an episode mentioned by B. Harshav and B. Harshav (1986: 674-677) and often quoted in the literature – Leivick refused

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6 Also transliterated as Leyvik.

7 Also spelled *cheder* when transliterated from Hebrew. In this article preference has been given to the system of transliteration for Yiddish names and words established by the YIVO Institute of New York. As for the details of Leivick's biography, when those provided in the relevant literature are contradictory, I have generally relied on the information given by Harshav, Harshav 1986.

8 Although the study of Hebrew grammar and of the Bible dates back to the seventh century, it was, in practice, frequently reduced to mnemonic repetition.

to be defended by a famous lawyer and even declared to his judges that "I will not defend myself":

> Everything that I have done I did in full consciousness. I am a member of the Jewish revolutionary Party, the Bund, and I will do everything in my power to overthrow the tsarist autocracy, its bloody henchmen, and you as well (*Ivi*: 675).

Leivick was sentenced to four years of forced labor and permanent exile in Siberia.

In an isolated cell in the Minsk prison tower, Leivick wrote his first dramatic poem, *Di keytn fun Meshiakh* (*The Chains of the Messiah*), which was published only in 1939. The poem tells of the rebellion of angel Ariel against God's command that the Messiah be kept in chains, thereby postponing humanity's redemption. Together with *The Golem* and *Di geule komedie* (*The Comedy of Redemption*, 1934), *The Chains of the Messiah* completes a triad of works on the idea of Messianism (and these three works were published as such in Israel in 1956 under the title *Hezyoney Geulah*, *Visions of Redemption*). Messianism, which is perhaps the leading theme in Leivick's work, began its development during the years of his imprisonment: rather than using Messianism to foreshadow apocalyptic upheaval, Leivick uses it to represent an ethical commitment that is very closely linked to both Russian culture and Jewish tradition, a sense of responsibility combined with an unbreakable tie to all those who suffer (cf. Goldsmith, 2003: 736). In this context, the poet himself – and others as well – can come forward as a messianic figure. It was in this same period that a picture was taken of Leivick dressed in traditional Russian garb with chains around his waist and ankles: very rarely, if ever, has an iconographic representation better illustrated the inner world of an artist than in that picture.

The first part of Leivick's detention ended in March 1912, when his long march to Siberia 'in stages' and in chains began. The final destination was a hamlet called Vitim, where the poet was supposed to spend the rest of his life. Named after a tributary of the Lena river, this village boasted an average temperature in winter of minus thirty-five degrees Celsius and lay at a distance of six thousand kilometers from Minsk. And yet, thanks to the money that some comrades who had earlier emigrated to America daringly managed to send, Leivick accomplished the almost unthinkable and escaped from Siberia. He did this by purchasing a horse and cart, which he drove to a railway station, traveling across Russia and Germany, and eventually to the United States, where he landed in the summer of 1913.

Like many intellectuals of his time, Leivick faced great professional and personal difficulties in the States; these are described in some of his most popular plays, such as *Shmates* (*Rags*) from 1921 or *Shop* from 1926. Although already a well-known poet, Leivick continued for years to earn his living as a wallpaper hanger; people walking about New York were thus able to bump into "the greatest Yiddish poet and playwright of our time" (Harshav, Harshav 1986: 675) holding a bucket of glue and a roll of wallpaper. Even in this new home-

land, however, Siberia remained one of the main themes in Leivick's work. It was a symbolic landscape, but also the setting of painful and tangible personal experiences, as described in his famous poem *Oyfn di vegn Sibirer* (*On the Road to Siberia*) from 1919:

> Oyfn di vegn Sibirer
> Emets nokh itster gefinen a klepl, a shtrikl
> Fun mayne a tserisenem shukh.
> A rimenem pas, fun a leymenem krigl a shtikl.
> A bleter fun heylikn bukh.
>
> Oyfn di taykhn Sibirer
> Ken emets nokh itster gefinen a tseykhn a shpendl
> Fun mains a dertrunkenem plit;
> In vald – a farblutikt-fartriktn bendl,
> In shney – ayngefroyrene trit (Leivick 1986: 679)[9].

Leivick's direct experience of oppression, revolt, and imprisonment, as well as the way in which he wove into his writings the details of his own exemplary and symbolic autobiography – his path of suffering and redemption – were undoubtedly highly meaningful for other Jews who had immigrated from Eastern Europe. In particular, for Leivick and for most of his readers, Jewish messianism was closely intertwined with Russian tradition. It is not mere chance that Harshav twice compares him to Dostoevsky; and, according to Roskies (1984: 102), who defined Leivick to be "in many respects the forerunner of the Holocaust survivors", his persona and writings were based upon notions "close to the heart of the Russian-Jewish intellectuals raised on Tolstoy". Leivick was linked to more recent Russian culture as well. Initially close to the New York group of modernist Yiddish poets known as "*Di Yunge*", Leivick focused increasingly on the legends and myths of the Jewish world, which he reinterpreted into forms that clearly reveal the influence of Russian symbolism. Over the years, however, he moved further away from these Russian sources: "one single theme ended up dominating his literary work: the nostalgia of a messianic redeemer, whom he fully expressed in the pièce *The Golem* (1917-1920), entirely set within the Jewish tradition" (Dinse, Liptzin 1978: 132).

Der goylem. Dramatishe poeme in akht bilder (*The Golem. Dramatic Poem in Eight Scenes*), first published in New York in 1921[10], is considered to be "one

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[9] "On the road to Siberia / Someone may still uncover a button, a lace / of my torn shoe / a leather belt, a shard of a clay mug, / A page of the holy book. // On the rivers of Siberia / Someone may still uncover a sign, a splinter / of my raft that has drowned; / in the forest, in snow – a ribbon with dried blood, / Footsteps frozen in the ground" (Leivick 1986: 679; translated by B. Harshav and B. Harshav).

[10] Many subsequent editions would later be published in Poland: in Warsaw by Kultur-Lige in 1922, in Vilna by the renowned Kletzkin, and more. There is abundant scholarly literature on the legend of the Golem; in addition to the books included in the Bibliography, see, for example, Idel 1990.

of the epoch-making works not only of Yiddish or Jewish literature, but of world literature as a whole" (Eidherr 2012: 21). It was first staged in Hebrew at the Habima theatre in Moscow in 1925, and soon became – and still is – one of that theatre's most successful plays. The premier was directed by Boris Veršilov, who, two years later and still in Moscow, also directed its first performance in Yiddish (cf. Zylberzwejg 1934: 1059). The history of the artificial man incapable of bridling his instinct for violence was apparently interpreted by many contemporary readers as criticism of the Bolshevik revolution and Leivick was attacked by some communist Yiddish writers and accused of anti-Soviet 'pessimism' – a response which did not prevent him from being triumphantly welcomed on a trip to Moscow and to his home town in 1925.

The remainder of Leivick's life unfolds in important public acknowledgments[11], political disappointment, and illness. It is difficult to imagine how hard it must have been for him, as one of the most illustrious contributors to the communist Yiddish press, to have given up writing for it in 1929 (following the Jewish communists' vote of support for the Hebron massacre)[12], or the desperation that persuaded him to break off any relations with the socialist Yiddish cultural organizations that he had helped to found in 1939 following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. His sufferings in this period were also exacerbated by tuberculosis, which obliged him to undergo long periods of hospitalization and consequent isolation from the outside world.

After the Shoah, Leivick was the first among Yiddish poets and writers in the United States to give voice to the widespread sense of disorientation and feeling of guilt for the catastrophe that many of his writings – including *The Golem* – seemed to have disturbingly foreshadowed. As early as 1945, he published in New York a collection of poems entitled *In Treblinke bin ikh nit geven* (*I Was Never in Treblinka*), in which he wonders how God could possibly not feel ashamed of his own existence before a humanity so degraded; he goes on to argue that one cannot differentiate between the Shoah's victims, all equally martyred by a barbaric power, and claims solidarity with 'the drowned': "I was never in Treblinka / not in the death camp of Majdanek. / But I stand upon their threshold / at their very edge" (cf. Schwarz 2008: 197).

Leivick died in New York in 1962. He had spent the last four years of his life paralyzed and unable to speak, visited constantly by writers and friends. He was compared to the *starets* Zosima of *The Brothers Karamazov* in both his own outlook and in the devotion that others demonstrated to him (Harshav, Harshav 1986: 677).

In 1957, a few years before his death, Leivick gave a speech entitled "*Der Yid – der Yikhud*" ("The Jew – The Individual") on the tenth anniversary of the

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[11] In 1936, Leivick represented Yiddish literature at the PEN Club's world conference in Buenos Aires; in 1958, he was granted a honorary doctorate by the Hebrew Union College; in 1961, he was awarded the medal of the National Jewish Welfare Board.

[12] On this event, cf. Nahshon 1998, particularly pp. 136 ff.

creation of the state of Israel at the foot of the biblical Mount Moriah, the site of the binding of Isaac. Once more presenting his own experience as symbolic of the experience of the Jewish people, Leivick turned in the last part of his speech to the narration of four events that had taken place when he was about seven years old, "four events of a single day [that] left a permanent imprint upon my entire life and became the undertone of all my later poems and plays, the undertone of my existence as a Jew and of my fate as a Jew..." (Landis 1966: 115). Specifically, as he was walking to the kheyder on a "bright, sunny winter day, cold and quiet, as often happens in the towns of White Russia" (*Ivi*: 116), Leivick recalled that he had happened to pass by "the Polish church", where he was assaulted by a tall and sturdy Pole, who threw him to the ground amidst mounds of snow, yelling "Dirty Jew! When you pass our Church you have to take our hat off! You dirty Jew!" Young Leivick struggled to his feet with difficulty and ran in shock to the *kheyder*. The lesson that day was on the binding of Isaac and when Leivick heard Abraham described as lifting the knife, he burst into hysterical tears. Though the teacher tried to comfort Leivick – it was just a test, Isaac was not slaughtered! – the child remained unconsoled, whimpering back, "But what would have happened had the angel *come one moment too late*?" (*Ibidem*; italics in the text). Despite the teacher's reassurances that the angel "could not have been late", that childhood fear – Leivick averred – would never leave him.

Returning home on that same day, young Leivick walked past the estate of Count Yassevitch[13], who, everyone knew, had a mad son that he kept locked up. Young Leivick felt an irresistible urge to go and see with his own eyes "this man of pain and suffering" (*Ibidem*) and, standing before the iron-grated window, caught sight of him: "silent and motionless, he stood looking at me. Great terrifying eyes. The man himself – a giant, the black hair of his head and face dishevelled, wild. I stared at him as if entranced, as if gazing into an abyss that drew me" (*Ivi*: 117). When the monster's eyes met the child's, young Leivick felt his knees tremble. "To save myself I thought up a trick". He touched his tongue to the grate's freezing cold iron, where it stuck to the metal and began to bleed copiously. It was a game, Leivick recalled, invented to entertain the prisoner, to show him that he wanted to cheer him up. Russian nineteenth-century novels often tell of pranks played on village idiots and greeted with general hilarity, but in this case, Leivick inverts the expected prank to punish himself.

The four events of Leivick's narration (the anti-Semitic attack; the feeling of powerlessness and terror at the mere *possibility* of a catastrophe; the figure of the man behind the grate; the combination of strong physical pain and copiously shed blood) seem to foreshadow and summarize the plot of *The Golem*. Two keys to understanding these events may be found in the child/adult and the Jew/non-Jew relationships that are brought up and reversed several times (Goodhart 1992: 95 ff.). In the first episode, the sudden and unjustified act of anti-Semitic

[13] Also spelled Jasiewicz. I have been unable to find any information confirming the historical existence of the Count, although this surname was very common in that region.

aggression by an adult against a defenseless child does not seem to require any further comment; in the second case, however, Leivick highlights the teacher's inability to comfort the boy, his failure – in spite of all his knowledge – to usefully interpret the biblical narrative and give meaning to its events. The sight of the locked-up man, who looks exactly like the Golem, also foreshadows (albeit in retrospect) the writer's detention, a crucial period in his personal and spiritual life that was instrumental for his self-creation as a messianic figure. The blood that was not shed by Isaac, but flowed instead from the child's absurd injury would also be abundantly shed in *The Golem* and, during the years when Leivick was working on his magnum opus, in the pogroms and summary executions of the Russian Civil War and, later, by the millions of victims of the Shoah; the child's sacrifice had been useless. Leivick thus presents himself as a messianic figure, but not in the image of a triumphant Messiah, the son of David, but according to another Talmudic model provided by Jewish tradition, i.e. that of the suffering Messiah, the son of Joseph, one of the many Messiahs in Jewish narrative that try in vain to redeem their people, and suffer in vain as well. To this Messiah, Jewish tradition offers no chance of victory, but only eternal defeat, doomed to recur over the centuries to one who "was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" and "he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

The *Talmud* states that the Messiah is a beggar waiting at the gates of Rome. And how can one recognize him? While the other lepers change their bandages all at once, the Messiah does so one bandage at a time, so as not to be late (cf. Facioni 2005: 111 ff.). In Leivick's *The Golem*, however, the miracle-working rabbi, the Maharal of Prague[14], creates a puppet Messiah who can never be ready, who recoils from his assigned task and refuses to embrace the life he is given, begging his creator with the desperation of a child to leave him in the darkness of non-being.

The first of the eight scenes into which *The Golem* is divided, entitled *Clay*, takes place at night just outside Prague and presents an argument between the rabbi and the shadow of the Golem that he is about to remove from the darkness. Who cares if you do not want to live, says the Maharal to the shadow, "*Es iz deyn rotsn gornisht*" ("Your own desire is nothing"), a great destiny awaits you; "*Du vest bashafn nit azoy zikh lebn*" ("You are created for more than mere life"), he states in a short conversation in which both characters voice prophecies that will become true, "*geheymnisfule veln zikh di maysim dayne. / S'vet keyner fun dayn gvure gornisht visn, / a holts-heker, a vaser-treger vestu zayn*" ("To do your deeds in secrecy and silence. / No one shall know about your furtive

[14] Judah Loew ben Bezalel (1520-1609), generally known by the Jewish acronym *Maharal* (from *Moreinu ha-Rav Loew, our Master, rabbi Loew*), was one of the leading Jewish thinkers and philosophers of his time. He was a rabbi in the Moravian town of Mikulov, in Prague, and in Poznań. His grave in the Jewish cemetery of Prague, which has remained untouched to this day, is often visited. Legend holds that he was the creator of the Golem.

strength, / You'll be a water carrier, a woodchopper"). The Phantom: "*A golem*". The Rabbi Maharal: "*A sheliekh fun a folk, a groyser gvur*" ("A nation's messenger, a man of might"). The Phantom: "*A meshores – iber vemen tsu geveltikn*" ("A servant to be ordered, to be ruled") (Leivick 2012: 14; Leivick 2006: 117)[15]. The shadow then disappears, after one last unheeded prayer, his apparition soon replaced by the sinister one of the Priest, whose name is Polish – Tadeush (Tadeusz) – and who hisses to the rabbi:

> Nor ze, funvanem kumen dos tsu dir azoyne oygn?
> Retsikhe shpritst fun zey un shvartse gvure,
> Vi kumt retsikhe tsu a rov? Ikh hob shoyn in mayn lebn,
> In tfises un oyf sheyters funem heylikn gerikht,
> Gezen azoyfil penimer fun yidn,
> Azoyfil oygn alerleyidike, un keynmol nokh
> Hot zikh gemakht zikh mir tsu zen a yidns oygn
> Vos zoln ton a kuk oyf dir mit emeser
> Gazlonishe retsikhe, beyzn has, vi dayne oygn –
> Zey zeen oys, vi oygn fun a vilder goylem… (2012: 17)[16].

The Maharal decides not to heed the feeble voice of the Golem's shadow, disregarding – with "savage" and "hate-filled eyes" – his desperate request to not be created. The rabbi thus deludes himself that he has correctly interpreted God's will, but was this desire for compliance with the divine sufficient justification for the Maharal's own great transformation from a meek rabbi-philosopher who studies the stars into a murderer filled with wild rage? The cynical Tadeush is certainly right when he sees *retshikhe*, slaughter, in the eyes of the rabbi, when he recognizes him as an alter ego of the Golem.

One of the leading themes in Leivick's text is a conflictual relationship with physical violence – the violence of which the Jews were often passive victims, the violence whose rejection was one of the founding principles of Ashkenazi Judaism, the violence without which rabbis and Jewish notables knew not how to 'save' their people. "The Golem was a typically creative Rabbinical solution to a knotty problem", summarizes Warren Rosenberg (2001: 71). The Golem, half man and half puppet, endowed with supernatural strength but ready to obey every request of his creator, will be the savior of the helpless Jews. He will be the one to stain his hands with blood in obedience to a higher will; thus it has

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[15] Quotations in this article from the original Yiddish text of *The Golem* are taken from Leivick 2012, while the English translations (found largely in the notes) are from Leivick 2006.

[16] "But what can cause your eyes to look so strange? / Your eyes shoot slaughter and spurt blackest strength! / How can a rabbi ever think of slaughter? / Throughout my life I've seen all kinds of dungeons, / Auto-da-fés ruled by the holy court. / And I have seen all sorts of Jewish faces, / And I have seen all kinds of Jewish eyes. / But I have never, ever chanced to see / A pair of Jewish eyes imbued with slaughter, / With truest hate as your eyes are now filled. / They look like the eyes of a savage golem..." (2006: 119-120).

been ordered, the Maharal believes. Though violence is here invoked in the pursuit of a just and pure goal and by the purest of all men, it – like the sleep of reason in Goya – "produces monsters", and feeds upon a hatred that contaminates the rabbi himself, deforming his features.

In the second scene, entitled *Walls*, the Golem is no longer a shadow, but a person. He has a name, Yosl, Joseph, that reminds us of his messianic destiny and a rough-hewn appearance: he is huge and strong, with black hair, a black beard, a stupid smile, and childlike eyes. At first, the Golem can feel only the most primordial, violent feelings: fear and rage. The rabbi seems both disappointed and fascinated by his creature. He teaches him to bend his head if he has to walk through a very low door, to move objects instead of sweeping them away; he teaches him that the sunset is not a fire that will soon devour everything. Nonetheless, not even the rabbi's promise that Yosl will be welcomed as if "at home" soothes Yosl's terror. His rage explodes in an expressionistic outburst, his desperation at finding himself in a world so incomprehensible and threatening recalling scenes in works by other contemporary authors about the tragedy of the First World War:

> Es hoybt zikh epes inveynik in mir un vergt,
> Un klapt, a klinkerey in beyde oyern,
> Un far di oygn – royt un grin…
> Un mayne fis zey hoybn zikh, zey viln geyn,
> Un mayne hent ot gibn zey a khap dikh farn halz
> Un trogn zikh avek mit dir... vos iz do, zog,
> Ikh vill ontloyfn un ikh ken nit, [*Shreyt*.]
> Zog, vos iz do?
> Ikh vil a sets ton mit a hant dir ibern kop –
> Un kon zikh nit a rir ton... ze, ikh fal bald um,
> Ez dreyen zikh di vent arum,
> Der feyer durkh di shoybn vert alts greser [...]
> Farlesh dos feyer arum mikh,
> Nem tsu di vent (2012: 32-33)[17].

It is only when the Golem sees Dvorel (Deborah), the rabbi's young granddaughter, that he catches a glimpse of that "very first gleam of [his own] very first hope" (2006: 129) that his creator had predicted – not the premonition of a messianic future, but the glimmer of some human warmth, desire, and passion. But Yosl Golem – be he man, Messiah, or animated puppet – does not belong to the human community, for which he can only feel nostalgia, and thus any inti-

[17] "Something inside me's rising, choking me – / A throbbing, pounding, ringing in my ears, / And red and green loom up before my eyes... / My legs move up; they want to, wish to walk. / My hands – they want to, wish to grab your throat / And carry you away. Tell me, what's here? / I want to run, but I can't even walk. (*Shouts*) / Tell me, what's here? I want my hand to hit / Your head, and yet I cannot move... Watch me, / I'm staggering: the walls are spinning around. / The fire in the windows blazes bigger [...]. / Snuff out the flames and take away the walls" (2006: 127-128).

macy, any possibility of love is barred to him: "He doesn't really seem to be a Jew", says the *rebezin* (*Ibidem*); even just looking at the girl will be forbidden to that "guest from very far away".

In the following scene, *Through Darkness*, the distance between the Golem and the community that he is supposed to protect continues to grow. When the biblical God had called Abraham, the patriarch had answered with the single word: *Hinneni*, Here I am, and it is from this absolute readiness that Jewish sacred history was born. The relationship between the Golem and the rabbi may also be seen as a degraded version of this narrative from the Book of Genesis: God-Maharal will not call Yosl, but Yosl will think he has heard the call, and when he, like Abraham, leaves everything to answer: "*Ikh bin do*", "I'm here!", the only response he receives is the spiteful laughter of young boys:

> Kh'hob moyre far dayn kuk, far iedn vort.
> Un shtendik dakht zikh mir, ikh her dayn kol:
> "Vu bistu, kum aher". Ikh tu a sets
> Di hak in holts areyn un entfer: "do bin ikh".
> Un ale nehmen lakhn, iberkrimen: do bin ikh… (2012: 51)[18].

It is from Yosl's feelings of fear and absolute loneliness that a sense of dependence on the Maharal and of heartbreaking nostalgia for him arise in the Golem: "*Zo iz gut mit dir. / Ven du volst stendik zeyn mit mir, nit lozn mir aleyn…*" (2012: 53) ("I feel so good with you! / If you wished to be with me constantly / You wouldn't leave me by myself...", 2006: 138). Many times throughout the drama does the Golem repeat this request, even crouching down at the rabbi's feet "like a dog!", and many times does the Maharal turn his face away. After all, for the Golem, God – the Maharal – is exactly that "wholly Other" that the German philosophers wrote about, a God that man can perceive only in the awareness of his desertion, an absent God for whom man can feel only unredeemable nostalgia[19].

In the meantime, events come to a head. "*Klange geyen um fun moyl tsu moyl*" ("rumors rushing round from mouth to mouth"), reb Bassevi complains when visiting the Maharal, "*un ikh aleyn* [...] *bin ikh nit zeyer ruhik, rebe*" ("And I [...], / I myself, Rabbi, feel so queasy now", 2012: 56; 2006: 140-141). It is known that on Passover, the Christians, led by the priest Tadeush, will set up a provocation and accuse the Jews of ritual murder – and, once again, blood will be shed, the blood of the child killed in order to cast blame on the Jews… "Rabbi, what do they want of us?", his guest asks. And the rabbi answers:

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[18] "I'm frightened of your glaring eyes. / I'm terrified of every word you utter. / I always think that I can hear your voice: / 'Where are you now?' I smash the ax into / The wood, and then I answer you: 'I'm here!' / And everyone laughs and mimics me: 'I'm here!'" (2006: 137).

[19] The expression "*Ganz Andere*" was first used in reference to God by theologian Rudolf Otto (2004: 28 ff.) in 1917 and later by several thinkers, including Max Horkheimer.

Men vil fun unz a fule, reb Basevi. Gor a sakh, a sakh...
Nor gebn konen mir zey gornisht, gornisht, hert mir?
Un epes konen mir – o, io, mir konen, reb Basevi,
mir viln ober nit. Mir viln nit… mir hobn
Tsu alts un alemen fun gor der velt
Nor tsugerirt zikh mit eyn shpits fun finger,
Gor fun der zeyt a hoykh geton mit unzer otem,
Un alts un ale fun der gantser velt
Vet trogn shoyn oyf eybik unzer finger,
Un shturems, virblendike shturems veln oysbrekhn
Fun unzer leykhtn oysgehoykhtn otem…(2012: 59-60)[20].

The fourth scene, *Beggars*, is set among the poor who are quartered in the Fifth Tower, a sort of timeless non-place belonging to noone, perhaps a reference to the Minsk Tower where Leivick himself had been imprisoned. Tadeush wants to throw the Jews out of even that horrible shelter: he dreams of dancing "*arum fun flam fun sheyterhoyfns*" ("around the flaming stake"), and ridicules the Jews' passiveness, their being "*eybik, eybik, greyt tsu geyn*" ("always, always ready to go away", 2012: 104-105; 2006: 171-172).

According to a well-known prophecy, the Messiah will come when the world is either completely good or when it is completely evil. In either case, mankind will have to be ready to welcome him and to accept change. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav nonetheless argued that the coming of the Messiah, "will change nothing, except that the fools will suddenly be ashamed of their foolishness" (Mandel 1963: 19). Gershom Scholem, one of the most authoritative historians of Jewish thought who wrote about the "catastrophic character of redemption", defined the messianic era as the "final catastrophe" (Scholem 1995: 12)[21]. In his view, 'true' messianic liberation is only possible through a bold undertaking, the courageous assumption of responsibility that lies almost at the limit of human power.

In the scene *Unbidden*, Prophet Elias and the Messiah are two beggars, one old and one young, both with sore hands and feet and waiting for dawn at the outskirts of Prague. As noted above, however, no redeemer may come without having been called for. Who cares if the young Messiah feels that "*zayn harts hot zikh farbenkt far eykh*" ("his heart is filled with yearning [...], longing") for his people (2012: 110; 2006: 180). The time is not yet ripe; the awaited Messiah can only be the Last One, who marks the end of time. It is the Maharal himself who sends the two miserable beggars away. And, as one can only respond to violence with vio-

[20] "They want a great deal of us, Reb Bassevi. / But we can give them nothing, do you hear? / Yet if we can – oh, reb Bassevi, if / We can, we do not want to, do not want to... / With a mere fingertip we touched the world / And everything and everyone it holds. / Standing aside, we merely breathed a breath / On the entire world, and everything / And everyone it holds will bear the imprint / Of our touch until the end of time. / And storms will rage and whirlwinds will erupt / From our mild and our gentle breathing (2006: 143).

[21] Consider the "bold statement" of a third-century sage of the Talmud: "May he come, but I do not want to see him" (Sholem 1995: 12).

lence, the young Messiah, the beggar-Messiah, now bitterly predicts the coming of the Golem, whose only resource is force:

> Fun den man, vos trogt zayn tseylem
> Tsu dem betler mitn zakh,
> kumt der oysleyzer, der goylem,
> mit a fist un mit a hak (2012: 112)[22].

In scene six, *Revelations*, the Golem wakes up in the Fifth Tower, where the Maharal had imprisoned him together with beggars and victims of the pogroms. Here, the puppet suddenly reveals his messianic role; the time set for his birth has come: his way of speaking becomes refined, he becomes aware of the ugliness of his body, of his glassy eyes, is pervaded by "*likhtikeyt fun eyne-ni're*" ("a brightness of invisibility", *Ivi*: 133; 2006: 189). Nevertheless, the power that he has suddenly acquired does not mean that the Golem is moving away from his creator: even in the midst of rage and desperation, his words still maintain a "*vink oyf mayn tsurikker, an onzog oyf mayn benkenish un libshaft*" ("A hint of my return, a trace, a touch, / a sign of all my love and all my longing", 2012: 150; 2006: 202). I am – reiterates the Golem – "always waiting for him", I am "*eybik zeyner*" ("forever his", 2012: 150-151; 2006: 202).

In the penultimate scene, *In the Cave*, the plot draws to a close. In the dark tunnels of the Fifth Tower that connect cathedral with synagogue, Tadeush and a monk carefully carry sealed bottles containing the blood of the child they have killed. Blood is the key word in the last pages of the poem, the blood which the Golem smells from afar. Only he will be able to prevent the final slaughter, but the means by which he can do so are the same as those used by Tadeush and his fellows. "*Durkh toyt un blut un letstn otem*" ("Through death and blood and final breath", 2012: 166; 2006: 210), the Maharal teaches him, preparing him for the attack. The Golem tries to brace up, repeating the terrible formula, but he is continually tormented by nightmares and phantoms he cannot explain. Deserted by the Maharal and lost in the airless underground tunnels, he finds the bottles with the blood and probably intends to murder Tadeush and his assistant. But visions haunt him: the Golem is visited by a deformed image of the Maharal who insults him, "*dos ponim – beyz mit retsikhe, dos moyl tsunoyfgeprest*" ("an icy rage on his features [...], his lips clenched", 2012: 173; 2006: 216), a choir of dead people, a man with the large cross, a young pilgrim. When the real Maharal finally reaches him and encourages him to complete his tragic mission, the Golem once more begs to be left in the tunnels, in the underground world to which he belongs – before suddenly casting off his messianic role and returning to his former state, that of a naïve being who suffers the torments of nostalgia, he rises all at once, gapes, embraces Rabbi: "*Rebe, rebe, du bist do? O, rebe mayner!*" ("Oh, Rabbi, Rabbi – you are here, my rabbi?", 2012: 198; 2006: 236).

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[22] "From the man who bears the cross / To the beggar with his pack, / Comes the golem, the redeemer, / With his fist and with his axe" (2006: 174).

In the final scene, *The Final Mission*, the Golem, still imprisoned, looks shaggy, unkempt, and sleepy (2006: 237). The rabbi has not visited him for eight days. The memory of that terrible night in the Fifth Tower is still vivid in the larger community: the beggars remember the crying, the solitary Golem, "*a riziker, a shverer*" ("huge and heavy"), and also the fact that as they themselves fled the Tower, "*keynem iz nisht eyngefaln gor tsu rufn im*" ("no one even thought of calling him", 2012: 208-209; 2006: 240-241). When, at last, the Rabbi comes, he is appalled by the Golem's appearance: "*Azoy fil umru in dayn harts, azoy fil sine; azoy fil shvartse tayve, kalte beyzkayt!*" ("So much distress and hatred in your heart! – he exclaims – So much dark passion and so much cold fury", 2012: 213; 2006: 245). And yet, the Rabbi would still like the Golem to learn to live among other Jews, to relish the sound of their prayers. His naiveté is astonishing: the Golem is a stranger to human culture, a misfit. Moreover, the violence that the Rabbi himself has triggered within his creature – indeed, the violence for which the Rabbi created him – cannot be restrained. The result is a grotesque tragedy: the Golem does join the group of people praying at the synagogue, but only in order to slaughter them – and it is only then that the Maharal realizes the destructive power he has released:

> Iz dos a shtraf far unzer freyd, Reboyne oylem?
> Iz doz dayn shtraf far veln rateven zikh?
> Ti hostu nisht baviligt?
> [...]
> Vos ikh hot in mayn ungeduld; in mayn fartsveyflung
> Gevolt zikh opkern fun iene vegn fun dayn folk,
> Vos zaynen shtil, geduldik, ful betuekh, eybik?...
> Mayn zind far veln opnemen baym faynt dos zeynike;
> Der faynt hot oyfgemant...
> Ikh hob gevolt farmaydn blut un blut fargosn... (2012: 224)[23].

But, once again, the Golem pleads with the Rabbi, orders him – "You'll stay with me!" – and confesses that all that he has done, he has done "*durkh benkenish*", "for yearning" (*Ibidem*). Dvorel runs in, terrified. The Golem reaches out to her, thinking she has come to be with him. At this point, the Rabbi gathers his strength, entrusts the puppet with his "final mission", forces him to lie down, and orders him to die (2006: 252-253).

Evening falls. The Maharal orders the faithful to resume the song that marks the beginning of the Shabbat. An Invisible Force seeps into the dark,

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[23] "Oh, Lord, are we now punished for our joy? / Are we chastised for trying now to save / Ourselves? And didn't you grant your approval? [...] / In my despair, in my intolerance, / I wished to turn my back on all those ways / Of all your people, ways that are eternal, / Ways that are silent, patient, full of faith? / My sin in wanting what the foe lays claim to? / The enemy demanded what was his. / The blood that I desired to save I spilled!" (2006: 248-249). Here again, Leivick highlights the problem of violence being completely alien to Jewish identity.

closed room – it is perhaps the soul of the Golem, perhaps the personification of his craving for love, of his "nostalgia" (Kalk Lubatti 1956: 13), a Force that whispers to the dying puppet before descending onto him:

> Dervayl hot zikh mit eynuneyntsik rege
> Fartsoygt mer, durkh mir, dayn leben;
> Zay dankbar mir far der gerateveter rege,
> Vayl ot fargeyt zi... (2012: 234)[24].

4. *Conclusions*

Leivick's tragedy does not provide a unique answer to the great themes it raises. We do not know whether the existence of the Golem was really the realization of God's will or only the expression of the Maharal's own Promethean hubris, nor do we learn the meaning of redemption, nor are we given any justification for or decisive condemnation of violence. What is highlighted, however, in this all-male tragedy – essentially as male-centered as is traditional Jewish culture itself – is the relationship between the rabbi and the Golem, simultaneously that of both father/son and God/man[25] – and the lost, yearning, and unconsoled creaturality of the big, clumsy puppet – a true symbol, in this respect, of modern man.

Messianic nostalgia is expressed in Leivick's work to the fullest degree: either the Messiah will not come or, if he does, he will achieve – for both himself and the world – only disappointment and catastrophe. Such had already been prophesized by the Chassidic masters, reflecting their profound knowledge of 'mercurial' life in the Diaspora and of its frail accomplishments[26]. The devising of utopias and conjuring up of complex plans for salvation is pointless, Leivick argues. Humanity's only way out, he seems to say, is through the acceptance of its own vague, objectless nostalgia.

While Leivick knew that even the greatly yearned for coming of the Messiah would change nothing in the human condition, he also held that continuing to wait for and to believe in his arrival was necessary. In this he resembles the addressee of Kafka's famous *Message from the Emperor*, a text written during

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[24] "Meanwhile my life is pouring, pouring through me, / Pouring me through that solitary moment, / Grateful now for that salvaged moment here, / For now that moment melts…" (2006: 254).

[25] In the 1991 staging of *Golem*, one of Moni Ovadia's most successful performances, he 'softened' the androcentricity of this work by including a choir consisting of three pregnant women, representing simultaneously both the *Shekinah*, or divine presence, and the only possible way of generating in the human world. Ovadia's approach was based on his interpretation of the father/son relationship in Leivick's text, which he emphasized even more explicitly by adding some passages by Kafka, including *Letter to His Father* (cf. Bertolone 2012: 32 ff.).

[26] On Jewish 'mercuriality', a concept elaborated by Yuri Slezkine (2004), see the introductory article to this volume by L. Salmon.

the same period as Leivick's *The Golem*. Kafka's figure continues to wait for the arrival of a messenger, even though he is well aware that such waiting is useless, that the messenger will never come. As the narrator explains: "No one will get through here [...]. You, though, will sit at your window and conjure [arrival] up for yourself in your dreams, as evening falls" (2012: 28).

That said, Leivick's 'nostalgic' thought – like twentieth-century Jewish life and thought in general – both recognizes and encompasses a new dialectical element, namely political Zionism, the return to the land of the Fathers, the re-founding of the state of Israel. Following Boym's definitions, Zionism could be considered the expression of 'restorative nostalgia' since it "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (Boym 2001: XVIII). It is difficult, however, to draw a neat boundary between Boym's two varieties of nostalgia – restorative and reflective. For Leivick and many other thinkers and interpreters of the Zionist movement, the re-foundation of the state of Israel was less "a return to the original stasis" or "a perfect snapshot" of a static past (Boym 2001: 49), than an enormous, innovative, and maieutic challenge, oriented towards making Israel a model for other nations, a challenge necessary to face that held no guarantee of success. While Yiddish, to which Leivick chose to attach his destiny, is generally associated – at least in its secular version – with the simultaneous acknowledgement and acceptance of dispersion and of exile, Yiddish language and culture also participated, albeit in often conflicting and troubled ways, in the building of the new country. Israel was, after all, a new reality, not the reproduction of clichés from a bygone era[27].

Leivick spent the greater part of his life hovering between two idealizations of life in the Diaspora, both of them reflective in mood: on one hand, the idealization of "transcendental homelessness", to use the expression of György Lukács (1985: 41), on the other, the hope-filled vision of Israel, the "future of nostalgia". These two visions culminated after his death, as had often happened in his life, in a symbolic event, namely the creation in Tel Aviv in 1970 of the House of Leivick, a cultural center and museum, as well as the Israeli seat of the association of Yiddish writers and journalists[28]. This institution is one of very few in the state of Israel where the sounds of Hebrew and Yiddish, together with the multiple nostalgias of the Hebrew world, coexist in relative harmony – and both worlds, significantly, are contained in its name: Bet Leyvik, Leyviks Hoys.

(Translated by Cecilia Pozzi and Sara Dickinson)

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[27] At the same time, this guttural and poetic idiom of a disinherited and homeless people, a language whose very structure would seem to symbolize exile, necessarily suggested paradox and a sort of bizarre defeatism. Indeed, in the early years of the Israeli state, Ben Gurion led an aggressive campaign against Yiddish culture, which he identified with the humiliation and powerlessness of the Diaspora.

[28] During her speech at the opening of the House of Leivick in 1970, Golda Meir characterized that event as a celebration of "the elimination of the partition between Hebrew and Yiddish" and the end of any "battle between the languages" (Goldsmith 1997: 24).

Резюме

Лаура Кьуерчоли Мицер

Тоска и креатурность в Големе *Г. Лейвика*

В данной статье рассматриваются некоторые составные элементы ‘еврейской тоски’, чаще всего воспринимающей метафизический характер. Объектом анализа является пьеса на языке идиш *Голем* (1921) – шедевр русско-еврейского писателя Г. Лейвика. Известная креатура-великан из глины, созданная в VII веке раввином Левом в Праге, становится в произведении Г. Лейвика эмблемой еврейской меланхолической ностальгии. Подобного рода тоска направлена как на онтологически далекого, недосягаемого творца и на столь же недосягаемую мессианскую эру, так и, парадоксально, на состояние небытия.

Regret for the Time of Heroes and Existential *Toska* in Vladimir Vysockij

Mario Alessandro Curletto (University of Genoa)

Жить, покоем дорожа –
Пресно, тускло, простоквашно;
Чтоб душа была свежа,
Надо делать то, что страшно[1].

Игорь Губерман

In the vast poetic output of singer-songwriter Vladimir Vysockij, melancholic moods assume various shapes and shades of nostalgia – or *toska.* Natal'ja Zakurdaeva (2003: 188-189) has equated Vysockian *toska* with sentiments ranging from '*skuka*' (boredom) to '*trevoga*' (anxiety, anguish) as seen, for example, in lines such as "*Vse v prošlom, ja zevaju ot toski*" ("All is past, I yawn from *toska*") and "*My ždem ataki do toski…*" ("We await the attack filled with *toska…*")[2]. This article will focus on that variety of Vysockian *toska* that might be defined, paraphrasing Giambattista Vico (1847: 237-258), as nostalgia for a 'heroic era'. Such nostalgia is expressed explicitly in the song, or poem, *Ja ne uspel (Toska po romantike)*, *I Was Too Late* (Toska *for Romanticism*) (Vysockij 1999, II: 74), and it pervades a large number of Vysockij's other texts as well, albeit often implicitly, i.e. without the clear semantic signal of words such as '*toska*', '*nostal'gija*', and so on. As Evgenij Ševjakov (2006: 80) justly notes, nostalgia for a heroic era is one of several channels taken by the great flux that constitutes Vysockij's more general "*nostal'gija po geroike*" ("nostalgia for heroism") – and, arguably, one of the most important. Indeed, a longing for the heroism or courage felt to be lacking in contemporary life is the most prevalent type of *toska* in Vysockij's work and he frequently remarked on the importance of heroic courage in live commentary at his concerts, e.g.:

> Я вообще стараюсь для своих песен выбирать людей, которые находятся в самой крайней ситуации, в момент риска, которые каждую следующую минуту могут заглянуть в лицо смерти, у которых что-то сломалось, произошло

[1] "To live treasuring peace and quiet / means living insipidly, dimly, like clotted milk; / For your soul to be fresh, / You have to do something dreadful".

[2] In her detailed catalog of the myriad linguistic and conceptual elements that constitute Vysockij's system of meanings, Zakurdaeva describes Vysockian *toska*, at its most basic, as a sense of loneliness sufficient to drive one's actions, its dynamic quality demonstrated by *toska'*s frequent syntactic link with a verb. The two lines quoted here are taken, respectively, from the songs *Poseščenie Muzy* (*The Visit of the Muse*) and *Voennaja pesnja* (*Combat Song*) (Vysockij 1999, I: 209, 114). Unless otherwise noted, subsequent volume and page numbers in this chapter for citations of Vysockij refer to this edition.

– в общем, короче говоря, людей, которые “вдоль обрыва, по-над пропастью” (Vysockij 2007)[3].

As will become clear, Vysockij’s *toska* for ‘heroic eras’, while deeply personal, is largely directed at the concept of ‘*podvig*’ or ‘heroic feat’ found in specific contexts and events that contrast sharply with ‘*byt*’ or ‘*obydennost’*’ – the prosaicness of everyday life (cf. Lotman, Uspenskij 1985: 61; Boym 1995: 133). Heroic gestures simultaneously constitute a supreme form of human experience for Vysockij and serve as the object of nostalgia – and it is in this light that they appear in his most well-known musical-poetic cycles. In point of fact, it is precisely the absence in normal daily life of both heroism and the extreme situations that serve as heroism’s context that triggers Vysockij’s nostalgia for the force and passion of stronger emotions. His songs consistently situate the heroic feat in a dramatic ‘elsewhere’ that is juxtaposed to the normal daily grind and defined by its spatial and/or temporal remarkableness. Harsh expanses of steppe and polar ice, underground mines, and mountain peaks are among the spaces selected by Vysockij to elaborate his conception of heroism. When locating heroism in other eras, Vysockij often chooses to contemplate the heroic feat in the context of war. Particular attention will be devoted in this article to the origins of this choice as well as to the expression of heroism found in his songs about the men who fought in World War II. The blend of a profoundly personal nostalgia for the heroic feat with widely shared public sentiments enabled both Vysockij and his audience to transcend the quotidian reality of daily Soviet life.

1. *A Heroism Opposed to Everyday Life (*byt*)*

Vysockij’s worldview repeatedly opposes normal Russian ‘*byt*’, or everyday life, to ‘*bytie*’, borrowing Boym’s terminology, a more authentic type of ‘being’ or ‘existence’ (Boym 1995: 133). This opposition is evident, for example, in the celebrated *Pesnja o druge* (*Song of a Friend*), where the standard Manichean distinction between ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’ is blurred in that both are contrasted to a third category, that of the banal and prosaic, represented in the song by the word ‘*tak*’, meaning “so-so” or “without particularly remarkable or distinguishing features”:

Если друг оказался вдруг
И не друг, и не враг, а так,

[3] “Generally, I try to select for my songs people in the most extreme situations, in moments of risk, people who might at any next moment come face to face with death, people who have been somehow broken, to whom something has happened, in general, to put it briefly, people who are ‘on the edge of the precipice, the brink of the abyss’”. Vysockij’s self-quotation is taken from the first verse of his well-known *Koni privered-livye* (*Headstrong horses*).

Если сразу не разберешь
Плох он или хорош,
Парня в горы тяни, рискни,
Не бросай одного его,
Пусть он в связке одной с тобой,
Там поймешь кто такой (I: 112, emphasis added)[4].

A micro-representation of Vysockij's universe, this song recommends mountain climbing as a means for discovering who our acquaintances 'really are', whether true friends or genuine foes, truly 'good' or really 'bad'. The song yearns for a world illuminated by pristine clarity, in which prosaic indefiniteness ("so-so") is overcome by alpine feats of heroism:

А когда ты упал со скал
Он стонал, но держал.
Если шел он с тобой, как в бой,
На вершине стоял хмельной [...] (*Ivi*: 112-113, emphasis added)[5].

In these lyrics, we can begin to intuit a link between heroism and the ethical nature of true friendship (the only admissible kind) found elsewhere in Vysockij as well[6].

Vysockij's specific interest in the heroic feat has been noted by Šilina (2006: 188), who finds his 'war songs' (*voennij cikl*) to be illustrative of the *podvig,* and by Andrej Skobelev and Sergej Šaulov, whose important monograph (Skobelev, Šaulov 1991) associates the heroic feat with the broader category of 'overcoming' (*preodelenie*) frequently found in his poetics. Nikolaj Rerix, who in 1942 characterized *podvig* as a concept that is specifically Russian and thus untranslatable into other languages, highlighted the notion of moral choice found at its core:

> Heroism accompanied by fanfare is not capable of conveying the immortal, complete, and all-encompassing idea contained in the Russian word *podvig* [...]. Gather together a series of words from various languages that expresses the best notions of progress, and not one of them will be equivalent to the compressed, but precise Russian term '*podvig'* [...]. Those who choose to take on the heavy burden of the *podvig* bear it voluntarily (Rerix 1991: 367).

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[4] "If a friend suddenly turns out to be / *neither a friend nor an enemy, but so-so* / If you can't immediately tell whether he's good or bad, / Take the guy up in the mountains, take the risk, / Don't abandon him alone / Rope him to you, / Then you'll see who he is".

[5] "And when you fell from the cliff / *He groaned, but held steady.* / Though he came with you as if into battle, / At the peak he stood as one intoxicated [...]".

[6] As is well known, the Russian word '*drug*' has a stronger connotation than does English 'friend', the latter term normally rendered in Russian as '*prijatel"*. '*Drug*' is a more 'extreme friend', one on whom you can rely, as Vysockij's song indicates, "*kak na sebja samogo*" ("as if on yourself") (I: 113).

The deliberate performance of the heroic gest is also raised by Skobelev and Šaulov (1991: 56), who find intention and choice inherent in the specifically Vysockian *podvig*:

> Это подвиг жизни и нравственности, влекущий, может быть, смерть, но зато – радость свободного выбора, торжествующее чувство собственного человеческого достоинства, сознание полной реализации[7].

Indeed, the personages described in Vysockij's verses never opt for the easiest or least painful solution to their various predicaments, but choose instead to confront these heroically, accomplishing notable feats through either resistance or risk. Vysockij's choice to capture these protagonists in situations that put them to the test in different ways result from criteria that are not purely aesthetic: his characters are driven neither by a thirst for glory nor a sense of duty, but rather by a sort of ethical 'maximalism', a refusal to accept compromises or half-way solutions that leads them to conceive of the heroic act as the fullest expression of their own human dignity.

It is widely believed – and with good reason – that a never placated yearning for clear, strong feelings, extreme situations, and radical choices (to be made according to the dictates of conscience and requiring subsequent payment for the consequences), together with Vysockij's drive to locate such sentiments and decisions in a spatially or (still more frequently) temporally defined 'elsewhere' were exacerbated by the historical and social context in which he lived. With the exception of its earliest beginnings, which coincided with the decline of the 'Thaw' period, Vysockij's artistic trajectory unfolded entirely within the temporal confines of the so-called 'Stagnation' of the Brežnev years. His impetuous temperament, his romantic sense of honor, and his irrepressible surges of creativity clashed constantly and irremediably with the paralysis that reigned in Soviet society during that era. In particular, Vysockij suffered from the stifling conformity that reigned in the official artistic institutions and from the hostility of the politico-cultural bureaucracy, that, while never overt, was insidious, systematic, and encountered by him daily[8]. Relatively assiduous travels to the West – primarily to France, but also to the United States, Germany, Italy, Spain, Mexico, Britain, even Tahiti, and so on[9] – did not in the least mitigate Vysockij's

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[7] "This is an existential and moral *podvig*, perhaps one that implies death, but that also offers the joy of choosing freely, the triumphant feeling of one's own human dignity, and the consciousness of full self-realization".

[8] Although Vysockij is often credited with personifying this hostility as "*Moj černyj čelovek v kostjume serom*" ("*My dark individual in a gray suit*", II: 137), a lyric that appears in even the most authoritative collections of his works, scholar Andrej Semin (2012: 149-185) convincingly argues on the basis of concrete textual evidence that Vysockij did not actually write this song.

[9] Vysockij traveled to the West for the first time in 1973, thanks largely to the strenuous efforts of Vlady, an actress whom he married in 1970 and who was president of the France-USSR Association. His first long-coveted permit to travel was followed

existential discomfort. This point has been attested by various reliable sources, including his wife, Marina Vlady, and his close friend Mixail Šemjakin (Buvina, Curletto 2009: 271-276); it has also been corroborated by the valuable testimony of poet Andrej Voznesenskij, who, in an interview with Demetrio Volcic (then correspondent in Moscow for RAI, the Italian national broadcasting network), described a brief, but significant exchange with Vysockij upon his return from one of the first trips to Paris:

> I asked him: 'Tell me immediately, in just a few words, what do you think of the West?'
>
> His response was brilliant: 'When you first find yourself in the West', he said, 'you want to buy everything; after a bit, you want to steal everything; then, in the end, you want to smash everything'[10].

Whatever weight we attribute to the possible influence of the Brežnev era on Vysockij's worldview, it is quite clear that he had a generally antagonistic relationship to daily life – and that his ideas of heroism were conceived in contrast to it. Leonid Dolgopolov (1990: 8) goes so far as to claim that a conflict with the quotidian was the aesthetic dominant in Vysockij's work and links this notion both to his quest for a heroic era and to his nostalgic mood:

> Prosaicness [*obydennost'*] is Vysockij's implacable enemy. The main theme in all of his artistic production is the search throughout life for a heroic essence [*načalo*], *toska* for this, a passionate desire to see it embodied. This *toska* is expressed by him so passionately and with such profound self abnegation that it is almost embarrassing to discuss it in the clichéd language of criticism[11].

Implicit in Dolgopolov's comment is the idea that Vysockij's quest for a heroic era was inextricably tied to a his concomitant sense of nostalgia, a sentiment arising precisely from the realization that such an era was irreparably beyond reach. Dreaming of a wonderland where "Добро и зло [...] живут на разных берегах" ("Good and evil [...] live on opposite shores", II: 268), Vysockij wandered through the gray blur of Brežnev's USSR in search of heroic individuals in heroic situations. His travels through poetic space took him to dramatic geographical settings and harsh climates: beneath the earth's surface and far above it, on the steppe, in the tundra, and atop mountain peaks. En route, Vysockij's path sometimes crossed through territory that traditionally belonged to official Soviet

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by others: in 1977 the Soviet authories even went so far as to grant Vysockij a sort of permanent exit visa, perhaps in the (ultimately vain) hope that he would emigrate and thus destroy the exceptional regard that he enjoyed among the Soviet people.

[10] Voznesenskij's words are taken from a documentary (cf. Volcic 1982) that appeared on Italian television shortly after Vysockij's death.

[11] Other scholars have recognized the heroic as one of several primary themes in Vysockij's work, together with, for example, the tragic and the satirical (e.g. Ševjakov 2006: 3).

literature, such as that belonging to labor, a theme elaborated in ubiquitous and celebratory narratives about the working people and its epic daily accomplishments on the road of socialism's construction. For Vysockij, however, the idea of labor was not intrinsically linked to the pompous rhetoric and empty didacticism of social realism, but struck him with robust and vivid images of folkloric stamp, as seen in the march of the miners in *Černoe zoloto* (*Black Gold*):

> Любой из нас – ну, чем не чародей?
> Из преисподней наверх уголь мечем.
> Мы топливо отнимем у чертей -
> Свои котлы топить им будет нечем! (I: 249)[12].

In *Dorožnaja istorija* (*Story of the Road*), another example of heroism 'on the job', an unexpected predicament triggers an argument between two coworkers when the large truck that they are driving through the desert steppe breaks down under the lash of a fierce blizzard. The protagonist, a former convict and one of Vysockij's more complex "role heroes"[13], remains cool-headed and conscious of the two men's common good. His colleague, however, who up until that moment also been his friend, obeys a mistaken instinct for survival and, in a display of irrationality and irresponsibility, succumbs to the urge to flee. Luckily, fate has prepared a happy ending for both men, as well as for the truck that they are delivering to a construction site beyond the Urals:

> … Конец простой: пришел тягач,
> И там был трос, и там был врач,
> И МАЗ попал куда положено ему (*Ivi*: 311)[14].

Having overcome adversity with remarkable firmness, the hero reaches his apotheosis in a demonstration of magnanimity – as genuine as it is laconic – towards his weaker companion:

> И он пришел – трясется весь...
> А там – опять далекий рейс, –
> Я зла не помню – я опять его возьму! (*Ibidem*)[15].

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[12] "Why shouldn't each and every one of us be a magician? / From the depths of hell we toss up coal. / We'll take the fuel from the devils, / They'll have nothing for stoking their cauldrons".

[13] The term '*rolevoj geroj*' ('role hero') was coined by Boris Korman (1964: 165) to describe the protagonist of what he calls "*rolevaja lirika*" ("role lyrics"): "The peculiarity of role lyrics lies in the fact that the author does not appear in person, but in the disguise of other characters. In role lyrics, a lyrical procedure is used to appropriate epic material: the author gives voice to characters that are clearly distinct from himself. He is present in the poem, but it is as if he were diluted in his own characters and wearing their mask".

[14] "The end is simple: a tow truck came, / It had a cable on board and it had a doctor, / And our truck made it to where it was going".

[15] "And he made it in, too, shaking all over… / Out there another long journey lies before us, / I bear him no grudge – I'll take him with me again!".

Though his coworker fails the test of friendship, the heroic protagonist remains generously disposed towards him.

While the main characters in both *Černoe zoloto* and *Dorožnaja istorija* are only simple workers, and thus ostensibly representatives of the common people, the actual settings of their heroic gests are far from banal. Both songs are set in dramatically rendered environments that sharply contrast with one another and with daily life: one takes place in the hellish darkness of a suffocating coal mine in the burning bowels of the earth, the other in the frigid whiteness of the snow-covered steppe, symbolic of both immaculate purity and deadly austerity. Severe atmospheric conditions are exploited still more fully in *Beloe bezmolvie* (*White Silence*), where perennial pack ice serves as stage for the mental states and heroic acts of polar explorers:

> Как давно снятся нам только белые сны,
> Все иные оттенки снега замели.
> Мы ослепли давно от такой белизны [...]
> Север, воля, надежда, – страна без границ,
> Снег без грязи, как долгая жизнь без вранья (*Ivi*: 296)[16].

2. *Alpine Heroism*

Alpine settings were another of Vysockij's favorite contexts for rendering the heroic feat and the nostalgia that he associated with it – from his first direct contact with the mountains during the shooting of the film *Vertikal'* (*Vertical,* 1966) in the Caucasus. In general, Vysockij's 'mountain cycle' (*gornyj cikl*)[17] addresses what he considered to be some of life's most fundamental issues, including friendship, courage, the challenging of one's own limits, personal 'ascent' in various forms, the possibility of reaching happiness that verges on rapture, as well as a paradoxical variety of nostalgia that takes shape in an ineluctable inner need for a 'homecoming', albeit one that is temporary and inconclusive. Indeed, his mountain songs repeatedly outline what we might call a 'phenomenology of heroism' that likens the pursuit of happiness to the labors of Sisyphus: one reaches the summit, pure and majestic, but such triumph is inevitably followed by literal and figurative descent in returning 'home' to what is – because of its

[16] "For so long we've dreamt only white dreams, / The snows have swept away all the other hues. / We were blinded long ago from this whiteness [...] / The North, liberty, hope – a country without borders, / Snow without mud, like a long life without lies".

[17] Because they are relatively few in number, Vysockij's alpine songs are arguably not comparable, for example, to his so-called '*blatnoj cikl*'('illegal underworld cycle'), '*sportivnyj cikl*' ('sport cycle'), or 'war cycle'; they have, however, sometimes been taken to constitute a 'mountain cycle' because of their consistent form and content (cfr. Skobelev, Šaulov 1991).

very prosaicness – less a safe haven, than a source of anguish[18]. Such homecoming is tolerable only because it is necessary in order to subsequently embark upon yet another path of ascent. In his mountain songs, the vital and vitalist Vysockij suggests that our only means of achieving happiness is choosing to set out again and thus to perform not just one, but several heroic feats, waging sustained battle against our own weaknesses and fears:

И можно свернуть, обрыв обогнуть,–
Но мы выбираем трудный путь,
Опасный, как военная тропа [...]
Мы рубим ступени. Ни шагу назад!
И от напряженья колени дрожат,
И сердце готово к вершине бежать из груди (*Ivi*: 113-114)[19].

As we gradually supersede one trial after another, uncertainty and apprehension give way to a self-confidence that borders on exaltation:

Ну вот, исчезла дрожь в руках,
Теперь – наверх!
Ну вот, сорвался в пропасть страх –
Навек, навек.
Для остановки нет причин –
Иду, скользя,
И в мире нет таких вершин,
Что взять нельзя (*Ivi*: 201)[20].

In the final verse of *Gornaja liričeskaja* (*Mountain Lyric*), Vysockij both captures the long-awaited moment of adamantine serenity and transcendence and brusquely opposes it to descent into the daily grind:

И пусть пройдет немалый срок –
Мне не забыть,
Как здесь сомнения я смог
В себе убить.
В тот день шептала мне вода:
“Удач всегда...”

[18] In their opposition to daily life we can perhaps see a similarity between Vysockij’s protagonists and Ivan the Fool, the folkloric hero for whom “*byt*, the everyday, is a more dangerous enemy [...] than the multi-headed dragon with flaming tongues” (Boym 1995: 133).

[19] “One could turn back, go around the precipice, / But we choose the difficult path, / Dangerous as a war track [...] / We hew steps. Not one step back! / And from exertion our knees shake, / And our heart is ready to flee from our chest to the summit”.

[20] “Hey look, my hands aren’t shaking anymore, / Now – to the top! / Hey look, my fear has plunged into the abyss / Forevermore, forevermore. / There’s no reason to pause, / I move on, sliding, / And there are no summits in this world / That can’t be conquered”.

А день... какой был день тогда?
Ах да – среда!.. (*Ivi*: 202)[21].

In *Proščanie s gorami* (*Farewell to the Mountains*), Vysockij reiterates the theme of homecoming as inescapable descent into the monotonous routine of daily life. At the same time, this song underlines the notion that conquering the peak confers a certain spiritual elevation that indelibly defines one's character:

В суету городов и в потоки машин
Возвращаемся мы – просто некуда деться! [...]
И спускаемся вниз с покоренных вершин
Что же делать, и боги спускались на землю (*Ivi*: 116-117)[22].

The film *Vertical* features four songs on mountains themes that Vysockij specifically composed for the film as well as a scene where he – in the role of Volodja, the alpine expedition's radio operator – sings while accompanying himself on the guitar[23]. While the two brief and apparently random quatrains that Volodja intones lack any explicit connection with mountain heroism, they can be linked to his general vision of mountaineering. Indeed, these verses articulate a link between heroism and the experience of nostalgia that characterizes both Vysockij's mountain songs and his work in general:

Свои обиды каждый человек –
Проходит время – и забывает.
А моя печаль – как вечный снег:
Не тает, не тает.

Не тает она и летом
В полуденный зной, –
И знаю я: печаль-тоску мне эту
Век носить с собой (*Ivi*: 117)[24].

Ultimately, Vysockij's mountain cycle connects nostalgia for homecoming with a longing for setting out yet again towards those particular and special contexts in which heroic feats are possible. The quest for such opportunities is constant in his work, perhaps because it is through the demonstration of heroism, in his view, that one earns the right to be called a human being. Nonetheless,

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[21] "And even if a long time passes, / I won't forget / How I was able here / To kill the doubt in myself. / On that day the water whispered to me: / 'Good luck always ...' / But the day… what day *was* that? / Oh, yeah... it was Wednesday, midweek! ...".

[22] "Into the tumult of the cities and streams of cars / We return – there's nothing else to do / [...] And so we come down from the conquered peaks [...] / What can you do? Even the gods came down to earth".

[23] A fifth alpine song, *Skalolazka* (*Climber-girl*), was not included in the film.

[24] "Every person suffers offense, / Time passes – one forgets. / But my sorrow like perpetual snow / Doesn't melt, it doesn't melt. / It doesn't melt even in summer / In the swelter of midday, / And I know I will have to bear this sorrow-*toska* all my life".

heroism is not an enduring trait or lasting solution to life's problems – in fact, it cannot survive the descent into prosaicness constituted by homecoming. Heroism constitutes an ongoing process that, despite moments of triumph, is imbued with uneasiness and longing. Vysockij himself appears to have been driven by a troubled restlessness or anxiety in his ceaseless desire to uncover heroes. He searches for heroes everywhere, ranging widely through space and time to do so. The feats of such personages offer at least temporary respite from the continued threat of quotidian stagnation, their repeated acts of heroism constituting a bulwark against the encroachment of the mundane as well as the vital reassertion of full human dignity. As noted, the quest for heroism takes Vysockij to extreme geographical contexts: mountain peaks, the wintry steppe, the Far North. His search also leads him to the past and, particularly, to the era of World War II and to the heroism of the soldier.

3. *Vysockij's Nostalgia for a Heroic Era in Its Historical and Personal Context*

Vysockij's notions of space and time forcefully converge in the theme of the Second World War to form a particular chronotope of nostalgia for authentic heroism. He began to write war songs in the first half of the 1960s[25], when no theme in Soviet culture was more widespread than that of the Second Great Patriotic War. Ubiquitous in the figurative arts and classical music, the War was also featured in hundreds and hundreds of novels, stories, plays, poems, lyrics, songs, historical essays, journalistic reportage, war diaries, and films, both documentary and non-. Such vast output obviously – and justifiably – suggests wide discrepancy in the nature and quality of the works produced – and in the artists' motivations. During the War itself, the greater part of such artistic efflorescence had been inspired by sincere patriotic impulse, but in the 1960s, other factors came into play and War-themed cultural production often featured what might be termed 'historical patriotism' in which nationalist sentiments were elaborated through figures taken from the pre-Soviet past.

The Soviet 'rediscovery' of Russia's historical past and of the heroism shown at critical moments by the Russian people and its far-sighted sovereigns and leaders began in the late 1930s, even before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 1939), probably in reaction to the external threat represented by Nazi Germany. After the Axis invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941, such historicizing assumed unprecedented vigor and breadth. Even the official labeling of the ensuing conflict as the 'Second Great Patriotic War', i.e. that following

[25] In 1961, Vysockij wrote his first war song, *Leningradskaja blokada* (*The Blockade of Leningrad*), but the song's protagonist (a thief) and its general content make this piece very similar to the '*blatnye pesni*' (songs from the 'illegal underworld') that he wrote at the beginning of his career.

the conflict with Napoleon that broke out in 1812, clearly underlined historical continuity with the tsarist epoch. Reference to traditional Russian values was also evident in Stalin's radio speech on July 3, when, after a disturbing silence of more than 10 days, he addressed the Soviet people for the first time after the Nazi invasion with the formulaic opening "*Tovarišči! Graždane!*" ("Comrades! Citizens!"), immediately followed by the expression "*Brat'ja i sestry!*" ("Brothers and Sisters!"), evoking a shared cultural heritage extending back through the centuries.

In the vast and variegated fresco that constituted Russian literature during the four years of war that followed (1941-1945), texts celebrating the courage and spirit of sacrifice exhibited by various 'combatants' (a term loosely intended to include not only soldiers and partisans, but also civilians), appeared alongside variegated tributes to great figures from national history, including Dmitrij Donskoj, Ivan IV, Emel'jan Pugačev, and General Brusilov, one of the few high-ranking officers of the tsarist army that aligned himself with the Soviet cause[26].

Under both Stalin and Brežnev, the Second Great Patriotic War was extensively celebrated in nationalistic terms and through the lens of restorative nostalgia. Another approach to that historical cataclysm was available to Vysockij in the work of the so-called '*šestidesjatniki*', or liberal poets of the 1960s. Though close to him in both age and cultural orientation, and despite their supposed distance from officialdom, these poets interpreted the war in bombastic tones that had very little to do with Vysockij's more reflective nostalgia. Closely tied to their particular historic moment, the *šestidesjatniki* wrote poetry that contrasted sharply with the metahistorical essentialism of the ethical questions raised by the war songs of Vysockij (cf. Šilina 2006: 188).

At first glance, Vysockij's *toska* for a heroism located in the past might be seen to assume some features of the nostalgia that Svetlana Boym (2001: 49) describes as "restorative". Nonetheless, while he does mourn a profound lack of heroism in the dismal, gray, and dispiriting life that surrounds him, Vysockij does not seek return to the past. Indeed, deeper examination of his poetic texts reveals a "reflective" quality in Vysockian *toska*, concerned less with evoking "national past and future", than with "individual and cultural memory" (*Ibidem*). In short, Vysockij's *toska* emanates from a more general problem of identity and from his search – doomed by definition – to find a place in the world for himself[27].

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[26] Aleksej Brusilov (1853-1926) served as protagonist in several Soviet literary works, including a novel and a play; most notably, however, was his key role in an enormous historical trilogy about World War I written by Sergej Sergeev-Censkij (1875-1958) after the model of *War and Peace*. Tolstoj's masterpiece was popular in World War II as well and reprinted several times in Leningrad during the Nazi siege (cf. Barskova 2009: 34).

[27] It is interesting to note that Vysockij tried to 'escape' from everyday life through various adrenaline-inducing strategies. Those close to him have corroborated Vysockij's tendency to recklessly expose himself to danger, the most frequently cited examples be-

Restorative nostalgia requires not only regret for the past, but also an ideology – nowhere visible in Vysockij – that programmatically advocates return to it. A lack of interest in such themes allows him to avoid the heavy finality of either tragic or rhetorical emphasis, and to conclude his songs with the acknowledgement of a permanent, ongoing state or condition of *toska*. Although Vysockij positively views bygone eras of heroism – together with the extreme and intense quality of their sharply distinct 'friends' and 'enemies' – he aims less to restore the past, than to celebrate it, nostalgically, in song. At the end of the day, artistic production seems to have allowed Vysockij to simultaneously sublimate and come to terms with a sense of loss through the act of commemorating it. It is also true that since his songs contain no clearly expressed desire for any actual restoration of the past, they generate in listeners a variety of nostalgia that is linked less to properly historical memory than to remembrance shot through with an emotional and even deeply personal nostalgia.

Since the struggle for survival that characterized the War era did not lend itself well to the discussion of ideological fine points, rehabilitated 1960s patriotism was easily reconciled with the official image of the USSR as different nationalities united to defend the native land against medieval Nazi barbarity. The Soviet concept of '*Novyj gumanizm*' ('New Humanism') even permitted a short-lived re-evaluation of the shared ideals and cultural ties that had once existed between pre-Soviet Russia and the now inimical countries of the capitalist West such as France and Great Britain. Nonetheless, a climate of acute conflict was quickly established between the USSR and the West in the postwar era, and the Soviet state launched a massive ideological campaign that cast its victory over Nazism and Fascism less as the result of any general or traditional patriotism than as proof that the 'new man' forged by the Communist Party under Stalin's infallible guidance was invincible. In fulfillment of the resulting 'commission' imposed upon writers and artists by this new party line, a great number of monumental and clumsy attempts at a communist war epic were born[28], side by side with several texts that were truly powerful and enthralling, such as Boris Polevoj's *Povest' o nastojaščem čeloveke* (*Story of a Real Man*, 1946), a work that fascinated several generations of young Soviets with its pathos and action scenes to become a canonical text in socialist realist mass culture (cf. Polevoj 1947)[29].

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ing a driving style that caused several car accidents, a stubborn insistence on performing his own stunts (riding, jumping, falling in the most perilous scenes of the films in which he starred), and the insatiable, childlike curiosity with which he ventured into dangerous places (e.g. the blast furnaces in steel plants and mines). Ekaterina Klimakova (2014: 4) has noted Vysockij's great fascination with the archetype of heroic death, for which the use of alcohol and drugs ("*narkotičeskij tip povedenija*") served as a surrogate in both his life and his literary production.

[28] An example of such verbose and interminable writing may be found in *Belaja bereza* (*The White Birch*, 1947), a novel by Michail Bubennov (1909-1983).

[29] *Povest' o nastojaščem čeloveke* was based on actual events from the life of military pilot Aleksej Mares'ev ("Meres'ev" in the story), who continued to fight even

Vysockij himself had the 'privilege' of becoming acquainted with the heroism of the Second Great Patriotic War not only through the mediation of literature and cinema, but also – and especially – through the vividly personal memories of his own first-hand experience of it, albeit in childhood, and through the stories of the war that were told and retold in his family circle – including stories about young Volodja himself. As Vysockij's mother, Nina Maksimovna, declared during an interview (Bakin 2012: 11),

> Volodja endured all the hardships and the uncertainties of daily life during the war with a strength unusual for his age. In the initial months of the war, I had to take him, as a three-year-old, with me to work. Sometimes he would sleep right there on the tables. When the air-raid sirens went off, we went down into the bomb shelter. It was always crowded, very hot and stuffy. And did he whine? Not once! Just the opposite: he made friends with everyone, began to chat with them, recited poems…

The same moments are recalled by Vysockij himself in the half-bragging and half-romantic tones of *Ballada o detstve* (*Ballad on Childhood*):

> Не боялась сирены соседка,
> И привыкла к ней мать понемногу.
> И плевал я, здоровый трехлетка,
> На воздушную эту тревогу (I: 378)[30].

In subsequent verses, *Ballad* goes on to confirm Nina Maksimova's recollection that

> Trucks carrying sand drove around to the buildings and we had to take it up to the attic – and to fill barrels with water in order to put out firebombs. Volodja came up to the loft several times, too, with his little toy bucket (Safonov 1989: 21).

In grown-up Volodja's version:

> Да не все то, что сверху от бога –
> И народ зажигалки тушил.
> И, как малая фронту подмога,
> Мой песок и дырявый кувшин (I: 379)[31].

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after both of his legs were amputated. In 1948, Polevoj's book was made into a movie directed by Aleksandr Stolper and an opera scored by Sergej Prokof'ev (performed only in 1960, seven years after the composer's death). It was a standard literary text in Soviet schools until the collapse of the USSR.

[30] "The neighbor lady was not afraid of sirens / And my mother had slowly gotten used to them. / And I, a healthy three-year old, couldn't have cared less / about that air-raid siren".

[31] "Not all that falls from above comes from God, / And so people put out the flares / And a bit of aid to the front came from / My sand and my beat-up jug".

Thus, *Ballad on Childhood* begins with an autobiographical event that is re-elaborated with great precision, creating a genuine epic centered in the 1940s and sinking deep roots into the second half of the 1930s, an era that in some respects had been as devastating as the War:

> В те времена укромные, теперь почти былинные,
> Когда срока огромные брели в этапы длинные (*Ivi*: 378)[32].

With the adjective *bylinnye*, referring to the Russian folk epic, Vysockij blends historical reality with folkloric reminiscence. These merge again in the subsequent verse's creative turns of phrase: "Трофейная Япония, / трофейная Германия… / Пришла страна Лимония, / Сполшная Чемодания" (*Ivi*: 379)[33].

Vysockij's mixture of styles and tones, which included the use of metaphors daringly suggestive of the illegal underworld, which flourished in Russia immediately following the War, coupled with pervasive admiration for strength and courage, leads to what Ljudmila Abdullaeva (2001: 317) has defined as the song's "*geroizacija povestvovanija*" ("heroization of narration"), a suggestion that Vysockij's own feats as a singer-songwriter had a heroic component as well:

> Девять месяцев – это не лет.
> Первый срок отбывал я в утробе:

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[32] In those secluded times, which are now almost epic / When huge verdicts dragged themselves up the river.

[33] "Japanese Trophy-land, / German Trophy-land... / We turned the country into Millionia, / total Suitcasia". The age-old concept of the war trophy requires little ulterior explanation. In this specific case, the taking of the spoils of war was officially regulated by Stalin's decree in June 1945 that soldiers and petty officers had the right to send home a fixed number of packages and also to keep everything that they were capable of carrying back to the *patria*; in addition, officers had the right to appropriate one bicycle or motorcycle apiece, while generals were permitted an auto. Prior to Vysockij, this phenomenon had been poetically treated in Aleksandr Tvardovskij's poema *Vasilij Terkin* (cf. Krečetnikov 2007). In the first years of the New Economic Policy, or NEP, in the 1920s, the term '*limon*' ('lemon') came to signify 'a million rubles', the assonance between '*limon*' and '*million*' effectively underlining the era's steep inflation that caused items such as lemons to be exorbitantly priced. Deriving from this term, the appellation '*Limonia*' became an ironic designation for Soviet Russia. When the New Economic Policy was terminated, '*Limonia*' came to refer to the clandestine survival of (illegal) private commerce and to the circle of persons who devoted themselves to such activities. With the passage of time, the term progressively moved towards the criminal world, becoming a slang term for institutions of detention (cf. Krylov-Kulagin 2010: 279). For Vysockij, the land of "Limonia" would seem to recall both Cockaigne and the "Land of Muravija" from Tvardovskij's eponymous poem; it's primary referent, however, was the sudden appearance in starved, postwar Moscow of precious items plundered abroad and brought home by returning soldiers. The expression "whole Suitcasia", allegedly invented by Vysockij, has now become part of day-to-day language where it refers to systematic plundering, especially of public property.

Ничего там хорошего нет.
[...]
В первый раз получил я свободу
По указу от тридцать восьмого (I: 377-378)[34].

Abdullaeva (2001: 319) also draws an interesting parallel between *Ballad on Childhood* and Vysockij's *Ballada o bor'be* (*Ballad on Combat*), both written in 1975 and exemplifying an "original paraphrase of themes from the fantasies of childhood and adolescence", played out on a 'bookish' plane of legend and imagination, rife with beautiful women, swords, suits of armor, chariots of war, and so on. In her view (*Ibidem*), these songs "offer readers the era from another perspective [...], the mythology of the post-war epoch". *Ballad on Combat* is also interesting in that, on one hand, it expresses nostalgia both for heroism as an existential category and for the specific eras when performance of heroic gests was required for the survival of both individuals and groups, large and small; on the other hand, this song obliquely reveals the watermark of the author's psychological condition – as one who has lived through a heroic era unable (because of his youth) to heroically contribute to a cause so absolutely just:

Средь военных трофеев и мирных костров
Жили книжные дети, не знавшие битв,
Изнывая от мелких своих катастроф.
Детям вечно досаден
Их возраст и быт [...]
А в кипящих котлах прежних боен и смут
Столько пищи для маленьких наших мозгов! (I: 397-398)[35].

It is instructive to compare the verses quoted above with what Vysockij himself declared about the motives that drove him to write songs about the war:

> Мы дети военных лет – для нас это вообще никогда не забудется. Один человек метко заметил, что мы 'довоевываем' в своих песнях. У всех у нас совесть болит из-за того, что мы не приняли в этом участия. Я отдаю дань этому времени своими песнями. Это почетная задача – писать о людях, которые воевали (Vysockij 1998: 10)[36].

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[34] "Nine months are not years. / I served my first sentence in the womb: / It was no good in there. / [...] / I first tasted freedom / Pursuant to the decree of 1938." Vysockij suggests here that as a child raised in a disreputable neighborhood, he was intimately, even innately familiar with criminal slang and legal diction.

[35] "Amidst trophies of war and peacetime bonfires / There lived bookish children who had known no battles / Brooding over their own petty catastrophes. / Children have always been annoyed / By their age and by everyday life/ [...] / And in the bubbling cauldrons of ancient massacres and riots / There is so much fodder for our small brains!".

[36] "We are the children of the war years – that is something we will never forget. One man remarked concisely that we are 'finishing the fight' in our songs. We all feel

Vysockij refers in these lines not to an abstract notion of the homeland at war, but to the concrete individuals who fought in the conflict. Indeed, most of the protagonists in his war songs are individuals or well-defined groups. His "we" clearly refers to an entire generation of twenty-year-olds who grew up in the brief Détente era of 'socialist humanism' to have their romantic dreams of heroism frustrated by stifling moral squalor. Nonetheless, *Ballad on Combat* contains no trace of any disenchantment or bitterness towards youthful romantic idealism. On the contrary, fidelity to the teachings of books read in childhood and adolescence constitutes an ethical requirement for human beings:

> Если в жарком бою испытал, что почем, –
> Значит, нужные книги ты в детстве читал! [...]
> Если руки сложа
> Наблюдал свысока,
> И в борьбу не вступил
> С подлецом, с палачом, –
> Значит, в жизни ты был
> Ни при чем, ни при чем! (I: 399)[37].

Given Vysockij's enthusiasm and admiration for the heroic gests performed by knights of old in his childhood reading, we can imagine the extraordinary impact made on him as a child by tales recounted directly by those who had experienced combat firsthand, tales of courageous acts and of terrible and unforgettably difficult situations. Several members of Vysockij's family were regulars in the army, including his father, Semen Vladimirovič, who was discharged with the rank of colonel. Immediately after the war, Volodja lived with his father and stepmother on a Soviet military base in Eberswalde, East Germany for almost three years (from the end of 1946 to August 1949). His father's testimony (Ključenkov 1988: 43) confirms Volodja's childhood interest in stories of war:

> Volodja began to love books very early [...]. He loved retelling to his friends what he had been reading. He had an excellent memory. He could memorize a poem after reading it only once [...]. In Germany and later in Moscow my friends would come to see us. You can imagine what men who had served together on the front lines would talk about when they got together. My son would listen to our conversations seriously and thoughtfully, then he would bombard "Uncle Kolja", "Uncle Lenja", "Uncle Fedja", and "Uncle Saša" with questions [...]. I believe that Volodja's great interest in military events was aroused in him by my brother, Aleksej Vladimirovič Vysockij. He has seven decorations on his chest, including three

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guilty that we didn't take part in the war. I pay tribute to this era with my songs. It is a task of honor to write about the people who fought".

[37] "If during the raging battle you felt you were there for a purpose, / It means that you read the right books as a child / [...] / If with folded arms / You looked down from above, / And you did not fight / Against villains and executioners / It means that in life / You were useless! Useless!".

> Red Banners. Every time we met, my son would literally not take a single step away from "Uncle Leša".

These family circumstances help to explain a peculiar aspect of Vysockij's 'war songs'. Let us note, to begin with, that these are almost always based on real events – to the point that it has even been possible at times to identify the prototypes on whom he modeled his protagonists[38]; it is also the case that Soviet veterans of World War II find Vysockij's songs to be impressively 'true' from all perspectives. Nonetheless, for all their plausibility, these songs seem to be set both in World War II, and also – simultaneously – in a metahistorical or mythologically prototypical dimension. In short, as young Vysockij read tales of medieval knights and listened to stories of the War, the two 'genres' blended together in his imagination.

4. *Vysockij, the Restoration of War Patriotism, and the Heroic Feats of Soldiers*

Having briefly touching upon the theme of war in 1961 with "Leningradskaja blokada" (*The Leningrad Blockade*), Vysockij began to treat it more systematically in 1964. In that year, no less than six war songs came into being, two of which, "Štrafnye batal'ony" (*Penal battalions*) and "Vse ušli na front" (*Everyone's Gone to the Front*), may be considered transitional insofar as their protagonists are taken from the same marginalized world that had recently served the poet as inspiration for his illegal underworld cycle (1961-1964)[39]. An external circumstance of particular importance that certainly contributed to Vysockij's work on the war cycle was the twentieth anniversary of the Soviet victory in World War II: May 9, 1965 was proclaimed a national holiday – as it had been in the early postwar years – and the tradition of holding an imposing military parade on Red Square was revived as well. Soviet leaders took advantage of this anniversary to celebrate the restoration of a more conservative political and cultural climate under the guidance of Brežnev, the new General Secretary of the Communist Party. Brežnev used the patriotic and national past as a political touchstone in a way that his predecessor Xruščev had not. While Xruščev had not been inclined, for example, to use military symbolism

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[38] See, for example, the outstanding work of Leon Nadel' (2011: 3-35), who has identified the prototype for the protagonist of the song *Tot, kotoryj ne streljal* (*He Who Did Not Shoot*).

[39] In 1964, the range of characters role-played by Vysockij in his songs began to widen considerably, moving from the marginalized personages (thugs, petty criminals) of his earlier '*blatnye pesni*' or 'songs of the illegal world' to a series of characters representing broad portions of Soviet society: soldiers, workers, scientists, athletes, etc. Anatolij Kulagin (1999: 8-11), who divides Vysockij's poetic production into four stages, has defined the years 1964-1969 as his '*proteističeskij*' ('protean') period.

in shaping his own public image, Brežnev's official persona was cast as that of a courageous warrior from the Second Great Patriotic War. Construction of the Brežnev myth began in earnest, the process of systematic historical distortion going so far that even Marshal Žukov felt compelled to insert into his 1974 memoirs the narration of imaginary acts of heroism supposedly performed by young Brežnev in 1943[40].

This twentieth anniversary of the victory was celebrated with understandable pride by the large majority of Soviet citizens, to whom the War had caused indescribable suffering and hardship. The Communist Party exploited the event to launch a major campaign of self-celebration, mobilizing exponents of the creative intelligentsia. Painters, sculptors, prose writers, poets, playwrights, theatre and film directors each responded to the call on the basis of their talents (if they had any) and character, be it a tendency towards servility or the affirmation of courage and a sense of dignity. Vysockij himself was involved during this period with two important projects that he would never have occasion to regret and that marked a significant step in his artistic evolution. The first of these was the film *Ja rodom iz detstva* (*I'm from Childhood*, 1966), a deeply lyrical drama shot in Bielorussia about the fate of children during World War II. The film was directed by Viktor Turov, who was constrained by the censorship at several points during the film's shooting, and based on a screenplay by Gennady Špalikov, one of the great and prematurely ruined talents of the Brežnev era[41]. Although Vysockij had only a secondary role as the tank man Volodja, several of his songs were included in the film, marking *I'm from Childhood* as the first cinematographic context for his music. All of these songs were related to the theme of war and range in tone from

[40] The culmination of this mythologizing process was reached in 1978, when Brežnev was awarded the Order of Victory, the USSR's highest military decoration and one previously awarded only to generals and marshals who had distinguished themselves during the War. Brežnev's glorious and fictitious military career left its mark on contemporary literature as well: in 1980, the Lenin Prize for Literature was awarded to a trilogy of war memoirs – *Malaja Zemlja, Vozroždenie, Celina* (*The Small Land, Rebirth, Virgin Lands*) – that Brežnev had supposedly written and that had been published in *Novyj Mir* two years earlier. In point of fact, these texts were authored by a group of journalists based on Brežnev's memories. Georgij Žukov (1896-1974) enlisted as a common soldier in the Soviet army in 1918 and rose up through the ranks of the military hierarchy to the top, becoming Army Chief of Staff in February 1941. In January 1945, he led the Russian occupation of Warsaw and conquered Berlin; as representative of the Soviet Union, he undersigned the German Instrument of Surrender in May 1945.

[41] The first screenplay of poet and screenwriter Gennadij Špalikov was *Zastava Il'iča* (*Il'ič's Ilyich's Gate,* also known as *Lenin's Guard*), directed by Marlen Xuciev and released in 1962 to become one of the most interesting films of the Détente period. Since Xruščev did not like the film, it was withdrawn, then trimmed, retitled *Mne dvadcat' let* (*I Am Twenty*), and released again in 1965. Špalikov also wrote the screenplay of *Ja šagaju po Moskve* (*Walking the streets of Moscow*, 1963), a comedy directed by G. Danelija that met with great success. He committed suicide in 1974.

the heroic to the lyrical[42]. The most well known among them, *Mass Graves* (*Bratskie mogily*), was sung off screen by Mark Bernes and used by Turov as a connecting thread in the plot[43]:

> Здесь раньше вставала земля на дыбы,
> А нынче – гранитные плиты.
> Здесь нет ни одной персональной судьбы –
> Все судьбы в единую слиты [...]
> У братских могил нет заплаканных вдов –
> Сюда ходят люди покрепче.
> На братских могилах не ставят крестов,
> Но разве от этого легче?.. (I: 69)[44].

Bernes himself was a celebrated performer of several pieces that have since become part of the history of Russian song and Vysockij later noted the powerful effect that the older artist's performance had on members of the film's audience:

> Я с ним дружил в конце его жизни. Это был действительно удивительный человек, который, правда, ценил по-настоящему авторскую песню. И это производило удивительный эффект, потому что мы, например, получили письмо от одной женщины. Она потеряла память, когда на ее глазах повесили двух сыновей. И она посмотрела это кино в больнице, и написала нам письмо, что она вспомнила, где это случилось с ее детьми. "Вы мне вернули память", – она написала. И Бернесу было письмо, и на студию на минскую. Но вот такое было на нее воздействие, этих вот слов, бесхитростной совсем мелодии, и, конечно, голос Бернеса, который весь из тех времен [...] (Vysockij 1988)[45].

Vysockij's recollection illustrates how his songs served as an intermediary link between collective and individual memory, a function that Boym (2001: 54) attributes to reflective nostalgia, noting that "in the emotional topography of

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[42] The songs included in the film were *Bratskie mogily* (*Mass Graves*), *Vysota* (*The Height*), *Zvezdy* (*Stars*), *V choloda, v choloda* (*Into the Cold, into the Cold…*).

[43] Mark Bernes (1911-1969), movie actor and pop singer, was one of the most popular performers of 'official' Soviet songs.

[44] "Here the earth once reared up, / But now it is covered by granite slabs. / Here there is no such thing as personal fate, / All fates have merged as one. / [...] Over the mass graves no widows weep, / The people that come here are stronger. / Over the mass graves they raise no crosses, / But does that really make it any easier? ...".

[45] "We became friends towards the end of his life. He was a truly extraordinary man, who really valued bard music. And this had a surprising effect, because, for example, we received a letter from a woman who had lost her memory when two of her sons were hanged right in front of her. She watched this movie in the hospital and she wrote us a letter telling us that she had suddenly remembered where that had happened to her children. 'You have given me back my memory', she wrote. She wrote both to Bernes and to the studio in Minsk. And so that was the effect on her of those words, of that very simple melody, and, certainly, of Bernes's voice, a voice that was entirely of those times [...]".

memory, personal and historical events tend to be conflated". Indeed, through his war songs – based in part on memories dating back to Vysockij's childhood (i.e. the recollection both of his own adventures and of the stories recounted to him by veterans or in the books that he read) and in part on the knowledge of historical and literary matters that he acquired in adulthood – Vysockij was able to paint an enormous canvas representing collective Soviet memory of the War era. Many of his compatriots were able to relive their own personal memories in this realistic and emotionally charged 'verbal fresco'. Vysockij, like Bernes, regularly received a number of letters from veterans who thought they had recognized themselves in the protagonist of this or that song, a fact that he often mentioned with pride during his concerts.

Vysockij had orginally written *Mass Graves* for a production to be staged at the Taganka Theater under the title *Pavšie i živye* (*The Fallen and The Living*), in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the victory. This was Vysockij's second major project in the 'restoration era'. Here director Jurij Ljubimov used an approach that would become one of his trademarks, namely presenting the bare poetic text without any set. Accompanied only by the music of Šostakovič, the actors in *The Fallen and The Living* recited verses that had been composed primarily by the '*poety frontoviki*' (frontline poets), i.e. those who had served during the War. It is likely that Vysockij's sensitive nature and tendency to deeply identify with other people's experiences contributed to his interest in the works and biographies of the frontline poets. Certainly, his discovery of them had a strong impact, both psychologically and artistically, on Vysockij's artistic production, contributing definitively to the shape of his war songs[46]. A thorough analysis of the features shared by Vysockij's verses and those of the frontline poets may be found in Šilina (2006: 188-225), including emotional tension, historical and psychological plausibility, and the conjunction of symbolic ethical and philosophical images with day-to-day life.

As was the case with all Taganka productions, restrictions imposed by the censorship meant protracted struggles, lengthy negotiations, and multiple postponements. In point of fact, the song *Mass graves* was itself cut before the drama opened in November 1965, although Vysockij had the honor of singing another of his songs on stage. That composition, *Soldaty gruppy 'Centr'* (*Soldiers of the 'Center' Group*), countered prevailing restorative trends by focusing on protagonists who were not Russian, but representatives of the enemy forces and it is the only song to do so in his war cycle. In sum, Vysockij's conception of World War II as a heroic era resulted from a personal evolution that was largely independent of

[46] Vysockij spoke admiringly of *The Fallen and the Living* and the works of the frontline poets at his concerts and also in two of his (very infrequent) television interviews, i.e. on Bulgarian television in 1975 and on Chechen television in 1978. Moreover, when he made a brief video in May 1979 in order to introduce himself to Warren Beattie, who was then casting the movie *Reds*, Vysockij began by reciting (in Russian) some poems from *The Fallen* written by wartime poet Semen Gudzenko (1922-1953), rather than a selection from his own wide repertoire.

politics, though it sometimes overlapped with the political interests of the Soviet state during the years of the Brežnevian restoration. Unlike the prohibited theme of the illegal underground that Vysockij had explored in previous work – and that had no official outlet – the war theme was publicly approved and even officially embraced; his own approach to the War, however, remained *sui generis*.

Why Vysockij's 'war cycle' should so prominently feature heroism has been extensively treated by various critics (e.g. Uvarova 1999, Fomina 2001, Ševjakov 2006, Nadel' 2011, etc.). We will consider here how these wartime heroic feats differ qualitatively within Vysockij's oeuvre from those accomplished during times of peace. An initial answer to this question was given by Vysockij himself in an explanation of his constant references to war:

> [...] я считаю, что во время войны просто есть больше возможности, больше пространства для раскрытия человека – ярче он раскрывается. Тут уж не соврешь, люди на войне всегда на грани, за секунду или за полшага от смерти. Люди чисты, и поэтому про них всегда интересно писать [...]. И я их часто нахожу в тех временах. Мне кажется, просто их тогда было больше, ситуации были крайние. Тогда была возможность чаще проявлять эти качества: надежность, дружбу в прямом смысле слова, когда тебе друг прикрывает спину (Vysockij 2007)[47].

Having argued that war provides the best context for investigating human nature, offering as it does constant opportunities for such to be revealed, Vysockij goes on to note that in the martial setting questions of themes such as courage or cowardice, selflessness or egotism, responsibility or lack thereof, remain substantially invariant across eras:

> Это не песни-ретроспекции: они написаны человеком, который войну не прошел. *Это песни-ассоциации*. Если вы в них вдумаетесь и вслушаетесь, вы увидите, что их можно петь и теперь: просто взяты персонажи и ситуации из тех времен, но все это могло произойти и здесь, сегодня. И написаны эти песни для людей, большинство из которых тоже не участвовали в этих событиях. Так я к ним отношусь – это современные песни, которые написал человек, живущий сейчас. Они написаны на военном материале с прикидкой на прошлое, но вовсе не обязательно, что разговор в них идет только чисто о войне (*Ibidem*)[48].

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[47] "[...] I think that during war there are simply more opportunities, more space for the revelation of human nature: humans reveal themselves more vividly. You can't pretend anymore: people at war are always on the edge, a second or a half-step away from death. People are transparent and that's why it's always interesting to write about them [...]. And I often find them in those times. It seems to me that there were simply more of them then, that the situations in which they found themselves were more extreme. At that time it was possible to more often display qualities like reliability, friendship – in the real sense of the word, when a friend covers your back".

[48] "These are not retrospective songs: they were written by a man who did not go through the war. These are 'associative songs': If you think about and listen to them carefully, you will see that they can even be sung today: it's just that the characters and the

He expressed quite similar ideas in *Pesnja o vremeni* (*Song About Time*), a sort of manifesto of his view on the relationship between past and present (cf. Korkina 1998: 46):

> И холодное прошлое заговорит
> О походах, боях и победах.
> [...]
> Ты к знакомым мелодиям ухо готовь
> И гляди понимающим оком, –
> Потому что любовь – это вечно любовь,
> Даже в будущем вашем далеком (I: 390)[49].

The motives for courageous acts on the battlefield are quite specific and differ from those that inspire, for instance, climbers. According to Šilina (2006: 191-192), the protagonists of Vysockij's war cycle are combatants, who, despite their very different levels of training and specialization, share an unconscious, inner predisposition for heroism, an attitude resembling the implicit sense of duty that pervades the verses of the frontline poets as well. The sentiment is so natural and deeply-rooted, in other words, that no explicit mention of it is necessary. Indeed, Vysockij makes no use of patriotic rhetoric in his entire oeuvre – a fact essential to understanding his poetics. Even the word '*Rodina*' (*Homeland*), which he uses very rarely, carries a somewhat ironic aftertaste, especially in the mouths of convicts who choose to risk their lives at the front in order that their sentences be reduced by two-thirds:

> За грехи за наши нас простят, –
> Ведь у нас такой народ:
> Если Родина в опасности –
> Значит, всем идти на фронт.
> Там год – за три, если бог хранит (I: 59-60)[50].

The soldierly sense of duty that Vysockij describes does not appear to be triggered by conditioned reflex (since the men do reflect upon it), nonetheless, this sentiment ultimately prevails over their other motives for action and, most notably, over an instinct for self-preservation. Their participation in the war results

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situations have been taken from those days [of war], but all of it could very well happen here, too, even now. And these songs were written for people, the majority of whom didn't take part in those events either. This is how I regard them: as contemporary songs written by a person living today. They were written using wartime material, looking towards the past, but they are certainly not necessarily only and exclusively about the war".

[49] "And the cold past would speak / Of campaigns, battles, and victories. [...] / Ready your ear for these familiar melodies / and look with an understanding eye, because love is love forever – / Even in your far-off future".

[50] "For our sins we'll be forgiven, – / That's the kind of people we are: / If the Homeland is in danger / Then everyone must go to the front / There a year is worth three, if God protects us".

from various pressing events, but it is mainly the product of individual choice. Indeed, Vysockij rarely deprives his characters of the chance to choose or, at least, to challenge their fate even in the most dramatic contexts. In *Černye bušlaty* (*Black pea jackets*), for example, a song that can be considered the peak of the entire war cycle, a soldier of the naval landing force rejects the idea of having to sacrifice his life for the homeland because he cannot grasp how a supremely heroic act could be achieved by executing an order. And thus he *thinks* before obeying:

> Сегодня на людях сказали: "Умрите геройски!"
> Попробуем – ладно! Увидим, какой оборот…
> Я только подумал, чужие куря папироски:
> "Тут кто как сумеет, – мне важно увидеть восход" (*Ivi*: 318)[51].

Attempting to exorcise the peremptory heartlessness of the command that he has been given, the soldier replies in words so thick with connotations of daily life that they sound almost scornful. Nonetheless, it is not the order from above, but his own sense of personal responsibility in pursuit of the common good that prevents him and his companions from giving in to hatred or instinctive emotion. When it's time to blow up the fort, for example, the soldiers stick to that primary task, restraining themselves from other distractions: "*Prošli po tylam my, deržas' čtob ne rezat' ix sonnyx*" ("We crossed behind the lines, holding ourselves back from killing them in their sleep", *Ivi*: 319).

The song's leitmotif is the protagonist's strong wish to see the next day dawn symbolized by the sunflower, perhaps the last thing that he sees before dying: "*Ešče nesmyšlenyj, zelenyj, no čutkij podsolnux / Uže povernulsja verxuškoj svoej na vosxod*" ("A still thoughtless, green, and yet perceptive sunflower / Has already turned its crest towards the dawn", *Ibidem*). The sacred quality of this image is confirmed by the fact that in the last two stanzas, the protagonist's voice comes from another, unearthly world:

> Восхода не видел, но понял: вот-вот – и взойдет.
> ...Уходит обратно на нас поредевшая рота.
> Что было – не важно, а важен лишь взорваный форт
> (*Ivi*: 320)[52].

Nonetheless, even witness of the dawn, which remains the protagonist's cherished goal throughout the song, is virtually transfigured in the final lines and identified metaphorically with the success of the military operation. Fallen on the battlefield, the soldier bequeaths to his surviving comrades the sunrise

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[51] "Today they said straight to our faces: 'Die heroically!' / We'll try, fine! We'll see how things turn out. / I just had a thought, while smoking someone else's cigarettes: / 'Here everyone does what he can, what's important for me is to see the sunrise'".

[52] "I didn't see the sunrise, but I understood: it's just about to come up. / ... Our company, thinned down, comes back to us, / Whatever it was that happened doesn't matter, all that matters is we've blown up the fort".

that he was unable to see, sacrificing his life for their common welfare: "*Mne xočetsja verit', čto grubaja naša rabota / Vam darit vozmožnost' bezpošlinno videt' vosxod*" ("I want to believe that our rude work / Will grant you the chance to see the dawn tax-free"; *Ibidem*). Moreover, in keeping with a Vysockian tendency towards understatement, he defines the heroic gest that he and his comrades have performed without any rhetorical frills as "*grubaja naša rabota*", an expression Šilina (2006: 190) sees as demonstrating the view shared among Vysockij's soldier protagonists that war was not "heroic epic, but day-to-day life at the front" (*frontovye budni*).

While Šilina's characterization accurately renders the soldiers' own point of view, it is also true that if we take the war cycle as a whole, the most appropriate general definition for it would be precisely that of "heroic epic". Despite a few variations in poetic tone, the war cycle is a coherent group of songs persistently laced with the themes of friendship, danger, courage, fear, physical exertion, life, and death. As noted, the situations, actions, and psychology described in Vysockij's songs are so plausible that some war veterans believed he had fought among them. Moreover, his verses contain what might be described as 'substantial', rather than 'documentary' realism insofar as they manage to express all of the war's tragedy without indulging in the representation of horrors and atrocities. Certainly, such an approach itself might be interpreted as adding a touch of aesthetic and psychological authenticity to the subject, insofar as those who were actually involved in the War, whether as participants, witnesses or victims, were often quite unwilling to offer up the grisly details, preferring to recollect the tragedy in all its emotional complexity as a world in and of itself. It is quite likely, in fact, that many unpleasant details had been omitted from the tales narrated by Vysockij's father, his uncle, and their comrades-in-arms that had so fascinated him as a boy.

6. *Epic and Existential Heroism*

Many of the passages quoted in this article – from both Vysockij's war cycle and his other songs – demonstrate how he often tended to diminish the heroism of individuals in favor of a 'choral' variety. While not all of the persons described perform heroic feats, they do all overcome their fears and transcend the limitations imposed by an egotistical sense of self-preservation in order to create an epic together. Vysockij himself enjoyed participating in this collective 'epic identity': indifferent to the appeal of the superhero, he preferred to position himself against a more democratic backdrop – and to blend in with it.

A dimension that is epic in both temporal and spatial terms can be seen clearly in the adventures and misadventures of the main character in *Letela žizn'* (*Life Flew By*), a ballad that combines epic, lyric, and philosophical elements to serve as a patent example of the poetics preferred by Vysockij in his final years. In *Kak sbityj kust* (*Like an Uprooted Shrub*, I: 458), a Chechen protagonist is

dragged by the winds of history through the boundless expanse of the fierce Stalinist age; his national identity serves as sufficient motive for the repressive state apparatus to require his deportation to Kazakhstan in February 1944, together with hundreds of thousands of other Chechens and Ingush[53]. Recalling the land where he was born, the protagonist remembers his orphanage childhood with implicit gratitude: "*Oni nam detskix duš ne zagubili, / Delili s nami pišču i sud'bu*" ("They did not destroy our childish souls, / They shared with us their food and fate"; *Ibidem*). Decades of exile, misfortune, hardship, unfreedom, and displacement follow: "*Ja mog by byt' s kakix ugodno mest* [...]. *Živu – vezde, sejčas k primeru, – v Tule*" ("I could be from anywhere [...]. I live everywhere, now, for instance, in Tula"; *Ibidem*). The Chechen does not speak of his own sad fate in order to inspire compassion, but reflects upon it, fully aware that his experience is but one detail in an immense collective portrait of the entire nation: "*Byval ja tam, gde i drugie byli, – / Vse te, s kem rezal popolam sud'bu*" ("I have been where others have also been, / All those with whom I shared fate by halves"; *Ibidem*)[54]. His difficult life has followed an itinerary through Siberian locales known as symbols of hard labor (Noril'sk, Anadyr', Barnaul). Of all the types of violence to which he has been subjected, he is particularly haunted by the ethnic variety perpetrated among the deported peoples:

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[53] Mass deportation was the merciless Soviet response to the rebellion of various peoples upon the occasion of the Soviet invasion of Germany in February 1944. In merely six days, the repressive apparatus of Berija's political police crammed over 478,000 Chechens and Ingush into sealed railroad cars traveling to Kazakhstan and Kirghizia. More than one third of the deportees died during the journey or from hardships suffered in the first years of exile, while the survivors were forbidden to leave their place of destination. The same fate also befell the Crimean Tatars, similarly accused of collaboration with the Nazis and rounded up by the Red Army in May 1944 for deportation to Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan. The situation of the Chechens and Ingush, like that of other groups deported within the USSR (including Volga Germans, Bulgars, Crimean Armenians and Greeks, Balkars, Kalmyks, etc.) remained unchanged until 1956, when Xruščev authorized them to return to their native regions. Nonetheless, Xruščev himself made no mention of this delicate topic in his historic speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 and it was fully ignored by the media and in official historiography, remaining taboo until the beginning of Perestrojka.

[54] At the beginning of September 1978, Vysockij performed *Letela žizn*' during an evening spent with the staff of the Groznyj (Chechnya) Theater of Dramatic Art. Among those present was actor Vasabek Naurbiev, who years later recalled the reaction of that group to Vysockij's song: "A pause of literally five minutes followed. No one could move, everyone sat in silence. And suddenly someone burst into tears, another began to cry, a third." According to Vysockij's manager Vladimir Gol'dman, he also sang *Letela žizn'* during that same tour to an audience of 10,000 in the Groznyj stadium – during heavy rain in an event that aroused both enthusiasm and emotion. Naurbiev's testimony appeared in the documentary film *Letela žizn'*, aired on Soviet national television in January 1990 during the height of *glasnost'*. Nevertheless, only two verses of the song for which the program itself was named were included and *Letela žizn'* has not since been rebroadcast (Cf. Cybul'skij 2008: 154-155; Buvina, Curletto 2009: 309-313).

Вот бьют чеченов немцы из Поволжья,
А место битвы – город Барнаул [...]
Те и другие были не отсюда,
Но воевали, словно за себя (*Ivi*: 460)[55].

Even though surrounded by degradation and despair, the protagonist of *Life Flew By* can be defined as one of Vysockij's paradigmatic heroes because he retains a sense of compassion for others and seems to be endowed with innate courage: "*Kogda došlo počti do samosuda, / Ja vstal goroj za gorcev, č'e-to gorlo terebja*" ("When things got close to lynching / I rose like a mountain to defend the mountain dwellers, grabbing someone by the throat; *Ibidem*). In the last stanza, a long-awaited note of almost cathartic liberation sounds: "*A te, kto nas na podvigi podbili*, / *Davno ležat i korčatsja v grobu*" ("And those who incited us to heroic feats / Have long been lying – and rolling over – in their graves"; *Ibidem*). Here Vysockij clearly refers to Stalin and to the regime that led the Soviet people to "*podvigi*", a term he uses with bitter sarcasm to underline how encouraging heroism through terror and violence is immoral – and even sacrilegious in that heroic acts imply exaltation and transcendence.

Letela žizn' is one of few cases in which Vysockij directly addresses the problem of 'nationality' or ethnic identity. As Austrian scholar Heinrich Pfandl (2012: 132) correctly affirms, the Jewish theme had no great role in his work:

> Высоцкий, человек, несомненно, русской культуры, сформировавшийся в советских условиях, не применял критерий нации к оценке сограждан или при определении своей идентичности[56].

Attention to Jewish themes in Vysockij is motivated by the fact that he was of Jewish ancestry on his father's side. In addition to the well-known *Antisemity* (*Anti-semites*) and *Miška Šifman* – songs in which Vysockij satirizes crass antisemitic prejudice to express a point of view widely agreeable to any Soviet *intelligent* of liberal views – one can find Jewish names and bits of realia scattered throughout his repertoire. These assume a more concentrated form in the song *Lekcija o meždunarodom položenii* (*Lecture on the International Situation*), where Vysockij makes explicit reference to Jewish themes in comments on Soviet emigration to Israel and Israeli politics. Another important example of Vysockij's reflections on Russian-Jewish themes appears in two quatrains from the *Ballad on Childhood* describing a dialog between the Russian Evdokim Kirilyč and the Jew Gisja Moiseevna:

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[55] "Now the Chechens take a pounding from the Volga Germans. / And the site of the battle is the city of Barnaul. [...] / Neither came from these parts, / But they fought as if it were for themselves".

[56] "Vysockij, a man of undoubtedly Russian culture, shaped under Soviet conditions, did not apply ethnic criteria when evaluating his co-citizens or when defining his own identity".

Она ему: “Как сыновья?” –
“Да без вести пропавшие!
Эх, Гиська, мы одна семья, –
Вы тоже пострадавшие.

Вы тоже пострадавшие,
А значит обрусевшие:
Мои – без вести павшие,
Твои – безвинно севшие (I: 116-379)[57].

These verses illustrate how Vysockij’s own Jewish ancestry, though externally invisible, formed an integral part of his own Russian and even Soviet identity. He thus contextualized his own personal and familial affairs in the greater historical narrative that saw the Jews of the tsarist Empire adhere *en masse* to the progressive and universalist ideology of the Revolution (inimical as it was to nationalism and antisemitism), as Yuri Slezkine (2004) brilliantly demonstrates. Initially rewarded with roles of power and responsibility, the Jews fell victim to Stalinist repression in the 1930s: “You have also suffered, / Which means you have become Russian”.

7. *Heroism’s Distilled Essence*

In the poem *I Was Too Late (*Toska *for Romanticism)*, Vysockij pointedly expressed the existential malaise that resulted from his virtual imprisonment in a dismal era from which great deeds and profound sentiments had been precluded. In a list of historical situations allowing humankind to demonstrate its heroic qualities, he regretted that such an opportunity had been denied to him by the epoch in which he lived:

К чертям пошли гусары и пираты.
Пришла пора всезнающих невежд,
Все выстроено в стройные шеренги (II: 74)[58].

In the final stanza, Vysockij significantly introduces – and reiterates – the concept of ‘*vzlet*’, or ‘taking flight’ – intended as transcendent soaring:

Но все они на взлете, в нужный год –
Отплавали, отпели, отпророчили...
Я не успел – я прозевал свой взлет (*Ivi*: 76)[59].

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[57] “She to him: ‘How are your sons?’ / ‘They’ve vanished without a trace / Eh, Gis’ka, we’re of one family / You have also suffered! / You have also suffered, / Which means you have become Russian. / Mine have vanished without a trace / Yours are jailed without guilt’”.

[58] “The hussars and pirates have gone to hell. / The time of the all-knowing numbskulls has come, / Everything is built up in orderly ranks”.

[59] “But they all soared up, in the necessary moment – / They set sails, they sang, they foretold… / I was too late – I slept through my time for takeoff”.

It is on this same *vzlet* that the soldier protagonist of "Black Pea Jackets" pins all his hopes: "*Za našej spinoj ostalis' paden'ja, zakaty, / Nu xot' by ničtožnyj, nu xot' by nevidimyj vzlet!*" (Behind us falling, sunsets / If we'd only had even an insignificant, even an invisible take off!"; I: 318). The wish to detach oneself from the ground and soar high above ordinary daily life thus unites the lyric voice in *I Was Too Late (*Toska *for Romanticism*) with the 'role heroes' found in the songs discussed above, most of them climbers and men of arms. We can agree with Klimakova (2014: 3) that in Vysockij's mythopoesis, medieval knights and the soldiers of World War II are essentially two equivalent instantiations from the category of warrior heroes[60].

Whether actually realized or (as is more often the case) unrealized, '*vzlët*' constitutes one of the most significant representations of attempting to 'cross the line' that in many of Vysockij's texts separates the actual situation of the protagonist, whether 'role hero' or lyrical 'I', from that for which he longs. This opposition has been given a spatial dimension by Skobelev and Šaulov (1991: 56-57), who characterize it in terms of a distinction between 'here' ('*zdes'*') and 'there' ('*tam*'):

> This 'here' and 'there' are, of course, invested with ideological and ethical meanings that fly up and away like the soul's spheres of being (me-here – a boundary – me-there) [...]. In the poetry of Vysockij, the 'there' that contrasts with the present 'here' takes shape in several quite well-defined hypostases. First of all, 'there' means the mountains [...], juxtaposed to the depressing life of the pedestrian dweller of plains; secondly, 'there' means the war and the dangers connected with it that demand from us courage, the exertion of force, and so on [...]. Moreover, 'there' signifies the past and, in general, the 'world beyond'.

While an entire essay could easily be devoted to the theme of 'the beyond' or 'other world' (*mir potustoronnij*) in Vysockij's poetry, it is also true that, in their excellent work on Vysockij, Skobelev and Šaulov (1991) specifically identify the mountains, the war, and the past as different examples of the contrasting other world or dimension represented by 'there'. They thus corroborate the thesis that Vysockij's *toska* for 'heroic eras' is but one of many concrete instances of a constant and irrepressible yearning for an 'elsewhere' – the attainment of which, should it ever occur, would not in any case to be perceived as final or conclusive. Indeed, the theme of return from a transcendent elsewhere back to the daily grind appears not just in Vysockij's mountain cycle, but is widespread throughout his artistic production. There is no lasting escape from existence: one must descend from the peak to continue the process of ascending and descending, of putting oneself to the test, a process from which even the gods are not exempt.

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[60] This fact recalls the observations made by Lotman and Uspenskij (1985: 63-64) about Aleksandr Radiščev, who, in his "reconstruction of the utopia of the past", failed to distinguish between classical antiquity, pagan Slavdom, and ancient Orthodox Russia; he similarly depicted his friend, Fedor Ušakov, as a contemporary "man of firmness" ("*muž tverdyj*"), thus uniting in him features belonging both to Cato and the Christian martyrs.

Truly essential to Vysockij's characters (again, be they 'role heroes' or lyrical 'I's) is proving – to themselves – that they are indeed capable of crossing the boundary separating 'prosaicness' from an idealized 'wonderland' of heroic feat. He underscored this point in 1973, when amidst the 26 songs that he wrote for a recorded version of the fairy tale *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* Vysockij had the Dodo sing these lines[61]:

> Вдруг будет пропасть – и нужен прыжок?
> Струсишь ли сразу? Прыгнешь ли смело?
> А? Э-э! Так-то, дружок,
> В этом-то все и дело (II: 268)[62].

Summing up, Vysockian *toska* is an existential melancholy that is incommensurate with the rudimentary mechanisms of restorative nostalgia: he did not idealize the past and even less so the past used for tendentious purposes. His *toska* would seem to derive primarily from an acute sense of the gulf separating artistic experience from the 'prosaicness' of humdrum daily life. Vysockij attempted to overcome the anxiety produced in him by this divide through artistic expression and experience. Singing offered him a means of transcendence and it is not mere coincidence that Vysockij set himself a furious pace in work and (as a result) in life (cf. Buvina, Curletto 2009: 323-328). His frenetic attempts to achieve an exalted state yet again illustrate an attitude that deeply worried those close to Vysockij and was the primary cause of his premature death. It is quite probable that he more or less consciously considered artistic creation to be his own individual *podvig,* a heroic feat whose realization required a *vzlet* or act of taking flight that could not, alas, continue uninterrupted. His quest to soar constantly above daily life was ultimately impossible to reconcile with the physical limitations of human existence.

Vysockij was not content with artistic creativity that was restricted to an intimate or personal scale – the result of factors both external and internal, including his character, his theatrical training, and a certainty that he would not be published or officially recorded in Soviet Russia. Vysockij was driven to share his art, and the more he immersed himself in others, the more successful he felt it to be. Writing verses was only the first step in this heroic creative process: the artistic feat could only be fully realized in the context of public sharing, in the establishment of consonance between his own feelings and those of others. Vysockij himself affirmed that his songs assumed (semi-)definite shape only after having passed muster with his audience: they were measured first by the

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[61] Three of these songs were performed personally by Vysockij himself. This recorded *Alice*, directed by Oleg Gerasimov, was first released in 1976 as a double album and, after its great success, reissued almost every year until the early nineties; an MP3 version became available in 2006.

[62] "Suddenly there's an abyss – and you need to jump? Will you chicken out at once? Or will you boldly leap? What? Mmhmm! That, my friend, / That's the whole problem right there".

reaction of his friends and then by that of the public at various concerts. Interestingly, his compositions never achieved a final form: recordings of Vysockij's concerts illustrate numerous – and also significant – variations in his texts, even the inclusion or exclusion of entire verses. Perhaps he felt that the heroic feat of performing a song could not be repeated mechanically and that each realization required new effort and new adjustments.

Vysockij's peculiar attention to his broadly defined public perhaps renders less mysterious the fact that even though he is the bearer of profound existential discomfort, Vysockij is also the most 'popular and national' ('*vsenarodnyj*') Russian poet of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Some clarification of this apparent paradox is suggested by Boym (1995: 133):

> diverse representations of the Russian national character [...] are remarkably similar in their key structures: the opposition between *byt* (everyday existence) and *bytie* (spiritual or poetic existence), and the valorization of heroic sacrifice over both private life and practical accomplishment. The border between *bytie* and *byt* seems to parallel the mythical border between Russia and the West.

While 'Russian national character' has been always been a scientifically debatable concept and can be variously understood, Boym (1995: 133) suggests that a profound sense of a sharp rift between the quotidian and the transcendental somehow characterizes Russianness[63]. Vysockij also meets the definition established by Antonio Gramsci (1996: 71-75) for 'popular-national' (*nazional-popolare*), namely he expresses the characteristic features of national culture in such a way that they can be recognized as representing the entire people, and thereby simultaneously contribute to a fuller awareness of the conceptual identity of the 'nation' (e.g. Russia) and of the 'people' (Russians). This is exactly what Vysockij does and it explains his success: he transforms national spirit into true art without sacrificing its national connotations. And, despite their difficulty, artistry, linguistic condensation, and conceptual profundity, Vysockij's songs are performed in a light and accessible style that makes them understandable to to all. Most importantly, he suggests that one's ability to occasionally transcend daily life constitutes the distilled essence of heroism. And by voicing nostalgia for the War and, more generally, for heroic contexts located in other spatial and temporal worlds, Vysockij allowed his public to both accept daily life and to understand it as preparatory to the heroic feat.

(Translated by Cecilia Pozzi and Sara Dickinson)

[63] The topic of Russian national identity has been hotly debated by myriad cultural figures ranging from Aleksej Xomjakov and Petr Čaadaev in the early nineteenth century to Viktor Erofeev (2009) and Vladimir Žirinovskij (2009) in the present.

Резюме

Марио Алессандро Курлетто

Ностальгия по ‘эпохе героев’ и экзистенциальная тоска в творчестве Владимира Высоцкого

В поэтическом наследии Владимира Высоцкого чувство ‘тоски’ выражается по-разному, передавая все оттенки скуки, томления, меланхолии. Однако особенную роль играет в стихах Высоцкого так называемая ‘тоска по героической эпохе’, которая в некоторых песнях выражается эксплицитно, но чаще всего встречается в имплицитной репрезентации ‘тоски по подвигу’. Понятие ‘подвиг’ следует рассматривать как морально-духовное состояние, противопоставленное миру обыденности. Хотя ‘тоска по подвигу’ ассоциируется с разными географическими контекстами (с горами, тайгой, ледниками на Севере), хронотоп Великой отечественной войны становится квинтэссенцией репрезентации ‘подвига’ в мироощущении Высоцкого.

Melancholic Humor, Skepticism and Reflective Nostalgia. Igor' Guberman's Poetics of Paradox

Laura Salmon (University of Genoa)

How can one be homesick for a home
that one never had?

Svetlana Boym

What is freedom? To me freedom is
the Russian language.

Viktorija Tokareva

1. *Igor' Guberman's* Gariki*: the Hybrid Genre of a Melancholy Joker*

Igor' Mironovič Guberman (b. 1936) is a Soviet-Russian-Jewish-Israeli poet and key figure in contemporary Russian-Jewish literature. Born in Kharkiv, in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, Guberman grew up in the capital (Moscow) and spent five years in Siberian detention and exile, before being 'invited' to quit the USSR in 1988[1]. He now lives in Jerusalem. Although Guberman worked for many years as an electrical engineer, he has written verse throughout his life. His humorous quatrains, called '*gariki*', are well-known among Russian readers throughout the world[2].

From a formal standpoint, the *gariki* are a blend of refined European poetry, the Russian folk-peasant limerick ('*častuška*')[3], and the skeptical Yiddish aphorism. The genre is 'paradoxical' insofar as it combines elements of both 'high' and folk art, even overtly demonstrating a circular relationship between them (cf.

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[1] Guberman was found guilty of conducting illicit trade in icons. A reliable biography that might offer insight on this charge does not currently exist, although Guberman himself provides some information on the subject in his prose writings and other scattered comments may be found in the memoirs of his friends and other acquaintances.

[2] Guberman's quatrains are thus named after him, 'Garik' being a familiar and diminutive form of Igor'. Although this name might seem to reflect some narcissism on the author's part, it is more properly understood as indicating an ironic attitude towards his own writing. Indeed, dozens of *gariki* demonstrate that the poet does not take his own literary endeavors too seriously. At present, almost twelve thousand *gariki* have been published in various books, primarily organized in "journals" (*dnevniki*) according to a chronotopic principle: there are *gariki* from prison, from Siberia, from Jerusalem, and so on. A four-volume edition of Guberman's prose appeared in 2009, although the most authoritative edition to date is that published in two volumes in 2010. Later books including the *Seventh* and *Eighth Journals* came out in 2011 and 2013, respectively (cf. the reference list).

[3] *Častuški,* found in Russia from the late nineteenth century, are short, rhymed poems comprised of two to six verses, mostly quatrains (cf. Šeptaev 1950: 5 ff.; Kvjatkovskij 1966). In the Soviet era, a large number of obscene *častuški* circulated widely.

Ginzburg 1998: 21). *Gariki* resemble the jocular folk *častuški* in their brevity, in their punch-line-like conclusions, and in their expression of an anti-dramatic and anti-romantic point of view. While *častuški* largely reflect the lyrical structure of folk songs and/or the aphoristic quality of proverbs and sayings (Astaf'eva 1934: 5-18), *gariki* are more complex: these skeptical questions with skeptical quasi-answers reveal an extensive and coherent system of thought that constitutes a variety of the 'existential riddle'. It should be noted that the technically sophisticated *gariki* are quite distinct from the simpler variety of riddles that comprise that "popular genre" *par excellence* (Ginzburg 1998: 29), representing instead a well studied metrical combination of vernacular (even bawdy) Russian speech and sophisticated literary intertextuality[4]. Among the *gariki*'s most frequently recurring topics are Russia and the intricate mirroring of Russian and Jewish identities, God (generally in terms of uncertainty as to His existence), aging (viewed with ironic melancholy and particularly prominent in his most recent collections), women and sex (often viewed ironically as well), and drinking (a specifically Russian way to combat anguish).

Almost all of the *gariki* are elaborated through the prism of a peculiar humorous melancholy, whose paradoxical nature seems to deliberately echo Guberman's worldview, articulating what can be defined as a 'poetics of paradox'. As this paper will demonstrate, a close link exists between Guberman's skeptical humor, his sense of an identity that is discontinuous or split, and the nostalgic mood that permeates his writing[5]. In particular, we will demonstrate here a clear correlation between the poetics of paradox that structure his *gariki* and his condition of 'exile' (first in Soviet Russia, his 'stepmother country', and then in the unfamiliar 'historical forefatherland' of Israel). Guberman's very existence contains the sort of funny-yet-poignant melange of contrasting elements found in his *gariki*: a Jewish background, the Soviet era, Russian culture, and Israeli 'meta-exile'. This melancholic Russian 'bard' of Jewish paradoxicality is also the product of a specific and multifaceted historical context that helped to shape his skeptical and melancholic humor – into a quintessential representation of *reflective nostalgia*.

According to Svetlana Boym (2001: 49-55), "reflective nostalgia" is a form of nostalgic feeling that contrasts with "restorative nostalgia", the latter based

[4] For a detailed formal description of the gariki, together with a review of the very limited (and mostly non-academic) response to Guberman's poetry and prose, see Salmon 2014a.

[5] It is worth mentioning that English '*humor*' (a loanword from Latin via Old French) originally meant both 'mood' (Italian '*umore*', French '*humeur*', Spanish '*humor*', etc.) and "each of the four chief fluids of the body (blood, phlegm, yellow bile [choler], and black bile [melancholy]) that were thought to determine a person's physical and mental qualities by the relative proportions in which they were present" (cf. the entry for 'humor' in the Oxford Dictionary 2015 [American and British]). It is significant that 'black bile' has been related to melancholia and 'spleen' to 'bad temper' ("from the earlier belief that the spleen was the seat of such emotions"; cf. the entry 'spleen': *Ibidem*). The concept of 'mood' is further explored in the introduction to this volume.

on oppositions whose psychological appeal belies their rhetorical and artificial nature: the present is bad, the past is good; old age is bad, youth is good; exile is bad, returning home is good, etc. A predilection for the restorative variety of nostalgia issues from a conservative desire to return to a previous condition or 'paradise lost' and thus flee a present moment that is perceived more negatively. It does not matter, as Antonio Prete notes, whether one's dream of restoration properly constitutes a "mythology" or an "abstraction" (Prete 2008: 84): the restorative attitude offers an idealized and dogmatic escape – from the reflection that is inherent in reflective nostalgia and from the related (even consequent) mental state of limbo or 'undecidability'. Restorative nostalgia is a means to assertively translate a vague and intimate longing into a concrete sentiment that is both ideologized and goal-directed, whereas reflective nostalgia (cf. Boym 2001: 41-48) is 'ideology-free' and objectless or "blind", an indefinite feeling that something is missing, a *toska* that lacks precise motivation:

> Вот человек. Он всем доволен.
> И тут берёт его в тиски
> потребность в горечи и боли
> и жажда грусти и тоски (Guberman 2010a, I: 279)[6].
>
> Чтоб делался покой для духа тесен,
> чтоб дух себя без устали искал,
> в уюте и комфорте, словно плесень,
> заводится смертельная тоска (*Ivi*, II: 70)[7].
>
> Я всё живу, как будто жду чего-то.
> События? Известий? Благодать?
> С утра уже томит меня забота
> не просто жить, а слепо ожидать (2013: 155)[8].

Reflection (or introspection) corrodes any comfortable, self-referential system of values (I vs. You, right vs. wrong) into the feeling of psychological suspension that Karin Johannisson (2011: 20-22) associates with "a border zone"[9].

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[6] "Ecce homo. He is content with everything. / And then suddenly caught in the grip / of a need for sorrow and pain, / of a thirst for sadness and *toska*".

Where indicated, we have been able to use the translations of Guberman found in Sokolovskij (2013), although the bulk of the *gariki* cited here have been rendered into unrhymed English verse by Sara Dickinson, Cecilia Pozzi, and Laura Salmon. In the subsequent quotations of *gariki*, we have omitted the author's name (Guberman).

[7] "In order that the quarters of the spirit be more intimate / So that the spirit can tirelessly search for itself, / In cosiness and comfort, like mold, / A deathly *toska* is established".

[8] "I still live as if waiting for something. / Events? News? Grace? / In early morning I'm already careworn / not simply by living, but by blindly waiting".

[9] In the introduction to this volume, we argue that a direct semantic connection exists between *toska* (a form of nostalgia that lacks an object) and the semantic field of *melancholia* (the first definition [1881] of the term '*melanxolia*' in Dal' [1979, II: 315]

Guberman's *toska* is indeed a melancholic response to the uncanny intuition that the universe is governed by a blind principle of indeterminacy and that no design exists for human happiness. Humans are not the Chosen in a world ruled by logic, but "two-legged petty beings"[10], who can only nostalgically reflect on their delusion, on the happiness they once had. Indeed, the sober unmasking of this delusion is the only existential happiness that humans can hope for:

> Чтобы долю горемычную
> без печали принимать,
> укрепляют люди личную
> веру в Бога, душу, мать (2009c: 25)[11].
>
> Я скепсисом съеден и дымом пропитан,
> забыта весна и растрачено лето,
> и бочка иллюзий пуста и разбита,
> а жизнь – наслаждение, полное света (2010a, I: 23)[12].
>
> Не по капризу Провидения
> мы на тоску осуждены,
> тоска у нас – от заблуждения,
> что мы для счастья рождены (*Ivi*, II: 446)[13].
>
> Меня всегда влекло познание,
> и я дознался до того,
> что счастье – это понимание,
> что ты не создан для него (2011: 272)[14].

It is not surprising then that Guberman's nostalgic feeling primarily concerns the loss of familiar reference points for anchoring belief:

> Засеребрился сумрак серый,
> тоска явилась – тоже серая;
> намного б легче жил я с верой –
> во что угодно, только веруя (2014a: 496)[15].

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being "*zadumčivaja toska*"), suggesting that *melancholia* is the main 'structure of feeling' of reflective nostalgia. *Toska* with no object, in other words, is nothing but the feeling of reflective nostalgia, or melancholia.

[10] "*Dvunogie melkie osoby*" (Guberman 2010a, II: 606).

[11] "In order to accept hapless destiny / without sadness, / people strengthen their personal / faith in God, in the soul, and Mom".

[12] "I'm devoured by skepticism and steeped in smoke, / spring is forgotten, summer squandered, / the cask of illusions empty and shattered, / but life is a pleasure, full of light".

[13] "It's not due to the whim of Providence / that we are condemned to *toska*, / our *toska* comes from the delusion / that we were born for happiness".

[14] "I was always attracted by knowledge / and have learned enough to know / that happiness is understanding / that we're not made for it".

[15] "The gray twilight became silver, / *toska* appeared – equally gray; / I would have lived a lot more easily with faith, / faith in anything, just having some".

In other words, reflection occupies the hole left by faith, replacing clarity with vagueness and "indeterminacy" (Sicher 1995: 34). Lacking an object, *toska* becomes a sort of nonsensical dreaming, a wolfish "howling at the moon", a 'waiting for nothing' and a longing for nowhere.

Как дорожная мысль о ночлеге,
как виденье пустыни – вода,
нас тревожит мечта о побеге
и тоска от незнанья – куда (2010a, I: 104)[16].

Хоть живу я благоденно и чинно,
а в затмениях души знаю толк;
настоящая тоска – беспричинна,
от неё так на луну воет волк (*Ivi*, II: 466)[17].

Довольно странным сочетанием
ветвится дух во мне двойной:
с ленивой склонностью к мечтаниям
ужился черный скепсис мой (2011: 202)[18].

Хоть и редки во мне воспарения,
на земле я недаром гощу:
в этом мире, где три измерения,
я четвертое нагло ищу (2013: 300)[19].

Indeed, the noun *toska* and the verb *toskovat'* are used extensively in all of Guberman's collections of *gariki* (sometimes even twice in a single quatrain), where they pertain primarily to the semiotic domain of nostalgic melancholy that lacks an object. The same can be said of other frequently occurring lexemes referring to the same semantic domain, i.e. '*skuka*' (boredom), '*unynie*' (dejection), '*tomlenie*' (languor), '*pečal'*' (sorrow).

In Guberman, vagueness about *toska*'s object provokes in turn a response specific to the concept of paradox itself – an attitude, appropriately paradoxical, of blissful torment:

Тоска, по сути, неуместна,
однако, скрыться не пытаясь,
она растёт в душе, как тесто,
дрожжами радости питаясь (2010a, II: 601)[20].

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[16] "Like a traveler's thoughts of shelter, / like a desert vision of water, / we are troubled by dreams of escape / and by the *toska* of not knowing where to".

[17] "Though I live beatifically and in dignity, / I know the use of the soul's eclipse: / genuine *toska* has no motive, / it is why the wolf howls at the moon".

[18] "In quite an odd combination / my soul branches in two: / a lazy bent for dreaming / gets along with my dark skepticism".

[19] "Although I rarely feel exaltation, / I am not a guest on Earth in vain: / in this world of three dimensions, / I insolently search for a fourth".

[20] "*Toska* is essentially out of place / and yet, without trying to hide, / it rises in the soul like dough, / fed by the yeast of joy".

От улочки старинной городской,
от моря под закатным освещением
вдруг полнишься *божественной тоской*,
невнятным и блаженным ощущением
(2013: 239; emphasis added)[21].

Guberman's sense of melancholic paradox is expressed primarily by *laughing through tears*, a healing response, as we argue below, to the feeling of alienation widespread among those who inhabit society's 'border zones'. Faced with reality's ambivalence, with its combination of the very sad and the very funny, Guberman expresses a calm and melancholic sense of resignation, warmth and benevolence. His smiles and his tears transcend rhetoric and eventually blend:

В столетии ничтожном и великом,
дивясь его паденьям и успехам,
топчусь между молчанием и криком,
мечусь между стенанием и смехом (2010a, I: 33)[22].

На слух – перевернутым эхом
звучит наших жизней истома:
то стон выливается смехом,
то смех неотличен от стона (*Ivi*: 459)[23].

Дерзость клоуна, лихость паяца
человеку нельзя не любить,
ибо очень полезно смеяться,
когда хочется плакать и выть (2011: 193)[24].

Even when oppressive *toska* drives the poet to respond (in typical Russian fashion) by praying, drinking and writing, he invariably filters his feelings through skepticism or irony, rather than dramatizing them:

Я редко, но тревожу имя Бога:
материи Твоей худой лоскут,
умерить я прошу Тебя *немного*
мою непонимания тоску (2010a, II: 178; emphasis added)[25].

Блаженство алкогольного затмения
неведомо *жрецам ума и знания*,

[21] "From the alley of an ancient city, / from the sea illuminated by sunset / suddenly you're filled with *divine toska*, / *with an unintelligible sensation of bliss*".

[22] "In a century insignificant and great, / marveling at its downfalls and triumphs, / I shift between silence and shouting, / am tossed between groans and laughter".

[23] "To the ear, like an reversed echo / sounds the languor of our lives: / now groaning issues forth as laughter, / now laughing and groaning merge".

[24] "The clown's impudence, the joker's bravura / can't but inspire our love, / for laughing is useful indeed, / when you'd rather cry and wail".

[25] "Though rarely, I sometimes do trouble the Lord's name: / *a poor scrap of Thy matter,* / I beg Thee to go a little easy on / the *toska* of my non-comprehension".

мы пьём от колебаний и сомнения,
от горестной тоски непонимания (*Ivi*: 421; emphasis added)[26].

Почти не ведая заранее,
во что соткётся наша речь,
тоску немого понимания
мы в текст пытаемся облечь (*Ivi*: 647)[27].

The condition or state of indeterminacy and mental 'suspension' seems not a consequence, but rather a source of reflective *toska* and of its tendency to find expression in paradoxicality. *Toska*, says Guberman, is an inevitable and universal component of human sensibility, but it assumes different forms on the basis of different individuals' own personal 'stories':

Конечно, есть тоска собачья
в угрюмой тине наших дней,
но если б жизнь текла иначе,
своя тоска была бы в ней (*Ivi*, I: 106)[28].

Если выпал бы жребий иначе
от небрежного сверху броска,
то иные бы ждали удачи
и томила *иная тоска* (2013: 181; emphasis added)[29].

An emphasis on paradoxicality is Guberman's creative response to his own indeterminate identity. When one habitually lives in the peripheral spaces of a physical and/or psychological 'borderland', when hybridity is the most essential characteristic of one's identity, a clear opposition between Self and Other collapses and the categories of you and I, bad and good overlap. The result is not an elevated, 'serious' yearning for restoration, but a mood of melancholic 'suspension' that constitutes a form of reflective nostalgia. The sense of paradox found in Guberman's poetics is the aesthetic expression of this mood, a response to the poet's sense of his 'fluctuating identity' – to the compound or hybrid nature of his Russian-Jewish Self. Indeed, the *gariki* resemble the famous 'Jewish questions', whose answers are only more questions[30].

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[26] "The beatitude of alcoholic eclipse / is unknown to *the priests of intellect and science*: / we drink out of vacillation and doubt, / from a woeful *toska* of non-comprehension".

[27] "Almost without knowing beforehand / the future weave of our words, / the *toska* of dumb understanding / is what we try to wrap in text".

[28] "Of course, there's a damnable *toska* / in the gloomy slime of our days, / but if life had flowed differently, / it would still have had its own *toska*".

[29] "Had lots been cast otherwise / due to a careless throw from above, / we'd have met with other successes / and been wearied by *another toska*".

[30] Answering a question with another question is so frequent among Jews that it has become a stock topic in Jewish jokes, such as "Why do you always answer a question with another question?" – "Why not?" (Stolovič 1996: 117), or "Rabbi, why

2. *'Strangers at Home, at Home among Strangers'*

In general, individuals who perceive their identity to be unstable or fluctuating (Jewish/Russian/Soviet/Israeli) tend to experience a vague and also somewhat contradictory longing: what is attractive to one component of the hybrid Self is unattractive to another. Such individuals live on the margins of a dominant culture, in a borderland whose fertile soil nourishes skepticism. Here, the awareness of their own complex and compound – or 'hybrid' – identity generates a special variety of 'high' melancholy:

> Живя в душном равновесии
> и непреклонном своеволии,
> меж эйфории и депрессии
> держусь высокой меланхолии (2010a, II: 49)[31].

A constant feeling of melancholy results from the stigma attached to physical and/or psychological 'exile'. In *The Anatomy of Exile*, Paul Tabori (1972: 23-31) underlines its commonsense and literal definition as a condition of estrangement or distance (emigrant, refugee, displaced person, etc.) from a specific space that is now lost. Prete (2008: 83-84) suggests that nostalgia is generated not by the loss of space alone, but by the loss of both time and space. In Boym's conception, reflective *toska* would seem to be characterized also and prevalently by a chronically ambivalent *mood* – the result of an exaggerated preoccupation with one's own compound identity. Althought Prete (*Ivi*: 86) states that all humans are in some type of metaphorical "exile", only some experience exile in a particularly tangible and dramatic way, managing to confront the glaring discontinuity between their own longing and reality only by laughing "at their own despair" (Guberman 2010a, II: 125):

> Теперь я смирный старый мерин
> и только сам себе опасен:
> я даже если в чём уверен,
> то с этим тоже не согласен (2011: 164)[32].

An emphasis on skepticism and paradox is particularly fostered by the feeling of being an 'exile at home'. 'Exiles at home' are individuals or groups, who live as foreigners in the country of their birth, developing a split identity in a split world. For such exiles, there is no spacetime on earth where this inner sense of diversity might be erased – hence their questing takes the shape

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do Jews always answer a question with a question?" – "Do we?" (<http://visionwiz.net/2011/03/why-do-jews-always-answer-a-question-with-a-question/>).

[31] "Living in suffocating equilibrium / and unrelenting arbitrariness, / between euphoria and depression, / I hold on to my elevated melancholia".

[32] "Now I'm a tame old gelding, / and dangerous only to myself: / even if I'm sure of something / I don't agree with that either".

of wandering not through actual spacetime, but through their own minds. The component of reflection that is specific to reflective nostalgia results from this process of mental wandering.

The Jews of the Diaspora represent such 'exiles at home' *par excellence.* "Permanent exiles" in multiple native countries, they live, as Yuri Slezkine puts it, in a "permanent state of ambivalence" (Sleskine 2004: 47, 36)[33]. "The successful peoples of the modern world […,] urban, mobile, literate, articulate, and intellectually sophisticated" (MacDonald 2005: 65-66), such Jews are, in Slezkine's terms, "Mercurians" who speak the Mercurian "languages of difference" (Slezkine 2004: 19). They are always potentially ready to leave, to find and adapt to new spaces, and yet to preserve their constitutive strangeness wherever they are. The Mercurian identity is thus 'suspended': it evolves together with a state of mind or "worldview" characterized by wandering, but it is also "a matter of psychological choice" (MacDonald 2005: 66). In contrast, "Apollonians" – as Slezkine calls the culturally antithetical group against whom these Mercurians are defined – are "rooted in the land and in traditional agrarian cultures, and prize physical strength and warrior values" (*Ibidem*). Whereas Apollonians have a clear sense of belonging to a concrete territory and constituting a stable nation – they can leave immovable property to their heirs – Mercurians tend to cultivate knowledge, an asset that can not be inherited, but is easily transportable in case of flight.

In order to cope with this peculiarly complex ontology, with an identity that is in fact constituted by duality and marginalization, these 'strangers at home' came to consider their very state of 'suspension' or being 'in between' to be a specific, autonomous identity, a solution (*tertium datur*) to an otherwise irresolvable duality. The result is a 'hybrid' identity in which the binary opposition between You and I is transformed into 'melancholic suspension', the sign and existential state of Mercuriality, whose "*raison d'être*" is not a desire for integration, but precisely "the maintenance of difference, the conscious preservation of the Self and thus of strangeness" (Slezkine 2004: 19):

> Когда кругом кишит бездарность,
> кладя на жизнь своё клише,
> в изгойстве скрыта элитарность,
> весьма полезная душе (2010a, I: 206)[34].

Against the physical power of the Apollonians, Mercurians wield in their own defense language, intellect, and knowledge, their "weapon of weakness and

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[33] Jews are not, of course, the only national group that has been able to preserve its identity for generations while living within a given country in a state of paradoxical ambivalence, but they do comprise the oldest and largest community of such exiles and their enormous literary output represents the cross-cultural phenomenon of 'hybrid exile literature' in unsurpassed quantity.

[34] "When lack of talent teems all around, / imprinting on life its cliché, / elitism hides as an outcast, / which is extremely good for the soul".

dependence": "Hermes needed his wit because Apollo and Zeus were so big and strong" (Slezkine 2004: 29). In the host countries of the Diaspora, the Jewish condition of alien brought with it fear, uncertainty, and a sense of ontological suspension, and encouraged concomitant Jewish-Mercurian tendencies towards mastering the languages of the Others, reflecting on alterity, and renewing and even subverting various cultures:

> Между слухов, сказок, мифов,
> просто лжи, легенд и мнений
> мы враждуем жарче скифов
> за несходство заблуждений (2010a, I: 200)[35].

Regardless of the particular form that it assumes, Jewish-Mercurian exile appears as intrinsically *disharmonic* (cf. Wex 2005: 23). This is not the case for Apollonians, who in physical exile are often able to maintain a sense of their own identity as they long for a 'home' constituted by a stable territorial reference point. Mercurians, however, being peculiarly sensitive to "the immensity of time and the multiplicity of individuals", inevitably become aware that human existence has no importance at all (Ginzburg 1998: 19), thus experiencing, in Guberman's words, the dangerous wisdom of "their own vacuity and futility" ("*svoej pustoty i naprasnosti*"; Guberman 2013: 326). This state of incertitude and its related inclination for reflection inspires in the Jews of the Diaspora both increasing curiosity towards the Other and partial – and ambivalent – identification with them.

The *gariki* comprise a form of paradoxical humor mixed with skeptical *toska* that mirrors Guberman's own ambivalent self-perception and reflective qualities. They are the artistic expression of a thoughtful and empathic Mercurian mood[36], for reflection also means looking at oneself from an outside perspective, i.e. through the eyes of the Other. Guberman's skepticism testifies to an emancipation from both internal and external prejudices, dogmas, and binary oppositions, and consequently enhances new ways of thinking. A direct connection between his mental flexibility and the reflective nature of his social critique is evident. Mercurian nostalgic reflectiveness assumes the shape of a feeling that is suspended between an impulse to become like the Other and a tendency to misrecognize the Self:

> Забавно мне моё еврейство
> как разных сутей совмещение:
> игра, привычка, лицедейство,
> и редко – самоощущение (2009c: 29)[37].

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[35] "Amidst rumors, tales, and myths, / amidst nothing but lies, legends, and opinions, / we fight more fiercely than Scythians / for the divergence of our fallacies".

[36] 'Empathic' is intended here as a psychological disposition to share emotions *with* others.

[37] "My Jewishness is funny to me, / like a mixture of different essences: / play, habit, dissembling, / and rarely – a sense of self".

Обживая различные страны,
если выпало так по судьбе,
мы сначала их жителям странны,
а чуть позже мы странны себе (2010a, II: 587)[38].

If serious Apollonian writers experience a concrete sense of cultural belonging, Mercurians operate in a reality that is paradoxical. Unlike Apollonians, who can believe in their elective advantage over Others, Mercurians have no accessed to a similarly biased and one-sided 'truth'. Where Apollonians offer conservative answers, Mercurians pose thorny questions:

В саду идей сейчас уныло,
сад болен скепсисом и сплином,
и лишь мечта славянофила
цветет и пахнет нафталином (*Ivi*, I: 179)[39].

В лабиринтах, капканах и каверзах рос
мой текущий сквозь вечность народ;
даже нос у еврея висит, как вопрос,
опрокинутый наоборот (*Ivi*, II: 112)[40].

Жизнь хороша, но удивительна
такой ли быть она должна?
Неправда людям отвратительна,
а правда – вовсе не нужна (2011: 182)[41].

In point of fact, if skeptical *toska* can be said to have a precise object, it would be a hypothetical 'fourth dimension' in which hybrid identity would be regarded as 'normal'. Indeed, the more stable identity that skepticism produces is an evolutionary precondition for the preservation of one's ego[42] and also needed for mental stability. Such stability does not necessarily mean rigidity, however. While the less flexible Apollonian identity is built on exclusion ('Us vs. Them'), characterized by mistrust of the Other and a desire for unambivalent clarity, Jewish reflective irony provides a basis for empathy and rejects wholly self-referential conceits:

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[38] "As we try to become integrated / into different nations abroad / early on we seem odd to the natives, / later on find ourselves to be odd" (translated by Sokolovskij 2013).

[39] "The garden of ideas is now dreary, / the garden is ill with skepticism and spleen, / and only the Slavophile's dream / blossoms and smells of mothballs".

[40] "Amidst labyrinths, traps, and intrigues, / my people grew, flowing through eternity; / even the Jewish nose hangs like a question mark, turned upside down and backwards".

[41] "Life is good, yet surprising / should it be like this? / People hate lies / but truth they don't need at all".

[42] The chameleon-like protagonist of Woody Allen's *Zelig* eloquently illustrates the risks inherent in the Mercurian acquisition of a stable identity.

Развеяв нас по всем дорогам,
Бог дал нам ум, характер, пыл;
еврей, конечно, избран Богом,
но для чего – Творец забыл (*Ivi*: 118)[43].

В нас есть огонь, и есть металл,
и дух наш дерзостен в борьбе;
как мы велики, я читал,
как мелки – знаю по себе (*Ivi*: 274)[44].

3. *Jewish Reflective Skepticism and the Pirandellian Mechanism of 'Feeling the Opposite'*

Even though Guberman is generally and erroneously considered a parodist, or poet who jokes, he is actually, as he puts it, a "bright pessimist":

Ни тучки нет на небе чистом,
а мне видна она вполне,
поскольку светлым пессимистом
я воспитал себя во мне (2010a, II: 598)[45].

The poet speaks of himself as a "typical tragedian" as well, surprised that his verses "full of skepticism and disbelieving" (Guberman 2009a: 98) often elicit jocular laughter:

> "Что в них смешного?" – с ужасом думал я [...]. Отчего друзья всегда так хохотали в застольях? (*Ivi*: 84)[46].

He also describes himself as a "sad" (*grustnyj*), "sober" (*trezvyj*) or even "despondent optimist" (*otčajannyj optimist*; cf. Guberman 2009c: 17; 2010a, I: 218; 2013: 351) – or not an optimist at all:

Время летит с нарастающим свистом,
Тают года на планете отпетой;
я по ошибке слыву оптимистом –
и не перечу я глупости этой (2013: 336)[47].

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[43] "Dispersing us on roads everywhere, / God gave us wit, character, and zeal; / the Jews, of course, are God's chosen, / but for what – the Creator forgot".

[44] "We have in us fire and metal, / and our spirit is bold in fight; / of how great we are I've read, / of how petty I know from myself".

[45] "There's no dark cloud in the clear sky, / but I see one perfectly / because I've cultivated / a bright pessimist in myself".

[46] "What's funny about them? – I would think with horror [...]. Why did my friends always laugh so much at parties?"

[47] "Time flies with a rising whistle, / our years on this incorrigible planet wane; / I'm wrongly taken to be an optimist / and I don't contradict such nonsense".

Guberman's poetry with its emphasis on paradox stands are a crystalline realization of the reflective humor that Luigi Pirandello described as *umorismo*, opposing it to the rhetorical humor of *comicità*. In his 1908 treatise *On Humor,* Pirandello, who was also quite preoccupied with fluctuating identities (as attested in *The Late Mattia Pascal* and *One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand*), provides a good description of the empathetic reflective mood, albeit in somewhat different terms (cf. Pirandello 1995). Whereas the rhetorically comic or ironic is essentially conservative, reinforcing vertical hierarchy, paradoxical 'laughing through tears' is rare, subversive, and empathic, even "horizontal". 'Laughing through tears' is not directed against humanity and its shortcomings, but benevolently makes fun of life's absurdity, the sole object of mockery being the incongruity and inconsistency of the human condition[48]. "Horizontal" levity is thus distinguished from the "vertical" mocking (found in jokes, parody, satire, sarcasm, and irony) and predicated on the supposed superiority of the mocker with respect to his or her target (cf. Salmon 2008: 54-57, 97-100). Aimed at individuals or groups that are seen to represent specific faults (ignorance, greed, arrogance, etc.), vertical mocking reflects judgments shared with a culturally dominant (Apollonian) point of view and characterized by binary oppositions: good/evil, right/wrong, smart/stupid, man/woman, wife/lover, healthy/ill, Christian/Jew, heterosexual/homosexual, Self/Other, and so on. Vertical humor thus reinforces in the mocker both prejudice and a sense of moral or physical superiority[49], while horizontal humor conversely leads toward a sense of solidarity according to the principle that 'trouble shared is trouble halved'. Paradox, by its very nature, is exclusively horizontal and anti-Manichean: it both unmasks the conceptual constraints that urge human consciousness towards the consolation of rigid and naive dualities and hinders the establishment of vertical hierarchies with a clear position for one's self.

According to Pirandello's theoretical model, reflection is at the core of our humorous response to melancholy and 'laughing through tears' a mechanism that he calls "feeling the opposite" (Pirandello 1995: 171-219; Salmon

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[48] In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,* Freud speaks of "Jewish skeptical humor" as being perfectly illustrated in the following anecdote: "Two Jews meet in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. 'Where are you going?' asks one. 'To Cracow' was the answer. 'What a liar you are!' broke out the other. 'If you say you are going to Cracow, you want me to believe you are going to Lemberg. But I know you are going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?'" (Freud 1960: 80-81). According to Freud (*Ivi*: 81), such humor is of "the rarest" type, since it does not "attack" anyone or anything, besides the reliability of our cognitive system.

[49] The more widespread jokes about greedy Jews become, the more greed is associated with Jews, for example, and thus the stereotype is reinforced. Moreover, since the mockery of greed is ostensibly effected by more generous persons, the joke's teller assumes a position of vertical superiority with respect to the derided object, further reinforcing that position. Irony and parody directed at one's self are no exception, superiority arising from the implicit fact that only a condition of self-esteem can allow for self-mocking (cf. Salmon 2008: 72, 97-99).

2008: 74-91). Reflection triggers the exaggerated development of 'humoral' sensitivity towards both Self and Other, improving empathy and solidarity. Pirandellian humor is properly a "quality of expression", the way an author looks at reality, the way objectivity is "subjectivized" (Pirandello 1995: 59, 64). Through humor, the 'objectivity' of commonsensical 'truth' is suspended and 'reflection' becomes 'refraction', as in Pirandello's famous metaphor of the "reversed telescope"[50]. Guberman's skeptical humor can thus be defined as a stylization ('humorization') of melancholy that converts nonsense into shared disbelief:

> Народ любой воистину духовен
> (а значит – и Создателем ценим)
> не духом синагог или часовен,
> а смехом над отчаяньем своим (2010a, II: 125)[51].
>
> С разным повстречался я искусством
> в годы любованья мирозданием,
> лучшее на свете этом грустном
> создано тоской и состраданием (*Ivi*: 457)[52].

Throughout the twentieth century, the paradoxical melancholic mood of Ashkenazi Jewish culture exerted a strong influence on Apollonian culture in the West. 'Laughing through tears' became both the way that Jews looked at themselves – through the critical eyes of the Other – and a strategy for opposing the dogmatic 'seriousness' of the dominant host culture. Skeptical humor is by no means frequent in either everyday life or literature (Freud 1960: 80-81, Pirandello 1995: 39), since it requires a perspective that is difficult to grasp, that "requires", in Guberman's words, "being able to get it" (Guberman 2010c: 11):

> Что наша жизнь – трагедия, известно каждому, поскольку каждый знает о неминуемом финале этой пьесы. Но что наша жизнь комедия, понимает и чувствует далеко не любой из ее участников. Мне повезло: я ощущаю оба эти два жанра. Но стенать, скулить и жаловаться – глупо, [...] снижает, мягко говоря, высокую пожизненную трагедию человека до сопливой и слезливой мелодрамы (Guberman 2009b, I: 77)[53].

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[50] Cf. the 'philosophical model' of Dr. Fileno in the 1911 story *A Character's Tragedy* (*La tragedia di un personaggio*, Pirandello 2006).

[51] "Any people is truly spiritual / (and hence valued by the Creator) / not for the spirit of its synagogues or chapels, / but for laughing at its own despair".

[52] "I met with various kinds of art / in the years when the universe delighted me, / the best of this sad world / is created with *toska* and compassion".

[53] "Everybody knows that our life is a tragedy, since everybody is aware of this play's inevitable ending. But the fact that our life is a comedy is understood and felt by only very few of its participants. I've been lucky: I perceive both of these two genres. But groaning, whining, and complaining stupidly (to put it mildly) degrades the high tragedy of human life to snotty and lachrymose melodrama".

Guberman expects that the audience for his skeptical humor will be composed of skeptics and humorists as well:

> Каков он, идеальный мой читатель?
> С отчётливостью вижу я его:
> он скептик, неудачник и мечтатель,
> и жаль, что не читает ничего (2010a, I: 221)[54].

His well-disposed reader enters an illogical world where laughing is a response to *toska*, which in turn is the response to cheerfulness:

> Зря моя улыбка беспечальная
> бесит собутыльников моих:
> очень много масок у отчаянья,
> смех – отнюдь не худшая из них (*Ivi*: 161)[55].

> В остывшей боли – странная отрада
> впоследствии является вдруг нам,
> полны тоски отпущенники ада,
> и радость их – с печалью пополам (*Ivi*: 526)[56].

Gariki function as a 'rule-breaking device' to subvert the binary logic of Manichean reasoning. Indeed, skeptical humor is a form of subversive cognitive deprogramming that can make sense of ambiguity much like the insights of Zen (Salmon 2008: 91-100; 143-154). Insofar as Mercurian Jews tend to reject dogma, nourish doubt, and invert moments of inconsistent logic, they are perceived by Apollonian culture – which defends the status quo and aches for restoration – as a dangerous threat:

> Дух нации во мне почти отсутствовал.
> Сторонник лишь духовного деления,
> евреем я в тюрьме себя почувствовал
> по духу своего сопротивления (2010a, I: 69)[57].

> Я не стыжусь, что ярый скептик,
> и на душе не свет, а тьма;
> сомненье – лучший антисептик
> от загнивания ума (*Ivi*: 213)[58].

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[54] "Who, after all, is my ideal reader? / I conjure up an image quite distinct: / he is a skeptic, failure, utter dreamer / and, what a pity! does not read a thing" (translated by Sokolovskij 2013).

[55] "There's no reason that my cheerful smile / should enrage my drinking buddies: / despair wears many masks, / humor is certainly not the worst of them".

[56] "After the pain grows cool, a strange joy / suddenly appears to us – / inmates released from hell are full of *toska, /* their joy and sorrow exist in equal shares".

[57] "I never had any ethnic spirit./ As a fan only of sharing spirit, / it was in prison I began to feel I was Jewish / from the spirit of my opposition".

[58] "I am not ashamed of being a raging skeptic / of having darkness, rather than light, in my soul: / doubt is the best antiseptic / for decay of the mind".

С полюса до линии экватора
всем народам нравятся их танцы,
а евреи всюду реформаторы,
потому что всюду иностранцы (*Ivi*: 467)[59].

Радость – ясноглазая красотка,
у покоя – стеганый халат,
у надежды – легкая походка,
скепсис плоскостоп и хромоват (*Ivi*: 299)[60].

A reflective, humorous response to feelings of regret, sorrow, melancholia, and nostalgia implies a thorough revision of human binary postulates. Even when nostalgia has an object, as in '*toska po rodine*' ('nostalgia for the homeland'), that object can be approached with humor, reflectiveness, and empathy. In such cases, subjective empathy paradoxically means the demystification, and thus *humanization* of the object itself. A reflective and humorous representation of the '*rodina*' ('homeland'), for example, reveals sober affection 'with eyes wide open'. The process of subjectivizing and humanizing the object also paradoxically makes it available to the Other. Indeed, the more subjective the object of nostalgia, the more universal it becomes. This approach can be epitomized by Dovlatov's words about Russia:

> – Матерей не выбирают. Это моя единственная родина. Я люблю Америку, восхищаюсь Америкой, благодарен Америке, но родина моя далеко. Нищая, голодная, безумная и спившаяся! Потерявшая, загубившая и отвергнувшая лучших сыновей! Где уж ей быть доброй, веселой и ласковой?!..
>
> Березы, оказывается растут повсюду. Но разве от этого легче?
>
> Родина – это мы сами. Наши первые игрушки. Перешитые курточки старших братьев. Бутерброды, завернутые в газету. Девочки в строгих коричневых юбках. Мелочь из отцовского кармана. Экзамены, шпаргалки... Нелепые, ужасающие стихи... Мысли о самоубийстве... Стакан "Агдама" в подворотне... Армейская махорка... Дочка, варежки, рейтузы, подвернувшийся задник крошечного ботинка... Косо перечеркнутые строки... Рукописи, милиция, ОВИР... Все, что с нами было, – родина. И все, что было, – останется навсегда (Dovlatov 1985: 168-169)[61].

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[59] "From the pole to the equatorial line / their dances are liked by peoples everywhere, / but Jews are everywhere reformers / because they are everywhere foreigners".

[60] "Joy is a clear-eyed beauty, tranquility wears a shabby housecoat, / hope steps lightly, / skepticism is flat-footed and limping".

[61] "You can't choose your mother. This [Russia] is my one and only homeland. I love America, I admire America, I'm grateful to America, but my homeland is far away. Poor, hungry, crazy, and drunk! Having lost, destroyed, and exiled her best sons! How could she be kind, cheerful, and loving?!

"Birch trees, it turns out, grow everywhere. But does that make it any easier?

"We are our homeland. Our first toys. The altered jackets of our elder brothers. Sandwiches wrapped in newspaper. Girls with severe brown skirts. Some coins from father's

In Guberman's words, "one cannot curse the past, since it coincided with our childhood" (Guberman 2014b: 459).

4. *The Languages of Russian-Jewish Nostalgic Feelings*

As is well known, the Jews lived for many centuries as exiles in the lands of their birth, with no homeland of their own. Until the Zionist movement, 'Zion' was an abstraction, the object of 'ritual nostalgia' (as in the annual Pesach toast 'next year in Jerusalem'), a spiritual concept, rather than an actual geographical destination. In the meantime, the Jews lived in countries that simultaneously were and were not 'their own', in linguistic melting pots, where three or even four languages were often required to function in the different spheres of religious, professional, official and private life[62]. This linguistic melange that echoed inside and outside of Jewish life fostered, on one hand, open-mindedness, creativity, and an appreciation of novelty, and, on the other, distress, disorder, and a sense of split or discontinuous identity. Each of the languages in question was related to a distinct 'space of identity' and any language used by Jews was a vehicle of multifaceted "Jewish thought" (Markish 1998: 282). Such is the case for all "Jewish literatures in another language" (Hetényj 2008: 21), particularly for the writings of the Ashkenazi Jews, for whom Jewishness "was above all the first bifurcation of identity, the first marker of difference" (Hoffman 2008: 240), an expression of contradiction and ambivalence (Gershenson 2008: 176). Indeed, East-European Jewish literatures were largely written in languages that became de facto "mother tongues" only in the twentieth century, even while to some extent remaining 'languages of the Other'.

There is a clear interrelationship among the languages used by Russian Jewish writers, their respective poetics, and the different modalities (restorative or reflective) of nostalgia that inform their work. In Russia especially, the literary production of the Jews – regardless of the language selected – faithfully mirrored a unique and intense longing for belonging, a "perpetually creative, diasporic tension" (Boyarin, Boyarin 1995: 326). Russian-Jewish literature is specifically a "*border phenomenon*, a literature with *dual cultural roots*" (Hetényj 2008: 2; emphasis in the original). That said, the semantically hybrid term

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pocket. Examinations, crib notes... awkward, horrible verses... Thoughts of suicide... A glass of Azerbaijani wine in the entryway... Army tobacco... My baby daughter, her mittens, her woolen tights, the crushed back of a tiny shoe... crossed-out lines... Manuscripts, the militia, the Emigration Bureau... Everything that happened to us is our homeland. And everything that happened will forever remain" (translated by S. Dickinson).

[62] After the third partition of Poland in 1795, for instance, Polish Jews lived in a funny and tragic world where frequent code switching between Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish and Russian was required.

"Russian-Jewish literature" itself has "no unambiguous or universally accepted definition" (*Ivi*: 1) and requires a brief explanation[63].

At the beginning of the 1920s, Vasilij L'vov-Rogačevskij (1990: 49) claimed that "the nationality of a literary work is not defined by its language, but by the author's *dominant mood*, by his longing for a certain people" (emphasis added). This viewpoint was further elaborated by Shimon Markish (1985, 1998), Russian-Jewish literature's most prominent scholar, whose still useful taxonomy argues that a literary text can be classified as Russian-Jewish if it is: (1) written in Russian, (2) by a Jewish author, who (3) openly displays a Jewish identity, and (4) says something about Jews.

While the earliest examples of Jewish literary writings in Russian were published in the early 1800s, it was only in the second half of that century that an impressive number of journalistic, prose, and poetic works appeared. This efflorescence was one of the direct consequences of the ideological split that occurred among Ashkenazi Jews in the second half of the eighteenth century, leading to Jewish 'enlightenment' (the '*haskalah*'), secular acculturation, and emancipation from Jewish orthodoxy. For 'enlightened' Jews (the '*maskilim*'), such emancipation meant the loss of a stable identity. Having for centuries felt either '*svoi sredi svoix*' ('at home among their own') or '*čužie sredi čužix*' ('strangers amidst strangers'), the Jews now became both strangers amidst their own *and* strangers per se:

> Застенчив и самонадеян,
> всегда с людьми, везде один,
> меж русских был я иудеем,
> а меж евреев – славянин (2010a, I: 520)[64].
>
> Я жил, за всё сполна платя,
> меня две матери носили –
> я был еврейское дитя,
> и был я выродок России (2011: 520)[65].

Prior to Soviet times, Russian-Jewish writers and publicists had used one or more of the three languages at their disposition: Russian, Yiddish, and the newly revived Hebrew (Salmon 1995: 131-156; Hetényi 2008: 14-21). "In Russia, Jewish literature is trilingual" wrote L'vov-Rogačevskij (1990: 37). The choice of language was made for clear ideological and sentimental reasons that reflected the writer's views on hope and disappointment, faith and skepticism, dreams and caution – in short, his or her inclination towards two opposing, but equally restorative myths, that of Jerusalem and that of Petersburg. With few exceptions, Yiddish was the language of exile and popular (mostly oral) tradi-

[63] Some scholars (e.g. Shreyer 2007) prefer to invert these qualifiers to speak of "Jewish-Russian" literature.

[64] "Bashful, yet conceited, / always with others, yet everywhere alone, / among Russians I was a Jew, / but among Jews a Slav".

[65] "I lived paying in full for everything, / carried by two mothers, / I was a Jewish baby, / and Russia's degenerate son".

tion[66], Hebrew the language of Jewish nationalism and/or religion, and Russian the secular language of assimilation. The language of the Jews' "Apollonian neighbors", Russian had the status of "Apollonian language" (Slezkine 2004: 19 ff.), for native speakers of Yiddish, and the choice to become a writer in Russian was an act of "self-alienation" (Sicher 1995: 34) that indicated a Jewish author's yearning to become a fully-fledged *Russian* citizen and to embrace Russia as Motherland[67]. From its very origins, Russian-Jewish literature was thus, on one hand, artificial and biased ("it either supports or blames Jewish people"; L'vov-Rogačevskij 1990: 47), and, on the other, a rich amalgam of topics, linguistic features, and techniques:

> To make an application of the notion of double-voicing to the Jew writing in Russian, a language not 'one's own', we might say that the Jew writing in Russian was so hypersensitive to the valuation of himself as Other that he sought to appropriate Russian cultural texts as his own and to attenuate the difference of his discourse from that of the Other (Sicher 1995: 33).

At the same time, the Yiddish used in the ghetto of the Pale was an idiom with dual and contradictory significance, a symbol of both exile and home. The echo of a native nowhere, Yiddish in late tsarist Russia was the narrative idiom of "the fundamental absurdity of Jewish existence in the world" (Wex 2006: 6) as well as, eventually, the living memory of a *place outside of space*:

> Yiddish had produced an aesthetic in which ideas of beauty and standards of artistic worth are inextricably linked to expressions of longing and pain [...]. Yiddish arose, at least in part, to give voice to a system of opposition and exclusion (*Ivi*: 7, 18)[68].

As Guberman (with Aleksandr Okun') put it,

> Так вот, иврит, как всем совершенно очевидно, – официальный язык Господа Бога. На нем Он диктовал Моисею заповеди, на нем Он говорил с про-

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[66] For many centuries, Ashkenazi schools, which were largely male and doctrinal, offered only Hebrew (for religious purposes), while Yiddish was used for female prayer books, Hasidic tales, and some translations from other European languages. Modern Yiddish literature appeared in the last decades of the nineteenth century and it was officially recognized only in 1908 at the First Yiddish Language Conference in Černovic (Chernovitz). In the revolutionary period, Yiddish was the official language of all the Jewish workers' parties, and after the October Revolution was preferred by the Soviet establishment as the language of Soviet Jewish education (as opposed to 'clerical' Hebrew and 'bourgeois' Russian language; cf. Bemporad 2013: 81 ff.).

[67] There were also extremely rare cases of Jewish nationalists using Russian to 'convert' assimilationists back to Jewish tradition (cf. Salmon 1995).

[68] With the exception of a few rich merchants, before April 1917, the Jews of the Russian Empire were required to live outside Russia proper in the Polish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Moldavian territories of the Jewish Pale of Settlement and had most trades, arts and professions barred to them.

> роками, на нем поносил сынов Израилевых и порой жалел их. Все это Он делает на иврите. Но смеется и плачет Господь на идише… (Guberman, Okun' 2009: 131)[69].

For several decades, Yiddish remained the sole language capable of fully describing Jewish life, the sole means of realizing the incredible potential of Jewish oral communication. It was a "fusion language", "using components of several languages and melting them in one linguistic system" (Harshav 2008: 995). These borrowed words, which were necessary to designate objects, persons, rites, and customs, and to express idioms, proverbs, and imprecations, made possible the narration of Jewish life in 'another language' – an apparent paradox that was actually a logical response to the burdensome dual identity of Russian Jews. In Alice Stone Nakhimovsky's words:

> By choosing to write in Russian and about Jews, a writer is taking on a tradition that runs counter to the kind of unconscious self-identification that others, working in their national literatures, take for granted [...]. If you were going to write about Jews the obvious language was Hebrew or Yiddish; to do so in Russian was to embark on a journey of self-contradiction (Nakhimovsky 1985: 175)[70].

In Boym's terms, Yiddish was the idiom of the reflective mood, of intimate nostalgia, of skepticism and melancholy. It had an almost oxymoronic status, being both one's native tongue, but also the language of one's Otherness. The structural ambiguity of the Yiddish world influenced Jewish writers, first among them Sholem Aleichem, to lean towards paradoxical humor as a specific response to the difficult condition of permanent exile:

> Когда на всех, на всех, на всех
> удушье мрака нападает,
> на смену слез приходит смех
> и нас, как смерть, освобождает (2010a, I: 440)[71].
>
> Искры наших шуток очень разны,
> но всегда унынию помеха,
> мы шутить особенно горазды,
> когда нам по жизни не до смеха (2013: 187)[72].

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[69] "Thus Hebrew, as is absolutely obvious to all, is the official language of the Lord God. In Hebrew He dictated the commandments to Moses, in Hebrew He spoke with the prophets, scolded the children of Israel, and sometimes pitied them. All this He does in Hebrew. But the Lord laughs and cries in Yiddish...".

[70] For a useful review of scholarship on Jewish identity, see Gershenson 2008: 175-179.

[71] "When on all and everyone, / the strangle of darkness falls, / laughing takes the place of tears, / and, like death, releases us".

[72] "The sparkles of our jokes are very different, / but they always stave off dejection, / we are especially good at joking, / when we don't feel like laughing".

In contrast, Jewish literature couched in Russian was a dramatic attempt to erase a Jewish (Mercurian) otherness perceived as ridiculous, to overcome suffering, and to demonstrate that Jews, too, could participated in the 'serious' project of the Apollonian nation and its tradition. Literature in revived biblical Hebrew was also 'serious': this was the language of the Messianic dream and addressed the rebirth of the Jewish people in the Promised Land. Thus, both Russian and Hebrew were emblems of emancipation from a condition of alterity, from marginalization, and from ridiculous Jewish melancholy; these were 'higher', more 'serious' languages that lacked empathetic humor – difficult to achieve, after all, in a non-native idiom – but could, at best, allow rhetorical irony. Jewish authors who chose to write in Russian or Hebrew were inclined towards restorative nostalgia: they dreamed of a concrete Fatherland (Russia or Zion), of a strong Apollonian identity (Russian or Hebrew), and of a stable cultural point of reference ('official' Russian or Judaic culture). Also specific to Russian-Jewish literature was a particular critical gaze upon the 'world of the Fathers' or *shtetl*, a gaze full of alienation.

In the era of the Great Pogroms in the Russian Empire's southwest territories during the last few decades of the nineteenth century, Jews suffered unprecedented physical and psychological violence. "Emigration had become an integral part of the life of Russian Jews" (Heténi 2008: 117) and America and Palestine safe havens. Palestine was also the chronotopic setting for Russian-Jewish restorative nostalgia, the chief feeling at that time (cf. Salmon 1995). Restorative nostalgia took various forms: there was a more 'passive' religious nostalgia oriented towards the past (the 'pure', dying shtetl), and two 'active' nostalgic yearnings, one for a renewed future Zion, the other for the promised land of Socialism. Both of these nostalgic feelings aimed at the restoration of a past when, presumably, humanity had lived in a state of freedom, brotherhood, and justice; they also aimed at the transformation of "Mercurians into Apollonians" (Slezkine 2004: 269). In this context, melancholy was produced by the knowledge that the Jewish love for Russia would never be reciprocated:

> Евреям придется жестоко платить
> за то, что посмели когда-то
> дух русского бунта собой воплотить
> размашистей старшего брата (2010a, I: 433)[73].
>
> Любя всей душой беззаветно
> ту землю, в которую врос –
> чего ж не любим я ответно? –
> извечный еврейский вопрос (2014c: 442)[74].

[73] "The Jews will pay a very heavy price / for having dared in the past / to embody the spirit of the Russian struggle / more boldly than their elder Russian brothers".

[74] "Loving selflessly with all my heart, / the land where I grew up, / why am I not loved in return? / – the primeval Jewish question".

The Jews who remained in Russia were assimilated to become both Russian and Soviet. Similarly, the Russian culture and language assimilated Jewish *toska*: Russian became the language of mercuriality and hybridity, and Russia's long-neglected humorous tradition was reinvigorated[75].

5. *Three in One: Jewish, Russian, Soviet Identity*

When the Pale of Settlement was abolished after the February Revolution and Russia's 'two capitals' opened to the Jews, hundreds of thousands of people from shtetls in the Empire's west and south arrived in Petrograd and Moscow. They started a new life, one finally shared with their Russian neighbors (cf. Salmon 2012: 151-154). Gradually, Russian became the main language of the Jews, as they finalized their "eager conversion to the Pushkin faith" (Slezkine 2004: 127). While Yiddish was spoken primarily by parents and grandparents (children born in the 1920s who attended Soviet schools could understand Yiddish better than they could actively use it), it continued to reverberate inside and outside of Jewish life. In the second and third decades of the twentieth century, Jewish and Russian literature and culture were already difficult to clearly distinguish – a stunning cultural hybridization had begun in which Yiddish culture was Russified, and Russian culture 'Jewished':

> Не зря среди чужих едим и пьём,
> немедля мы занятие находим:
> с которым населением живём,
> того мы на еврейский переводим (2011: 154)[76].

Such mutual hybridization was made possible by oral exchanges between Jews and Russians in the shared urban spaces of Soviet daily life. Among these was the communal apartment that "absorbed cultural elements from the surrounding languages, folklore, and verbal behavior", encouraging "an essential multilingualism that enabled the functioning of the Jews in a bifurcated existential situation" (Harshav 2008: 994)[77].

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[75] Čechov, the most important prerevolutionary Russian writer to perform the melancholic 'humorization' of Russian literature, was quite influenced by Jewish culture (despite his explicit views of Jews and the Jewish question in different periods of his life). On the significance of Čechov's familiarity and involvement with the Jewish world (his various Jewish acquaintances included Sholem Aleichem), see Bartov 2010.

[76] "Not for nothing do we eat and drink among strangers, / quickly finding some task to fulfill: / with whatever people we live, / we translate them into Jewish".

[77] In the Russian Republic of the Soviet Union, the percentage of Jewish males who married non-Jewish women increased from 17.4 to 42.3 percent between 1924 and 1936 (cf. Slezkine 2004: 179).

> Сколько эмигрантов ночью синей
> спорят, и до света свет не тухнет;
> как они тоскуют по России,
> сидя на своих московских кухнях! (2010a, I: 369)[78].

After the Revolution, when everything "became so endlessly complicated" (Heténi 2008: 33), Jews broke with "old Russian-Jewish literature" (Sicher 1995: XX). In the new era of Socialism, Soviet state policy required all writers to firmly express their 'Soviet identity' and Jewish identity thus officially became an outmoded concept. Because of the Soviet hostility towards religion, the overt expression of a specifically Jewish identity was a provocative and dangerous action. As a result, Jewish authors lost any direct link with their Jewish cultural identity and its ritual life, as they adopted the last surviving religion, the 'Puškin faith'.

During the Soviet era, Russian tears became Jewish and vice versa. In Vladimir Vysockij's *Ballad of Childhood* (*Ballada o detstve*), the Russian Evdokim Kirillič says to Disja Mojseevna, the Jewish woman with whom he shares a communal apartment: "*Ech, Dis'ka, my odna sem'ja* [...]*, Vy tože postradavšie, a značit obrusevšie*" (Vysockij 2010: 434)[79]. Soviet Russian and Soviet Russian-Jewish identity also shared 'laughing through tears' in its different manifestations. Indeed, the beginning of the Soviet period saw a minor stream of unofficial humorous genres – in addition to the serious literature that was supported by the Bolsheviks – such as the feuilleton, the riddle, the limerick, the folk-song, and various expressions of the absurd that existed on the margins of the 'great literature'. If conversion to the 'Puškin faith' represented Jewish full immersion in the Russian verbal heritage, the major representatives of the 'laughing-through-tears tradition' in Russian – e.g. Sholem Aleichem, Isaak Babel', Daniil Xarms, Sergej Dovlatov, etc. – reflect a joint Russian and Russian-Jewish verbal heritage. Indeed, the Soviet 'laughing-through-tears tradition' stands as the most significant result of Russian-Jewish cultural hybridity. As Dovlatov (1999a: 269) appositely noted:

> The ability to mock, even maliciously, even with derision towards themselves, is the wonderful, high-minded feature of the ineradicable Jewish people [...]. Jews returned to Russian verbal art the forgotten predilections – easiness, elegance, total humor. That is exactly how – would you believe it? – *The Little House in Kolomna* was written. And even more so *Count Nulin*"[80].

In a remarkable paper, Efim Etkind (1985) states that Soviet literary criticism neglected the evident, but "embarrassing" fact of Russian/Jewish kinship. A large number of well-known Soviet writers were Jews from Jewish fami-

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[78] "How many emigrants in the dark blue night / argue and don't turn off the lights before dawn; / how they long for Russia, / sitting in their Moscow kitchens!"

[79] "Oh, Dis'ka, we're a single family [...], You've suffered too, which means you're Russified". On this song see also M.A. Curletto's article in this volume.

[80] Translated by S. Dickinson.

lies, who had received a Jewish upbringing and education; these included Osip Mandel'štam, Vera Inber, Isaak Babel', I. Lunc, I. Utkin, Viktor Šklovskij, and Jurij Tynjanov (*Ivi*: 205), but the list could be extended[81]. Much as the Hebrew Bible had a special influence on classical Russian poetry (Etkind E. 1985: 202), so did neo-Jewish culture influence Soviet poetry, and while the scale was comparatively modest, a "marginal sounding of the Jewish note" (*Ivi*: 204) was not unusual[82]. The first Soviet decade witnessed the birth of a sort of 'Russian Yiddish', which included a few real Jewish expressions or lexical items, together with the typical intonations of Yiddish humor, "joining together the funny and the sad, the droll and the tragic" (*Ivi*: 205)[83].

Stalin's violent persecutions also influenced the decisive replacement of Yiddish with Russian. Even references to the shtetl, a theme which inspired Jewish writers with a contradictory mix of "nostalgia and repulsion" (Gershenson 2008: 178), found its expression in the Russian language, enriching the musical scale of Russian poetry with a Jewish melancholic note:

> Мне ответил бы кто-нибудь пусть,
> чтоб вернуть мой душевный уют:
> почему про славянскую грусть
> лучше прочих евреи поют? (2011: 241)[84].

Due to Stalinist repression, and although appreciated by the Soviet intelligentsia, Jewish skepticism and paradoxicality found no support in official Soviet ideology, which was characterized by seriousness and increasing dogmatism as well as a quasi-religious set of beliefs, axiomatic myths, and rules. If the Soviet authorities were ready to accept humor structured on a binary principle (jokes are always widespread in dictatorships), they could not admit doubts and question marks. Soviet Jews became increasingly adept at using encoded subtexts as their verbal skills grew stronger. Equally active in both underground and official culture, the Russian Jew became, at least in the popular Soviet imagination, the

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[81] Indeed, almost all of the surnames found in Walter Benjamin's 1926-1927 *Moscow Diary* – whether from the realm of everyday life, art, or science – are Jewish (Benjamin 1986). In Bartov's words: "Beginning with the end of the nineteenth century and over the course of the twentieth, many Jewish names entered Russian literature; [the Jewish writers] wrote in Russian and were the bearers of Russian culture. A list of the Jewish names found in different areas of Russian culture would go beyond a single page" (Bartov 2010).

[82] Authors such as M. Svetlov, S. Marshak, Il'ja Erenburg, and I. Sel'vinsky were often not permitted to publish their poetry (Etkind E. 1985: 202).

[83] Among his frequent references to the topic of Jews in Moscow, Walter Benjamin (*Ivi*: 40, 110) twice mentions adults speaking Yiddish in daily life and notes, for instance, the performance of Yiddish songs after a meal: "They sang communist adaptations (I don't believe they were intended as parodies) of Yiddish songs. Except for Asja [Benjamin's friend], everybody in the room was certainly Jewish" (*Ivi*: 45).

[84] "Would somebody please answer me, / to give me back my peace of mind: / why of Slavic sadness / do Jews sing better than the others?"

paradigmatic representative of the Soviet intellectual (Gershenson 2008: 177), "paving the way" for the hybridization of Russian culture[85]:

> Напористо, безудержно и страстно –
> повсюду, где живое колыхание, –
> в российское духовное пространство
> вплетается еврейское дыхание (2010a, II: 429)[86].
>
> Питомцы столетия шумного,
> калечены общей бедой,
> мы – дети романа безумного
> России с еврейской ордой (2011: 163)[87].

Although not 'ethnically Russian', Russian Jews were, from an ideological and cultural standpoint, hyper-Russified and they became deeply emotionally involved in Russian cultural and ideological life. As Slezkine (2004: 141) has put it, "Few passions are as bitter, ardent, and hopeless as the love of repentant Mercurians for their Apollonian neighbors". In Guberman's words:

> Как ни обливали грязной сплетней,
> как бы нас хулой ни поносили,
> нет любви горчей и безответней,
> чем любовь еврейская к России (2011: 190) [88].

Both fully Russian and fully Jewish (and thus neither one nor the other), Soviet Jews have a "double foundation" (Markish 1998: 277) that "at the aesthetic and poetic levels provides the keenness and accuracy of an unprecedented binocular vision":

> Один еврей другого не мудрей,
> но разный в них запал и динамит,
> еврей в России больше, чем еврей,
> поскольку он еще антисемит (2010a, II: 115)[89].

Although Russian-Jewish literature was able to aesthetically influence Soviet culture, the 'implantation' of Jewish cultural seeds was met by Russian writers with aggressive disdain throughout the twentieth century (Guberman

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[85] Dovlatov's *Marš odinokix* (*The March of the Lonely*) contains the following joke: "Skažite, Vy – evrej?" "Net, prosto u menja intelligentnoe lico" ("Are you a Jew?" "No, I just have the face of an *intelligent*"; Dovlatov 1983: 30).

[86] "Stubbornly, impetuously, and passionately, / wherever there is a vital oscillation / in the space of Russian spirituality, / you'll find the interweave of Jewish breathing".

[87] "We are the nurslings of a calamitous century, / crippled by a general misfortune, / children of the crazy love affair / between Russia and the Jewish horde".

[88] "No matter how they flung mud at us, / no matter how they reviled us, / there is no more bitter and unrequited love / than the Jewish love for Russia".

[89] "One Jew is no smarter than any other, / but they differ by fuses and dynamite; / In Russia a Jew is more than a Jew, / for he's also an anti-Semite".

2009b: 257-261). The relationship between Russians and Jews became more complex in the last two decades of the Soviet era, when massive Jewish emigration to Israel and to the United States began. Most of the new 'exiles in exile' (meta-exiles) quit the USSR voluntarily for ideological or personal reasons, but a significant part of the Jewish literary intelligentsia was forced to expatriate. There was no choice or, rather, it was a ridiculous choice: "I easily chose between New York and prison…", declared, for instance, Sergej Dovlatov (1999b: 384). This was also the case of Igor' Guberman, who left Russia "with grief" ("*s goreč'ju*"; Guberman 2011: 227):

> Уж очень, очевидно, стали широко ходить стишки по рукам, и не смогло больше терпеть всевидящее око [...]. Вдруг позвали нас с женой в тот памятный всем отдел виз и регистраций [...] и красивая строгая чиновница с благородной лаконичностью произнесла: "Министерство внутренних дел приняло решение о вашем выезде.
>
> Господи, сколько людей мечтало, чтобы за них вот так решили все сомнения, устранив проклятую занозу вольного выбора! В семидесятые годы наблюдал я много евреев, мечтающих не ехать, а пожизненно бороться за отъезд [...]. Но рассеянный взор фортуны пал на нас, хоть, видит Бог, я не просил об этом (Guberman 2009a: 395)[90].

The condition of being 'strangers at home' over the past two centuries has led to the recurrence of *toska* in Russian-Jewish culture, restorative and reflective nostalgia affecting the literary mood, style, and genre of Russian-Jewish texts. The general pattern would appear to be that the stronger the dream of a radiant future or pride for a glorious past, the more an author is prone to gravity, romanticism, and rhetorical dramatization (cf. Salmon 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014a, 2014b), while the stronger he or she feels undecided or 'suspended', the more he or she is prone to reflective, melancholic humor:

> Мне кажется, она уже близка
> расплата для застрявших здесь, как дома:
> всех мучает неясности тоска,
> а ясность не бывает без погрома (2010a, II: 84)[91].

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[90] "It became very, very evident that my verses had begun to circulate extensively passing from hand to hand, and the all-seeing eye could no longer tolerate it [...]. Suddenly my wife and I were invited to that department of visas and registrations that all remember [...] and the officer, an attractive and severe woman, declared with noble succinctness: 'The Ministry of Internal Affairs has determined that you will leave'".

"Lord! How many people have dreamt that all their doubts would thus be resolved by others, removing the damned splinter of free choice! In the seventies I saw many Jews who dreamt not of emigration, but of a life-long struggle for permission to emigrate [...]. But the absent-minded gaze of fortune fell on us, though, God knows, I didn't ask for it".

[91] "It seems to me that very soon the reckoning will come / for the people stuck here [in Israel] as if at home; / all are tormented by the *toska* of uncertainty, / but you can't have certainty without pogroms".

Наш разум лишь смехом полощется
от глупости, скверны и пакости,
а смеха лишенное общество
скудеет в клиническом пафосе (*Ivi*: 235)[92].

Влекусь душой к идее некой,
где всей судьбы видна картина:
не вышло если стать Сенекой,
то оставайся Буратино (2011: 221)[93].

6. *The Holy Borderland*

Once Russian Jews emigrated to Israel, they were not just psychologically, but also socially and linguistically 'strangers at home'[94]. Having been Jews in Russia, in Israel they paradoxically became Russians:

Изверившись в блаженном общем рае,
но прежние мечтания любя,
евреи эмигрируют в Израиль,
чтоб русскими почувствовать себя (2010a, I: 380)[95].

Without either linguistic liberty or familiar cultural reference points, these émigrés became 'strangers' both to relatives left behind in Russia and to their own children, who grew up as Israelis, rapidly forgetting Russia – and sometimes the Russian language as well. It was in this 'meta-exile' that Guberman began to discover the strength of his bond with the Soviet Union, precisely in the era when that country was itself disappearing:

Иные на Руси цветут соцветия,
повсюду перемены и новации,
а я – из очень прошлого столетия,
по сути – из другой цивилизации (2009c: 20)[96].

---

[92] "Only laughter can rinse our mind / of stupidity, filth, and villainy, / while a society deprived of humor / shrivels in clinical pathos".

[93] "I'm attracted to a certain idea / in which fate's entire picture is evident: / if you didn't get to be a Seneca, / then remain a Pinocchio".

[94] Exiles from Russia to Israel could try to integrate into Israeli society, and sometimes did manage to partially adapt to the very different way of life, climate, and socio-political context (exchanging the world's most expansive country for a microscopic territory beset by enemies).

[95] "Having lost their faith in blissful communal paradise, / but loving still their earlier dreams, / Jews emigrate to Israel, / so as to feel Russian".

[96] "Different blossoms are now flowering in Russia, / everywhere changes and innovations, / but I come from a very past era, / in point of fact, from another civilization".

На сердце – странные колючки:
прошли ведь вовсе не века,
но вот в Россию едут внучки,
уже не зная языка (*Ivi*: 136)[97].

Soviet Russia became a literary chronotope, the object of the emigré's paradoxical new *toska,* while post-Soviet Russia was an altogether alien place. An affective attachment to Russia was constituted by memory alone:

Стало скучно в нашем крае,
не с кем лясы поточить,
все уехали в Израиль
ностальгией сплин лечить (2010a, I: 422)[98].

Забавно туда приезжать, как домой,
и жить за незримой межой;
Россия осталась до боли родной
и стала заметно чужой (*Ivi*, II: 257)[99].

Guberman's life acquired new paradoxical features in emigration. The most onerous of these concerned the linguistic sphere, since language was not only a marker of his identity, but also the means for his professional activity. For almost all of the Russian Jews who emigrated to Israel after the 1970s, Hebrew remained a foreign language. In this 'impasse' (Sicher 1995: 28), Russian language and culture thus became the emblem of a new split identity (cf. *Ivi*: XVI) and the USSR, a lamented and long-lost hell, the object of an ambivalent *toska*. To Soviet exiles, who were neither religious nor Zionists, as was the case with Guberman, Israel could to some extent become a 'homeland', but not an intimately felt or by any means "literary homeland" (*Ivi*: XVII). For Igor' Guberman, nostalgia again assumed skeptical, melancholic and illogical form as illustrated by his yearning for bygone troubles:

Всю свою жизнь (как и сейчас) я всей душой любил Россию, но, разумеется, странною любовью (Guberman 2009a: 435)[100].

Тоска былых невзгод, утрат, метаний
с годами не низводится к нулю,
и сладостная боль воспоминаний
нас часто посещает во хмелю (2014c: 440)[101].

---

[97] "There are odd thorns in my heart: / it's not as if centuries have gone by, / but off my grandchildren go to Russia, / already not knowing the language".

[98] "It got boring in our land, / no one to jabber with, / everyone had left for Israel / to heal spleen with nostalgia".

[99] "It's funny to arrive there, as if coming home, / and to live behind an invisible boundary. / Russia has remained so painfully mine, / and has become so notably Other".

[100] "I have loved Russia all my life (and still do) with all my heart, but, obviously, it is a strange love".

[101] "*Toska* for past afflictions, losses, bewilderment / has not, over the years, been reduced to null, / and the sweet pain of memories / often visits us in drunkenness".

In *The Book of Wanderings* (*Kniga stranstvij*), Guberman describes the fulfillment of a request made by an old Russian Jew who had asked his daughter to divide his ashes between Petersburg and the Judea Desert in a humorous, but poignant image of the Russian-Jewish split identity:

> На склоне возле могилы пророка Самуила такое место отыскалось. Дочь вынула из сумочки старый школьный пенал, мы вытрясли из него горсть серого праха, ветер аккуратно унес его, развеивал по пустыне. Мы курили и молчали. Так советский физик разделил себя посмертно, чтобы обозначить поровну свою любовь и причастность (Guberman 2009b: 263)[102].

Such a profound division of identity triggered in its subject either of two opposite reactions – denial or acceptance – both fraught with *toska*. If the former implies a yearning to become the Other, the latter suggests a humorous and wistful yearning for relativity, suspension, and unrealized potential (as in fantastic 'fourth dimensions' or "birches sporting branches of oranges"). An old Soviet joke summarizes this paradox quite well. A Soviet Jew emigrates to Israel, but after a few weeks regrets the decision and heads back to the USSR; he then once again returns to Israel, then back to Russia, and so on, several times. When finally asked by the increasingly impatient authorities in both Russia and Israel in which context he ultimately feels better, the Jew replies: "I feel better in the plane"[103]. His paradoxical nostalgia is directed at the borderland itself, an 'in-between' territory or no-man's land, a nowhere, which is also perhaps everywhere:

> В душе у всех теперь надрыв:
> без капли жалости эпоха
> всех обокрала, вдруг открыв,
> что где нас нет, там тоже плохо (2010a, II: 107)[104].
>
> Еврей тоскует не о прозе
> болот с унылыми осинами,
> еврей мечтает о берёзе,
> несущей ветки с апельсинами (*Ivi*, II: 662)[105].
>
> Тоска, тревога, пустота…
> Зовёт безмолвная дорога

[102] "On a slope beside Prophet Samuel's grave we found a good place. His daughter took out of her handbag an old school pencil case, we shook out of it a handful of gray ashes: the wind neatly carried them off and scattered them over the desert. We smoked in silence. This is how a Soviet physicist divided himself up after death in order to equally commemorate his love and the fact of his belonging".

[103] A slightly different version of this joke appears in Leonid Stolovič's famous collection of Russian-Jewish humor (Stolovič 1996: 184-185).

[104] "All of us now have anguished hearts: / without a shred of mercy the age / has robbed everyone by suddenly revealing / that everywhere else is just as bad".

[105] "Jews long not for prose / of bogs and downcast aspens, / Jews dream of birches, / sporting branches of oranges".

в иные выбраться места…
Там пустота, тоска, тревога (2013: 265)[106].

A feeling of nostalgia towards the contradictory concept of 'inferno/paradise lost' is both the cause and the effect of Guberman's love for Russia. Russia itself is represented as the 'land of paradoxes', which haunts the mind day and night (Guberman 2010a, II: 8). Whatever he sings in *gariki* or states in prose about Russia contains apparent inconsistencies and contradictions:

Россию всё же любит Бог:
в ней гены живости упорны,
а там, где Хармс явиться мог,
абсурд и хаос жизнетворны (2009c: 21)[107].

В России слезы светятся сквозь смех,
Россию Бог безумием карал,
России послужили больше всех те,
кто ее сильнее презирал (2010a, I: 20)[108].

Я скучаю по тухло-застойной
пошлой жизни и подлой морали,
где, тоскуя о жизни достойной,
мы душой и умом воспаряли (*Ivi*, II: 114)[109].

В российском климате испорченном
на всех делах лежит в финале
тоска о чём-то незаконченном,
чего ещё не начинали (*Ivi*: 727)[110].

Exiled from a nonsensical Russia to the new – serious, nationalist, and Apollonian – Jewish state, Guberman discovered that his feelings were affected by multiple internal contradictions, leading him to become a nostalgic "disabled veteran [*invalid*] of Russian culture" (*Ivi*: 22):

Люблю российский спор подлунный,
его цитат бенгальский пламень,
его идей узор чугунный,
его судеб могильный камень (*Ivi*: 9)[111].

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[106] "*Toska*, anxiety, emptiness… / A silent path is calling me / to strike out for other places… / Where I'll find emptiness, *toska*, anxiety".

[107] "God loves Russia anyway: / it has the stubborn genes of vivaciousness; / in a place that could have produced Daniil Xarms, / nonsense and chaos generate life".

[108] "In Russia tears shine through laughter, / Russia was punished by God with madness, / Russia was best served by those / who most despised it".

[109] "I miss the foul and stagnant / vulgar life and its vile ethics, / when, we longed for a life that was worthier, / and our hearts and minds soared".

[110] "In the ruined Russian climate, / all matters have this finale: / *toska* for something unfinished, / for something yet unbegun".

[111] "I love the sublunary Russian quarrel, / the Bengal flare of its quotations, / the cast-iron tracery of its ideas, / the gravestone of its destinies".

Навидевшись америк и европ,
вернулся я в мой дом, душе любезный,
и стал сильней любить российский трёп,
распахнутый, густой и бесполезный (2013: 220)[112].

From the "island" (Jerusalem) of his exile, Guberman feels the tedium of prosperity:

Уже настолько дух наш косный
с Россией связан неразлучно,
что жить нам тягостно и постно
повсюду, где благополучно (*Ivi*: 257)[113].

Меня оттуда съехать попросили,
но я сосуд российского сознания
и часто вспоминаю о России,
намазывая маслом хлеб изгнания (*Ivi*: 519)[114].

Живу, как будто я на острове,
и все любимое – со мной,
и чувствую блаженство острое
от легкой скуки островной (2011: 192)[115].

In meta-exile, the poet finds that his real, one and only homeland is neither a time nor a place, but the Russian language, the very essence of his identity. Inseparable from experience, emotions, and perception, language constitutes the ontological core of the Self: "In the end, I feel at home in only one language", corroborates Norman Manea (2008: 4). Hence, Russia is, first and foremost, the 'lost paradise' of Guberman's native tongue:

Я пристегнут цепью и замком
к речи, мне с рождения родной:
я владею русским языком
менее, чем он владеет мной (2010a, II: 36)[116].

Я уезжал, с судьбой не споря,
но в благодетельной разлуке,

---

[112] "After visiting americas and europes, / I returned to the home so dear to my soul, / and began to love even more / the broad, dense, and useless Russian baloney".

[113] "Our inert soul has been so / indissolubly bound with Russia / that our lives are heavy and dreary / wherever we find prosperity".

[114] "They asked me to move out of there, / but I am a vessel of Russian consciousness, / And often think of Russia, / buttering my bread of exile".

[115] "I live as if on an island / and all that I love is here with me. / Yet I feel bliss sharpened / by light island boredom".

[116] "I'm chained and padlocked / to the language that has been mine since birth: / I have mastered Russian even less / than it has mastered me".

как раковина – рокот моря,
храню я русской речи звуки (*Ivi*: 114)[117].

Russia is also the place of memory and intimacy, where the Russian language reverberates on all sides, be it in Siberia or in a Moscow kitchen:

На кухне или на лесоповале,
куда бы судьбы нас ни заносили,
мы все о том же самом толковали –
о Боге, о евреях, о России (*Ivi*: 14)[118].

Всего одна в душе утрата,
но возместить её нельзя:
Россия, полночь, кухня чья-то
и чушь несущие друзья (*Ivi*: 705)[119].

Thus, Russian today assumes the function of Yiddish in the past, giving voice to the nostalgic sounds of the exiled. If the Lord laughs and cries in Yiddish, those exiled from Russia to Zion laugh and cry in Russian:

Горжусь, что в мировом переполохе,
в метаниях от буйности к тоске –
сознание свихнувшейся эпохи
безумствует на русском языке (*Ivi*, I: 350)[120].

7. *Guberman's '*Toska *for Existence'*

Guberman's melancholy is mitigated by the process of reflection itself. Through reason, he gains distance and the resulting *ostranenie* facilitates his empathic approach to all kinds of nonsense. Unlike tragedy, skeptical humor is not cathartic, but represents a form of emancipation (or even abdication) from drama and tragedy, an acceptance both cognitive and affective of the funny-yet-poignant paradoxes of human existence. Reflective *toska* is paradoxical, a "*toska* of existence (*suščestvovanija*)" directly connected to skeptical disillusionment:

Сполна я осознал ещё юнцом
трагедию земного проживания

[117] "I left, without contesting fate, / but in the beneficence of distance, / as a shell holds the murmur of the sea, / I retain the sounds of Russian speech".

[118] "In the kitchen or felling trees, / wherever fate took us, / we always talked about the same thing / about God, Jews, and Russia".

[119] "There is only one loss in my heart, / and no chance of compensation for it: / Russia, midnight, someone's kitchen, / and friends talking rubbish".

[120] "I'm proud that in the world's tumult, / in the bouncing from turbulence to *toska*, / the conscience of this age gone mad / does its raving in Russian".

с кошмарным и заведомым концом,
со счастьем и тоской существования (*Ivi*, II: 435)[121].

Забавные печали нас измучили,
былые сокрушая упования:
не знали мы, что при благополучии
угрюмее тоска существования (*Ivi*: 563)[122].

Guberman's writing has always been accompanied by nostalgic feeling that, despite its persistence, has never been restorative or dogmatic. In the context of exile or meta-exile to the Apollonian 'Forefatherland' of Israel, his poetics have remained as skeptical as ever. Whatever his political views and regardless of his obvious affection for Israel, the poet looks at any religious orthodoxy or dogmatic ideology with marked diffidence, precisely because his general ontological mood conflicts with the assumption of such a cognitive position. In both prose and verse, he also repeatedly rejects any form of blind nationalism:

С душою, раздвоенной, как копыто,
обеим чужероден я отчизнам – еврей,
где гоношат антисемиты,
и русский, где грешат сионанизмом (*Ivi*: 205)[123].

Тонул в игре, эпикурействе,
любовях, книгах и труде,
но утопить себя в еврействе
решусь не раньше, чем в воде (*Ivi*: 441)[124].

Skepticism, the poet suggests, is the direct result of a discontinuity between dreams and reality, and allows one to substitute false beliefs or illusions with the comparatively liberating feeling of sober melancholy:

За периодом хмеля и пафоса,
после взрыва восторга
и резвости неминуема долгая пауза –
время скепсиса, горечи, трезвости (*Ivi*, I: 91)[125].

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[121] "Even as a boy I fully realized / the tragedy of living on earth / with a nightmarish and well-known ending, / with the happiness and *toska* of existence".

[122] "Amusing sorrows tormented us, / destroying our former beliefs: / we did not know that in prosperity / the *toska* of existence is gloomier".

[123] "With my soul split like a hoof, / I'm alien to both my fatherlands, / I'm Jewish when anti-Semites are at work, / and Russian when the sin is Zionanism".

[124] "I was drowning in games, in hedonism, / in loves, books, and work, / but sooner than drown myself in Judaism, / I'd do so in water".

[125] "After a period of drunkenness and pathos, / after a burst of enthusiasm / even zeal inevitably needs a long break – / a time of skepticism, grief, sobriety".

8. *The Melancholic God of Skeptical Judaism*

The 'fluctuating Jew' – depicted in the Soviet joke about the 'flying Jew' as well as in a series of masterpieces by Marc Chagall – symbolizes the coupling of a state of suspension with persistent melancholy. Such melancholic suspension is an enduring phenomenon in the history of Jewish cognitive and emotive experience. Although Jewish tradition also includes a Rabbinical branch of cognitive inflexibility (the heritage of Shammai)[126], skepticism is an ancient component of traditional Jewish exegesis as well – and it reflects the condition of exile itself as well as an elemental Judaic aversion to dogmatism. The roots of melancholic Ashkenazi humor thus seem to be of a piece with the ancient tradition of skeptical Judaism[127].

As Giuseppe Veltri points out, the Talmud itself uses irony in interpreting the Torah, occasionally making fun of the 'written Torah', as in the case of the Qohelet's pessimism (Veltri 2013: 725). Here, God Himself can be considered a student of the Talmud, his arguments bested in discussions with rabbinical scholars (*Ivi*: 726). Such an idea of God renders Judaism and the Judaic God substantially different from the Christian religious model:

> Only Christianity has dogmas and moral authorities, which invoke the authority of God and his representatives. Judaism does not [...]. So the question still remains unanswered: do/did the Jews believe in God? In response to difficult questions people often answer with a counter-question: does/did God for his part believe in the Jews? [...]
>
> Halakhah [the Jewish enlightenment, L.S.] is decided day by day, and the only norm is everyday existence. The rabbi is not a dogmatist who determines truth for future generations. Rather, he negotiates between past and present. And if he does not do his job well, he is fired. So God as an authority plays no role [...]. In sum, between God and the Jewish people, in history and the present, there is a loving, skeptical, but constructive and mutual mistrust (*Ivi*: 726, 731, 732).

Guberman seems a worthy heir of both ancient (Hebrew) and modern (Ashkenazi) skeptical traditions, his latest collections of *gariki* (2011-2014) giving ever more evidence of this philosophical framework. God paradoxically responds to humanity with benevolent mocking, sometimes even expressing himself in seemingly trivial language – albeit in an entirely non-trivial way:

> Найдя предлог для диалога,
> – как Ты сварил такой бульон? –

[126] In the middle of the first century BCE, Hillel and Shammai led the Sanhedrin and founded two respective and antagonistic religious schools (or 'houses'), the distinction between them was similar to "the difference between liberals and conservatives in America today" (Wylen 1989: 166).

[127] Several *gariki* even contain evident gibes at Jewish orthodoxy and at religious hypocrisy.

спрошу я вежливо у Бога.
– По пьянке, – грустно скажет Он (2010a, I: 272)[128].

Всеведущ, вездесущ и всемогущ,
окутан голубыми небесами,
Господь на нас глядит из райских кущ
и думает: разъебывайтесь сами (*Ivi*: 181)[129].

Бог в игре с людьми так несерьезен,
а порой и на руку нечист,
что похоже – не религиозен,
а возможно – даже атеист (*Ivi*, II: 92)[130].

Напрасен хор людских прошений,
не надо слишком уповать,
ведь Бог настолько совершенен,
что может не существовать (2011: 199)[131].

Jews can amicably joke with their sole God because they created Him at least as much as He created them:

Про наше высшее избрание
мы не отпетые врали,
хотя нас Бог избрал не ранее,
чем мы Его изобрели (*Ivi*: 146)[132].

Не зря себе создали Бога двуногие –
под Богом легко и приятно.
Что Бог существует, уверены многие
и даже Он сам, вероятно (2013: 200)[133].

Where God is concerned, Guberman's skepticism is particularly evident. By emphasizing the profound inconsistency implied by standard, trivializing conceptions of the Lord, Guberman subverts the reader's logical expectations: in His supreme imperfection, God deserves our empathy and benevolence. Here again, the *gariki* trigger a feeling of skeptical melancholy:

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[128] "When I have a pretext for dialogue, / 'How ever didst Thou make such a broth?' / I'll politely ask the Lord. / 'I was on a drunk', he will sadly reply".

[129] "Omniscient, ubiquitous, and omnipotent, / wrapped in the blue skies, / the Lord looks down at us from the heavenly foliage / and thinks: unfuck yourselves without me".

[130] "In playing with people, God is so shallow, / and sometimes also light-fingered, / that He would seem not to be religious, / It may even be that He's an atheist".

[131] "The choir of human prayer is futile, / there's no need for too much trust, / after all, God is so perfect / that He can even non-exist".

[132] "About being chosen from above / we weren't inveterately lying / although God did not choose us before / we invented Him".

[133] "Not by chance did the bipeds create God: / with God all is easy and pleasant. / Many people are sure that God exists / and He's probably sure, too".

Версии, гипотезы, теории
спорят о минувшем заразительно,
истинную правду об истории
знает только Бог. Но приблизительно (*Ivi*: 199)[134].

На старости пришло благополучие,
Живу я в обеспеченности даже;
Ты, Господи, прости меня при случае,
И я – клянусь – прощу Тебя тогда же (*Ivi*: 331)[135].

In Guberman's cosmogony, God is depicted in full hybridity. He has at least three contradictory hypostases, ranging from the empathic and powerless, to the powerful and indifferent, to the guiltless and absent:

Не знаю, чья в тоске моей вина;
в окне застыла плоская луна;
и кажется, что правит мирозданием лицо,
не замутнённое сознанием (2010a, II: 396)[136].

Господь, создатель мироздания,
все знал и делал навсегда,
не знал Он только сострадания,
и в этом – главная беда (2011: 227)[137].

Не имея к Богу доступа
И ввиду его отсутствия
Крайне глупо ждать от Господа
милосердного сочувствия (2013: 317)[138].

Moreover, Guberman's God, who rarely seems interested in human matters, not only reacts to the evolution of His own creation with human-like disappointment, but also personally declares his disapproval for planet Earth in an incongruously offhand and humorous style[139]:

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[134] "Different versions, hypotheses, theories / argue contagiously about the past – / the genuine truth about history / is known only by God. Roughly".

[135] "In my old age it turns out I've become prosperous, / and even manage to live without a care; / You, Lord, forgive me for that if you need to, / and then I swear I'll forgive You, too".

[136] "I don't know who is to blame for my *toska*; / outside the window a flat moon has congealed, / and it seems the universe is governed by someone, / who is untroubled by cognizance".

[137] "The Lord, the creator of the universe, / knew and created everything for evermore, / the only thing He didn't know was compassion / and *that* is our primary misfortune".

[138] "Having no access to God / and seeing how He's absent, / it's very stupid to expect from Him / merciful compassion".

[139] On Guberman's poetic use of obscene words, see Vol'skaja 2003 and Salmon 2014a.

Творец не лишен интереса,
глядит он и думает: бля,
убойная сила прогресса
растет на планете Земля (*Ivi*: 340)[140].

This skeptical Jewish God is a symbol of the paradoxical, funny-yet-poignant *toska* of the exiles for a metaphysical, hence unrealizable homeland, for what Jankélévitch (1974: 360) has called "la localization symbolique et métaphorique d'un désir indéterminé". A supreme representation of lack, loss, and/or distance, this celestial homeland is as hybrid as God is. God represents our longing for Him, a nostalgic reflection of His longing for us:

Мы пустоту в себе однажды
вдруг странной чувствуем пропажей;
тоска по Богу – злая жажда,
творец кошмаров и миражей (2010a, I: 363)[141].

Подвержен *творческой тоске*,
Господь не чужд земного зелья,
и наша жизнь на волоске висит
в часы Его похмелья (*Ivi*, II: 432)[142].

Max Horkheimer (1985: 387) said that what matters in Judaism is not what God is like, but rather what we, human beings, are like. Judaic skeptical *toska* is thus a perception of each individual's ethical responsibility towards his or her own intrinsic nature and towards the nature of others. Through contrast, Guberman illustrates the intrinsic gap between metaphysical ethics, which implies passive subordination to external dogmas, and skeptical ethics which vitally contributes to the moral struggle within each of us. Such is the position expressed by Bashevis Singer's Magician of Lublin: "If there is no God, man must behave like God" (Singer 2010: 229), a comment that does not illustrate would-be Jewish megalomania, but simultaneously asserts skeptical awareness and a sense of responsibility before God's absence. In other words, by considering God's inexistence or even distance, humans can show Him their indulgence:

Я жил весьма, совсем, отнюдь не строго,
но строго за своей следил судьбой,
боялся потому что я не Бога,
а тягостной вражды с самим собой (2011: 174)[143].

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[140] "Not without some interest, the Creator / looks down and thinks: shit, / the destructive power of progress / is really growing on planet Earth".

[141] "Emptiness we one day / suddenly perceive within, like a strange loss; / *toska* for God is a nasty thirst, / the creator of nightmares and mirages".

[142] "When subject to creative *toska*, / the Lord doesn't deny Himself an earthly drink, / and our life hangs by a thread / in the hours of His hangover".

[143] "I lived quite, completely, entirely casually, / but carefully paid attention to my fate, / not that I was afraid of God, / just of onerous enmity with myself".

Хоть Бога я душой не принимаю,
однако в силу этого плебейства
с Него я и ответственность снимаю
за все многовековые злодейства (2013: 272)[144].

Ни вслух, ни про себя я не молюсь
и не творю поклонов менуэт,
лишь изредка шепчу я, тертый гусь:
“Спасибо, если даже Тебя нет!” (2014a: 504)[145].

The Freudian intuition that two opposing drives paradoxically govern the human psyche (love/life vs. death) finds its voice at the close of Singer’s novel *Family Moskat*, where the primary object of Jewish longing is nothing less than death itself: “Death is the Messiah. That’s the real truth” (Singer 2000: 611).

9. *Demystifying* Toska – *Skepticism's* Toska *for Humanity*

As we have seen, skeptical humor, the humorous variety of reflective *toska*, undramatizes whatever seems to humans irreparably ‘serious’, including nostalgia itself. Guberman’s thought thus avoids rhetorical or romantic appeal to appear before the reader in all its humaneness. His *gariki* both result from and foster an easy, benevolent gaze at ‘life as it is’, lending a sense of dignity to existential experience. In a universe governed by an inconsistent God, on a planet inhabited by inconsistent beings, in chaos that is governed by chance and necessity, verbal humor and drinking are the only responses that Guberman, a mournful optimist, has to combat *toska.* Life is so heavy that it deserves lightness:

Нельзя длительно страдать,
нет пользы в бесконечном сокрушении.
Совсем не в легкой жизни благодать,
а в легком к этой жизни отношении (2011: 226)[146].

Я не искал чинов и званий,
но очень часто, слава Богу,
тоску несбывшихся желаний
менял на сбывшихся изжогу (2010a, II: 383)[147].

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[144] “Although I do not accept God in my soul, / I do, however, in view of this petty fact, / relieve Him of any responsibility / for all those centuries of evildoing”.

[145] “I don’t pray either aloud or to myself, / nor do I perform minuets of bowing, / I only whisper rarely, old goose that I am: / ‘Thank you, even if for only not-existing’ ”.

[146] “You can’t go on suffering for too long, / there’s no advantage to endless distress. / Beatitude is not the result of an easy life, / but of living easily with the life you have”.

[147] “I wasn’t looking for ranks and titles, / but quite often, thank God, / I replaced the *toska* of unrealized dreams / with the real burning of hangovers”.

Это счастье – дворец возводить на песке,
не бояться тюрьмы и сумы,
предаваться любви, отдаваться тоске,
пировать в эпицентре чумы (2013: 131)[148]

The *gariki* may be seen to contain an aesthetic and speculative 'completeness' that represents an entire philosophical system based on the insight that overcoming *toska*, identity hybridity, and suspension means accepting *toska*, hybridity and suspension, and on the expression of this acceptance in art. Poetry itself becomes the stylization of chaos, rather than a means to achieve fame or status. For Guberman, accepting *toska* means transcoding it into Russian-Jewish paradoxicality – and thus reinvigorating all the humorous resources of his beloved mother tongue. The more refined his verse technique, the stronger the element of playfulness.

The concept of an opposition between "*jazykovoj optimism*" ("linguistic optimism") and "*spiritual'nyj pessimizm*" ("spiritual pessimism") that Efim Etkind developed in his studies of Puškin (cf. Etkind A. 2005: 12), applies perfectly to the *gariki*. Puškin's optimism lies in the fact that his verses, however sad they may be, nonetheless manage to persuade us that sadness can be expressed and hence that the strength of language is the primary means of psychological endurance and resistance. "Spiritual pessimism" conversely expresses a mistrust of language and is thus a form of ideological conservatism.

Guberman's worldview demystifies and 'humorizes' everything, particularly those objects that are typical of human mystification. His verses propose an approach to life without either self-deception or despair, replacing these with humor and skeptical melancholia, in short, a form of ethical, ironic, and melancholic heroism:

На собственном горбу и на чужом
я вынянчил понятие простое:
бессмысленно идти на танк с ножом,
но если очень хочется, то стоит (2010a, I: 263)[149].

Если уж несет тебя течение судьбы против твоей воли, то плыви по нему и получай удовольствие (2009a: 44)[150].

Though such reflectiveness is onerous, it is the direct consequence of accepting the poignant and counterintuitive logic of "chance and necessity" (in

[148] "Happiness is building a castle in the sand, / with no fear of either prison or poverty, / indulging in love, surrendering to *toska*, / continuing to feast in the epicenter of the plague".

[149] "From my own bitter experience and those of others, / I've extracted this simple idea: / it makes no sense to attack a tank with a knife, / but if you really want to, then it's worth it".

[150] "If the current of destiny carries you against your will, then float along and enjoy it".

Jacques Monod's famous formulation). Once we accept the logic of the universe – which at first seems senseless to us – we can change our perspective and look at things from an estranged (*ostranennoe*) position. *Gariki* express the poignancy of knowledge and the pleasure of de-dramatization:

> Поскольку мыслю я несложно,
> То принял с возрастом решение:
> Улучшить мир нельзя, но можно
> К нему улучшить отношение (2013: 345)[151].

In the words of Volková (2008: 175), "if it does not break us, exile paradoxically makes us more humane". As Guberman puts it:

> У самого кромешного предела
> и даже за него теснимый веком,
> я делал историческое дело –
> упрямо оставался человеком (2010a, II: 136)[152].

[151] "Since I think simply, / I made a decision as I grew older: / it's impossible to make the world better, / but one can improve his approach to it".

[152] "When I reached the utter limit, / and had even gone beyond, pushed by the era, / I performed a historical feat – / and stubbornly remained human".

Резюме

Лаура Сальмон

Меланхолический юмор и задумчивая тоска. Поэтика парадоксальности Игоря Губермана

Поэтическое творчество Игоря Губермана, составленное из тысяч четверостиший (так наз. '*гариков*'), отражает гибридный жанр, находящийся на стыке наследия еврейской афористической традиции, русского устного фольклора и классической русской поэзии. Тема тоски является в '*гариках*' ключевой, хотя она сугубо далека от 'реставрирующей ностальгии' в понятии С. Бойм (2001). Напротив, губермановская тоска – чувство задумчивое, меланхолическое, парадоксальное. Оно выражает ту особенную скептическую специфику, которая характеризует ашкеназский парадоксальный юмор, целью которого является не осмеяние недостатков людей, а доброжелательный смех над жизненным, болезненным абсурдом, над грустью человеческого существования. Подобный меланхолический и парадоксальный юмор позволяет поэту смотреть на жизнь, на себя, даже на самого Бога со снисходительной 'улыбкой разума', принципиально лишенной всякой надменности или чувства высокомерия. В отличии от поверхностного восприятия широкой публики, Губерман – тончащий меланхолик, глубокий скептик, смеющийся сквозь слезы. Ибо так учит русско-еврейская традиция, глубоко проникшая в российскую словесность: когда слишком грустно на душе, остается лишь смех.

The Presence of Absence. Longing and Nostalgia in Post-Soviet Art and Literature

Irina Marchesini (University of Bologna)

> Che cosa avete contro la nostalgia, eh? È l'unico svago che resta per chi è diffidente verso il futuro, l'unico.
>
> Paolo Sorrentino, *La grande bellezza*[1]

> Reconciliation is to understand both sides; to go to one side and describe the suffering being endured by the other side, and then go to the other side and describe the suffering being endured by the first side.
>
> Thich Nhat Hanh

1. *Memory, Identity and Post-Soviet Studies*

Do we have an obligation to remember? Pondering this philosophical problem in *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit (2002: 71) argues that from a strictly moral point of view, we have no particular obligation to remember, yet ethically speaking a duty to remember does exist. In his view, memory, or shared history, serves as a constitutive element in the formation of human societies. Indeed, Margalit considers "communities of memory" to be even more significant than nations themselves. A conceptualization of memory as the mortar necessary for cementing human relationships may also be found in Jeffrey Blustein's *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Blustein 2008), which focuses on memory's relation to personal and collective identity. The problems of memory and identity that Margolit and Blustein tackle seem particularly crucial in the swiftly changing context of contemporary Russian society, where it is now possible to witness a process of reconstruction and re-creation very similar to that typically occuring in individuals after the experience of trauma or shock – which is exactly what the collapse of the Soviet Union was, in diverse and often contradictory ways, for many of its citizens.

While the Holocaust and World War II have obviously been the inspiration and point of departure for much of trauma theory's development, we can also use the concept of 'calamitous historical events' more generally, extending it even to the collapse of totalitarian regimes[2]. In the last decade, in fact, many

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[1] "What do you have against nostalgia, huh? It's the only fun left for those who have no faith in the future, the only one" (*The Great Beauty*).

[2] The reports collected by two leading scholars in the field of trauma studies, Jacob D. Lindy and Robert J. Lifton, for example, demonstrate the effects of political violence on the populations of post-Communist Hungary, Germany, Romania, Russia,

scholars addressing issues of post-Soviet identity have described it as the reappropriation – or sometimes misappropriation or even negation – of traumatic memory. In the words of Evgeny Dobrenko and Andrey Shcherbenok, "the notion of trauma has great potential for research into contemporary Russian culture" (Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011: 78).

Still more frequently, scholarly debate on the process of historical change in Russia has emphasized the equivocal character of the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet state. While Dobrenko and Shcherbenok (*Ibidem*) hold that "the analysis of the Soviet legacy can provide invaluable insight into contemporary Russia, political, economic, and cultural transformations notwithstanding", they also describe the relationship between contemporary Russian culture and the Soviet past as "characterized by profound ambiguity" (*Ivi*: 77). In our view, such ambiguity relates directly to the general sense of trauma that the collapse of the Soviet Union and its 'great narrative' arguably provoked as well as to what Sarah Elizabeth Mendelson and Theodore P. Gerber have called "collective amnesia about the past" and "absent memory" (Mendelson, Gerber 2005: 84)[3]. Thus, the Soviet legacy cannot be ignored. In the words of Dobrenko and Shcherbenok,

> two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian society and culture are still dependent on their Soviet heritage, which is upheld and rejected, often simultaneously, in practically all fields of symbolic production, from state ideology to architecture, from elite literature to mass culture. Russian culture remains suspended between the historical narratives of the emergence of the new nation from the ruins of the USSR and the Soviet cultural legacy, whose models are no longer functional;

Croatia, and Armenia (Lindy, Lifton 2001). While they do not specifically deal with the fall of political regimes, they exploit the German concept of '*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*' or 'coming to terms with the past' to provide very useful insights on how trauma can be defined. If, as they argue, traumas occur "in great sudden breaks with the past" (*Ivi*: 216), much of history itself can be considered trauma (*Ivi*: 213). In their view, the concept of trauma "operates on many levels and its complexities defy our ordinary categories. It lacks the structure and limits of a discrete disaster, such as an earthquake. Natural disasters have something approaching an end point: the effects reverberate over years or even decades, but the catastrophe itself is over", while trauma "is on the order of a sustained catastrophe that never goes away, of threats, dangers, and pressures towards betrayal that become perpetual. The pressures are both acute and chronic, both individual and societal. For the individual person caught up in these traumatic historical forces, fear and pained ambivalence to the regime are transmitted from the moment of birth and before and extend throughout the life cycle" (*Ibidem*). For a counter-argument on the application of trauma studies to post-Soviet reality, see Blacker *et al*. 2013; on the connection between trauma studies and post-Soviet studies, see Abbott 2007, Bridger, Pine 2013; on trauma studies, see also Antze, Lambek 1996, Caruth 1996 and 2003, Herman 1997, Minow 1998, Wiesenthal 1998.

[3] For a general discussion of collective memory, see Zerubavel 1995, Fridja 1997; on memory and its public absence in contemporary Russia, see also Maier 2001, Zhurchenko 2007, Etkind A. 2012.

> the result is the instability of its ideological symbolic order and a palpable traumatic void, which its subjects fill with their incoherent, emotional, and ideologically charged interventions. This suspension between the traumatic experiences of the past, both remote and quite recent, and an underdeveloped and unstable narrative about it, are at the core of contemporary Russian culture, marking it as an inherently post-Soviet culture (Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011: 77)[4].

Alexander Etkind (2009: 193) has emphasized the difficulty of properly understanding the nature of both memory and trauma associated with the fall of the Soviet Union. According to Etkind (*Ibidem*):

> Many speculate about collective nostalgia and cultural amnesia, or notice the 'cold' character of the memory of Soviet terror. In my view, surveys reveal the complex attitudes of a people who retain a vivid memory of the Soviet terror but are divided in their interpretation of this memory.

Stressing the inadequacy of communal memorial practices in today's Russia, "a land where millions remain unburied, the dead return as the undead" (*Ivi*: 182), Etkind avers that:

> While the state is led by former KGB officers who avoid giving public apologies, building monuments, or opening archives, the struggling civil society and the intrepid reading public are possessed by the unquiet ghosts of the Soviet era. Haunted by the unburied past, post-Soviet culture has produced perverse memorial practices that are worthy of detailed study (*Ibidem*).

Russia's failure to fully address collective memory might seem surprising in light of claims that "ecstasy of suffering" and "erotization of the wound", features that find their ideal representation in Dostoevsky's Marmeladov, are general characteristics of the Russian cultural system, as Dragan Kujundzic (2000: 905) rightly maintains[5]. Following Kujundzic, we should today be witnessing the performance of multiple autopsies on the corpse of the Soviet past. As will become apparent, Russian culture's relationship with this 'object' (the Soviet past) is still unstable, however, and in evident need of additional 'negotiation'.

This article will make use of analytical instruments from the field of trauma and memory studies to envision 'trauma' not as an isolated event, but as a process of collective reinterpretation – as suggested by the framework of Freudian trauma theory. We will also further explore the contemporary debate on the role

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[4] Lisa Ryoko Wakamiya (2011: 136), reflecting on the intersections of and boundaries between post-Soviet studies and trauma studies, contends that the former "has derived strength from its analyses of diverse and subjective responses to the experience of oppression", but these "are not the sole focus of post-Soviet scholarship", since scholars "have instead looked to the interaction between degrees of agency and Foucauldian formulations of self-regulation".

[5] On this tendency towards emotive display, see also Boym 1995 and Tröbst 2004.

of memory in post-Soviet culture and society by responding to several crucial questions. Can nostalgia itself be considered a form of reconciliation with a traumatic past? If so, what type of nostalgia – in terms of Svetlana Boym's distinction between the 'restorative' and 'reflective' varieties (Boym 2001: 49-55) – performs this function? And what role do art and literature play in this process? We take as case studies a series of works by Ilya [Il'ja] Kabakov, Sergej Volkov, Evgenij Fiks, and Andrej Astvacaturov, including both installations and literary texts. The installations of Ilya Kabakov function to preserve relics of Soviet material culture as modern 'Russian (Soviet?) arks'. In the words of Svetlana Boym (1999), his

> fragmented 'total installations' become a cautious reminder of gaps, compromises, embarrassments, and black holes in the foundation of any utopian and nostalgic edifice. Ambiguous nostalgic longing is linked to the individual experience of history. Through the combination of empathy and estrangement, ironic nostalgia invites us to reflect on the ethics of remembering[6].

The artistic reflections on Soviet society produced by Sergej Volkov and poignantly expressed in the 1990 installation *Art Warehouse,* demonstrate a similar attempt to come to terms with the Soviet legacy's influence – as does *Adopt Lenin* (2008), the more recent installation of Evgenij Fiks and, in the field of prose literature, Andrej Astvacaturov's *Skunskamera* (2011).

2. *What is Nostalgic about Nostalgia? Post-Soviet Identity, Nostalgia, and Art*

Clearly, understandings of the past evolve and can vary widely[7]. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey Alexander (2004) suggests that collective trauma is continuously created through discursive (re)interpretation. A recent issue of *Slavonica* edited by Dobrenko and Shcherbenok (2011) variously illuminates the discursive instability that pervades post-Soviet Russia's visions of the past. An article in that issue by Oksana Sarkisova and Olga Shevchenko analyzes materials such as private photos from family albums to demonstrate the contradictory quality of Thaw Era visual narratives about the violent suppression of popular unrest in 1962 (cf. Sarkisova, Shevchenko 2011). In particular, they identify an oscillation between the nostalgic and the traumatic, which they take to be a characteristic feature of these narratives. In "This is Not a Pipe: Soviet Historical Reality and Spectatorial Belief in Perestroika and Post-Soviet Cinema", Shcherbenok (2011: 155) underlines the glaring incongruities found in post-Soviet cinematic representations of the past:

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6 On Kabakov, see also Boym 2001: 309-326.

7 See also Alexander 2003.

> as in Magritte's painting, post-Soviet Russian films represent 'the pipe' – Soviet historical reality – and add a contradictory dimension to this representation, which, in the final analysis, only helps sustain its believability.

Paradoxically, cinema's false representations of the past have helped to bridge the gap between pro-Soviet and anti-Soviet attitudes in contemporary Russia through what Shcherbenok (*Ibidem*) calls "sutured belief", a powerful term that refers to the internally divided self of the 'new' Russian, which results from "a split belief that disavows its incompleteness and seems to be the only possible mode of belief in the conditions of the ideological havoc of post-Soviet Russia" (Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011: 82). According to Kevin Platt (2009: 4), the ambivalent and often incoherent character of post-Soviet culture derives from the fact that its very essence is 'constructedness' itself:

> the revolutionary termination of the Soviet epoch and inauguration of a new era – whether by means of a momentary leap into the future, an extended passage through a period of "hybridity", or overlap of incommensurate social worlds, or even through a less definite period of incoherent post-Soviet civilizational 'hangover' as in Oushakine's proposal[8] – was always as much of an ideological fiction as is any proclaimed revolution in human history.

Within the frame of the current and rather confused debate on post-Soviet identity, the concept of *nostalgia* can be helpful for describing a more general attitude towards the shared re-appropriation of a common (Soviet) past that continues to exert strong influence on constructions of contemporary Russian identity. The concept of nostalgia itself, of course, has multiple shadings that must be taken into account. Ilya [Il'ja] Kalinin (2011), who has written extensively on the rhetorical use of nostalgia in politics, explains how the appeal to the Soviet past contained in Dmitrij Medvedev's modernization program was indispensable for his project – which paradoxically aimed to eliminate the traces of its own political implications. In Kalinin's view, Medvedev exploited both the negative and positive potential of nostalgic attachment. Nostalgia's negative side, he believes, provided the energy necessary to cleave the past from the present. And we can agree that "nostalgia always involves (explicitly or implicitly) drawing a contrast between the present and the past" (Blustein 2008: 10), although, as Theodore Adorno reminds us, "the past one wishes to evade is still so intensely alive" (Adorno 1986: 115). The positive side of Medvedev's nostalgia, Kalinin holds, may be seen in his rhetorical reliance on the relationship between 'fathers' and 'sons' that is so emphasized in Russian culture. Widespread perception of such familial ties as 'natural' helped to remove any lingering sense of political connection with the Soviet epoch – leading to the paradoxical result that the earlier Soviet period was ultimately felt to be politically 'neutral'. In short, this diffusion of familial paradigms assisted in the retrospective erasure of the Soviet Union's political significance:

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[8] Platt makes reference here to the conclusions reached by Serguei Oushakine 2000.

> we are no longer dealing with nostalgia and the desire for a return of the lost object, but with a politics whose objective is the positive recoding of nostalgia for the Soviet past into a new form of Russian patriotism for which 'the Soviet' lacks any historical specificity, but is rather seen as part of a broadly conceived and comically heterogeneous cultural legacy (Kalinin 2011: 157).

More recently, Kalinin (2013: 255-256) has characterized Medvedev's program as harking back to the past for very specific reasons. By linking the present with the past, Medvedev effectively suggests both that the past should be evaluated positively and that it provides the source of a sense of tradition:

> both nostalgic and modernizing drives derive from dissatisfaction with the present [...]. The Soviet past, which [Medvedev's, I.M.] project claims to overcome, remains a major source of the energy that is necessary for starting the engine of modernization. There is thus a component of nostalgia in this modernization, a particular sense of a break between the present and past that endows the past with a positive value. Add to this a nationalist mindset that valorizes the notion of continuity between an idealized past and an unfulfilled present, and the result is a glorious tradition that invites its heirs to assert their place within it, thus becoming part of the historical nation.

Using somewhat more clinical language, Dobrenko and Shcherbenok (2011: 88) observe that "Medvedev's rhetoric can be viewed as an attempt to replace the psychoanalytic traumatic fixation upon the irremediable loss of the Soviet Union with the thoroughly discursive and therefore more malleable traumatic structure which, indeed, can be resolved in the future".

In short, Medvedev and the Russian state have both integrated cultural trauma into the ongoing construction of a national narrative by exploiting the sentiment of nostalgia widely felt among its citizens. Blustein (2008: 10) warns of nostalgia's possible dangers in such a context: this is a "highly selective form of remembering and forgetting" that "may distort political and personal, public and private life". At the same time, however, he concedes the value of nostalgia's "antiquarian sense", which "lies in the fact that it gives individuals and peoples a sense of rootedness and historical continuity and in this way comforts them with a sort of existential reassurance", granting life "a meaning and a purpose" (*Ivi*: 8-9). A nostalgic connection with the past is thus essential to the shaping of identity, whether that of a single individual or of an entire nation.

Nostalgia in contemporary Russia is not confined to the political domain alone, of course, but also pervades other social and cultural spheres, including the arts. That art should be understood as particularly germane to political inquiry is nothing new: as Schiller (1989: 6) pointed out, "if man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom". Works of art also provide fecund material for theoretical reflection. In the view of Jill Bennett (2005: 150), art not only "might produce thought", but is also "engaged in a synchronous development of theory" itself.

What is the nature of the nostalgia that such art-inspired theoretical reflection brings into being? In Russia today, the visual construction of the Soviet past raises a number of pressing issues relating to how we transmit and communicate memory and trauma, transforming these into problems of narrative. Visual art has thus become a privileged site for the creation of social memory and for the study of the same.

3. *Remembering Just After the Fall: Ilya Kabakov and Sergej Volkov*

In recent years, the work of Ilya Kabakov has been widely scrutinized from various points of view. Harriet Murav (2011), for example, tackles the issue of Kabakov's artistic production from the perspective of history – and especially Jewish history – to reveal evidence of trauma in his poetics. Taking as her example the 2004-2005 installation entitled *The Teacher and the Student: Charles Rosenthal and Ilya Kabakov,* she identifies Kabakov's use of blank spots, or lacunae, as symbolic of a Soviet failure to address Jewish history. She also infers from his work the posing of another question, a perhaps still wider and more general interrogative concerning Russia's identity, namely to what extent are we actually able today to tell a story about ourselves and our (Soviet) past? It is precisely by means of reflecting on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym (2001: 324) argues, that we can begin to formulate an answer about our capacity to understand the past. In her view, Kabakov's "total installations reveal a nostalgia for utopia, but they return utopia to its origins – not in life, but in art" (*Ibidem*)[9]. Boym's discussion of Kabakov's most important artworks – *The Toilet*, *The Life of the Flies* and the *Lost Civilization* – addresses both the general link between Kabakov's poetics and nostalgia, and the still more potent sense of nostalgia that emerges when we examine the specific objects which constitute his installations (*Ivi*: 313-322). These objects, together with white (blank) spots representing their absence, function as important nodes in both the overarching structure of the installation and in the narrative it engenders. In her analysis of *The Toilet*, for example, Boym (*Ivi*: 317) observes that "Kabakov took great care in arranging the objects in the inhabited rooms around the toilet", deploying these as "metonymical memory triggers of everyday Soviet life". This use of things to provoke memory is precisely what requires investigation in a study of nostalgia, for objects implicitly produce stories and even though the objects in Kabakov's installations are sometimes mere reproductions, rather than the 'real' things themselves, they tell the stories of past, shared lives and therefore are significant and in some degree 'real'. Their importance lies less in their design, than in their erstwhile function. Spectators' feelings are stirred by remembering the use or simply the former presence of these objects in Soviet-era homes, by the sight of these silent testimonies of

[9] On the concept of the 'total installation', cf. Kabakov 2008.

the past – a past that is simultaneously both private and collective. The spectators' emotions are thus linked to a particular type of nostalgia: not 'restorative nostalgia' in Boym's terminology, but a more indefinite feeling that has to do with the lure of past experience: "a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams" (*Ivi*: XV). Moreover, it is in these objects themselves that public and private nostalgias blend. Indeed, due to mass production, these objects were uniform and thus identical for all Soviets. At the same time, however, they were also personal because, despite their apparent sameness, they became the 'personal' property of individuals or family units after being purchased. Moreover, as is widely known, if an object broke or did not work properly during the Soviet period, people did not discard it, but instead adjusted it or used it for another purpose. Objects were thus modified to undergo a second, and more profound, process of personalization (or even privatization). Paradoxically, the presence in Kabakov's installations (most notably in *Monument to a Lost Civilization*) of objects from everyday life shows the absence of a past for which the spectator longs – not because he or she wants the return of the Soviet Union, but because this past is intertwined with dimensions of memory, childhood, and youth.

As a specific art form, the installation would seem to overcome many of the difficulties inherent to representing memory, since it gives audiences the concrete possibility to see (and, in some cases, even to touch) physical objects that were part of the Soviet past. As Boym rightly asserts, "[Kabakov's] installations offer an interactive narrative that could not exist without the viewer" (*Ivi*: 313). The rich potential of artistic installations to represent memory is exploited by many contemporary artists in their constructions of the Soviet past. A similar approach to objects and to their significance as potential generators of narrative can be found, for example, in Sergej Volkov's *Art Warehouse*. This installation from 1990 presents the viewer with dozens of objects that directly recall the Soviet past – such as, *Belomorkanal* brand cigarettes (*papirosy*) – all of which are sealed in large glass jars placed on a series of metal shelves. These jars strongly resemble the omnipresent Soviet *banki* that held various homemade preparations, both salty and sweet. As scholar Nancy Ries (1997: 10) recalls, in Soviet homes "in the fall, a line of jars of home-preserved apples and currants ran along the back of the counter, and on the top of the refrigerator sat huge jars full of salted cucumbers and home-stewed whole tomatoes". In the context of Volkov's installation, these jars inevitably radiate a particularly ambivalent aura. Indeed, viewers recognize them as familiar objects, but in an unexpected context of use, insofar as such glass containers were normally employed to preserve and store food, rather than objects. Nonetheless, precisely because they are estranged from their standard use, these jars with their bizarre evocation of the domestic sphere catch the public's attention even more forcefully[10]. Making direct reference to a shared, familiar past, these jars stimulate nostalgia in the viewer, again

[10] For further information on the domestic sphere during the Soviet era, see Kelly 2011. On housing as a key object of investigation in the field of 'Everyday Life Studies',

as an indefinite, fleeting feeling. Furthermore, the audience's expectations are twice confounded, since Volkov places his jars in an unusual environment, i.e. not a kitchen, but a structure typical of an industrial warehouse.

In the 1994 installation *Dusty Models* (architectural clay, dust, glass, wood), Volkov takes the discourse of nostalgia even further. This crossroads of metaphysics and conceptualism allows the spectator to admire a series of dusty objects placed for preservation in a vacuum flask of greenish laboratory glass. While some of these items are architectural[11], others – such as a sofa – belong mainly to the domestic domain. The 'dusty technique' developed by the artist aims to show the viewer something that does not exist – or that will soon disappear – by capturing and fixing the object in the moment before it actually vanishes.

The choice of both Volkov and Kabakov to focus on the domestic environment is more than random coincidence: as Jean Baudrillard argued in *The System of Objects* (1968), it is exactly this specific environment that tends to reflect and structure not only core cultural values, but also political beliefs. Commenting on the semiotic significance of household objects, Baudrillard (1996: 22) even goes so far as to suggest the need for a "sociology of interior design": insofar as personhood is determined by our interaction with domestic commodities, "'man the interior designer' is neither an owner nor a mere user – rather, he is an active engineer of atmosphere".

4. *Contemporary Nostalgia for a Soviet Past (I): Yevgeniy Fiks and "Critical" Nostalgia*

Yevgeniy [Evgenij] Fiks's *Adopt Lenin* (2008) generally follows the direction taken by the works of Kabakov and Volkov in the 1990s, with the addition of some new elements. For this project, Fiks purchased a large quantity of Lenin memorabilia, spending roughly $5000 on busts, statuettes, posters and photographs of Lenin that he bought both online and in Moscow shops. All of these items were part of an installation on display in September and October 2008 at Winkleman Gallery in New York. As was the case for Kabakov, the audience was indispensable for *Adopt Lenin* to function: indeed, the public was even invited to 'adopt' one of the exhibited objects and to take it home for free. In order to seal this transaction, the participants signed a legal contract preventing them from putting these memorabilia back on the market. These contracts themselves became part of the installation as well, thus ostensibly precluding the future circulation of the same objects.

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see Goffman 1978; Certeau 1984; Low, Chambers 1989; Gupta, Ferguson 2001; Miller 2001; Highmore 2002a and 2002b; Lefebre 2002; Shove 2003; García-Mira *et al.* 2005.

[11] The exhibit includes, for example, a wooden tower and a pedestal.

Fiks's work and the modalities of interaction that it provoked raise several questions about the interrelationship between the Soviet past, Russian identity, and nostalgia. First of all, why Lenin? In a 2010 interview, Fiks claimed that

> Lenin is a "no-no" of contemporary Russian discourse. After Komar and Melamid and perestroika, the name Lenin enters post-Soviet discourse only ironically or with humorous connotations. In the post-Soviet era, Lenin is a clown, maybe a revolutionary clown. The word "Lenin" since perestroika could have only been read as a joke. So "Lenin" is another way of saying the "post-Soviet trauma" (Fiks 2010).

Hence, here and in other installations dedicated to Lenin[12], Fiks probes the legacy of the Soviet past in shaping contemporary Russian identity, focusing on aspects of history that are often neglected or otherwise considered to be secondary. In his programmatic essay *Responsibilities of the Post-Soviet Artist*, Fiks (2007) explains the importance of salvaging the neglected sides of Russian (and Soviet) identity:

> the post-Soviet artist must assume responsibility for the Soviet history. An overwhelming sense of denial of Soviet history as a way of dealing with the (post) Soviet trauma is perhaps one of the most striking symptoms of the post-Soviet condition. While the pre-Revolutionary history is being discussed at length and with much interest, the Soviet history is almost totally repressed. As the last ten years have shown, however, this repression and denial have not served the post-Soviet subject well. Reclaiming and activist engagement with Soviet history can be a much more effective way of dealing with the (post) Soviet trauma. In no way, however, am I suggesting that the post-Soviet artist should have a rosy nostalgic view of Soviet times and be affirmative of the excesses of that period. The post-Soviet artist should also be careful to avoid exploitation and commodification of the Soviet past. I'm advocating quite the opposite – a critical nostalgia, where work of memory becomes a tool for exposing excesses of both the past and present indiscriminately.

Fiks's very emphasis on Lenin undoubtedly represents a move away from the general post-Soviet trend that focuses on Stalin. As Dobrenko and Shcherbenok note,

> the person who creates history becomes the 'father of the nation' – so the father of the Soviet nation was Stalin (not Lenin!), which is why post-Soviet culture, with its narratively nonenveloped pain, is so enduringly interested in Stalinism (Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011: 78).

Moreover, we might argue that Fiks examines precisely such "commodification" itself by concentrating on material objects and, through them, political aspects of the Soviet past that are manifest in these diverse representations of one

[12] An earlier installation by Fiks was *Lenin for Your Library?* (2005), a display of replies received from the world's major corporations upon receiving a copy of *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism* by V.I. Lenin as a donation to their corporate libraries.

of its political leaders. Although politically charged, Lenin memorabilia is nonetheless comprised of objects from standard daily life that were easy to find in Soviet homes and thus recall not only political history, but also a bygone dimension of domesticity that inevitably arouses feelings of nostalgia in the viewer.

5. *Contemporary Nostalgia for a Soviet Past (II): Andrej Astvacaturov and "Sensory" Nostalgia*

Nostalgia relating to the Soviet home and household can also be found in contemporary Russian literature, a case in point being Andrej Astvacaturov's fictionalized autobiography *Skunskamera* (2011)[13], permeated with references to objects whose poignant effect on the sensory system is stressed. Such passages provoke an immediate emotional reaction in the reader, the five senses being memory triggers *par excellence*. Particularly striking is the capacity of cold beer to cause nostalgic reflection:

> всякий раз, когда я подношу к губам холодную бутылку пива или огромный запотевший бокал с золотистым напитком, резкий запах бродильни ударяет мне в ноздри. И я с горечью понимаю, что весь этот веселый пивной мир исчез навсегда. Золотые кольца, потерявшие над людьми власть, унесены яростной лавой 1990-х (Astvacaturov 2011: 11-12)[14].

The same image – a cold bottle of beer – is reiterated throughout the entire book, reappearing, for example in the vignette entitled *Scents of Memory* (*Zapaxi vospominanij*), where, again,

> всякий раз, когда я подношу к губам холодную бутылку пива или огромный запотевший бокал с золотистым напитком, резкий запах бродильни ударяет мне в ноздри" (*Ivi*: 19-20)[15].

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[13] The novel's title is a play on the name *Kunstkamera*, a Petersburg anthropological and ethnographical museum that was founded by Peter the Great in 1727 to house his collection of curiosities. Astvacaturov substitutes '*kunst*' with '*skuns*', the Russian word for '*skunk*', thereby suggesting that an olfactory dimension be added to the other types of memory (visual and tactile) engaged by this institution's collection. For a very different example of personal history from the late Soviet and early post-Soviet eras, see Sergej Šargunov's *Kniga bez fotografij* (*Book Without Photographs*, 2011). Although stylistically and formally dissimilar to Astvacaturov's text, this book, too, demonstrates the overwhelming presence of nostalgia as a motif in contemporary Russian literature.

[14] "Each time I raise to my lips a cold bottle of beer or a huge sweaty goblet holding a golden drink, the sharp odor of fermentation strikes my nostrils. And I understand with bitterness that that entire jolly, beery world has disappeared forever. The golden rings, having lost their power over people, were carried off by the furious lava of the 1990s".

[15] "Each time I raise to my lips a cold bottle of beer or a huge misty goblet holding a goldish drink, the sharp odor of fermentation strikes my nostrils".

As a result,

> в теплой глубине памяти его продолжением из ленивого марева проступают дома [...], становясь явственными, будто многие месяцы, а то и годы, они ждали своего часа вырваться на свободу. Смутные постройки напрягаются, уплотняются каменной тяжестью, выпрямляются во весь рост (*Ivi*: 19-20)[16].

Throughout the novel, sensory channels perform a prominent function in activating memory. But instead of "snivelling nostalgia" (to quote Astvacaturov), we are confronted here with a feeling that differs from the connection to childhood that can be represented by general, blurred archetypes, or primordial imagery. Instead, Astvacaturov's writing emphasizes the specific and concrete 'ingredients' of a culture that is distinctly Soviet, such as buildings, food, and drink (especially beer). Indeed, his reference to "golden rings" implicitly collapses the circle of prestigious medieval towns forming the so-called 'Golden Ring' around Moscow, sites of bygone princely power and great historical significance, into alcoholic beverages in glass bottles – the circular form, the liquid's color, the marks left by these on tabletops. The slippage between these two images becomes more explicit in a subsequent celebration of Soviet-era objects:

> кому-то детство возвращается благоуханной сиренью в тихом саду, дачным домом с мезонином, поварами, готовящими на летней кухне жирных голубей, старыми качелями, голубым крымским Артеком, круизом по Волге вместе с семьей, с мамой, папой и сестрой, непременно, чтоб в ситцевом платье, наконец, автобусной экскурсией по Золотому кольцу. А вот меня пивная река памяти уносит мыслями к теснящим друг друга зданиям возле станции метро и золотому кольцу пивных ларьков, последнему форпосту угасающей империи (*Ivi*: 20)[17].

Like Kabakov, Volkov, and Fiks, Astvacaturov bears witness to the ambivalent blending of past and present as post-Soviets make sense of the Soviet legacy. His awareness of Petersburg's shifting position in the popular imaginary has been noted by Catriona Kelly (2014b: 61): the city's residents are growing "used now to actually living in 'St Petersburg' rather than dreaming about the place", she writes, nonetheless, "in the words of the writer Andrei Astvacaturov,

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16 "In the warm depths of this memory, like the extension of a lazy mirage, apartment buildings become visible [...], and grow distinct as if they had waited many months or even years for their moment to burst into freedom. These dim constructions tense and thicken with the heaviness of stone, they straighten up to full height".

17 "To some childhood returns as fragrant lilacs in a quiet garden, a dacha home with a mezzanine, cooks preparing fat squabs in the summer kitchen, old swings, the Crimea's azure Pioneer camp, a family cruise on the Volga, with Mama, Papa, and Sister (in the obligatory chintz dress), and, lastly, in the form of a bus trip around the Golden Ring. As far as I'm concerned, the beery river of memory carries my thoughts off towards buildings that are crowded up against one another beside the metro station and towards the golden ring of beer stalls, the last outpost of a dying empire".

'The city's shinier now and better-groomed but it hasn't become the old Petersburg and at the same time we've kind of lost touch with the Leningrad side'"[18].

Within late Soviet culture, nostalgia had been expressed in literature by the *derevenščiki*, or writers of 'village prose', advocates of rural life who enjoyed great popularity in the 1970s. Philippa Lewis (1976: 568) has linked the sentiment of nostalgia embodied in village prose directly to the drastic changes occurring around them, suggesting that their "nostalgia and desire to pause to evaluate what has been left behind may be particularly acute in Soviet society since the changes have been so rapid and drastic". Astvacaturov's writing illustrates a similar response to surrounding reality: it, too, reflects on the way that Russians, especially those who belonged to the last Soviet generations, relate to the past that abruptly crashed to a halt. As Astvacaturov himself put it at the Edinburgh World Writers' Conference (2012), "literature is a membrane resonating with public opinion and culture".

6. *Conclusions. Nostalgia as a Form of Reconciliation?*

In coming to terms with trauma, not only does history itself perform an anesthetic function, but political authority, manipulating history for its own ends in order to shape Russian post-Soviet identity, follows suit. As Dobrenko and Shcherbenok put it:

> The past is the experience of pain, the trauma of experience; history is anesthesia, the narrative that is produced by power and envelops this pain, thereby creating a nation that can be defined as a community of people united by shared pain and the contract with the power that plays the role of anesthesiologist (Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011: 77-78).

In this context, the role of the artist assumes a quite different form: rather than offering sedatives to numb trauma 'patients', the artist goes to the heart of the problem, both literally and figuratively. He or she[19] stimulates in the post-Soviet viewer conflicting and contradictory sentiments towards the experienced

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[18] On Astvacaturov's relationship to the city, see also Kelly 2014a, especially p. 117.

[19] A female artist of relevance is Irina Naxova, awarded the 2013 Kandinskij Prize for the work *Untitled*, which uses photographs from her family archive to preserve personal memories of the Soviet past – and particularly of the harsh Stalinist repression that caused her grandfather's death. The artist printed an old black and white photograph on vinyl, and then removed all the faces of the men, and replaced them with red parachute silk. The work is accompanied by the following statement: "'Untitled' is my reckoning with history as comprehended through the history of my family — my grandma, executed grandpa, mom, dad and my past self. This is my attempt to understand the inexplicable state of affairs that has reigned in my country for the last century, and to understand through private imagery how millions of people were erased from history

trauma and towards the viewer's own 'sutured belief' in a reality that, however crude, nonetheless constituted the cradle of national identity. Fiks (2007) has aptly described his own relationship to the legacy of the Soviet bloc as "a love-hate relationship",

> where sentimentalism (including for the promise of the Revolution) is clashing with a sobering coming to terms with the brutal realities of the Soviet era. The legacy of the Soviet bloc is a trauma, which I'm trying to address through compulsive remembering rather than via [the] repressing of those memories. So my relationship to the legacy of the Soviet bloc is about the disruption of historical amnesia which has affected all of us – the self-hating post-Soviets[20].

It is precisely in these contadictory feelings about the harsh past that nostalgia enters the picture. The passage of time has to a certain degree succeeded in removing the sense of suffering connected with several Soviet-era experiences. What remains are memories, both good and bad, which constitute the most important legacy of a past that is both personal and shared, ultimately comprising the identity of both individuals and, consequently, of the community.

Both Margalit (2002: 62) and Blustein (2008: 10) warn of the possible 'risks' connected with nostalgic feeling: sentimentality, a crucial feature of nostalgia, is also morally troubling insofar as it tends to distort reality, usually by idealizing it. Blustein even asserts that "nostalgia is a defect of memory or of memory accuracy: nostalgic memory is not faithful to the past because it distorts it" (*Ibidem*). In his view, nostalgia

> is a kind of escapism, typically escape from the complications and disappointments of the present into an imagined golden past of unalloyed happiness. The past is frozen in time and the nostalgic person either seeks to restore that ideal, usually with disastrous consequences, or broods over the impossibility of doing so (*Ibidem*).

The installations of Kabakov, Volkov and Fiks, and the prose of Astvacaturov belie the assumptions of Blustein and Margalit, however, countering the motives advanced by these scholars for discrediting a nostalgic vision of the past. In point of fact, sentimentality does not necessarily imply desire for the restoration of a past ideal, nor does nostalgia automatically entail diffidence towards the present. These works cause audiences to feel not restorative nostalgia, but a vaguer sense of longing connected to issues of identity, stimulating two interrelated questions: 'who were we (back in the USSR)?' and 'who are

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and happily forgotten; how people have been blinded and their souls destroyed so that they can live without memory and history" (Naxova 2013).

[20] Further exploration of such 'self-hatred', which illustrates a striking affinity with the notion of the 'self-hating Jew', would be particularly interesting. Eliot Borenstein, who considers the 1990s to have seen a momentary loss of national identity (2005; 2008), addressed this topic in a talk given at the University of Virginia in April 2012 (*Soviet Self-Hatred: Sovok, Kitsch, and the Empire of Yokels*).

we (today)?' We can thus isolate a general tendency in both these installations and Astvacaturov's novel: each connects post-Soviet nostalgia primarily to the experience of everyday life, which is in turn made visible and concrete through the presence of tangible objects. These objects function both structurally and semantically: if the viewer can appreciate the aesthetic value of these objects as part of the work, they also serve as 'memory triggers', activating several different feelings, including nostalgia – understood here as an indefinite longing for a past that is not going to return.

This more reflective variety of nostalgia also opens up a possibility of reconciliation with the traumatic past[21], a process that restorative nostalgia does not permit. Indeed, in the case of restorative nostalgia, the clash between past and present necessarily implies a (moral) choice between the two, while the nostalgia found in the works of the artists examined here – and which, we suggest, may be taken to characterize nostalgia in post-Soviet Russia – seems open to compromise and rapprochement with the past. According to Scheper-Hughes (2002: 374),

> reconciliation has emerged as one of the master narratives of the late twentieth century, as individuals and entire nations struggle to overcome the legacies of suffering ranging from rape and domestic violence to collective atrocities of state-sponsored dirty wars, genocides, and ethnic conflicts.

Is the same process taking place in Russia today? It is impossible to answer this question yet, as Russian identity is currently undergoing a serious process of self-evaluation that will probably last for decades. How exactly the contemporary sense of 'suspension' that results from this process might be concluded is unclear: as Dobrenko and Shcherbenok maintain, the very nature of this process

> does not allow for a cutting of the umbilical cord between the Soviet nation of yesterday and the still problematic post-Soviet nation. This is why all strategies of post-Soviet nation-building have stumbled upon the impossibility of creating a coherent historical narrative and the formation of a new national consensus (Dobrenko, Shcherbenok 2011: 77).

Nonetheless, art gives important signals that should not be ignored. Kabakov and Volkov have taken significant steps towards a reevaluation of the 'traumatic' Soviet past as personal and collective memory. Moreover, by focusing on objects themselves, both artists 'force' viewers to think about their own pasts, identities, and feelings. The more recent work of Fiks has gone still further. Indeed, the audience's taking of memorabilia from the *Adopt Lenin* installation could be interpreted as an act of appropriation – that implies in turn a form of reconciliation. The adoption of a Lenin statuette marks the 'return home' of that

[21] Other artistic events on the theme of such reconciliation include brilliant performances such as *Underground Wedding,* staged by Valera and Natasha Cherkashin in the early 1990s in Moscow's Revolutionary Square metro station.

object, which then ceases to be bereft, displaced, and debased into a spectacle aimed at attracting tourists. The concept of "adoption" featured in the installation's English-language title derives from the Latin *ăd* and *optāre* ('*optāre*' signifying 'to opt' or 'to choose'). Reconciliation with the past thus becomes a choice, an active choice for (partial) closure that enables an individual to 'move on'.

Nostalgia is a symptom of our age, as Boym (2001: XVI) rightly asserts. Nostalgia is also an integral part of contemporary Russian society, particularly for those who once lived in the Soviet Union, and who now live in its aftermath, in the aftermath of what might even be considered a morally unacceptable past. The appeal of reflective nostalgia seems to emphasize the uniqueness of the Soviet character, now irremediably lost[22]. One consequence of the fall of the Iron Curtain and the collapse of the Soviet Union has been a sentiment of bewilderment, particularly in cultural terms, that has given birth to the 'mythologization of a vanished identity' and now seems to constitute the single most salient trait of post-Soviet society. The problem of defining Russian national identity, which is almost as old as Russia itself, has become particularly agonizing in the last twenty years. In the words of Muscovite novelist Zinovy Zinik (2005: 18): "Russians don't know any longer who and what they are and therefore they are resentful of any attempt to define them". The loss of Soviet national identity issues from the disappearance of the great Leviathan that was the USSR:

> During the last decade the entire Communist universe, like a Soviet Atlantis, disappeared from the map of the world and sank into oblivion. We are no longer sure what country under the name of Russia we are dealing with. It is still a fictitious entity, even its geographical borders are still questionable, its durability as a state in doubt... Even its language was switched to the foreign Volapuk, embracing its marketink, kholdink and body-bildink as part of the modern Russian vocabulary (*Ibidem*).

The sharp contrast between clear Soviet-era perceptions of identity and post-Soviet uncertainty about the same becomes even more dramatic if we consider how the Politburo controlled and cultivated Soviet national identity through an emphasis on conflict with Western countries and the importance and superiority of the Soviet state. The return to similar values, now seen as an alternative to a globalized and depersonalized world, is particularly noticeable today. Interestingly, these feelings often involve nostalgic youth, a generation lacking direct familiarity with the Soviet era. A study by Peter Baker and Susan Glasser illustrates the younger generation's interest in the Soviet past by quoting a teenager named Tanya:

> When [Tanya's teacher, I.M.] divided her students into sections and asked for opinions on the revolution and bloody civil war that had followed, Tanya huddled

[22] On the question of Russian identity, see also Chubais 1998 and Franklin, Widdis 2004; on the crisis of post-Soviet identity, see Fedotova 2003, Piontkovsky 2006, Berezkin 2012, Urjutova 2012.

> with one group of girls to pronounce the Bolsheviks a success. The results were positive," she said. "The Bolsheviks concentrated the entire country in their hands. They had concrete ideas, concrete goals, and concrete plans for the development of this society" (Baker, Glasser 2005: 355).

It would be fascinating to further investigate if – and how – nostalgia is present in younger generations, i.e. those who were born from 1991 on, who never came into contact with the Soviet Union, but who have experienced it through the various filters represented by their families, by society, and by its institutions – mediators who tell very diverse stories about the past depending upon their own points of view. Is it possible to be nostalgic towards an idea or an ideal, or even someone else's ideal, towards a (past) reality that one never actually experienced? Research on this problem – and on the problem of (post-traumatic) identity in general – will perhaps be furthered by provocative new studies conducted at the University of Zurich's Brain Research Institute that demonstrate a startling fact: the behavioural and metabolic alterations produced by trauma affect subjects' progeny up to the second generation (cf. Mansuy *et al*. 2014)[23].

Резюме

Ирина Маркезини

Присутствие отсутствия. Тоска и ностальгия в искусстве и литературе постсоветского периода

Целью данного исследования является изучение 'явления' ностальгии по советской эпохе в современном российском обществе. С целью оценки различных форм, посредством которых проявляется тоска, анализ касается как особого жанра современного искусства – инсталляции (в частности произведений Ильи Кабакова, и Сергея Волкова, Евгения Фикса), так и современной литературы (в основном прозы Андрея Аствацатурова). С помощью таких средств, как визуальные исследования (*visual studies*) и теория травмы (*trauma studies*), рассматривается связь между визуальной составляющей произведения искусства и репрезентацией тоски, памяти, материальной культуры. Сопоставление с художественной литературой выявляет значительную роль, которую чувство "задумчивой" тоски-ностальгии (в понимании С. Бойм, 2001) играло и играет в формировании постсоветского самосознания россиян.

[23] In her recent book on Holocaust testimonies, Raffaella Di Castro (2008: 21 ff.) argues that trauma produces effects up to the *third* generation.

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This book examines the feeling that we often refer to as 'nostalgia' from the perspective of writers and artists located on the (imperial, Soviet, and Post-Soviet) periphery of Russian culture who regard the center of the culture from which they have been excluded with varying degrees of longing and ambivalence. The literary and artistic texts analyzed here have been shaped by these author's ruminations on social and psychological marginalization, a process that S. Boym has called 'reflective nostalgia' and that the authors of this volume also refer to as 'toska'.

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