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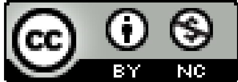

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Chapter IB

Language, History, Ideology: Tsvetaeva, Remizov

Bol'she, chem russkomu—vselenskomu skazochniku i bol'she, chem skazochniku—vselenskomu serdtsu: Alekseiu Mikhailovichu Remizovu (tishaishemu)—vse-taki prozevannomu sovremennikami!

A dar—ot sud'by

(To someone who is more than a Russian storyteller—he is the universe's storyteller; and more than a storyteller—he is the universe's heart: to Aleksei Mikhailovich Remizov (the Meek), nevertheless overlooked by his own contemporaries!

And his gift came from his fate)

—Marina Tsvetaeva

More than the admiration of one writer for another emanates from Tsvetaeva's inscription to the poem "The Swain" (*Molodets*), sent to Aleksei Remizov from Vsendra, near Prague on 15 May 1925.[1] Completed in December 1922, the poem followed "The Tsar-Maiden" (*Tsar'-devitsa*) and "Side Streets" (*Pereulochki*), as the last of the trilogy of pseudo-folk poems with sources from Aleksandr Afanasev's collection.[2] Dedicated to Boris Pasternak with an epigraph from a Russian epic (*bylina*), this poem "of passion and crime, passion and sacrifice" was an apt offering to Remizov, with whom Tsvetaeva became personally acquainted in emigration.[3] The laudatory inscription reveals not only Tsvetaeva's admiration for Remizov, but also her keen sense of the essential attributes of a great writer.

1 The Natalia Kodriansky Collection. Courtesy of Adina Cherlein (a private collection).

2 Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva: The Woman, Her World, and Her Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 142.

3 Ariadna Efron, *Stranitsy vospominanii* (Paris: Lev, 1979), 157; A. Remizov, "Rossiia v pis'menakh," *Blagonamerennyi* 1 (1926): 136.

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Marina Tsvetaeva, 1892-1941

Aleksei Remizov was a leading innovator in prose of the Symbolist period who was called by contemporaries a "magician of the word"; his writing was unmistakably recognizable by its intonation and diction of archaic, folk, and colloquial Russian. With a flourish of hyperbole, Tsvetaeva presents a string of comparative adjectival clauses where each defies the preceding one, hailing Remizov as "more than Russian, a universal storyteller, more than storyteller, a universal heart." This is fitting for Remizov, who was concerned with establishing his metapoetic cosmogony from the very beginning, but also points to a similar focus in Tsvetaeva's own poetry.[4] Another epithet, the archaic Russian superlative adjective "the quiet one" (*tishaishemu*), is a reference to Remizov's historic namesake, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, that signals his identification with the medieval popular religious tradition. However, a dramatic switch from the laudatory tone set by the message so far marks the next phrase in the inscription: Remizov was "missed by contemporaries after all," despite his remarkable attainment. The tribute now appears complete with the ironic acknowledgment of a shared reality, an expression of a growing lack of recognition of their stature and talent, both in the Soviet Union they have left and in the émigré literary community of which they are now a part. Yet the one-line phrase that ends the inscription, "but the gift is from fate" (*a dar—ot sud'by*), offers a swift comeback with the highest mark of real talent that affirms at once its primacy and independence from judgment by contemporaries. This echoes Marc Slonim's description of Tsvetaeva, of her "unshaken certainty of a poet in being unlike anyone else [*nepokhozhest'*], in her gift—from God—from birth—from fate."[5]

As innovators with an archaist bent and a passionate interest in Russia's premodern tradition, Tsvetaeva and Remizov projected the aware-

4 Jerzy Faryno, "Mifologizm i teologizm Tsvetaevoi," *Wiener slawistischer Almanach,* Sonderband 18 (Vienna: Gesellschaft zur Förderung slawistischer Studien, 1985): 242n32.

5 Marc Slonim, "O Marine Tsvetaevoi," *Novyi zhurnal* 100 (1970): 169.

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ness of difference, of being "alone," not understood by conservative émigré critics. The folk sources of "The Swain" and the complementary text of the inscription underscore Tsvetaeva's regard for Remizov as "a living treasury of Russian speech,"[6] a bearer of a shared Muscovite past that becomes all the more important in exile. The place of birth was a significant literary fact in their creative biographies that evolved during a period of artistic flowering of the Russian Silver Age, centered in St. Petersburg. To the predominantly Western orientation of the Symbolists, as native Muscovites, they contributed the Old Russian cultural heritage. And while there is no commemoration of a specific moment of transmission of a "poetic gift," such as Tsvetaeva's offering of her Moscow to Mandelstam or to the senior poets, Blok and Akhmatova, she was undoubtedly familiar with Remizov's work quite early on.[7] It is most likely that Remizov's acclaimed 1906 collection of fairytale miniatures, *Sunwise* (*Posolon'*), an extensive compendium of folk texts with an acknowledgment of sources, became an important model for her abiding interest in Russian folklore, folk culture, and ethnography.[8]

The appropriation of the Moscow heritage held dual importance for Tsvetaeva and Remizov. It offered access to Russia's premodern culture, whose limitless resources of verbal riches could feed their linguistic utopianism: a passionate preference for the "elemental" (*stikhiinyi*) character of the Russian language that exceeds all borders, breaking grammatical or canonical rules. At the same time, this utopianism implied a rebellion against all constraints, including the political; hence their identification with rebels from the turbulent seventeenth-century history of Muscovite Russia—Avvakum, Razin, and Pugachev. I would like to consider briefly the significance of this dual heritage as a mark of Tsvetaeva's poetic stance before 1917, sustained after emigration, focusing on its paradoxical role in the aftermath of the Revolution as reflected in her diary of the revolutionary period, *Omens of the Earth* (*Zemnye primety*). Remizov's chroni-

6 Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 133.

7 See the chapter "Exchanging Gifts: Tsvetaeva and Mandelstam," in Gregory Freidin, *A Coat of Many Colors: Osip Mandelstam and His Mythologies of Self-Presentation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). See also Marina Tsvetaeva, "Nezdeshnii vecher," *Izbrannaia proza v dvukh tomakh. 1917-1937*, ed. A. Sumerkin (New York: Russica Publishers, 1979), vol. 2, 136.

8 Here I agree with Jerzy Faryno, who makes a distinction between folklore, as influence in terms of genre, and that of "popular culture" (*narodnaia kul'tura*) (5).

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cle of the Revolution, *Whirlwind Russia* (*Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*), published in Paris in 1927, will provide a context for this discussion.[9]

Both Remizov and Tsvetaeva responded to the loss of Old Russia with profound shock and grief. First and foremost, the Revolution changed the writers' relationship to language, no longer just a great poetic resource to be mined and cultivated. The elemental force or *stikhiia* of the anarchic, rebellious Russia that had been a great poetic resource now became an actual active threat. I would like to demonstrate how the bond they forged with the deeper linguistic strains of collective cultural memory played a crucial role in their struggle for personal and poetic survival at a time when that memory and the nation were threatened with destruction. Tsvetaeva's diary and Remizov's chronicle are representative of the literary memoir, which emerges during this period as an important genre that allows writers to probe the inherent tension between art, life, and history, and reveals the inevitable conflict between aesthetics and politics.[10] The single dominant device that connects the fragments is the voice of the author/subject, speaking in a range of intonational and lexical registers: syncopated, breathless, emphatic, angry, playful, passionate. The language of the works is performative, where "saying something is doing something recognizable."[11] The recognizable act performed here is that of writing, named and referred to throughout.

As a native Muscovite, Remizov represented Russianness in the Petersburg literary circles once he settled in the capital in 1905. The peasant speech and lore of Old Russian culture was still very much in Moscow where Remizov grew up as a child of a prominent merchant family, exposed to the traditional patriarchal way of life that he observed at home, on the street, and in the neighborhood of St. Andronik Monastery. He memorialized the cultural and linguistic Moscow heritage in his earliest short stories and in his first long novel, *The Pond (Prud*) (1903-1911), as well as in stylized apocryphal legends and fairytales.[12] In an essay written in 1908, Evgenii Anichkov remarked on Remizov's contribution to the Petersburg literary scene as an innovator who introduced the lesser known

9 For a discussion of the chronicle, see Greta N. Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions*, Chapter 6.

10 On literary memoirs of this period, see Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 75-76.

11 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 6.

12 Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions,* especially Chapter 3.

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aspects of traditional Moscow culture and language into contemporary literature, a writer "whose soul remained ancient Muscovite."[13] Conscious of his role, Remizov recalled that when he arrived in St. Petersburg in 1905 as a young writer returning from northern exile, he was "struck by the poverty of vocabulary and incorrect speech."[14] Remizov's role as a carrier of the national tradition was especially evident in his dialogue with Aleksandr Blok, the Westernizer, begun when Remizov first came to Petersburg in 1905 and continued until 1921, the year of Blok's death and Remizov's emigration.[15] This relationship can be seen as a gift exchange similar to that between Tsvetaeva and Mandelstam.

Although Tsvetaeva came from the intelligentsia and grew up in a very different neighborhood, her Moscow was a city of churches and religious wanderers that she evoked in the 1916 Moscow cycle of *Mileposts I (Versty I)*: "the Moscow rabble—the holy fools, thieves and flagellants" (*moskovskii sbrod—iurodivyi, vorovskoi, khlystovskii*).[16] Tsvetaeva believed that the Moscow-Kaluga road, traveled by pilgrims, would also be there for her, should she become weary of the world. And in this city, "rejected by Peter," she would be "happy even in death" (*Gde i mertvoi mne/ Budet radostno*). In a letter to George Ivask, Tsvetaeva asserted that she was the first poet to write this way about Moscow.[17] Her mastery of colloquial and peasant speech was undeniable. According to Simon Karlinsky, Tsvetaeva "confronted the question of her reciprocal connection to various aspects of her native culture" in her cycle *Verses about Moscow* (*Stikhi o Moskve*). He argues that her 1916 collection *Mileposts I* represents "her assertion of her inalienable right to this Muscovite patrimony" and suggests that her first real exposure to colloquial Russian came from her wide travels with Sofia Parnok in 1915, rather than in the Revolution, as Ariadna Èfron claims in her memoirs.[18]

13 Evgenii Anichkov, "Stat'ia o tvorchestve Remizova, A. M," Unpublished typescript. Collection of Y. F. Lavrov, St. Petersburg, Russian National Library, f. 414, n. 15.

14 Aleksei Remizov, *Podstrizhennymi glazami* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1951), 92.

15 See Z. Mints, Introduction to "Perepiska s A. M. Remizovym," in *Aleksandr Blok. Novye materialy i issledovaniia*, vol. 2. *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 92, ed. G. P. Berdnikov et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), 63-142. See also A. Pyman, *The Life of Aleksandr Blok*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978-1980).

16 From the poem "Seven Hills," in *"Stikhi o Moskve."* From *Versty I*, in *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, ed. A. Sumerkin (New York: Russica Publishers, 1980), 218.

17 Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva*, 65.

18 Ibid., 64.

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About a decade later, in emigration, Marc Slonim admired Tsvetaeva's colloquial Russian of a "true Muscovite."[19] And in his 1925 review of "The Swain," Vladislav Khodasevich noted the masterful richness and variety of her vocabulary that included words now rare, thus making the poems difficult to understand for readers "both there and here," because of a widespread forgetting of Russian.[20] Support for Khodasevich's apprehension came from Tsvetaeva herself the following year in the Belgian journal *Well-Intentioned* (*Blagonamerennyi*), where she published "The Flowerbed" (*Tsvetnik*), a compendium of quotations from reviews written during 1925 by the émigré critic, Georgii Adamovich, with her brief acerbic comments. Adamovich deplored the regrettable presence of "pseudo-folk art" style in contemporary writing and criticized Tsvetaeva's "The Swain" as an example of this practice; his claim that he was willing to give credit for her verbal "inventiveness" and his "admiration for her knowledge of the Russian language" belied his intolerance. Tsvetaeva noted this contradiction, along with his telling misquotation of the dedication to Pasternak that, she added, came from a *bylina*, available in any anthology.[21] In the first issue of this journal, Remizov published a chapter from his continued work on *Russia in Writ* (*Rossiia v pis'menakh*), a compilation of Old Russian documents with his commentary (the first volume appeared in Berlin in 1922). Remizov echoed Khodasevich in expressing concern for the state of the Russian language and was emphatic about the importance of knowing its past and reading old documents and texts, indispensable both "in Russia where Russians are living, and abroad, where Russians happen to live."[22]

The passion for the word that Tsvetaeva and Remizov shared included its visual aspect. Writing to Aleksandr Bakhrakh in 1923, Tsvetaeva ex-

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19 Quoted in Veronique Lossky, *Marina Tsvetaeva v zhizni* (Tenafly, NJ: Ermitazh, 1989), 214.

20 V. Khodasevich, "Zametki o stikhakh (M. Tsvetaeva, 'Molodets')," *Poslednie novosti*, 11 June 1925.

21 Marina Tsvetaeva, "Tsvetnik: Zveno za 1925 g. 'Literaturnye besedy' A. Adamovicha," *Blagonamerennyi* 2 (1926): 130, 136. Her essay "Poet o kritike" also appeared here. Both pieces are reprinted in Marina Tsvetaeva, *Izbrannaia proza v dvukh tomakh: 1917-1937*. Tsvetaeva cites other critics who have attacked both her work and Remizov's, and concludes that a study of literary politics of this period will be a task of future historians.

22 Aleksei Remizov, "Rossiia v pis'menakh," *Blagonamerennyi* 1 (1926): 136.

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plained her preference for prerevolutionary orthography: “Let the word also exist graphically” (*Daite slovu i graficheski byt’*).[23] Marc Slonim confirmed her strong dislike for the new orthography, which she unwillingly adopted in 1925.[24] A lover of calligraphy, for whom the visual aspect of the word was indispensable, Remizov not only continued to write in the old orthography, but often used Glagolitic in his handwritten manuscript albums and charters given to members of his mock literary society, *Obezvelvolpal*.[25] To her friends’ surprise, Tsvetaeva also used Glagolitic in a dedication on a copy of *After Russia* (*Posle Rossii*) (1928).[26] In their poetic cosmogony, events and dates have metapoetic significance as they do in popular tradition: both note that they were “marked” from birth; both were born on the day of John the Baptist. She attributed her verbal gifts to this association with Ioann Predtecha.[27] Remizov referred to the day as the holiday of Ivan Kupala, memorialized by Gogol, which marked the Ukrainian midsummer night celebration when magic is released and witches and goblins emerge.[28]

In his essay on Tsvetaeva’s prose, Joseph Brodsky called attention to her “linguistic excess” and noted that Tsvetaeva was closer to folklore, to the stylistics of incantation (*prichitanie*), than other twentieth-century poets.[29] In her 1932 essay “Art in the Light of Conscience” (*Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti*), Tsvetaeva elucidated the importance of folkloric sources for her creativity, verging on transgression, with “The Swain” as a prime example: “Blasphemy. When I am writing my ‘Swain’—vampire’s love for a girl and a girl’s for the vampire—I am not serving any God: I know what God I am serving” (*Koshchunstvo. Kogda ia pishu svoego “Molodtsa”—liubov’ upyria k devushke i devushki k upyriu—ia nikakomu Bogu ne sluzhu: znaiu kakomu Bogu sluzhu*).[30] For Tsvetaeva, “art as temptation is pos-

23 Aleksandr Bakhrakh, “Pis’ma Mariny Tsvetaevoi.” Letter of 30 June 1923. *Mosty* 5 (Munich, 1960): 307.
24 Slonim, “O Marine Tsvetaevoi,” 158.
25 For samples of calligraphy and charters, see *Images of Aleksei Remizov*, ed. Greta N. Slobin (Amherst, MA: Mead Art Museum, 1985).
26 Lossky, Véronique, *Marina Tsvetaeva i Frantsiia: novoe i neizdannoe: doklady simpoziuma “Tsvetaeva-2000”* (Moscow: Russkii put’, 2002), 125.
27 Jerzy Faryno, “Mifologizm i teologizm Tsvetaevoi,” 242, fi. 32.
28 Slobin, *Images of Aleksei Remizov*, 5.
29 Iosif Brodskii, “Predislovie. Poet i proza,” in Marina Tsvetaeva, *Izbrannaia proza*, vol. 1, 12-16.
30 Marina Tsvetaeva, “Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti,” *Izbrannaia proza*, vol. 1, 395.

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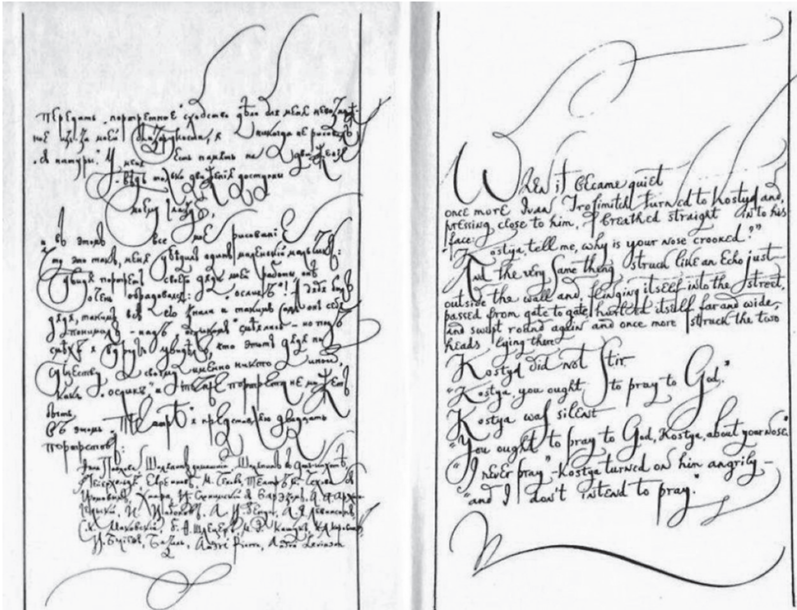
When it became quiet
once more Ivan Trofimitch turned to Kostya and,
pressing close to him, breathed straight into his
face:
"Kostya, tell me, why is your nose crooked?"
And the very same thing struck like an Echo just
outside the wall and, flinging itself into the street,
passed from gate to gate, hurled itself far and wide,
and swept round again and once more struck the two
heads lying there.
Kostya did not stir.
"Kostya, you ought to pray to God."
Kostya was silent.
"You ought to pray to God, Kostya, about your nose."
"I never pray," Kostya turned on him angrily—
"and I don't intend to pray."

Remizov's calligraphic style from "Teatr."
Courtesy Center for Russian Culture, Amherst College.

sibly the last and most irresistible seduction on earth" *(lskusstvo—iskus, mozhet byt' samyi poslednii, samyi neodolimyi soblazn zemli …)*. But more than that, she points to native folklore as the source of temptation and transgression that shape her poems: "All my Russian things are elemental, that is, sinful" (*Vse moi russkie veshchi stikhiiny, to est' greshny*).[31] Her associative etymology acquires incontrovertible power through a pattern of lexical equivalents that resemble precise algebraic equations: "art = temptation" (*iskusstvo=iskus*) and "elemental = sinful" (*stikhiinyi=greshnyi*), where the root *stikh* also means "verse."[32] She asserts that the realm of poetry is a "third kingdom with its own laws" (*Tret'e tsarstvo so svoimi zakonami*).[33] Tsvetaeva's romantic emphasis on the nature of poetic gift (see the inscription to Remizov) as god-given and elemental underlies a confession made earlier in a letter to Aleksandr Bakhrakh that, although

31 Ibid.

32 On the connection between *stikh* and *stikhiia* in Tsvetaeva's poetry, see Svetlana Boym, *Death in Quotation Marks: Cultural Myths of the Modern Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 221.

33 Tsvetaeva, "Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti," 395.

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she had lived with poetry since birth, "only now [has] she learned the difference between trochee and dactyl." She asserts that "I write as I live, by ear [*na slukh*], that is, on faith [*na veru*]." [34] Remizov had a similar conception of an innate gift for words and considered the ear indispensable for finding the right intonation and modality of the phrase that "must be shaken ... tested by ear" (*Frazu nado vstriakhnut' ... proverit' na slukh*).[35] Transgression and play with the boundaries of sacred and profane figure in Remizov's writing from the beginning.[36]

The Revolution marked a major watershed in the work of Remizov and Tsvetaeva. The writing of the diaries, begun in 1917, proceeded in fragments throughout the Revolution and the Civil War. Tsvetaeva undoubtedly read the chapters from Remizov's chronicle that first appeared in Bely's journal *Èpopeia* in Berlin, in 1921. Tsvetaeva collected her writing from the "Notebooks and Notes of 1917-1920" for a book to be titled *Omens of the Earth* (*Zemnye primety*), which was to have been published by Helikon in Berlin, but was rejected on the ground of its "political" content. In letters to Roman Gul' from 5-6 March 1923, Tsvetaeva attempted to assure him that "the book has no politics: it has terrible truth, the impassioned truth of cold, hunger, anger, and the year" (*politiki v knige net: est' strashnaia pravda: pristrastnaia pravda kholoda, goloda, gneva, goda!*).[37] In this aphoristic statement of great elocutionary force, with an implacable denial of politics underscored by an alliterative, rhythmic string of rhymed two-syllable words at the end, she defined her autobiographical space, her right to passionate subjectivity or truth that is at once terrible (*strashnaia*) and impassioned (*pristrastnaia*). Tsvetaeva was aware that, ironically, this work was as likely to have been rejected in the Soviet Union for identical reasons. Although the diary was not primarily political, its poetic counterpart, poem cycle *The Demesne of the Swans* (*Lebedinyi stan*) (1917-1920), was counter-revolutionary in its royalist sentiment. Here Tsvetaeva appeared "in a new literary role which she deliberately chose at that time, that of chronicler of the momentous period in which she was living."[38]

34 A. Bakhrakh, "Letters of Marina Tsvetaeva," 304.
35 N. Kodrianskaia, *Aleksei Remizov* (Paris, 1957), 41.
36 Greta N. Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions*, 35.
37 Marina Tsvetaeva, *Izbrannaia proza,* vol. 1, 445.
38 Simon Karlinsky, *Marina Tsvetaeva,* 70.

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The confrontation with the "chaos" of existence in the first days of the October Revolution became for Remizov and Tsvetaeva a confrontation with verbal violence. They were caught in the "whirlwind" of history that drew them into the midst of a verbal eruption, but not one of their own making: it came from the agitated masses encountered everywhere on trains, tram stops, streets. In the first poem of the Revolution, "The Twelve" (*Dvenadtsat'*), written in January 1918, Blok transposed the chaos of Petersburg streets to music by allowing them to speak in this symphonic work, composed of a range of genres of popular culture, particularly urban folklore, including the city romance, gypsy romance, army romance, urban and prisoner's ditty. Blok's poem was greatly admired by Remizov and Tsvetaeva as they struggled to register the cataclysm and its immediate consequences in their writing. A chapter in *Whirlwind Russia* (*Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*) entitled "To the Stars: In Blok's Memory" (*K zvezdam: Pamiati Bloka*) is Remizov's homage to Blok that draws a deep connection between the two works. In her cycle *Demesne of the Swans*, Tsvetaeva included a poem "To Blok" (*Bloku*) whose "holy heart" appeared before the square and who, despite the ills that have befallen the land, "has not stopped loving you, Russia!"[39] The actual process of writing becomes a means of survival and sustenance for Remizov and Tsvetaeva. She calls the diary her *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, where the reordering of the terms of Goethe's title suggests the difference in her condition: writing in order to survive the poet's tragic present rather than the past. Remizov attests that Blok died when "he could no longer hear music," while he himself almost died when he could no "longer see dreams, his 'autobiographical space.'"[40]

The street speaks in Remizov's chronicle through snatches of conversation, occasional encounters, as well as news items, slogans and decrees of the revolutionary order. The motley voices reflect the confusion of a nation at the crossroads. The writer's grief and mourning, initially expressed in the controversial "Lament for the Destruction of the Russian Land" (*Slovo o pogibeli russkoi zemli*), written in October 1917, are counterbalanced by the sheer energy of verbal creativity, play, theatrical-

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39 *Lebedinyi stan (1917-1920)*. In Marina Tsvetaeva, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, vstupitel'naia stat'ia, sostavlenie, podgotovka teksta i primechaniia E.B. Korkinoi (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1990), 180.

40 Antonella d'Amelia, "Avtobiograficheskoe prostranstvo Alekseia Remizova," in A. Remizov, *Uchitel' muzyki* (Paris: Presse libre, 1983), xvii.

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ity, and humor. Laughter provides relief in the phantasmagoric reality of cold and hungry Petrograd. The narrator's identity as a writer whose unique perspective dominates the text lends authority to this account of the uprising, composed of dreams and "the word that accidentally reached the ear not deafened by noise, and fragments of events spied by the eye."[41] A similar foregrounding of the poetic self allows Tsvetaeva to assert the right to her "impassioned" objectivity: "I do not even stand for the composite of my earthly omens, I stand only for the right of their existence, for the truth—of what is mine" (*ia ne stoiu dazhe za sovokupnost' svoikh zemnykh primet, a stoiu tol'ko za pravo ikh sushchestvovaniia i za pravdu svoego*).[42] Tsvetaeva transposes daily reality into the poetic world, the "third kingdom with its own laws," where art and life are inseparable as they are for an audience that, after a performance of a mystery play, rushes to tear Judas apart.[43]

As we will see, Tsvetaeva's defiant stance dominates everyday encounters, where the threatening "voices of the mob," no longer "the folk" (*narod*) but "chaos," and the voice of the writer now inevitably clash. Like Remizov, who writes in Petersburg, a city "torn by strife," Tsvetaeva faces "Moscow's various plagues" with an arsenal of poetic tools: manipulation of temporal perspective; transposition and translation of incidents from daily life into a mythological realm; theatricality, with props and various forms of verbal play, often improvised on the spot; arid subversion of the verbal icons of the new state. Tsvetaeva's diary is an extraordinary record of a poetics of survival, when the terms of canonical poetic dualities, such as *byt* (the daily grind) and *bytie* (being), and *poet i chern'* (the poet and the mob) are forced beyond metaphor into a Joycean "nightmare of history."

The struggle for survival requires verbal self-defense and new self-definition. With the maximalism and verve that distinguish her poetry, Tsvetaeva now captures the elemental (*stikhiinyi*) sense of the time in the diaries, describing encounters that inevitably elicit her involvement in street scenes. Instead of the expected fear and anxiety, she presents these scenes as a chance to be immersed in the language that seems to have broken all dams and assaults the receptive ear in public places: streets,

41 Aleksei Remizov, *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, 105.

42 Tsvetaeva, "Otryvki iz knigi 'Zemye primety'" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 117.

43 Ibid., 108.

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trams, trains, offices. Tsvetaeva actively engages the street adversary, most likely a "class enemy," in a dialogue that becomes a verbal duel (*slovesnyi poedinok*) in which she participates by choice: "I, not wanting to miss the dialogue" (*Ia, ne zhelaia upustit' dialoga…*).[44] In this one-to-one combat, on the battlefield of words, she is on her turf, invincible and victorious. In moments of potential danger, Tsvetaeva acts like a *bylina* "heroine," accomplishing miraculous feats. And as a true heroine she knows her strength: "'verbal game! The one thing where they can't beat me!" (*slovesnaia igra! To, v chem ne sob'iut!*).[45] When a crude soldier challenges her on the street "Comrade miss, look, she's put on a hat" (*Tovarishch baryshnia, ish', shliapku natsepila*), she looks down at his feet, ready with a swift comeback, a rhymed play on his words: "Look, he's put on a rag" (*Ish', triapku natsepil*).[46] The audience or the crowd surrounding them breaks into laughter and, to everyone's relief, tension ceases as the class conflict is subsumed by the verbal wit of her repartee.[47]

The dialogue with "another's word" extends to the newly emerging verbal icons that include signs, slogans, and acronyms. By framing these elements of revolutionary *byt* in her narrative, Tsvetaeva subverts the new lingo and subjects it to an acerbic critique. She took a job in Narkomnats, one of the many acronyms that she abhorred and that she was told referred to nationalities (The National Committee on Nationalities). Her response—"'What kind of nationalities, when there is the International?" (*Kakie zhe natsional'nosti kogda Internatsional?*)—is another brilliant, witty comeback with a stab at the incongruity of the new ideology.[48] She collected nonsensical newspaper items, such as the ridiculous rhetorical paean to dried fish (*vobla*) from the Menshevik paper *Always Forward* (*Vsegda vpered*): "Oh, you, the only dish/ of the Communist land" (*O ty, edinstvennoe bliudo/ Kommunisticheskoi strany!*).[49] The same satirical wit is seen in the self-definition of a verbally innocent political instruc-

44 Tsvetaeva, "Moi sluzhby" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 67.

45 Tsvetaeva, "Iz dnevnika: Smert' Stakhovicha (27 Fevralia 1919g.)" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 79.

46 Tsvetaeva, "Moi sluzhby" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 67.

47 Marc Slonim confirmed Tsvetaeva's militant defense of language, writing that in arguments about words or word choice she became "an amazon" (*voitel'nitsa*). See "O Marine Tsvetaevoi," 158.

48 Tsvetaeva, "Moi sluzhby" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 50.

49 Tsvetaeva, "Otryvki iz knigi 'Zemnye primety'" in *Izbrannaia proza,* vol.1, 110.

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tor: "It's not at all hard! Just get up on a trash can and yell, yell, yell!" (*Sovsem ne trudno! Vstanesh' na musornyi iashchik—i krichish', krichish', krichish'*).[50]

Fiction becomes a frame of reference in the effort to capture the incongruity of daily reality that, for Remizov, exceeds even the Gogolian imagination: "No Gogol would ever see as much as there was in Russia during these years."[51] And Akakii Akakievich becomes for him the epitome of the "little man" who rebels against the revolution meant to liberate the oppressed. Tsvetaeva's first job in the office of records, located in the building of a former tsarist prison, consisted of making lists of newspaper articles about those who had been executed. She seized the irony of the situation with a joke based on an association with Gogol's *Dead Souls*: "Should one register the ones who've been shot?" (*Rasstreliannykh perepisyvat'?*).[52] Tsvetaeva is reminded of Gogolian characters not only by the petty vices of people all around her but also by the rising new institutions: she sees Nozdrev (crooks), Korobochka ("How much are dead souls on the market now?"), Chichikov (a natural speculator), and Manilov, who personifies new institutional banality ("Temple of Friendship," "The House of a Happy Mother").[53]

This points to another narrative strategy that consists of a process of translation of unfamiliar, unrecognizable reality into "familiar" terms that constitute the poet's personal system of values: uncompromising maximalism, idealism, sense of honor. Thus she transposes "real" events into a "symbolic" system of myth.[54] This symbolic system is based on the cultural heritage that combines both literary and nonliterary sources—poetry, myth, folklore, history—that have shaped her poetic system and provided cultural heroes: Tristan and Iseult, Stenka Razin, Marina Mniszek, Orpheus. Thus, in order to go down the dark, slippery stairs of an institutional kitchen that she hated, she transposed the act into a "Virgin's descent into hell or Orpheus' into Hades" (*Skhozhdenie Bogoro-*

50 Ibid.

51 Remizov, "Nikakoi Gogol' ne uvidit stol'ko, kak bylo v eti gody v Rossii," in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, 374.

52 Tsvetaeva, "Moi sluzhby" in *Izbrannaia proza,* vol.1, 50.

53 Tsvetaeva, "Cherdachnoe: iz moskovskikh zapisei 1919-1920 g." in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 87.

54 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

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ditsy v ad ili Orfeia v Aid), with the kitchen as a "fiery inferno" (*Kukhnia: zherlo. Tak zharko i krasno, chto iasno: ad*).[55] The transposition of reality into myth becomes part of "theater for oneself."[56] When sitting next to a soldier on the train, she calls him Stenka Razin almost involuntarily, they become friends and she reads her poems to her astonished and appreciative neighbor.[57] The irony of the fact that the story she recalls from Russia's past history is no less violent than its present is irrelevant: the myth from the past becomes a refuge in the turbulent present. This process of mythmaking becomes a part of daily life: the milkman who comes and says, "I shall not leave you" (*ia vas ne ostavliu*), appears as God the Savior, since "Only God can say this, with milk, in Moscow, in the winter of '18" (*Tak mozhet skazat' tol'ko Bog—ili muzhik s molokom v Moskve, zimoi 1918 g.*).[58] By the same token, an Armenian vendor, gravely weighing potatoes, becomes "an Archangel of Communist Judgment" (*Arkhangel kommunisticheskogo Strashnogo Suda*).[59]

The ability to manipulate temporal perspective appears key in Tsvetaeva's effort to capture and convey the "terrible truth" of the present: "The whole secret is to be able to see a hundred years ago as if it were today, and today as if it were a hundred years ago" (*vsia taina v tom, chtoby sto let nazad videt', kak segodnia, i segodnia—kak sto let nazad*) (108). The apprehension of the present is a critical act for her as a poet: "I perceived the year 1919 with some exaggeration, as people would do a hundred years from now" (*ia vospriniala 19-yi god neskol'ko preuvelichenno,—tak, kak tol'ko ego vosprimut liudi cherez sto let*).[60] The poet's vision not only reveals temporal relativity, but anticipates the historian who regards the past from a considerable distance. Hence her "heightened" perception of the year 1919, a legendary year in the revolutionary annals, becomes a projected prophetic vision of reality.

The past history of Old Russia acquires immediacy and particular meaning for Tsvetaeva and Remizov at this time. In the "Lament for the

55 Tsvetaeva, "Moi sluzhby" in *Izbrannaia proza,* vol.1, 55-56.
56 N. Evreinov, *Teatr kak takovoi* (St. Petersburg: Izd. N. I. Butkovskoi, 1912).
57 Tsvetaeva, "Vol'nyi proezd" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 39-43.
58 Tsvetaeva, "Otryvki iz knigi 'Zemnye primety'" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 108.
59 Tsvetaeva, "Moi sluzhby" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 66.
60 Tsvetaeva, "Cherdachnoe: iz moskovskikh zapisei 1919-1920 g." in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 87

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Destruction of the Russian Land," Remizov writes: "Wretched and dumb I stand in the desert, where once was Russia. My soul is sealed."[61] The passing of Old Russia marks the end of time—"Time is lost; it is no more; it ran out"—and of God.[62] In Tsvetaeva's folk-style lament in *Demesne of the Swans*, written in syncopated rhythms with short, breathless phrasing of incantation, the dying sons of Russia who are both red and white call out to her, "Mother!" but "without will without anger."[63] For both writers, the Petrine rule represents the initial modern rupture from that past. In the poem addressed "To Peter" (Petru) from *Demesne of the Swans*, Tsvetaeva refers to him as "the founder of the Soviets" (*Rodonachal'nik—ty—Sovetov*) and of "ruins."[64] Remizov interpolates a narrative from Peter's time in the chronicle, with a focus on the obscure craftsmen and engineers who built his palaces, bridges, and gardens. In the "Lament," Peter is the "mad horseman" who "destroyed the Old Russia," yet Remizov interjects a surprising note of hope in the possibility that "he will raise the new one from perdition."[65]

Throughout the diary, Tsvetaeva's defiant assertion of her "omens" emerges as a source of strength. While in her major essay, "The Poet and Time" (*Poet i vremia*, 1932), she deemed the involvement with history as inevitable "you can't jump out of history" (*iz istorii ne vyskochish'*)—as a poet she superseded the historian.[66] As a Muscovite, she was able to put the resources of spoken and folk Russian at her disposal to good use in "verbal duels." The laws (*zakony*) of her poetic system enabled her to subvert the new verbal icons as well as to use her identification with the historical rebels, Razin and Pugachev, in order to reject the social restrictions imposed by the Bolsheviks and remain on the side of anarchy. She proclaimed herself to be "an inexhaustible source of heresies"

61 Remizov, "Obodrannyi i nemoi stoiu v pustyne, gde byla kogda-to Rossiia. Dusha moia zapechatana," in *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, 185.
62 Remizov, "I vremia propalo, net ego, konchilos'," ibid.
63 Marina Tsvetaeva, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, 185.
64 Marina Tsvetaeva, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*, 182. It is interesting to note in this connection that an issue of *Nezavisimaia gazeta* from 9 June 1992 devoted a large section to Peter the Great as the "Bolshevik on the Throne," with excerpts from V. Kliuchevskii, G. Fedotov, and N. Berdyaev.
65 Quoted in Slobin, *Remizov's Fictions*, 144.
66 Tsvetaeva, "Poet i vremia," 370.

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(*Ia neistoshchimyi istochnik eresei*),[67] and in her role of heretic she forged a crucial anchor in the face of and in opposition to present history. Tsvetaeva embodied the "romantic radicalism" that "can embrace the local, sensuously specific, and irreducibly individual," and that seeks "to shipwreck an abstract idealism" of the universalizing ideas of revolutionary radicalism.[68] Remizov also affirmed free will, whose elemental freedom he likened to the "whirlwind" (*vikhr'*) that runs counter (*naperekor*) to any imposition.[69]

Along with Remizov, Tsvetaeva remains a verbal utopian who believed that language supersedes both history and ideology. In their love of the Russian language, Tsvetaeva and Remizov recall the linguistic nationalism and utopianism of the Futurists, Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Mayakovsky, who in their writing called for the exclusive use of an endless Russian language.[70] The resort to the indigenous culture is typical of nationalist writers who "attempt to create a version of history for themselves in which their intrinsic essence has always manifested itself…."[71] Tsvetaeva's longing for Russia transposed the land into a "poetic space," and in "The Poet and Time" she quotes Rilke: "There is such a land—God, and Russia borders on it."[72] Tsvetaeva amplified this statement and pronounced Russia a natural boundary (*prirodnaia granitsa*), a geographic personification of the poetic realm, her "third kingdom with its own laws." She declared that every poet was by nature a rebel and an émigré, "even in Russia"; consequently, only a person for whom Russia was defined by conventional borders could fear forgetting her. Echoing Tsvetaeva, Remizov wrote with disdain about the émigrés who bemoaned their losses in endless conversations, while he had gained "the most passionate emotions," words and dreams.

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67 Tsvetaeva, "Otryvki iz knigi 'Zemnye primety,'" in *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 120.

68 Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 31. Although Eagleton writes about Ireland, his statement is applicable to Russia.

69 Aleksei Remizov, *Vzvikhrennaia Rus'*, 98.

70 Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "A New Word for a New Myth: Nietzsche and Russian Futurism," in *The European Foundations of Russian Modernism*, ed. Peter I. Barta in collaboration with Ulrich Goebel (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991), 246.

71 Seamus Dean, "Introduction," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Eagleton et. al., 9.

72 Tsvetaeva, "Poet i vremia," 372.

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Yet, Tsvetaeva's certainty of the incompatibility of aesthetics and politics differs sharply from the stance of the Left Futurists.[73] In "The Poet and Time" she cites her experience of the public readings of "The Swain" and *Demesne of the Swans* as proof. After a reading of the former (in emigration), she was asked whether the poem was about the Revolution. Though surprised by the question, she suggests that to dismiss it as a sign of ignorance would be just as ignorant, because the work itself is revolutionary—all the more so since her counter-revolutionary poems from *Demesne of the Swans* drew an unexpected response from a red audience (at home): "It's all right. You are a revolutionary poet, anyway. You've got our tempo." She made a clear distinction between two types of poets: "a poet of the revolution" and a "revolutionary poet." Remizov belonged to the latter, while Mayakovsky, as a tragic exception, was both.

Tsvetaeva was not alone in her debate with the conservative émigré critics. Her 1926 essay "The Poet on Criticism" (*Poet o kritike*) appeared in the above-mentioned issue of *Blagonamerennyi* together with a short piece by Mirsky, entitled "On Conservatism: A Dialogue" (*O konservatizme: Dialog*). Here the author answers questions from a naive émigré reader who thinks that his responsibility is to protect the past tradition, and who complains that he does not understand Pasternak's *My Sister—Life*. Mirsky's position is close to Tsvetaeva's, and his ironic answers state clearly that literary conservatism is impossible because art is revolutionary by definition: it "creates new values"; poets are ahead of their readers because they create what is "new"; and "Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva may not be immediately appreciated, but I also have to make an effort to get to the British Museum from my house."[74] In this context, Tsvetaeva valued Remizov's dedication to the writer's calling as "a feat of a soldier standing guard who had done more for Russia than all the émigré politicians put together."[75]

73 "Poet i vremia," *Izbrannaia proza*, vol.1, 367-380. In this context, see the following publications with the critiques of the left avant-garde: L. Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art in the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Fascist Italy, and the People's Republic of China* (London: Collins Harvill, 1990); B. Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1988).

74 *Blagonamerennyi* 2 (1926): 92.

75 Quoted in Marc Slonim, "O Marine Tsvetaevoi," *Novyi zhurnal* 100 (1970): 171-172.

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