

The Russian Intelligentsia in Focus

KERSTIN OLOFSSON

”I miss censorship...”
*Yevgeny Yevtushenko 1991*¹

”The intelligentsia entered into an alliance
with political egoists and ended,
as usual, as losers..”
*Liberal literary critic 1993 (Natalya Ivanova)*²

”The people felt, with justice, that Gorbachev
had a weakness – his sympathy for and trust
in the intelligentsia. But I am still proud of
this kind of weakness.”
*Mikhail Gorbachev 1997*³

”The ’radiation’ of the market has showed
itself more penetrating and murderous for the
intelligentsia than totalitarianism.”
*Sociologist 1999 (Nikita Pokrovsky, Moscow University)*⁴

Russia in the 1990s was characterized by the struggle with the difficulties of renewal after the fall of the Soviet system in 1991. The intelligentsia came into focus in the cultural debate. This article provides a review of the stances and themes of this debate, and provides historical parallels. It ends with a close reading of Vladimir Makanin’s novella *Escape Hatch*, written 1991. In this novella, the intelligentsia takes a central place in the depiction of the problem of transformation.

The Debate in the Media

The Background: Perestroika

During perestroika (1985–91) a ”civil war in literature” played itself out, among other things, in the so-called thick journals, which are an important Russian institution.

¹ *Ogonyok* 5/91, p. 24

² *Znamya* 11/93, p. 183

³ *Dosye na tsenzuru* 2/97, p. 12

⁴ *Na pereputye* (Moscow 1999), p. 49

There were three main camps – Westernizing liberalism, democratically inclined Slavophilism, and traditionalistic "national-patriotism", a stance hostile both to the West and to perestroika. The national-patriotic camp would eventually become what was, for a time, termed the red-brown coalition – communist and non-communist nationalists in cooperation. The primary opposition in the great debate was between Westernizing liberalism, and national-patriotism.

In a situation of increased pluralism in opinion, but without freedom of organization, the thick journals functioned as a sort of party organization before the parties. The journals' role is an expression of what is considered the traditional role of the Russian intelligentsia, that is, to function as replacements for a more extensive civil society. Towards the end of perestroika, however, the importance of the thick journals decreased, and their circulation sank – their circulation had been enormous, especially in the case of the pro-perestroika journals.

A few years after the end of the literary "civil war", which coincided with the end of the Soviet system, a liberal debater asked herself who had emerged victorious. She maintained that victory had gone to a completely unexpected third party, namely popular culture.⁵ This is one possible way of describing the result of the polemic. Another way to describe the result is to talk about a loss of influence for the liberals, who were at the height of their influence 1990–1991. You could, instead, award the palm of victory to the national-patriotic movement. According to debate participants this movement was in fact born within some of the thick journals.

Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the Communist Party, figured among the national-patriots as one of the twelve signatories of the "Appeal to the People" that presaged the attempted coup of August 1991, which was meant to save the Soviet Union and the Soviet system. During 1992, the year that economic shock therapy was instituted, he continued his work for ideological rapprochement between communist and non-communist nationalists. He acknowledged the Orthodox Church as fundamental to Russia, and presented socialist ideals as deriving from the Bible and from the Russian village commune. In doing so, he distanced himself greatly from the atheism and anti-peasant stance of his mother party, the Soviet Communist Party. Meanwhile, a non-communist nationalist who had once described the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 as the result of an anti-Russian conspiracy between Jews and Masons wrote in the December 1991 issue in the communist publication *Pravda* that socialism was the world's luminous goal.⁶

⁵ N. Ivanova, *Znamya* 9/93, p. 198

⁶ V. Sorgin, *Politicheskaya istoriya sovremennoy Rossii* (Moscow 1994), pp. 138, 139

In the subsequent years, there appeared a number of organizations that united right- and left-wing opposition. The People's Patriotic Front, founded 1996, expressed the basis of the alliance as follows:

We do not divide ourselves up in red and white, rich and poor, believers and non-believers. We are Russian supporters of a strong state /.../ united in our love to our beautiful Russia, through concern for its welfare and its indivisibility, in unbearable sorrow over its fate.⁷

This important alliance began to form as soon as it was politically feasible during perestroika. There was much speculation on the fusion within the cultural debate. Many debaters, trying to explain the alliance, pointed to the fact that the intellectual traditions that underlay Russian communism and Tsarist-era Russian nationalism shared common characteristics, despite their historic opposition. Both traditions emphasize the primary importance of maintaining the empire. Both believe, albeit for different reasons, that destruction comes from the Western world. Both oppose pluralism, and support authoritarian rule and control of the mass media. Finally, both emphasize the special nature of Russia and Russia's special developmental path, in ideological and nationalist terms respectively. The national-patriotic movement had its predecessor in so-called National-Bolshevism.

The cultural debate also mirrored another fundamental occurrence: the cultural "paradigm shift" towards the end of perestroika. A new, more pluralistic public sphere had emerged, censorship was abolished and a multi-party system introduced. Literature and literary criticism were no longer special channels of information, bearing forbidden truths. The laws on how one should read and write during totalitarianism – that is, between the lines – no longer obtained. To read, acquire, discuss, and write about a divergent work was no longer a collective act of civil disobedience. Commercialism appears as a new unfreedom. The cultural intelligentsia and the thick journals had lost their role as leading opinion makers. They had been replaced by television, commercial culture, a political life with "image makers" in prominent roles, media oligarchs.

The pro-perestroika writings showed a faith in the transforming power of the word, as pronounced truth. This belief in the word is generally considered to have survived within Russian culture. Within both the Tsarist Russian and the Soviet regime's public sphere, both regime representatives and critics attached great importance to the word; hence a censorship of varying stringency and a struggle against censorship through different methods. This faith and the expectations that were attached to it during perestroika had been nourished by,

⁷ S. Kislitsyn, V. Krikunov, V. Kuraev, *Gennady Zyuganov* (1999), p. 255

among other things, the field of tension between the censorship laws and the struggle to outwit the censor. It had been given classic expression in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize speech in 1970: "A word of truth can move the entire world."⁸

The new Russian government, unlike the Soviet state, no longer depends on the power of authors and the cultural intelligentsia. The dependence of the old Soviet state on authors had its last, somewhat curious expression when, on the second (and penultimate) day of the August 1991 coup, the coup leaders sent a representative to the Secretariat of the Authors' Association.

The paradigm shift is expressed when, in 1996, a liberal writer paints the cultural situation of 1986, that is, of a decade ago, as if it were a matter of another world.⁹ Another writes, in 1997, that something happened "an eternity ago" – that is, six or seven years ago – for "today we live in another land."¹⁰ The liberal debaters, who have fought for perestroika, repeatedly work through their disappointment. Formulations such as "we believed that if only the censorship were abolished and truth appeared all would be well, but..." are common.¹¹

There have been many attempts to explain why the liberal expectations of what would happen once censorship was abolished have been disappointed. Here is one of these attempts, from the journal *Novyi mir*, in 1995:

Censorship is abolished. The truth has stopped being dangerous, and flows forth. For a time there was a hope that this truth would purify and transform us, but this did not happen. Information about the horrors of the past did not diminish the horrors of the present /.../ We did not succeed in assimilating the truth about the past, and the unassimilated truth threatens to drown us. There appears enthusiasm, ecstasy over the disintegration, spiritual capitulation to chaos or still worse – a flight to new myths, a hunt for the guilty, an attempt to transfer the responsibility to other shoulders.¹²

In the following, we will look at the question of how the debate of the 1990s mirrors what is seen as a basic problem in Russian political and social life: the historic significance of the intelligentsia. The problems experienced by Russia's liberal intelligentsia during perestroika have historical precedents; as

⁸ A. Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika v trekh tomakh*, tom. I (Yaroslavl 1995), p. 25. I do not agree with the English translation given in A. Solzhenitsyn, *Nobel Lecture* (N Y 1972), p. 34.

⁹ N. Ivanova, *Znamya* 9/96, pp. 201-210

¹⁰ S. Chuprinin, *Znamya* 1/97, pp. 206, 207

¹¹ For example S. Chuprinin, *Znamya* 5/92, p. 215

¹² G. Pomerants, *Novyi mir* 8/95, p. 138

has their agonized and public self-examination. These historical antecedents illuminate the contours of the debate of the 1990s.

History Reappearing

Vissarion Belinsky was a literary critic and proponent of the 1840s "Natural School", which heralded the great Russian novels. He is considered the "father" of the (left-wing radical) Russian intelligentsia. He started his career by complaining that there existed no Russian literature. He then, during his short life, managed to write thirteen thick volumes of articles on this non-existent phenomenon. Similarly, during the 1990s and to this day, innumerable Russian books and articles have been written, just as scores of conferences have been arranged, discussing the intelligentsia – which has been declared dead by many. The supposedly dead intelligentsia was one of the central themes in the cultural debate, especially in the period before the mid-1990s.

This, as was also brought out in the great debate of the 1990s, is another recurring phenomenon in Russian cultural history: in times of change one discusses the intelligentsia, its contributions and above all its failings. The foremost reason for this is, presumably, the need to find a bearer of renewal within a society which had been censored and steered from above, and thus unable to bring forth independent forces.

This phenomenon is so striking that the liberal Russian literary critic and "historian of the intelligentsia" Dmitry Ovsianiko-Kulikovsky wrote, in 1908, that in other countries there were discussions on science, politics and art – in Russia there were only discussions on the nature of the intelligentsia.¹³ Note the term "historian of the intelligentsia". In today's Russian cultural and especially academic life, there exist *intelligentovedy* and *intelligentovedenie* – that is, intelligentsia scholars and intelligentsia studies.

The following is a summary of the beginning of one article: This revolution has not given that which was expected from it, the Russian society is exhausted from its earlier stresses and from all its failures and is currently in a condition of apathy, depression and spiritual disintegration; the Russian state has not been renewed and strengthened despite the fact that this was so necessary, Russian literature is drowning in a dirty stream of pornography and sensationalism; there is every reason to fear for Russia's future.

This could have been an article from the 1990s, but is, in fact, the beginning of an article by the philosopher of religion, Sergei Bulgakov, published in 1909 in *Landmarks (Vekhi)*, with the subtitle "A Collection of Essays on the Russian Intelligentsia."¹⁴ This is probably the most debated work of Russian twentieth-century culture. It appeared after the first, failed Russian revolution of

¹³ C. Read, *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia 1900-1912* (London 1979), p. 1

¹⁴ *Landmarks* (N Y 1977), 23ff.

1905–1907. This is one of the times when the intelligentsia was discussed in a manner similar to that of the 1990s. In many of the articles that appeared in the 1990s, discussing *Landmarks*, it is also emphasized that the type of reference points mentioned in the article are held in common.

The authors of *Landmarks* mostly defined the intelligentsia as consisting only of radical opponents to the autocratic state. The seven articles oppose positivism and materialism to the new idealism and philosophy of religion, and they want the intelligentsia to take a new road (given, of course, certain differences of opinion among the authors). The “landmarks” they establish for the intelligentsia are: investment in one’s inner self rather than in changing outer circumstances; morality rather than politics; repentance and humility rather than arrogance; religion (orthodoxy) instead of atheism; admitting the mystique of the state, instead of disassociating from, rejecting and struggling against it; and patriotism instead of “cosmopolitanism”. They see the 1905 revolution as the work of the intelligentsia, and blame the intelligentsia for its failed and destructive elements. The meeting, in revolution, between the ideas of the intelligentsia and the people’s instincts had generated an “enormous destructive energy.”¹⁵

The book came out in several editions, and the debate after its publication was extremely extensive. It met opposition from liberals and socialists of various kinds, while its supporters came almost exclusively from certain deeply conservative supporters of the autocracy. This demonstrates the difficulties inherent in the “liberal conservatism” that *Landmarks* represents. Lenin was one of the most hostile critics. And during the Soviet Era the book was part of the condemned and forbidden heritage.

During the avalanche of publications of formerly forbidden works during perestroika, the turn also came to *Landmarks*. The introduction to one of the book’s new editions, in 1991, discusses the book’s relevance to current times. As in 1909, so also in 1991 there is a general feeling among the intelligentsia that the country has a historical need of renewal. The beginning of the century is seen as having been conscious of many aspects of such a radical renewal, which still are not realized. As long as the fundamental problems of renewal have not been solved, they will be the object of heated discussions. Therefore, the introduction continues, it is no coincidence that a number of publishing houses have reissued the book, and in very great numbers besides.

The 1991 introduction also expresses sympathy for the book’s authors, five of whom were expelled in 1922 on the so-called philosophical steamboat. It emphasizes the great harm that was caused to Russian culture through the persecution of dissidents and the importance of gaining knowledge of the interrupted intellectual traditions.¹⁶ Culturally, this retying of links to the period

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 26, 27, 41, 42, 51, 54, 72, 73, 141, 142 (and so on)

¹⁶ *Vekhi. Intelligentsiya v Rossii* (Moscow 1991), pp. 19, 21

between 1905 and 1917 had already happened to a great extent during perestroika. On the political plane one can refer to a detail such as the fact that Russia's new parliament was, as of December 1993, termed the fifth State Duma – the first four being the (pseudo) parliaments of the years between 1906 and 1917.

The Problem of Renewal

In the cultural debate of the 1990s *Landmarks* had a very important role. Just as in the century's beginning, so do many believe today that the situation is so threatening that it puts Russia's future into question. In this dangerous situation there is, to cite *Landmarks*, "no subject more compelling than the nature of the Russian intelligentsia."¹⁷ Then, as now, the intelligentsia is put at the centre of Russian modernization. In his 1909 article, Sergei Bulgakov gives a more poetical expression of what today is termed the problem of the uncompleted modernization. The soul of the intelligentsia, he writes in an oft-quoted expression, is the creation of Peter the Great:

Be it bad or good, the fate of Peter's Russia is in the intelligentsia's hands regardless of how hunted and persecuted it is /.../ The intelligentsia is that window on Europe that Peter cut out and through which we breathe in Western air, at once both life-giving and poisonous /.../ Russia cannot do without this enlightenment /.../ [T]here is no more agonizing and alarming concern than whether the Russian intelligentsia will rise to its task, whether Russia will acquire an educated class with a Russian soul /.../ For otherwise the intelligentsia, in conjunction with Tartar barbarism which is still so prevalent in our state and social systems, will ruin Russia.¹⁸

A common feeling – with its modern antecedents among, amongst others, Alexander Solzhenitsyn in the *samizdat* of the 1970s – is that *Landmarks* is an "unheard prophecy"; and the "price" or "result" of the intelligentsia's unwillingness to change itself according to its precepts was Russia's "catastrophe" with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the millions of victims of the "regime's war on the people" and other damages to society.¹⁹ This judgement is an expression of the "absolutist" view of the importance of the intelligentsia, which is typical if not universal.

Continuity exists, thus, in the valorisation of the intelligentsia as responsible for Russia's fate. There is also continuity in the discussion of the intelligentsia's

¹⁷ *Landmarks*, p. 25

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25

¹⁹ A. Solzhenitsyn, *From Under the Rubble* (London 1975), pp. 229, 236; M. Litvak, *Intelligentsiya i mifotvorchestvo* (St. Petersburg 2000), p. 6

function in society. The triad "intelligentsia" – "people" – "power" is a concept that has survived into modern times, with the intelligentsia in the role as the people's "educators", the mediators between the people and the power. Even today one can find instances of the intelligentsia being termed the "representatives" of the people – self-appointed representatives, it seems.²⁰

The question of the importance of the intelligentsia in society is one of the matters in the cultural debate. The traditional pattern, described above, is defended and questioned. A liberal "critic of the intelligentsia" writes, for example, sarcastically that the people is suffering want, but that for the first time the people seems to wish to suffer want independently, without mediators.²¹ Complaints about the degeneration of culture, immorality, stupid television series, Western and indigenous popular culture are common in the cultural debate. Many of these articles throw an indirect light backwards, on the Soviet system, as the promised land of true cultural values.²² On the other hand the sociologists Lev Gudkov and Boris Dubin maintain in the book *The Intelligentsia* (1995) that the intelligentsia makes "imperialist" claims to decide what is "the only right culture". Gudkov and Dubin explain that today's popular culture has a function: it socializes people into the values of the new social system, something which traditional high culture cannot do.²³

Many see the intelligentsia as decisive for the fall of Communism – looking, in this case, at the dissident movement, as well as certain half-official cultural expressions during the Brezhnev epoch. They also include the publication of once-forbidden texts by pro-perestroika cultural journals and other media, and their work to expand the frame for the permissible during the end of the 1980s. These phenomena contributed to undermine the legitimacy of the Soviet power. It is more unusual to hear anyone object that the system fell of its own weight, its own inner weakness.²⁴

A *Novyi mir* author criticized *Landmarks* for reducing the question of freedom in Russia to a question of the consciousness of the intelligentsia.²⁵ Another author presented similar criticism. Did the intelligentsia really have such a monopolistic role in the 1905 revolution? Doesn't the intelligentsia, personified in the authors of *Landmarks*, give itself a little greater importance than it in fact really has?²⁶ This is a question one could put to many intelligentsia debaters of the 1990s, as well.

²⁰ Yu. Shreider, *Novyi mir* 5/93, p. 194

²¹ A. Ageev, *Znamya* 2/94, p. 168

²² *Fenomen rossiyskoy intelligentsii* (St. Petersburg 2000), p. 151, 153. Comments on this: A. Ageev, *Znamya* 3/00, p. 198

²³ L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, *Intelligentsiya* (Moscow 1995), pp. 6, 102, 132, 149, 150, 182, 188

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90; D. Shturman, *Novyi mir* 2/95, p. 161

²⁵ M. Kolerov, *Novyi mir* 8/94, p. 161

²⁶ D. Shturman, *Novyi mir* 4/94, p. 174

Great numbers of texts published during the 1990s express the explicit or implicit expectation, that the intelligentsia would be the bearer of renewal, the power that leads the country out of its crisis. In the paradoxically depressed 1990s, the great weight given the intelligentsia took on grandiose expressions. This was especially evident in the abuse heaped on the intelligentsia, which became the great “genre” on the subject. All political shades united in this abuse. The mode was typically accusatory rather than self-critical. Russians often give, in self-irony, the two great questions of Russian history as “who is to blame?” and “what should be done?”

The questions above express difficulties with renewal and transformation. Historically, periods of enthusiasm are followed by periods of disappointment, when many feel the need to find a guilty party. This is the background to the remarkable “genre” where authors who “logically” themselves could be counted as part of the intelligentsia turn against it, as outsiders, with bitter accusations.

This “genre” is supported by the value-laden definition of the intelligentsia. According to their varying sympathies, authors include those they dislike in an intelligentsia which is negatively described, or those they like in an intelligentsia which is given positive characteristics. This includes the author him- or herself who can be either self-critical, or level accusations as if he or she stood outside the group. This feature characterized *Landmarks*, as well. The book is a bill of indictment against the intelligentsia by authors whom it would be natural to see as its members themselves. (The element of self-criticism is much weaker.)

The concept “intelligentsia” can cover a number of different entities – the entire educated layer, the critics of the regime, producers of culture, those who do not lie, the milkmaid or the peasant (but not the professor), depending on different ways of describing its ideal characteristics. Bolshevik leaders can be described both as typical members of the intelligentsia and as “renegades from the intelligentsia”.²⁷ And most authors change back and forth freely and without warning between different definitions of the word. This means, as has also been pointed out in the Russian debate, that the intelligentsia can be blamed for anything at all.

Take, as an example of the fact that this “genre” of abuse also has its historical antecedents, an excerpt from the great debate that followed the publication of *Landmarks* in 1909: a debater declares himself solidaristic with Anton Chekhov, whose letter of 1899 is quoted: “I do not believe in our

²⁷ A. Bystritsky, *Novyi mir* 3/93, p. 180; D. Shturman, *Novyi mir* 4/94, p. 153; in *Literaturnaya gazeta* 24/99 there is a roundtable, “The intelligentsia and those in power,” p. 3, where different contributions include different groups and persons in the intelligentsia or exclude them from it—journalists and politicians, not journalists and politicians, Gaydar, not Gaydar, and so on.

intelligentsia, hypocritical, false, hysterical, badly brought up and lazy, I do not believe in it even when it suffers and complains, because its oppressors come from within its own ranks.”²⁸

Unitarianism

Among the many who protested against *Landmarks* was Pavel Milyukov, the leader for the liberal party Constitutional Democrats. He explains, in an article published in 1910, that the intelligentsia is not uniform and that what the authors of *Landmarks* have done is to condemn one stream of the intelligentsia from the viewpoint of another. Instead of “intelligentsia”, the *Landmarks* authors should have written “anarchy” or “Russian socialism”. It was unjust to attribute enmity to the state and religion, to the intelligentsia as a whole.²⁹ During the 1990s, the liberal journal *Znamya* and even the “liberal conservative” *Novyi mir* have advanced similar critique of *Landmarks*.³⁰

Nonetheless, the description of the intelligentsia as a unit is very common. There seems to be a reluctance, even on a linguistic level, to give expression to the idea that there might be different streams within the intelligentsia. Debaters of the most differing shades describe, rather, the intelligentsia in terms of unity, even when the meaning is that it contains differences – the “liberal intelligentsia”, the “totalitarian intelligentsia”, and so on. The liberal authors who do try to talk about different currents have a tendency nonetheless to at some point fall back into thinking of the intelligentsia as a unit. The value-laden moral definitions of the intelligentsia lead to arguments about “the true intelligentsia”, and that one should “count some people out of the intelligentsia”. This last occurs in Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s well-known *samizdat* article, written in 1974 as a follow-up to *Landmarks* – “The Smatterers.”³¹

When Solzhenitsyn said that it was about time to exclude the one or the other from the intelligentsia, he was considering their moral behaviour. This consideration had its serious background in the battle for freedom against an oppressive regime. The risks of the battle against oppression, contrasted to adaptability and service to the former regime, are naturally important external reasons for the high emotional content of the debate about the intelligentsia. But there is also an inner cause: a lack of, or a conscious rejection of, pluralism. This appears when, for instance, Solzhenitsyn in an article of 1982 uses his term of abuse “the smatterers” as the equivalent of the expression “our pluralists”.³²

²⁸ *Vekhi. Pro et contra* (St. Petersburg 1998), pp. 315, 316

²⁹ *Vekhi. Intelligentsiya v Rossii*, pp. 299, 304, 329, 332

³⁰ N. Ivanova, *Znamya* 11/93, p. 179; A. Kiva, *Novyi mir* 8/93, p. 160

³¹ A. Solzhenitsyn, *From Under the Rubble*, p. 251

³² A. Solzhenitsyn, *Publitsistika v trekh tomakh*, tom. I, pp. 431, 441, 442

Much of the debate is thus characterized by, on the one hand, the tendency to think in whole units, and, on the other hand, by an emotional coloration of concepts. Both of these factors collaborate to create a discourse which is opposed to pluralism, although the discourse is pluralistic insofar as different sides are allowed to express their views. The emotional coloration judges groups and persons either as good or bad. It is not seen as legitimate to have different opinions and worldviews.

The demand for unity has been discussed and criticized by various authors during the 1990s. One author writes that there is a tendency to declare all differing opinions as traitorous.³³ Another presents the thought of the Russian culture's uniformity as a firmly held mythic pattern – oppositions are erased, or differing elements are condemned as not belonging to true Russian culture.³⁴ The sociologists Gudkov and Dubin write that "the intelligentsia" operates with concepts of totality, the extent of which has to do with terms of great pretensions – such as "the country", "the people", "the West", and "culture". This, according to them, is connected to the fact that the whole applies to the totalitarian consciousness.³⁵ The operation of the concept "intelligentsia" is along similar lines.

There are a great number of negative and positive characterisations of the intelligentsia as a totality in the debate of the 1990s. This is connected to the constant treatment of "the intelligentsia" as an undifferentiated concept. The journal *Novyi mir* hosted an extensive debate on the intelligentsia. Articles on the subject were especially numerous in 1994. I will excerpt two characterizations of the intelligentsia, from two articles of that year. The first: "The Russian intelligentsia has never served anyone – it has always, as far as its understanding reached, sought to serve the true, the good and the beautiful."³⁶ And the second: "The Russian intelligentsia's catastrophism, its apocalypsis, its shameless hysteria and psychopathy /.../ have, to a great extent, contributed to Zhirinovskiy's success in the Duma elections."³⁷

The nationalists likewise have joined the totalising debate on the intelligentsia. Today's nationalists join up with *Landmarks* and Solzhenitsyn but turn their arguments to their own ends. According to the nationalists, the Russian intelligentsia was born in the chasm which divided the country during the process of Peter the Great's Europeanization. The intelligentsia as the bearer of Western ideas is foreign to Russia, and wages war on its own country. Russia cannot be conquered from without, so it is necessary to import a doctrine. The intelligentsia, by this reading, is a sort of fifth column in the

³³ G. Andreev, *Novyi mir* 2/94, p. 185

³⁴ M. Yampolsky, *Novaya volna* (1994)

³⁵ L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, *Intelligentsiya*, p. 86

³⁶ G. Andreev, *Novyi mir* 2/94, p. 167

³⁷ D. Shusharin, *Novyi mir* 7/94, p. 186

country, which is how their argument ends. This is one of the occasions when people with intellectual professions count themselves out of "the intelligentsia" and view it as a foreign, hostile power. This does not stop them from recurring to the concept in other contexts, but then in the meaning of "the true intelligentsia", which is Russian-nationalist and which consists of altogether different persons.³⁸

I will present an article which exemplifies the fact that even those who talk of different currents within the intelligentsia, still tend to revert to unitarian thinking in wholes. In the article "The intelligentsia in the hour of trial" (*Novyi mir* August 1993), Alexei Kiva begins by distancing himself from the predominant view of the pre-1917 Russian intelligentsia as uniformly opposed to the Tsarist regime. One should, rather, speak of different streams, among them for instance the Westernizing and Slavophile. Nonetheless, the article goes on to establish a number of uniform characteristics, with the reservation that they apply to "the part of the creative intelligentsia which establishes the tone." Whereupon even this reservation quietly disappears, and the author states: "It is we who are guilty of much, we who are united by the concept of 'the intelligentsia'." This is Kiva's answer to the question of who bears the "guilt" for Russia's lack of "uniform national spirit", which he sees as having caused the October 1917 revolution and the subsequent "genocide". The idea of "different streams" with which the article began has been replaced by the expression "splintering of the national spirit", something of which someone is "guilty".³⁹

Conception of uniqueness

Unitarianism can be said to be one of the most enduring thought patterns of Russian history of ideas. Another such thought pattern is the idea of Russia's uniqueness. The debate on the intelligentsia is characterized by this idea as well. In Kiva's article, analyzed above, the idea of uniqueness is treated in the same way as the unitarian idea. Kiva begins by maintaining that there is nothing unique about Russian history, whereupon he proceeds to make the "assumption" that European history can show no analogue to the Russian intelligentsia. To back this up he cites "No common yardstick can avail you" from Feodor Tyutchev's emblematic (and constantly quoted) 1866 poem on Russian uniqueness: "Through reason Russia can't be known."⁴⁰ Indeed, almost everything that is written on this theme has its roots in the nineteenth century, when the "Russian idea" was constantly debated within Russian cultural circles. The formulations of the arguments often bear word-for-word similarity.

³⁸ V. Rasputin, *Moskva* 2/91, A. Panarin, *Na pereputye*, p. 11

³⁹ A. Kiva, *Novyi mir* 8/93, pp. 160-177

⁴⁰ *An Age Ago. A Selection of Nineteenth-Century Russian Poetry* (N Y 1988), p. 116

The *intelligentsia*, unique to Russia, is often contrasted to *intellectuals*, a phenomenon seen as typical of the West. Kiva maintains that Western intellectuals are concerned with material well-being, so that their heirs will be able to "clip coupons" and "their wives bring up their children themselves". The intelligentsia, on the other hand, seeks rather for the meaning of life and behaves according to the principle "all or nothing". "We are a young nation", as Kiva puts it, and behave like a teenager. But, he continues, there are people with high ideals in the West too.⁴¹ There is a strong tradition in Russian culture that sees the West in this way, as a sort of "anti-world". Kiva, though, writes about ideals in the West, while many see the West (the whole of it) as completely governed by material interests.

Many thus paint the West as lacking moral and idealistic qualities. The sociologist Yevgeny Pokrovsky has expressed typical views: the Western intellectuals are first and foremost adapted to the market; morality comes second; they are preoccupied with their own problems, compete for personal success, they have no idealistic motivation, and they make no sacrifices. All this, implicitly, in contrast to the Russian intelligentsia. This line of argument is tied to a critique of Western pluralism and moral relativism (which is equated with immorality), as well as a general lack of spiritual values. The special role awarded the Russian intelligentsia even takes expression in messianic ideas, which trace their origins to the nineteenth century. These survive in a series of articles that maintain that the Russian intelligentsia will help the West to achieve a spiritual state, help the whole world achieve a higher level, give the world light.⁴²

Another common pattern still sees the West as an anti-world, but places the positive pole there instead of in Russia. The Russian critic-in-exile Pyotr Vail says in a 1999 newspaper interview: "Russia is convinced that there is nothing like the Russian intelligentsia anywhere else." Vail maintains, on the contrary, that the traditional contrast between the Russian intelligentsia and the Western intellectuals is false: everywhere there are people whose intellectual and spiritual interests extend beyond work and family. That is his definition of a member of the intelligentsia. There are untold numbers who devote themselves to idealistic work in the West, says Vail, so the Russian boast is groundless. But its source is clear: the members of the Western intelligentsia fight for the owl and rescue it; but in Russia they fight for the owl sitting in their kitchens, and the owl perishes in peace and calm together with the Baikal lake; to explain

⁴¹ A. Kiva, *Novyi mir* 8/93, pp. 161, 167

⁴² N. Pokrovsky at the VI ICCEES World Congress, Tampere 2000. N. Pokrovsky, *Na pereputye*, p. 51, 62, 63, 64; *Fenomen rossiyskoy intelligentsii*, pp. 145, 148, 151, 153; *Novyi mir* 1/93, p. 20; *Znamya* 1/00, p. 195

away these facts myths are made up about the uniqueness of the Russian intelligentsia.⁴³

The West is also seen as the positive pole by a group of liberal-minded writers and debaters, who declare the old intelligentsia to be poorly adapted to the new times. What Russia needs is intellectuals on the Western model. The sociologists Gudkov and Dubin write, for instance, of the Western intellectuals as unique. They are bearers of the European culture's relativistic spirit, of modernity, where the individual is the constitutive element. They show an adult attitude, by relying on their own subjective understanding. They are functional as innovators and as culture-bearers. The Russian intelligentsia is, by contrast, they declare, authoritarian, and symbiotic to the old power system. "The comfort of violence" meant, among other things, that the intelligentsia could show off its potential possibilities during the era of censorship without having to prove anything, because they could refer to external obstacles. This gave the intelligentsia a feeling of being chosen, while in fact the elite was castrated as innovators. Under the new, freer conditions, the intelligentsia has shown itself to be incompetent to fulfil the role of elite that society needs, in order to come out of the crisis.⁴⁴

Portrayal in Literature

Vladimir Makanin's Escape Hatch

The question of the modern Russian intelligentsia has also been framed in literature. Vladimir Makanin's much-noted novella *Escape Hatch (Laz)* has, as its thematic heart, the problem of transformation and change. The intelligentsia, as it is depicted here, is closely tied to this problem. Central features of this story are thus connected with the media debate. The novella was published in *Novyi mir* in May of 1991.⁴⁵ Russian critics have termed the work one which both unites and divides Soviet and post-Soviet literature, a literary turning-point.⁴⁶ Makanin is seen today as one of the foremost, or even the foremost, contemporary Russian author.⁴⁷

Escape Hatch was published in 1991, the last year of perestroika, a difficult year for Russia. The stores were empty of goods, decay and crime were spreading, people feared starvation, civil war, a state coup, total collapse.

⁴³ *Literaturnaya gazeta* 39/99, p. 11

⁴⁴ L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, *Intelligentsiya*, pp. 77, 78, 99, 100, 101, 113.

⁴⁵ Page references and quotations refer to the English translation of the novella – Vladimir Makanin, *Escape Hatch & The Long Road Ahead* (Dana Point 1995)

⁴⁶ A. Genis, *Ivan Petrovich umer. Statyi in rassledovaniya* (1999), p. 47; A. Nemzer, *Novyi mir* 1/00, p. 207

⁴⁷ A. Nemzer, *Literaturnoe segodnya. O russkoy proze. 90-e* (Moscow 1998), p. 259; A. Arkhangelsky, *Druzhiba narodov* 7/98

Chaos and changed social roles, pauperisation and its opposite, sudden wealth, created eschatological moods. *Escape Hatch* describes two worlds, one subterranean, and one on the earth's surface. In the upper world fear rules, in half-dark, empty streets threatened by violence, in a city where streetlamps, telephones, collective traffic, electricity and waterworks have virtually ceased to function, where the houses stand with dark windows as "their dead glass eyes"(59). An enormous crowd in movement within the city, "with all its unpredictability and heightened suggestibility"(61), awakens horror.

If the world on the surface is darkness and duskiness, the subterranean world is always clearly illuminated. Here there is plenty in the stores and restaurants, gleaming cars are driven, here is health care, opinion polls, poetry readings, endless discussions among the intelligentsia, social life – all that is lacking on the surface. But here is also a lack of air, people spit blood and suddenly collapse, dead, an easy death it is said. Up there the air is fresh and the grass is green.

The two worlds are isolated from each other, except for a *laz* – translatable in English as gap, hole, or hatch – a narrow passage in the earth that sometimes contracts, sometimes widens itself, "[t]he earth breathes"(22). The main character, Viktor Klyucharyov, seems to be the only person who can pass through this *laz*.

Already on the story's concrete surface plane there appear clear signals that this is to be read symbolically and/or allegorically. There is no demand, here, for Aristotelian probability. This is typical for allegories, as is a composition in which two parallel worlds are contrasted to each other, a doubling with an unavoidably allegorical effect.

The Masses and the Minority

The story's first page establishes the opposition between the masses and the intelligentsia, the masses and the minority, death and life. Klyucharyov considers how two hundred people have been trampled to death by the crowd – "The mob [crowd]⁴⁸ doesn't count"(9). He himself is presented twice, within the first two pages, as belonging to the intelligentsia (9, 10). He is completely alone in the silent and empty streets in the increasing duskiness, now and later. This, together with other connections, shows that he belongs to the minority. The masses kill [the crowd kills], Klyucharyov maintains life.

Normal world order has been inverted in this story – the world on the surface is characterized by chaos and duskiness, the subterranean world by order and light, albeit artificial illumination. The image of upside-down inversion is also allegorical. It can be linked to an essay by Vladimir Makanin, entitled "Kvazi" (published in *Novyi mir* July 1993). In this essay, Makanin wrote about how the

⁴⁸ In the square parenthesis [] are found alternative translations, by author.

levelled-off masses live in chaos and darkness, and that these masses have come to the surface during the twentieth century. In this theoretical argumentation, Makanin does not distinguish between “the masses” and “the people,” something which is otherwise common in Russian cultural tradition. In this, he is in accordance with the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, for whom he expresses admiration in “Kvazi.”⁴⁹

The ideas of Ortega y Gasset are strikingly embodied in *Escape Hatch*. From this point of view, the Spanish philosopher is important in this context. This embodiment of ideas is one more feature of allegory. On the surface the masses rule, while in the subterranean world the intelligentsia sits and talks and talks. In accordance with Ortega y Gasset’s description in *The Revolt of the Masses*, written in 1930, members of the qualified minority have been shoved aside by the masses. The masses “do not obey them or respect them.” On the contrary, “they push them aside and supplant them.” But the modern intellectuals are disqualified too in many respects according to the Spanish philosopher. “[I]n the intellectual life one can note the progressive triumph of the pseudo-intellectual”, who is disqualified.⁵⁰ In *Escape Hatch* this is apparent already in the fact that the subterranean world lacks air, is artificially lit and is closed off from the reality on the surface.

The book’s hero, Klyucharyov, belongs to the intelligentsia, and there is much that unites him with the subterranean world – the words and the social life of which are, for him, the life which is lacking on the surface. But he is also contrasted to the subterranean world. He is the only one who can pass between the underground and the surface, and thus constitutes an exclusive minority of one. His surname is allegorical, created, as several critics have pointed out, from the Russian word *klyuch* and, it can be added, even *klyuchar* – key and key holder, just as Saint Peter, the gatekeeper of heaven and hell, is called in Russian texts.⁵¹ He is shy in words, but great in his work of maintaining life, while the subterranean world’s intelligentsia is presented, in various ways, as not suiting action to its high-sounding words. Klyucharyov personifies those who, in Ortega y Gasset’s conceptual world, “make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties”, as opposed to the masses “who demand nothing special of themselves”.⁵²

The mass man is the “average man” (a concept which Makanin picks up from Ortega y Gasset in the essay “Kvazi”); as the Spanish philosopher writes, “in the presence of one individual we can decide whether he is ‘mass’ or not.” Ortega y Gasset believes, as we have seen, that traditionally “select minorities”, such as intellectuals, have degenerated. But, according to him, “it

⁴⁹ V. Makanin, “Kvazi,” *Novyi mir* 7/93, pp. 132, 134

⁵⁰ J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (London 1969), pp. 13, 17

⁵¹ A. Genis, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* 25.07.91

⁵² J. Ortega y Gasset, *op. cit.*, p. 12

is not rare to find to-day amongst working men”, who have traditionally belonged to the masses, “nobly disciplined minds”.⁵³ There are two motifs of *Escape Hatch*, which can serve as direct illustrations of these theses.

Both in the surface and in the subterranean world Klyucharyov is moving towards a definite goal. Up on the surface it is a voyage, undertaken through the danger-filled city together with the very pregnant Olya and with Chursin, who belongs to the intelligentsia but has a background as an orphanage child. The goal of the journey is a mortuary – they are going to bury Olya’s husband, Pavlov, who has died on the street of a heart attack. Among the barriers they encounter on the way is a bus driver who refuses to drive on to the end station in a dark, deserted quarter. He is a typical “mass man” in his behaviour and in his lack of respect for the minority.

‘Sure she’s pregnant!’ the driver yells, his anger suddenly flashing out at these intellectuals [members of the intelligentsia] who were and are responsible for everything /.../ He’d probably been listening to their conversation and inasmuch as they hadn’t been swearing or talking about primuses and grub, it was clear that they were the ones who had brought the country to ruin. Destroyed it! (If not sold it out.) (56)

When the three arrive at the medical college where the mortuary is located they are taken care of by a small fellow with a number of folksy attributes – his name, Semyonich, quilted jacket, simple speech, shovel, skill in digging. The man shows a sense of responsibility and care when he helps them bury Olya’s husband in an old, deserted churchyard in the area – “one of the last professionals doing a job honestly”(64). He is, furthermore, furnished with enormous rusty keys on a steel ring. He is still another possessor of keys, but his keys seem to belong to a past time. He is one of those with “nobly disciplined minds” whom Ortega y Gasset found among workers. As the last of his kind he, too, belongs to the minority.

The most dangerous barrier on the way is the CROWD, which “tramples anyone who’s not part of it”(62). It overflows a square that the three must cross to get to the medical college. They are close to being swallowed in the crowd’s maelstrom. The crowd’s great, threatening power and movement is described for five pages. In “Kvazi” Makanin describes how the “average man” undertakes a “merciless cleansing of the square in social consciousness, so as to make room for temples and memorials dedicated to new idols.” Makanin praises Ortega y Gasset for daring to set culture against “[t]he many-headed slave who has come out onto the square, that is to say, the crowd.”⁵⁴

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp. 12, 13

⁵⁴ V. Makanin, “Kvazi,” *Novyi mir* 7/93, pp. 134, 135

Compare Makanin's praise in "Kvazi" and the depiction of the crowd in *Escape Hatch* with this quotation from Ortega y Gasset: "The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody /.../ runs the risk of being eliminated."⁵⁵

The Subterranean World and the Word

Klyucharyov is in the beginning of the novella shown to have a strange way of moving – "he periodically makes a strange twitching movement with his body"(10). His body is covered with deep wounds, incurred during his passages through the narrow *laz*. He is on his way to the hole; and when he forces himself through he reopens his bleeding wounds. He descends into a beautiful, lit room, a "wine cellar", where people are sitting and talking and drinking wine (11, 12).

The two worlds structure a number of oppositions that have to do with the Word. High, valuable words are contrasted to low, destructive words, or the crowd's "muffled drone" and "roar". A flawless but empty run of words is opposed to defective, but meaningful words, or to a silence filled with understanding (33, 35, 71). The first of these opposites characterizes the nether world, the second the world on the surface. It is not a matter of a simple division between "good" and "bad" between the worlds. It is a matter of what serves life and what serves death, and that pattern is a complicated one.

Klyucharyov passes through the *laz* and returns twice (10–11 + 22–25, 67–68 + 85–86). The longest episode of the story, of about forty pages, takes place in the upper world between the two descents, and contains, among other things, the hazardous trip to the mortuary. He exposes himself to this danger as a thoughtful friend, and his movements in both worlds is conditioned by his incessant care for the survival of himself, his friends, his wife, his son, and even unknown victims of violence. At the middle of the story he happens, during these movements, to end up next to the *laz*, and discovers that the hole has drawn itself tightly closed (49).

From below he hears "sublime [high] words", song and the music of guitars, discussions on spirituality and the sound of someone ordering another "double shot" (of vodka). This is a collection of intelligentsia attributes. The combination of high words and vodka does not disturb Klyucharyov, on the contrary "he's overcome by warmth, love, and a passionate human longing to be with them, to be there." To be shut out from there is an enormous loss, loss of thought itself, the process of thought. None of them has final knowledge, but they speak, and, like Klyucharyov, attempt – "and this common attempt is their salvation"(50). The high words remind them that they are not going to die.

⁵⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset, *ibid.*, p. 16

Without the high words he cannot live, and neither can his wordless, mentally handicapped son. "We are words"(51).

In this section, characterized by Klyucharyov's *erlebte Rede*, the expression "sublime [high] words" is linked to the sentence "The sublime [high] sky of ceilings over tables where people sit and talk"(50). The sky is artificial, as is the light. This, as one critic has pointed out, gives the high words a dubious aftertaste.⁵⁶

Klyucharyov is a bit of the way down the hole. When he gets back up he sees his wife on her way home to their son. He imagines how it would be, if he instead were to be "separated from this darkening street where his wife now walks and where Denis is, such an enormous and good boy, and the dead Pavlov, and where it's impossible to buy either a battery or a nail on the dark streets"(52). He directs a pointless, furious shout down into the subterranean world. His wife will stay with his son in the apartment.

If he wakes up and no-one is right there, Denis cries out; he has a simple nature [soul], he'll open a window looking out on the street and call in a crying voice, 'Mama! Mama!...' a gift to anyone who loves profit and easy pickings. An empty, desolate street. A child's cry – what could be easier! (52).

The subterranean world and the world on the surface are both, in their own ways, the realms of death and the realms of life. On the surface is the destructive crowd, dead streets, windows like dead glass-eyes. But this surface world also contains life. Here the grass is green and the air fresh. Here Klyucharyov sees, when he at one point emerges from the black earth, a "glimpse of the bright sky"(24), the only real light to appear in the entire story. Here Olya is pregnant, here is family and the friends, and his concern for them. Even "the dead Pavlov" can be seen as a sign of life – it is a matter of affection and fulfilment of duty that ties one to life and place. On the empty and threatening street Klyucharyov thinks to himself: "And this is life..."(9).

Yet, when Klyucharyov has forced his way down to the discussing representatives of the intelligentsia in his second visit to the subterranean world, his feelings are described as follows:

Klyucharyov, who felt numb (dead) on those desolate streets where the only active energy was the thief who sat on his victim and rummaged in his pockets – the numb Klyucharyov feels the presence of words. Like a fish landing in water again, he revives. (70)

⁵⁶ P. Vail, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* 25.07.91

Once again, we find death above and life below. At the same time, however, the author demonstrates how words below do not tally with actions. Around the table the discussion is of Dostoevsky and the refusal to accept a fortune that is built on others' misfortune. But Klyucharyov, who has just forced his way through *laz* with "unbearable pain", has been completely forgotten by these glad companions (67). The contraption, the ladder-stairway (68) he needed to get down from the hole has been moved to make place for more tables; as a result, he almost falls to his death. These "sublime [high] words", like others – about a community between the people in the two worlds, about their common misfortune if "the mob [crowd] will [should] completely lose its mind"(72) – are brought into question here and in the novella's resolution.

The man who talks about community between the two worlds spits blood, sickened by the lack of air – "The blood's not from his body but from his throat"(71) – in contrast to Klyucharyov. On his way back Klyucharyov stops, once again, in the wine cellar, caught up in the conversation. In this section, which takes up a little more than a page, the phrase "they talk" occurs five times, of which four are anaphor in a paragraph. The paragraph that immediately precedes Klyucharyov's difficult passage up through the *laz* consists of this phrase alone, as the conclusion of the story's account of the subterranean world's discussion (86, 87). This further diminishes the reader's faith in the underworldly intelligentsia's discussions and words.

At the same time, nonetheless, the description seems to express respect for the speakers:

They talk sincerely and with pain /.../ Their sublime [high] words are vague and not very convincing, but they're spoken with the hope that even approximately true sincere words will expand the soul (the gap [laz] in our soul), and the pain expelled from within will speak in words that are new /.../ And will the mob [crowd] become good? /.../ [Klyucharyov] feels connected to their words, they are dear to him. But man is finite. Man is mortal. (87)

Here, the word is contrasted to human mortality, as opposed to earlier statements that seem, rather, to posit the ability of the word to confer immortality on mortals.

Renewal as Rebirth

When Klyucharyov leaves the speakers in the subterranean world the story has just over six pages left. The last, painful, forced passage through the *laz* has associations to both birth, death and intercourse. Once up on the surface, Klyucharyov goes homewards, to the apartment in the five-story house, built during the Khrushchev era, a *chrushchevka* – an emblematic late-Soviet home. He discovers that a cave he built, as a survival project, has been destroyed.

Next to the cave hangs a killed crow – that is how it goes when you build something of your own, it says (89).

Well, he thinks, from biology and hatred they've progressed to concrete signs one can understand. This is already a sign. It's already the beginning of a dialogue. (Signs and gestures are followed by words – isn't that right?) /.../ He's tired but he won't complain; that's the way he is. (90)

In his exhaustion he sits down very close to his home, falls asleep and dreams a short dream: The *laz* has closed itself. Through the little hole which remains he shouts down information about the misfortunes of the upper world (90). He shouts that the approaching dark is destroying the individual, that even thugs and thieves are afraid on the streets. He shouts about Denis, about starvation, about dark curtains in front of the windows. The people in the subterranean world have computers and can decode the information. They usually ask for all the information they can get, and from below comes the call: "Speak! Speak!" (91). Klyucharyov lets down a thin cord to them, and feels them fastening something to it. He expects a text, but "there's not a single word in reply" (92). Instead of "a reply directed to his soul", however, he would be able to content himself with sausage links. But finally he understands what it is he is pulling up, by the thousands:

canes for the blind. When total dark falls, you can keep on walking, tapping the sidewalk with your cane. This is their answer /.../ A terrible dream, and unjust, in Klyucharyov's view, in its real lack of trust in reason. (93)

A good man in the twilight. (So few and so many.) [So little and so much.] He had woken Klyucharyov, this passer-by /.../ 'Why have you fallen asleep?' A simple voice. 'You shouldn't sleep on the street.' Still somewhat sleepy, Klyucharyov looks up. A man stands there. Middle-aged, with rather long hair that falls loosely, almost to his shoulders. /.../ 'Get up,' he repeats just as firmly, with a calm and patient smile. /.../ Klyucharyov rises. 'Yes,' he says, stretching. 'It's gotten so dark.' 'But it's not night yet,' the man says /.../ The man is still standing in the same place, and only as Klyucharyov begins to walk away does his figure in turn ever so slowly dissolve (though not completely) in the twilight. (93, 94).

These are the last words of the story.

The sudden appearance of this Christ-like figure can, among other things, be contrasted to the section about the subterranean intelligentsia's hope that

sincere words can open a painful and renewing passage/*laz* in our souls, which is followed by Klyucharyov's objection that humans are mortal (87). The sleeping Klyucharyov is awoken by Christ, who also termed Lazarus's death as sleep, and awoke him, saying "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, shall live, even if he dies."⁵⁷ If one likes, one can point to the phonetic relation between the title of the story, and the name Lazarus in Russian – *Laz* and Lazar.

Both the conclusion of the story, and Klyucharyov's passages through the *laz*, especially the last, painful forcing through to the surface, where it is said that it is perhaps he who holds the connection open with his crawling (89), are symbols for this passage in the soul, as in social consciousness. The fact that Klyucharyov in the end of *Escape Hatch* can be seen as the bearer of the possibility of renewal, in the form of rebirth traditional for Russian culture, has to do with his role as mediator between the worlds.

The story is permeated with mythical patterns and allusions. One critic has pointed out that the figure of the mediator Klyucharyov is reminiscent of the mythical "culture hero" who brings fire and work-tools to the human world, on the surface.⁵⁸ Klyucharyov does in fact bring with him, from his visits to the subterranean world, a shovel, crowbar, pickaxe, material [cloth], tea, batteries, candles, and a kerosene stove.

Chaos rules in the surface world – mythical signs of chaos include the darkness and half-darkness, as well as the emptiness and silence, all phenomena which are mentioned again and again. Another sign of chaos is the fact that time stands still, both on the surface and in the subterranean world. All the events in the surface world take place in an unchanging half-darkness. It is twilight all the time, the light is failing – sometimes, it is added, "quickly". The phrase "It's not night yet", spoken by "Christ" at the end of the story, recurs. Disturbance in the transition between night and day is an eschatological motif. The ordering of the world from chaos to cosmos involves, among other things, the culture hero's institution of periods of time and means of reckoning time.

The "rebirth" of Klyucharyov at the end of the novella results in the time starting to pass. When he is awoken we receive, for the first time, exact information on time: "He had slept for four or five minutes" (93). The immobility of time can also be seen as symbolizing the Russian word *bezvremenyie* (difficult times, stagnation) in its literal meaning of "no time". The word is used when Klyucharyov thinks about how reluctant he is to journey out and bury Pavlov "in these difficult times" (29). In this way you can link the hero's mythical role as the starter of time with a social role as the overcomer of crisis.

⁵⁷ *The Bible*, Joh. 11:11, 25

⁵⁸ P. Vail, *Nezavisimaya gazeta* 25.07.91

Conclusion

Escape Hatch shows us the subterranean world's emptily talking intelligentsia, isolated from the reality of the surface world, on the one hand; and, on the other, the main character Viktor Klyucharyov, also a representative of the intelligentsia, whose actions affect the entire world order. When he wakes/is reborn time starts again, the *bezvremenyie*/crisis can begin to be overcome. He lives up to his given name, Viktor (from the Latin *victor*). This is reminiscent of a pattern we find in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's article of 1974, "The Smatterers," as well as in articles of the 1990s debate. On the one side we are shown "the semi-educated estate – the 'smatterers'", often termed just "the intelligentsia", who are a collection of empty and nihilistic chatterers. On the other, we are presented with "the nucleus of the intelligentsia" as the equivalent of "the nucleus of goodness". The "smatterers" have brought Russia to its ruin, "the nucleus of the intelligentsia" is the only hope for its salvation.⁵⁹ The difference lies in the way of answering the question, "who is to blame?". Solzhenitsyn prioritises the intelligentsia, while Makanin focuses on the people/the masses.

Here the pendulum has swung fully between demonisation and idealization. But the two have in common the incredibly high evaluation of the importance of the intelligentsia. The elitism, which is often hidden in the arguments based on this ideological kernel, is obvious in Makanin, especially in his essay "Kvazi". Ortega y Gasset can be included in this context; the Spanish philosopher was important not only to Makanin in the Russian debate of the 1990s.

In 2000 a large conference was held in St. Petersburg on the Russian intelligentsia. In one of the contributions, the concept of "intelligentsia" was declared to be an "ideologem", meaning that those who have the power to include themselves among "the intelligentsia" are those who have the power to express themselves with authority in the public sphere. To search for a "scientific" definition of the intelligentsia was equivalent, according to this contribution, to searching for an absent black cat in a black room. And, of course, someone (defined as member of the intelligentsia) will find this absent cat and give instructions about its place in the room.⁶⁰

There is, in short, a certain circularity in the debate on the intelligentsia. It is a matter, after all, of a group that seeks to describe itself, even if some in the heat of polemic set themselves up as outsiders. The literary critic Natalya Ivanova has spoken of an intelligentsia that sought a new identity but ended up on the same old rails, unable to find a way out.⁶¹ In this article, we have looked

⁵⁹ A. Solzhenitsyn, *From Under the Rubble*, pp. 229-278, 242, 271

⁶⁰ E. Sokolov, *Fenomen rossiyskoy intelligentsii*, pp. 166, 167

⁶¹ At the VI ICCEES World Congress. Tampere 2000. This going in circles can be seen as symbolized by a number of circular definitions of the intelligentsia in the debate of the 1990s.

at different ways of dealing with this problem, which is a part of the identity crisis of post-Soviet Russian society.

The connection between the problem of renewal and the Russian intelligentsia's crisis during the 1990s can be illuminated by the following "post-modern" comment. Viktor Yerofeyev's *Encyclopaedia of the Russian Soul* of 1999 delivers a number of hard blows to the national Russian myths. He writes, with irony, that Westernisation has castrated the Russian element. The autocracy, by contrast, sustains Russianness. Russians should not be too educated and should not be allowed to go abroad. "In that case new Belinskys will appear. Romantic underground. The Natural School. The intelligentsia will revive again. Everything will start functioning. Empty stores – full refrigerators. Life will be heavenly."⁶²

Translated by Madeleine Hurd

⁶² V. Yerofeyev, *Entsiklopediya russkoy dushi* (Moscow 1999), p. 57.

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