



The Cultural Politics of the Nation in the Soviet Union After Stalin, 1953-1991

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The Cultural Politics of the Nation in the Soviet Union after Stalin, 1953-1991

A dissertation presented

by

Erin M. Hutchinson

to

The Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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The Cultural Politics of the Nation in the Soviet Union after Stalin, 1953-1991

Abstract

This dissertation studies the rise of rural-based cultural nationalism in the USSR in the years between the death of Stalin in 1953 and the break-up of the USSR in 1991. It analyzes the lives and work of a multinational group of writers who were part of a massive wave of rural-to-urban migration that took place in USSR after the Second World War. It traces the emergence and development of the Russian Village Prose movement and demonstrates that it was part of a broader, pan-Soviet phenomenon. In literary works composed between the 1950s and 1980s, rural-born writers articulated a critique of modern Soviet life that reversed longstanding Soviet ideas about the supposed superiority of the progressive urban proletariat over the “backwards” peasantry. They argued that peasant culture should form the basis of national culture and championed the preservation of historic churches, peasant material culture, and the natural world.

The dissertation shows how intellectuals from villages navigated the complex world of Soviet “cultural politics” in order to spread their ideas in an authoritarian system. Working largely through official Soviet cultural institutions, they mobilized state resources, networks of like-minded intellectuals, and connections with political elites. I adopt a pan-Soviet approach to the development of rural-based cultural nationalism, focusing on the republics of Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, and Moldova but analyzing the Soviet cultural world as an integrated system based in Moscow. The dissertation demonstrates that center-periphery dynamics in the USSR created opportunities for nationally-minded writers to promote their views. Drawing on archival and pub-

lished materials in Russian, Ukrainian, Armenian, and Moldovan/Romanian, the dissertation considers how Russian and non-Russian nationalism evolved in tandem. Over the course of the Brezhnev era, a shared sense of frustration at the Soviet state's seeming inability to halt national and rural decline developed among rural-born intellectuals. These frustrations exploded in the late 1980s, when Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* allowed writers from villages to emerge as leading national spokesmen. Several assumed leading roles the nationalist movements, and their ideas became foundational in the new post-Soviet states.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
Nation and Nationalism in the Soviet Union.....	7
Soviet Cultural Politics and the Development of Nationalism after Stalin	14
The Peasantry, the Nation, and De-Stalinization.....	23
A Pan-Soviet Approach to Soviet History.....	29
Structure of the Dissertation	35
<i>Chapter 1:</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Writing about Soviet Agriculture during the Early Thaw:</i>	
<i>Coming to Terms with Late Stalinism in Moscow, 1952-1957</i>	
Before the Thaw: The <i>Zhdanovshchina</i> and the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign.....	46
The Early Thaw: Valentin Ovechkin’s Agricultural Sketches	51
Fëdor Abramov and the “ <i>Novyi mir</i> critics”	57
The Second Congress of the Union of Writers of the Soviet Union	73
Literary Moscow Speaks: The Twentieth Party Congress, <i>Literaturnaia Moskva</i> , and Aleksandr Yashin	78
The Founding of the RSFSR Union of Writers	97
Conclusion	100
<i>Chapter 2:</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>From the Soviet Periphery to Moscow:</i>	
<i>National Writers and the Thaw in the 1950s and 1960s</i>	
Soviet Cultural Politics and Institutions in the 1950s.....	107
Moldova: Ion Druță	113
Kyrgyzstan: Chingiz Aitmatov	130
Armenia: Hrant Matevosyan.....	148
Conclusion	170
<i>Chapter 3:</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>The Rise of the Rural Periphery in Russian Literature in the 1960s</i>	
Building the Vologda Network:.....	178
Beyond Yashin: Vikulov Expands His Network in Leningrad and Moscow.....	191
Vikulov in Moscow and Vologda.....	196

The Conservative Backlash against Yashin and Solzhenitsyn	200
Vikulov and Evolving Conservative Discourse on the Village in the RSFSR Union	217
Vikulov in Moscow	222
<i>Nash sovremennik</i> as Institutional Base for the Russian Periphery.....	227
Conclusion	235
<i>Chapter 4:</i>	239
<i>Village Writers and the Preservation of Historic Churches: Religion and National Culture in Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, 1960s-1980s</i>	
Soviet Conceptions of the Nation and Policies on Church Preservation.....	243
Elite Struggles over Nationalities Policy in the 1950s and 1960s.....	248
Russia: Vladimir Soloukhin and the Russian Church Preservation Movement	250
Ukraine: Oles' Honchar and the Battle Over <i>Cathedral</i>	265
Moldova: Ion Druță and the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture	292
Conclusion	303
<i>Chapter 5:</i>	306
<i>Gathering the Nation: Soviet Collectors, the Village, and the National Idea</i>	
Ivan Honchar: Collector of Ukrainian Folk Art	309
Vladimir Soloukhin: Collector of “Black Boards”.....	314
Dmitrii Kara Choban: Collector of the Gagauz Village	319
The Practice of Collecting and the National Idea.....	325
Intellectuals, the Soviet State and the National Idea	332
Conclusion	345
<i>Chapter 6:</i>	349
<i>Village Writers and the Cultural Politics of State Prizes: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Brezhnev Era</i>	
On State Prizes.....	355
Hrant Matevosyan and the Ambivalent Armenian Politics of Inclusion.....	357
Ion Druță and the Moldovan Politics of Exclusion	377
Fëdor Abramov, Valentin Rasputin, and the Russian Politics of Conditional Inclusion	408
Conclusion	432
<i>Chapter 7:</i>	437
<i>Writers as Environmental and National Activists during Glasnost' and Perestroika</i>	
Towards a Typology of Soviet Environmentalism.....	441
Environmental Advocacy of Village Writers before <i>Perestroika</i> and <i>Glasnost'</i>	447

Valentin Rasputin and the Baikal Movement.....	457
Oles' Honchar Under the Sign of Chernobyl	474
Ion Druță and Agricultural Pollution in Moldova	488
The 1989 Congress of People's Deputies: Writers as National Spokesmen	504
Conclusion	513
<i>Epilogue</i>	517
Rural Issues on the Eve of the Collapse of the Soviet Union.....	518
The Break-up of the USSR.....	523
The Fate of Soviet Cultural Politics.....	524
Living through the End of an Empire	528
<i>Note on Transliteration</i>	533
<i>Bibliography</i>	534
Archives	534
Soviet Press.....	535
Interviews	536
Selected Published Primary Sources	536
Memoirs	538
Selected Soviet Literature in Translation	540
Document Collections	541
Selected Secondary Sources	542
Documentary Films	556

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Introduction

In a discussion with students at Yerevan State University in 1984, the Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan recounted the story of watching his father, a stern man, crying in front of his mother after he lost his beloved horse to the state farm. As he explained to the students, this experience became the basis of his literary debut, the 1961 sketch “Ahnidzor,” which garnered him the attention of the Armenian literary world—and brought down a firestorm of controversy onto his head.¹ In the sketch, Matevosyan told the story of how the administration of the local *sovkhos* (state farm) had decided that Matevosyan’s father no longer had the right to own a private horse, which meant that his father was forced to walk five or six kilometers to work on the farm every day. Matevosyan included a searing letter from his father to the *sovkhos* administration condemning the decision in the sketch.² The Bureau of the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party harshly criticized “Ahnidzor” in a directive, leading to Matevosyan’s exile from the Armenian literary world for several years.³ Matevosyan’s career ultimately recovered from this seemingly inauspicious beginning, and the theme of the struggle of Armenian peasants to maintain their autonomy in the face of indifferent Soviet authorities became the main focus of his literary work. As Matevosyan, who had just won a USSR State Prize for literature earlier in the year, explained to the students, it had all begun after watching his father lose his horse: “Re-

¹ “Mshakuyt’i pataskhanatvut’yuně ashkhari chakatagri mej vit’khari ē’: Handipum EPH-um, 1984 t. septemperi 28,” in *Es es em: harts’azruyts’ner*, by Hrant Mat’evosyan (Erevan: “Oskan Erevants’i” hratarakch’ut’yun, 2005), 245, http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/mshakuiti_patasxanatvutiuny_ashkarhi_chakatagrum_vitxari_e.

² Hrant Mat’evosyan, “Ahnidzor,” *Sovetakan grakanut’yun*, no. 4 (1961): 84–102.

³ HAA 1/41/29 (June 30, 1961): 89-91.

ally, that has been my most aggressive, most aggravated desire, as much as I have written: to get my father's horse back."⁴

Matevosyan was one of many sons of peasants who entered the Soviet literary world in the 1950s and 1960s with the aim of changing the way that peasants were perceived and treated in the Soviet Union. In the Stalin era, most writers had depicted the Soviet peasantry as the grateful recipients of the progress heralded by the Soviet regime and its leading class—the urban proletariat. Matevosyan and other writers presented an insider's view of rural life in the Soviet Union based on their experiences growing up in villages. They had witnessed the Stalinist transformation of the village firsthand as children and young adults. They had seen their father's horses taken away, their family members deported, their churches shuttered, their fellow villagers stricken by famine, their forests chopped down, and their lands flooded in the name of progress. Starting in the 1950s, writers from villages began to challenge the triumphant narrative of progress that dominated Stalinist literature about life on the collective farm. Under Stalin (and, some dared to suggest, his successors) Soviet administrators had often disregarded the needs and interests of the country's peasant population.

Starting in the 1960s, however, their criticism of the treatment of peasants under Soviet rule began to evolve into a broader critique of Soviet modernity. Urban Soviet life appeared in their works as rootless and lacking in spiritual values. The village, in contrast, was a repository of national culture and values. Writers from villages began to reassert the importance of the culture of the pre-Stalinist village for national identity. They embraced historic churches and traditional peasant material culture as colorful alternatives to the gray banality of modern Soviet life. Peasant values meant different things for different writers. Some emphasized that the heavy-

⁴ “‘Mshakuyt’i pataskhanatvut‘yuně ashkhari chakatagri mej vit‘khari ē,’” 245.

handed administration of Soviet agriculture was an affront to peasants' traditional dignity and autonomy. Others rejected dramatic Soviet plans for the transformation of nature, advocating instead the peasant's respect and love for his native land. Over time, the distinction between the peasantry and the nation in their works became increasingly blurry. The suffering of the peasantry under Stalin became the suffering of the nation. Over the course of the postwar decades, their literary works increasingly suggested that Soviet rule was inimical to both the peasantry and the nation.

This dissertation considers how and why the rural-based conception of the nation espoused by Matevosyan and other writers from villages became a powerful ideological force in the Soviet Union in the decades between the death of Stalin in 1953 and the collapse of the USSR under a wave of nationalist mobilization in 1991. The history of nationalities and nationalism in the USSR in the post-Stalin era remains largely unexplored despite widespread acknowledgement that a rise in national consciousness across the Soviet Union was an important factor in its break-up. Particularly after the death of Stalin, the cultural sphere was one of the primary spaces in which Soviet ideology was developed and spread. I argue that the postwar migration of a large number of former peasants into Soviet urban cultural institutions led to the rise of a rural-based cultural nationalism that challenged the foundational principles of proletarian internationalism. The Russian Village Prose writers—Valentin Rasputin, Fëdor Abramov, Vladimir Soloukhin, and others—are known to students of Soviet culture and history, but my dissertation shows that this was a pan-Soviet phenomenon. This dissertation brings together sources in Russian, Ukrainian, Moldovan/Romanian, and Armenian to reveal how intellectuals navigated the complicated world of Soviet cultural politics in order to promote a rural-based conception of the

nation that amounted to a stark reversal of many of the foundational ideas of the Soviet Union that were laid during Stalinism.

On the basis of research conducted in four former Soviet republics, this dissertation argues that Soviet intellectuals from the rural periphery of the empire presented another, less considered, and different challenge to the ideological underpinnings of the Soviet Union than the dissident movement that was primarily composed of established metropolitan elites. These sons of peasants fled the poverty of the Stalin-era village to pursue literary careers in the USSR's booming postwar cities. Unlike the peasant migrants who flooded the cities in the 1930s in the wake of collectivization, this new generation was able to access institutions of higher education thanks to the removal of class-based barriers made in recognition of the peasantry's immense contribution to war effort. These peasant migrants to the city eventually found a home in the complex ecosystem of literary journals, publishers, literary institutes, theaters, newspapers, and Writers' Unions that made up the Soviet cultural sphere. Rural-born writers from the Russian regions and the non-Russian republics took advantage of the opening provided by the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's subsequent criticism of his policies in agriculture to bring the topic of the peasantry to the center of the literary conversation. I demonstrate that Russian Village Prose was part of a broader, multinational literary movement of peasants-turned-writers who sought to transform Soviet discourse on the peasantry at a time when the forward-looking, modernizing socialist ideology of the Khrushchev era was beginning to falter. In literary works produced from the 1960s to the 1980s, rural-born writers from across the Soviet Union articulated a different ideological vision for the country. Reversing longstanding Soviet ideas about supposed superiority of the progressive urban proletariat over the "backwards" peasantry and rejecting the violent, forced transformation of peasant life under Stalin, they argued for the centrality of national iden-

tity with traditional peasant values at the core. Many became leading figures in the nationalist movements of the late 1980s, and their ideas shaped national identity in many of the new post-Soviet states.

In the tumultuous and shifting cultural landscape of Khrushchev's Thaw, rural-based critiques of the Soviet were not always welcomed by regional and republican Soviet authorities, as the story of Matevosyan's literary *début* suggests. Writers from the rural periphery frequently traveled to Moscow to advance their education—but also to make connections among the Moscow literary elite that they could leverage to boost their careers at home. They used official Soviet literary institutions to build networks of like-minded intellectuals that transcended regional and republican boundaries. As scholars of Russian Village Prose have noted, in the Brezhnev era, central authorities marginalized the urban left intelligentsia and began to patronize Russian writers from rural backgrounds in an effort to enlist the vital new literary movement in support of the regime. Given the interconnected nature of the Soviet literary world, the backing that Russian Village Prose received in central Moscow-based institutions reinforced and encouraged the rural-based conceptions of the nation that were developing across the USSR, even in republics where local authorities sought to suppress their own home-grown variants of rural cultural nationalism. Across the USSR, rural-born writers began to raise controversial subjects such as the need to preserve national religious heritage, the damage done by Stalinist collectivization and its aftermath, the impact of Soviet industrial development on rural residents, and low standards of living in the countryside. Expressing these views became increasingly difficult under the intensified censorship regime of the Brezhnev era. Nevertheless, authorities in Moscow continued to lend official support to Russian writers from villages, granting them the top literary awards in the Soviet Union, while republican leaders persecuted writers from similar backgrounds in Ukraine and

Moldova. By the 1980s, rural intellectuals of all nationalities had lost faith in the capacity of the Soviet state to realize their vision of national identity, which was based in the values of a traditional rural world that was quickly disappearing. During *glasnost*, writers from villages began to publicly attack central Soviet authorities as hostile to the nation, using their positions as spokesmen for the nation to spearhead environmental movements before ultimately joining the new nationalist movements on the eve of the Soviet collapse.

This dissertation addresses a major problem in the historiography of the Soviet Union: how did nationalism arise in the Soviet Union in the period between the death of Stalin in 1953 and the advent of *glasnost* in 1986? Building on a generation of research that studied the institutionalization of nationality in the Stalin era, I demonstrate that the Soviet cultural institutions that were built to integrate a sprawling, multinational state became the mechanism through which a rural-based cultural nationalism developed and spread in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era. Writers engaged in cultural politics, working in and through state institutions to promote their own ideological agendas. While previous scholarship, with a few exceptions, examined Russian and non-Russian nationalism in isolation, I show that they were part of an interconnected Soviet cultural phenomenon. This dissertation also offers a significant reinterpretation of a key topic in Soviet history: de-Stalinization. While recent scholarship on de-Stalinization has focused on the debates around a relatively limited set of issues, namely the 1937 purges and the Gulag, I show that questions of peasant and national identity were also central. Writers from rural backgrounds led the charge to reevaluate Stalinist policies towards the countryside, including collectivization, the assault on religion, and the devastation of nature. Debates on these issues continued throughout the so-called “stagnation” period of the Brezhnev era, long after authorities moved to end public discussion of 1937 and the Gulag in the late 1960s. Finally, while much prior work in the

field either approaches nationalities in isolation from each other, or ignores the experiences of non-Russians in the Soviet Union entirely, this dissertation argues for an approach to Soviet history that treats the country as the multinational state and society that it was.

Nation and Nationalism in the Soviet Union

Why did the Soviet Union collapse into fifteen new nation-states in 1991 under a tidal wave of nationalist mobilization? Despite significant advances in the scholarship on Soviet nationalities since the break-up of the Soviet Union, this question has not yet been fully answered. On the eve of the Soviet collapse, the topics of nation and nationalism remained relatively marginal to Soviet history, which was largely consumed by battles between the political historians of the “totalitarian school” and the social historians of the “revisionist school.”⁵ Those historians and political scientists who studied the nationalities question were limited by the inaccessibility of many Soviet archives.⁶ On the eve of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika*, the German scholar Gerhard

⁵ For an overview that briefly considers the place of nationalities within these debates, see Ronald Grigor Suny, “Reading Russia and the Soviet Union in the Twentieth Century: How the ‘West’ Wrote Its History of the USSR,” in *Red Flag Unfurled: History, Historians, and the Russian Revolution*, by Ronald Grigor Suny (London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2017), 53–122, especially 110–113. Two scholars who dedicated serious attention to the topic of nationality in Soviet history before the collapse of the Soviet Union were Richard Pipes and Ronald Suny, historians of the “totalitarian” and “revisionist” schools, respectively. See Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917–1923*, Rev. ed., Russian Research Center Studies 13 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918; Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution*, Studies of the Russian Institute. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, Studies of Nationalities in the USSR (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press in association with Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., 1988).

⁶ Political scientists and diaspora scholars nevertheless managed to make important contributions on the basis of published sources. Significant works by political scientists on the nationalities question include Barbara A. Anderson and Brian D. Silver, “Equality, Efficiency, and Politics in Soviet Bilingual Education Policy,” *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 4 (December 1984): 1019–39; Gail Lapidus, “Ethnonationalism and Political Stability: The Soviet Case,” *World Politics* 36 (1984): 555–580; Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, “Ethnicity in the Soviet Union,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 433, no. 1 (1977): 73–87; Brian D. Silver, “Ethnic Intermarriage and Ethnic Consciousness among Soviet Nationalities,” *Soviet Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 1978): 107–16. See also the extensive literature on Ukrainians in the Soviet Union produced by diaspora scholars, as well as an edited volume on non-Russian Soviet literatures. Jaroslaw Bilocerkowycz, *Soviet Ukrainian Dissent: A Study of Political Alienation*, Westview Special Studies on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Boulder:

Simon was able to sketch out a comprehensive outline of the contours of Soviet nationalities policy on the basis of published sources.⁷

The appearance of fifteen new nation-states on the world map understandably generated substantial academic interest in the nationalities question in the Soviet Union. Scholars began to employ new, “constructivist” interpretations of the formation of nations and nationalism in their work. In the 1980s, a new movement in the study of nations and nationalism rejected the notion of nations as ancient, “primordial” entities extending back into time immemorial, emphasizing that nations and nationalism were the products of particular historical circumstances.⁸ Scholars of the Soviet Union drew renewed attention to the ways in which the Bolsheviks, hoping to neutralize the challenge of borderland nationalism that had undermined the Russian empire, had designed a state that actually reinforced nationality as a basic building block of society. Ronald Suny applied the theoretical innovations of the constructivist school to the study of the Soviet Union and sketched out the contours of Bolshevik “nation-making” through policies such as the delimitation of national territories and the promotion of national cadres and languages (*korenizatsiia*).⁹ Yuri Slezkine famously likened the USSR to a communal apartment, with each nation

Westview Press, 1988); Kenneth C. Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era: Myth, Symbols, and Ideology in Soviet Nationalities Policy*, Studies in Contemporary History 4 (The Hague ; Boston ; London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980); Bohdan Krawchenko, ed., *Ukraine after Shelest*, The Canadian Library in Ukrainian Studies (Edmonton; Downsview, Ont., Canada: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta; Distributed by the University of Toronto Press, 1983); George Stephen Nestor Luckyj, ed., *Discordant Voices : The Non-Russian Soviet Literatures, 1953-1973* (Oakville, Ont: Mosaic Press, 1975).

⁷ Gerhard Simon, *Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion: von der totalitären Diktatur zur nachstalinischen Gesellschaft*, 1. Aufl., Osteuropa und der internationale Kommunismus ; Bd. 16 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1986). Translated as Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, trans. Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

⁸ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; repr., London; New York: Verso, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983; repr., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

occupying its own national room, a result of what he called the Bolsheviks' "chronic ethnophilia."¹⁰ The sociologist Rogers Brubaker likewise analyzed the ways in which the Soviet system of "institutionalized multinationality" reinforced the importance of nationality in Soviet life.¹¹ In addition to a constructivist theoretical perspective, all three scholars shared a tendency to fast-forward from early Bolshevik policies to the Gorbachev era, with scant attention to the decades in between.

These theoretical innovations provided the impetus for a burst of historical scholarship that took advantage of the accessibility of archives in the post-Soviet states (the so-called "archival revolution") to study Soviet nationalities policy under Lenin and Stalin.¹² The new generation of scholarship documented the ways in which the Soviet state cultivated local political and cultural elites. Terry Martin understood Soviet *korenizatsiia* as "a strategy aimed at disarming nationalism by granting what were called the 'forms' of nationhood" in order to "avoid the perception of empire."¹³ Martin traced the Party-state's promotion of local elites and languages, documenting the challenges of implementation and the evolution of policies through the 1920s and 1930s. Francine Hirsch, meanwhile, emphasized the influence of ethnographers on Soviet nationalities policies.¹⁴ A flurry of works focusing on individual nationalities explored the formation of local political and cultural cadres and institutions in the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars ex-

¹⁰ Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414–52.

¹¹ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

¹² For an early example of work on *korenizatsiia* in Ukraine, see George Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923-1934*, *Soviet and East European Studies* 84 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹³ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 3, 19.

plored how the Soviet state forged national cultures through the codification of languages and the development of cultural elites, from the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic in the east to the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in the west.¹⁵ Collectively, the new scholarship highlighted the ways in which the Soviet state institutionalized nationality and national culture, even as it conducted campaigns against “bourgeois nationalists,” both real and imagined. But what about the Russians? “The Russians were also a Soviet nationality,” Martin stressed, with their own language and culture.¹⁶ Both Suny and Martin argued that the Soviet Union was not an “ethnically ‘Russian empire’ with the metropole completely identified with a ruling Russian nationality.”¹⁷ Yet observers of the Stalinist Soviet Union had long noted a rise in Russian patriotic appeals in Soviet propaganda starting in the 1930s.¹⁸ While emphasizing the multinationality of the Soviet state, Martin also showed how the early Bolshevik desire to counterbalance “great Russian chauvinism” with affirmative action policies for non-Russians eventually gave way to the “reemergence of the Russians” as the leading nationality, the “first among equals.”¹⁹ David Brandenberger also treated Russians as a nationality, detailing how the Stalinist

¹⁴ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ See, for example Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Ali F. Iqmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 63-88; David Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918-1930* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938” (PhD thesis, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago, 1996), 1.

¹⁷ The quotation is from Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, ‘National’ Identity, and Theories of Empire,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 26. See also Martin’s explanation of his use of the term “Affirmative Action Empire,” in Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 15-20.

¹⁸ See, for example, Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat; the Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1946).

¹⁹ See Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 394-461.

state inculcated a sense of Russian national identity among the masses as it drew on Russian national and imperial symbols in order to bolster the Marxist-Leninist cause from the 1930s onward.²⁰

Meanwhile, a parallel, but rarely intersecting, branch of scholarship sought to explain how Russian nationalism had developed within official Soviet political and cultural institutions after the death of Stalin. This strand of scholarship examined the relationship between intellectuals and state actors, what anthropologist Katherine Verdery called the “nexus between politics and culture.”²¹ Using both published and *samizdat* materials available outside the Soviet Union in the 1980s, political scientist John Dunlop described what he considered manifestations of contemporary Russian nationalism in literature, art and the voluntary societies for the protection of historic monuments and nature.²² After the collapse of the Soviet Union, political scientist Yitzhak Brudny provided a detailed account of the emergence and development of a movement of Russian nationalist intellectuals, based in state cultural institutions, who sought the “reinvention of the Russian national identity.” On the basis of the Soviet press, post-Soviet memoirs, and a limited number of archival documents, Brudny argued that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had supported the movement in the Brezhnev era in order to shore up their political legitimacy as Marxist-Leninism faltered as a mobilizing ideology.²³ Sociologist Nikolai Mitrokhin,

²⁰ David Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002).

²¹ Yitzhak Brudny quotes Verdery explicitly. See Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 13; Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1991), 3.

²² John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

²³ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*. Using largely the same source base as Brudny, Simon Cosgrove provided an in-depth study of the journal *Nash Sovremennik* in the 1980s. Simon Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Sovi-*

relying much more heavily on post-Soviet memoirs and interviews, focused his attention on the organizational development of the “Russian party” in cultural institutions like the Soviet and RSFSR Writers’ Unions as well as political organizations such as the apparatus of the Komso-mol. Mitrokhin’s scholarship provided much-needed insight into the behind-the-scenes connections that had remained obscure in previous works.²⁴ Thus, by the mid-2000s, although archival sources remained largely untapped, a picture of the cultural politics of Russian nationalism in the post-Stalin period had emerged.²⁵

The same could not be said for other nationalities in the Soviet Union. By the 1990s, scholars had provided more detail about events in individual republics after Stalin’s death on the basis of published sources.²⁶ But the burst of archivally-based scholarship detailing the Soviet institutionalization of nationality during the Stalin era was not followed by a similar boom of research that could connect the dots between Stalin-era policies and the mass nationalist mobilization of the Gorbachev era. In part this reflected the field as a whole, as research on the Soviet Union from 1940 onwards has lagged far behind the scholarship on the 1920s and 1930s until relatively recently. Scholars in the former Soviet Union, often publishing in local languages, did begin to take advantage of the opening of republican archives to study nationalities policy and

et Literature: The Case of Nash Sovremennik, 1981-91, Studies in Russia and East Europe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

²⁴ Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Ruskaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

²⁵ Historian Geoffrey Hosking synthesized many of these findings in his account of Russians in the USSR, *Rulers and Victims*. Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

²⁶ See, for example Audrey L. Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks: Power and Identity under Russian Rule*, Studies of Nationalities in the USSR (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1992); King, *The Moldovans*; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Simon, 265-369; Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

the national opposition to the Soviet government in the post-Stalin era.²⁷ In the 2010s, they were joined by new generation of scholars working in former Soviet republics who drew on archival and published sources (and, increasingly, oral histories) to advance the study of Soviet nationalities into the late Stalin era and beyond.²⁸ The new nationalities scholarship moved away from state policy towards what one scholar called “lived nationality,” examining what Soviet identity categories meant in practice. While research deeply grounded in individual republics was often necessary for this sort of fine-grained scholarship, it meant that, with a few exceptions, the perspective on Soviet nationalities and nationalities policy was still largely the view from one (or at most, two) republics.²⁹ A synoptic view of Soviet nationalities that could explain why national-

²⁷ See, for example, Igor Cașu, “*Politica națională în Moldova Sovietică (1944-1989)*” (Chișinău: Cardidact, 2000); Iu. Z. Danyliuk and O. H. Bazhan, *Opozytsiia v Ukraïni: druha polovyna 50-kh - 80-ti rr. XX st.* (Kyïv: Ridnyi kraj, 2000); Jamil Hasanli, *Khrushchev’s Thaw and National Identity in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1954-1959*, Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series (Lanham; Boulder; New York; London: Lexington Books, 2015); H. V. Kas’ianov, *Nezhodni: ukraïns’ka intelihentsiia v Rusi oporu 1960-80-kh rokiv* (Kyïv: Lybid’, 1995).

²⁸ Kathryn Dooley, “Selling Socialism, Consuming Difference: Ethnicity and Consumer Culture in Soviet Central Asia, 1945-1985” (PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2016), <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:33840731>; Megan Duncan-Smith, “Taming the Dnipro Rapids: Nature, National Geography, and Hydro-Engineering in Soviet Ukraine, 1946-1968” (PhD diss., Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, 2019), <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42013094>; Moritz Florin, “What Is Russia to Us? Making Sense of Stalinism, Colonialism and Soviet Modernity in Kyrgyzstan, 1956–1965,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2016): 165–89; Krista Goff, “‘Why Not Love Our Language and Our Culture?’ National Rights and Citizenship in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 27–44; Claire Pogue Kaiser, “Lived Nationality: Policy and Practice in Soviet Georgia, 1945-1978” (PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2015), Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations (1795), <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1795>; Maike Lehmann, “Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 9–31; Maike Lehmann, “Bargaining Armenian-Ness: National Politics of Identity in the Soviet Union after 1945,” in *Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States*, ed. Tsypylma Darieva and Wolfgang Kaschuba, Representations of Patterns of Social Order 3 (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2007), 166–89; Maike Lehmann, “The Local Reinvention of the Soviet Project: Nation and Socialism in the Republic of Armenia after 1945,” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 59, no. 4 (2011): 481–508; Michael Loader, “The Khrushchev Thaw and Soviet Latvia: National Politics: 1953 - 1961” (PhD thesis, King’s College London, 2015); John M. Romero, “Socialist in Form, National in Content: Soviet Culture in the Tatar Autonomous Republic, 1934-1968” (PhD thesis, Arizona State University, 2019). For scholarship that incorporates interview and oral history sources, see Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013); Dooley, Adrienne L. Edgar, “What to Name the Children? Oral Histories of Ethnically Mixed Families in Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 269–90; Goff, “‘Why Not Love Our Language and Our Culture?’” Petru Negură, *Ni h eros, ni tr aitres: les  crivains moldaves face au pouvoir sovi etique sous Staline* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009).

²⁹ For works adopting an all-Union analytical frame, see Jeff Sahadeo, *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow* (Ithaca, New York ; London: Cornell University Press, 2019); Erik Scott, *Familiar*

ism emerged among both Russians and non-Russians during the post-Stalin period proved elusive.³⁰

Soviet Cultural Politics and the Development of Nationalism after Stalin

I argue that the concept of Soviet cultural politics is the means through which rural-based nationalism emerged as a potent ideological force across the Soviet Union during the period between 1953 and 1991. The term “cultural politics” refers to the struggle for control over the ideological content of cultural production in socialist societies.³¹ This dissertation’s use of a broad range of sources, including archival documents, published sources, memoirs, and interviews, gives unprecedented insight into the practice of cultural politics in the Soviet Union during this period. Over time, cultural elites working within official Soviet institutions developed a rural-based cultural nationalism that placed rural people and traditions at the heart of national identity. This happened due to a confluence of “from below” pressure on the part of writers from villages who had entered urban cultural institutions starting in the late 1940s, as well as decisions made “from above” by factions within the Party to support rural-based cultural nationalism in particular places at particular times.

Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Anna Whittington, “Forging Soviet Citizens: Ideology, Identity, and Stability in the Soviet Union, 1930-1991” (PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2018).

³⁰ Jeremy Smith has written a synthetic account on the basis of secondary scholarship. Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³¹ Although the term “cultural politics” is typically used in the scholarship on socialist societies, it could in theory be applied to similar phenomena in other types of societies. For an example of a similar study outside the former socialist bloc, see Martha Hanna’s work on the development of “intellectual nationalism” among French intellectuals during the First World War. Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Katherine Verdery coined the term cultural politics in her 1991 book *National Ideology Under Socialism*, in which she seeks to explain how Communist Party rule actually strengthened national ideology in socialist Romania.³² Rejecting the approach that posits a binary division between intellectuals and the government, Verdery argues that ideology in Romania was in fact co-produced by Party officials and intellectuals. In socialist systems, political leaders recognized the power of culture to shape the consciousness of the masses, and sought to incorporate cultural producers into the regime in order to shore up its legitimacy.³³ Socialist authorities sought to control intellectuals through institutions such as the Writers' Union, but nevertheless remained dependent on them to produce works of culture that could translate socialist ideology for the masses. As a result, although intellectuals were very much unequal partners in this process, they held a significant amount of sway over the shape of socialist ideology. Conflict in the contest for cultural power was thus not a struggle simply between "intellectuals" and "the Party," but rather a competition among factions of the cultural elite, allied with different political actors, to determine the content of ideology. Following the method developed by French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu, Verdery analyzes cultural production as a field, a social arena in which actors deploy tangible and intangible resources in the struggle to gain power and improve their social position.

The concept of cultural politics, although developed in reference to socialist Romania, is equally applicable to the Soviet Union. As Denis Kozlov has argued, modern Russia is a "literature-centered civilization" where literature has historically played a "time-honored role [...] as

³² Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*.

³³ Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, 90.

the main generator of socioethical norms.”³⁴ The Bolsheviks, steeped in the intellectual milieu of the Russian empire, well understood the political significance of literature and, moreover, believed they had a messianic mission to bring culture to the masses.³⁵ They lavishly subsidized literature and conducted massive literacy campaigns so that ordinary Soviet citizens could read Soviet publications. Even during the most repressive days of the Stalin era, when writers who made the wrong step could face execution or a long prison term, literature was a battleground where factions within the cultural and political elite sought to shape Soviet ideology, and thereby mold the future of the country. Khrushchev’s decision to end the use of terror as a routine policy tool opened up much more space for intellectuals to pursue their political goals through engaging in cultural politics. As Brudny and Mitrokhin have shown, intellectuals working in and around official state institutions played a key role in determining the shape of Russian identity in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. Thus, in order to understand how a rural-based nationalism emerged in the Soviet Union after 1953, we must understand the interactions between the state and intellectuals that shaped national identity, the cultural politics of the nation.

The development of rural-based cultural nationalism in the Soviet Union began with the entrance of a significant number of former peasants into the field of Soviet culture in the 1940s and 1950s. Writers who grew up in the poverty and violence of the Stalinist village brought a different perspective to urban cultural institutions. They tended to reject the Stalinist narrative that depicted the city as a beacon bringing enlightenment to a benighted countryside. They saw virtues in the rural way of life that their literary predecessors and urban contemporaries often did not. Acutely aware that as former peasants they came from a lower rung of the Soviet cultural

³⁴ Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4, 2.

hierarchy than their urban peers, they turned their disadvantage into an advantage by turning their intimate familiarity with rural life into an asset.³⁶ Their first-hand knowledge of the village allowed them to write literature that their peers saw as more “truthful” than late Stalinist depictions of life of the collective farm. Despite their initial disadvantages *vis-à-vis* the urban cultural elite, writers from villages also managed to become an important cultural force by leveraging social relationships to exert influence on the field of Soviet culture. These social networks used Soviet cultural institutions that were designed to integrate the Soviet cultural world in order to facilitate the movement of rural-born intellectuals and ideas from periphery to center (and back again). Writers from villages who encountered authorities who were hostile to their rural-based reinterpretation of national identity at the regional or republican level were often able to subvert them by cultivating ties in central institutions and then deploying them against their enemies at home. Ultimately, many writers from villages used their connections to find a literary home at prestigious central journals like *Novyi mir* (*New World*), *Nash sovremennik* (*Our Contemporary*) and *Druzhba narodov* (*Friendship of the Peoples*). They turned these state institutions into mouthpieces for their rural-based conceptions of the nation, criticizing the Stalinist treatment of the peasantry and placing traditional rural life at the heart of depictions of the nation.

Intellectuals competing to influence Soviet ideology had a range of tactics at their disposal. As other scholars have noted, in the field of culture, as well as Soviet society as a whole,

³⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 5.

³⁶ On the sense of cultural inferiority that many Russian Village Prose writers felt, see Anna Razuvalova, “«Mne by khotelos’ kogda-nibud’ stat’ vpolne intelligentnym chelovekom»: Pisateli-«derevenshchiki» i problemy kul’turnogo samoopredeleniia,” in *Pisateli-«derevenshchiki»: literatura i konservativnaia ideologiiia 1970-kh godov* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 81–179.

strong patronage relationships were necessary to achieve one's goals.³⁷ Young writers from the rural periphery who wanted career opportunities depended on the aid of patrons who had already established strong positions in cultural institutions in the Stalin era. As patrons usually wanted to support likeminded young writers, these relationships melded the personal and the political. In addition to advice, powerful patrons could tap the resources of cultural institutions such as the Writers' Union and literary journals, which could provide access to publication, advanced education, decent apartments and more. The Russian poet Aleksandr Yashin, for example, helped his protégé Sergei Vikulov, a young peasant poet from Vologda, get established in the Soviet literary world by leveraging his connections in the Soviet Writers' Union, publishers, and other Moscow-based institutions. Vikulov went on to become the editor of *Nash sovremennik*, the flagship journal for Russian Village Prose in the 1970s and 1980s. Powerful patrons like Aleksandr Tvardovskii, a renowned poet and the editor of *Novyi mir*, could even appeal to the Central Committee on a writer's behalf.

For writers from the Soviet periphery, especially for those who faced political opposition early in their careers, perhaps the most important thing a patron could do was to help them travel to Moscow, usually by securing them admission to an educational institution there. Moscow was the country's cultural hub and home to the country's most prestigious literary journals, publishers, and theaters. Writers from villages, especially those whose education had been interrupted by wartime service in the Red Army, learned how to be "cultured" through contact with Moscow educational and cultural institutions. Living in Moscow also provided another advantage—it was the place where intellectuals experienced the most freedom, especially during periods of reform.

³⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 10; Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); John P. Willerton, *Patronage*

Spending time in Moscow helped writers to forge networks. Networks often formed among intellectuals who shared a common region of origin (so-called *zemliaki*) or other formative life experience (such as serving in World War II). Building a network opened up further opportunities for publication and positive reviews in major journals and newspapers, thus boosting the career prospects of rural writers who lacked the connections that urban peers often made through family and education. Writers in the same network generally shared ideological positions, which could lead to clashes with other networks. Networks were an endemic but oft-criticized part of cultural life in the Soviet Union; political and cultural actors often used the negative term *gruppovshchina* to describe networks that they did not like. Although they could exclude as well as include, the existence of patronage relationships and networks that connected periphery and metropole provided a means by which writers from the periphery could achieve social and geographical mobility. The young Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan, for example, found himself blacklisted in his native republic after publishing his controversial sketch “Ahnidzor” in 1961. With the help of patrons in the Armenian Writers’ Union, he secured a spot in the Higher Screenwriting Courses in Moscow. Matevosyan’s friends in Moscow promoted his work in prestigious all-Union publications, boosting his reputation enough so that Armenian publishers felt pressured to publish his works. Personal ties among intellectuals thus acted to move people and diffuse ideas across the broad expanses of the Soviet Union.

The cherished goal of intellectual networks was often taking over state institutions, which enabled them to promote their own political (and personal) ends. Nationally-minded intellectuals often sought to take over republican Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in the 1960s, for example. Taking control of an institution was not easy, however, and

and Politics in the USSR, Soviet and East European Studies ; 82 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

usually required strong political ties. Intellectuals also sometimes managed to found state institutions if they could not commandeer a preexisting one; the Vologda network of Russian Village Prose writers scored a major coup when they convinced the Soviet Writers' Union to found a branch in Vologda. When a network successfully monopolized the leadership of a publication, publishing house, or even the Writers' Union, then it could mobilize state resources. Once under a network's control, a state institution became a home base from which writers promoted their ideology, including their network's conceptions of national identity. This could have tremendous implications depending on the strength and reach of the institution. With an all-Union distribution that spanned the USSR, Aleksandr Tvardvoskii's *Novyi mir* became an important voice for de-Stalinization and the Thaw in distant republican capitals as well as in Moscow. Tvardvoskii supported writers who rejected Stalinist conceptions of national identity in the RSFSR as well as republics such as Moldova, Lithuania, and Kyrgyzstan. The takeover of *Nash sovremennik* by Sergei Vikulov's Vologda network, meanwhile, made the journal the leading voice of rural-based Russian nationalism from the periphery in the 1970s and 1980s, boosting writers like Valentin Rasputin who otherwise may never have been published in a prestigious central journal. The resources of state institutions were the necessary lubrication that enabled the circulation of intellectuals and their ideas about the nation throughout the Soviet Union.

Networks and other groups of like-minded writers could also steer material resources towards their allies and boost their cultural prestige through the securing state prizes. State prizes like the Lenin Prize and the all-Union and republican State Prizes in the Soviet Union provided significant material remuneration and vaulted writers into the Soviet cultural canon. Being awarded a prize signaled to the intellectual community as a whole that the writer had the ideological *imprimatur* of the Party leadership. Winning a Lenin Prize in 1963 boosted the Kyrgyz

writer Chingiz Aitmatov's position in the Kyrgyz Writers' Union because it demonstrated that he had the favor of the all-Union political and literary elites. As the state prize committees were composed of writers and other intellectuals, they were a key site where battles between dueling networks were waged and ideological positions staked out. The nomination of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for a Lenin Prize in 1964 became an occasion for heated debate over the nature of the Russian peasantry between pro- and anti-Thaw forces. The failure of the nomination was an important signal that the power of Khrushchev and his allies among the Soviet intelligentsia was waning.

Authorities at different levels of the Party-state had different attitudes towards intellectuals' advocacy for rural-based conceptions of the nation, ranging from encouraging to openly hostile. This dissertation argues that the policies of central and republican Central Committees of the Communist Party towards intellectuals who espoused rural-based conceptions of the nation can be characterized as either a "politics of inclusion" or a "politics of exclusion." In practice, policies often fell along a spectrum between these two. Yitzhak Brudny coined the term politics of inclusion (or inclusionary politics) to describe the policy that Party officials in the Brezhnev era adopted towards Russian nationalist intellectuals starting in 1965 shortly after Brezhnev's takeover of the Central Committee.³⁸ A politics of inclusion did not always mean outright sponsorship of a particular viewpoint (although it could), but it did mean tolerance of those who shared that viewpoint. A politics of exclusion, meanwhile, meant the silencing of particular viewpoints by marginalizing them from the sphere of official culture. While the policies of republican and central officials exerted tremendous influence on writers' futures, they were not all-important. The integrated nature of the sphere of Soviet cultural production created opportunities for these poli-

³⁸ See Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, especially Chapter 3.

cies to be subverted by well-connected writers. Moreover, central and republican policies often acted at cross-purposes. A politics of inclusion towards intellectuals who espoused a rural-based conception of the nation at the central level often had the effect of encouraging likeminded writers in the republics, who were perfectly capable of noticing the discrepancies between central and republican policies (and exploiting them).

Party policies towards nationally-minded writers evolved over time. After the death of Stalin, Khrushchev's repudiation of Stalinist agricultural policies created opportunities for writers with a rural-based conception of the nation, who were allowed to express their views in central publications to a limited extent under Khrushchev's inclusionary policy. In the non-Russian republics, the end of the late Stalinist anti-nationalist campaigns and the generally freer and more inclusive cultural atmosphere resulted in minor national renaissances in many republics. It became possible to voice rural-based conceptions of the nation, although intellectuals who espoused these views were often suppressed by cautious republican leadership. In the Brezhnev era, although all intellectuals worked under intensified censorship, the central Party adopted an inclusionary policy towards the developing Russian Village Prose movement. The policies of Brezhnev's appointees in the republics, meanwhile were uneven. Brezhnev clients in the western republics of Moldova and Ukraine adopted harshly exclusionary policies towards rural-based conceptions of the nation. With Russian Village Prose writers being published in large press runs and winning state awards, it was hard to prevent their rural-based conceptions of the nation from influencing non-Russian writers, however. Writers from the non-Russian republics who espoused a rural-based conception of the nation often found that it was possible to publish their works in Moscow because of similarity between their works and those of the Russian Village Prose writers. In the Caucasus, meanwhile, republican leaders were somewhat more inclusionary towards

nationally-minded intellectuals, allowing them to establish strong positions in cultural and academic institutions.³⁹ The harsh censorship that all writers faced during this period fostered resentment, even among Russian writers who were relatively privileged compared to their peers in the republics. After Gorbachev's announcement of the policy of *glasnost* in 1986, intellectuals were able to voice rural-based critiques of the Soviet state, first in Moscow and then later in the republican capitals. Writers from villages pushed the boundaries of *glasnost*, ultimately becoming some of the most prominent intellectuals of the period and assuming the role of spokesmen for the nation. The visible roles that many held in the nationalist movements on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union testifies to the importance and strength of the rural-based strand of national identity that evolved after the death of Stalin.

The Peasantry, the Nation, and De-Stalinization

The peasantry has long occupied a central place in the history of both the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, but the topic has been largely absent from the emerging scholarship of the post-Stalin period. Given the overwhelmingly agrarian nature of the Russian empire, it is not surprising that for Russians, as well as for many other peoples of the empire, national identity was deeply tied to the peasant class. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the Russian word *narod* encompassed the meanings of “people,” “nation,” and “peasantry.”⁴⁰ As nationalism developed as an intellectual phenomenon in the empire over the course of the nineteenth century, the question of the condition and nature of the peasantry, which after all formed the vast majority of the

³⁹ For an example of this phenomenon in the field of history, see V. A. Shnirel'man, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001).

⁴⁰ Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 33.

population, fascinated the Russian intellectual elite, as well as the budding intelligentsias of the “peasant peoples” who occupied the empire’s western territories, including the Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, and Finns.⁴¹ As Cathy Frierson has explained, the abolition of serfdom in the Russian empire in 1861 sparked a fascination with the peasantry among educated Russian society, which became a search for Russian self-definition during a time of profound social change. By the late 1880s, however, intellectual disillusionment with the peasantry had set in.⁴² The empire’s Marxists believed that the country would instead find salvation in the figure of the progressive urban worker, who would lead the backwards peasantry into modern life. The Bolsheviks were the inheritors of this Russian intellectual tradition.

After the Bolshevik revolution, the peasant question became one of the central preoccupations of the Soviet leadership and has occupied a similarly important place in the history of the interwar Soviet Union.⁴³ From the beginning, the *raison d’être* of the Bolshevik regime was to promote the industrialization of the Soviet Union. Yet when they seized power in 1917, the urban-oriented Bolsheviks found themselves at the head of a society that was still overwhelmingly agrarian. Culturally, the “backwards” and “uncultured” peasantry represented the antithesis of the progress that the Bolsheviks sought to bring to the Soviet Union. Economically, however, the

⁴¹ On the development of nationalism among the “peasant peoples,” see Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2001), 220-230.

⁴² On images of the Russian peasantry in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Frierson, *Peasant Icons*.

⁴³ See, for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: New Press, 1994); Jochen Hellbeck, “Secrets of a Class Enemy: Stepan Podlubny,” in *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 165–221; Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, Norton Library ; N752 (New York: Norton, 1975); Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin’s Special Settlements* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Bolsheviks depended on a steady stream of grain from the countryside in order to feed the cities and fund their industrialization program. Joseph Stalin ultimately made the fateful decision to solve the Soviet regime's peasant problem by implementing the collective farm system. During collectivization, as Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, "Communists and Komsomols descended on the countryside en masse to get rid of the kulaks, collectivize the village, close the churches, and generally kick the backward peasantry into the socialist twentieth century."⁴⁴ The social historian Lynne Viola interpreted collectivization as "an all-out attack against the peasantry, its culture, and way of life."⁴⁵ Citing a 1928 speech by Stalin in which he explicitly stated that Soviet industrialization required "tribute" from the countryside, Viola argues that "the countryside served as the Soviet Union's 'internal colony,' to be tapped in the interests of Moscow." For Viola, the exploitation of the peasant class in the Soviet Union was similar to European overseas colonization not only in its economic exploitation, but in its espousal of a "civilizing mission" towards a group constructed as culturally inferior.⁴⁶ Depictions of peasants, to be sure, were central to Stalinist socialist realism—but the portrayals of happy, prosperous, enlightened, and secular peasants in Stalinist culture bore little relationship to the lived reality of Soviet peasants.⁴⁷

The profound influence of peasants on the Red Army during World War II has begun to attract attention, and a small English- and Russian-language historiography explores the postwar period in the village, when the state once again required the peasantry to pay "tribute" to the So-

⁴⁴ Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 48.

⁴⁵ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, vii. See also Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland*; Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*.

⁴⁶ Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*, 186-187. See also Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 3.

⁴⁷ See Evgeny Dobrenko, "Utopian Naturalism: The Epic Poem of Kolkhoz Happiness," in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, ed. Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (London; New York; Delhi: Anthem Press, 2009), 19–51; Laura J. Olson, "A Unified National Style: Folklore Performance in the Soviet Context," in *Performing Russia: Folk Revival and Russian Identity* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2006), 35–67.

viet economy, this time to rebuild after the devastation of war.⁴⁸ As Soviet historians have moved the chronological limits of the field forward into the post-Stalin era, however, the peasantry has gone missing.⁴⁹ One area where the absence of the peasantry is particularly felt is in the historiography of de-Stalinization. This is particularly striking given the tremendous impact of collectivization on the country's peasant majority, and the fact that Khrushchev staked his initial claims to leadership on his efforts to improve the conditions in the countryside after the blatant exploitation of the postwar years. While the process of "coming to terms with Stalinism" has attracted renewed attention, the recent historiography on de-Stalinization focuses on a relatively narrow set of issues mostly from the pre-war period, including the purges of 1937, the Gulag, and (to a lesser extent) Stalin's mismanagement of the Soviet war effort.⁵⁰ Collectivization and related issues like the attack on the church are largely absent from the historiography on Khrushchev's Thaw, and the dominant issues discussed in the literature are those that concerned the urban Russian population.⁵¹ When collectivization does come up in discussions of de-Stalinization and the

⁴⁸ On peasants in the Red Army during the Second World War, see Brandon M. Schechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II through Objects*, Battlegrounds (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, NJ; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2002). On the postwar village, see Mark Edele, "Veterans and the Village: The Impact of Red Army Demobilization on Soviet Urbanization, 1945–1955," *Russian History* 36, no. 2 (2009); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy', 1945-1953," in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan J. Linz (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 144-150; Iu. V. Kostiashev, *Povsednevnost' poslevoennoi derevni: iz istorii pereselencheskikh kolkhozov Kaliningradskoi oblasti, 1946-1953 gg.*, *Istoriia stalinizma* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2015); Elena Zubkova, "The State and the Peasant: Village Antagonism to the Collective Farm," in *Russia After the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 59–67.

⁴⁹ A notable exception is Aaron Todd Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade: Khrushchev's Farming Revolution in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵⁰ Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: The Stalinist Past as Soviet Culture, 1953-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*; V. M. Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁵¹ See two edited volumes on de-Stalinization and the Thaw: Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East

Thaw, it tends to be only in connection to Aleksandr Tvardovskii, the head editor of *Novyi mir*, the leading journal of the Thaw, who came from a family of dekulakized peasants.⁵² The one area where scholars, largely from outside the discipline of history, have discussed the reaction to Stalinist policy towards the village during de-Stalinization has been in the scholarship on the literary movement known as Russian Village Prose.⁵³ Political scientist Yitzhak Brudny explicitly discusses Russian Village Prose as a literary movement triggered by the Twentieth Party Congress and composed largely of former peasants.⁵⁴ Lithuanian scholar Violeta Davoliute traced a similar phenomenon among the Lithuanian intelligentsia.⁵⁵ Yet the literature on de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union still remains almost entirely urban-focused, with discussion of the reaction to collectivization and the Stalinist treatment of the peasantry generally cordoned off in the literature on nationalities.⁵⁶

Building on the literature on the impact of Stalinism on the peasantry, this dissertation offers a reinterpretation of de-Stalinization. First, it argues that, especially in the early phases, the intellectual debates triggered by the death of Stalin and the Twentieth Party Congress were as

European Studies 23 (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

⁵² See Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, 134-170; Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 246-247.

⁵³ One exception is historian Geoffrey Hosking, who has long been interested in Village Prose. Brudny; Geoffrey A. Hosking, "The Russian Peasant Rediscovered: 'Village Prose' of the 1960s," *Slavic Review* 32, no. 4 (December 1973): 705-24; Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Kathleen Parthé, "The Dangerous Narrative of the Russian Village," in *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 75-101; Anatoly Pinsky, "The Individual after Stalin: Fedor Abramov, Russian Intellectuals, and the Revitalization of Soviet Socialism, 1953-1962" (Columbia University, 2011).

⁵⁴ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 33-39.

⁵⁵ Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁶ A recent, welcome exception has been the work of historian Anatoly Pinsky, who has used the diaries of Russian Village Prose writer Fëdor Abramov to explore the evolution away from Stalinist subjectivity during the 1950s and early 1960s. Pinsky, "The Individual after Stalin."

much reaction to the relatively recent events *late* Stalinism as they were a reaction to the purges that had happened some twenty years earlier. The treatment of the peasantry in the postwar period was one of the most important issues in the early Thaw.⁵⁷ The nationalities policies of late Stalinism—including rising Russocentrism, the “anti-nationalist” campaigns in the republics, and the anti-Semitic “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign in the center—were also a major topic of debate.⁵⁸ As the peasantry was a central part of national identity in many republics, the reaction against the postwar treatment of the peasantry and late Stalinist nationalities policy could not but be intertwined. This brings us to the second expansion of our understanding of de-Stalinization: the centrality of the topic of the Stalinist transformation of peasant life and the related issue of national identity to the Thaw. Writers from rural backgrounds from across the Soviet Union began to question collectivization and rejected the Stalinist denigration of the peasant way of life, including the attack on the church and traditional peasant folkways. The reassertion of the importance of the culture of the pre-Stalinist village for national identity found expression on the pages of literary journals as well as intellectuals’ efforts to collect rural material culture and their participation in the movement to preserve historic churches and monasteries.

Finally, this dissertation argues for a broadening of our periodization of de-Stalinization. While the removal of Aleksandr Tvardovskii as the head editor of *Novyi mir* in 1970 has long been considered the final nail in the coffin of de-Stalinization, in fact, it really signaled the end of discussion of two issues that primarily (but not exclusively) preoccupied the urban intelligentsia:

⁵⁷ Dina Spechler discussed several *Novyi mir* works on agriculture from the early 1950s but connects them to criticism of the Stalinist model of production rather than the Stalinist treatment of the peasantry *per se*. Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novy Mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1982), 1-34.

⁵⁸ For an overview of late Stalinist nationalities policy, see Brandenberger, *National Bolshevism*, 183–96. The backlash to the anti-cosmopolitan campaign is sometimes mentioned as an aspect of de-Stalinization and the Thaw, especially by Russian scholars. See Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*; M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast' v 1950-e--60-e gody* (Moskva: Dialog MGU, 1999); Polly Jones, “The Personal and the Political:

the 1937 purges and the Gulag. The re-evaluation of the Stalinist legacy in the countryside continued through the period of so-called “stagnation.” This has not been widely appreciated as de-Stalinization because these conversations frequently happened in the “conservative” journal *Nash sovremennik* and in the journal that published primarily non-Russian writers, *Druzhba narodov*. Nevertheless, by the advent of *glasnost*, rural-born writers had spent decades chipping away at the Soviet narrative of the heroic Stalinist transformation of peasant life.

A Pan-Soviet Approach to Soviet History

Today the scholarly consensus acknowledges that the Soviet Union was a multinational state. Unfortunately, the sources and approaches adopted by many historians in the field have not kept up with the scholarship on nationalities policy in the Soviet Union. Outside the nationalities subfield, Russian sources (often gathered exclusively in Leningrad and Moscow) sometimes stand in for the Soviet Union as a whole. Scholars of Soviet nationalities, meanwhile, have often framed their analysis within national boundaries that were nonexistent at the time. This dissertation adopts a pan-Soviet approach to Soviet history. One of the primary intellectual objectives of this dissertation is to advance an approach to the study of empires and multinational states that unites metropole and periphery within a single frame of analysis. Two leading scholars of European empire have argued that the metropole and the colonies should be “treat[ed] in a single analytic field,” stressing that “Europe was made by its imperial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts within Europe itself.”⁵⁹ This observation may be even more

Opposition to the Thaw and the Politics of Literary Identity in the 1950s and 1960s,” in *The Thaw*, 231-57; Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 227-236.

⁵⁹ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley:

applicable to the Soviet Union. Adeeb Khalid has argued persuasively that, in contrast to European colonial empires that sought to perpetuate difference, the Soviet Union acted as a mobilizational state, driven by an impulse to integrate and homogenize.⁶⁰ Yet as Adrienne Edgar has observed, “In Soviet history, center and periphery are still for the most part written about separately, and by different people. Even among those who study ‘nationality policy,’ there are those who focus on the center and those who focus on the republics.”⁶¹ Although they were part of a single state for more than seven decades, Soviet nationalities continue to be studied largely in isolation from one another. Those scholars who have studied Soviet nationalities in the post-Stalin period have generally focused on individual Soviet republics, and never on Russian and non-Russian nationalism together. Mine is the first archivally-based, multi-sited dissertation to examine the spread of cultural nationalism between 1953 and 1991 across multiple Soviet republics, and the first to consider Russian and non-Russian nationalism in this period as part of a single, integrated pan-Soviet phenomenon.

In order to tell a more integrated story of Soviet nationalities in the post-Stalin era, I have focused on the cases of Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, and Moldova (with a brief foray into Kyrgyzstan in Chapter 2). These cases provide insight into republics large and small and from different geographical regions of the Soviet Union. The cases are weighted more towards the Soviet west-

University of California Press, 1997), 4, 1. Stoler and Cooper’s observation is perhaps even more applicable to the Russian empire, where the location of the Russian “core” of the empire has never been stable. See Leonid Gorizontov, “The ‘Great Circle’ of Interior Russia: Representations of the Imperial Center in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, ed. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 67–93.

⁶⁰ Adeeb Khalid, “Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 231–51.

⁶¹ Adrienne Edgar, “*Rulers and Victims Reconsidered: Geoffrey Hosking and the Russians of the Soviet Union*,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 432. For a cultural history that integrates both center and non-Russian periphery, see Mayhill C. Fowler, *Beau Monde on Empire’s Edge: State and Stage in Soviet Ukraine* (Toronto; Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

ern borderlands in part because this region experienced a higher degree of nationalist mobilization during the Gorbachev era. Central Asia is underrepresented, meanwhile, because it did not experience significant nationalist mobilization during that period. (The Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov was very much involved in the development of rural-based nationalism in the Soviet Union, but from the 1960s onward he worked in Moscow, not his native republic.) These cases also provide examples of varying degrees of inclusive and exclusive policies towards nationally-minded intellectuals, with Russia and Armenia being generally inclusive and Ukraine and Moldova being predominantly exclusive. The case of Moldova also provides insight into the dynamics of cultural politics in the territories incorporated largely after the Second World War.⁶² My choice of republics was also influenced by my language proficiencies, as I sought to incorporate sources in writers' native languages as much as possible.

As we will see, thanks in large part to Soviet central institutions, the Soviet Union functioned as an integrated cultural space in which national writers and their ideas often moved easily between Moscow and the Russian and non-Russian peripheries. A multi-sited source base is necessary to trace the pan-Soviet connections that the Soviet Union fostered and allows us to follow actors as they move between Moscow and the republican capitals. Examining sources from both the republics and Moscow sheds light on how writers fit into different contexts, and how ideas and policies developed in one context translated (or failed to translate) to another. Analyzing archival sources from multiple levels of the Soviet Party-state helps us to better understand the relationship between republican and all-Union authorities. When we examine reports and correspondence from Party officials in both Moscow and the republics, we see that Party leaders in the republics often had a very different set of interests and considerations than Party leaders in the

⁶² I have also sought to integrate information from Lithuania where possible, relying on work by Violeta Davoliūtė. See Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania*.

central apparatus. Republican leadership did not act independently from Moscow, but neither were they blindly implementing the latest Party decrees regardless of the local consequences. The disconnects that often existed between republican and all-Union officials created both frustrations and opportunities for writers. Comparing policies and implementation across multiple republics also helps us to better understand what was unique in a particular republic, and what was shared. All of these issues remain obscure when scholars rely sources from a single location.

As the dissertation is multi-sited, it is also multi-lingual. Although much can be learned from Russian-language sources, sources in the national languages are essential for a project focusing on culture and national intellectuals in the Soviet Union. As a rule, national writers took pride in their national languages, and even those who ultimately switched to writing mostly in Russian left a significant body of untranslated writing in their national languages. In the Soviet Union, choice of language largely determined one's interlocutors. Published sources in the national languages give insight into the public conversation about issues among the national intelligentsias—they reveal what Armenians wanted to say to other Armenians, what Ukrainians thought was worth arguing about with other Ukrainians, etc. National writers writing in Russian-language publications were writing for a broader audience (although also considering interlocutors in their native republics as well). Sources published in the independent post-Soviet states, including memoirs, interviews, and secondary sources, are often available only in the national language. National languages are also important for reading archival sources, especially the records of cultural institutions. The higher-level Party documents, such as the decisions of the republican Bureaus of the Central Committees of the Communist Party, are almost always in Russian so as to be legible for central Party authorities. Otherwise the language of the sources in republican archives tends to vary a great deal by republic. In Moldova, Russian is the norm except

for explicitly “Moldovan” cultural institutions, such as journals, theaters, and the Moldovan Union of Writers. In Ukraine, Ukrainian is more common, but documents are sometimes in Russian (or both Russian and Ukrainian). In Armenia, Armenian is the norm for most non-Party sources, as well as the discussions of local Party cells. Overall, both national- and Russian-language sources are invaluable for understanding republican-level and all-Union cultural politics.

This dissertation is based on both published and archival sources. The published sources serve several analytical purposes in a study of cultural politics. Literary texts were the primary sites where rural writers sought to mold conceptions of peasant and national identity. Elite reception of literature, meanwhile, can be understood through the debates that took place in the pages of literary journals and newspapers through reviews and other forms of literary criticism. These sorts of public, published sources were widely available in both the Soviet Union and abroad throughout the Soviet period (although they may not have been the subject of scholarly research, especially in the non-Russian republics). Like many other works on Soviet culture, this dissertation also makes use of memoirs published before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁶³ Like any source composed retrospectively, memoirs are subject to the vagaries of memory and necessarily influenced by events and narratives that may have occurred years after the events described in the memoir. At the same time, Soviet memoirs provide valuable insight into phenomena that are at the core of Soviet cultural politics—controversies, factions, networks, and informal practices. Moreover, as Alessandro Portelli has argued regarding oral history, memoirs shed light on the meaning of events for the narrator; properly contextualized, they are excellent sources for

⁶³ On Soviet memoirs as a genre, see Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Barbara Walker, “On Reading Soviet Memoirs: A History of the ‘Contemporaries’ Genre as an Institution of Russian Intelligentsia Culture from the 1790s to the 1970s,” *The Russian Review* 59 (July 2000): 327–52.

analysis of the writer's subjectivity.⁶⁴ When possible, I have sought to check assertions made in memoirs against other sources and have noted in the text when information is drawn from a memoir source.

A major contribution of this dissertation to the study of Soviet cultural politics, particularly Russian cultural politics, is its use of archival sources. Although there are several excellent books dedicated to Russian Village Prose, in general they do not rely on an archival source base.⁶⁵ This dissertation draws on a wide range of archival sources, including Party documents, correspondence among government bodies, the transcripts or minutes of meetings of prize committees, journals, Writers' Union congresses, Party cells, and private correspondence. These archival sources give us glimpses of the process of the publication of literature, revealing the often-complicated machinations that ultimately resulted in published texts and the awarding of prestigious prizes. They give a more behind-the-scenes picture than published sources because writers were willing to say things in the semi-private settings of a meeting that they would be uncomfortable publishing on the front page of *Literaturnaia gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*). Private letters held in authors' personal collections are still more revealing, giving insight into the networks of writers and intellectuals that made publication possible for some. Meanwhile, documents from the Party apparatus reveal the details of policy on literature, and sometimes its motivation. Archival sources are particularly helpful for understanding cultural politics because they are less subject to the vagaries of memory and changing ideology than post-Soviet memoirs. Archival

⁶⁴ See Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 96–107.

⁶⁵ Brudny's *Reinventing Russia* and Cosgrove's *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature* do include some citations to documents held in the Central Repository of Contemporary Documentation (TsKhSD), today known as the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI). Both Kathleen Parthé and Anna Razuvalova focus exclusively on literature and memoirs published during and after *glasnost*. Nikolai Mitrokhin makes extensive use of published memoirs and interviews.

sources, analyzed together with published sources, give us a much more precise picture of the practice of Soviet cultural politics than is possible with published sources alone.

In the Soviet Union, as in the case of other multinational states and empires that have broken up along national lines, today's national boundaries are not adequate analytical frameworks for understanding developments that occurred when those boundaries did not exist. This dissertation is part of a small, but hopefully growing, body of scholarship that approaches the Soviet Union as the multinational state and society that it was.

Structure of the Dissertation

The intellectual ferment of Thaw-era Moscow, which shaped the lives and careers of many of the writers in this dissertation, is the setting for Chapter 1. In contrast to much of the recent scholarship on de-Stalinization and the Thaw, this chapter argues that many of the literary debates that shook the Soviet literary world in the years after Stalin's death revolved around developments in the late Stalinist period, namely the treatment of the peasantry after the Second World War and the depiction of rural life in postwar literature. It analyzes debates around works by Valentin Ovechkin, Vladimir Pomerantsev, Fëdor Abramov, and Aleksandr Yashin that criticized legacies of Stalinism in the countryside, as well as struggles in the Soviet Writers' Union at their Second Congress in 1954 and after Khrushchev's speech denouncing the Stalinist "cult of personality" at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Because of the wide gap between the difficult life of the peasantry and its idealized depiction in Soviet literature, these discussions were important moments for the development of the Thaw-era discourse about the need for "truth" and "sincerity" in literature. These debates also reveal an evolution in Soviet discourse about the peasantry taking place in the 1950s. Criticizing the management of agriculture in the late Stalin-

ist period, writers' sympathies began to shift towards peasants and away from representatives of the Soviet state. First-hand experience of life in the countryside, as opposed to the latest pronouncements of *Pravda*, emerged as a preferred source of literary truth. These developments would ultimately privilege an emerging generation of writers who grew up in villages, setting the stage for the emergence of the Russian Village Prose writers and a similar cohort of writers from the non-Russian republics.

Chapter 2 follows the career paths of three non-Russian writers as they mobilized Soviet literary institutions to promote conceptions of national identity that centered peasants and rural life during the period of de-Stalinization and the Thaw. At a time when Soviet literary institutions roiled with debates over the country's past and future, Ion Druță (Moldova), Chingiz Aitmatov (Kyrgyzstan), and Hrant Matevosyan (Armenia) responded to de-Stalinization by introducing rural and national themes into literature in their native republics. Marginalized by conservative literary and political establishments at home, each writer traveled from the Soviet periphery to Moscow in order to make cultural and political connections that would allow them to further their literary and ideological agendas. Central literary institutions, including the Higher Literary Courses at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow and the journal *Druzhba narodov*, played an important role in promoting the careers of all three writers. These, along with other Moscow-based cultural institutions, facilitated the circulation of writers and their ideas throughout the Soviet literary world. These center-periphery dynamics played an important role in spreading the cultural values of the Thaw to the non-Russian republics and amplified the rural-based conceptions of national identity that Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan promoted in their literary works.

The 1960s also witnessed the emergence of Russian Village Prose, a literary movement that initially developed from the anti-Stalinist works on the Soviet village discussed in Chapter 1.

Following the life of Sergei Vikulov, an obscure poet who rose to become the editor of one of the most important literary journals in the country, Chapter 3 traces the unlikely rise of a network of Russian Village Prose writers from the literary backwater of Vologda. In the 1950s and 1960s, Vikulov built a literary network of village-oriented writers with the help of his patron Aleksandr Yashin, a writer associated with the anti-Stalinist line on the village espoused by the journal *Novyi mir* who happened to share Vikulov's rural Vologda origins. Like the writers in Chapter 2, Vikulov capitalized on his patronage relationships and ultimately secured a place in the Higher Literary Courses of the Gorky Literary Institute. Traveling to Moscow played a key role in Vikulov's blossoming literary career. Vikulov's rise in the Soviet literary world was also aided by central policies that aimed to co-opt writers from the Russian periphery, especially Russian Village Prose writers. Although his initial patron in the Soviet literary world had been the anti-Stalinist Yashin, Vikulov was increasingly drawn into neo-Stalinist and Russian nationalist literary institutions in the capital city in the 1960s. When Vikulov became editor of the Moscow-based literary journal *Nash sovremennik* in 1968, he turned it into an institutional base for his growing network of Russian Village Prose writers from the periphery. *Nash sovremennik* became the main Soviet journal promoting a rural-based conception of Russian national identity, but its ideological stance on the village continued to reflect elements of the anti-Stalinist perspective that Vikulov had inherited from his patron Yashin.

One of the major components of the Stalinist transformation of the countryside had been the mass closure of rural churches and corresponding efforts to divorce religion from national identity. Chapter 4 explores the reemergence of historic churches and monasteries as important symbols of national heritage in the works of rural-born writers from the 1950s to the 1970s. Khrushchev's Thaw witnessed a growing movement for the preservation of the country's historic

religious buildings, most of which were now in a state of disrepair after years of neglect. Many writers from rural backgrounds joined the newly-established Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in the 1960s, only to be disappointed when the promised state support for historic preservation never materialized. Works by Vladimir Soloukhin (Russia), Oles' Honchar (Ukraine), and Ion Druță (Moldova) transformed the crumbling churches that dotted the rural landscape into symbols of the Soviet state's neglect of national identity. This chapter also examines the case of the movement to preserve historic churches as a means of tracing shifting policies towards national intellectuals during the transition from Khrushchev to Brezhnev. The rise to power of Brezhnev's political network led to what one scholar has called a "politics of inclusion" for nationally-minded writers in Russia, and a "politics of exclusion" in Ukraine and Moldova.

The Stalinist war on peasant tradition, and the Soviet modernization project more broadly, anticipated the replacement of "backwards" village lifestyles with a new, modern way of life. Chapter 5 examines the reimagining of the significance of traditional rural material culture to the nation through the act of collecting as conducted by the Ukrainian sculptor Ivan Honchar, the Russian writer Vladimir Soloukhin, and the Gagauz poet Dmitrii Kara Choban. These three collectors reconceptualized everyday village objects such as icons, traditional crafts, and farm implements as treasures of national culture. Their collections thus reflected and contributed to the rural-based conceptions of the nation that gained strength in the 1960s. All three collections started out as private initiatives to fill gaps in existing state museums, which in the eyes of the collectors were failing to preserve many elements of true national culture. Kara Choban's collection ultimately became a state museum, while Soloukhin's and Honchar's remained in private

hands. The stories of these three collections reveal the ways in which Soviet intellectuals worked in, around, and against state institutions to pursue their own rural-based visions of the nation.

Although the Brezhnev era has often been characterized as a time of "stagnation" and ideological conformity, Chapter 6 analyzes the politics of state literary prizes to show that debates about the nation showed continued dynamism during this period. In a context of heightened censorship, rural-born writers nevertheless managed to publish works that drew attention to the mistreatment of peasants by Soviet officials in both the Stalin era and the present day, warning of a growing gap between the state and the peasant/nation. This chapter follows the nominations of the Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan, the Moldovan writer Ion Druță, and the Russian writers Fëdor Abramov and Valentin Rasputin for major literary prizes in the Brezhnev era. Although their nominations were not without controversy, both Abramov and Rasputin both won USSR State Prizes in the late 1970s, the result of the "politics of inclusion" adopted towards Russian Village Prose writers. Meanwhile, the policies towards nationally-minded writers like Matevosyan and Druță varied in the non-Russian republics, ranging from cautiously inclusionary in Armenia to highly exclusionary in Moldova. The nominations of these two writers for all-Union state prizes demonstrates that the "politics of inclusion" toward Russian Village Prose had the effect of amplifying the voices of rural writers from the republics, even when republican authorities strongly opposed them. Ultimately, although ultimately many national writers managed to get their ideas into print in one way or another during the Brezhnev era, they found themselves increasingly frustrated at the harsh censorship to which their works were subjected.

The developments of the previous decades reach their culmination in Chapter 7, which analyzes the activism of rural writers during the period of *glasnost'*, when they were allowed to express their views freely for the first time. Although writers from villages had been arguing for

the need to protect the Soviet population from the harms of environmental degradation for decades, in the mid-1980s, the issue took on a new prominence as the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl shocked the world and writers began to test the new policy of *glasnost*'. In their environmental writings, writers such as Valentin Rasputin, Oles' Honchar, and Ion Druță increasingly took on the role of the defenders of the peasant and the nation against the toxic policies of the Soviet state. Once again, central Soviet literary institutions played a key role in facilitating the spread of these ideas across the Soviet Union. Environmental advocacy ultimately became a means through which many writers assumed the role of national spokesmen and became some of the most prominent figures of the period of *glasnost*'. By the late 1980s, many village writers had eschewed fiction writing entirely, and instead championed their causes through newspaper editorials, participation in national movements, and involvement in formal politics through election to the Congress of People's Deputies in 1989. As faith in the Soviet government began to evaporate across the USSR, many village writers publicly called upon the population to transfer their loyalties to the nation, with fateful consequences.

Chapter 1:

Writing about Soviet Agriculture during the Early Thaw: Coming to Terms with Late Stalinism in Moscow, 1952-1957

The late 1940s and early 1950s were a grim time in Soviet literature and, indeed, in the country as a whole. The Soviet Union was the triumphant victor of the Great Patriotic War, but the cost of victory had been enormous. The Soviet Union was still struggling to rebuild after four years of war and occupation, which had left 27 million Soviet citizens dead and the country's economy in ruins. Stalin sought to pay for postwar reconstruction through extracting resources from the exhausted peasantry; the government imposed low procurement prices on agricultural goods, raised taxes on collective farm income, and increased quotas for deliveries of meat and milk. As they had during collectivization, ragged peasants from the impoverished countryside streamed into the cities in large numbers, an estimated 9 million between 1950 to 1954.⁶⁶

During this difficult time in the country's history, Andrei Zhdanov, the Central Committee ideological secretary, initiated a campaign in Soviet literature to enforce a narrow interpretation of socialist realism and crack down on foreign, "nationalist," and "cosmopolitan" influences in literature. A clique of writers, eager to enforce the Party's line on literature, had taken over the leadership of the Soviet Writers' Union. Targets of their xenophobic campaign included the famous writers Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko, "nationalist" Yiddish writers, and so-called "cosmopolitans"—often Jews—who stood accused of a lack of patriotism. Emblematic of this period was the Russian poet Nikolai Gribachëv. In 1948 Gribachëv won the Stalin Prize, the country's top literary award for his epic poem *The Collective Farm "Bolshevik,"* (*Kolkhoz*

⁶⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Postwar Soviet Society: The 'Return to Normalcy', 1945-1953," in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan J. Linz (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 144-151.

“*Bol’shevik*”) which painted an optimistic picture of the lives of cheerful Soviet peasants in the postwar countryside. Meanwhile, from his position as head of the Party cell of the Union of Writers, Gribachëv enthusiastically persecuted his fellow writers for “cosmopolitanism.” The triumph of literature that was completely divorced from the country’s postwar reality, combined with the ongoing persecution of writers by the Union leadership, caused a crisis of morale in the country’s literary community.⁶⁷

Shortly before Stalin’s death on March 5, 1953, the Russian poet Aleksandr Tvardovskii, the editor of the leading Soviet journal *Novyi mir*, made a tentative effort to challenge this status quo. Encouraged by signals at the Nineteenth Party Congress that the Soviet leadership’s policy towards both the peasantry and literature might be shifting, Tvardovskii began publishing a series of literary sketches by Valentin Ovechkin that criticized the management of agriculture in the country. Emboldened by Stalin’s death and the widespread praise that Ovechkin’s sketches received, Tvardovskii and the editorial board of *Novyi mir* redoubled their efforts, publishing literary criticism by Vladimir Pomerantsev and Fëdor Abramov that challenged the “varnished” depictions of rural Soviet life in works that had received the highest honors in Soviet literature. The yawning gap between the reality of life in the postwar Soviet countryside and its depiction in Soviet literature made debates over agriculture a key site where writers developed an alternative literary theory that emphasized “truth” and “sincerity.” Writers like Ovechkin, Abramov, and Aleksandr Yashin emphasized the importance of first-hand knowledge of life in the countryside, privileging experience over ideological pronouncements as a source of knowledge. These Thaw-era works put Tvardovskii and his allies on a collision course with the leadership of the Soviet

⁶⁷ On the crisis of morale, see Maria Zezina, “Crisis in the Union of Soviet Writers in the Early 1950s,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 4 (1994): 649–61.

Writers' Union. In the long run, they represented the initial phase of the broader re-evaluation of Soviet discourse on the peasantry and the countryside that is the subject of this dissertation.

This chapter argues that the early stages of what we know as the Thaw in literature were deeply connected to the cultural politics of the late Stalinist period. Recent major English-language works on the literary politics of de-Stalinization and the Thaw have emphasized debates over issues from the prewar period, including the 1937 purges and the Gulag.⁶⁸ Yet much of the conflict that took place in the literary community during the Thaw stemmed from a revolt against the policies adopted by the leadership of the Soviet Writers' Union during the late 1940s and early 1950s. After the Second World War, a faction of writers had gained control of the Soviet Writers' Union and, with support from above, used their power to conduct an "anti-cosmopolitan" campaign against assimilated Jewish writers and grant awards to literature that presented a blatantly false picture of life on the Soviet collective farm.⁶⁹ The Thaw provided an opening for writers—often those connected to *Novyi mir* or the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union—who opposed these policies to air their grievances. Debates over both the postwar treatment of the peasantry and the depiction of the Soviet peasantry in postwar literature were a central part of literary debates during the early Thaw. Moreover, they played an unacknowledged role in the development of discourses of "truth" and "sincerity" that were at the heart of the backlash against late Stalinist literature. The conflict over whether Soviet literature about life on the collective farm should address existing social problems or present an idealized depiction

⁶⁸ Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: The Stalinist Past as Soviet Culture, 1953-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013); V. M. Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁶⁹ Although many Russian Village Prose writers came to espouse anti-Semitic beliefs in the late Soviet period, during the Thaw, writers from villages and Jewish writers were united under the banner of shared anti-Stalinism.

based on the prevailing ideological currents was deeply intertwined with the conflict for control of the Soviet Writers' Union.

This chapter also adds to our understanding of the developments that eventually led to the literary movement known as Russian Village Prose, which played a central role in the transformation of Soviet conceptions of the Russian peasantry and the Russian nation. In the 1990s, literary scholar Kathleen Parthé and political scientist Yizhak Brudny brought renewed scholarly attention to 1950s works by Ovechkin, Abramov, and Yashin that laid the foundation for the later Village Prose movement.⁷⁰ This chapter makes two arguments about the depiction of the peasantry in these works. First, I argue that they show that writers' sympathies had begun to shift away from the Soviet government and towards the peasantry. Significantly, Ovechkin, Abramov, and Yashin did not yet repudiate the positive Soviet narrative about the transformation of the peasantry through collectivization. Rather, they argued that the state was largely successful in turning the peasants into loyal, conscious Soviet citizens—but agricultural managers had continued to treat the peasantry in condescending and high-handed way. Second, building on recent work by Anatoly Pinsky, this chapter argues that the 1950s works marked an important epistemological shift that privileged direct, first-hand knowledge about the countryside.⁷¹ As we will see, Ovechkin, Yashin, and Abramov all argued for the importance of this sort of knowledge in evaluating literature about rural life in the Soviet Union. This, in turn, paved the way for the appearance of a generation of writers from peasant origins to further transform the discourse of the peasantry in the 1960s by staking their claims on their intimate knowledge of rural life.

⁷⁰ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Kathleen Parthé, "The Dangerous Narrative of the Russian Village," in *Russia's Dangerous Texts: Politics between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 75–101; Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁷¹ Anatoly Pinsky, "The Individual after Stalin: Fedor Abramov, Russian Intellectuals, and the Revitalization of Soviet Socialism, 1953-1962" (Columbia University, 2011), especially Chapter 2.

We will begin by examining developments in the literary world during postwar Stalinism, particularly the visions of Soviet village life expressed in the Stalin Prize-winning "collective farm novels" of the late 1940s. We will then witness the first stirrings of a Thaw in writing about Soviet agriculture. In 1952, Tvardovskii's journal *Novyi mir* broke new ground by publishing Valentin Ovechkin's "District Workdays" ("Raionnye budni"), the first in a series of sketches that criticized the management of agriculture in the Soviet Union. After Stalin's death, the editors of *Novyi mir* published several articles that challenged Stalinist literary orthodoxy, including two that targeted the depiction of the countryside in late Soviet literature: Vladimir Pomerantsev's "On Sincerity in Literature" ("Ob iskrennosti v literature") and Fëdor Abramov's "People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose" ("Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoennoi proze"). The backlash to these articles in the summer of 1954 was the first major controversy of the Thaw. The leadership of the Soviet Writers' Union remained in the hands of Stalin-era literary elite, who managed to beat back the challenge presented by the insurgent critics whose calls for greater "truth" and "sincerity" threatened to dislodge the faction that had controlled the Union since the late Stalin era.

The Second Congress of the Union of Writers revealed that the controversy over the *Novyi mir* criticism had done little to resolve the underlying ideological conflicts between the emergent pro-Thaw faction and dominant, conservative faction that controlled the Soviet Writers' Union. In their speeches at the Congress, Ovechkin and Aleksandr Yashin spoke in favor of drawing on personal experience in order to write more "sincere" literature about the countryside. The conflict between the advocates of "sincerity" in literature and the old guard erupted once more in March of 1956 with the discussion of Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" on the Stalinist cult of personality. The wide-ranging discussion of the "cult" touched on the sad state of rural life and the

depiction of the countryside in the late Stalinist period. Members of the newly-established Moscow branch of the Writers' Union included a short story by Yashin in their new literary almanac *Literaturnaia Moskva* (*Literary Moscow*) that criticized the Party policy of treating peasants as unthinking “levers” for executing decisions from above. But 1957 witnessed a new "freeze" as Yashin's short story became the center of a literary firestorm that resulted in the shuttering of the new almanac. Ultimately, the Soviet Central Committee intervened to "tame" the rebellious, pro-Thaw Moscow branch by putting it under the control of the newly-founded RSFSR Writers' Union, whose leadership was stacked with conservative stalwarts. The RSFSR Union's leaders used their positions in the new institution to recruit ideologically orthodox writers from the Russian periphery to counterbalance the radicals in Moscow.

Before the Thaw: The *Zhdanovshchina* and the Anti-Cosmopolitan Campaign 1946-1953

The immediate postwar years were tumultuous ones in the world of Soviet literature, as Soviet ideologists sought to demonstrate to the literary world that the relative freedom of the wartime years had come to an end. On August 15, 1946, Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov gave a speech condemning Russian writers Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko for succumbing to western influences and publishing “apolitical” literature.⁷² A series of documents produced on the basis of Zhdanov’s speech appeared between 1946 and 1948, laying out the guidelines for socialist realism that would come to define culture in late Stalinism.⁷³ Accord-

⁷² The speech coincided with the Central Committee resolution “On the Journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*.” For detailed discussion of this period from the perspective of the center, see Chake Der Melkonian Minassian, *Politiques littéraires en U.R.S.S.: depuis le debut a nos jours*. (Montreal: Presses de l’Universite de Montreal, 1978), 144-164.

⁷³ Wolfram Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve: 1953-1970 gg.* (Moskva: AIRO-XX, 1999), 15-16.

ing to these criteria, Soviet literature was expected to display “Party spirit,” educate readers in the “spirit of Communism,” condemn bourgeois society, and focus on present-day issues instead of historical themes.⁷⁴ In literature, the Zhdanov era, or *Zhdanovshchina*, was characterized by an optimistic, “rosy-hued” literature that glossed over the difficulties of postwar reconstruction in the Soviet Union.

Epic poems and novels about life in the Soviet countryside were fixtures of Soviet literature in the Zhdanov era. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, epic poems like Nikolai Gribachëv’s *The Collective Farm “Bolshevik”* and Aleksandr Iashin’s *Alëna Fomina* won Stalin Prizes for their portrayals of happy peasants on the collective farm.⁷⁵ “Collective farm novels” by writers such as Galina Nikolaeva, Elizar Mal’tsev, and Semen Babaevskii came to exemplify the excesses of what later became known as “conflictless” literature. The typical plot of these novels, sometimes satirized as “boy meets girl meets tractor,” featured a hero who returns home after the war and manages to easily conquer all the obstacles presented by postwar reconstruction. Nikolaeva, Maltsev, and Babaevskii all received the Stalin Prize for their collective farm novels, which set them up as models for Soviet socialist realism.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, life on the typical Soviet collective farm in the postwar period bore little resemblance to Soviet literature. The collective farms had been battered by wartime destruction, a postwar drought, and high procurement quotas aimed at generating funds to pay for the postwar reconstruction of the country. As financial pressures on collective farms mounted, peasants fled the village *en masse*, believing that “there is no

⁷⁴ Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novy Mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1982), 2-3.

⁷⁵ On the “kolkhoz poem,” see Evgeny Dobrenko, “Utopian Naturalism: The Epic Poem of Kolkhoz Happiness,” in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, ed. Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (London; New York; Delhi: Anthem Press, 2009), 19–51.

living on the collective farm.”⁷⁷ Anyone with a passing familiarity with conditions in the postwar countryside could not help but be struck by the extreme contrast between and the “collective farm novels” and the actual experiences of Soviet peasants.

In addition to the “collective farm novels,” the Zhdanov era became known for major campaigns against “bourgeois nationalism” among non-Russian writers (see Chapter 2). In Moscow this was most evident in the attacks on Jewish writers, which included the arrests and executions of prominent Yiddish writers and the “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign against assimilated Jews in the Soviet intelligentsia. Towards the end of 1948, the “anti-cosmopolitan” campaign began to gather steam. According to Gennadi Kostyrchenko, the campaign originated in a conflict between a group based in the Central Committee’s Department of Propaganda and Agitation and the head of the Union of Writers, Aleksandr Fadeev. The bureaucrats in Agitprop lent their support to a group of mostly Jewish theater critics who attacked Fadeev’s management of dramaturgy. Fadeev responded by launching a campaign against so-called “cosmopolitans” in the Union in December of 1948. A *Pravda* editorial on January 28 entitled “On an Unpatriotic Group of Theater Critics” became the opening salvo of an anti-Jewish purge that affected many different professions, not least the writers.⁷⁸ In the Soviet Union, many Jewish writers had adopted Russian names as a way of assimilating into Soviet society. During the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, the editors of newspapers began including the original Jewish names of writers parentheses after

⁷⁶ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 190-209; Evgeny Dobrenko, “Socialist Realism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Russian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 106-7.

⁷⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Postwar Soviet Society: The ‘Return to Normalcy’, 1945-1953,” in *The Impact of World War II on the Soviet Union*, ed. Susan J. Linz (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), 144-151; E. Iu. Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, New York; London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 59-67.

⁷⁸ G. Kostyrchenko, *Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin’s Russia : From the Secret Archives of the Soviet Union*, Russian Studies Series (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1995), 153-178.

their Russian names.⁷⁹ Practices like these made the anti-Semitic overtones of the campaign obvious.

While the campaign against cosmopolitanism in the press died down by April of 1949, conflict continued to simmer in the Writers' Union, leading to factionalism and low morale. Members of Fadeev's faction, including Anatolii Sofronov, Anatolii Surov, and Nikolai Gribachëv, continued to attack Jewish members of the Writers' Union as "cosmopolitans," ultimately resulting in a number of firings and expulsions from the Writers' Union.⁸⁰ Nikolai Mitrokhin argues that although the leaders of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign had the support of the political leadership, dedicated anti-Semites were a minority in the Union. Jews made up nearly a third of the members of the Writers' Union in Moscow. Many non-Jewish writers had family members who were Jewish, and others retained the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia's horror at the anti-Semitic pogroms of the Tsarist era. Isolated within the larger community of writers, the anti-Semites formed a sort of "brotherhood," according to Mitrokhin.⁸¹ In the wake of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, morale in the Writers' Union suffered. The Central Committee received many letters from writers in the early 1950s complaining of a "vicious atmosphere" in the union.⁸² In the eyes of Moscow writers who quietly opposed the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in these years, the faction leading the Writers' Union (including Fadeev, Sofronov, Surov, and Gribachëv) was tainted

⁷⁹ For example, Vasilii Semënovich (Iosif Solomonovich) Grossman.

⁸⁰ Fadeev himself appears to have felt a great deal of ambivalence about his leading role in the campaign, which affected not only his literary opponents but also many of his friends. He apparently used his power as head of the Writers' Union to secretly help many writers accused of cosmopolitanism. See Maria Zezina, "Crisis in the Union of Soviet Writers in the Early 1950s," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 4 (1994): 650.

⁸¹ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 148. 29.8% of the members of the Moscow organization of the Union of Writers were Jewish in 1953. See RGANI 5/17/437 (March 24, 1953): 7-8.

⁸² Zezina, "Crisis in the Union of Soviet Writers in the Early 1950s," 649.

by their enthusiastic participation in the anti-Semitic purges. The Thaw would bring many of these divisions in the Writers' Union out into the open.

While the Zhdanov-era campaigns were raging, significant changes were taking place in the world of Soviet literary journals. The journal *Novyi mir*, which had had a reputation as a second-rate journal, began to improve under the leadership of Konstantin Simonov, who had gained fame and three Stalin Prizes for his wartime journalism and poetry. In February of 1950, Aleksandr Tvardovskii replaced Simonov as head of the journal when Simonov left *Novyi mir* to head *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the country's main newspaper dedicated to literature.⁸³

As head of *Novyi mir*, Tvardovskii became one of the most important figures in the history of Russian literature. Born in a village in 1910, Tvardovskii largely missed out on the experiences of Revolution and Civil War that older intellectuals shared, but he was part of the first generation that could be considered Soviet—"a generation that came to awareness in a fundamentally new reality," in the words of Russian literary critic Lev Anninskii.⁸⁴ In 1931, however, when Tvardovskii was twenty-one years old, his father was branded a *kulak*. Tvardovskii's family was dispossessed and exiled. The allegation that Tvardovskii was a *kulak* sympathizer hounded him as he attempted to establish his literary career in the 1930s. It was only after he received a 1936 Stalin Prize for his poem *The Land of Muravia (Strana Muraviia)* that the young poet managed to escape the stigma of his supposed *kulak* origins.⁸⁵ With *The Land of Muravia*, an epic poem about a peasant who searches for utopia only to find it in the collective farm, Tvardovskii created

⁸³ Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 37-41.

⁸⁴ Anninskii writes of this generation, "It was they who raised the cult of Stalin on their backs. And it was they who bore the brunt of the war. A generation of fighters. Tvardovskii and Shalamov, Babaevskii and Kochetov, Dombrovskii and Gribachev. I'm not talking about the scale of their talents, but about their natures; about their inability to forgo their principles." Lev Anninskii, "The Sixties Generation, the Seventies Generation, the Eighties Generation . . . Toward a Dialectic of the Generations in Russian Literature," *Soviet Studies in Literature* 27, no. 4 (Fall 1991): 20.

⁸⁵ Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 139-140.

the canonical "collective farm poem." Tvardovskii truly entered the Soviet literary pantheon, however, during the Second World War, when his serialized wartime poem about a Soviet peasant-soldier, *Vasilii Tërkin*, became wildly popular and earned the author another Stalin Prize. But the war changed Tvardovskii. As Evgeny Dobrenko argues, after the war, Tvardovskii began to take a more responsible and serious attitude towards ideological content of his work. His postwar poem *House by the Road* (*Dom u dorogi*) portrayed the destruction of a village idyll by war. Although Tvardovskii had founded the genre of "collective farm poem" with *The Land of Muravia*, he came to loathe the way that his latter-day imitators continued to portray the Soviet countryside as happy and untouched by the war.⁸⁶ As Lazar Lazarev recalls in his memoir, at a meeting of the Soviet Writers' Union,

one of the speakers had said that Tvardovskii ought to be happy. What he was doing in his poetry had found a worthy continuation in the long poems *The Collective Farm "Bolshevik"* by Nikolai Gribachëv and *Alëna Fomina* by Aleksandr Iashin. In his speech, Tvardovskii noted that anyone who thought those poems were close to him and that he liked them was mistaken. They repulsed him with their varnished depiction of the devastated postwar countryside, which they drew as prosperous, content, and carefree.⁸⁷

At the helm of *Novyi mir*, Tvardovskii would challenge Stalinist depictions of the Soviet countryside, laying the groundwork for the genre of Russian Village Prose.

The Early Thaw: Valentin Ovechkin's Agricultural Sketches 1952-1953

The last year of Stalin's life witnessed a small but significant shift in cultural policy. By the early 1950s, many among the literary elite were concerned that Soviet literature was in decline. Soviet drama had particularly suffered due to the Zhdanovite policies, and theaters were nearly

⁸⁶ On Tvardovskii's ideological evolution, see Dobrenko, "Petrified Utopia," especially 34-35.

⁸⁷ Lazar Lazarev, "The Sixth Floor," *Russian Studies in Literature* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 68.

empty. Starting in February of 1952, articles attacking the so-called “theory of conflictlessness” in Soviet drama began to appear in the press. During this debate, which took place over the course of 1952, critics of the “theory of conflictlessness” such as playwright Nikolai Virda attacked the weak depiction of negative characters in Soviet plays and the lack of real conflicts in them.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, some within the Soviet leadership, most prominently Nikita Khrushchev, had been pushing for a reevaluation of agricultural policy. As Anatoly Pinsky has explained “the Soviet leadership’s turn towards the countryside,” in combination with the opening in cultural policy, paved the way for the appearance of Valentin Ovechkin’s sketch “District Workdays” (“*Raionnye budni*”) in the pages of *Novyi mir* in September of 1952.⁸⁹ In the sketch, Ovechkin depicted conflicts over the management of a Soviet collective farm, pointing to the Party’s administrative failures in agriculture.⁹⁰ At the Nineteenth Party Congress held in October of 1952, Malenkov seemed to signal his support for this more critical tone in literature when he stated that “our writers and artists must castigate [*bichevat*] the flaws, defects, and painful phenomena that are prevalent in society.” He called on Soviet literature and art to “boldly show life’s contradictions and conflicts” and to use the “weapon of criticism” as a means of instruction. In his speech, Malenkov also hinted that not all was well in Soviet agriculture.⁹¹ After Malenkov’s speech, *Novyi mir* continued to publish Ovechkin’s sketches. In a piece published in December of 1952, Ovechkin criticized the management of agriculture, describing how a district secretary used col-

⁸⁸ On the “early Thaw” in 1952, see Edith Rogovin Frankel, “Literary Policy in Stalin’s Last Year,” *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1976): 392-393; Zezina, “Crisis in the Union of Soviet Writers in the Early 1950s,” 654-655.

⁸⁹ See Pinsky’s discussion of the emergence of the “Ovechkin school.” Pinsky, “The Individual after Stalin,” 65-69.

⁹⁰ Valentin Ovechkin, “Raionnye budni,” *Novyi mir*, no. 9 (1952): 204-21.

⁹¹ “Otchenyi doklad Tsentral’nogo Komiteta TsK VKP(b) XIX s’ezdu partii,” *Pravda*, October 6, 1952.

lective farms as a dumping grounds for incompetent personnel.⁹² Ovechkin's sketches received positive reviews in the Soviet press and several were republished in *Pravda*, the country's leading newspaper.⁹³

Valentin Ovechkin was committed to both the Party and the goal of improving rural life in the Soviet Union. Unlike Abramov, Yashin, and the Village Prose writers who would follow in his footsteps, Ovechkin was not the son of a peasant. He wrote about the topic of the village based on his personal experience of working to achieve the Party's goals in rural areas. Born in 1904 in the port city of Taganrog on the Sea of Azov in the south of Russia, Ovechkin spent the 1920s in the village of Efremovka, where he taught peasants how to read and became the secretary of the local Komsomol cell. In 1925 he spearheaded the organization of an agricultural commune. Ovechkin was a true believer in the collective farm system and the Party's mission to transform the village.⁹⁴ He became a full member of the Party in 1929 and worked in various Party positions in the early 1930s before beginning his career as a journalist.⁹⁵ As his editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii noted in an essay published after Ovechkin's death, even after Ovechkin had become a successful writing publishing in one of the country's top journals, he never became "a capital-city sort of writer," preferring to live in the agricultural south of the country.⁹⁶ His goal

⁹² Valentin Ovechkin, "V odnom kolkhoze," *Novyi mir*, no. 12 (1952), 187-209. Translated in V. V. (Valentin Vladimirovich) Ovechkin, "Collective Farm Sidelights," in *Collective Farm Sidelights: Short Stories*, trans. Naomi Jochel and Ralph Parker, Library of Soviet Short Stories (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 85-151.

⁹³ Nikolai Atarov, "Raionnye budni," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 25, 1952; Marietta Shaginian, "Raionnye budni," *Izvestiia*, October 26, 1952. "Shirit front boevoi publitsistiki!," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 17, 1953.

⁹⁴ Patricia Carden, "Reassessing Ovechkin," in *Russian and Slavic Literature*, ed. Richard Freeborn, R. R. Milner-Gulland, and Charles A. Ward (Cambridge, MA: Slavica Publishers, 1976), 412-413.

⁹⁵ "Valentin Vladimirovich Ovechkin. Avtobiografiia," in *Sovetskii Pisateli*, vol. 4, 5 vols. (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Khudozhestvennaia literatura," 1972), 473-4.

⁹⁶ Tvardovskii, qtd. in "Valentin Vladimirovich Ovechkin. Avtobiografiia," 490.

was to use his hands-on knowledge of life in the Soviet periphery in order to improve the state of agriculture and rural life in the Soviet Union.

Ovechkin sought the truth about Soviet agriculture from people in the collective farm fields, not from the speeches of Soviet leaders in the pages of *Pravda*. This emphasis on gathering information from direct experience of rural life became an important aspect of writing about the village during the Thaw, ultimately strengthening the cultural credibility of writers from rural backgrounds. Ovechkin wanted to see real change on the collective farms, and measured his impact based on his own observations. In a January 11, 1953 letter to Tvardovskii, Ovechkin wrote about his disappointment with the impact he had had thus far: “The sketches have made a lot of noise, but that noise is literary. The earth’s axis has not moved by half a degree. On the collective farms, everything is the same as before.” Ovechkin emphasized the importance of gathering feedback on his reform proposals directly from the people who worked on the collective farms.⁹⁷ Ovechkin’s letter to Tvardovskii reflects what Pinsky refers to as the “empirical imperative” adopted by Ovechkin other writers who became known as the “Ovechkin school.”⁹⁸

Ovechkin’s sympathies were firmly on the side of Soviet peasants, and not the often-incompetent collective farm administrators. This was a major shift from the suspicious attitude towards peasants in the 1930s based on their resistance to collectivization. Ovechkin believed that collectivization had transformed the Soviet peasantry, preparing them to be good Soviet citizens. As Ovechkin explained to Tvardovskii in the letter, the peasants had long since lost their attachment to private property—now they simply wanted a better life. He told Tvardovskii that the solution was to reform collective farm administration and to pay collective farmers a con-

⁹⁷ RGALI 1702/9/5 (January 11, 1953): 4-11. Quotation from page 5.

⁹⁸ See Pinsky, “The Individual after Stalin,” especially Chapter 2.

sistent daily wage. (At the time, collective farmers were not paid a consistent daily wage, but rather with a share of the remaining kolkhoz income after the payment of government obligations based on how many days they had worked on the collective farm.) Under the current system, he told Tvardovskii, the peasants were “defenseless” from “idiots”—collective farm administrators who did not know what they were doing.⁹⁹ Viewing peasants as potential victims of Soviet administration was a major change from prior rhetoric that portrayed them as prone to “private property tendencies” and needing urbanite administrators to keep them in line.

Readers who wrote to *Novyi mir* in response to Ovechkin’s sketches in 1952 and 1953 shared Ovechkin’s conviction that rural administration was in desperate need of reform and his belief in the importance of collecting first-hand information in order to craft better policy. Many letters came from people who claimed to work in agriculture, and they judged the accuracy of Ovechkin’s sketches by their own experiences. Anna Bogunova, a veterinary paramedic, agreed that the role of the collective farm chairman was of the utmost importance based on her many visits to collective farms. If the collective farmers had lost faith in the chairman, believing that they would not receive compensation for the days that they had worked, then all was for naught.¹⁰⁰ Several letter-writers had experience in rural management. For example, A. Siroid, the secretary of the Mikhailo-Kots’iubinsk raion Party committee in the Ukrainian SSR, wrote in to express his support for Ovechkin’s arguments about the importance of rural personnel and the need to reform rural administration.¹⁰¹ Ovechkin’s frank assessment of the situation in Soviet agriculture resonated with many readers’ personal experiences.

⁹⁹ RGALI 1702/9/5 (January 11, 1953): 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ RGALI 1702/4/322 (January 3, 1953): 59.

¹⁰¹ RGALI 1702/6/54 (November 20, 1952): 48-51.

The readers of *Novyi mir* seemed ready for a new approach to literature that moved beyond the rosy depictions of rural life found in kolkhoz novels. Readers thanked Ovechkin for raising important issues, telling the truth about life in the countryside, and dealing with issues that were too often avoided in literature. “Thank you very much for your interesting, truthful (*pravdivyi*), topical, and, most importantly, intelligent and brave sketch ‘District Weekdays,’” wrote a certain Poliakova. She hoped that Ovechkin would continue “to raise bravely, without a backward glance, the urgent questions that many are thinking about, but have not dared to or are not able to say out loud.”¹⁰² The reader Zemskov from the city of Gor’kii, compared Ovechkin’s sketch with the novel *Harvest* by Galina Nikolaeva, one of the most famous kolkhoz novels of the late Stalin era. “*Harvest* shows ‘what should be’ [...] but you show ‘how it is now.’ Both are good. Life is many-faceted [*mnogogranna*], but it is high time to strike fundamentally at those sore subjects that you so bravely raised.” Echoing Malenkov’s rhetoric at the Nineteenth Party Congress, Gerasimov praised “works that truly show not only the bright sides of our life, but also the dark sides.” He considered Ovechkin’s criticism to be the act of a loyal Soviet citizen: “Write the truth, comrade, only the truth, after all, that is how Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin teach us to work and that is how he teaches you writers to write.”¹⁰³ Another reader, who identified himself as an engineer and a Party member, stated that Ovechkin’s sketch reflected the regulations of the Party adopted at the 19th Party Congress.¹⁰⁴ Readers saw Ovechkin’s willingness to address the “dark sides” of Soviet life as perfectly appropriate for a Soviet writer and emphasized the importance of telling the "truth" as they saw it.

¹⁰² RGALI 1702/6/54 (September 1, 1952): 36.

¹⁰³ RGALI 1702/6/54 (October 1, 1952): 39.

¹⁰⁴ RGALI 1702/6/54 (October 30, 1952): 41.

The desire for agricultural reform reflected in Ovechkin's sketches and the responses of his readers was increasingly shared by members of the Soviet political elite. In the political jockeying that followed Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, Nikita Khrushchev staked his bid for power on bold proposals to reform agriculture. Like Ovechkin, Khrushchev acknowledged that the situation in Soviet agriculture was far from what was portrayed in the Stalin-prize winning kolkhoz novels. At the September 1953 plenum, Khrushchev introduced a number of proposals to improve material conditions in rural areas, including increasing collective farmers' pay, relieving them of their tax burdens, and increasing the size of the private plots that provided additional income for Soviet peasants.¹⁰⁵ Ovechkin's proposals for Soviet agriculture were well in line with Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives. As a result, the first stirrings of a thaw in the depiction of the countryside in literature did not meet resistance from political and literary authorities. Indeed, Ovechkin became the founder of "the Ovechkin school" of *Novyi mir* writers (also dubbed the "ocherkisty") that included Vladimir Tendriakov and Gavriil Troepol'skii.¹⁰⁶

Fëdor Abramov and the "Novyi mir critics"
1954

While the political and literary establishment welcomed Ovechkin's sketches about the problems facing Soviet agriculture, the rural theme did not remain uncontroversial. In 1954, writing about life on the collective farm was at the center of heated debates over the future of Socialist Realism. Fëdor Abramov's article "People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose" was published in the literary criticism section of *Novyi mir* in April of 1954. It was one in a series of arti-

¹⁰⁵ Anatolii Strel'ianyi, "Khrushchev and the Countryside," in *Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. William Taubman, Sergei Khrushchev, and Abbott Gleason, trans. David Gehrenbeck, Eileen Kane, and Alla Bashenko (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 113.

cles published by *Novyi mir* in the winter of 1953 and the spring of 1954 that generated an enormous stir among readers, writers, and literary critics.¹⁰⁷ Abramov, who had recently migrated to Leningrad from a village and still had deep ties to his rural relatives, could easily identify the false notes in the Stalin Prize-winning collective farm novels of the 1940s. Drawing inspiration from Malenkov's speech at the Nineteenth Party Congress that called on writers to criticize the shortcomings of Soviet society, Abramov challenged Soviet writers to be more true to life in their writing on the Soviet collective farm. Full of biting criticism of the collective farm novels, Abramov's article rallied writers to deconstruct late Stalinist modes of depicting the peasantry. The controversy that Abramov's article provoked cannot be understood without an analysis of the cultural politics of the Soviet literary world in 1954. As always in the Soviet Writers' Union, ideological debates were intertwined with the struggle for power in the Soviet literary world. Abramov and the other *Novyi mir* critics took aim at prominent writers aligned with the dominant faction within the Writers' Union. Writing "truthfully" about rural life thus became one of the rallying cries of the insurgent writers who sought to dislodge the faction that had dominated the Writers' Union in the late Stalin era.

After Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, Fadeev and the leaders of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign remained at the helm of the Writers' Union. Unambiguous support for Stalin and Zhdanovist policies in literature dominated the press until April of 1953, when critiques of the reigning interpretation of socialist realism began to appear. On April 16, 1953, the poet Ol'ga Berggolts published an article in *Literaturnaia gazeta* criticizing the stereotyped characters and

¹⁰⁶ On the *ocherkisty*, see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 47-48; Pinsky, "The Individual after Stalin," 68-69

¹⁰⁷ Fëdor Abramov, "Liudi kolkhoznnoi derevni v poslevoennoi proze (Literaturnye zametki)," *Novyi mir*, no. 4 (April 1954): 210-31; Mikhail Lifshits, "Dnevnik Marietty Shaginian," *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (February 1954): 206-31; Mark Shcheglov, "Russkii les Leonida Leonova," *Novyi Mir*, no. 5 (May 1954): 220-41; Vladimir Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrennosti v literature," *Novyi Mir*, no. 12 (December 1953): 218-45.

overemphasis on descriptions of labor in lyric poetry. She called on poets to depict people's inner worlds.¹⁰⁸ Berggolts' article hearkened back to the late 1930s, when she and other proponents of "the lyric" had aimed at "dismantling some of the more rigid and crude aspects of socialist realism" by appealing to ideas such as "the authentic" (*podlinnyi*) and "sincerity" (*iskrennost'*).¹⁰⁹ Berggolts' article was the first after Stalin's death to call for greater attention to characterization and "sincere" depictions of Soviet reality. Berggolts' article was followed by another in a similar vein, Il'ya Ehrenburg's "On the Work of a Writer," which was published in *Znamia* in October of 1953.

The reaction to Berggolts' and Ehrenburg's articles in 1953 revealed that tensions that had been submerged during late Stalinism were beginning to come to the surface after Stalin's death.¹¹⁰ Contemporaries described the division of the Writers' Union into factions after Stalin's death with the term *gruppovshchina*, a noun with negative overtones that can be translated as "factionalism" or "clannishness."¹¹¹ Scholars have given these factions within the Writers' Union different names.¹¹² Here I use the term "conservative" to refer to those who wanted to preserve

¹⁰⁸ "Razgovor o lirike," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, April 16, 1953. On this article, see Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ Katarina Clark and Galin Tihanov, "Soviet Literary Theory in the 1930s: Battles over Genre and the Boundaries of Modernity," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 119. On Berggolts' role in the literary debates of the 1930s and 1950s, see Katerina Clark, "'Wait for Me and I Shall Return': The Early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?," in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 85–108.

¹¹⁰ Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 34–35.

¹¹¹ *Gruppovshchina* literally means the "reign of groups" or the "era of groups." For use of the term in 1954, see, for example, RGANI 5/30/83 (June 29, 1954): 88–96 in Z. K. Vodop'ianova, V. Iu. Afiani, and E. S. Afanas'eva, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1953–1957: dokumenty, Seriia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2001), 253; V. Lakshin, *Novyi mir vo vremena Khrushcheva: dnevnik i poputnoe (1953–1964)*, Populiarnaia biblioteka. Dnevnik, memuary, svidetel'stva (Moskva: Izd. Knizhnaia palata, 1991), 16.

¹¹² Eggeling discusses conflicts between "conservative"/"dogmatic" and "liberal" or "anti-dogmatic/anti-Stalinist forces;" Mitrokhin likewise refers to former as the "conservative faction" in the Writers' Union. Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 27, 34–5; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 146.

the late Stalinist status quo. The conservative faction included those who, like Fadeev, Sofronov, and Surkov, had cemented their power during the anti-cosmopolitan campaigns and who supported the Zhdanov-era literary norms. Those who, like Tvardovskii, Berggolts, and Pomerantsev, sought to undermine the ideological hegemony of the Writers' Union leadership, belonged to the "liberal" or "anti-Stalinist" faction that supported the Thaw and de-Stalinization.

After the September 1953 plenum, at which Khrushchev introduced a number of proposals to reform agriculture, the "conservative" wing of the Writers' Union sought to demonstrate their newly critical stance towards the situation in Soviet agriculture. At the Party meeting of the Moscow writers dedicated to the plenum, writers from the ruling elite of the Writers' Union sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the new Soviet leadership by condemning the "varnishers of reality" (*lakirovshchiki deistvitel'nosti*).¹¹³ But when Abramov criticized many of these same authors for their rosy depictions of postwar collective farm life in his article a mere six months later, he would be fiercely attacked.

The leading faction of the Writers' Union remained in charge despite a shakeup in the leadership in October of 1953. At the Nineteenth Plenum of the Writers' Union in October 1953, Fadeev was replaced by one of his deputies from the time of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, Alexei Surkov.¹¹⁴ As Wolfram Eggeling notes, by replacing Fadeev with Surkov, the political authorities sidelined a figure strongly associated with Stalinist cultural policy but left the ruling faction intact.¹¹⁵ The dominant group of the late Stalin era remained in power, much to the dissatisfaction of writers who opposed late Stalinist literary policies. The Russian Jewish poet Il'ia

¹¹³ Sergei Chuprinin, *Ottepel' 1953-1956 : strannitsy russkoi sovetskoi literatury* (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1989), 427.

¹¹⁴ Zezina, "Crisis in the Union of Soviet Writers in the Early 1950s," 650-651; Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, 116.

¹¹⁵ Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 33.

Sel'vinskii, for example, wrote a letter to Malenkov complaining that “the group that Agitprop has put in charge over the writers’ community is out of touch and has turned into a caste that is deeply hated by the other writers.”¹¹⁶ Sel'vinskii’s attitude towards the dominant elite was likely shared by many of his fellow Jews and their allies within the Union. There was also strong personal animosity between Surkov and *Novyi mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii. The political authorities’ refusal to change course, in combination with the new assertiveness of a group of writers after Stalin’s death, set the Union of Writers up for a conflict. The polarization of the Writers’ Union became more obvious with the explosion of controversy that swirled around a series of works of literary criticism published in *Novyi mir* in the winter and spring of 1953-1954.

Starting in December of 1953 with the publication of Vladimir Pomerantsev’s “On Sincerity in Literature,” the literary criticism section of *Novyi mir* joined the growing chorus of writers taking aim at the strict interpretation of socialist realism that had dominated the Soviet literary world since the late Stalin era. Pomerantsev’s article was followed by Mikhail Lifshits’ “The Diary of Marietta Shaginian” in February of 1954. Abramov’s “People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose” and Mark Shcheglov’s “*The Russian Forest* of Leonid Leonov” appeared in quick succession in April and May of 1954. Readers took notice of the journal’s newly critical stance. “We impatiently snatched each issue of *Novyi mir* from the mailbox. The name of the journal suddenly took on its precise, original meaning: NEW [*novyi*],” recalled the translator and future dissident Raisa Orlova in her 1988 memoir.¹¹⁷

Both Pomerantsev's and Abramov's articles attacked late Stalinist modes of depicting collective farm life. Pomerantsev’s article, the most hotly debated of the four, argued that too many

¹¹⁶ Sel'vinskii, qtd. in Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, 116.

¹¹⁷ R. D. Orlova and Lev Kopelev, *My zhili v Moskve: 1956-1980* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), 22.

Soviet writers were simply churning out idealized, clichéd works—engaging in what he called the “varnishing of reality”—instead of producing “sincere” literature that would truly aid in the cause of building socialism.¹¹⁸ Pomerantsev argued that literary works needed to depict real conflicts. Pomerantsev drew many of his examples from literature about the collective farm. He held up Valentin Ovechkin’s “District Workdays” as a literary model, comparing it favorably with the recent Stalin Prize-winning novels *Cavalier of the Golden Star* by Semën Babaevskii and *Harvest* by Galina Nikolaeva:

And then I understood that before Ovechkin, in many books on the theme of the collective farm, everything was wiped clean, all the sharp edges had been cut off, the corners broken off. I understood that Tutarinov [Babaevskii's hero] overcame simple obstacles; he did not deal with or even see the genuinely complicated problems of village life. Today he looks not so much like a hero as a little angel on an Easter cake. He is sprinkled with praise, like colored poppy seeds; but lick him, and he melts. On the other hand, the heroes of Ovechkin are seekers. They keep their eyes open. They do politics. It's not just that their own thought is not constrained; but they also awaken ours. The writer clarifies life for us, and changes it. After this, we sense that life has outgrown the novel of S. Babaevskii, and that the emotionally thin characters of G. Nikolaeva's lack that searching for ideas, those discoveries and surprises with which Ovechkin continually surprises us.¹¹⁹

In his article, Pomerantsev referred to Ovechkin’s sketch more than any other recent work of Soviet literature, praising it for both aiding the authorities in formulating policy and provoking new thoughts in its readers with its frank depictions of the economic problems on the collective farm.

In “People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose,” Abramov developed many of the same themes of “truth” and “sincerity” with an exclusive focus on literature about rural life. Like Pomerantsev, Abramov argued that a lack of real conflict marred recent Soviet literature about the countryside. In his view, these works failed to contribute to the historic tasks laid out in the September 1953 plenum because they did not depict the very real challenges facing Soviet col-

¹¹⁸ On Pomerantsev, see Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, especially Chapter 2; Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia inteligentsiia*, 130-144.

lective farms. Declaring “expression of the truth of life [*zhiznennoi pravdy*]” to be the “main standard of the value of a literary work,” he argued that “only truthful art [*pravdivoe iskusstvo*] can have a strong and true influence on life.”¹²⁰ Quoting from Malenkov’s speech at the Nineteenth Party Congress, Abramov maintained that this included criticizing the flaws and failures of Soviet society.¹²¹ Abramov argued that Soviet writers must remember that “only the truth—direct and unflinching” can aid in the struggle for the rapid development of Soviet agriculture.¹²² Working from these principles, Abramov proceeded to attack Stalin Prize-winning works on collective farm life by Semen Babaevskii, Galina Nikolaeva, and Elizar Mal’tsev. He systematically demonstrated how they glossed over the real difficulties faced by collective farms in the postwar years. He criticized the ease with which collective farm workers managed to solve all of their problems in novels like Babaevskii’s *Cavalier of the Golden Star*. Abramov scoffed at Babaevskii’s depiction of a collective farm that had managed to build an electrical station without encountering any actual difficulty in raising the funds for such an undertaking. Even worse, in Abramov’s view, was the fact that Babaevskii’s collective farmers built the electrical station in the middle of harvest time. How could a collective farm possibly spare workers for construction at the busiest time of the year during a period in which there was a rural labor shortage, Abramov wondered.¹²³ In his view, works that displayed such blatant disregard for the basic realities of life on the collective farm could not possibly help the Party and the Soviet people achieve the goals of agricultural development laid out in the September 1953 plenum.

¹¹⁹ Pomerantsev, “Ob iskrennosti v literature,” 234. Translation from Vladimir Pomerantsev, “On Sincerity in Literature,” trans. Eric Konkol, SovLit.com, 2004, <http://hstrial-beverett.homestead.com/pomerantsev.htm>.

¹²⁰ Abramov, “Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoiennoi proze,” 211.

¹²¹ Abramov, “Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoiennoi proze,” 227.

¹²² Abramov, “Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoiennoi proze,” 231.

¹²³ Abramov, “Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoiennoi proze,” 215-216.

Abramov criticized his literary targets for their weak portrayals of rural characters, arguing that they lacked the knowledge necessary to write about collective farmers. He mocked their seeming ignorance of real lives and habits of rural people. He poked fun, for example, at Nikolaeva's portrayal of an agronomist wearing a squirrel fur coat while working in the fields in *Harvest*.¹²⁴ Abramov's critiques focused on more substantive details as well. He called for greater attention to the psychological development of rural characters, echoing Berggolts' and Ehrenburg's articles from 1953. He argued that Babaevskii, Nikolaeva, and Mal'tsev failed to portray the obstacles to the development of true socialist consciousness of the peasantry. Abramov repeated Soviet tropes, common in Soviet culture and propaganda under both Lenin and Stalin, that the peasantry's socialist consciousness lagged behind that of the progressive urban working class. Abramov argued that although two decades of life in collective farms had impacted the psychology of rural people, "holdovers from the past" (*perezhitki*) continued to hinder socialist progress. The development of socialist consciousness did not happen so easily.¹²⁵ Writers who lacked a deep familiarity with both the material and spiritual condition of people in rural areas could not write convincing, effective literary works. Abramov sought to persuade his readers that raising the level of socialist consciousness among collective farmers required an insider's knowledge of their inner lives. This move illustrates the way in which the Thaw-era discourse of "truth" and "sincerity" had the potential to empower writers with first-hand experience of rural life—those who could make the case that they understood rural people better than lifelong urbanites.

¹²⁴ Abramov, "Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoiennoi proze," 221-222.

¹²⁵ Abramov, "Liudi kolkhoznoi derevni v poslevoiennoi proze," 219.

While it would be tempting to see the hand of Tvardovskii in the publication of the four articles, according to the *Novyi mir* staff member Vladimir Lakshin, it was actually the work of Igor Sats, whom Tvardovskii asked to temporarily “look after” the criticism department while he was on leave in the Far East.¹²⁶ Indeed, the literary agenda expressed in these four articles was one that Sats had been associated with for decades. In the 1930s, Sats and Lifshits had worked at the journal *Literaturnyi kritik*, which had been at the heart of the late-1930s campaign for “the lyric” (*lirika*) in literature (in which Berggol'ts also participated). In February of 1940, Aleksandr Fadeev, already an important figure in the Writers' Union, convinced the Central Committee to shut down *Literaturnyi kritik*.¹²⁷ As head of the division of literary criticism at *Novyi mir*, Sats sought to re-start the debates of the late 1930s, once again deploying the concept of “sincerity” against his opponents' interpretation of socialist realism. Sats thus played a role in reviving these 1930s debates during the early Thaw that scholarship has not previously recognized.¹²⁸ Abramov's article thus introduced the topic of rural life into the long-running debate over “truth” and “sincerity” in Soviet literature.

Sats and the *Novyi mir* critics were doing more than simply promoting a more “sincere” form of socialist realism. They were attacking some of the most prominent figures in postwar Soviet literature, Stalin Prize-winning writers who were associated with the dominant faction within the Writers' Union. Abramov targeted Stalin Prize-winning works by the prominent writers Semën Babaevskii, Galina Nikolaeva, and Elizar Mal'tsev. Mikhail Lifshits' article criticized the well-known novelist and essayist Marietta Shaginian, who had entered the socialist realist

¹²⁶ Lakshin, 15.

¹²⁷ For a discussion of Sats' time at *Literaturnyi kritik* within the context of his biography see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), 151-156.

¹²⁸ Katerina Clark argues that the early Thaw represented a return to the late 1930s focus on the lyric. She focuses, however, on the roles of Berggol'ts and Simonov in this phenomenon. Clark, ““Wait for Me and I Shall Return.””

pantheon in the 1930s with the publication of her novel *The Hydro-central (Gidrotsentral')*, one of the first “production novels.” In his article, Mark Shcheglov had taken aim at Leonid Leonov’s 1953 novel *The Russian Forest (Russkii les)*. A longtime fixture of the Soviet literary world, Leonov had won a first-degree Stalin Prize in 1943 for his patriotic play *Invasion (Nash-estvie)* and was a member of the Writers’ Union Secretariat.¹²⁹ Of the writers attacked in the *Novyi mir* articles, most, according to Nikolai Mitrokhin, were connected to the conservative, pro-Stalinist faction that was dominant within the Writers’ Union.¹³⁰ Abramov’s article thus aligned him with Sats and others who sought to dislodge the conservative faction of the Writers’ Union from power.

The pro-Stalinist faction took the challenge presented by the *Novyi mir* critics seriously, responding quickly to Pomerantsev’s article “On Sincerity in Literature.” At a meeting of playwrights on January 15, 1954, Anatolii Surov, a fixture of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, and Surkov, who had become *de facto* head of the Writers’ Union after the sidelining of Fadeev, made speeches critical of Pomerantsev. Anti-Pomerantsev articles began to appear in the press.¹³¹ The Writers’ Union leadership also enlisted their allies in the Department of Science and Culture to appeal to the Central Committee leadership on their behalf.¹³² In March, the Department of

¹²⁹ On Leonov, see Boris Thomson, *The Art of Compromise: The Life and Work of Leonid Leonov* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

¹³⁰ According to Mitrokhin, Leonov belonged to the Russian nationalist wing of the conservative faction. Shaginian was sympathetic to the Russian nationalists (although not one of them), while Babaevskii was affiliated with a statist, anti-Western group among the conservatives. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 151, 157, 160.

¹³¹ Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 51-53.

¹³² See, for example, RGANI 5/17/454 (February 8, 1954): 33-36 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 198-203; RGANI 5/30/84 (after March 14, 1954): 113-120, in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 206-210.

Science and Culture chided *Komsomol'skaia pravda* for publishing a letter in favor of “On Sincerity in Literature.”¹³³

Thus, by the time that Abramov's article “People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose” was published in *Novyi mir* in April of 1954, the battle between the *Novyi mir* division of literary criticism and the conservative, pro-Stalinist leadership of the Writers' Union and their allies in the Department of Science and Culture was already heating up. In April, *Kommunist* (the press organ of the Central Committee) published an article that criticized Pomerantsev's position in “On Sincerity in Literature,” stating that ideological principles were more important criteria than sincerity when judging a work of literature. The author also attacked Abramov's article, published earlier that month, for its “one-sided” account of the weaknesses of the works he criticized. He rejected Abramov's argument that the collective farm novels were unrepresentative of rural life in the Soviet Union.¹³⁴ In a May 10 letter to a colleague from his graduate study at Leningrad State University, Abramov complained about the article in *Kommunist* (“a slap in the face”) and the characterization of his article as ideologically harmful at a recent meeting of the Party group of the governing board (*pravlenie*) of the Union of Writers. He wrote that he feared that the worst was yet to come (he was right), but he vowed to continue his work. (The only thing he regretted, he wrote, was that the editors at *Novyi mir* had removed all of his harsh wording from the article.¹³⁵)

On May 25, 1954, Surkov, the *de facto* head of the Writers' Union, continued his attack in the in the pages of the country's leading newspaper *Pravda*, criticizing Pomerantsev's article as

¹³³ RGANI 5/17/488 (March 24, 1954): 74 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 211.

¹³⁴ Miasnikov, “Sbornik literaturno-kriticheskikh statei M. Gor'kogo,” *Kommunist*, no. 6 (April 1954): 123, 125.

¹³⁵ Letter from Fëdor Abramov to L. S. Levitan, May 10, 1954, in Fëdor Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, ed. D. S. Likhachev, V. G. Rasputin, and L. Krutikova-Abramova, vol. 6, 6 vols. (Leningrad: Khudozhlitra, Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1995), 242-243.

“harmful” and stating that the publication of Abramov’s, Lifshits’, and Shcheglov’s articles “raises serious concerns” about the direction of literary criticism at *Novyi mir*.¹³⁶ Around this time, Tvardovskii received reports that Surkov had insinuated that Tvardovskii was the son of a *kulak* in a speech in front of hundreds of people at the Academy of Social Sciences.¹³⁷ Surkov’s revival of an allegation that had dogged Tvardovskii for years shows how the personal and the political were intertwined in the battle between the Union leadership and *Novyi mir*.

Over the summer of 1954, the Party and the leadership of the Union of Writers took decisive steps to beat back the challenge by the *Novyi mir* critics to the literary status quo.¹³⁸ Their task was made more difficult by the fact that Tvardovskii was back from his sabbatical and ready to defend Sats’ decision to publish the four controversial articles *Novyi mir*. In early June, Tvardovskii and other members of the *Novyi mir* editorial staff were called in to Central Committee Secretary Pëtr Pospelov’s office for a two-day meeting to discuss the four articles published by the literary criticism section as well as Tvardovskii’s controversial new poem, *Tërkin in the Other World* (*Tërkin na tom svete*). In a letter to the Presidium of the Central Committee, Tvardovskii complained that the meetings had been unproductive because of their harshly critical (*prorabotochnyi*) tone. Tvardovskii told the Presidium that he did not agree that he had not acted in a Party manner and refused to make a “automatic,” forced acknowledgement of his errors.¹³⁹

Novyi mir remained defiant.

¹³⁶ Surkov, “Pod znamenem sotsialisticheskogo realizma,” *Pravda*, May 25, 1954.

¹³⁷ A. Tvardovskii, “Iz rabochikh tetradei (1953-1956),” *Znamia*, no. 7 (1989): 132.

¹³⁸ A thorough account of the events in June and July can be found in Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 72-78; Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, 139-142.

¹³⁹ RGANI 5/30/84 (June 10, 1954): 29-31, in *Kul’tura i vlast’*, 225-227.

Later in June, at a meeting of the Union of Writers, Surkov continued his campaign against the *Novyi mir* critics. He blamed Sats and the old team from *Literaturnyi kritik* for causing a faction to spring up around Tvardovskii (“*vozrozhdenie gruppovshchiny vokrug Tvardovskogo*”).¹⁴⁰ Accusations of factionalism flew the opposite direction as well. On June 29, Stepan Zlobin, the head of the Moscow section of prose writers, wrote a letter to Khrushchev complaining that the campaign against the *Novyi mir* literary critics lacked any ideological substance; it was simply a cover for Surkov’s vendetta against Tvardovskii.¹⁴¹ Surkov’s campaign continued in July, when *Literaturnaia gazeta* published an unsigned article attacking the literary criticism department of *Novyi mir*. The article linked Abramov to Pomerantsev’s “ideologically harmful” idea of sincerity and accused Abramov of refusing to support progressive developments, hiding his ossified and backwards views under a cover of practicality.¹⁴² The leadership of the Union of Writers was doing everything they could, holding meetings and publishing attacks in their press organ, to beat back the challenge presented by the critics at *Novyi mir*.

In July, the Central Committee put their weight behind the campaign against the critics. On July 7, 1954, the Central Committee Secretariat held a meeting presided over by Khrushchev and attended by members of the *Novyi mir* editorial board and the leadership of the Union of Writers. The stress was apparently getting to Tvardovskii: he was not in attendance because he had gone on a drinking binge the night before. Fadeev, who had at one time been friendly with Tvardovskii, wrote him a letter describing the meeting, telling him that the political leadership had made it clear that *Novyi mir*’s actions were “mistakes.”¹⁴³ On July 23, the Secretariat of the Cen-

¹⁴⁰ Lakshin, *Novyi mir vo vremena Khrushcheva*, 16.

¹⁴¹ RGANI 5/30/83 (June 29, 1954): 88-96 in *Kul'tura i vlast'*, 251-257.

¹⁴² “O kriticheskom otdel' zhurnala ‘Novyi mir,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 1, 1954.

¹⁴³ Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 75-76.

tral Committee adopted the directive “On the Mistakes of the Journal *Novyi mir*,” which mandated the replacement of Tvardovskii with the previous head editor, Konstantin Simonov.¹⁴⁴

Khrushchev supported Tvardovskii’s firing, but sought to avoid a direct conflict with Tvardovskii and other members of the intelligentsia. The Secretariat chose not to publish the directive, but rather instructed the Union of Writers to deal with the matter.¹⁴⁵

On August 11, 1954, the Presidium of the Governing Board of the Writers’ Union met to deal with the *Novyi mir* critics. In their statement, the members of the Presidium accused the four critics of calling into question the veracity (*zhiznennaia pravdivost’*) of Soviet literature.¹⁴⁶

While Pomerantsev was the main target of the Writers’ Union directive, the discussion reveals that leadership of the Writers’ Union was deeply concerned by the issues raised by Abramov in his article. The Presidium accused Abramov of tendentiously ignoring new developments in the village and defending the “stagnant” and the “backwards.”¹⁴⁷ In Surkov’s speech during the meeting, he stated that “Abramov acts as if he is addressing works of literature, but very frequently the examples he gives reveal that the critic does not agree with how things are proceeding in real life.”¹⁴⁸ He accused Abramov and other writers of drawing a single, erroneous conclusion from the decisions of the Central Committee on agriculture: “that everything in the village is bad.”¹⁴⁹ To Surkov, Abramov’s negative outlook suggested a lack of faith in the entire kolkhoz system, which, Surkov felt the need to emphasize, was the “unshakable foundation of the sub-

¹⁴⁴ TsKhSD (RGANI) 4/9/123 (July 23, 1954): 61-63 in “‘Edva raskrylis’ pervye tsvety...’: ‘Novyi mir’ i obshchestvennye umonastroeniia v 1954 godu,” *Druzhba narodov*, no. 11 (1993): 232-233.

¹⁴⁵ Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 76-77; Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, 140-142.

¹⁴⁶ RGALI 631/30/422 (August 11, 1954): 2-3.

¹⁴⁷ RGALI 631/30/422 (August 11, 1954): 4.

¹⁴⁸ RGALI 631/30/422 (August 11, 1954): 16.

¹⁴⁹ RGALI 631/30/422 (August 11, 1954): 18.

sistence of tens of millions of workers in agriculture,” a system that had proven its worth in the Second World War.¹⁵⁰ Vadim Kozhevnikov, editor of the journal *Znamia*, stated that *Novyi mir* had done great harm to Soviet literature. He said that the journal had confused writers, particularly on rural issues. Mal'tsev, one of the writers criticized by Abramov, had renounced his novel *From the Whole Heart* and had started to talk about hunger on the collective farm. Like Surkov, Kozhevnikov complained that the writers had not understood the meaning of the Central Committee plenums on agriculture. They had started to submit manuscripts to journals criticizing every aspect of collective farm life. The Ukrainian poet Mykola Bazhan said that the dangerous ideas of *Novyi mir* had begun to seep into Ukrainian literature as well.¹⁵¹

The meeting of the Writers' Union represented a defeat for the journal *Novyi mir* and its literary agenda. Boris Riurikov, a secretary of the Union of Writers, stated that *Novyi mir* had sought to revive the “politically dangerous” views of the journal *Literaturnyi kritik*, which had been repudiated in the past by the Party.¹⁵² This was clearly a swipe at both Sats and Lifshits, who had worked at *Literaturnyi kritik* during the period when it advocated for greater sincerity and lyricism in socialist realist literature in the 1930s. For his part, Tvardovskii accepted the criticism of the political mistakes made by the department of literary criticism under his editorial leadership. Although he could not resist the urge to say that Surkov was exaggerating somewhat, he ultimately accepted the blame for himself.¹⁵³ In his diary entry on the same day, Tvardovskii wrote that he agreed with the conclusions of the Union of Writers: “The main fault is mine. The

¹⁵⁰ RGALI 631/30/422 (August 11, 1954): 19.

¹⁵¹ RGANI 5/17/488 (August 12, 1954): 87-91 in *Kul'tura i vlast'*, 292-296.

¹⁵² RGANI 5/17/488 (August 12, 1954): 87-91 in *Kul'tura i vlast'*, 294.

¹⁵³ RGANI 5/17/488 (August 12, 1954): 87-91 in *Kul'tura i vlast'*, 41-44.

decision is correct.”¹⁵⁴ *Novyi mir* published the resolution of the Presidium of the Union of Writers criticizing the four critics at the beginning of their September issue.¹⁵⁵

The criticism of Abramov within the broader attack on *Novyi mir* did not, however, signal a complete reversal of Khrushchev’s decision to open a discussion about agriculture. Around the same time that the Central Committee and the Union of Writers were punishing *Novyi mir* for the publication of Abramov’s article, Ovechkin’s sketch “With Our Own Hands” (“*Svoimi rukami*”) was serialized in *Pravda*, the country’s most authoritative newspaper.¹⁵⁶ The sketch dovetailed nicely with Khrushchev’s initiatives at the September 1953 plenum. In the sketch, Ovechkin once again called for better leadership of the collective farms, hearkening back to the collective farm chairmen from the early days of collectivization. At a Party meeting, the main character of the sketch gives voice to the opinion, shared by both Ovechkin and Khrushchev, that collective farmers needed better compensation for their work: “If we can give the collective farmers a material interest in their work, things will start moving, the wheels will begin to turn...”¹⁵⁷ Ovechkin’s sketches hewed closer to Khrushchev’s policies than Abramov’s sweeping condemnations of Soviet kolkhoz novels. However, the fact that Ovechkin’s sketches continued to receive support at the highest level while Abramov was sharply criticized suggest that Abramov’s association with Sats and *Novyi mir* tainted his work in the eyes of the political and literary authorities.

The story of Abramov’s article “People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose” thus illustrates the important role that contestation over the representation of rural life played in the lit-

¹⁵⁴ A. Tvardovskii, “Iz rabochikh tetradei (1953-1960),” *Znamia*, no. 7 (1989): 142.

¹⁵⁵ “Ob oshibkakh zhurnala ‘Novyi mir,’” *Novyi mir* no. 9 (1954): 3-7.

¹⁵⁶ Valentin Ovechkin, “Svoimi rukami,” *Pravda*, August 27, 1954, August 30, 1954, September 1, 1954. Translated in V. V. (Valentin Vladimirovich) Ovechkin, *Collective Farm Sidelights: Short Stories*, trans. Naomi Jochel and Ralph Parker, Library of Soviet Short Stories (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954).

¹⁵⁷ Ovechkin, *Collective Farm Sidelights*, 180.

erary firestorm of 1954. Abramov's article advanced an aesthetic position by arguing for the importance of "truth" and "sincerity" in literature about the collective farm, developing arguments made by Berggolts and *Literaturnyi kritik* in the 1930s and revived by Sats and Pomerantsev in the 1950s. At the same time, by attacking the leading authors of "collective farm novels," Abramov was participating in *Novyi mir*'s struggle to dislodge Surkov and the ruling faction of the Writers' Union. Implicit in Abramov's argument was the idea that writers with first-hand knowledge of rural life (i.e. people like him and Tvardovskii) were the ones who were most capable of writing about it. Coming from a rural background, Abramov was able to make a strong case that he could give a more truthful representation of rural life than writers like Nikolaeva and Babaevskii. This argument strengthened the position of the *Novyi mir* writers, and, more broadly, privileged the perspective of writers from villages on Soviet agricultural policy. In the summer of 1954, Surkov and the ruling faction of the Writers' Union managed to beat back the threat posed by Abramov and the other *Novyi mir* critics, but only temporarily. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Russian Village Prose writers used their claim to privileged knowledge about the village to critique the policies of Stalin and his successors towards the village.

The Second Congress of the Union of Writers of the Soviet Union December 1954

Over the course of two weeks in December of 1954, the Second All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers took place in the Kremlin. It was the first time the writers had gathered for a congress since the original founding congress of the Union of Writers in 1934. The Second Congress made clear that the events of the preceding summer had done little to resolve the deep-seated conflicts in Soviet literature. The Central Committee of the Communist Party welcomed the

writers with a speech that continued the ambiguous literary policy that had been in place since 1952. The speech, delivered by Pëtr Pospelov, did little to resolve the question of how much criticism of Soviet society was now permitted. It criticized both the “embellishment of reality” (the *bête noire* of the *Novyi mir* critics) as well as “the distorted, and sometimes libelous portrayal of Soviet society” (the bugbear of the conservative faction).¹⁵⁸ In his keynote address, Union head Surkov dedicated several paragraphs to the danger of cosmopolitanism, including references to *Literaturnyi kritik*, Sats’ old journal, and *Novyi mir*.¹⁵⁹ Liberal writers like Berggol'ts and Ehrenburg, meanwhile, continued to advance their own literary agenda. Ehrenburg once again stressed the importance of “the truth” for Soviet literature: “A society which is developing and getting stronger cannot fear a truthful portrayal: the truth is dangerous only for the doomed,” he said.¹⁶⁰ Berggol'ts feuded with the conservative stalwart Nikolai Gribachëv, author of “collective farm poems” and a leader of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, over the importance of “the lyric” in poetry.¹⁶¹ Despite the suppression of the *Novyi mir* literary critics, late Stalinist literary conventions were still up for debate.

In his speech, Ovechkin continued to emphasize first-hand experience as a source of literary truth. Expressing the concern that many writers felt over the quality of Soviet literature, Ovechkin declared that most recent literature was mediocre and that the standards for literary

¹⁵⁸ “Privetstvie TsK KPSS,” in V. Dorofeev and V. Pimenov, eds., *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei. 15-26 dekabria 1954 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1956), 7-9.

¹⁵⁹ “Doklad A. A. Surkova ‘O sostoianii i zadachakh sovetskoi literatury’ in *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 10-37. References on 31-32.

¹⁶⁰ “Rech’ I. G. Erenburga” in *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 142-146. English translation from Ilya Ehrenburg, “Ehrenburg Blasts Conservatives at 2nd Congress of Soviet Writers: Speech of I. G. Ehrenburg to 2nd Congress of Soviet Writers, 17 December 1954,” trans. Eric Konkol, SovLit.net, 2012, <http://www.sovlit.net/2ndcongress/ehrenburg.html>.

¹⁶¹ This was an extension of a debate that had played out on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* in October. “Rech N. M. Gribacheva” in *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 496-500.

prizes had fallen. In his view, the literary lifestyle was to blame for the declining quality of books: writers fell into a routine of “positions, meetings, receptions and banquets” in Moscow and lost touch with the masses. Only by living alongside ordinary people could writers gain the experience they needed to help the Party lead the masses. Ovechkin called on writers to abandon the capital for life in the smaller towns of the country.¹⁶² Ovechkin's juxtaposition of the perspective from from Moscow and the perspective from the periphery that would become increasingly salient in Russian literature starting in the late 1950s.¹⁶³ Ovechkin's contention that Soviet literature had to be rooted in experience as well as ideology bore more than a passing resemblance to Pomerantsev's and Abramov's arguments in their now-condemned critical essays, a similarity that did not go unnoticed. In his speech, the Azerbaijani writer Mirza Ibragimov sought to tie Ovechkin to the discredited *Novyi mir* critics, stating that Pomerantsev had claimed Ovechkin was “the only sincere, truthful writer in the Soviet Union” and wondering if Ovechkin shared Pomerantsev's opinion.¹⁶⁴ The political authorities were similarly unimpressed with Ovechkin's speech: in their report on the Congress, the Central Committee's Department of Science and Culture dismissed Ovechkin's “one-sided” criticism of Soviet literature.¹⁶⁵

The most significant speech on literature about the Soviet village, however, not delivered by Ovechkin, but by one of the Stalin Prize-winning writers whose works he implicitly criticized—Aleksandr Yashin. Born into a peasant family in 1913 in what is today Vologda *oblast'*, Yashin entered the Soviet literary world in the 1930s and won a Stalin Prize for his 1949 poem about a female collective farm organizer, *Alëna Fomina*. The poem was the epitome of the “var-

¹⁶² “Rech' V. V. Ovechkina” in *Vtoroi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 248-252.

¹⁶³ See Chapter 3.

¹⁶⁴ “Rech' Mirza Ibragimova” in *Vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 293-297.

¹⁶⁵ RGANI 5/17/534 (January 11, 1954): 4-11 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 337-345.

nished" literature about the countryside that Tvardovskii, Ovechkin, and the *Novyi mir* critics opposed. In his speech, Yashin all but repudiated his previous work and embraced the position of the disgraced *Novyi mir* critics—without referencing them by name. Yashin criticized postwar Soviet poetry for glossing over the difficulties of village life much in the same way that Pomerantsev and Abramov had criticized the collective farm novels. Yashin characterized such “varnishing” (*lakirovka*) as a departure from the principles of socialist realism. Echoing Abramov’s argument, Yashin stated that the embellishment of life in the countryside in literature was an obstacle to the improvement of conditions in the countryside. He recounted a story that Fadeev had told the writers about a collective farm that was so advanced that the farmers were giving up their private plots. Yashin did not question the veracity of Fadeev’s story, but asked why the writers had accepted this exceptional collective farm as the norm for Soviet agriculture. Why had they not sought to understand the reasons why some collective farms had fallen behind, he wondered. Why had they waited for a Central Committee plenum on the problems in agriculture before dealing with this issue? Yashin criticized this as a departure from true socialist realism.

Like Abramov, Yashin also criticized the lack of attention to the inner worlds of characters in Soviet literature. Although Yashin did not mention Berggol’ts or Ehrenburg by name, he raised similar concerns about writers’ lack of interest in depicting their characters’ psychology in lyric poetry.¹⁶⁶ Yashin’s critique of Soviet poetry about the village, which he consistently portrayed as betraying the principles of socialist realism, thus echoed many of the issues raised by the writers in the liberal camp.

Like Ovechkin, Yashin identified personal experience as the primary source of knowledge about the Soviet countryside. During his speech, he recounted a story about situation

¹⁶⁶ “Rech’ A. Ia. Iashina” in *Vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 338-341

in 1951 when there was a bad harvest in his native Vologda region. According to Yashin, the overly cautious authorities in the region began taking the local collective farm chairmen to court for failing to fulfill their requisition quotas. At the time, Yashin had been visiting his native village and he witnessed firsthand the injustice of local chairmen being punished for circumstances outside their control. Strikingly, Yashin reproached himself for violating his own principles as a communist by failing to defend the collective farms of his native village from bureaucratic excesses. "To this day I consider myself guilty before the party and my *zemliaki* (the people from his region) that I did not show enough civil courage and did not immediately do whatever was necessary in order to correct this abnormal situation. It was corrected by the party without my participation as a writer," he said.¹⁶⁷ Although he lacked the courage of his convictions to protest the situation in 1951, Yashin expressed his determination to advocate for the interests of the people going forward. After all, he stated, the interests of the people are the interests of the Communist Party. Writers do a service to their country when they reject "varnishing" and the admonitions of the "internal editor," he stated. Yashin even chided Tvardovskii for neglecting the topic of rural life in the Soviet Union, although he praised writers that Tvardovskii had published as editor of *Novyi mir*; including Ovechkin. Yashin's reliance on his personal experiences in his native village as a source of knowledge about the countryside thus privileged the rural writer as the handmaiden to the Party in its mission of improving the state of agriculture. It also foreshadowed Yashin's later decision to begin writing hard-hitting short stories that exposed the failures of Party management of agriculture.

¹⁶⁷ "Rech' A. Ia. Iashina," *Vsesoiuznyi s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei*, 339.

Despite Yashin's critical stance, his speech was not mentioned in the final report produced by the Department of Science and Culture for the Central Committee.¹⁶⁸ Yashin's speech did not escape notice, however; Sergei Vikulov, a young poet from Yashin's native Vologda oblast wrote him, calling the speech "courageous."¹⁶⁹ As we will see in Chapter 3, Vikulov went on to become the editor of *Nash sovremennik*, where he published many of the most significant works of Village Prose of the 1970s and 1980s.

Literary Moscow Speaks: The Twentieth Party Congress, *Literaturnaia Moskva*, and Aleksandr Yashin
1955-1957

In the mid-1950s, debates over the portrayal of the state of the Soviet countryside continued to be central to the broader struggle over the legacy of Stalinism in literature. The conflict between the conservative faction that controlled the Union of Writers leadership and the anti-Stalinist faction that sought to redefine socialist realism continued. After the founding of the Moscow branch of the Union of Writers in 1955, the Moscow-based literary community became the center of the opposition to the conservative Stalinist faction that controlled the Union of Writers. After Nikita Khrushchev's attack on the Stalinist "cult of personality" at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the Moscow branch hosted a three-day discussion of the Congress at which writers debated the impact of Stalinism on literature and writers condemned Stalin-era portrayals of life in the Soviet countryside. Also in 1956, Moscow writers organized a new literary almanac, *Literaturnaia Moskva*, which generated another storm of controversy. Much of the controversy revolved around a short story by Aleksandr Yashin that contended that Soviet admin-

¹⁶⁸ RGANI 5/17/534 (January 11, 1954): 4-11 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 337-345.

istrators cared little for peasants, treating them as mere "levers" to be manipulated. In 1957, the Soviet Central Committee sought to silence the critical discussions taking place at the Moscow branch.

The founding of the Moscow branch (*moskovskoe otdelenie*) of the Union of Writers in 1955 provided a boost to the anti-Stalinist faction among Soviet writers. As Polly Jones has explained, the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union "was institutionally post-Stalinist, and in many respects it was anti-Stalinist too."¹⁷⁰ Previously, the activities of writers living in Moscow—who made up a third of the membership of the Union of Writers—had been under the direct supervision of the Soviet Union of Writers.¹⁷¹ With the founding of the Moscow branch in April of 1955, the Moscow writers gained a separate institutional base, which the anti-Stalinist faction used to wage their struggle against the leadership of the Union of Writers.

The anti-Stalinist orientation of the Moscow branch of the Union of Writers was obvious from the first organizational meeting held by Moscow Party members on April 8, 1954. At the meeting, the writer Viacheslav Kovalevskii blasted the leadership of the Union of Writers, stating that they had failed to gain the trust of the writers of Moscow. He claimed that the idea to found the Moscow branch had come "from below" and had been realized against the will of the Union leadership. Moreover, he accused the leadership of the Union of pursuing an ideologically incorrect line by promoting the theory of conflictlessness. Citing the great Lev Tolstoy's writings on

¹⁶⁹ Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka (OR RGB) 647/14/43 (January 9, 1955): 33-34.

¹⁷⁰ Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 62.

¹⁷¹ The leadership of the Union of Writers had a history of conflict with the Party cell of the Moscow writers; in 1953, Fadeev had even accused the committee of the Party organization of the Moscow writers of attempting to seize the leadership of the Union. The Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party investigated his complaints but found no evidence to support his accusations against the party committee of the Moscow writers. RGANI 5/17/437 (October 17, 1953): 112. Fadeev wrote several letters to Party organs over the course of 1953 complaining about the Moscow writers' Party organization and also the work of the creative "sections" (for prose, poetry, etc.) located in Moscow. See RGANI 5/17/437 (August 17, 1953): 112; RGANI 5/17/437 (September 29, 1953): 79-84; RGANI 5/17/437 (October 5, 1953): 87-111.

the impact of the 1891-2 famine on the Russian village, Kovalevskii wondered aloud who among the writers or the leadership of the Union would say something about the difficult situation in Soviet agriculture on a visit to the Kremlin. Kovalevskii's comments demonstrate the central importance of the issue of Soviet agriculture to the anti-Stalinist writers. The Department of Science and Culture, firmly on the side of the leadership of the Union of Writers, stated with dismay that even among the Moscow writers who belonged to the Party "there is a segment of people with politically immature and even anti-Party moods" who oppose the leadership of the Union of Writers.¹⁷²

At the Twentieth Party Congress in February of 1956, Khrushchev shocked the Party when he delivered his famous "Secret Speech" to the assembled delegates. He accused Stalin of a multitude of crimes, most notably the creation of a "cult of personality" and the baseless imprisonment and execution of Party members in the purges of 1937-8. The speech was not published in newspapers, but it was distributed for discussion in Party cells across the country. The discussion of the speech in March became an opportunity for disgruntled writers to air their grievances in the republican and all-Union Party cells of the Unions of Writers. In the Moscow branch, as elsewhere, the three-day discussion ranged far beyond the relatively narrow set of issues that Khrushchev had discussed in the speech. Granted a mandate to condemn Stalin's cult of personality, the Moscow writers seized the opportunity to air their grievances about late Stalinist literary policy, including the pressure to present an overly positive view of life of the Soviet collective farm.

The writers at the meeting of the Moscow Party cell echoed criticisms of Stalin-era depictions of the countryside that Pomerantsev and Abramov had made in the pages of *Novyi mir*.

¹⁷² RGANI 5/17/534 (April 12, 1955): 20-22.

During the stormy three-day discussion of the Twentieth Party Congress, writers challenged the literary policy of the late Stalin era, tying the literary sins of “conflictlessness” and “varnishing” directly with Stalin’s cult of personality.¹⁷³ Much like Aleksandr Yashin in his speech to the Second Congress, the Moscow writers sought to delegitimize the literary policies of the late Stalin era by arguing that they actually violated core principles of Soviet literature.¹⁷⁴ Again, the depiction of Soviet rural life in Stalin-era literature was at the top of writers’ minds. In her speech, the writer Nadezhda Chertova said that writers were afraid to write about what they saw during their visits to Soviet villages.¹⁷⁵ The writer Elena Usievich said that Soviet writers had not told the truth about what was happening in the village, even though “almost all of us knew” what the real situation was there. She recounted a visit to a collective farm where she was told that the collective farmers were reading Nikolaeva’s *Harvest* with great interest: “Does it resemble your life?” the writers asked. “Why, it’s literature!” they replied. “They, our readers, were not even used to the idea that Soviet literature resembled life,” she lamented.¹⁷⁶

Elizar Mal’tsev, one of the Stalin Prize-winning authors that Abramov had criticized in his article “People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose,” criticized the Stalinist mismanagement of agriculture and the depiction of the Soviet countryside in Stalin-era literature. Much like Yashin, he became a convert to the anti-Stalinist position on agriculture. He complained that, even when pushed by Khrushchev to discuss the problems in agriculture in their regions, regional Party leaders refused to speak up, preferring to wait and see “what they will say from above.”

¹⁷³ See, for example, Aleksandr Avdeenko’s and Pavel Bliakhin’s speeches. TsGAM P-8132/1/5 (March 29, 1956): 191; TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 12.

¹⁷⁴ As Polly Jones states in her analysis of the meeting, the members of the Moscow branch advocated for “alternative definitions of Soviet literatures *partiinnost’* (party mindedness) and *narodnost’* (popularity), rather than alternatives to these principles.” Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 61.

¹⁷⁵ TsGAM P-8132/1/5 (March 29, 1956): 179-180.

Much like Ovechkin, he placed the blame on regional and local Party officials for failing to address the country's real agricultural problems. Mal'tsev tied this behavior to the cult of personality: bowing before a single person had led to a fear of speaking the truth and a penchant for hiding problems instead of dealing with them.¹⁷⁷ In the area of ideology, blind dogmatism had taken over: "Life was checked against quotations [from ideological texts] instead of the other way around."¹⁷⁸ Mal'tsev underscored the importance of first-hand experience, emphasizing the knowledge he had gained speaking with collective farmers in Riazan'. Although at first glance the Stalin Prize-winning Mal'tsev may have appeared to have been in a different ideological camp than Abramov, in fact he was going through the same epistemological shift that Anatoly Pinsky observed in his study of Abramov's notebooks and diaries.¹⁷⁹ Observing the gap between life and literature had led both writers to question the epistemological framework that valued ideology over lived experience.

Mal'tsev saw many of the same negative legacies of Stalinism in the literary world as in the Party's management of agriculture. In his speech, Mal'tsev connected the cult of personality with the tendency of writers to place their trust "not in the life that we saw around us, but in dogma."¹⁸⁰ "When they told us about cosmopolitanism, Zionism, murderous doctors," Mal'tsev said, referencing the anti-Semitic campaigns of the late Stalin years, "we raised our hands and voted against comrades against whom there were accusations, although in our souls we did not

¹⁷⁶ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 31, 1956): 26.

¹⁷⁷ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 44-46.

¹⁷⁸ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 47.

¹⁷⁹ See Pinsky, "The Individual After Stalin," Chapter 2.

¹⁸⁰ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 47.

believe it.”¹⁸¹ Mal’tsev moved on to discussing the campaign against Pomerantsev, which he likewise considered to be a stain on the writers’ community. Pomerantsev’s article was a “modest protest against that falseness and varnishing” that had existed in Soviet literature. Pomerantsev had made philosophical mistakes, but he should have been patiently instructed, not treated as an ideological enemy. Mal’tsev made it clear that he did not blame Abramov for having criticized his work in his controversial article. There were mistakes in the article, but they should have been concretely and convincingly refuted. Instead, “they stopped up Abramov’s mouth and branded him a nihilist.” Mal’tsev said that Surkov had played the primary role in the persecution of the *Novyi mir* critics, and he called on him to admit to his mistakes in a brave and Leninist way.¹⁸² Despite the criticism that had been directed against his own writing on rural life in the Soviet Union, Mal’tsev clearly had some sympathy for Abramov and Pomerantsev’s critiques.

Mal’tsev was not the only writer present to take the opportunity to condemn the anti-cosmopolitan campaign as part of the cult of personality. Jewish writers and their allies seized the opening provided by the Twentieth Party Congress to condemn the anti-Semitism of the late Stalin years. The writer Vladimir Rudnyi, for example, challenged the assembled writers to discuss the role of Anatoly Sofronov and Nikolai Gribachëv—two prominent members of the Union leadership during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign—in fabricating accusations against writers. He condemned the anti-Semitic practice of including writers’ original Jewish names in parentheses after their adopted Russian names, which he blamed on Sofronov.¹⁸³ Aleksandr Isbakh said that Gribachëv’s days as a secretary of the Union of Writers and its party committee were associ-

¹⁸¹ A reference to the spurious allegations that several Jewish Kremlin doctors had been planning to kill Stalin. The people arrested in connection with the so-called Doctors’ Plot were released in April 1953 after Stalin’s death.

¹⁸² TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 47-48.

¹⁸³ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 59.

ated with some of the most shameful pages in the organization's history.¹⁸⁴ Ultimately, the bulk of the blame for the anti-Semitism that marred the life of the Writers' Union during late Stalin years fell on Sofronov and Gribachëv, who, although connected with the current ruling faction, had been voted out of official positions of power in the Union around the time of the 1954 Congress. Both were censured for their actions as Union secretaries in the final decision issued by the Party cell at the end of the three-day meeting.¹⁸⁵ The Twentieth Party Congress had strengthened the hands of the writers who argued that the leadership of the Union of Writers was tainted by its association with the anti-cosmopolitan campaign.

Meanwhile, a group of Moscow writers were launching a new publication where they could put their anti-Stalinist literary principles into action. On February 17, while the Twentieth Party Congress was still ongoing, the first volume of a new literary almanac, *Literaturnaia Moskva*, had been approved for publication.¹⁸⁶ The writers who formed the editorial board of the new publication included several Jewish writers who were active in the Moscow branch Party cell, including Emmanuil Kazakevich, Vladimir Rudnyi, and Margarita Aliger, as well as several prominent Russian prose writers, including Konstantin Paustovskii, Aleksandr Bek, and Vladimir Tendriakov, a member of the "Ovechkin school" of prose writers at *Novyi mir*. At the meeting of the Moscow branch Party cell to discuss the results of the Twentieth Party Congress, Nadezhda Chertova reported with pride that copies of the almanac organized by "our communists" Kazakevich, Rudnyi and Aliger had been distributed to delegates on the last day of the Congress. "This event in our literary life, starting from its birth in the belly of our prose section and ending with its début, shows with all its brightness what sort of fruitful initiative is bubbling up in our writ-

¹⁸⁴ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 31, 1956): 55.

¹⁸⁵ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 31, 1956): 168.

¹⁸⁶ Chuprinin, *Ottepel' 1953-1956*, 461.

ers' collective," she told the assembled writers at the Party meeting. She praised the almanac's publisher, Goslitizdat, for being unafraid to publish the work of a self-made editorial board.¹⁸⁷

The first issue of *Literaturnaia Moskva* included works by writers from the leading faction in the Writers' Union, such as Konstantin Fedin and Aleksei Surkov, but it also featured poetry by Margarita Aliger and Nikolai Zabolotskii, two writers who had recently returned to Moscow from the camps.¹⁸⁸ The most significant new work was by Tvardovskii: he published the first sections of his new long poem *Faraways (Za dal'iu dal')*.¹⁸⁹

Opposition to the Moscow writers' new initiative was already brewing. Rudnyi, one of the editors of *Literaturnaia Moskva*, warned the writers at the meeting of the Moscow Party cell to discuss the Twentieth Party Congress that Vasilii Smirnov, a Russian poet and secretary of the Writers' Union, had expressed to the members of the Party committee his suspicions about the almanac *Literaturnaia Moskva* and the writers on its editorial board. According to Rudnyi, Smirnov had speculated that a "group" of writers, including Paustovskii, Kazakevich, and Bek, were possibly part of a conspiracy.¹⁹⁰ Already, *Literaturnaia Moskva* was caught up in the struggle between the new Moscow branch and the leadership of the Union of Writers.

The Soviet Writers' Union lost one of its most prominent members on May 13, 1956, when Aleksandr Fadeev, the former head of the Union, shot himself at the writers' dacha settlement of Peredelkino. In a suicide letter addressed to the Central Committee, Fadeev condemned Stalin and the current leadership alike, writing that "after the death of Lenin they reduced us to

¹⁸⁷ TsGAM P-8132/1/5 (March 29, 1956): 186-187.

¹⁸⁸ *Literaturnaia Moskva: literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik moskovskikh pisatelei*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1956); Grigorii Svirskii, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1981), 98.

¹⁸⁹ "Za dal'iu dal' (Glavy iz knigi)," *Literaturnaia Moskva: literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik moskovskikh pisatelei*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1956), 494-505.

the status of children, destroyed us and frightened us with ideology, and called it 'party-mindedness' (*partiinosť*)."¹⁹¹ The letter was kept a secret, and Fadeev's suicide was attributed to his alcoholism in his official obituary.

In August of 1956 *Novyi mir* began serializing the novel that would generate the biggest controversy that the journal had experienced since Tvardovskii had been fired due to the affair of the *Novyi mir* critics two years earlier. Vladimir Dudintsev's *Not By Bread Alone*, which told the story of an inventor whose innovations are blocked at every turn by Soviet bureaucrats, generated heated discussions among readers and writers alike.¹⁹² Members of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union discussed the novel on several occasions. At a party meeting, Valentin Ovechkin praised the novel for exposing negative aspects of Soviet life: "How can one wash clean a person without taking off both his outerwear and underwear?" he asked.¹⁹³ In the aftermath of the uprising in Hungary, the Party's literary bureaucrats became concerned about the activities of the Moscow writers. In December of 1956, the Department of Culture wrote a report for the Central Committee on "the facts of incorrect moods among a segment of writers." The report's authors expressed concern over the "one-sided" discussion of the Twentieth Party Congress at the Moscow branch Party cell and its exclusive focus on the cult of personality. The report focused on *Not By Bread Alone* as well as other works published in *Novyi mir* and the first collection of *Lit-*

¹⁹⁰ TsGAM P-8132/1/6 (March 30, 1956): 60.

¹⁹¹ The letter was printed in *Izvestiia* during *glasnost*. "Predsmertnoe pis'mo Aleksandra Fadeeva," *Izvestiia*, September 20, 1990.

¹⁹² On the reaction to the novel, see Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir*, Chapter 3.

¹⁹³ Ovechkin, qtd. in Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 71.

eraternaia Moskva.¹⁹⁴ The report was a clear signal that the Moscow branch had gone too far in its criticisms of the Soviet order.¹⁹⁵

In the context of an incipient freeze and a growing divide between the two literary camps, *Literaturnaia Moskva*'s second collection was published in December of 1956. The almanac included two significant works on rural life, Efim Dorosh's *Village Diary* and Aleksandr Yashin's "Levers." *Village Diary* echoed many of Ovechkin's themes and introduced a topic that would become a mainstay of writing about the Soviet countryside: the need to preserve rural churches.¹⁹⁶ While Dorosh's text was an important early moment for the historical preservation movement, it was Aleksandr Yashin's contribution that made the bigger splash. In a departure from his preferred genre of poetry, Yashin contributed a short story, "Levers."¹⁹⁷ In the story, Yashin demonstrated that he was serious about the criticism of postwar writing about the village that he had made at the Second Congress of the Union of Writers. The story was set in the office of a collective farm on the eve of the Twentieth Party Congress. The assembled collective farmers are chatting before they start their Party meeting. Their conversation demonstrates a clear-eyed view of the problems facing the collective farm, from the pilfering of sugar from the collective farm store to the highhanded behavior of the first secretary of the district committee. "He thinks that the Party will lose authority if he talks with the people like a human being in a plain way," says one collective farmer of the first secretary. "Why, he knows that we earn in the kolkhoz 100

¹⁹⁴ RGANI 5/36/14 (December 1, 1956): 97-109 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 570-580.

¹⁹⁵ On Dudintsev and the 1956-1957 "freeze," see Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, Chapter 2.

¹⁹⁶ The movement to preserve historic churches is the topic of Chapter 4. On *Village Diary*, see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 48. Efim Dorosh, "Derevenskii dnevnik," in *Literaturnaia Moskva: literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik moskovskikh pisatelei*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1956), 549-626.

¹⁹⁷ Aleksandr Yashin, "Rychagi," in *Literaturnaia Moskva: literaturno-khudozhestvennyi sbornik moskovskikh pisatelei*, vol. 2 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1956), 502-13. English language translation: Alexander Yashin, "Levers," *Partisan Review* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1958): 406-20.

grams [of grain] for a workday, but he repeats the same thing over and over: with every year the earning power of the workday is growing and prosperity is becoming greater.”¹⁹⁸ The collective farmer’s words echoed Ovechkin’s critiques of collective farm management and his emphasis on the need to compensate farmers better. While the criticism was harsh, it was still in the vein of Khrushchev’s criticism of Stalin’s management of agriculture—although the fact that the story was set in 1956 and not 1952 may have given the Soviet leader pause.

In “Levers,” Yashin sought to portray how Party administrators treated Soviet peasants as mere “levers” for executing orders from above instead of active, socially conscious Soviet citizens. In his speech to the Second Congress of the Union of Writers, Yashin had criticized himself for not speaking up when bureaucrats began unfairly prosecuting collective farm chairmen in his native region for failing to fulfill the plan during a bad harvest. “Levers” also indicts those whose leadership style demonstrates a lack of knowledge of conditions on the ground and a lack of faith in the Soviet peasantry. In the story, a collective farmer launches into an indignant monologue on the treatment of collective farmers by the Party leadership. The peasantry had been transformed by Soviet rule, he stated, but they were not treated as active participants in building a new society:

It’s not enough just to teach us—you have to listen to us. But the way things are, everything comes from above, always from above. The plans are handed down from above, chairmen from above, the harvest yield estimate from above. There’s no time to persuade people, and it isn’t even necessary, it’s easier not to. Just hand down directives, in other words, and recommend. They stopped cultural work—it was too much trouble. Clubs and reading rooms function only in reports. There’s no one to give lectures and talks. What’s left are campaigns for getting things ready and getting things in; five-day, ten-day, monthly deadlines...¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Yashin, “Levers,” 410.

¹⁹⁹ Yashin, “Levers,” 411-412.

Yashin's message was clear: good managers needed to listen to collective farmers. Moreover, they needed to respect their dignity as members of Soviet society with cultural and spiritual needs. Peasants should not be treated as inanimate "levers" to implement the economic plan.

The conclusion of the story connected Yashin's critique of agricultural management with the Thaw-era concept of sincerity. After their free-wheeling conversation, the collective farmers decide to begin their Party meeting. As if at the flip of a switch, their frank speech turns to political cant and their behavior changes entirely. The secretary of the Party organization begins to mimic the behavior of the district boss. Yashin reveals to the readers that none among the assembled Party members actually work in ordinary, "rank and file" collective farm jobs. The picture Yashin portrays is depressing: not only are the Party members of this collective farm cut off from ordinary workers, but they are incapable of speaking sincerely in an official context. There is, however, a brief moment of optimism at the end, when a group of young people take over the room at the conclusion of the Party meeting. The young people begin to let some fresh air into the smoky room and they turn on the radio to hear a report on the preparations for the Twentieth Party Congress. Relieved of their official duties, the members of the Party cell once again become "plain, warm, straightforward people—people, and not levers."²⁰⁰ The evocation of the Twentieth Party Congress gives the reader hope that these Party members can learn to be sincere once more.

Criticism of *Literaturnaia Moskva*, and "Levers" in particular, began shortly after the release of the second collection. The first shots were fired at a meeting of the Party cell of the Moscow branch in January, when the poet Evgenii Dolmatovskii sharply criticized Yashin's story. Alluding also to Dudintsev's controversial novel *Not By Bread Alone*, he urged the writers to

²⁰⁰ Yashin, "Levers," 420.

remember the global struggle with capitalism and “keep their ideological powder dry.”²⁰¹ In February, a two-day discussion of *Literaturnaia Moskva* took place at the party committee of the Moscow branch of the Union of Writers.²⁰² Yashin’s “Levers” was the primary target of criticism. In the end, the Party committee issued a statement that chided the almanac’s editorial board for publishing ideologically incorrect statements and called on the Party members on the editorial board to recant. “But the times had already changed. People contradicted those who attempted to work them over [*prorabotchikam vozrazhali*]. Not all those were were being ‘worked over’ hurried to repent,” wrote Raisa Orlova, a member of the Moscow branch Party cell. Kazakevich, Aliger, Rudnyi, and Tendriakov apparently refused to do so.²⁰³ That month, *Literaturnaia gazeta* published two more reports on writers’ meetings—one in Lithuania and another in Leningrad—where speakers criticized “Levers” and tied it to *Not By Bread Alone*.²⁰⁴ In February the RSFSR Department of Science, Schools, and Culture called Yashin into their offices for a discussion on his recent poem “Tears from the Eyes,” which, in their words, “mocked the achievements of the collective farm system in the Soviet village.” In light of the ideologically-suspect poem and the recent criticism of “Levers” at the Moscow writers’ Party meeting, the Department suggested the publisher *Sovetskii pisatel’* reconsider their decision to publish Yashin’s most recent collection of poetry.²⁰⁵ It was the beginning of a long campaign to ostracize Yashin that would last until his death in 1968.

²⁰¹ “Sozdavat’ proizvedeniia, dostoinnye nashogo naroda,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 26 1957.

²⁰² The February meeting is discussed in TsGAM P-8132/1/14 (May 29, 1957): 37-38.

²⁰³ Kopelev and Orlova, *My zhili v Moskve*.

²⁰⁴ “S chuvstvom otvetstvennosti pered narodom,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 9, 1957; “Vyshe tvorcheskuiu aktivnost,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 26, 1957.

²⁰⁵ RGANI 5/37/21 (February 28, 1957): 6 in *Kul’tura i vlast’*, 624-625.

Literaturnaia gazeta, the newspaper of the Soviet Writers' Union, emerged as a major critic of *Literaturnaia Moskva*. The editor of the newspaper, Vsevolod Kochetov, was firmly on the side of the Stalinist status quo in literature, and articles in *Literaturnaia gazeta* consistently took the side of the Union of Writers leadership against the opinion of the Moscow branch.²⁰⁶ On March 5, 1957, Kochetov's *Literaturnaia gazeta* published a two-page review of *Literaturnaia Moskva* by Dmitrii Erëmin, in which the author stated that the journal suffered from "the disease of gloominess" (*nedug unyniia*). While Erëmin had positive things to say about Dorosh's sketch, praising Dorosh's commitment to correcting the mistakes that he witnessed in the management of collective farms, he declared Yashin's story to be an artistic and ideological failure. Conveniently ignoring the hopeful notes at the end of Yashin's story, he accused Yashin of taking a purely pessimistic view on the state of affairs in the contemporary collective farm and of characterizing rural Party members as hypocrites. Erëmin claimed that the backlash against varnishing and the theory of conflictlessness had led to a recent trend towards "nihilism" and "one-sided criticism" among the intelligentsia.²⁰⁷

That same day, Erëmin attacked *Literaturnaia Moskva* in the opening speech of a plenum of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union dedicated to prose. His speech evoked a fiery refutation from *Literaturnaia Moskva* editorial board member Vladimir Kaverin. Most of the speakers who followed condemned Kaverin, although Lidiia Chukovskaia and fellow editorial board member Margarita Aliger spoke up in support of the almanac and Yashin's story.²⁰⁸ In her speech defending *Literaturnaia Moskva*, Aliger suggested that the rank-and-file writers had understood the marching orders of the Twentieth Party Congress quite differently than the Union of Writers

²⁰⁶ On Kochetov and *Literaturnaia gazeta*, see Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia*, 192-194.

²⁰⁷ Dm. Erëmin, "Zametki o sbornike 'Literaturnaia Moskva,'" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 5, 1957.

²⁰⁸ "Podvodnia itogi," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 19, 1957.

leadership.²⁰⁹ Meanwhile, conservative writers like Mikhail Alekseev (who would go on to a career as a middling Village Prose writer and bureaucrat in the RSFSR Union of Writers) criticized Yashin's "Levers."²¹⁰ A few weeks later, an article appeared in *Pravda* on *Literaturnaia Moskva* in which the author accused Yashin of besmirching the good names of hardworking rural communists.²¹¹ The message was clear. Much like Abramov's "People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose," Yashin's "Levers" had gone beyond the limits of permissible discourse on the village.

The attacks on Yashin and *Literaturnaia Moskva* reached a peak in May of 1957. A few days before the Third Plenum of the Union of Writers, the Department of Culture discussed *Literaturnaia Moskva* and the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union in a lengthy report on the development of Soviet literature after the Twentieth Party Congress. The bureaucrats at the Department of Culture repeated the accusation that *Literaturnaia Moskva* presented a one-sided depiction of Soviet life and that Yashin's story depicted village Party members as dishonest and hypocritical. The authors of the report argued that *Literaturnaia Moskva* editorial board members Kaverin and Aliger had the mistaken impression that they were fulfilling the tasks set before them by the Twentieth Party Congress. They claimed that a group of *frondeurs*,²¹² including Rudnyi and Aliger, had taken over leadership of the Moscow writers' organization and they ac-

²⁰⁹ RGANI 5/36/32 (May 11, 1957): 55-66 in *Kul'tura i vlast'*, 652.

²¹⁰ "Podvodia itogi."

²¹¹ A. Dmitriev, "O sbornike 'Literaturnaia Moskva,' *Pravda*, March 20, 1957.

²¹² In 1957, Soviet authorities frequently made reference to the Fronde, a series of uprisings in France against Louis XIV from 1648 to 1653, in their descriptions of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union. Uses of terms like *fronderstvo* appear to have been an attempt to characterize the opposition to Soviet leaders' literary policies as reactionary, as the Fronde was in essence a defense of the privileges of the local nobility against central encroachment. The irony of comparing themselves to France's most famous absolutist ruler appears to have been lost on the Soviet leadership.

cused the writers around *Literaturnaia Moskva* of engaging in factionalism.²¹³ Three days later, a front-page article appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, accusing Yashin of portraying the Soviet people as faceless and passive.²¹⁴ At the Third Plenum on May 14-16, writers repeatedly attacked Dudintsev and Yashin from the podium.²¹⁵ In a front-page article on the results of the plenum, *Literaturnaia gazeta* criticized *Literaturnaia Moskva* editorial board members Kazakevich, Ali-ger, Kaverin, and Rudnyi as "a small, closed-off little group [*gruppochka*] that stands for the positions of nihilism and revisionism."²¹⁶ With both political authorities and the leadership of the Union of Writers against them, it seemed that *Literaturnaia Moskva* was doomed.

In a last-ditch attempt to save their reputations, if not the almanac, the members of the editorial board wrote a collective letter in protest to Central Committee Secretary Dmitrii Shepilov on May 28. The authors rejected the accusation that they stood for "nihilism and revisionism" as slander: "We tried to help the Party in its constructive actions and in its struggle with the filth of the past in the consciousness of our people. These are two sides of the same work. One without the other is impossible. The Party taught and teaches us that it is impossible to affirm the good without rejecting the bad, it is impossible to struggle against the negative without affirming the positive." In addition to refuting the ideological accusations in the article, the members of the editorial board accused *Literaturnaia gazeta* of spreading hatred and mistrust among the literary community. In an aside, they noted that *Literaturnaia gazeta* had only listed the names of four members of their editorial board in the article. Paustovskii, Tendriakov, and Bek had been left off

²¹³ RGANI 5/36/32 (May 11, 1957): 55-66 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 648-658.

²¹⁴ Boris Solov'ev, "Smelost' podlinnaia i mnimaia," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 14, 1957).

²¹⁵ "Za partiinuiu printsipial'nost', za edinstvo sil sovetsoi literatury!" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 21, 1957. "Za partiinuiu printsipial'nost', za edinstvo sil sovetsoi literatury!" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 22, 1957.

²¹⁶ "Narod zhdet novykh knig," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 25, 1957.

the list. In the final draft, the authors hesitated to state outright what the four writers named in *Literaturnaia gazeta* had in common: they were Jewish. In the original draft of the letter, the members of the editorial board were more plain, accusing the newspaper of an attempt “to divide, to separate writers—this time on the basis of nationality [*po national’nomu priznaku*].”²¹⁷ The letter demonstrates the significance of the Twentieth Party Congress for the editors of *Literaturnaia Moskva* and the extent of their disillusionment. At the discussions of the Twentieth Party Congress in March 1956, it had seemed to many Moscow writers that writers were finally free to tell “the truth” as they saw it. The Twentieth Party Congress had seemed to confirm Malenkov’s statement at the Nineteenth Party Congress that “our writers and artists must castigate the flaws, defects, and painful phenomena that are prevalent in society.” Moreover, in March of 1956 it had seemed like the Moscow writers could finally put the anti-Semitic campaigns of the late Stalin era behind them. But in May of 1957, the promise of the Twentieth Party Congress seemed chimerical. The methods had softened somewhat compared to the late Stalin era, but the strict management of literature and the anti-Semitic overtones remained.

Like the members of the editorial board, Yashin attempted to demonstrate that he was a loyal communist, criticizing Soviet society in order to improve it, but to no avail. On May 29, 1957, the Party cell of the Moscow branch of the Union of Writers held a closed meeting to discipline the writers who had contributed to *Literaturnaia Moskva*. Viktor Sytin, the secretary of the Party cell’s committee, along with several other writers, criticized the almanac and the behavior of the communists on its editorial board.²¹⁸ For their part, the writers associated with *Literaturnaia Moskva* refused to fully recant. In an impromptu speech, Yashin seemed genuinely dis-

²¹⁷ In the version that was sent to the Central Committee, the editors replaced this phrase with “*neponiatno po kakomu prichinu*.” RGALI 1579/2/22 (May 28, 1957): 1-4.

²¹⁸ TsGAM P-8132/1/14 (March 29, 1957): 31-41, 61, 65-66, 78-80, 117.

mayed by the backlash and unable to understand the criticisms of the journal. He explained that his story was not meant to skewer the “unhappy communists” in the village, but rather the district-level leadership and the system that treated them like “levers.” Yashin described the pain that he had experienced witnessing the failures of Soviet rule in the countryside: “It was very difficult to live through all of the ugly events that I described in my own native village in Vologda *oblast*’. There and even now there remains much that is difficult in the life of the village.” Yashin said that he welcomed the Party’s measures to improve the life of the village and the decisions of the Twentieth Party Congress.

Yashin concluded by describing his own communist *bona fides*: his coming-of-age, his membership in the Pioneers, the Komsomol, and the Party, his experiences in World War II and the Virgin Lands. He said that he was deeply distressed by what had happened to “Levers,” but completely rejected “all the loud words and rudeness” directed at him. He mentioned that his poems were no longer being accepted for publication, but said that he continued to write them anyway. The only regret he expressed was that he brought trouble to the editorial board of *Literaturnaia Moskva*. He concluded by denying that he belonged to any faction, any *gruppovshchina*: “After all, we all grew up in the Party.”²¹⁹

Yashin’s impassioned speech did not change the minds of the representatives of the literary and political establishment who were present at the meeting. Surkov, the head of the Union, criticized the speeches of the *Literaturnaia Moskva* writers. Elena Furtseva, a secretary of the Central Committee, simply echoed the writers’ comments about the need to struggle with capitalist ideology.²²⁰ Although the literary and Party functionaries remained unmoved, Yashin’s frank

²¹⁹ TsGAM P-8132/1/14 (March 29, 1957): 122-125.

²²⁰ TsGAM P-8132/1/14 (March 29, 1957): 126-150, 157-173.

discussion of Soviet agricultural dysfunction in “Levers” and the ensuing debate sent a shock wave through the intelligentsia. Intellectuals from a broad range of backgrounds recorded their reactions to the story. “When it appeared, the whole country started talking about Alexander Yashin's story ‘Levers,’” the Moscow-based writer Grigorii Svirskii recalled in an account published overseas after his forced emigration from the Soviet Union in 1972. “With Russia’s reading public, Yashin’s story had a stunning success. It helped many to stand up straight and acquire some realization of what was actually going on.”²²¹ Moscow State University historian Sergei Dmitriev discussed the backlash to the story in a diary entries on June 15 and 16, 1957. He called the story “great and significant” because it displayed “an independent stirring of thought.” Dmitriev defended Yashin’s right as a writer to express a different opinion than the Communist Party, to write about the negative aspects of Soviet life.²²² The young Vologda-based poet Sergei Vikulov (future editor of the journal *Nash sovremennik*) wrote a letter to Yashin expressing his support: “Someone here said on the subject of the harsh criticism of ‘Levers’: ‘Nothing stings like the truth [*Pravda glaza kolet*].’ It seems that this is the heart of the matter. They didn’t like it... But these ‘levers’ are a fact.”²²³ Much later, on the day of Yashin’s death in July of 1968, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn sent him a letter in which he wrote, “The author of ‘Levers’ will always remain in Russian literature.”²²⁴ Much like Aleksandr Tvardovskii, Yashin seemed to have the ability to unite people of widely different political and social backgrounds around his mission of truth-telling.

²²¹ Svirskii writes also movingly about his personal relationship with Yashin. Svirskii, *A History of Post-war Soviet Writing*, 105, 115.

²²² S. S. Dmitriev, “Iz Dnevnikov Istorika S. S. Dmitrieva. 1957 g.,” *Otechestvennaia Istorii*, no. 3 (2000): 155-156.

²²³ Sergei Vikulov to Aleksandr Iashin, n.d., in OR RGB 647/14/44 (n.d.): 14.

²²⁴ Nataliia Iashina, “‘Iz rasput’ia, iz bezdorozh’ia”” *Sever*, no. 7 (1989): 119.

After the Party meeting, the Central Committee Department of Culture issued a lengthy report on “unhealthy phenomena” in the Moscow branch of the Writers’ Union. The report’s authors criticized the Moscow branch’s discussion of the Twentieth Party Congress in March 1956 and its discussion of Dudintsev’s *Not By Bread Alone* in the fall of 1956. The report discussed the second issue of *Literaturnaia Moskva* at length, including “Levers,” and the refusal of the writers involved to admit their mistakes at the third plenum and the recent Party meeting. The report ended with a discussion of the need to take measures to improve the state of the Moscow branch of the Writers’ Union.²²⁵ Over the course of 1957 a number of the leaders in the Union who had supported the more critical stance were removed. Elections held at the end of the year resulted in the replacement of 50% of the people in management positions in the Moscow branch. The Moscow branch now became a mouthpiece for the strict enforcement of the ideological line.²²⁶

The Founding of the RSFSR Union of Writers 1957-1958

In February of 1957, Department of Culture set in motion a plan to tame the recalcitrant Moscow branch by creating a new Union of Writers for the Russian republic (RSFSR) that was staffed by conservatives and oriented towards the regions instead of the capital city. As we have seen, the Moscow branch was initially administered directly by the Union of Writers of the USSR. Up until the mid-1950s, the Russian republic lacked the republican institutions that were standard for the other Soviet republics. In 1956, the longstanding tradition of administering the

²²⁵ RGANI 5/36/32 (n.d., not earlier than May 30, 1957): 79-89 in *Kul'tura i vlast'*, 673-682.

²²⁶ See Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 87.

RSFSR through all-Union institutions began to change when the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for the RSFSR was organized. This trend towards granting the RSFSR its own institutions then spread to the area of culture. On February 2, 1957, the Department of Culture wrote a report for the Central Committee in which they called for the creation of a Union of Writers for the RSFSR. The authors of the report stated that the lack of a structure dedicated to organizing the writers of the RSFSR put them in a “backwards” position relative to their fellow writers in the non-Russian republics. Moreover, the report made it clear that there was an ulterior motive for the founding of the RSFSR Union: “The founding of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR will also help defuse the abnormal situation in the Moscow writers’ organization by taking upon itself the functions of the governing board (*pravlenie*) of the given organization,” they explained.²²⁷ As Nikolai Mitrokhin explains, the establishment of the RSFSR Union essentially institutionalized the divisions that had existed in the Writers’ Union since 1953.²²⁸ Raisa Orlova, a member of the Party organization of the Moscow branch during this period, later wrote that the establishment of the RSFSR Union was an example of Khrushchev’s Central Committee’s “bloodless” means of exerting pressure on rebellious members of the intelligentsia. They stacked the organizational committee of the new RSFSR Union with the writers they considered the most loyal and then depended on writers from the Russian regions to subdue the Muscovites.²²⁹ The founding of the RSFSR Union thus created a dynamic in which the ideologically “reliable” Russian periphery kept the politically suspect capital city in line.

²²⁷ RGANI 5/37/21 (February 2, 1957): 4-5 in *Kul'tura i vlast*, 617-618.

²²⁸ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 149.

²²⁹ Orlova and Kopelev, *My zhili v Moskve*. Orlova’s interpretation is widely shared by scholars. See Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 87-88; Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 87.

Following the strategy of playing the periphery off the capital city, the new RSFSR Union adopted an explicitly pro-regional policy. At the founding Congress held in December of 1958, Leonid Sobolev, the head of the new Union, spoke of his desire to treat Moscow and the periphery equally.²³⁰ Sergei Vikulov, the Vologda-based poet based who had written to Yashin to praise "Levers" and his speech at the Second Congress, recalled in his memoirs that the secretariat of the new Union gained the nickname "the secretariat on wheels" for its willingness to hold meetings in the regions and autonomous republics of the RSFSR.²³¹ Vikulov was not the only writer from the Russian periphery who appreciated the policy of the new Union. Sergei Zalygin, a *Novyi mir* writer from Novosibirsk who would later become a notable Russian Village Prose writer, praised Sobolev's speech at the founding congress of the RSFSR Union. In his speech, Zalygin complained about the way that the central press dealt with "so-called periphery literature": frequently making mistakes about the basic details of authors' biographies and where books were published. The fact that a writer close to Tvardovskii and *Novyi mir* expressed these grievances suggest that they were shared by people who did not support the conservative, anti-Thaw politics espoused by Sobolev. Zalygin argued that a deep knowledge of the history of the Russian village and the construction of the collective farms was necessary to write important, topical works like Ovechkin's "District Workdays."²³² In the decades to come, writers from the rural Russian periphery increasingly found support in the RSFSR Union. In the coming chapters, we will explore how the conservative forces in Soviet literature increasingly began to co-opt writers from the Russian periphery who produced critical literature on the state of the Russian village.

²³⁰ See "Doklad L. S. Soboleva 'Literatura i nasha sovremennost'," in *Pervyi uchreditel'nyi s"ezd pisatelei Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1959), 65.

²³¹ Sergei Vikulov, "Chto napisano perom," *Nash sovremennik* no. 9 (1996): 4.

²³² "Rech' S. P. Zalygina" in *Pervyi uchreditel'nyi s"ezd pisatelei Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1959), 88-93.

Conclusion

The death of Stalin on March 5, 1953, opened up limited space for members of the intelligentsia who were dissatisfied with the postwar *status quo* to raise their concerns. One of the first issues that writers began to address in the wake of Stalin's death was the difficult situation in the postwar Soviet countryside. The state of Soviet agriculture and its depiction in literature became central topics of debate during the early Thaw. The journal *Novyi mir*, under the leadership of Aleksandr Tvardovskii, was the first to suggest that Soviet agriculture was in desperate need of reform, publishing sketches by Valentin Ovechkin that criticized collective farm management. The journal's division of literary criticism moved quickly to challenge the representation of the countryside in postwar Stalinist literature. Essays by Vladimir Pomerantsev and Fëdor Abramov critiqued the wide gap between Stalin Prize-winning "collective farm novels" and the realities on the ground, developing important Thaw-era concepts like "truth" and "sincerity." The new emphasis on experience as a source of knowledge about the countryside during the early Thaw privileged writers with first-hand knowledge of life on the Soviet collective farm—especially those who, like Abramov and Yashin, grew up in villages. In subsequent chapters, we will see how writers from villages became a major force in Soviet literature.

Although the Soviet Central Committee delivered a harsh rebuke to the *Novyi mir* literary critics in 1954, the backlash against Stalinist agricultural policies (and their glorification in literature) was not so easily repressed. These issues arose again at the 1954 Congress of the Union of Writers and during the discussion of the Twentieth Party Congress at the Moscow branch of the Soviet Writers' Union in March of 1956. Meanwhile, a new publication spearheaded by a group of Moscow writers, *Literaturnaia Moskva*, published a short story by Aleksandr Yashin that criticized the Party's treatment of collective farmers and its seeming inability to speak frankly about

the real situation in the countryside. By December of 1956, the Soviet Central Committee became increasingly concerned with what they had unleashed with de-Stalinization. The Central Committee ensured that the writers who had contributed to *Literaturnaia Moskva* were harshly censured and founded the RSFSR Union of Writers to keep the Moscow branch in line. As we will see, however, the discussion of the fate of the village under Soviet rule was only just beginning. Chapter Two will analyze struggles over the depiction of rural life in literature in three Soviet republics during the Thaw, tracing the careers of three writers from villages who wrote about life in the Soviet countryside in a new way. Moscow-based institutions played a similar role in fostering critical writing about the village in the non-Russian republics during the Thaw.

The explosion of discourse about the portrayal of the Soviet village during the 1950s set the stage for the development of Russian Village Prose, which became the most significant new movement in Soviet literature after the death of Stalin. The works discussed in this chapter became the founding texts of the Russian Village Prose movement. As we have seen, the roots of Village Prose lay in the reaction against postwar Stalinism. Institutions controlled by the anti-Stalinist faction of writers, namely the journal *Novyi mir* and the Moscow branch of the Soviet Union of Writers, fostered writers who questioned the legacy of Stalinism in agriculture during the early Thaw. Those who struggled against the ruling faction of the Soviet Writers' Union to introduce criticism of the management of agriculture in the Soviet Union were aligned with other writers who felt marginalized by late Stalinist literary politics—most notably, Jewish writers who had been subject to veiled anti-Semitic attacks during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. These anti-Stalinist alliances did not last for long, however. Chapter Three will explore how the conservative faction at the helm of the RSFSR Union warmed to critical writing about the village

from the Russian periphery in 1960s and sought to co-opt the budding literary trend known as Russian Village Prose.

Chapter 2:

From the Soviet Periphery to Moscow: National Writers and the Thaw in the 1950s and 1960s

“Если художника загоняют в угол, ему ничего не остается, кроме как взломать стену...”

“If an artist is driven into a corner, there is nothing for him to do but to break through the wall...”
—Georgii Tovstogonov, as quoted by Ion Druță²³³

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Stalin’s death in 1953 and Khrushchev’s Thaw created an opening for Russian writers with firsthand experience of village life to challenge Stalinist narratives about the countryside in the 1950s. Writers like Valentin Ovechkin, Fëdor Abramov, and Aleksandr Yashin sought to counter the urban bias in Soviet culture, which had been present since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, but which had become particularly exaggerated in the late Stalinist period.²³⁴ Ovechkin, Abramov, and Yashin stirred up controversy in the Moscow literary world by challenging the rosy, optimistic picture of rural life found in the socialist realist “collective farm novels” of the late Stalin period and depicting the real difficulties that rural people in the Soviet Union faced after the Second World War. In this chapter, we will continue to focus on Soviet literature about the village, but we will turn our attention to the dynamics of de-Stalinization and the Thaw in the national republics. This chapter examines the stormy literary débuts of authors from Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia who sought, each in their own way, to place rural people at the center of national identity. Rejecting Stalin-era cultur-

²³³ Ion Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii: mărturii și spovedanii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2011), 34.

²³⁴ As Stephen Kotkin writes, in the Stalinist cultural imaginary, cities were “the epitomes of progress and therefore the bulwarks for the existing order.” Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 18.

al hierarchies that prioritized the progressive working class over the backwards peasantry, they embedded their stories in rural settings and featured villagers as positive protagonists. Much like their Russian counterparts in the mid-1950s, they encountered opposition from literary elites who rejected their portrayals of rural life in the Soviet Union. Frustrated at the local level, one by one these upstart writers abandoned their native republics for Moscow, making connections with all-Union literary institutions in order to find a solution to their political problems in the republics.

Drawing on sources in languages that are rarely used in Soviet history, this chapter adds to the growing literature on the impact of de-Stalinization and the Thaw in the non-Russian republics.²³⁵ The scholarship on the social and cultural history of the Thaw and the overlapping process of de-Stalinization has expanded rapidly in the last fifteen years, but most work has traditionally focused on Russians, particularly those in Moscow and Leningrad.²³⁶ Although dramatic events were indeed taking place in the capital city, an exclusive focus on Moscow and Leningrad obscures the very real impact of de-Stalinization and the Thaw elsewhere. Stalin's death meant an end to the campaigns against "bourgeois nationalism" that characterized the late

²³⁵ This chapter consults sources in Russian, Armenian, and Romanian/Moldovan. The sources from Kyrgyzstan are in Russian. For academic literature on the Thaw in the national republics, see Timothy K. Blauvelt and Jeremy Smith, *Georgia after Stalin: Nationalism and Soviet Power*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies 106 (London; New York: Routledge, 2016); Igor Cașu and Mark Sandle, "Discontent and Uncertainty in the Borderlands: Soviet Moldavia and the Secret Speech 1956-1957," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 4 (2014): 613–44; Krista Goff, "'Why Not Love Our Language and Our Culture?' National Rights and Citizenship in Khrushchev's Soviet Union," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 27–44; Michael Loader, "The Khrushchev Thaw and Soviet Latvia: National Politics, 1953 - 1961" (PhD diss., King's College London, 2015); Benjamin Tromly, "Higher Learning and the Nationalization of the Thaw," in *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 217–43; Amir Weiner, "The Empires Pay a Visit: Gulag Returnees, East European Rebellions, and Soviet Frontier Politics," in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture During the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 308–61; Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

²³⁶ The two major English-language edited volumes reflect this bias. Polly Jones' *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* includes only one chapter (Juliane Furst's) that incorporates archival material collected outside of Russia. Denis Kozlov and Eleanor Gilburd's *The Thaw* includes chapters by Amir Weiner and Michaela Pohl that focus on the impact of Khrushchev's policy in non-Russian republics. Polly Jones, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies

Stalin era and opened up room for national expression in the non-Russian republics. As we will see, the Thaw also created space for writers in the republics to explore conceptions of national identity centered on the village and the peasantry. Change in the literary world did not happen automatically, however. In the republics, as in Moscow, Khrushchev's rise to power did not immediately mean an end to the dominance of Stalin-era political and cultural elites. Writers in republican capitals who favored the de-Stalinization of ideology and institutions often had to actively fight the leadership of the republican Writers' Union and the Central Committee. They drew inspiration from events in Moscow, which was not only the country's literary capital, but also the epicenter of the Thaw. For many young writers in the republics, the ultimate solution to their struggles was to travel to Moscow to make connections among the metropolitan cultural elite that they could leverage against their opponents at home. Moscow-based literary institutions played an important role in facilitating the circulation of people and ideas from the periphery to the metropole and back again. Central institutions thus facilitated the spread of de-Stalinization and the Thaw among the Soviet cultural elite. Events in Moscow and the republican capitals were closely intertwined.

This chapter follows the Thaw-era careers of three young writers who, like the Russian writers discussed in Chapter 1, emphasized the view from the village. Having migrated to republican capitals from their native villages during the difficult postwar years, they found themselves stymied when they sought to publish literary works with a rural-based conception of the nation. In Moldova, the young writer Ion Druță settled in the capital of Chișinău after completing his mandatory military service in 1951. He quickly found literary patrons among the older generation of writers, but ran into trouble with Moldovan authorities because he set his lyrical love sto-

(London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd, eds., *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

ries in the world of peasant traditions. In Kyrgyzstan, Chingiz Aitmatov's family had retreated to their native village after his father, a high-ranking Party official, was arrested and executed as an enemy of the people. He managed to overcome the stigma of his father's fate and enter the Kyrgyz literary world, but his portrayal of a progressive Kyrgyz village woman in his 1958 novella *Jamilia* provoked the ire of Kyrgyz literary and political elites. In Armenia, a humble printer named Hrant Matevosyan ignited a literary firestorm with a 1961 sketch that argued for the dignity and autonomy of the Armenian peasant in the face of indifferent Soviet authorities. Their careers demonstrate that, as in Moscow, the rural theme was a significant—and controversial—part of de-Stalinization and the Thaw in the non-Russian republics.

Blocked from publishing at the republican level, Druță, Aitmatov and Matevosyan discovered that literary success required another migration: this time, to Moscow. The Soviet capital offered an escape from local Writers' Unions that seemed to be dominated by Stalin-era elites and Stalin-era modes of thinking. Moscow was not just the center of the Soviet literary world; it appeared to offer literary freedom that was hard to find in republican capitals.²³⁷ The seeming lack of a literary Thaw in many Soviet republics was particularly frustrating for young writers who wanted to focus on rural perspectives just as Russian writers were doing in Moscow. Shortly after the death of Stalin, the Union of Writers established two new literary institutions that connected Moscow and the non-Russian periphery: the Higher Literary Courses at the Gorky Literary Institute and the journal *Druzhba narodov* (*Friendship of the Peoples*). The former brought writers to Moscow to be educated, while the latter introduced them in translated form to a Rusophone audience. Going to Moscow became a way to bypass the recalcitrant local political and

²³⁷ On the reinvention of Moscow as the Soviet literary capital in the Stalin era, see Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture; 1931 - 1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011).

cultural elites. The early careers of these three writers not only demonstrate the centrality of Moscow in Soviet literary life during the Thaw, but also the ways in which enterprising writers exploited the multilayered nature of authority in the Soviet Union by engaging with all-Union institutions when they failed to find support in their native republics. As we will see, Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan successfully made connections in among the Moscow literary elites and then managed to deploy them with some success against their political and literary foes at home. In Moscow, Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan found ways to promote rural-based conceptions of national identity that had been blocked by authorities in the republican capitals. All-Union literary institutions thus contributed to the spread of de-Stalinization and the Thaw in the non-Russian periphery.

Soviet Cultural Politics and Institutions in the 1950s

In order to understand how Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan were able to successfully navigate the complicated world of Soviet cultural politics, we must first understand how it functioned. In the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe, political authorities valued literature highly, considering it to be a key force for the cultural and political enlightenment of the population. Writers in socialist countries were expected to write works that promoted the values of the regime. In return, authorities lavishly subsidized literature. The Soviet Writers' Union and the republican Writers' Unions exercised control over the ideological content of literary works and provided members with access to the perquisites that made writing an attractive profession. Highlighting the key role that writers played in crafting and disseminating ideology, anthropolo-

gist Katherine Verdery argues that ideology in socialist regimes is best understood as a “coproduction” of Party officials, intellectuals, and other social actors.²³⁸

In socialist societies, because literature played an important social function, it was supposed to be planned.²³⁹ Even as Soviet authorities warmed to some aspects of consumer culture under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, Soviet ideology continued to reject the idea of books as commodities subject to the whims of consumer taste.²⁴⁰ Thus, in Soviet and Eastern Bloc countries, a complicated bureaucratic system determined the distribution of literary resources. In a system where bookstores were required to buy the books that publishers sent to them, Soviet literary institutions had few incentives to cater to the reading public. As a result, as Stephen Lovell explains, Soviet editors often cared more about satisfying ideological requirements and “protect[ing] their own fiefdoms” than selling books.²⁴¹ Successful Soviet writers thus needed to appeal to both political authorities and the broader community of writers who staffed literary institutions in order to see their work in print.²⁴²

This system meant that new writers entering the literary world needed to make connections and find patrons among cultural and political elites, but in the long run they also needed to convince them that the values that they expressed in their literary works were the correct ones. In this chapter, I will give particular attention to both the ways in which writers sought to devel-

²³⁸ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1991), 313.

²³⁹ On “the Plan” as a mode of censorship, see Robert Darnton, *Censors at Work: How States Shaped Literature* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

²⁴⁰ As Stephen Lovell explains, in the Soviet literary world, “The criterion for publishing a book should be the popular ‘need’ (*potrebnost'*) for it, not the ‘demand’ (*spros*).” Stephen Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution: Print Culture in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Eras* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, in association with the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 2000), 56.

²⁴¹ Lovell, *The Russian Reading Revolution*, 57.

op ties among the cultural and political elites and their efforts to transform them into “cognizant publics” who affirmed the legitimacy of their values.²⁴³ Initially, the village youths who sought to enter republican literary communities in the 1950s and 1960s faced an uphill battle. They lacked the political connections of the scions of the educated urban elite. Moreover, the Soviet cultural world they encountered was still dominated by the urban-focused values of Stalinism, which characterized the village as dark, backwards, and in need of Soviet enlightenment. Rather than accept their inferior position, authors from the countryside found patrons in the literary establishment and attempted to cultivate a group of sympathetic readers in their respective literary communities. Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan drew on their firsthand knowledge of village life to create rural settings and characters that felt “authentic” to their elite readers and appealed to Thaw-era ideals of “truth” and “sincerity.” As we will see, although they managed to convince some of their fellow writers to recognize their claims to cultural status, all three found themselves unable to cultivate a cognizant public among the republican political elites.

Luckily for them, the establishment of the Higher Literary Courses and the expansion of *Druzhba narodov* shortly after Stalin’s death made it easier for writers stymied at the republican level to seek out the approval of cultural and political elites in Moscow. The immediate postwar years were tumultuous ones in the world of Soviet literature, as Soviet ideologists sought to demonstrate to the literary world that the relative freedom of the wartime years had come to an end. The era that became known as the *Zhdanovshchina* (after the hardline Communist Party secretary Andrei Zhdanov) was characterized by campaigns against “bourgeois nationalism” in the republics. Anti-nationalist efforts had begun as early as 1944 in some national republics, and ac-

²⁴² In the words of Katherine Verdery, “authors under socialism need mass publics to buy their works less than they need the attention of bureaucrats who will fund their projects.” Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 94.

celerated after Ukrainian authorities launched a major anti-nationalist campaign in June of 1946.²⁴⁴ Under crushing pressure from these ideological campaigns, republican Unions of Writers in the late Stalin era seemed to have become increasingly dysfunctional, riven by bitter factionalism.²⁴⁵ In the months after the death of Stalin in March of 1953, it became clear that many in the leadership of the USSR Union of Writers in Moscow were dissatisfied with the way that multinational Soviet literature had been managed up to that point. Discussions at meetings of the governing board (*pravlenie*) in June and August revealed that, in the eyes of the literary bureaucrats in the center, the Unions of Writers in the non-Russian republics were still not doing enough to stamp out bourgeois nationalism and promote proletarian internationalism. Moreover, they complained, the activities of the republican Unions of Writers remained “outside the field of vision” of the central Union because the institutions that were supposed to be uniting writers of different nationalities under the banner of Soviet literature were not up to the task.²⁴⁶ It was in this context that the Union of Writers supported two initiatives to improve the management of multinational Soviet literature: the founding of the Higher Literary Courses and the expansion of *Druzhba narodov* into a full-fledged journal.

In May of 1953, the secretariat of the governing board of the Union Writers appealed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Soviet government with a request to found a special two-year program called the Higher Literary Courses (*Vysshie literaturnye*

²⁴³ Verdery calls a group that “recognizes and acknowledges the bases upon which an elite makes a claim to superior status” a “cognizant public.” Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 197.

²⁴⁴ Benjamin Pinkus and Jonathan Frankel, *The Soviet Government and the Jews: 1948-1967; a Documented Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 147-148; Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin's Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 63.

²⁴⁵ Petru Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres: les écrivains moldaves face au pouvoir soviétique sous Staline* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), 262-263.

²⁴⁶ See discussions in RGALI 631/30/235 (July 21, 1953): 1-54; RGALI 631/30/204 (August 11, 1953): 43-109.

kursy) at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. The Central Committee accepted the proposal in August.²⁴⁷ The Presidium of the Union of Writers contended that the best way to raise the level of culture of Soviet writers and foster connections among them was to gather writers from across the Soviet Union together at the Literary Institute.²⁴⁸ The poet Aleksei Surkov, who in a few short months would become the head of the Writers' Union, agreed with the need to raise writers' cultural level, noting that many writers had never had the opportunity for formal higher education. Moreover, the Courses could raise writers' ideological level. "I was recently in England," he said in a speech. "There at Oxford, Cambridge, and the University of London are taught a countless number of people of all races and nationalities. They take the sons of sheikhs, princes, and maharajas and educate them there in the spirit of imperialist politics. We need to do this in the name of the brotherhood of peoples."²⁴⁹ The Presidium of the governing board of the Union of Writers ultimately decided to allocate approximately 75% of the spots in the Courses to the Unions of Writers of the union and autonomous republics. They would choose the candidates for the spots from among their younger members. The proposed Courses opened after a one-year delay in September of 1954. As we will see in the cases of our three young writers, the Courses did indeed expand their cultural horizons and strengthen their connections with other Soviet writers in ways that the hardliner Surkov could hardly have envisioned in 1953. The writers used the connections they gained in Moscow to bring a taste of the Thaw in literature to their home republics.

²⁴⁷ Nikolai Gorbachev, "Vysshie literaturnye," in *Vospominaniia o literaturnom institute*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Literaturnogo instituta im. A. M. Gor'kogo, 2010), 8.

²⁴⁸ See Konstantin Simonov's speech proposing the Courses in RGALI 631/30/204 (August 11, 1953): 13.

²⁴⁹ RGALI 631/30/204 (August 11, 1953): 41.

In November of 1953, the Secretariat of the Union of Writers discussed a proposal to reorganize *Druzhba narodov* into a monthly journal, and in August of 1954, they submitted their proposal to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.²⁵⁰ *Druzhba narodov* had existed as an anthology (*almanakh*) published on a semi-regular basis since 1939.²⁵¹ The Secretariat of the Union of Writers argued that the transformation of *Druzhba narodov* into a monthly journal would help them to better control the development of Soviet literature in the republics. They claimed that an anthology that came out only six times a year could not provide an adequate overview of developments in Soviet literature across the USSR, nor could it make a significant contribution to the struggle against bourgeois nationalism.²⁵² The Central Committee accepted the proposal of the Union of Writers, and the new journal began monthly publication starting in January of 1955. *Druzhba narodov* gradually evolved into an important forum for the translation and publication of Soviet literature from the national republics.

As we will see in the sections that follow, these two Moscow institutions—the Higher Literary Courses and the journal *Druzhba narodov*—played an important role in the fates of many Soviet writers from the non-Russian republics during the Thaw. It would not be an overstatement to say that the careers of Ion Druță, Chingiz Aitmatov, and Hrant Matevosyan would not have been possible without them. They were important additions to the list of institutions that enterprising writers from the republics sought to turn to their advantage. As we will see, republican writers also used other preexisting institutions such as the journal *Novyi mir*, the *dekady* (ten-day festivals) of national literature and art in Moscow, the Higher Screenwriting Courses, and even

²⁵⁰ RGALI 631/30/250 (November 5, 1953): 6-7.

²⁵¹ For the early history of the journal, see the article on the official site of the journal: “‘Druzhba narodov’. Pervye polveka (1939-1989),” *Druzhba narodov*, n.d., <http://xn--80aabgdk2dkbof7a.com/druzhba-narodov>.

²⁵² RGALI 631/43/108 (September 13, 1954): 65.

the Union of Writers of the USSR to curry favor among the capital-city elites and thereby boost their positions in the republican and all-Union literary worlds. These institutions created a particular dynamic during the Thaw in which writers who found themselves unable to successfully cultivate a sympathetic readership among the cultural or political elites in their home republics left to try their luck with a different set of writers and Party authorities in Moscow. Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan all found Moscow political and cultural elites more sympathetic to their attempts to write Soviet literature from a rural perspective. All three found that they could sometimes leverage the acclaim they received in Moscow into greater support for their work among republican political and cultural elites. Druță and Aitmatov eventually discovered, however, that the support they cultivated among the Moscow-based Party and literary community was not enough to overcome entrenched opposition in their home republics.

Moldova: Ion Druță

The life of Ion Druță (pronounced DRUTS-uh) illustrates the many ways in which a young writer whose career was blocked by republican political authorities could manipulate central literary institutions to his advantage. Druță was born in 1928 in the village of Horodiște in Bessarabia in what was then the Kingdom of Romania. When Druță entered the Moldovan literary world, he found that it was divided into two feuding regional factions: the writers from Bessarabia, which had been fully incorporated in the Soviet Union only after the Second World War, and the writers from the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), which was set up on Soviet territory in 1924. As a Bessarabian, Druță found that his upward mobility was blocked by writers and political elites from the MASSR, who considered the Bessarabians politically suspect. In 1955, Druță gained a spot in the Higher Literary Courses and spent two years

studying in Moscow at the height of the Thaw. Druță sought to bring some of the cultural freedom that he had experienced in Moscow back with him to Moldova, but he found Moldovan authorities resistant to his depictions of “backwards” peasant traditions. Rebuffed in Moldova, Druță nevertheless found cultural elites in Moscow who were willing to publish his works set in the world of rural Moldovan peasants over the objections of the Moldovan authorities.

Ion Druță’s fate was intimately tied to the history of Bessarabia, a territory that Russia annexed from the Ottoman principality of Moldavia (Moldova in the local language) in 1812. In 1859, the rump province of Moldavia and the principality of Wallachia united to form the Romanian United Principalities. Romania became independent from the Ottoman Empire in 1877. In 1918, the Kingdom of Romania capitalized on the chaos following the Russian Revolution and incorporated their Moldovan Bessarabia “brothers” across the Prut into “Greater Romania.” Although the Bessarabian population spoke a language that was mutually intelligible with Romanian, most considered themselves at this time to be Moldovan, not Romanian.²⁵³ Remaining under the control of the new Soviet government was the territory across the Dniestr, which we today call Transnistria. In 1924 Soviet authorities established the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) under the auspices of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.²⁵⁴

As Druță was growing up in a village in Bessarabia, Romanian authorities attempted, with modest success, to promote Romanian language and culture to the largely rural and illiterate

²⁵³ While some sources refer to this population as Romanian, as Jennifer Cash explains, "In large part, the majority population of Bessarabia and Transnistria has not traditionally identified itself or its language as Romanian, because the Romanian state, nation, and language appeared only in the last two hundred years, under historical and political conditions that had minimal effect on Bessarabia and even less on Transnistria." Jennifer R. Cash, *Villages on Stage: Folklore and Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova*, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia ; v. 26 (Berlin: Lit ; London, 2012), 31.

²⁵⁴ On the formation of the MASSR, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 274-275.

population of Bessarabia through the Romanization of the educational system.²⁵⁵ Druță received seven years of education in a Romanian school in the village of Ghica Vodă.²⁵⁶ Over the course of the 1930s, Romanian state ideology became increasingly chauvinist, a trend which culminated with the rise of Ion Antonescu to power and the conclusion of an alliance with the Axis powers on the eve of the Second World War. Meanwhile, across the Dniestr, Soviet authorities in MASSR initially sought to inculcate a Moldovan national identity based on the establishment of a Moldovan literary language that was separate from Romanian. Starting in the early 1930s, however, many of the intellectuals who had sought to promote a distinct Moldovan national language were purged as nationalists.²⁵⁷ When the Soviet Union occupied Bessarabia in 1940 as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, these two territories were united to form the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). The different experiences of Moldovans who lived on different sides of the Soviet border during the interwar period would shape the literary politics of the MSSR for decades to come.

In June of 1941, the allied forces of Romania and Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Druță and his family lived under Nazi-Romanian occupation for three years until the Red Army recaptured the territory in 1944. After the war, the Sovietization of the Moldovan SSR resumed. The twin factors of forced collectivization and drought produced a terrible famine in 1946 and 1947, during which Druță served as secretary of his village soviet.²⁵⁸ In 1947, he began his mandatory Soviet military service in Tiraspol'. He was fortunate enough to land in a regiment

²⁵⁵ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 94-112; Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 44-46.

²⁵⁶ Ion Druță, interview with the author, June 20, 2017.

²⁵⁷ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 275; King, *The Moldovans*, 63-88.

²⁵⁸ See Chapter 6 for further discussion of the 1947-1947 famine in Moldova.

with an excellent library and became an avid reader. He began to write. By chance, Druță met the Bessarabian poet Iosif Balțan and gave him a notebook of his poetry. Through Balțan, Druță got an invitation to visit the Writers' Union, where he met the two leading Bessarabian writers, the poets Emilian Bucov and Andrei Lupan.²⁵⁹ At the time, Bessarabian intellectuals were in relatively short supply, as most writers active during the interwar period had fled to Romania before the Soviet annexation of 1940.²⁶⁰ Both Bucov and Lupan had been active in the underground Romanian Communist Party during the interwar period, however, and had moved quickly up the ladder of the Writers' Union. Lupan had been president of the Moldovan Writers' Union since 1946.²⁶¹ These were excellent connections for a young soldier trying to break into the Moldovan literary world. Lupan later invited Druță to attend a conference of young writers in Chișinău and asked him to visit his apartment and read him some of his poetry. Lupan liked Druță's poetry so much that he used a shoe brush to rap on the ceiling to summon Balțan, his upstairs neighbor, to listen as well. In retrospect, as Druță wrote in his 2012 memoir about his relationship with Lupan, he and Lupan were polar opposites. Lupan had been an underground communist revolutionary, while Druță was the descendant of free peasants, who held on to the land "with their teeth" as their only guarantee of freedom. Despite their differences, Lupan secured Druță a position on the staff of the newspaper *Țăranul Sovietic* (*Soviet Peasant*) when Druță was demobilized in 1951.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 9-11; Ion Druță, *Lupaniada: înălțarea și prăbușirea unei epoci* (Chișinău: Editura "Cadran," 2012), 7-11.

²⁶⁰ Of the Bessarabian writers who remained, many were deported to Siberia. Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres*, 69.

²⁶¹ As Negură explains, although the Bessarabian Lupan held the position of head of the Writers' Union, the Moldovan Central Committee granted the Party cell supervisory power over the presidium. This ensured that MASSR writers still dominated the top administrative positions. Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres*, 56-57, 232-233.

²⁶² Druță, *Lupaniada*, 16-18, 42.

The Moldovan literary landscape, riven by divisions between the writers from Bessarabia and the interwar Moldovan autonomous republic, was a treacherous one for a young and inexperienced writer. As Moldovan sociologist Petru Negură explains in his comprehensive study of the Moldovan literary politics in the first half of the twentieth century, the cadres who moved from the MASSR's capital of Tiraspol' to the new capital of Chișinău were the survivors of the Stalinist anti-nationalist purges of the 1930s; they knew how to navigate the Soviet cultural and ideological landscape. They were considered more politically reliable than the Bessarabian newcomers, who after all had until recently lived in a fascist-aligned country. Although Lupan was nominally president, MASSR writers dominated important administrative positions in the Writers' Union. Although the Bessarabian writers lacked the political connections and know-how of the MASSR writers, they had the advantage of superior knowledge of the Moldovan/Romanian language and literary heritage, which they had learned in the interwar Romanian schools.²⁶³ Moreover, the Bessarabians tended to see the writers from the MASSR as overly Russified. As Druță wrote in his 2011 memoir, in the struggle for control over the cultural arena, "the weapon of the Bessarabians was European language and culture, the weapons of the *șantiști* [writers from the MASSR] were Marxist-Leninist ideas and the leadership positions, of which 100% belonged to them."²⁶⁴ Having a keen sense of their own cultural superiority, Bessarabian writers chafed at what they perceived as their inferior position in the Writers' Union.

Thus, as a young writer whose connections were from the Bessarabian camp, Druță found himself at something of a disadvantage in the Moldovan literary world. The situation was even

²⁶³ Petru Negură, "From a 'Liberation' to Another. The Bessarabian Writers During the First Year of Soviet Power (1940-1941): Integration Strategies and Forms of Exclusion," *Euxeinos: Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region* 14/15 (2014): 46–64. See also King, *The Moldovans*, 183; Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres*.

²⁶⁴ In his memoirs, Druță refers to the writers from MASSR as *șantiști*, a derogatory nickname derived from their particular way of speaking the Moldovan language, which sounded "truncated and deformed" to Bessarabian ears. Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 11.

more difficult for a young writer who wanted to write about rural life in a republic that was still reeling from the upheaval of collectivization, the deportations of thousands of supposed kulaks (rich peasants), and a devastating famine in the late 1940s. In his memoir, Druță recalls that young journalists were constantly urged to get closer to the people and describe real life, but the reality in the villages was tragic.²⁶⁵ Despairing of hearing an unbiased evaluation of his work in the polarized Moldovan literary environment, in 1952 Druță wrote to the Moscow-based journal *Novyi mir* asking for feedback on a short story. “A collection [*How We Live in Our Village*] will be published soon. But that’s beside the point. The issue is that people either praise me a lot for my stories or attack me a lot. There’s nothing in the middle,” he complained.²⁶⁶ In 1953, the young journalist published *How We Live in Our Village* (Rom/Mold: *La noi în sat*, Rus: *U nas na sele*), his first collection of short stories.²⁶⁷ In a review in the republic’s leading Russian newspaper, Z. Dăleanu wrote that Druță’s knowledge of the Moldovan village was “not bad,” but criticized Druță for his tendency to write about unrepresentative situations instead of those that were “characteristic of what is developing” in the surrounding world.²⁶⁸ Given the polarization of the Moldovan writers and the delicate situation in the Moldovan countryside, Druță had to tread carefully when depicting the Moldovan village.

The fissures between the two camps of the Moldovan literary world were laid bare during the first-ever Congress of the Union of Writers of Moldova on August 24-27, 1954. Lupan, who had managed to hold on to the position of head of the Union of Writers since 1946 despite fierce

²⁶⁵ Druță, *Lupaniada*, 22.

²⁶⁶ *Novyi mir* did write back, informing him that the short story he sent was not substantive enough to be published in the journal, but encouraging him to send more. Ion Druță to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, August 19, 1952, RGALI 1702/4/254 (August 19, 1952): 43-44.

²⁶⁷ Ion Druță, *La noi în sat: Povestiri* (Chișinău: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1953).

²⁶⁸ Z. Delianu, “‘U nas na sele,’” *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, May 8, 1953.

struggles with the writers from the MASSR, gave the obligatory opening speech on the state of Moldovan literature. Lupan discussed the obligatory talking points of the day, such as the recent official criticism of works of literary criticism by Vladimir Pomerantsev, Fëdor Abramov, and others that had appeared in the pages of *Novyi mir* (see Chapter 1). These articles had called for greater “sincerity” in literature and had condemned the “varnishing of reality” in literary depictions of collective farm life in particular. Just a few weeks before the Congress in Moldova, the Union of Writers had condemned *Novyi mir* and forced head editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii to resign. The *Novyi mir* articles would eventually be seen as one of the first manifestations of the Thaw in literature, but in August of 1954, the Party had spoken, and Lupan had to condemn the journal as a matter of course. In his overview of Moldovan literature, Lupan also made several positive mentions of Druță’s recent collection of short stories.²⁶⁹ During the discussion that followed, the Bessarabian writer George Meniuc praised also Druță in his speech, stating that collective farmers in the fields read his work with great interest.²⁷⁰ Not everyone had good things to say about Lupan and his protégé Druță, however. The writer V. Roșca complained that Lupan constantly praised and “spoiled” his favorite young writers, causing them to have an inflated sense of self-importance: “So, [Lupan’s] favorite prose writer Druță—a talented writer—has gotten so full of himself that he publicly announces that poetry is not literature and that he, Druță, is the best writer in the republic.”²⁷¹ Druță’s position as Lupan’s *protégé* also made him a target.

The writers from the MASSR were quick to ally themselves with the anti-Thaw position. Mozes Kahana, a writer from the MASSR camp, attacked Druță and Lupan, suggesting that they

²⁶⁹ AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 24-27, 1954): 7-84. On Druță see 20, 37, 56. On *Novyi mir*, see 74.

²⁷⁰ Remarks like this one show that perceptions of popularity among the reading public were important to writers. AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 24-27, 1954): 158-159.

²⁷¹ AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 24-27, 1954): 178.

were taking incorrect political positions. He said that Lupan had not devoted enough attention to the dangerous articles by the *Novyi mir* writers. According to Kahana, while none of the writers in Moldova had yet expounded dangerous theories like Pomerantsev, some writers in Moldova were beginning to depict Soviet life negatively. Echoing Dăleanu's critique that *How We Live in Our Village* failed to provide a representative picture of the Moldovan village, he accused Druță and others of "avoiding everything happy and bright in life and adding darker tones" in recent short stories.²⁷² Kahana was clearly attempting to tie Druță (and by extension, his patron Lupan) to the politically suspect views of the *Novyi mir* literary critics. After Kahana's speech, the visiting Russian writer Anatolii Sofronov continued the attack on *Novyi mir*, vigorously condemning the *Novyi mir* writers for using literary criticism to launch a veiled attack on Soviet agricultural policy.²⁷³ Sofronov, who was visiting Moldova for the Congress, had been an important and much-feared member of the governing board of the Soviet Union of Writers since the late Stalin era and had participated in the campaign against *Novyi mir* earlier that month.²⁷⁴ In a few short months he would be ousted from his position in the Union of Writers, but in August he was still a powerful figure.²⁷⁵ This exchange illustrates that the writers from MASSR were aligning themselves with the anti-Thaw, Stalinist faction within the Soviet Writers' Union—and painting Bes-sarabians like Lupan and Druță as ideologically suspect.

²⁷² AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 24-27, 1954): 266-267. On Kahana, see Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres*, 268-271.

²⁷³ AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 24-27, 1954): 271-277.

²⁷⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1, Sofronov's behavior during the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of the late Stalin era gained him an apparently well-deserved reputation as diehard anti-Semite. See also a summary of Sofronov's statements at the meeting of the Union of Writers dedicated to the mistakes of *Novyi mir*: RGANI 5/17/488 (August 12, 1954): 87-91 in Z. K. Vodop'ianova, V. Iu. Afiani, and E. S. Afanas'eva, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1953-1957: dokumenty*, Seriiia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2001), 294.

²⁷⁵ Evgeny Dobrenko and Ilya Kalinin, "Literary Criticism During the Thaw," in *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tikhanov, Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 185.

In his own speech, Druță ignored the attacks on his politics, seeking to play up the cultural strengths of the Bessarabian writers instead. He called for the promotion and preservation of Moldovan literary heritage and proposed the creation of a journal titled *Cultural Heritage* that would teach readers about the Moldovan literary classics.²⁷⁶ The recovery of literary heritage that had been suppressed during the campaign against bourgeois nationalism was an important part of the Thaw in many republics. Druță's speech was in line with a campaign for greater attention to the Moldovan-Romanian literary classics that the Bessarabian writers had been waging since the early 1950s.²⁷⁷ Thus, while the writers from the MASSR sought to turn the "weapon" of ideological orthodoxy on him, Druță armed himself with the Bessarabians' superior cultural knowledge.

The skirmishing between the two factions at the Congress culminated with a showdown over the election of a new governing board. Druță decided to run for the last remaining spot on the board, challenging Petrea Darienco. Darienco was the editor of the main party newspaper, *Moldova socialistă*, where Druță had recently started working as a journalist. Like many of the other writers from the MASSR, he was well-connected politically—he was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova. Druță wrote in his 2011 memoir that he simply could not bear to cede the seat on the governing board to the MASSR faction. At the time, the headquarters of the Union of Writers was the only remaining organization in Moldova where the Moldovan language was still widely spoken, but MASSR writers like Darienco gener-

²⁷⁶ AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 24-27, 1954): 323-325.

²⁷⁷ The issue of the classics was complicated due to the Soviet state's insistence that Romanian and Moldovan were different languages. However, because many of the most famous Romanian authors, including the beloved nineteenth-century poet Mihai Eminescu, were born within the boundaries of the historic principality of Moldova, they could conceivably be integrated into a Soviet Moldovan canon. The Bessarabian writers' campaign was eventually successful; for example, in 1955 they writers convinced the Moldovan Central Committee to support the construction of an "Allée of the Classics" in Pushkin Park in Chișinău. See Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres*, 321-331; Igor Cașu, *Dușmanul de clasă: represiuni politice, violență și rezistență în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924-1956*, 2nd ed. (Chișinău: Cartier, 2015), 332-333.

ally spoke Russian amongst themselves.²⁷⁸ The results of the voting are recorded in the transcript of the Congress: seventeen votes for Darienco, and nineteen votes for Druță.²⁷⁹ In a small act of rebellion against the dominant MASSR faction, Druță had successfully persuaded the Bessarabian writers to support him over a member of the Moldovan Central Committee.

In theory, Druță's election to the governing board of the Union of Writers could have been an opportunity to curry favor with the political elites in the republic, but the fact that he had run against a member of the Central Committee destroyed any chance of this. In his 2011 memoir, Druță bitterly recalled how the MSSR's secretary of ideology, Dmitrii Tcaci, made a pointed joke at a meeting of republican cultural workers about a tractor driver who comes to Chișinău, thinking he can become a writer. "The so-called intellectuals mock the peasants," Druță wrote. In 1955, the Union of Writers granted Druță a two-month sabbatical to write his new novel, but when he attempted to publish his new novella about a love story between two peasant youths, *Leaves of Sorrow* (Rom/Mold: *Frunze de dor*, Rus: *List'ia grusti*), he found himself stuck in publication limbo.²⁸⁰ No one would reject the manuscript, but no one would publish it. Ultimately Andrei Lupan, president of the republican Union of Writers advised him to get out of the "dangerous atmosphere" of Moldova. After two years of writing and calling people in Moscow, Lupan had found Druță a spot in the Higher Literary Courses at the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. In his memoirs, Druță describes his move to Moscow as an effort to gain support among the all-Union political authorities. As he explains, "The principal weapon of the *șantiști*

²⁷⁸ Of course, it is somewhat difficult to judge the veracity of this assertion, but it is worth noting that the Moldovan Union of Writers was one of very few organizations in the MSSR that occasionally recorded their minutes in Moldovan instead of Russian. Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 14-15.

²⁷⁹ AOSPRM R-2955/1/148 (August 26, 1954): 369-371.

²⁸⁰ See AOSPRM R-2955/1/161 (May 18, 1955): 42-45.

[writers from MASSR] was the support of the Kremlin. The Bessarabians needed to obtain the support of Moscow at any price, or Moldovan culture didn't stand a chance."²⁸¹

Druță spent two years in the Soviet capital from 1955 to 1957, the very years when Khrushchev's Thaw began to dramatically alter the Soviet literary world. In his 2012 memoir, Druță described the strong divide between the cultural atmosphere in Chișinău and in Moscow: "The capital of the Soviet Union had already become the capital of another world. The so-called Sixtiers had appeared. The prose of Alexander Yashin and Fëdor Abramov, the verses of Evtushenko and Okudzhava, the theaters 'Sovremennik' and 'Taganka,' the plays of Viktor Rozov and Leonid Zorin, and Pomerantsev's simple essay in the journal *Novyi mir*, 'On Sincerity in Literature,' had shaken the entire Party structure."²⁸² Chișinău may have been stuck in the past, but Thaw culture was flourishing in Moscow. As a student at the Literary Institute, Druță, who had no higher education, was able to study with eminent professors and met fellow students like Mikhail Alekseev, who went on to become an influential figure in the RSFSR Writers' Union.²⁸³ During his years in Moscow, Druță became a devotee of the theater, which for him embodied the "democratic spirit" of the Thaw.²⁸⁴ In 1957, he entered a literary competition connected with the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students and took first place with his novella *Sani*, which he had written as his final project for the Courses. It was his first step onto the all-Union literary stage. Druță returned home from Moscow in 1957 with a new worldview and valuable new connections in the capitol.

²⁸¹ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 16-18. See also Druță, *Lupaniada*, 42-44.

²⁸² Druță, *Lupaniada*, 47-48.

²⁸³ Alekseev, who graduated from the Higher Courses in 1957, won a State Prize in 1976 and served as a secretary of the governing board of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR.

²⁸⁴ Ion Druță, interview with the author, June 20, 2017.

After returning home from Moscow in 1957, Druță found that the journal *Nistru* was suddenly willing to publish *Leaves of Sorrow* after two years of sitting on the manuscript.²⁸⁵ When he attempted to publish his new play *Casa mare* (Rus: *Kasa mare*) in 1960, however, *Nistru* rejected it.²⁸⁶ The play told the story of Vasiluță, a young war widow who falls in love with a much younger man but refuses to betray the memory of her fallen husband. All the scenes in the play took place in Vasiluță's *casă mare*, the festively decorated room in a traditional Moldovan home where the family received guests. While Druță's celebration of peasant traditions may have seemed relatively innocuous to many in Moscow, it was controversial in a republic where the memory of peasant opposition to collectivization was still fresh. In an interview in a 2008 documentary, Druță complained that in Moldova his plays were considered *kulatskii* (from the word *kulak*, a derogatory term for a rich peasant used during collectivization).²⁸⁷

Druță responded to the rejection by attempting to publish the play in an all-Union journal. He appealed to Vasilii Smirnov, editor of *Druzhiba narodov*, which published literature from the non-Russian republics in translation. Like Sofronov, Smirnov was associated with the anti-Thaw faction in the Soviet Writers' Union (see Chapter 1). But, as Druță explains in his memoir, Smirnov's institutional loyalties trumped his ideological commitments in his case. Smirnov was willing to put political concerns aside because he desperately needed works by Moldovan writers for a special issue of the journal dedicated to the 1960 *dekada* of Moldovan national culture in

²⁸⁵ Ion Druță, *Frunze de dor: Povestire* (Chișinău: Editura de Stat a Moldovei, 1957).

²⁸⁶ Druță describes *Casa mare*'s long path to publication in Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 24-31.

²⁸⁷ *K iubileiu dramaturga Iona Drutse, Teatral'naia letopis'* (Rossiia, 2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN8vj0SSIN8>.

Moscow.²⁸⁸ (The *dekady* were ten-day festivals during which republics sent their best artists, writers, and performers to Moscow to show off the achievements of their national culture.) Perhaps Smirnov, who was born to a peasant family and dedicated his career to writing about the Russian village, found something he could relate to in Druță's depiction of Moldovan rural traditions. He collected the editorial board and announced, "Of course there's not a whiff of social or party [themes] here, but of love — an ocean! So be it. We'll risk it. We'll publish it."²⁸⁹ In the official transcript of the meeting of the journal's editorial council in April, Smirnov says that drama from the national republics had thus far been underrepresented in the journal, and he hoped that this play by Druță will change that—and possibly even inspire a Moscow theater to perform the piece.²⁹⁰ Smirnov's hopes were fulfilled. At the end of the Moldovan *dekada*, the Theater of the Soviet Army in Moscow announced their intention to stage *Casa mare*. The play received its Soviet premiere just a few months later in Perm' in July of 1960.²⁹¹

This would have normally been a major coup for a Moldovan writer, but the authorities in Chișinău were outraged that a play that could not get published in Moldova was being performed in Russian theaters. Moldovan Communist Party secretary Evgenii Postovoi characterized the play as ideologically harmful in a September 1960 article in the all-Union cultural journal, *Sovetskaia kul'tura*. In the review, Postovoi wrote that the play "praised private property tendencies and backwards, obsolete forms of life," presumably referring to the play's celebration of rural

²⁸⁸ Ion Drutse, "Kasa mare," trans. I. Khazin, *Druzhiba narodov*, no. 5 (1960): 27–61. An English translation of the play can be found in this collection: Ion Drutse, *Moldavian Autumn*, trans. Fainna Glagoleva (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970).

²⁸⁹ Ion Druță, "O muzhestve i dostoinstve cheloveka," in *Ora jertfirii* (Chișinău: Editura Cartea Moldovei, 1998), 45.

²⁹⁰ RGALI 1565/2/16 (April 15, 1960): 9-10.

²⁹¹ Gheorghe Cincilei, "Ion Druță în lumina rampei: geografie și statistică," *Moldova suverană*, September 3, 1998. A critic from the Moscow-based journal *Teatr* did not think that the performance did the play justice. I. Sakharova, "Bezrazlichie: na spektakliakh Permskogo Teatra," *Teatr*, no. 5 (May 1961): 112–15.

traditions such as the *casă mare*.²⁹² The phrase “private property tendencies” again raised the specter of peasant opposition to collectivization. In October, Druță appealed to another all-Union institution, the Union of Writers of the USSR in Moscow. He convinced the Union to assemble a committee of literary critics and playwrights to discuss the play. The transcript of the discussion of the play illustrates that Druță had won over the Moscow cultural elites with his depiction of a love story in a Moldovan village.²⁹³ The assembled writers praised the play’s focus on the power of love and rejected the Moldovan authorities’ arguments against the play’s depiction of rural traditions. The theater critic Inna Vishnevskaiia stated, “Regarding the glorification of backwards customs [*vospevanie perezhitkov*], there is none of this in Druță’s play.” She praised the play’s depiction of a *casă mare*: “The symbol of the best room in the house, the most light-filled corner of the soul, is not at all the glorification of old customs and in no way does this image hinder our ideology or the growth of progress.”²⁹⁴ Overruling the Moldovan leadership, the committee issued a statement that they found nothing objectionable in the play and ruled that *Druzhba narodov* had not made a mistake in publishing it. Two weeks later, the Union’s press organ, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, published a positive review of *Casa mare*.²⁹⁵ This review was a direct result of the meeting at the Union of Writers. Druță had won over the capital city elite by convincing them that his portrayal of rural traditions was not only not ideologically harmful but in fact enhanced the overall message of his play.

²⁹² E. Postovoi, “Vo imia novogo cheloveka,” *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, September 15, 1960.

²⁹³ RGALI 631/42/68 (October 14, 1960): 1-15.

²⁹⁴ RGALI 631/42/68 (October 14, 1960): 5.

²⁹⁵ M. Romanov, “O tovarishche po iskusstvu,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 29, 1960. Druță notes in his memoir that the article’s author, Mikhail Romanov, was the director of the Lesia Ukraïнка Theater of Russian Drama in Kyiv and had been Khrushchev’s personal friend since the latter’s days as a Party boss in Ukraine. Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 23.

In May of 1961, the Moldovan political landscape changed when Ivan Bodiul became first secretary of the Moldovan Communist Party. Bodiul chose to continue his predecessor Serdiuk's campaign against Druță. In 1961, the play premiered to critical acclaim at the Theater of the Soviet Army.²⁹⁶ According to Druță's memoir, the Moldovan leadership continued to complain to the theaters that put on the play, finally prompting Moscow to send Dmitrii Polikarpov, the head of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee, to Chișinău to meet with Bodiul. Polikarpov, in Druță's telling, had been childhood friends with Smirnov, and tried to defend *Casa mare* to Bodiul. Ultimately, however, Polikarpov and Bodiul failed to reach an understanding.²⁹⁷ The play continued to be performed across the Soviet Union. Druță's superior connections among the Moscow political and cultural establishment allowed him to continue to defy the Moldovan leadership.

Finally, the Moldovan authorities seem to have accepted their defeat. Druță was allowed to introduce his brand of Thaw-era theater to the Moldovan republic. After a year of delays, *Casa mare* finally premiered in Chișinău's A. C. Pushkin Moldovan Musical-Dramatic Theater in May of 1962.²⁹⁸ It was the fourteenth theater in the USSR to stage Druță's play.²⁹⁹ The head of the Moldovan Union of Writers, the Bessarabian prose writer Ion Ciobanu, published a long and

²⁹⁶ See, for example, these positive reviews: Natal'ia Krymova, "Kasa mare," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 18, 1961. Nikolai El'iash, "Poetichnyi spektakl'," *Trud*, June 7, 1961. M. Turovskaia, "Kasa mare," *Teatr*, no. 8 (1961): 109–11. A negative review appeared, again in *Sovetskaia kul'tura*. The play's director gave a spirited rebuttal to Zubkov's review in *Literatura i zhizn'*. Iur. Zubkov, "Nedoumenie," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, April 18, 1961. B. L'vov, "Nedoumenie po povodu 'nedoumenie,'" *Literatura i zhizn'*, May 21, 1961.

²⁹⁷ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 26.

²⁹⁸ The premiere was originally planned for the summer of 1961. See the minutes of the meetings of the artistic counsel and correspondence of the Pushkin Theater in ANRM R-2942/1/231 (1960-1961) and ANRM R-2942/1/227 (1961).

²⁹⁹ Cincilei, "Ion Druță în lumina rampei."

generally positive review in the MSSR's Russian-language journal *Dnestr* shortly thereafter.³⁰⁰ Druță continued to have supporters among the Bessarabian writers even though the republican political elites rejected his celebration of rural traditions. Meanwhile, the *Druzhba narodov* editor Smirnov asked Druță to write prose, hoping that a novel might generate less controversy than a play. The resulting work, *Ballads from the Steppe* (Rom/Mold: *Balade din câmpie*, Rus: *Stepnye ballady*), the first volume of the two-part novel *Burden of Our Kindness*, (Rom/Mold: *Povara bunătății noastre*, Rus: *Bremia nashei dobroty*), generated yet another backlash from Chișinău.³⁰¹ The novel depicts a Bessarabian family that ends up on opposite sides of the Second World War. In its sympathetic description of Moldovan peasants on both sides of the conflict, *Steppe Ballads* did not hew to the traditional Soviet narrative of the Great Patriotic War. The publication of the novel in *Druzhba narodov* brought down another storm of controversy upon the journal. As part of their annual subscription campaign, the journal encouraged republican newspapers to reprint an excerpt from *Steppe Ballads*. In Druță's words, this widespread distribution of his work across the Soviet Union caused the Moldovan authorities "to raise their Party-state eyebrows."³⁰² By 1963, the political situation had changed, and the Moscow cultural world was going through a "freeze" (discussed in greater detail in the following section). *Druzhba narodov* began to wobble, informing Druță that they could not ignore the Party officials of a republic forever. Druță, pivoting, decided to publish his next work, *The Last Month of Autumn* (Rom/Mold: *Ultima lună de toamnă*, Rus: *Poslednii mesiats oseni*) in *Novyi mir*.³⁰³ Druță be-

³⁰⁰ Ion Chobanu, "Kasa mare," *Dnestr*, no. 6 (June 1962): 156–60.

³⁰¹ Ion Drutse, "Stepnye ballady," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 1 (1963). Druță discusses the controversy around *Steppe Ballads* in Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 31–32.

³⁰² Ion Drutse, "Replika Tolstogo," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 8 (2001): 203.

³⁰³ Ion Drutse, "Poslednii mesiats oseni," *Novyi mir*, no. 4 (1964): 68–98. Druță discusses the novella and film in Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 32–34.

lieves that his association with the editor of *Novyi mir*, the highly respected Russian poet Aleksandr Tvardovskii, shielded him from some criticism from the Russophile officials in Chişinău. He once again demonstrated his ability to use his connections among the Moscow elite, finding political cover under the umbrella of *Novyi mir* when the controversy around his works got to be too much for the editor of *Druzhba narodov*. Still, Smirnov's rejection of *The Last Month of Autumn* shows that Druţă's support among the Moscow cultural elite could not sustain him forever in the face of the staunch opposition of the Moldovan Party.

Druţă's career demonstrates the ways in which political and literary authorities in the republics sought to block the spread of the literary Thaw. Although Druţă failed to win over the Moldovan political elites, he was able to leverage his patronage relationship with Lupan into a spot in the Higher Literary Courses at the prestigious Gorky Literary Institute. This enabled Druţă to launch his literary career on the all-Union level. Perhaps more importantly, he absorbed the "democratic spirit" of Thaw-era theater in Moscow, which inspired him to write a play, *Casa mare*. Moscow cultural institutions like the Union of Writers played an important role in promoting Druţă's rural-based portrayal of Moldovan society when Chişinău rejected it for its supposed "private property tendencies." *Casa mare* went on to become a smash hit at the Central Theater of the Soviet Army, solidifying Druţă's reputation among the capital city's cultural elite. It was possible for Druţă to evade republican authorities because he managed to transform the all-Union cultural and political elites into "cognizant publics" that recognized his claim to cultural status. Moscow-based institutions like the Higher Literary Courses and *Druzhba narodov* acted as conduits of the Thaw to the national republics. As we will see in Chapter 4, while Druţă remained popular with the Bessarabian writers in the MSSR, he once and for all destroyed any hope of winning over political authorities in Chişinău with his controversial statements at the Third Con-

gress of the Union of Writers of Moldova in 1965. After that, he moved to Moscow permanently, continuing to promote his village-based conception of the Moldovan nation from afar. As we will see in Chapter 7, Druță would only return to Moldova decades later, when he became, in the words of Charles King, “the national movement's spiritual leader.”³⁰⁴

Kyrgyzstan: Chingiz Aitmatov

Chingiz Aitmatov's career trajectory bears many similarities to Ion Druță's. Like Druță, Chingiz Aitmatov ran into roadblocks with the republican Party leaders and Union of Writers when he sought to bring Thaw-era cultural sensibilities back to his native republic. Both Druță and Aitmatov nevertheless managed to build successful careers as writers by appealing to the sensibilities of Moscow political and cultural elites. While their strategies of playing Moscow elites off of republican elites were similar, Aitmatov's incorporation of rural themes into his work was very different from Druță's. As a child, Aitmatov was exposed to the Soviet urban culture of his father, a high-ranking Kyrgyz Party official, as well as the rural Kyrgyz culture of his female relatives. Aitmatov's early works reflected this hybrid background: like other Thaw-era writers, he depicted rural people in his work, but Aitmatov particularly focused on characters who embraced progressive Soviet values at odds with “traditional” culture. The Kyrgyz political and literary elites opposed Aitmatov's blend of rural and Soviet values. Much like the leadership of the Moldovan Writers' Union, they resisted attempts to instigate a literary Thaw, but for different reasons. While the divisions in the Moldovan Writers' Union were primarily regional, the divisions in the Kyrgyz Union were between older, Stalin-era elites who sought to defend Kyrgyz history and culture and a younger generation who wanted to bring Thaw-era Russian literary

³⁰⁴ King, *The Moldovans*, 153.

forms to Kyrgyzstan. Having accrued a great deal of political and literary authority in Moscow, Aitmatov attempted to deploy it against the older generation of writers in Kyrgyzstan—with mixed results.

Chingiz Aitmatov was born in 1928 in the small *ail* (village) of Sheker on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border. Aitmatov's father Törökul, a rising star in the Kyrgyz communist Party, and his mother Nagima, a well-educated and, in his words, “fully modern” Tatar woman, introduced him to Russian language and culture at an early age. Although Aitmatov spent much of his childhood in cities (first Frunze, and then Moscow from 1935 to 1937), he spent his summers with his grandmother in Sheker. Aitmatov credited his grandmother with teaching him about Kyrgyz folklore, language, and the nomadic way of life. Thanks to his parents' and grandmother's influence, Aitmatov grew up bilingual in Kyrgyz and Russian and attended both Russian- and Kyrgyz-medium schools.³⁰⁵ Aitmatov's early immersion in both the nascent Soviet Kyrgyz culture of his father and the Kyrgyz folk tradition of his ancestors allowed him to craft a literary style that blended rural and Soviet values, marrying Kyrgyz settings and Russian literary forms.

The trajectory of Aitmatov's life changed dramatically at the age of nine when his father was arrested as a “bourgeois nationalist” in 1937. Törökul was executed in 1938.³⁰⁶ After Törökul's arrest, the family left Moscow and returned to Sheker. The onset of the Second World War forced young Aitmatov to shoulder adult responsibilities. As one of the few remaining peo-

³⁰⁵ The biographical information in this section is drawn from Chingiz Aitmatov, “Zametki o sebe,” in *Sovetskie pisateli: avtobiografii*, ed. B. Brainina and A. N. Dmitrieva, vol. 4, 5 vols. (Moskva: Gosizdatel'stvo khudozhliteratury, 1972), 9–17; A. Akmatalliev, “Chingiz Aitmatov: zhizn' i tvorchestvo,” in *Izbrannoe sobranie sochinenii [Tandalgan chygarmalarynyn zhyinagy]* (Bishkek: Sham, 1997), 262-274; A. A. Akmatalliev et al., *Çiñgiz Aytmatov: sunuş kılıngan bibliografiyalık körsötküç = Chingiz Aitmatov: rekomendatel'nyı bibliograficheskiı ukazatel'* (Frunze: Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka Kirg. SSR imeni V.I. Lenina, 1988), 137-141; Joseph P. Mozur, *Parables from the Past: The Prose Fiction of Chingiz Aitmatov* (University of Pittsburgh Pre, 1994), 1-30.

³⁰⁶ Aitmatov's family did not learn the full story of his death until his remains were discovered in a mass grave at Chon-Tash in the summer of 1991. Chingiz Aitmatov and Daisaku Ikeda, *Ode to the Grand Spirit: A Dialogue*, trans. Richard L. Gage (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 2-5.

ple in the *ail* literate in both Kyrgyz and Russian, the fourteen-year-old Aitmatov became secretary of the village soviet. After the war, Aitmatov studied veterinary science at a technical school from 1947 to 1948 before advancing to the Kyrgyz Institute of Agriculture in Frunze. Aitmatov began publishing short stories, mostly in a socialist realist mode, in the journal *Kyrgyzstan* in 1952. He continued to publish short stories in Kyrgyz publications, which gained him enough recognition to be accepted for membership in the Kyrgyz Writers' Union. Through the Writers' Union, he obtained a spot in the Higher Literary Courses at the Gorky Literary Institute in 1956. That year he was also accepted into the Union of Writers of the USSR, and his father was posthumously rehabilitated.

Like Druță, Aitmatov spent two years attending the Courses in Moscow during the heady days of the early Thaw. Trained in animal husbandry, Aitmatov had no formal education in the humanities, and he relished the opportunity to learn about literary theory and attend the Moscow theater. He credited the Courses with helping to free him from his “‘provincial’ notions” about literature (a telling remark in light of his conflict with the older generation of Kyrgyz writers) and enabling him to start writing more realistic characters.³⁰⁷ In Moscow, Aitmatov seems to have connected mainly with other Central Asian intellectuals, such as his fellow classmates, the Kazakh poets Sattar Seitkhazin and Zhappar Omirbekov. After a successful discussion of Aitmatov's novella “Face to Face” at a literary seminar at the Literary Institute, the editor of *Oktiabr*, Fëdor Panfërov, agreed to publish it in his journal.³⁰⁸ The novella, which told the story of a de-

³⁰⁷ Aitmatov, qtd. in Akmatalliev, “Chingiz Aitmatov,” 274.

³⁰⁸ Although *Oktiabr* later became known as the leading anti-Thaw, anti-*Novyi mir* journal, in the mid-1950s it had not yet gained that reputation. In 1954, the anti-Thaw warrior Aleksei Surkov harshly criticized Panfërov along with other writers like Valentin Zorin and Boris Pasternak. Wolfram Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve: 1953-1970 gg.* (Moskva: AIRO-XX, 1999), 38.

serter from the Soviet army during World War II, was Aitmatov's first publication in Moscow, and he quickly leveraged it into an even greater success.

In an apartment near the Literary Institute on Tverskoi boulevard, Aitmatov worked on the novella that would become his breakout hit, *Jamilia* (Rus: *Dzhamilia*).³⁰⁹ Aitmatov's classmate Seitkhazin recounted how Aitmatov first met the Stalin Prize-winning Kazakh writer Mukhtar Auezov at a packed seminar at the Union of Writers when Aitmatov gave up his chair for the venerable author.³¹⁰ Auezov later invited the young Kazakh and Kyrgyz writers up to his hotel room to chat, and after their discussion, Aitmatov left him a copy of the manuscript of *Jamilia*. When the French Communist poet Louis Aragon visited Moscow, Auezov introduced Aitmatov to Aragon and encouraged Aragon to read *Face to Face*.³¹¹ *Jamilia* was published in 1958 in *Novyi mir* in connection with the Conference of Writers of Africa and Asia that took place that year in Tashkent.³¹² *Jamilia* launched Aitmatov's career on an all-Union level and brought him international fame when Aragon translated the novel into French in 1959. Through *Jamilia*, Aitmatov got to know *Novyi mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii, who became one of his mentors. Tvardovskii taught Aitmatov the trick of writing his works simultaneously in Kyrgyz and Russian so that he could publish his works in Moscow first in order to avoid being censored

³⁰⁹ Chingiz Aitmatov, *Detstvo: avtobiograficheskie vospominaniia* (Bishkek: Mezhdunarodnyi fond Aitmatova "Turar," 2011), 89.

³¹⁰ Auezov was a figure that Aitmatov had admired since he had seen him speak in favor of the Kyrgyz national epic *Manas* during the Stalin-era campaign against the Turkic national epics. See accounts of Auezov's speech at a meeting of the Academy of Sciences on June 8, 1952, in Frunze in Jeffrey B. Lilley, *Have the Mountains Fallen?: Loss and Redemption in the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 83-84; Nikolai Arkad'evich Anastas'ev, *Tragediia triumfatora: Mukhtar Auëzov : sud'ba i knigi* (Almaty: Atamūra, 2007), 424-425.

³¹¹ Seitkhazin and Omirbekov, qtd. in Akmataliev, "Chingiz Aitmatov," 277.

³¹² Chingiz Aitmatov, "Dzhamilia," *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (1958): 3-32. Oksana Sergeevna Kobzeva, "Proza Chingiza Aitmatova v zhurnal'nom kontekste 'Novogo mira'" (PhD diss., Volgograd State University, 2004), 6.

by over-zealous local party bureaucrats.³¹³ This trick was to come in handy as the local Kyrgyz literary establishment became increasingly hostile to the literary styles that Aitmatov had picked up in Moscow.

The story of *Jamilia* is told through the eyes of Seit, a Kyrgyz adolescent living in a collective farm in Aitmatov's native region on the edge of the Kazakh steppe.³¹⁴ Over the course of the novella, Seit watches his sister-in-law, the titular character, gradually fall in love with another man while her husband is away at the front during the Great Patriotic War. In the end, Jamilia is forced to choose between her loveless marriage and her new lover Daniyar. Jamilia ultimately decides to abandon her soldier husband for a new love and a new life. *Jamilia* appealed to the all-Union audience in part because it resonated with the Soviet narrative of the liberation of Central Asian women under Soviet rule.³¹⁵ Jamilia's violation of traditional marital fidelity in the name of true love thus embodied the success of the revolutionary Soviet project.³¹⁶ According to Aitmatov, however, one of his fellow Kyrgyz writers criticized his portrayal of Jamilia at a meeting of the Party cell of the Union of Writers, claiming that Kyrgyz readers firmly rejected Jamila's behavior.³¹⁷ The very same "progressive" values that made Aitmatov's work appealing to an all-Union audience alienated him from some Kyrgyz writers.

³¹³ Aitmatov, *Detstvo*, 97.

³¹⁴ For a recent English edition, see Chingiz Aitmatov, *Jamilia*, trans. James Riordan (London: Telegram, 2007).

³¹⁵ From the early days of Soviet rule, the Bolsheviks had seen Central Asian woman as a "surrogate proletariat"—potential "agents of revolutionary transformation." Gregory J. Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), xxiii.

³¹⁶ See Moritz Florin's analysis of the story in Moritz Florin, "What Is Russia to Us? Making Sense of Stalinism, Colonialism and Soviet Modernity in Kyrgyzstan, 1956–1965," *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2016): 183. See also Ali F. Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 134–139.

³¹⁷ Aitmatov, *Detstvo*, 94–95.

With *Jamilia*, Aitmatov appealed to Soviet notions of the need to liberate Central Asian women from patriarchal traditions in a way that endeared him to all-Union readers, but also presented himself as fully Kyrgyz by extolling the virtues of his native countryside in a way that resonated with contemporary trends in Russian literature. Aitmatov depicted Jamilia, Daniyar, and Seit as rural people in love with their native steppe. Aitmatov's loving descriptions of his native land in *Jamilia* were reminiscent of the way that the Russian Village Prose writer Vladimir Soloukhin had written about his native Vladimir region in *Vladimir Country Roads*, which had been published in *Novyi mir* the previous year (see Chapter 4). Both Soloukhin and Aitmatov focused intensely on the relationship between rural people and their *malaya rodina* ("small homeland," meaning native region), which became a defining trait of Russian Village Prose.³¹⁸ Aitmatov's novella won praise for both its lyrical descriptions of Central Asian landscapes and its sensitive portrayal of a woman's inner conflict.

Having found success on the all-Union level with *Jamilia*, Aitmatov returned to Kyrgyzstan. In 1959 he became a member of the Communist Party. After a short stint at a Russian-language journal in Kyrgyzstan, he began working for all-Union publications, becoming *Pravda*'s special correspondent in Central Asia in 1961. While working for *Pravda*, he continued to publish his major works, such as 1962's *The First Teacher* (Rus: *Pervyi uchitel'*), in *Novyi mir*.³¹⁹ Writing for the prestigious journal was a dream come true for a young Soviet writer. Although *Druzhba narodov* was the Soviet journal tasked with translating non-Russian Soviet literature for the Russian reader, *Novyi mir*'s editorial board also saw the promotion of "the friendship

³¹⁸ Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 6.

³¹⁹ Chingiz Aitmatov, "Pervyi uchitel': Povest'," trans. A. Dmitrieva and Chingiz Aitmatov, *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (July 1962): 3–34. Aitmatov also published two early works in *Druzhba narodov*. Chingiz Aitmatov, "Soperniki," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 10 (1958): 66–77; Chingiz Aitmatov, "Topolek moi v krasnoi kosynke," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 1 (1961): 121–74.

of the peoples” as part of their mission. As a Kyrgyz author writing for a Russian-speaking audience, Aitmatov was in good company at *Novyi mir*, which was home to such prominent non-Russian authors as the Avar poet Rasul Gamzatov, the Abkhaz writer Fazil Iskander, and the Lithuanian poet and playwright Justinas Marcinkevičius.³²⁰ Indeed, this was also the period when Russian writers such as Aleksandr Yashin were beginning to incorporate Russian rural customs into their works published in *Novyi mir* as well³²¹. Moreover, while *Druzhba narodov* was led by Smirnov, a stodgy member of the Stalinist old guard, *Novyi mir* was helmed by Tvardovskii, a leading proponent of Khrushchev’s Thaw. By the early 1960s, Aitmatov had found a supportive home at the leading Thaw-era journal.

Aitmatov’s success with *Jamilia* did not go unnoticed by the all-Union literary establishment. In 1958, *Jamilia* received a positive review from Auezov, the dean of Central Asian literature, in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.³²² In 1961, Aitmatov received a nomination for the Lenin Prize, the highest literary honor in the country. Aitmatov made it past the first and second rounds of consideration, earning him a place on the final ballot. During the discussion of the literature section, most of the writers in the literature section argued that *Jamilia* was a work of exceptional literary merit, demonstrating Aitmatov’s strong reputation with the Moscow literary elite. Aitmatov had many fans among the Soviet cultural elite, but there were still some holdouts.³²³ He ultimately

³²⁰ Kobzeva, “Proza Chingiza Aitmatova v zhurnal’nom kontekste ‘Novogo mira,’” 6-7. English-language literature on *Novyi mir* has not addressed the extent to which it prominently featured non-Russian authors. See for example Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, and Dina Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novyi Mir and the Soviet Regime* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1982).

³²¹ See, for example, Yashin’s 1962 short story in *Novyi mir*, “Vologda Wedding,” discussed in Chapter 3.

³²² Mukhtar Auezov, “Put’ dobryi!,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 23, 1958.

³²³ The only skeptic was Nikolai Gribachëv, who agreed that *Jamilia* was well-written, but thought that it did not advance Soviet literature because it did not devote sufficient attention to social problems. RGALI 2916/1/244 (April 7, 1961): 184-227. For more discussion of *Jamilia* during the first and second rounds, see RGALI 2916/1/244 (February 2, 1961): 1-52; RGALI 2916/1/244 (February 7, 1961): 9-79; RGALI 2916/1/244 (April 4, 1961): 101-124; RGALI 2916/1/244 (April 6, 1961): 125-183; RGALI 2916/1/243 (April 8, 1961): 64-96.

failed to win the Lenin Prize that year, losing in the secret ballot to three giants of Soviet literature: the Russian poets Aleksandr Tvardovskii and Aleksandr Prokof'ev and the Ukrainian prose writer Mykhailo Stel'makh.

In 1963, Aitmatov was nominated for the Lenin Prize once more, this time with the addition of his 1963 collection *Stories of the Mountains and Steppe* (Rus: *Povesti gor i stepei*), which included works that had been first published in *Novyi mir* and *Druzhiba narodov*.³²⁴ In the intervening two years, Aitmatov's reputation had continued to grow among the Moscow literary establishment. When it came time to discuss Aitmatov's work during the first round of consideration in February 1963, a new champion of Aitmatov's work had emerged: the head editor of *Pravda* (and Aitmatov's boss) Pavel Satiukov. Satiukov called attention to Aitmatov's sensitive depiction of individual psychology, an important Thaw-era stylistic innovation. He said that Aitmatov dealt with themes that were important for national literature, but "not in a traditional style, characteristic of the peoples of the East, but in the style of socialist realism." Aleksei Adzhubei, who in addition to being Khrushchev's son-in-law was also the head editor of the newspaper *Izvestiia*, agreed. Leonid Sobolev, who as the head of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR would become a major patron of the Russian Village Prose writers (see Chapter 3), gushed over Aitmatov's descriptions of the Kyrgyz landscape.³²⁵ At the plenum, Aitmatov advanced to the next round of competition by a unanimous vote.³²⁶ Going into the second round, Aitmatov had the strong support of some of the most influential literary functionaries of the Khrushchev era.

³²⁴ Chingiz Aitmatov, *Povesti gor i stepei*. (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1963).

³²⁵ RGALI 2916/1/374 (February 6, 1963): 8-9.

³²⁶ RGALI 2916/1/372 (February 12, 1963): 116.

In March of 1963, Aitmatov demonstrated his ability to weather the literary controversies that punctuated the Thaw by garnering favor among the Moscow political and cultural elite. Since November of 1962, Khrushchev had been on a personal crusade against the avant-garde art that had flourished as a result of his own Thaw. It started first with his famous outburst against abstract art at an exhibition at the Manege on November 26, 1962, and broadened to include other examples of “formalism” in art and literature. On March 7 and 8, Khrushchev gathered the cultural intelligentsia for another tongue-lashing. This time he focused his ire on the young writers Evgenii Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii, and Vasiliĭ Aksënov. All had recently given interviews with foreign publications in which they criticized the continuing power of Stalinist elements and Stalinist modes of thought in the Soviet Union. According to Aksënov and Voznesenskii, the insistence that writers portray “positive heroes” in a socialist realist mode was a holdover from the cult of personality. At the meeting with the cultural intelligentsia, Khrushchev vehemently attacked each of the writers in turn, losing total control of his temper.³²⁷

On March 20, Aitmatov published an article in *Pravda* in which he polemicized with an unnamed “contemporary.” Details in the article made it clear he was arguing with Evtushenko, Voznesenskii, and Aksënov. Aitmatov started out the article by affirming the agenda of the Party under Khrushchev, especially the unmasking of the cult of personality at the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses. He supported the new spirit of cultural exchange with the capitalist world but criticized the “nihilistic views” of some young writers who had become overly enamored with the West and have started to scorn the traditions of socialist realism. He defended his portrayal in *The First Teacher* of a character that embodied the characteristics of a socialist

³²⁷ See discussions of these events in Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 137-143; William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 588-596; Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 209-219.

realist “positive hero.” He described a conversation in which his unnamed opponent had criticized him for writing on the “village theme”: “After all, it's not fashionable. Today's literary idol is the intellectual hero." Aitmatov dismissed such “lordly attitudes” towards the topic of the village and concluded his article by affirming his commitment to socialist realism.³²⁸ Aitmatov thus positioned himself as the ideal literary foot soldier of the Khrushchev era: supportive of de-Stalinization, while still hewing to the traditions of popular, ideologically correct Soviet literature. He also capitalized on the growing popularity of works depicting the village in Russian literature.

At the fourth plenum of the governing body of the Union of Writers of the Soviet Union, held on March 26-28, 1963, Aitmatov appeared as the “model” young Soviet author. The high-ranking writers Konstantin Fedin, Aleksandr Prokof'ev, and Nikolai Tikhonov blasted Evtushenko, Aksënov, and Voznesenskii, placing their statements to foreign journalists in the context of the ideological struggle between the capitalist and communist systems. Evtushenko and Voznesenskii attempted to atone for their sins from the podium.³²⁹ In his speech, Aitmatov once again contrasted his approach with theirs. “I know, now, when I say these words, that someone will think about me: look, we found yet another ‘ideologically committed comrade’ [*ideinyi tovarishch*] from Central Asia,” said Aitmatov. “Well, let them think what they want. I have long been acquainted with this ironic ‘ideologically committed comrade’ since my days at the Literary Institute.”³³⁰ Aitmatov went on to enumerate Khrushchev’s accomplishments since Stalin’s death in 1953, pausing particularly on Khrushchev’s agricultural policy: “I’m on the side of those ‘ide-

³²⁸ Chingiz Aitmatov, “Sozdamim iarkii obraz kommunistu: Pis'mo sverstniku,” *Pravda*, March 20, 1963.

³²⁹ Eggeling, *Politika i kul'tura pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve*, 141-143.

³³⁰ Evtushenko and Aitmatov were at the Literary Institute at roughly the same time. Evtushenko enrolled in 1952 and was expelled in 1957. Aitmatov began his studies at the Higher Courses in 1956.

ologically committed comrades' who [...] lifted up agriculture, lifted up the collective farmers and the collective farms, for that alone I am happy to serve the Party with truth and faith, because I know what the collective farms were like and what they became."³³¹ Aitmatov's vigorous defense of Khrushchev's policies, which was reproduced in *Pravda*, showed him to be the perfect standard-bearer for ideological orthodoxy in the Khrushchev era. As the son of an executed "enemy of the people" with firsthand knowledge of the Soviet countryside, he was able to speak convincingly to the need to reverse the harmful policies of the Stalin era. Yet he was also a Communist Party member who wrote in a relatively orthodox literary style. At a time when the Soviet Union was opening to the West, he had achieved the international success that so many writers craved—and he was a living embodiment of the advancements of non-Russian peoples under Soviet rule.

At the second round of deliberations for the Lenin Prize in April, Pavel Satiukov again hammered home the political and cultural significance of Aitmatov as a writer in the meeting of the literature section. Satiukov started his speech with a reference to Khrushchev's March meeting with the intelligentsia and recent controversies over the problem of youth in literature in the Soviet and international press. Moving to Aitmatov's candidacy, he stated,

I think that the given candidacy presents a great creative interest for us, first of all, because in the East of the country, from the republics of Central Asia, there has emerged a very talented prose writer, whom various peoples discuss not only here in the Soviet Union, but who has also been widely recognized abroad, and recognized not for modernist and other such attacks on the Soviet system in which we live, but recognized for his talent, which accurately portrays the life of the people of our country, and with his special artistry and flavor attracts attention to our country.³³²

³³¹ "Za vysokuiu ideinost' i khudozhestvennoe masterstvo sovetsoi literatury!: Plenum pravleniia Soiuza pisatelei SSSR," *Pravda*, March 29, 1963.

³³² RGALI 2916/1/375 (April 6, 1963): 8-9.

Satiukov also mentioned Aitmatov's speech at the plenum and his article in Satiukov's own paper, *Pravda*. In conclusion, he stated, Aitmatov was a young talent who needed to be supported. Leonid Sobolev, head of RSFSR Writers' Union, said that both Aitmatov and another writer under consideration, the Avar poet Rasul Gamzatov, wrote literature that people of diverse nations could appreciate because it felt "as if it were written for them."³³³ Aitmatov received the overwhelming support of the literature section. At the plenum a few days later, Ivan Anisimov, the head of the literature section, gave Aitmatov the full-throated endorsement of the literature section for the reasons Satiukov enumerated.³³⁴ Having won the support of the all-Union political and literary establishment through his spirited defense of Khrushchev's policies, Aitmatov was awarded the 1963 Lenin Prize.

Although the 1963 Lenin Prize deliberations ended with Aitmatov's triumph, there were already hints during the deliberations that not everything was going smoothly for Aitmatov in the Kyrgyz SSR. In February of 1963, Z. B. Boguslavskaiia met with the literature section of the Lenin Prize Committee to report on "a quasi-denunciation letter [*odno pis'mo polukliauznogo kharaktera*]" that the Committee had received. The article alleged that although Aitmatov's works were supposedly translated to Russian from the original Kyrgyz, in fact, he wrote the Russian version first and had a translator at *Novyi mir* brush it up for him. Then he translated the text back to Kyrgyz and published it in the Kyrgyz SSR as if it were the original text. According to the author of the letter, Aitmatov had been forced to admit this at a meeting of the Union of Writers in Kyrgyzstan. Boguslavskaiia stated that they investigated the allegations made in the

³³³ RGALI 2916/1/375 (April 6, 1963): 17.

³³⁴ RGALI 2916/1/373 (April 12, 1963): 13-14.

letter but had found nothing to substantiate them.³³⁵ Although the Committee decided to disregard the accusations, the implications were clear. Someone was trying to sabotage Aitmatov's candidacy by alleging that he was not "really" a Kyrgyz writer. This was a serious attempt to destroy Aitmatov's literary credibility among the capital city elite.

Indeed, in the early 1960s Aitmatov was deeply embroiled in a struggle for control of the Kyrgyz Union of Writers in his home republic. As in the case of the Moldovan Writers' Union, one faction had managed to dominate important positions in the Writers' Union, choking off the other faction's access to resources. The dominant faction in Kyrgyzstan was composed mostly of older writers who had risen to prominence during the Stalin era. As Moritz Florin explains, the older generation viewed Kyrgyz history as fundamentally progressive: "For many Kyrgyz intellectuals the revolution had been an act of self-liberation from tsarist or Russian colonial oppression. The Russian Revolution had coincided with this movement of self-liberation and thus helped to realize the ideals rooted in the Kyrgyz national past," writes Florin.³³⁶ A major touchstone for the older generation was the fierce resistance they had put up in response to Moscow's 1952 attack on the *Manas*, the Kyrgyz national epic. Between 1951 and 1952, central authorities launched a coordinated attack on the Turkic national epics in the Soviet Union, characterizing them as examples of unacceptable bourgeois nationalism. Nowhere was the resistance to the campaign against the Turkic epics stronger than in the Kyrgyz SSR, where a furious debate erupted in the republican press. Writers like Aaly Tokombaev had "cited Marx, Engels, Lenin,

³³⁵ RGALI 2916/1/375 (February 4, 1963): 5-6. See also her report to the Presidium of the Committee, RGALI 2916/1/370 (February 4, 1963): 104.

³³⁶ Moritz Florin, "What Is Russia to Us?," 187.

Kalinin and Stalin” to demonstrate the progressive nature of *Manas*.³³⁷ The other faction, led by Aitmatov, was composed of younger writers, the children of the Thaw, who sought to introduce new approaches in Kyrgyz national literature. Many writers of the younger generation had studied in Moscow, and they drew inspiration from the innovative literary approaches that reached Kyrgyz writers through Russian literature. The older generations’ ambivalence towards Moscow and its influence on Kyrgyz culture clashed with the younger generation’s desire to bring the fruits of Thaw-era Russian culture to Kyrgyzstan. The issue of Russian cultural influence was thus an important aspect of debates over the Thaw in Kyrgyzstan.

Aitmatov’s work had been hotly debated at meetings of the Kyrgyz Writers’ Union. The older faction of Kyrgyz writers rejected Aitmatov’s portrayal of a Kyrgyz woman’s struggle to free herself from a traditional, loveless marriage in *Jamilia*. Mikhail Aksakov, the Russian editor of *Literaturnyi Kirgizstan (Literary Kyrgyzstan)* and an Aitmatov ally, complained at a meeting of the Party cell of the Kyrgyz Union of Writers that members of the older faction had attacked Aitmatov for his innovative treatment of “moral and ethical problems in Kyrgyz culture” in the novella. According to Aksakov, some had even called her a “prostitute.” “That’s how they spoke about Jamilia, with her enormous love, who breaks all traditions of the old ways,” Aksakov said, revealing his own views on Kyrgyz traditions.³³⁸ A report produced by the all-Union Central Committee’s Department of Culture reported that Aitmatov’s chief antagonist in the Kyrgyz Union of Writers, Nasirdin Baitemirov, had repeatedly criticized the novella for “distorting the character of Kyrgyz women, as a Kyrgyz woman could never leave her husband.” Baitemirov had reportedly called the work “lacking in progressive ideals from start to finish” at a meeting of

³³⁷ Alexandre A. Bennigsen, “The Crisis of the Turkic National Epics, 1951-1952: Local Nationalism or Internationalism?,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 17, no. 2/3 (Summer and Fall 1975): 468-472.

the Central Committee in Kyrgyzstan, attempting to turn Kyrgyz authorities against Aitmatov.³³⁹ While Jamilia appeared to be a progressive national heroine to the members of the Lenin Prize Committee, Aitmatov's critics in Kyrgyzstan attacked Jamilia for violating traditional Kyrgyz culture.

As we have seen in the Lenin Prize discussions, Aitmatov's identity as a Kyrgyz writer was an important factor in his success in Moscow. The older generation of Stalin-era elites thus sought to attack Aitmatov's credibility as a Kyrgyz writer. Although Boguslavskaja did not identify the origin of the poison-pen letter in her report to the Lenin Prize Committee, it had obviously originated in Kyrgyzstan. The meeting it referred to apparently took place in the early 1960s under the auspices of the Party cell of the Kyrgyz Writers' Union. At the meeting, Baitemirov and another older writer, Kasymaly Dzhantoshev, had attacked Aitmatov, alleging that he published works in Russian with the note "translation from the Kyrgyz" when no Kyrgyz version, in fact, existed.³⁴⁰ The letter to the Lenin Prize Committee attacking Aitmatov's credibility as a Kyrgyz writer was thus part of an overall campaign on the part of the older generation to discredit Aitmatov among the capital city elite.

The tensions among the older and younger writers exploded at a heated meeting of the Party cell of the Kyrgyz Writers' Union dedicated to elections and the annual report (*otchetno-vybornoe sobranie*) on September 24, 1964. The conflict at the meeting, which frequently descended into *ad hominem* attacks, revolved around the controversial replacement of the head editor of the journal *Ala-Too*, which up until then had been the main mouthpiece for the younger

³³⁸ RGALI 631/42/307 (September 24, 1964): 68.

³³⁹ RGANI 5/36/148 (December 1, 1965): 199-215 in V. Iu. Afiani, Z. K. Vodop'ianova, and T. V. Domracheva, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1958-1964: dokumenty*, Seriya Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2005), 111.

³⁴⁰ Aitmatov's opponent Beishenaliev discusses this meeting in RGALI 631/42/307 (September 24, 1964): 57-61.

generation of Kyrgyz writers.³⁴¹ In May, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan had fired the original editor, Olzhobai Orozbaev, for publishing stories by young writers that the Central Committee had subsequently criticized.³⁴² Aitmatov kicked off the discussion at the meeting by calling the Kyrgyz Writers' Union a "crowd of people who have been driven to hate each other by intrigues and provocations." The cause, in his estimation, was the decision by the first secretary of the Union of Writers, Tokotbolot Abdumomunov, to appoint Shukurbek Beishenaliev to the position of head editor of *Ala-Too* without consulting the Writers' Union.³⁴³ According to Aitmatov, Beishenaliev had convinced his friend and relative Karybek Moldobaev, the secretary of science and culture of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, to induce the secretary of ideology, Beishenbai Murataliev, to support his appointment to the position. In Aitmatov's view, Abdumomunov and Beishenaliev had improperly used their political connections to secure the appointment and thereby deceived the Writers' Union and violated its principles of democracy. With the help of two Central Committee secretaries, Abdumomunov and Beishenaliev had staged a hostile takeover of the main journal that published Aitmatov's allies among the younger writers, threatening to cut off their access to publication. Aitmatov's accusation that Beishenaliev had used his political connections to get appointed to the position provoked an outcry from his opponents. Baitemirov claimed that Aitmatov was simply angry because he had turned *Ala-Too* into a "feeding trough" (*kormushka*) for himself

³⁴¹ As we will see in the case of the Russian monument preservation organization VOPIK (see Chapter 4), securing control over a publication was one of the main ways that groups of intellectuals sought to further their ideology in Soviet cultural politics.

³⁴² RGANI 5/36/148 (December 1, 1965): 199-215 in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1958-1964*, 115.

³⁴³ Although Beishenaliev was a younger writer (the same age as Aitmatov) he was clearly aligned with the older faction. RGALI 631/42/307 (September 24, 1964): 29-39.

and his favorites. He concluded by stating that nobody read Aitmatov's books.³⁴⁴ Beishenaliev called Aitmatov a "dictator" and again raised the accusation that he did not write his books in Kyrgyz.³⁴⁵ The meeting demonstrated that, unlike the writers from the Stalin era, Aitmatov had failed to establish strong patronage relationships with the dominant cultural and political elites in Kyrgyzstan and was unable to convince them to support him and the other young writers.

Ultimately, Aitmatov's support among the Moscow political and cultural elites brought him a victory over the older faction of Kyrgyz writers and the Kyrgyz Central Committee. In December of 1965, the Department of Organizational-Party Work and the Department of Culture of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a lengthy joint report on the situation in the Kyrgyz Writers' Union. In their analysis of the literary and national issues at stake in the conflict between the two factions of writers, the authors of the report tended to support the position of the younger writers, the children of the Thaw. They stated that writers of the older generation had refused to accept new literary trends. The younger and middle-aged writers grouped around Aitmatov, meanwhile, supported the new trends and had spoken out against "elements of conservatism and local narrow-mindedness" evident in the views of the older faction. The authors defended Aitmatov's works against his critics, stating, "There are grounds to argue that the sweeping and unjust criticism of Aitmatov's works, although also motivated by concern over defending the high ideological level [*ideinost*'] of Kyrgyz literature, is fundamentally oriented towards the preservation to a great degree of archaic traditions and views related to the national culture of the Kyrgyz people." This statement clearly vindicated Aitmatov's position on Kyrgyz national culture as expressed in *Jamilia*. The authors of the report also noted with

³⁴⁴ RGALI 631/42/307 (September 24, 1964): 42-44.

³⁴⁵ RGALI 631/42/307 (September 24, 1964): 56-60.

dismay that that Aitmatov was nominated for the 1963 Lenin Prize not by the Union of Writers, but Kyrgyzstan's Academy of Sciences. Baitemirov had even asked the Department of Culture to revoke Aitmatov's nomination for the prestigious prize. Ultimately, the report concluded, the struggle between the two factions had led to "extremely abnormal and uncollegial relations" at the Union.³⁴⁶

The authors of the report argued that the fault ultimately lay with republican leadership's poor management of the creative intelligentsia. They placed the bulk of the blame for this highly dysfunctional atmosphere on the shoulders of Central Committee first secretary Turkudan Usubaliev and secretary of ideology Murataliev. They cited examples of extreme bias against Aitmatov and reported that many younger writers in the Union thought Usubaliev and Murataliev bore personal animosity toward him. While the Central Committee was right to admonish Aitmatov for his occasional lack of restraint and harshness, they failed to criticize the older writers even when they behaved badly and made *ad hominem* attacks. Central Committee secretaries incorrectly blamed Aitmatov for all of the problems emanating out of the Kyrgyz Union of Writers. The report concluded with the statement that the Central Committee had acknowledged their serious mistakes in the work of the Union of Writers and had taken a number of measures to improve it.³⁴⁷ Thanks to his strong position among the all-Union political and cultural authorities, Aitmatov had won a victory over his opponents in Kyrgyzstan's political and literary establishment, but he was increasingly weary of the struggles in his native republic, where Usubaliev would remain in charge until 1981. He later wrote that problems in his native republic motivated his decision to write his 1966 anti-Stalinist work *Farewell, Gulsary!* (Rus: *Proshchai, Gulsary!*)

³⁴⁶ RGANI 5/36/148 (December 1, 1965): 199-215 in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1958-1964*, 108-109, 112.

³⁴⁷ RGANI 5/36/148 (December 1, 1965): 199-215 in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1958-1964*, 113-120.

in Russian.³⁴⁸ “Because of the level of competency of literary criticism, the publishing practices, and the ‘leadership’ of culture that existed in Kyrgyzstan, my novella risked not seeing the light of day at all,” he wrote in 1989.³⁴⁹

Like Druță, Aitmatov was ultimately more successful in convincing Moscow-based political and cultural elites to accept his interpretation of national identity than republican ones. Aitmatov’s version of a Kyrgyz national culture that featured “progressive” rural heroes and heroines ran up against stiff opposition in his home republic because it contradicted the Stalin-era elite’s conception of Kyrgyz culture. The very same characteristics that alienated many of Aitmatov’s fellow Kyrgyz writers endeared him to the Moscow cultural elite. Blocked by Stalin-era elites at home, Aitmatov built on the connections he made studying at the Higher Literary Courses to establish a career in Moscow. He proved himself to be a master of all-Union politics, making himself indispensable to Khrushchev’s cultural agenda. His willingness to be a mouthpiece for Khrushchev’s Thaw, in addition to his literary talents, helped him to win the country’s most prestigious literary honor. In Chapter 6, we will see how Aitmatov’s views evolved and influenced discussion on nationality in the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Armenia: Hrant Matevosyan

Of the three writers discussed in this chapter, Hrant Matevosyan offered the most radical critique of the Soviet Union’s policies towards its rural citizens. His short story “Ahnidzor” harshly criticized the campaign against private plots and livestock holdings that was being pursued by Khrushchev and the Armenian Central Committee. Much like Aitmatov, Matevosyan

³⁴⁸ Chingiz Aitmatov, “Proshchai, Gul’sary! Povest’,” *Novyi mir*, no. 3 (1966): 9–99.

³⁴⁹ Chingiz Aitmatov, “Pochva i sud’ba,” *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, November 8, 1989.

found himself blocked from career advancement on the local level by conservative political and literary elites. Like Druță, he managed to connect to a patronage network that helped him make his way to Moscow and establish a solid reputation with the Moscow cultural elite. Matevosyan's story once again illustrates the important role of Moscow-based cultural elites in promoting a rural-based vision of national identity in the republics during the Thaw.

Hrant Matevosyan was born in the village of Ahnidzor in the northern Armenian region of Lori in 1935, a part of the republic that was still reeling from intense conflict over collectivization in the early 1930s.³⁵⁰ After he was born, Matevosyan's family lived in a cattle shed: the small family lived on the top part of the shed, while buffalo occupied the bottom. World War II began when Matevosyan was six years old.³⁵¹ The end of the war in 1945 was a relief, but in the countryside, it did not provide the return to normalcy that so many had hoped for. In the Armenian SSR, authorities began depriving many peasants of an important source of income when in 1946 they cracked down on collective farmers whose private plots exceeded the legal limits and began seizing illegal cattle.³⁵² Matevosyan was one of many village youths who sought to escape through education. He left Ahnidzor and enrolled in a printing technical school in Yerevan in 1952 at the age of 17. He worked as a linotype machine operator for several years in Yerevan before matriculating at the faculty of history and literature at the Khachatur Abovyan Pedagogical Institute in 1958.

³⁵⁰ Mary Allerton Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 104-110.

³⁵¹ “‘Mshakuyt‘i pataskhanatvut‘yuně ashkhari chakatagri mej vit‘khari ē’: Handipum EPH-um, 1984 t. septemberi 28,” in *Es es em: harts‘azruyts‘ner*, by Hrant Mat‘evosyan (Erevan: “Oskan Erevants‘i” hratarakch‘ut‘yun, 2005), 245-6, http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/mshakuiti_patasxanatvutiuny_ashkarhi_chakatagrum_vitxari_e.

³⁵² Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia*, 179.

Living in Yerevan in the 1950s, Matevosyan witnessed some of the changes that Khrushchev's Thaw brought to the Armenian literary world. Relatively quickly after Stalin's death, two of the most prominent writers who had fallen victim to the 1937 purges, Eghishe Charents and Aksel Bakunts, were posthumously rehabilitated. Matevosyan later said that Charents and Bakunts were two of his first literary "teachers."³⁵³ Writers like Gurgen Mahari who were sent to the camps during the Stalin era returned to Yerevan.³⁵⁴ At a meeting of the Party cell of the Armenian Writers' Union on April 4, 1956, writers discussed Khrushchev's Secret Speech at the Twentieth Party Congress. At the long and heated meeting, writers vigorously denounced the Stalinist cult of personality, especially the jailing and torture of innocent writers from 1936 to 1938.³⁵⁵ At the meeting, the Party cell issued a resolution that called for, among other things, the liquidation of the remnants of the cult of personality, the reevaluation of writers who had been left out of the history of Armenian literature during Stalin's rule, and the punishment and removal of people from the Ministry of Internal Affairs who had participated in torture.³⁵⁶ The stormy discussion provoke the censure of the Yerevan City Committee of the Communist Party which issued a decision ordering that specific writers be punished for their "anti-Party" and "slandorous" statements.³⁵⁷ Despite the stormy controversy that accompanied the discussion, Armenian literary scholar Leon Mikirtichian argues that the Twentieth Party Congress did eventually lead

³⁵³ Grant Matevosian, interview with M. Iskol'dskaia, "Moi Tsmakut — chastitsa bol'shogo mira," *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, October 18, 1984.

³⁵⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 180-181.

³⁵⁵ See HAA 170/1/73 (April 4, 1956) and HAA 170/1/76 (April 4, 1956) for the nearly three-hundred-page transcript of this meeting.

³⁵⁶ For the resolution, including a translation into Russian, see HAA 170/1/77 (April 4, 1956): 122-129.

³⁵⁷ HAA 170/1/85 (June 1, 1956): 1-3.

to the liberalization of literature and literary scholarship in the Armenian SSR.³⁵⁸ Yet the republican authorities remained wary of de-Stalinization. Under Yakov Zarobyan, who was installed as first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party in 1961 during the anti-nationalist purges of the late 1950s and early 1960s, the literary world was prone to periodic blow-ups when writers exceeded the boundaries permitted by the authorities.³⁵⁹ The publication of Matevosyan's sketch "Ahnidzor" in April of 1961 would reveal the limits of the Thaw in Armenia.

Since matriculating at the Pedagogical Institute, Matevosyan had worked part-time as a printer at *Sovetakan grakanutyun*, the leading Armenian literary journal. Still a relatively unknown writer at the age of twenty-six, Matevosyan published "Ahnidzor" in *Sovetakan grakanutyun* in April of 1961.³⁶⁰ The sketch starts out, innocuously enough, with the history of the founding of the village. In Matevosyan's telling, Ahnidzor was founded a hundred years earlier by people fleeing "one or another princeling." The newcomers were greeted by a bear, who informed them that the territory was government-owned—here Matevosyan tellingly uses a Russian word, *kazennyi*—and asked for seven pieces of gold. Actually, the narrator immediately admits, the bear never said that. The bear could not pronounce the word "territory," and didn't understand the meaning of the word "government-owned." This joke from our unreliable narrator about the bear's "warning" foreshadows the dominant conflict of the text: the struggle between the villagers of Ahnidzor and the government authorities who would rule them. In a series of episodes set in the present day, Matevosyan wryly describes the many conflicts, large and

³⁵⁸ Leon Mikirtitchian, "Armenian Literature," in *Discordant Voices: The Non-Russian Soviet Literatures, 1953-1973*, ed. George Stephen Nestor Luckyj (Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press, 1975), 15-16.

³⁵⁹ On the anti-nationalist campaign, see Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, trans. Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 251-254.

³⁶⁰ Hrant Mat'evosyan, "Ahnidzor," *Sovetakan grakanut'yun*, no. 4 (1961): 84-102. The sketch is reprinted in Hrant Mat'evosyan, "Ahnidzor," in *Erker: 2 hatorov*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh, 1985), 7-41.

small, between the Ahnidzor villagers and Soviet authorities. The sketch was an acerbic commentary on the absurdities of Soviet agricultural policy. And unlike the famous sketches on rural topics published in *Novyi mir* in the first half of the 1950s, this one did not hesitate to take aim at Khrushchev's policies.

The culmination of the sketch is the story of Ignat Matevosyan's horse and how he lost it.³⁶¹ Ignat's story begins when the August 1953 plenum of the Party granted people the right to keep two cows, a few pigs, two sheep, and a horse. (An attentive reader would have identified this as one of Khrushchev's policies easing the burdens on the peasantry after Stalin's death.) A horse, Matevosyan explains to his readers, no matter how mangy, is the best animal you can have, because it saves Ignat from having to walk five or six kilometers to work every day. However, things change when the regional authorities decide to merge the Atan and Ahnidzor collective farms into a larger farm, a *sovkhov*. (Although this is not spelled out explicitly in the sketch, this merger was the result of the campaign to consolidate village-based collective farms into large conglomerates called *sovkhovy*, which was one of Khrushchev's signature initiatives in agriculture. Transferring the locus of power from the village collective farm to the more distant *sovkhov* was a major disruption in peasants' lives, and the policy was dubbed "second collectivization" by its critics.³⁶²) In "Ahnidzor," Matevosyan reports that the villagers in the newly formed *sovkhov* are only allowed to keep three sheep and a cow. (Although this is not stated explicitly, at this time Khrushchev was also waging an ongoing campaign against private plots and

³⁶¹ Although it is not explicitly stated in the story, it would be obvious to anyone who knew Hrant Matevosyan's patronymic Ignati (Ignatovich in Russian) that this was his father.

³⁶² Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 40-41.

livestock holding in the *sovkhozy*.³⁶³) The issue of private ownership of horses is left up to the discretion of the director, who says he “has no discretion” and kicks the issue up to the administration of the Atan-Ahmidzor *sovkhov*. They force Ignat to give his horse to the collective.

In response, Ignat writes an open letter to G. Eghikyan, the director of the Atan-Ahmidzor *sovkhov*, the *sovkhov* administration, and the leaders of the Alaverdi region. He tells them directly to allow him to have a horse. If they are afraid of the private ownership of horses leading to capitalism, then that they should build a tram, he jokes. He explains that keeping a pig provides much-needed meat for the people on the *sovkhov*: “Try it yourselves, burnt pork with wine: it’s good, and you’ll be so satisfied with the world.” Ignat then moves on to the reduction of the size of private plots. He asks Comrade Eghikyan how his conscience can allow him to reduce the little that people already have. Why not give the people who work on the *sovkhov* the salary of an industrial worker so they can afford to buy potatoes, cabbage, oil, meat, and clothes, he asks? Their salary is paid only once every two or three months, and this amount only covers the cost of clothing, not food. Ignat seeks to turn their bureaucratic logic on its head by pointing out all the ways that the *sovkhov* administration breaks the rules. “According to which law? According to the letter of the *sovkhov* statutes, huh?” Ignat scoffs. He concludes the letter by saying that all he wants is for everyone to have “a red face and a round belly” like Comrade Eghikyan himself.

Matevosyan depicts the consequences of these policies beyond his individual family’s struggle. As life working for the *sovkhov* continues to be defined by bureaucratic meddling and poverty, the Ahmidzor villagers increasingly leave for cities. The economic dysfunction of the village forces young people to search for employment elsewhere, thereby severing their ties with their homes, the land, and their neighbors. The ultimate consequence of these policies for many

³⁶³ Karl Eugen Wädekin, *The Private Sector in Soviet Agriculture*, 2d, enl., rev. ed. of *Privatproduzenten in der sowjetischen Landwirtschaft*, Russian and East European Studies (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973), 285.

is profound alienation. “Ahnidzor” was a searing indictment of the impact of agricultural mismanagement on the lives of Matevosyan’s fellow villagers.

Soviet Armenian writers initially welcomed the sketch as an authentic voice from the village. At a meeting of the Union of Writers Party cell on March 31, Vigen Khechumyan, a prose writer and editor at *Sovetakan grakanutyun*, listed Matevosyan as a promising member of a new generation of writers. According to Khechumyan, Matevosyan’s main advantage over other writers was that he had learned about his subject matter from real life. Khechumyan thus acknowledged Matevosyan’s claim to literary status based on his firsthand knowledge of the village. Moreover, by stressing the importance of Matevosyan’s fidelity to real-life experience, Khechumyan’s report evoked the Thaw-era discourse of “sincerity” in literature that is present in Pomerantsev’s and Abramov’s essays in *Novyi mir* in the early 1950s (see Chapter 1). There was no indication in this brief discussion of the literary firestorm that was to come.³⁶⁴

In May, the literary critics Levon Hakhverdyan and Suren Aghababyan praised the sketch in the Soviet Armenian literary newspaper *Grakan tert*.³⁶⁵ Writing a retrospective article on Matevosyan’s career in 1983, Hakhverdyan recalled the moment he read “Ahnidzor”:

Many years ago, May of 1961. Suren Aghababyan and I were not only close friends, but also neighbors. One evening he came over, not to play backgammon, but to give me the urgent assignment of reading the recently-published sketch ‘Ahnidzor.’ I read it. I came away with the same impression as the person who had assigned it to me. Who is Hrant Matevosyan, what kind of person is he, what does he do? I found out this much, that he was a student at the pedagogical institute. Leaving the rest for later, we immediately wrote a short article that was immediately published in *Grakan tert*.

In the review, they characterized “Ahnidzor” as a refreshing breath of fresh air in the otherwise monotonous and cliché-ridden literary genre of the sketch. The critics praised Matevosyan’s

³⁶⁴ HAA 170/1/121 (March 31, 1961): 22-23.

³⁶⁵ L. Hakhverdyan and S. Aghababyan, “T‘armashunch khosk’,” *Grakan t‘ert’*, May 21, 1961, 2.

good-natured sense of humor and his love for his village and fellow-villagers. The two critics concluded that the sketch's main strength lies in its truthfulness (*chshmartut'yun*). Looking back on their review, Hakhverdyan wrote that he and Aghababyan got everything right—except the last line. They ended the review by calling “Ahnidzor” a “quiet and confident step” into the literary world. “Ahnidzor made noise, and what a noise it made!”³⁶⁶

In an essay published in 2007, the Soviet Armenian journalist Margo Ghukasyan wrote about her reaction to “Ahnidzor” as a young journalist:

Hrant was working as a linotype operator, and his ‘Ahnidzor’ had already made a big splash. One after another we found a pretext to run an errand to the production section where the linotype machine stood in order to see the author of “Ahnidzor.” [...] Many said: ‘How dare he?’ When I finally got ahold of the issue of the journal *Sovetakan grakanutyun*, which was tattered from being passed from hand to hand, I thought: what is he guilty of, the fact that he told the truth?³⁶⁷

Hakhverdyan and Aghababyan's contemporaneous review, as well as Ghukasyan's memories of her initial reaction to the sketch, suggest that its social resonance was in large part due to the fact that it met a demand for more “truthful” and “sincere” literature, one of the rallying calls of the era. Matevosyan thus managed to use his intimate knowledge of village life to appeal to Thaw-era literary discourses that resonated with the Armenian literary community.

Trouble arose not from the Armenian writers, but from the highest echelons of the republican political establishment. On June 12, Vazgen Mnatsakanyan, the editor of *Sovetakan grakanutyun*, mentioned that one of their young writers had written a sketch that the Armenian Communist Party's Department of Agriculture had interpreted as an attack on the *sovkhoz* system as a whole. Several members of the Party cell defended Matevosyan. “The ‘Ahnidzor’ sketch is a talented piece of writing, it has some harsh spots, but it is not directed against the *sov-*

³⁶⁶ Levon Hakhverdyan, “Inch-n u inchpes-ě: Hrant Mat'evosyani ardzaki masin,” *Sovetakan grakanut'yun*, no. 8 (1983): 115. Article citations omitted from translation.

khoz system, it is directed against its shortcomings,” said Vagharshak Norents.³⁶⁸ Eduard Topchyan, the head of the Writers’ Union, agreed. “Our press must continue to write fearlessly by publishing the facts,” he stated. The writers concluded the meeting by approving a resolution to further discuss “Ahnidzor” and dispatch writers to the *sovkhos* to check on the facts.³⁶⁹

On June 30, it became clear that the Party writers had severely miscalculated. Mnatsakanyan was summoned to the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia. The end result of the Bureau’s meeting was a decision titled “On the gross political error made in *Sovetakan grakanutyun*.”³⁷⁰ In the decision, the Bureau of the Central Committee stated that in the sketch Matevosyan had made false criticisms of the Atan-Ahnidzor *sovkhos*, attacked socialized property, and encouraged tendencies toward private property. The entire sketch expressed “malevolence” (*zlopykhatel’stvo*) toward the *kolkhoz* structure and the policy of the party on the further development of socialist form of agriculture, they concluded. The Central Committee accused Matevosyan of presenting a distorted picture of Soviet reality. They blamed the publication of the sketch on Mnatsakanyan’s political short-sightedness and lack of oversight and summarily fired him. The Central Committee also criticized the editor of *Grakan tert*, M. D. Sargsyan, for allowing the publication of a positive review of the sketch by Aghababyan and Hakhverdyan. They criticized Eduard Topchyan for not exercising enough control over *Sovetakan grakanutyun* and *Grakan tert*, which was part of his responsibility as head of the Union of

³⁶⁷ Margo Gukasian, “Bogom Granta byla pravda,” *Druzhiba narodov*, no. 3 (March 2007): 219.

³⁶⁸ HAA 170/1/121 (June 12, 1961): 34. Norents, born in 1903, had been a victim of Stalinist repressions, but by the time of this discussion he had managed to return to full participation in Soviet Armenian literary life. He was arrested in 1936 and sentenced to ten years in a labor camp. He returned to Armenia in 1946, only to be arrested again in 1948 and sent to Siberia. He returned to Yerevan in 1954. Karinè Khalatova, *Delo № ...: s pozheltevshikh stranits tragicheskikh sudeb* (Erevan: Aiastan, 2012), 69-70.

³⁶⁹ HAA 170/1/121 (June 12, 1961): 35-36.

³⁷⁰ HAA 1/41/29 (June 30, 1961): 89-91.

Writers. Finally, they ordered the Party organizations of all editorial boards of all republican newspapers, journals, publishers, and radio and television stations to discuss the decision.

The decision rocked the Armenian literary world. While the consequences for political missteps in Khrushchev's Soviet Union were not nearly as severe as in Stalin's, the sacking of the editor of the country's main literary journal was nevertheless a startling rebuke to the literary establishment. Matevosyan's first-hand knowledge of the countryside and his willingness to tell the truth about its problems had increased his literary credibility. But Yakov Zarobyan's Central Committee was hostile to criticism of the *sovkhos* system and their efforts to crack down on private property ownership among peasants. After all, Matevosyan had not framed his critique as an attack on the legacy of Stalinist policies in the countryside, as *Novyi mir* sketch writers like Valentin Ovechkin had done, but rather had shined a spotlight on the shortcomings of current policies in agriculture. To the Central Committee, Matevosyan's sketch was simply another example of the peasantry's long-established, dangerous attachment to private property. The hostility of the Armenian Central Committee to Matevosyan's work turned a segment of the Armenian literary elite against him and revealed fractures in the Armenian literary community.

At a meeting of the Party cell of the Writers' Union held on July 12 under the watchful eye of the Central Committee secretary of ideology, Hovhannes Baghdasaryan, the Party writers fell in line with the Central Committee's decision.³⁷¹ One denounced it as anti-Soviet, others pointed to its malicious tone or the fact that it adopted the ideological position of "the enemy." Aghababyan recanted of his positive review. (He would later receive a slap on the wrist from the Institute of Literature, which oversaw literary critics.³⁷²) Writers from the younger generation of

³⁷¹ HAA 170/1/121 (July 12, 1961): 37-44

³⁷² HAA 1285/4/41 (July 19, 1961): 54-61.

Armenian writers, mostly World War II veterans, often sought to soften their criticism by alluding to the author's obvious talent. Topchyan warned the assembled writers that the author's talent still cannot exculpate his serious ideological mistakes. As the writers attempted to determine who was to blame for the publication of the sketch, the meeting descended, perhaps inevitably, into recriminations and score-settling, especially across generations. The older prose writer Vardan Atryan said that the younger critic Aghababyan was most to blame for praising the ideologically flawed sketch, while Aghababyan fired back that Atryan's book was "weak and had no connection to literature."³⁷³ Of the writers present at the meeting, Hrachya Kochar, a prominent prose writer and former member of the leadership of the Writers' Union, was the only one who truly tried to salvage Matevosyan's reputation, and with it some of Matevosyan's political and cultural capital. While allowing that "Ahnidzor" was fundamentally flawed because the author supported private property over the *sovkhoz* system of organization, he attributed the mistake to Matevosyan's immaturity, rather than malice. Kochar argued that writers should continue to publish critical sketches, as long as they stayed away from anti-Soviet positions. He said that Matevosyan was not a hopeless case and could be put on the right path with better ideological guidance from the Writers' Union. In his concluding speech, Baghdasaryan expressed his confidence that the writers responsible for the sketch had seen the error of their ways. However, he was less confident that all of the writers at the meeting had accepted the Central Committee's decision and criticized his comrades for searching to find artistic merit in this ideologically dangerous sketch.

A round of press coverage followed the party meetings. In its July issue, *Sovetakan grakanutyun* published a retraction, citing the decision of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, which criticized the "harmful" sketch for capitalizing on the

³⁷³ HAA 170/1/121 (July 12,1961): 42

shortcomings of the Ahnidzor sovkhos in order to make a case for restoring private property.³⁷⁴ Attentive readers would not have missed the fact that the journal's head editor was now listed as Stepan Kurtikyan instead of Vazgen Mnatsakanyan. An article appearing in the July 21 edition of *Grakan tert* on July 21 summarized the meeting of the writers' Party organization.³⁷⁵ These two articles publicly shamed Matevosyan and the wider literary community.

The Central Committee's criticism of the literary community over their handling of "Ahnidzor" brought the generational divides in the Writers' Union to the surface, stressing their relationships to the breaking point. On July 17, a week after their discussion of the Central Committee's decision on "Ahnidzor," the writers' Party organization met to hear their annual report and elect new officials.³⁷⁶ This meeting reveals the divergence between an older, more conservative generation (represented most vocally by Gurgun Haykuni and Stepan Kurtikyan) and a group of World War II veterans (including Hrachya Kochar, Sero Khanzadyan, Hrachya Hovhannisyan, Hamo Sahyan, and Vazgen Mnatsakanyan), who sought a more moderate policy towards Matevosyan. Throughout the meeting, members of each faction sought to prove their ideological and literary superiority. The older generation sought to pin the "Ahnidzor" controversy on the younger generation, while the younger generation continually brought up the Central Committee's recent rebuke of a "bourgeois-nationalist" article by Aramayis Karapetyan, who was apparently aligned with the older generation's camp. The old Bolshevik Gurgun Haykuni accused Kochar, a World War II veteran, of hypocritically attacking Karapetyan while taking Matevosyan under his wing. Reading an excerpt from "Ahnidzor," he concluded that Matev-

³⁷⁴ "Mets mtk'eri u huyzeri grakanut'yan hamar," *Sovetakan grakanut'yun* 1961, no. 7 (July 1961): iv.

³⁷⁵ "Grakanut'yan bardzr gaghap'araynut'yan hamar," *Grakan t'ert'*, July 21, 1961.

³⁷⁶ In Armenian, *hashvetu-ětrakan zhoghov*, in Russian *otchetno-vybornoe sobranie*. HAA 170/1/121 (July 18, 1961): 47-69 (minutes) and 70-91 (report).

osyan couldn't possibly have written something so anti-Soviet alone, implying that someone had been whispering in Matevosyan's ear. Hrachya Hovhannisyan immediately accused Haykuni of ruining the lives of two of Armenia's great poets of the early twentieth century—Vahan Teryan and Eghishe Charents.³⁷⁷ Vagharshak Norents stated that Haykuni's speech only hurt his own authority, to which Haykuni responded that he was happy to lose authority with someone like Norents.³⁷⁸ In his speech, Hovhannisyan lamented, "It's not good when two generations are pitted against each other: the participants in the October Revolution and our generation, when there is still shrapnel in our bodies from the bombs of the Patriotic War."³⁷⁹ While not denying the accomplishments of older generation, this statement also asserted that the veterans had moral authority due to their participation in the war. Hamo Sahyan, also a World War II veteran, complaining that the literary atmosphere was being poisoned by talentless people (by which he clearly meant Haykuni). Khanzadyan concluded the meeting by announcing that he did not respect Haykuni, "even if he has been a Party member since before the birth of Christ."³⁸⁰

When it became clear that Matevosyan's critique of Soviet policies in the village had overstepped the boundaries of the modest literary Thaw allowed by Armenian Party leadership, it was the World War II veterans who sought to shield him, at least partially, from the ire of the Party and the older generation of writers. This group of writers still affirmed the rightness of the collective farm system, but they were at least willing to entertain the criticisms of that system

³⁷⁷ As Charents was murdered by the Armenian NKVD in 1937, this was a very serious accusation indeed.

³⁷⁸ In terms of age, Norents was between the Revolutionary generation and the World War II generation. He, like Haykuni, was repressed in 1937 and spent the duration of the war in the Gulag. Although they shared this experience, they fell into different political camps. In 1962, Norents would denounce Haykuni to the secretariat of the Central Committee as a person who was still on the side of the cult of personality. Other names included in the letter to the secretariat were Aramays Karapetyan, V. Voskerchyan, and Tsolak Shoghents. See HAA 170/1/136 (December 10, 1962).

³⁷⁹ HAA 170/1/121 (July 18, 1961): 65.

³⁸⁰ HAA 170/1/121 (July 18, 1961): 68.

that were grounded in Matevosyan's experiences growing up in the postwar village. Their actions reflect a civic assertiveness among Soviet World War II veterans that has been identified in scholarship on the postwar period by Amir Weiner and Mark Edele.³⁸¹ After the July 17 meeting, however, it seemed like the veterans' hopes for a more open and self-critical society were unlikely to be realized. The political authorities were on their opponents' side. The prevailing political winds seemed to shift, however, after the Twenty-Second Party Congress was held in October. Khrushchev's reiteration of his condemnation Stalin's "cult of personality" at the Twenty-Second Party Congress on October 17-31, 1961, gave new energy to his de-Stalinization campaign.³⁸² The Congress emboldened the standard-bearers of "truth" and "sincerity" in literature. The Twenty-Second Party Congress empowered some writers in the Armenian SSR to criticize the political authorities' foot-dragging on de-Stalinization and the Thaw in Armenia.

At a meeting on December 6, 1961, the Party cell of the Union of Writers gathered to hear a report by Union head Eduard Topchyan on the results of the Twenty-Second Party Congress.³⁸³ Discussion started with the Armenian prose writer and translator Anahit Sahinyan.³⁸⁴ She began her speech by alluding to Tvardovskii's speech at the Twenty-Second Party Congress, in which he called on writers to be the closest helpers of the Party. As Sahinyan explained, for Tvardovskii, this did not mean simply putting a literary sheen on ideas taken from Party documents or front-page editorials in *Pravda*. Rather, it meant reporting one's own observations and

³⁸¹ See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2002); Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941-1991* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁸² Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: The Stalinist Past as Soviet Culture, 1953-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 107-110.

³⁸³ HAA 170/1/123 (December 6, 1961): 1-128.

³⁸⁴ HAA 170/1/123 (December 6, 1961): 1-13.

using one's judgment (based on Party principles, of course) to draw attention to new and important issues that still have not received proper attention. According to Sahinyan, this was exactly what Matevosyan was doing in "Ahnidzor." As she saw it, even if Matevosyan presented incorrect policy prescriptions, he was still performing a worthy service by drawing attention to the weak management of his local *sovkhoz*. She blasted the Armenian Central Committee's management of culture. "What good came from [condemning the sketch]," she asked, "other than the fact that more people read Matevosyan's sketch and the Glavlit comrades [i.e. the censors] once again took out their magnifying glasses to search for swastikas in Marx's beard?"³⁸⁵ She found it even more shameful that Matevosyan was called to the "corresponding organs" to write an explanation of who dictated the sketch to him. So Matevosyan committed the "unforgivable sin" of arguing that peasants should be able to keep more sheep. Let the press and Soviet agronomists demonstrate that this will not get the Ahnidzor villagers out of their bad situation. Is there really a need for a Central Committee decision, she asked, especially one with this tone?

Sahinyan then turned her focus to the management of culture in the republic more generally, singling out Topchyan, the head of the Union of Writers, and Baghdasaryan, the secretary of ideology. She stated that she rated Topchyan's character highly, but she lamented Topchyan's tendency to throw up his hands and say, "It's the Central Committee secretary's decision, what can we do?" There is a lot you can do, she chided him, if you are willing to take a more difficult path instead of keeping silent and nodding your head in the presence of the leadership. She gave Baghdasaryan credit for his love of literature and writers but complained that he rarely took their opinions into consideration. Concluding her speech, she quoted the great Stalin-era Armenian

³⁸⁵ HAA 170/1/123 (December 6, 1961): 9. Note the similarity of Sahinyan's description here to Anatoly Pinsky's discussion of the "empirical imperative" as an aspect of Soviet subjectivity during this period. Anatoly Pinsky, "The Individual after Stalin: Fedor Abramov, Russian Intellectuals, and the Revitalization of Soviet Socialism, 1953-1962" (Columbia University, 2011).

writer Derenik Demirchyan: “Our mistakes come from the fear of making mistakes.” She implored the comrades on the Central Committee to help writers, and especially Comrade Topchyan, to overcome their fear. The Twenty-Second Party Congress clearly encouraged writers in Armenia to push for a greater commitment to the Thaw from republican leaders.

While later speakers more or less avoided the issue of “Ahnidzor,” they all expressed similar concern about the continuing legacy of Stalin-era mentalities in Soviet Armenia. Although most of the speakers at the meeting were from the generation that fought in World War II, it also featured dramatic speeches from two older victims of Stalinist terror, Vahram Alazani and the aforementioned Vagharshak Norents, on their experiences in 1937. The Stalin Prize-winning poet Silva Kaputikyan, who would become one of the leading voices in the literary community on political issues, expressed dismay at the slow pace of de-Stalinization in Armenia. She complained that, although she could read articles on 1937 and the cult of personality in central publications like *Izvestiia* and *Literaturnaia gazeta*, their local Armenian publishers and editorial boards were still very “pressed” (*mamlats*). She called on Baghdasaryan, Topchyan, and Armenian writers generally to “wake up” (*st’apvel*).³⁸⁶ By treating valid criticism of Soviet shortcomings as the ultimate service to the Party, the pro-Thaw writers at the meeting effectively sought to break up the alliance between the Armenian Party leadership and the more “orthodox” writers in the Writers’ Union.

Despite the reaffirmation of the Thaw at the Twenty-Second Party Congress, Matevosyan himself nevertheless remained in a personally precarious situation. After the Armenian Central Committee’s very public rebuke of “Ahnidzor,” he was expelled from the pedagogical institute and lost one of his two printing jobs. He struggled to make ends meet on his small salary, but as

³⁸⁶ See Kaputikyan’s speech in HAA 170/1/123 (December 6, 1961): 42-58.

a father with a newborn son he did not feel he could leave Yerevan. Literary journals refused to publish his pieces. Finally, the newspaper *Hayastani fizkulturnik (The Armenian Physical Education Instructor)* agreed to take him on as a proofreader. “One day later, someone unexpectedly said, ‘Don’t you have something? Bring it and we’ll publish it,’” Matevosyan said in a 1999 interview, explaining how he managed to publish his next work, “Return” (Arm: “*Veradardz*”). He attributed the resurrection of his seemingly moribund literary career to the intervention of the Beirut Armenian diaspora community. According to Matevosyan, the members of the diaspora-based Dashnaktsutyun party in Beirut heard about his persecution and came to his defense. The American broadcaster Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) also got involved, accusing the Armenian authorities of attacking the youth as if it were 1937. After harsh criticism from the Beirut Armenians and RFE/RL, the authorities began to “atone for their sins,” in Matevosyan’s telling. They published two inoffensive stories by Matevosyan in order to show the diaspora that he was still alive and active in the literary world. They allowed Matevosyan to get back on his feet and get a job at *Grakan tert*.³⁸⁷ The episode came at a time of rapprochement between Soviet Armenia and the diaspora, and illustrates the moderating effect that the Armenian diaspora could have on Soviet Armenian authorities.³⁸⁸ If Soviet Armenia was to be presented to the diaspora as the true Armenian homeland, then its leaders had to fight the perception that they persecuted Armenian writers.

While Matevosyan was permitted to make a living as a writer and printer after the intervention of the Beirut Dashnaktsutyun, he had permanently alienated the republican political authorities. In 1962, Matevosyan wrote what would become his most famous and enduring novella,

³⁸⁷ Hrant Mat’evosyan, interview with Hovik Zardumyan, “Zruyts’ner Hrant Mat’evosyani het,” in Mat’evosyan, *Es es em*, 499-500, http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/zruicner_hrant_matevosyani_het.

We of the Mountains (Arm: *Menk' enk', mer sarerë*, Rus: *My i nashi gory*). The novella developed the same theme as “Ahnidzor,” albeit in a more subtle way. This time, Matevosyan described a group of four shepherds who are put on trial for theft after making *khovovats* (Armenian barbecue) out of some sheep from a neighboring village that wandered into their campsite. The author’s sympathies were clearly on the side of the peasants whose lives were very nearly destroyed for the seemingly minor sin of making barbecue. Suren Aghababyan, the same critic who had published a positive review of “Ahnidzor” in May of 1961, attempted to help Matevosyan get his novella published at a meeting of the *Druzhba narodov* editorial board on December 1, 1964. He warned that there could be problems because of the Armenian Central Committee’s reaction to “Ahnidzor;” still, he hoped that the editorial board might find something interesting in the novella and the author’s work. *Druzhba narodov's* editor Vasilii Smirnov responded that the Union of Writers had decided that the journal could only publish works in Russian after the work has appeared in the native language press of the republic and has been evaluated by the republican literary community.³⁸⁹ Smirnov may well have been remembering the censure the journal received from Moldovan authorities for publishing *Casa mare* by Ion Druță a few years earlier. Matevosyan’s problems with the Armenian political authorities blocked him from publishing in an all-Union literary journal.

Ultimately, Matevosyan’s friends from the generation of World War II veterans that preceded his—including Suren Aghababyan, Levon Hakhverdyan, and Hamo Sahyan—encouraged him to go to Moscow in order to escape the environment in Yerevan, where political and literary

³⁸⁸ For a discussion of diaspora politics in relation to Soviet Armenia during this period, see Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat*, 227-8.

³⁸⁹ RGALI 1565/3/39 (December 1, 1964): 37-39.

authorities remained hostile to him.³⁹⁰ In 1965, Matevosyan secured a spot in the Higher Screenwriting Courses in Moscow. Much like the Higher Literary Courses, the Higher Screenwriting Courses brought together people from across the Soviet Union, allowing Matevosyan to meet up-and-coming writers and filmmakers. Relocating to Moscow was a difficult experience for Matevosyan in many ways—he never truly adjusted to living in Moscow—but it also helped him make connections in the capital city.³⁹¹ One of his dorm-mates, the Leningrad prose writer Andrei Bitov, became a lifelong friend.³⁹² In 1967, he wrote about getting to know Matevosyan during the Courses:

As students, we had all come to Moscow from various parts of the country, living side by side in the dormitory of the Literary Institute on Rustaveli Street for two long years. Being transplanted from our native soil had a very detrimental effect on us. On the one hand, we were a bit like conquerors, while, on the other, we were still provincials who soon discovered that we could not take the capital in our stride.

I would say that Hrant Matevosyan felt this separation from home and family most keenly. He actually resembled a wilted plant that was not doing well in new soil. His eyes, which were naturally mournful, gazed sadly on Rustaveli Street. He was apparently even afraid to think of his children, who had remained behind in Yerevan. And still, he was the only one of us who did not lose his identity. Perhaps it was his peasant's conscience that bothered him for drawing a liberal stipend and living in such comfort in the capital. To somehow snuff out his homesickness he even cut down on his sleep in order to write, write and write. His only pastime was brewing coffee.³⁹³

³⁹⁰ Davit' Mat'evosyan, interview with the author, April 28, 2017. Many thanks to Davit Matevosyan and the Hrant Matevosyan Foundation for their help with my project.

³⁹¹ Elena Movchan, interview with the author, June 1, 2017. Movchan worked at *Druzhba narodov* for three decades and was a personal friend of the Matevosyan family.

³⁹² Bitov's work *Lessons of Armenia* [Rus: *Uroki Armenii*] is based on a trip to visit the Matevosyan family in Armenia. Andrei Bitov, "Uroki Armenii," *Druzhba Narodov*, no. 9 (1969). For an English-language translation, see Andrei Bitov, "Lessons of Armenia," in *A Captive of the Caucasus: Journeys in Armenia and Georgia* (London: Harvill, 1993), 11–147.

³⁹³ Matevosyan's coffee-making skills were famous. Andrei Bitov, "Pastoral', XX vek," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 28, 1967. Translation from Andrei Bitov, "A Twentieth-Century Pastoral," in *The Orange Herd* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 7.

While Matevosyan may not have liked living in Moscow, his time there helped him get published in both Russian and his native language. By 1965, Smirnov had been replaced at *Druzhba narodov* by the more forward-thinking Sergei Baruzdin. Elena Movchan, a longtime *Druzhba narodov* staff member, recalled the process by which *Druzhba narodov* helped restart Matevosyan's career after "Ahnidzor":

By that time, in Russian literature there had already appeared no less pointed works about the village by F. Abramov, V. Astaf'ev, and V. Belov. But that was Russia, she's allowed to do something like that, but in the periphery—no! And then the young translator Anahit Baiandur, recently graduated from the Gorky Literary Institute, translated a few stories by Matevosyan and gave them to the Moscow journal *Druzhba narodov*. They printed them, and they were immediately noticed by both writers and critics. And after that the prose of Hrant Matevosyan began to come out in his native language.³⁹⁴

As Movchan makes clear, Matevosyan's works resonated with a Russian-speaking audience in part because they fit well with the Village Prose movement in Russian literature, which was gathering steam in the mid-1960s (see Chapter 3).

In June of 1965, *Literaturnaia Armeniia*, a Russian-language journal published in Yerevan, published the first part of *We of the Mountains* in Russian. It was a minor coup for Matevosyan, but ultimately unsatisfying for a writer who saw himself as an Armenian writer first and foremost. Having a novella in Russian nevertheless helped Matevosyan begin to establish a reputation with the Moscow literary establishment. Moscow-based readers didn't know about his reputation in Armenia as a literary troublemaker—or didn't care. One of Matevosyan's new fans was *Druzhba narodov*'s literary critic and editor Leonid Terakopian. During a trip to Yerevan, he picked up a copy of *Literaturnaia Armeniia*. He read *We of the Mountains* on the plane home to Moscow and was struck by "the volcanic energy of the text." Upon his return to the offices of

³⁹⁴ Elena Movchan, "V nevyinosimo prekrasnom mire Grant Matevosyan," *Inye berega*, no. 3 (March 2007).

Druzhba narodov in Moscow, Terakopian insisted that his colleagues read it immediately.³⁹⁵ As the text had already been printed in Russian, however, *Druzhba narodov* could not republish it. Nevertheless, Matevosyan was solidifying his reputation at an important journal for non-Russian writers.

Over the next two years, a small campaign in support of *We of the Mountains* began in the Moscow-based press. The Russian playwright and screenwriter Mikhail Roshchin published a reaction to the novella in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* in January of 1966. A review by G. Trefilova appeared in the pages of *Novyi mir* two months later. Suren Aghababyan gave *We of the Mountains* a favorable review in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the main press organ of the Soviet Union of Writers. In the pages of a publication that was read by literary figures around the country, he remarked, "It's a shame that the publisher *Hayastan* to this day still has 'not made way' for this work, postponing its publication." Andrei Bitov also wrote an article about *We of the Mountains* for *Literaturnaia gazeta* in January of 1967. In his review, Bitov wrote that Matevosyan's work reminded him of Russian Village Prose writer Vasilii Belov's recent story *An Ordinary Thing* (*Privychnoe delo*).³⁹⁶ According to Davit Matevosyan, the Armenian literary gatekeepers were finally pressured into publishing *We of the Mountains* in Armenian when the publishing house of the Komsomol (Communist Youth League), *Moldaia gvardiia* (*Young Guard*), announced its intention to publish the novella in Russian.³⁹⁷ The publication of the novella by the Komsomol's own publishing house undermined the idea that Matevosyan was politically untouchable. It prob-

³⁹⁵ Leonid Terakopian, "Doroga k Grantu," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 3 (March 2007): 215.

³⁹⁶ M. Roshchin, "Skazanie sela Antaramech," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, January 15, 1966; G. Trefilova, "Vmesto idillii," *Novyi Mir* 1966, no. 3 (March 1966): 251–54; Suren Agababian, "Vzor obratit' k zhizni," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 22, 1966; Bitov, "Pastoral', XX vek." See also discussion in V. A. Grigoryan, *Hrant Mat'evosyan* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH GA Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1989), 19.

³⁹⁷ Grant Matevosian, *My i nashi gory: povesti*, Molodye pisateli (Moskva: Moldaia Gvardiia, 1967). The publisher *Moldaia gvardiia* was also associated with Russian Village Prose literature. See Chapter 3.

ably did not hurt that the first secretary of the Armenian Central Committee, Zarobyan, had been replaced by Anton Kochinyan in 1966, allowing Matevosyan to make a fresh start with the local authorities.³⁹⁸ Matevosyan's novella was finally published in Armenian in the 1967 collection *August* (Arm: *Ogostos*, Rus: *Avgust*).³⁹⁹ That year, the short stories from *August* that were published in Russian translation in *Druzhba narodov* won the journal's annual prize. Matevosyan had definitely arrived.

At the end of his two years in Moscow, Matevosyan returned to Armenia with the considerable honor of having been published in a central journal and publishing house—not to mention the accompanying honorariums. Like Druță and Aitmatov, Matevosyan had initially struggled to gain a foothold in the republican literary world. At first, he managed to win over many of his fellow writers to his critical, village-based perspective, which resonated with the Thaw-era values of “truthfulness” and “sincerity.” When his criticism of the treatment of Armenian villagers by authorities was rejected as politically toxic by political elites in Yerevan, he still found support from the younger generation of Armenian writers who hoped to see a Thaw in Armenian literature. However, they were not the ones in control of the Armenian Writers' Union. Thus, Matevosyan had to make the trip to Moscow in order to seek out more sympathetic readers among the all-Union cultural elites. Ultimately, as in the case of Druță, Matevosyan's good reputation among the capitol city cultural elites mattered more than the disapproval of republican political authorities. His depictions of Armenian villagers, which his readers connected with the growing Russian Village Prose literary movement, gained him recognition in the Moscow liter-

³⁹⁸ As Davit Matevosyan explained to me, Matevosyan developed a much better relationship with Kochinyan and the two were friendly.

³⁹⁹ Hrant Mat'evosyan, *Ōgostos* (Erevan: Hayastan Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1967). The novella is also available online on Matevosyan's official website. See Hrant Mat'evosyan, “Menk' enk' mer sarerë,” [Hrantmatevossian.org](http://hrantmatevossian.org), <http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/menq-enq-mer-sarery>.

ary world, which helped him get published in *Druzhba narodov*. Ultimately, Matevosyan was unique among the three writers in this chapter because he was able to gain enough support for his work among the republican political and cultural elites to settle permanently in his native republic.

Conclusion

The Thaw-era career paths that I have described here did not go unrecognized by observers at the time. At the plenum of the USSR Writers' Union in 1988, Sergei Baruzdin, editor of *Druzhba narodov* since 1965, commented on the paradoxical situation of many non-Russian writers in the Soviet Union.

Of course, the Russian and Russian-language reader has 5-10 names of writers who are, as they say, above the competition. Here too there is a definite paradox. I will mention three names, though I could name more—Chingiz Aitmatov, Hrant Matevosyan, and Ion Druță. They were valued first of all by the all-union reader, and not the local, republican reader. And also, not their local fellow writers.

I remember what a large number of attacks on Chingiz Aitmatov were relayed to Moscow in Khrushchev's day from many Kyrgyz writers. And Hrant Matevosyan was not recognized not only by the official powers of local significance, but also by many of his comrade writers. The same can be said of Ion Druță.⁴⁰⁰

The phenomenon that Baruzdin described in 1988 reveals a great deal about the dynamics of the Thaw. First, the cases of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia show that during the Thaw, the republican Writers' Unions and Central Committees were often hesitant to allow certain topics to be discussed, even if they were being actively debated in the pages of central publications. Upstart writers in the republics who wrote about the rural themes starting in the 1950s often encountered stiff opposition from the local Party authorities and the Stalin-era literary elites who con-

⁴⁰⁰ Sergei Baruzdin, qtd. in "From the 1988 Plenum of the USSR Writers' Union," *Soviet Studies in Literature* 25, no. 2 (April 1989): 91.

tinued to dominate the Writers' Unions. Second, Moscow was the epicenter of the Thaw in the Soviet Union, making it an attractive destination for young writers frustrated by more conservative policies at the republican level. As the cases of these three writers illustrate, the fact that cultural production was granted more freedom in Moscow only further cemented the significance of the Soviet capital for culture in the republics.⁴⁰¹ Third, central cultural institutions, including the Higher Literary Courses and the journal *Druzhba narodov*, helped spread the values of the Thaw to the periphery. They also introduced Moscow audiences to authors from the periphery whose works became an important part of the Soviet cultural landscape. Finally, the cases of Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan show the power of culture during the Thaw. Support from the Moscow-based cultural elite sometimes outweighed opposition from local Party officials. This cultural power, however, had limits: in the end, despite strong support from the center, both Druță and Aitmatov gave up on changing the literary establishments of their home republics and chose to resettle in Moscow, influencing opinion in their home republics from afar.

The careers of Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan show that discussion of rural themes as part of de-Stalinization and the Thaw was a pan-Soviet phenomenon. In the non-Russian republics, as well as in Moscow, writers sought to reframe the Soviet experience from the perspective of rural people. They rejected the urban bias of Stalinism by asserting the significance of the view from the village. Their views could easily have been snuffed out early in their careers. Instead, they made the trip to Moscow. Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan all used their time in Moscow to make connections among the metropolitan cultural elite, which proved receptive to their rural-based conceptions of the nation. Moscow-based elites that favored the nascent Rus-

⁴⁰¹ Historian Sergei Zhuk has made a somewhat similar observation about cultural dynamics in Ukraine in the 1960s and 1970s. See Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk, 1960-1985* (Washington, D.C: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

sian Village Prose movement found much to like in the works of these non-Russian writers as well. The editorial boards of the Moscow-based journals *Novyi mir* and *Druzhba narodov* and the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia* thus promoted works on the village from the non-Russian republics, reinforcing Druță's, Aitmatov's, and Matevosyan's commitment to writing on rural themes. With the support of Moscow-based cultural elites, Druță, Aitmatov, and Matevosyan each became the most significant prose writer of their generation in their home republics, amplifying their rural-based conceptions of national identity.

Chapter 3:

The Rise of the Rural Periphery in Russian Literature in the 1960s

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the circulation of people and ideas between the non-Russian republics on the Soviet periphery and Moscow was a key feature of Soviet culture in the era of de-Stalinization and the Thaw. Similar dynamics were also at play in Russian literature, where rural-born writers from the Russian regions played an increasingly important role in literary debates in the Soviet capital in the 1960s. The Russian word *zemliak* has no obvious analogue in English. Sometimes translated as "fellow countryman," it actually refers to a person with whom one shares a common region of origin. That the word is still commonly in use today testifies to the continuing importance of regional ties in the Soviet Union during a century when urbanization and various forms of forced migration uprooted millions from their regions of origin. This chapter will examine a group of *zemliaki* from the literary backwater of Vologda who played a critical role in shaping Russian Village Prose, which, in the words of literary scholar Kathleen Parthé, was "the most aesthetically coherent and ideologically important body of published literature to appear in the Soviet Union between the death of Stalin and Gorbachev's ascendancy."⁴⁰² This chapter will explore how a group of writers from the Russian periphery came to play such an important role in Soviet literature in the 1960s.

The pages that follow focus on the life of Sergei Vikulov, an aspiring rural poet in the Vologda region (*oblast'*) who rose to become the chief editor of the leading Moscow literary journal *Nash sovremennik*. Vikulov, a war veteran of modest literary talent, managed to turn a chance connection with a famous Soviet poet from the Vologda region into a patronage relationship that

⁴⁰² Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), ix-x.

became the basis of an influential literary network based in Vologda. The two years that Vikulov spent at the Higher Literary Courses in Moscow helped him to forge connections with other Russian writers from the rural periphery who became the core of his Vologda-based network of Village Prose writers. As Soviet literary authorities sought to counterbalance the more radical pro-Thaw voices in the Moscow branch of the Soviet Writers' Union with more "reliable" writers from the regions (see Chapter 1), Vikulov climbed his way up the literary ladder. In 1968, he became editor-in-chief of the Moscow-based journal *Nash sovremennik*, which he transformed into, in his words, "a home for writers from the periphery." With Vikulov at the helm, *Nash sovremennik* became the unofficial publication for Vologda writers in Moscow, giving the once-obscure provincial city a new prominence in the Soviet literary world. In the 1970s and 1980s, *Nash sovremennik* became the most prominent journal associated with Russian Village Prose and the burgeoning Russian nationalist movement among Soviet intellectuals in large part thanks to Vikulov's editorial vision. Though the life and career of Sergei Vikulov and his Vologda network, this chapter explores three key themes: the association of the rural periphery with Russian national identity, the injection of an anti-Stalinist narrative of the Russian village into conservative discourse, and the role of networks in Soviet cultural politics.

This chapter analyzes the political and social factors that contributed to the identification of Russianness with the rural periphery in Soviet Russian literature from the 1960s onward. In discussions of Russian national identity, the relationship between the center—either St. Petersburg or Moscow, depending on the time period—and the Russian periphery is an ever-present issue.⁴⁰³ Recently, one scholar has proposed a tripartite "topography" of post-Soviet Russian na-

⁴⁰³ The opposition of St. Petersburg/Moscow and the countryside is present in many nineteenth-century Russian classics, such as Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The relationship between capital and periphery was an important part of discourse on Siberian identity from the nineteenth century onward, see David Rainbow, "Siberian Patriots: Participatory Autocracy and the Cohesion of the Russian Imperial

tionalism: “the provinces—the capital—the West.”⁴⁰⁴ In this discussion of the complicated relationship between Moscow and “the provinces” in Russian culture, however, the Soviet period receives only a brief mention. Rural-born Russian writers from the periphery came to play an increasingly important role in Russian literature as the leadership of the RSFSR Writers’ Union sought to counterbalance the rebellious “liberal” writers of Moscow and Leningrad with supposedly more loyal writers from the periphery starting in the 1950s (see Chapter 1). In addition to the sense of cultural inferiority that recent migrants from the countryside felt relative to their urban peers, rural writers like Sergei Vikulov who were based in peripheral cities had ample reasons to resent the capital city writers, who had privileged access to scarce resources due to the extreme centralization of cultural institutions in Moscow. In the 1960s, Russian writers from the rural periphery, newly empowered by the political and literary establishment, increasingly sought to undermine the authority of Moscow- and Leningrad-based writers by associating Russian-ness with the periphery. From 1965 onward, they benefitted from what Yitzhak Brudny has dubbed a “politics of inclusion” towards Village Prose writers in particular and Russian nationalists in general during the Brezhnev era.⁴⁰⁵ After being appointed head editor of the journal *Nash sovremennik* in 1968, Vikulov promoted Russian Village Prose writers like Valentin Rasputin whose peasant characters embodied Russian national identity.

This chapter also analyzes the role that Vikulov and his Vologda network played in injecting an anti-Stalinist perspective on the village into conservative discourse over the course of the

State, 1958-1920” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013); Margaret Winchell and Gerald Mikkelson, “Translators’ Introduction: Valentin Rasputin Since The Fire,” in *Siberia, Siberia* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 14-16.

⁴⁰⁴ Lyudmila Parts, “Topography of Post-Soviet Nationalism: The Provinces—the Capital—the West,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 508–28.

⁴⁰⁵ See Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), especially Chapter 3.

1960s. As several scholars have pointed out, although Russian Village Prose had its roots in the anti-Stalinist, pro-reform journal *Novyi mir* in the 1950s, in the 1960s a “conservative” strand began to emerge that was aligned with more reactionary forces.⁴⁰⁶ Early in his career, Sergei Vikulov was deeply influenced by the views of his patron Aleksandr Yashin, who embraced an anti-Stalinist stance on Soviet policy towards the village during the Thaw. Yet Vikulov was eventually recruited into the conservative, anti-reform camp through his association with institutions such as the RSFSR Writers’ Union and the nationalist network around the editor Anatolii Nikonov at *Molodaia gvardiia*. This chapter argues that Vikulov and his Vologda network of Village Prose writers helped to introduce an anti-Stalinist perspective on the village into conservative discourse on rural life in the 1960s. Brezhnev’s “politics of inclusion” towards Russian nationalists allowed this critical perspective on the impact of Soviet rule on the village to survive even as other anti-Stalinist discourses disappeared from Soviet culture. Vikulov’s Vologda network thus deeply impacted the conservative institutions and intellectual networks that it came into contact with.

Finally, this chapter advances our understanding of Soviet cultural politics, especially the role of networks and their interactions with Soviet institutions. Political scientists have long understood the importance of political networks in Party institutions.⁴⁰⁷ In the cultural sphere, Sheila Fitzpatrick was the first to draw our attention to the significance of relationships between po-

⁴⁰⁶ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*; Evgenii Dobrenko, “The Lessons of Oktiabr’,” *Russian Studies in Literature* 34, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 50; V. M. Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 247-249.

⁴⁰⁷ Yoram Gorlizki, “Scandal in Riazan: Networks of Trust and the Social Dynamics of Deception,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 14, no. 2 (2013): 243–278; Yoram Gorlizki, “Too Much Trust: Regional Party Leaders and Local Political Networks under Brezhnev,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 676–700; Nikolai Mitrokhin, “The Rise of Political Clans in the Era of Nikita Khrushchev: The First Phase, 1953-1959,” in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, ed. Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 26–40; John P. Willerton, *Patronage and Politics in the USSR*, Soviet and East European Studies; 82 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

litical patrons and their clients among the creative intelligentsia. Building on Fitzpatrick's work, Kirill Tomoff has argued for the importance of networks in Soviet culture. His statement that "the unofficial network constituted an endemic informal component of the complex system of administering the production and performance of music" in the Soviet Union could easily be applied to literature.⁴⁰⁸ This chapter analyzes the development of a powerful literary network from its origins in a patron-client relationship between Sergei Vikulov and leading Soviet poet Aleksandr Yashin to its successful takeover of a major Moscow institution. As was the case for many Soviet political networks, ties based on region of origin were key for the formation of the Vologda literary network. As we will see, shared class origins—in this case, peasant origins—played an important role in the organization of the network as well. This chapter demonstrates that Soviet cultural networks sought institutional bases that provided them access to state resources to distribute to their associates, as well as press organs that allowed them to broadcast their views to the broader public. Access to state resources was the key reason why the Vologda network pushed for the establishment of a branch of the Writers' Union in Vologda for nearly a decade before they finally achieved their goal in 1961. In 1968, with the appointment of Sergei Vikulov as head editor of *Nash sovremennik*, the Vologda network managed to capture an even better institutional base—a Moscow literary journal. From his perch as head editor of *Nash sovremennik*, Vikulov was able to secure a steady stream of income for his *zemliaki* while broadcasting his network's rural-focused conception of Russian national identity to the Soviet public at large. This case study of cultural politics thus helps to explain how major changes took place in the construction of Russian national identity in the 1960s.

⁴⁰⁸ Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), 269.

Building the Vologda Network:
Sergei Vikulov's Patronage Relationship with Aleksandr Yashin
1950-1957

The Vologda network emerged from the germ of the decade-long patronage relationship between Sergei Vikulov and Aleksandr Yashin. Born in a village in the Vologda region in 1913, Yashin had moved to Moscow in 1935, graduated from the Gorky Literary Institute, and served on the front as a military correspondent during the war. Yashin found success with poetry that idealized life on the postwar collective farm, and he would go on to win a Stalin Prize in 1950 for *Alëna Fomina*, his 1949 poem about a female collective farm organizer. When he first met Yashin in 1948, Vikulov's only connection to him was that they both came from villages in the Vologda region. This regional tie was enough to form the basis of a patronage relationship that gave a major boost to Vikulov's budding career as a poet. This relationship was necessary because writers living outside the capital city lacked access to the Moscow-based institutions that provided the basic resources necessary to sustain a literary career. As their relationship developed, the pair sought the establishment of the branch of the Writers' Union in Vologda in order to bring resources closer to writers in Vologda. As time went on, Yashin seems to have had an influence on his young protégé's views, introducing Vikulov to the critiques of the legacy of Stalinism in Soviet agriculture that were attracting attention in pro-Thaw publications like *Novyi mir* and *Literaturnaia Moskva*.

There was little in Sergei Vikulov's early life to indicate that he would one day become one of the most powerful literary editors in the country. Vikulov was born on June 26, 1922, in the village of Emel'ianovskaia in the Russian North, in what is today Vologda *oblast'*.⁴⁰⁹ His parents, both peasants, joined the local collective farm in 1930. In 1933, Vikulov's father lever-

aged his training he had received as a paramedic (*fel'dsher*) in the tsarist army into a position at a first-aid station (*medpunkt*) in the larger neighboring village of Megra. His mother transferred to a collective farm near Megra, where she worked as a pig-tender (*svinarka*). As a fourth-grader in Megra, Vikulov made the first of what would be many literary connections: he met the fifth-grader Sergei Orlov, who in the 1940s would begin a successful career in poetry. Vikulov finished school at the Megrinskii School of Peasant Youth (*Shkola krest'ianskoi molodezhi*) in 1937 and entered the teacher training college (*peduchilishche*) in the nearby town of Belozersk, where again he studied alongside Orlov, who at that time was already publishing his poems in the local Belozersk newspaper. Later on, Orlov would be a key connection for Vikulov in the Leningrad literary world.

The war put any budding literary aspirations on hold. In 1940, Vikulov was sent to Sevastopol' for anti-aircraft training; his training school was evacuated from Crimea in August 1941 after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Vikulov participated in the defense of Moscow in December of 1941. Like many of his fellow Red Army soldiers, he joined the Party, becoming a member in August 1942 while stationed near Stalingrad.⁴¹⁰ Demobilized in July of 1946, Vikulov returned to his village and discovered to his horror that only five of his classmates had survived the war. Like many veterans, Vikulov returned to his native village only to leave after witnessing the extent of the devastating impact of the war on rural areas.⁴¹¹ Less than a month after returning home, Vikulov decided to apply to the pedagogical institute in Vologda. Given the policy of

⁴⁰⁹ The biographical information in this paragraph is drawn from Vikulov, "Avtobiografiia," *Sovetskie pisateli*, 119-123.

⁴¹⁰ On the growth of the Party during the war, see Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City That Defeated the Third Reich*, trans. Christopher Tauchen and Dominic Bonfiglio (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 34.

⁴¹¹ Mark Edele argues that this trajectory was typical for demobilized peasant soldiers, and indeed, Vikulov describes how he and fellow veterans left their village, "each in his own direction," in his autobiographical writings.

preferential admission for veterans, he easily passed his exams. Vikulov was part of a broader wave of peasants-turned-soldiers who entered higher education institutions after the war and would go on to make a major impact on the Soviet literary world.⁴¹²

Despite the difficult postwar conditions at the Vologda pedagogical institute, Vikulov made connections there that would sustain his future literary career. It was at the pedagogical institute that Vikulov met Valerii Dement'ev, a fellow veteran from a village in Vologda *oblast'*. Dement'ev would go on to a successful career as a literary critic, but in 1946 he, like Vikulov, was an aspiring poet. The two would-be poets received their first literary advice from Orlov, who by that time had moved to Leningrad, published a collection, and begun to make a name for himself. In 1948, the Vologda pedagogical institute received a visit from one of the region's most famous sons: the poet Aleksandr Yashin. Yashin's literary success story was an inspiration to would-be writers like Vikulov and Dement'ev. After he had delivered a speech at the pedagogical institute, Yashin asked the assembled students if there were any poets amongst them. The other students called out Vikulov's and Dement'ev's names. After hearing them recite a few poems, Yashin offered Vikulov some encouraging words. "Just one phrase! But how much it meant to me!" Vikulov later wrote.⁴¹³ This chance connection with Yashin set Vikulov on a trajectory that would eventually land him at the head of the Moscow literary journal *Nash sovremennik*.

Vikulov connected with Yashin again when Yashin visited Vologda in the fall of 1950 to attend a meeting of young writers sponsored by the Vologda *oblast'* Department of Agitation and

See Mark Edele, "Veterans and the Village: The Impact of Red Army Demobilization on Soviet Urbanization, 1945–1955," *Russian History* 36, no. 2 (2009).

⁴¹² Mitrokhin discusses the influx of former *frontoviki* in the Gorky Literary Institute in the late 1940s. Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 154-156.

⁴¹³ Vikulov, "Avtobiografiia," 123-124.

Propaganda.⁴¹⁴ By this time, Vikulov had started to work in the literary world. He had transferred to the correspondence division of the pedagogical institute and begun to work at the recently-founded Vologda *oblast'* publisher while writing poetry on the side. With editorial assistance from Orlov, Vikulov had begun to publish collections of his poetry in Vologda. Vikulov found his literary efforts thwarted, however, when he was called up to the military to work as the responsible secretary of a military newspaper in Vologda.⁴¹⁵ At the meeting, Vikulov apparently spoke with Yashin about his need to be relieved of the military obligations that were interfering with his budding literary career. After the meeting of young writers in Vologda, Vikulov and Yashin began an epistolary relationship that would prove decisive for Vikulov's future career.⁴¹⁶

Vikulov wrote to Yashin in the hopes that Yashin could use his institutional connections with the Soviet Writers' Union to help Vikulov get out of the burdensome military service that had been foisted upon him. The Writers' Union was one of the main sources of support for Soviet writers. Unfortunately for Vikulov, however, there was no official branch of the Writers' Union in postwar Vologda. This was hardly surprising because, as Vikulov later wrote, at the time the city could not boast of even a single professional writer.⁴¹⁷ Vikulov thus lacked access a bureaucracy that could help a young writer like him. In January of 1951, Yashin asked Aleksandr Fadeev, the head of the Soviet Writers' Union, to intervene with the military on Vikulov's behalf.

⁴¹⁴ Yashin's attendance at the Second Vologda Oblast' Meeting of Young Writers meeting is referenced in a letter he sent to USSR Union of Writers head Aleksandr Fadeev. Aleksandr Yashin to Aleksandr Fadeev, in OR RGB 647/35/10 (January 1951): 1.

⁴¹⁵ V. A. Oboturov, *Sergei Vikulov: stranitsy zhizni, stranitsy tvorchestva* (Moskva: Sovremennik, 1983), 20-21. Sergei V. Vikulov, "Poet i vlast' (o tvorchestve Aleksandra Iashina)," in *Na russkom napravlenii: zapiski glavnogo redaktora "Nashego sovremennika": (1970-1980 gody)* (Moskva: Izdat.-Poligraficheskii Tsentr FGUP "Medservis" Minzdrava Rossii, 2002), 233.

⁴¹⁶ Vikulov references their conversation at the meeting. Sergei Vikulov to Aleksandr Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (December 21, 1950): 1.

⁴¹⁷ Vikulov, "Avtobiografiia," 124.

In his letter, Yashin told Fadeev that the talented young poet Vikulov was ready to facilitate the founding of a branch of the Writers' Union in Vologda. He asked that Vikulov be released from the reserves of the Soviet Army so that he could "completely devote himself to literary work and the gathering of literary forces in the North."⁴¹⁸ Yashin's attempt to pull bureaucratic strings for Vikulov apparently worked: Fadeev intervened on Vikulov's behalf with the army's political administration, and Vikulov was allowed to return to civilian work in 1951.⁴¹⁹

Later that year, Yashin also helped Vikulov get access to another source of Writers' Union patronage—a paid business trip (*kommandirovka*). Yashin had encouraged Vikulov to request a *kommandirovka* from the Writers' Union to observe the construction of the Volga-Don canal. Vikulov again asked Yashin to intervene on his behalf, writing frankly about the challenges facing him in Vologda: "Where there are *oblast'* branches of the SSP [Union of Soviet Writers], they can give out *kommandirovki* at home, on site. But me? No one will give me anything here."⁴²⁰ Vikulov understood well that physical proximity to state institutions made a world of difference when it came to accessing state resources. Yashin wrote to the Soviet Writers' Union secretariat in Moscow on Vikulov's behalf, stating that "a trip to the construction sites of communism must give him great creative material."⁴²¹ Sure enough, the Soviet Writers' Union granted Vikulov his

⁴¹⁸ Yashin to Fadeev, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (December 21, 1950): 1.

⁴¹⁹ Oboturov, *Sergei Vikulov*, 20-21; Vikulov, "Poet i vlast," 233. Here Fadeev acted as a classic "broker" as described by Sheila Fitzpatrick and Tomoff. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 182-202; Tomoff, *Creative Union*, 268-299.

⁴²⁰ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (June 10, 1951): 3.

⁴²¹ Yashin to the Secretariat of the Union of Soviet Writers, in OR RGB 647/13/25 (June 16, 1951): 1.

kommandirovka.⁴²² Yashin's ability to leverage his institutional connections in the Soviet Writers' Union ensured that Vikulov had the time and funding he needed to jump-start his literary career.

Realizing that he would always be at a disadvantage as long as Vologda lacked an official branch of the Writers' Union, Vikulov sought to mobilize his connections with Yashin in order to strengthen the literary community in Vologda and make the case that the region deserved its own branch. Vikulov sought Yashin's help to increase the paltry numbers of Writers' Union members in Vologda. Yashin had recommended Vikulov for membership in the Writers' Union and had also played a key role in pushing through Valerii Dement'ev's candidacy for membership into the Writers Union in 1949.⁴²³ In 1951, Vikulov asked Yashin to lobby on behalf of N. Ulovskii's candidacy for membership in the Writers' Union. Vikulov had obtained support for the creation of a Writers' Union branch from the Vologda regional authorities ("There's money!" he told Yashin), and the Writers' Union in Moscow was already considering it. But if Ulovskii's application were to be rejected, he worried, there could be no question of founding a new branch.⁴²⁴ Yashin also helped Vikulov in 1953 when it came time to transfer his candidacy into full membership in the Writers' Union. Vikulov's application had been accepted by the Leningrad branch on the basis of, among other things, a recommendation by his childhood friend Orlov, but when his materials were forwarded to the Moscow branch, he was rejected. Yashin advised Vikulov to "force" his acceptance into the Union of Writers and reached out to a contact in the Union of

⁴²² Later that year, Vikulov referenced his trip to the Volga-Don canal. Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 20, 1951): 7.

⁴²³ Viacheslav Ogryzko makes this assertion on the basis of Dement'ev's file in the fond of the USSR Union of Writers. V. V. Ogryzko, "Emu by partiinym sledovatelem byt': Valerii Dement'ev," in *Sozdateli literaturnykh reputatsii: russkie kritiki i literaturovedy XX veka sud'by i knigi* (Moskva: Literaturnaia Rossiia, 2017), 196; Vikulov, "Poet i vlast'," 232.

⁴²⁴ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (July 2, 1951): 5; OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 20, 1951): 7.

Writers, the Stalin Prize-winning author Vasiliĭ Azhaev, in support of Vikulov's candidacy.⁴²⁵ Ultimately, the Union of Writers accepted Vikulov as a full member. The important role that Yashin played in ensuring the acceptance of writers from Vologda into the Writers' Union shows the significance of personal ties for professional advancement in the literary world—professional ties that many writers on the periphery lacked.

In addition to trying to increase the number of Writers' Union members in Vologda, Yashin helped Vikulov build up a local literary organization that both hoped would eventually be transformed into the Vologda branch of the Writers' Union. As Vikulov later described it, the Vologda *oblast'* writers' organization was "voluntary, without any rights or resources, a circle of young and not-so-young writers." Vikulov headed up this organization and also acted as all-around local literary booster in Vologda. From his position at the Vologda *oblast'* publisher, Vikulov spearheaded the creation of an annual anthology (*al'manakh*) called *Literaturnaia Vologda (Literary Vologda)*, which featured the contributions of local writers.⁴²⁶ At Vikulov's prompting, Yashin provided poems for the collection in 1955.⁴²⁷ Vikulov chose to open the collection with one of Yashin's poems, which provided much-needed prestige for an otherwise obscure regional *al'manakh*. In 1955, Vikulov secured support for a meeting of young writers in Vologda through his connections in the Vologda *oblast'* committee (*obkom*) of the Communist Party.⁴²⁸ Vikulov convinced Yashin to attend, and then asked Yashin to use his connections with the Union of Writers to induce them to send seminar leaders from Moscow or Leningrad to the

⁴²⁵ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (October 30, 1953): 15.

⁴²⁶ Vikulov, "Avtobiografiia," 124-5.

⁴²⁷ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (April 2, 1955): 42; OR RGB 647/14/43 (May 15, 1955): 54.

⁴²⁸ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 22, 1955): 49-50.

meeting.⁴²⁹ In December of 1957, Vikulov obtained support from the *obkom* for Yashin to spend a year-long residency in Vologda to strengthen literary life in the region.⁴³⁰ Yashin's expertise, connections, and experience were key resources that Vikulov sought to tap in order to achieve their shared goal of founding an official branch of the Writers' Union in Vologda.

While Vikulov sought to strengthen literary life in the provinces, he also mobilized his connections with Yashin in order to break into the Moscow publishing world. Yashin encouraged his younger *protégé* to publish at the more prestigious Moscow journals and publishing houses, but provincial writers like Vikulov experienced significant barriers to entry. In 1951, Vikulov asked Yashin for advice during his first tentative attempts to publish in Moscow.⁴³¹ Vikulov confessed that he lacked connections at big journals except for the military journal *Sovetskii voïn* (*Soviet Soldier*); like many provincial writers, he had few contacts in the capital city literary institutions. A few years after the publication of Vikulov's second collection in Vologda in 1952, Yashin invited Vikulov to his dacha near Moscow to work intensively on the manuscript of a new collection of poems that Vikulov hoped to publish at the Moscow publishing house *Sovetskii pisatel'* (*Soviet Writer*).⁴³² Vikulov was in close contact with Yashin during the his campaign to publish the collection in Moscow, sometimes asking for feedback on the manuscript and other times simply strategizing.⁴³³ One of Vikulov's first steps was collecting positive reviews of his

⁴²⁹ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 29, 1955): 46-47; OR RGB 647/14/43 (October 17, 1955): 68.

⁴³⁰ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/44 (no date, likely December 1957): 21.

⁴³¹ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (July 2, 1951): 5; OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 20, 1951): 7.

⁴³² Vikulov, "Poet i vlast'," 233.

⁴³³ Vikulov also repeatedly solicited advice on his poems in his letters to Yashin in 1955. See Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (February 20, 1955): 38; OR RGB 647/14/43 (March 1, 1955): 40; OR RGB 647/14/43 (April 2, 1955): 42; OR RGB 647/14/43 (May 15, 1955): 54-64.

previous work that he could show to Moscow publishers.⁴³⁴ To this end, Vikulov solicited a review of his 1952 collection *New Shore (Novyi bereg)* from Yashin.⁴³⁵ Yashin complied, and his review appeared in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* in 1954.⁴³⁶ Vikulov had written to N. V. Lesiuchevskii at the publishing house *Sovetskii pisatel'* about including his new collection in the publication plan for 1955. Having received no response, in July of 1954 he asked Yashin to inquire on his behalf.⁴³⁷ In August he was still waiting for a response.⁴³⁸ Vikulov apparently continued to work on his manuscript in 1955, repeatedly asking Yashin for feedback on it and advice on how to convince *Sovetskii pisatel'* to publish it.⁴³⁹ Finally, in August of 1955, Vikulov received a telegram from Yashin with good news. "I feel, remember, and understand that in this—in so much!—I am indebted to your kindness and compassionate heart," Vikulov wrote.⁴⁴⁰ It is not clear from the letter exactly what Yashin did to secure this outcome, but what is evident is that the publication of Vikulov's collection *Across the Lake (Zaozer'e)* in Moscow in 1956 was in large part due to Vikulov's ability to draw on Yashin's literary expertise and connections.⁴⁴¹

Although we only have Vikulov's side of the Vikulov-Yashin correspondence, it is evident that Yashin occasionally got annoyed with Vikulov's constant requests for help.⁴⁴² This begs

⁴³⁴ Vikulov specifically discusses the strategy of collecting positive reviews of his work, including Yashin's. Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (August 17, 1954): 25.

⁴³⁵ Vikulov thanks Yashin for the review. Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (July 25, 1954): 27-28.

⁴³⁶ A. Iashin, "Novyi bereg," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, July 16, 1954.

⁴³⁷ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (July 25, 1954): 27-28.

⁴³⁸ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (August 17, 1954): 25.

⁴³⁹ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (January 9, 1955): 33-34; OR RGB 647/14/43 (February 20, 1955): 38; OR RGB 647/14/43 (April 2, 1955): 42.

⁴⁴⁰ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (August 16, 1955): 66.

⁴⁴¹ Sergei Vasil'evich Vikulov, *Zaozer'e: stikhi* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1956).

⁴⁴² See, for example, Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (November 9, 1954): 30.

the question: what did Yashin receive in return for his efforts to help an unknown Vologda poet? Vikulov helped Yashin retain his connection to his *zemliaki* and his native region, something that was clearly important to Yashin even though he had already found success on the all-Union level, having won a Stalin Prize in 1950. Vikulov used his position at the Vologda regional publisher to publish Yashin's works in Vologda. In May of 1955, Vikulov assured Yashin that his poem "To my *zemliaki* on New Year's" would open the almanac, thus reinforcing Yashin's claim to being a true Vologda writer.⁴⁴³ As we will see, maintaining a connection to Vologda was something that Yashin valued, occasionally to the detriment of his pocketbook and peace of mind. Vikulov was able to leverage Yashin's desire to stay connected to Vologda, but his efforts sometimes back-fired.

In September of 1955, Vikulov hatched a plan to pay Yashin back for everything that he had done for him by publishing a book of Yashin's poems at the Vologda publishing house at which he worked.⁴⁴⁴ This seemingly innocuous undertaking gradually turned into a nightmare for both Yashin and Vikulov. Vikulov's boss Vladimir Malkov tried to go back on the plan, claiming that the publisher could not afford the financial losses incurred by publishing a book by Yashin. Vikulov then turned to a political patron, the second secretary of the Vologda regional committee (*obkom*) of the Communist Party, Leonid Vlasenko.⁴⁴⁵ Malkov caved at first, but then continued to stall for several months.⁴⁴⁶ In March of 1956, Malkov rallied his own patron within the Communist Party apparatus, the new ideological secretary Stal'. According to Vikulov, Stal' was an

⁴⁴³ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (May 15, 1955): 54.

⁴⁴⁴ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 22, 1955): 49-50.

⁴⁴⁵ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 22, 1955): 49-50

⁴⁴⁶ Vlasenko apparently called Malkov into his office to "straighten out his mind," in Vikulov's words. Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (September 29, 1955): 46-47; OR RGB 647/14/43 (October 17, 1955): 68; OR RGB 647/14/44 (n.d., likely December 1955): 3-4; OR RGB 647/14/44 (n.d., likely February 1956): 19.

old acquaintance of Malkov's.⁴⁴⁷ By June of 1956, the new ideological secretary appeared to have turned Vikulov's patron Vlasenko against the book project. Both Vikulov and Malkov accused the other of using their professional resources for personal gain. Vikulov told the *obkom* that Malkov was turning the publisher into a "feeding trough" (*kormushka*) for his friends, while Malkov told people that Vikulov only wanted to publish the book to satisfy his patron Yashin. Vikulov admitted to Yashin that the fight over the book had strained Vikulov's relations with the political authorities.⁴⁴⁸ Yashin only became more frustrated and offended by the situation as time went on, especially as he was accepting a much lower honorarium for the book than he could have received in Moscow.⁴⁴⁹ Vikulov's political connections in Vologda were apparently not enough to prevent Yashin's book from getting delayed year after year.⁴⁵⁰ After several years of delays, the Vologda regional publisher finally published a book of Yashin's poetry in 1960.⁴⁵¹ This episode shows how important it was for an ambitious provincial writer like Vikulov to cultivate and maintain ties in the local political apparatus in order to achieve his goals (and thus keep his patron Yashin happy). Unfortunately for Vikulov, this was easier said than done.

Another benefit of patronage is the pleasure of having influenced the views of one's protégé. Vikulov's letters to Yashin provide evidence that Yashin impacted Vikulov's view of Soviet policy towards the country's rural regions, bringing him over to the position of the liberals. Yashin had not had a reputation as a rebellious writer in the late Stalin era—his Stalin Prize-winning poem about a female collective farm activist toed the ideological line on agriculture. Indeed, ac-

⁴⁴⁷ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/44/14 (March 12, 1956): 9.

⁴⁴⁸ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/44/14 (June 19, 1956): 6-7.

⁴⁴⁹ Unlike Yashin's other letters to Vikulov, this letter is preserved in Yashin's personal fond. Yashin to Vikulov, in OR RGB 647/13/5 (January 1956): 1-2.

⁴⁵⁰ It was delayed again in November of 1958. Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/44 (November 4, 1958): 26.

⁴⁵¹ Aleksandr Iakovlevich Iashin, *Tebe liubimaia! Stikhi, poema* (Vologda: Vologodskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1960).

ording to Lazar Lazarev, such poetry had earned Yashin the contempt of Aleksandr Tvardovskii. In his 1993 memoir, Lazarev recalled a meeting at the Soviet Writers' Union where Tvardovskii had condemned Yashin's Stalin Prize-winning poem:

[...] one of the speakers had said that Tvardovskii ought to be happy. What he was doing in his poetry had found a worthy continuation in the long poems *The Kolkhoz "Bolshevik"* [*Kolkhoz "Bol'shevik"*] by Nikolai Gribachëv and *Alena Fomina* by Aleksandr Yashin. In his speech, Tvardovskii noted that anyone who thought those poems were close to him and that he liked them was mistaken. They repulsed him with their varnished depiction of the devastated postwar countryside, which they drew as prosperous, content, and carefree.⁴⁵²

Yashin came to regret his participation in what during the Thaw would be criticized as the "varnishing" of the dismal situation in the postwar Soviet countryside in Soviet literature. At the Second Congress of the Union of Writers in 1954, Yashin made a speech in which he criticized Soviet poets—including himself—for their idealized depictions of the countryside in literature (see Chapter 1). In the speech, Yashin criticized instances of Party mismanagement of agriculture that he had witnessed in his native Vologda region and called on Soviet writers to speak truth to power. There was considerable overlap between the ideas in Yashin's speech and the ideas that Tvardovskii was championing as editor of *Novyi mir*. Vikulov tried to get Yashin's speech at the Second Congress reprinted in the Vologda literary almanac, but a member of the editorial board thwarted his efforts. Vikulov told Yashin in a letter in January of 1955 that Yashin's speech had made him feel ashamed for the fact that he lived "too calmly, too privately [*lichno*]" and did not feel concern for what was happening around him as sincerely as Yashin did.⁴⁵³ Yashin's speech impressed upon Vikulov the liberal position that rural writers needed to provide truthful information to the Party about the dire situation in Soviet agriculture.

⁴⁵² Lazar Lazarev, "The Sixth Floor," *Russian Studies in Literature* 31, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 68.

⁴⁵³ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (January 9, 1955): 33-34.

Yashin made good on his vow to criticize agricultural mismanagement with the publication of his short story “Levers” (“*Rychagi*”) in the liberal Moscow publication *Literaturnaia Moskva* in December 1956 (see Chapter 1). The story, which criticized the Party for treating its members in the village as mere “levers” to execute poorly thought-out policies delivered from above, sent shockwaves through the literary and political establishment. In 1957, Yashin came under fierce attack from conservative, anti-Thaw forces. In a letter to Yashin, Vikulov, referring to the “persecution” of Yashin’s story, agreed that Yashin had identified a real problem, saying “nothing stings like the truth.” At the same time, he expressed optimism that “a fresh breeze was blowing through the village,” presumably as a result of Khrushchev’s agricultural reforms.⁴⁵⁴ Yet, as we will see, Yashin’s stance on Soviet agriculture does seem to have influenced Vikulov. Early in his career, Vikulov wrote about the countryside in the idealized manner that Yashin had condemned in his 1954 speech.⁴⁵⁵ Under Yashin’s influence, he came to see the need to accurately reflect the real problems he saw in the Soviet countryside, a major issue for the liberal wing of the Russian literary establishment in the 1950s. Later in his career, as editor of *Nash sovremennik*, Vikulov expressed much more critical views of Soviet policy in the countryside. Yashin influenced Vikulov’s stance on Soviet agriculture—an intangible yet real benefit of literary patronage.

⁴⁵⁴ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/44 (n.d., likely 1957): 14-15.

⁴⁵⁵ Vikulov’s literary biographer Vasilii Oboturov criticized this aspect of Vikulov’s early poetry. Oboturov, *Sergei Vikulov*, 21-22.

Beyond Yashin: Vikulov Expands His Network in Leningrad and Moscow
1954-1958

The publication of “Levers” and Yashin’s refusal to recant had won him respect from many in the literary world, but the controversy necessarily reduced his ability to act as an effective patron for Vikulov.⁴⁵⁶ Fortunately for Vikulov, his *zemliaki* Sergei Orlov and Valerii Dement’ev had already moved up in the world and were able to connect him to different sources of patronage in Leningrad and Moscow, respectively. Vikulov’s interactions with Orlov and Dement’ev illustrate the importance of having *zemliaki* in close physical proximity to literary institutions in Leningrad and Moscow. Dement’ev played a key role in helping Vikulov add another patron in Moscow, the *Oktiabr’* editor Fëdor Panfërov. Meanwhile, new opportunities for writers from the periphery were beginning to open up through the newly-founded RSFSR Writers’ Union. The new Union chief Leonid Sobolev saw writers from the periphery as potential allies in the struggle against the liberals in the Moscow branch of the Union. His efforts to promote writers from the periphery meant drawing them into conservative networks in the capital city. Sobolev would go on to play a critical role in advancing Vikulov’s career.

Two years prior to the “Levers” controversy, Vikulov had begun developing his ties in Leningrad with the ultimate goal of moving there. Abandoning Vologda seemed to make sense. Moscow was clearly in no hurry to establish a branch of the Writers’ Union in Vologda in the mid-1950s. As we have seen, Vikulov had cultivated a patron in the Vologda political apparatus, but Vlasenko does not appear to have been particularly reliable political contact for Vikulov. Leningrad was relatively close by and it boasted its own powerful branch of the Writers’ Union.

⁴⁵⁶ The writer Grigorii Svirskii, a member of the Moscow branch of the Writers’ Union who emigrated from the USSR in 1972, called “Levers” a “stunning success” with the Russian reading public. Grigorii Svirskii, *A History of Post-War Soviet Writing: The Literature of Moral Opposition*, trans. Michael Ulman and Robert Dessaix (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1981), 155.

Moving to Leningrad would help Vikulov tap into Writers' Union patronage, including funds for business trips (*kommandirovki*) and publication opportunities at the respected Leningrad journal *Neva*. Plus, Vikulov had a valuable friend in the Leningrad literary establishment: his onetime schoolmate Sergei Orlov. In August of 1955, having just returned from a *kommandirovka* granted to him by the Leningrad branch, Vikulov wrote in a letter to Yashin that he was attempting to move to Leningrad. Unfortunately, he explained, he was having a hard time finding an apartment, even though Orlov had expended a lot of effort trying to help him.⁴⁵⁷ No progress had been made on the apartment front by November, when Vikulov met with Aleksandr Prokof'ev, the powerful head of the Leningrad Writers' Union.⁴⁵⁸ Prokof'ev, a peasant poet and member of the Stalinist old guard, had promised to "do something" to help Vikulov find an apartment. Meanwhile, Orlov had promised to publish two of Vikulov's poems in *Neva*, where Orlov worked as head of the poetry division.⁴⁵⁹ Nothing seems to have come of Vikulov's attempts to move to Leningrad, but the episode underscores the importance for writers of physical proximity to sources of patronage. The fact that Vikulov seems to have given up on his Leningrad dream after months of searching for an apartment also illustrates the high barriers to success that writers in the periphery faced. Vikulov's literary network was expanding into Leningrad, but it was not powerful enough to enable him to make the move from Vologda. As the Leningrad example shows, however, Vikulov's network was beginning to expand beyond Yashin.

In the second half of the 1950s, Vikulov's old friend from the pedagogical institute, Valerii Dement'ev, seems to have helped him to rise in the Moscow publishing world. After graduat-

⁴⁵⁷ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (August 16, 1955): 66.

⁴⁵⁸ On Prokof'ev, see Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 150; V. A. Prokof'ev, "Prokof'ev, Aleksandr Andreevich," in *Russkaia literatura XX veka: prozaiki, poety, dramaturgi: bibliograficheskii slovar'*, ed. N. N. Skatov (Moscow]: OLMA-Press Invest, 2005), 136–40.

⁴⁵⁹ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (November 24, 1955): 52.

ing from the pedagogical institute with Vikulov in 1950, Valerii Dement'ev began graduate training (*aspirantura*) at the Gorky Literary Institute. He began teaching there after graduation.⁴⁶⁰ Having dropped poetry for literary criticism, Dement'ev began working at the Moscow literary journal *Oktiabr'* (*October*) in 1957. Although *Oktiabr'* gained a reputation as a conservative neo-Stalinist bastion in the 1960s under the editorial leadership of Vsevolod Kochetov, in the late 1950s the head editor was the more moderate Fëdor Panfërov.⁴⁶¹ In the wake of the Twentieth Party Congress, Panfërov had begun to align the journal more with the insurgent pro-Thaw faction in the Writers' Union.⁴⁶² Given that Dement'ev was working on the *Oktiabr'* editorial board, it seems likely that he helped bring about the publication of Vikulov's poem "Difficult Happiness" ("*Trudnoe schast'e*") in the journal in 1958. According to Vikulov, Panfërov frequently took an interest in the lives of young writers and intervened with the Soviet bureaucracy on their behalf on issues such as housing. Panfërov thus fulfilled the role of a "broker" as described by Sheila Fitzpatrick.⁴⁶³ As Vikulov explained, making the connection with Panfërov was key because "for a provincial writer, such attention was more important than any award, as it sowed

⁴⁶⁰ Ogryzko writes that Dement'ev began his graduate study on the advice of *Novyi mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii. Later in his career, Dement'ev would teach the Gagauz poet Dmitrii Kara Choban in his poetry seminar at the Literary Institute (see Chapter 5). Ogryzko, "Emu by partiinym sledovatelem byt'," 196.

⁴⁶¹ As Dobrenko argues, *Oktiabr'* was the public face of anti-reform orthodox Marxist thought during Kochetov's time as editor. Mitrokhin contends, however, that behind the scenes *Oktiabr'* attracted a new generation of Russian nationalists and connected them with older writers from the conservative faction of the Writers' Union, including Aleksandr Prokof'ev and Semën Babaevskii. See Dobrenko, "The Lessons of *Oktiabr'*;" Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 160.

⁴⁶² *Oktiabr'* published many writers who played a key role in the Moscow Writers' Union (see Chapter 1), including Konstantin Paustovskii, Vladimir Kaverin, and Margarita Aliger. During the period of *glasnost'* in the 1980s, Panfërov's deputy V. Frolov wrote an article in which he argued against the conventional wisdom that *Oktiabr'* had always been a conservative journal. V. Frolov, "Fëdor Panfërov i zhurnal 'Oktiabr'," *Voprosy literatury*, no. 9 (September 1990): 211–44.

⁴⁶³ Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 192.

faith in one's calling [as a writer]."⁴⁶⁴ Vikulov's cultivation of his literary friends from Vologda had already begun to pay dividends in the late 1950s. His network was expanding into Moscow.

The literary lay of the land began to shift in Vikulov's favor with the founding of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR in 1958. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Soviet Central Committee became increasingly nervous after Moscow writers continued to push a strongly pro-Thaw position after the Twentieth Party Congress. Seeking to support the conservative, anti-Thaw forces who had led the charge against Yashin's story "Levers" (as well as other works published in *Literaturnaia Moskva* and *Novyi mir*), the Central Committee decided to grant the Russian republic its own Union of Writers and stacked its leadership with the conservative "usual suspects." This was not a positive development for Yashin and his allies among the Moscow-based writers, but it opened up new opportunities for writers from the periphery like Vikulov. Realizing the conservatives were outnumbered in the new Union by liberal Moscow- and Leningrad-based writers, Leonid Sobolev, the head of new RSFSR Writers' Union, sought to shore up his position by appealing to writers from the periphery.⁴⁶⁵ In the conclusion of his speech at the Union's founding congress in December, Sobolev stated that the founding of the new Union "encouraged and inspired those of our comrades who live and work in the immense Russian spaces [*na neo-bozrimykh rossiiskikh prostorakh*]." Showing sympathy with provincial writers like Vikulov, he stated, "Many of their books have won acknowledgement from the all-Union reader, have also traveled abroad, but their authors have been in a kind of strange darkness. The founding of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR has decisively put an end to this." Sobolev asserted that all writ-

⁴⁶⁴ Vikulov, "Avtobiografiia," 127.

⁴⁶⁵ According to Mitrokhin, the Moscow writers' organization made of one-third of the total membership of the Soviet Writers' Union. Although the Leningrad organization was headed by the conservative Aleksandr Prokof'ev, it was also a majority-liberal organization. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 149-150. For a brief biography of Sobolev, see Cécile Vaissié, *Ingénieurs des âmes en chef: littérature et politique en URSS, 1944-1986*, Littérature & politique (Paris: Belin, 2008), 207-212.

ers in the RSFSR, regardless of place of origin, had gained equal rights. “There are no writers of center or periphery, there are only writers of the Russian Federation!” he declared.⁴⁶⁶

“We listened to [Sobolev’s] inspirational speech with great attention,” Vikulov wrote in his 1996 memoir.⁴⁶⁷ Although Vologda, lacking an official branch of the Writers’ Union, did not have official representation at the 1958 Founding Congress, Vikulov had nevertheless managed to secure an invitation to attend the Congress.⁴⁶⁸ In his memoir, Vikulov praised Sobolev’s determination to make the Union leadership more mobile. Instead of writers coming from the periphery to the Union in Moscow, Sobolev said he wanted to bring the Union to writers in the periphery. According to Vikulov, the RSFSR Union leadership gained the nickname “the secretariat on wheels” for its frequent meetings and plenums held outside the capital.⁴⁶⁹ Six years later, in 1964, Vikulov would feature prominently at a plenum of the RSFSR Union held in the southern city of Krasnodar. Sobolev’s policies opened up opportunities for ambitious writers from the provinces like Vikulov. Crucially, the RSFSR Union leadership’s decision to shore up their position in the new Union by seeking support among writers from the periphery would mean that peripheral writers would be integrated into conservative networks in the capital city. This would have a tremendous impact on the careers and political leanings of writers like Vikulov and, later on, Valentin Rasputin. Sobolev would prove to be a powerful ally for Vikulov in Moscow. His policy of reaching out to the periphery would bear fruit ten years after the RSFSR Union’s Founding Congress, when he appointed Vikulov head of the journal *Nash sovremennik* in 1968.

⁴⁶⁶ L. S. Sobolev, “Doklad L. S. Soboleva ‘Literatura i nasha sovremennost’,” in *Pervyi uchreditel’nyi s’ezd pisatelei Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1959), 65.

⁴⁶⁷ Sergei Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 9 (September 1996): 4.

⁴⁶⁸ He is listed among the participants in *Pervyi uchreditel’nyi s’ezd pisatelei Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 596.

⁴⁶⁹ Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” 4.

Vikulov in Moscow and Vologda
1959-1964

In the summer of 1959, Vikulov's career received a major boost when he was accepted into the Higher Literary Courses. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Higher Literary Courses were special two-year courses organized in parallel with the regular undergraduate program at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow. The Soviet Writers' Union designed the Courses, which opened in 1954, to improve the level of cultural and political knowledge among writers from the Russian periphery and the non-Russian republics. The two years that Vikulov spent in Moscow attending the courses allowed him to meet other writers from the rural Russian periphery who shared his background and point of view. Many of the writers that he studied with at the Gorky Literary Institute would go on to write for *Nash sovremennik*.

Vikulov had first heard about the Courses in 1953, when they were first being organized. Arguing that the lack of a literary community in Vologda was hindering him from developing his craft, Vikulov wrote to Yashin to ask for his help getting into the Courses.⁴⁷⁰ In 1954, he contacted Yashin again, asking him to inquire personally into whether he had been accepted into the Courses.⁴⁷¹ Vikulov's applications were unsuccessful until 1959, when he was finally offered a space in the Courses.⁴⁷² Vikulov wrote in 1986 that he never found out who helped him gain entry into the Courses.⁴⁷³ (The fact that Vikulov assumed that *someone* must have intervened on his behalf is itself a striking statement about the importance of personal ties for advancement in the Soviet literary world.) In Vikulov's case, as in the case of the Moldovan writer Ion Druță and the

⁴⁷⁰ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RBG 647/14/43 (September 10, 1953): 12.

⁴⁷¹ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/43 (February 22, 1954): 23.

⁴⁷² Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/44 (August 13, 1959): 33-34.

⁴⁷³ Vikulov, "Avtobiografia," 127.

Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, admission into the Higher Literary Courses in Moscow enabled Vikulov to make important connections in the capital city that proved decisive for his career advancement.

The Higher Literary Courses brought writers from all over the Soviet Union and the socialist world together to live and study together in Moscow. The Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, whose two-year stint at the Higher Literary Courses overlapped with Vikulov's, gave a frank description of the atmosphere in the Literary Institute dormitory in his 1978 novel based on the experience:

First floor: that's where the first-year students stay; they've not yet committed many literary sins. Second floor: critics, conformist playwrights, whitewashers. Third...circle: dogmatics, arse-lickers and Russian nationalists. Fourth circle: women, liberals, and people disenchanted with socialism. Fifth circle: slanderers and snitches. Sixth circle: denaturalized writers who have abandoned their own language to write in Russian...⁴⁷⁴

Kadare's description makes it clear that social, national, and ideological divisions did not simply dissolve after writers entered the Courses. If anything, the environment seemed to foster the formation of close-knit groups. In his work on the origins of the Russian nationalist movement, Nikolai Mitrokhin argues that the conditions at the Literary Institute in the late 1940s and early 1950s promoted the formation of tight groupings among the former peasants and front-line soldiers who entered the institution after the Second World War. According to Mitrokhin, many of these students went on to participate in the Russian nationalist movement.⁴⁷⁵ The Higher Literary Courses, initiated in 1953 to provide supplementary education for writers from the Soviet periphery, only added to the ranks of provincial writers at the Literary Institute. When the Siberian writer Viktor Astaf'ev enrolled in the Higher Literary Courses in 1959, he found that most of his

⁴⁷⁴ Kadare's novel, with its acid critique of the Soviet literary world, was published in Albania in 1978, well after Albania's expulsion from the Soviet bloc in 1960. Ismail Kadare, *Twilight of the Eastern Gods* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014), 93-94.

fellow students were, like him, writers from the provinces who sought to raise their level of education and culture. “The loftiness and arrogance of the capital did not keep company with us, we did not criticize or condescend to those around us, and every day we discovered something new,” he wrote in 1985.⁴⁷⁶ The Higher Literary Courses at the Gorky Literary Institute were thus an ideal place for Vikulov to find like-minded writers from the Russian periphery.

Discussing his experiences at the Higher Literary Courses, Vikulov later wrote that forming connections with other writers was one of the main benefits of attending the courses. Discussions with classmates that started in the literary seminars often continued in the rooms of the dormitory until the wee hours of the morning.⁴⁷⁷ One participant in these late-night conversations was Astaf’ev, who entered the Higher Literary Courses the same year as Vikulov. They were joined by Vikulov’s poet friend from Vologda, Aleksandr Romanov, and the Kursk-based writer Evgenii Nosov a year later. In the 1970s, both Astaf’ev and Nosov would become leading Village Prose writers at *Nash sovremennik* under Vikulov’s editorship. As class monitor (*starosta*) of his group of students in the Courses, Vikulov acted as a liaison between the administration and his fellow writers—a role he would play again later as editor of *Nash sovremennik*.⁴⁷⁸ At the same time as Vikulov, Astaf’ev, and Nosov were attending the Higher Literary Courses, a number of poets from the Russian North, including Nikolai Rubtsov, Ol’ga Fokina, and Vasiliï Belov were enrolled in the regular undergraduate program at the Literary Institute. Rubtsov, Fokina, and Belov would all go on to be associated with the nascent Russian Village

⁴⁷⁵ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 153-155.

⁴⁷⁶ Astaf’ev, qtd. in Iu. A. Rostovtsev, *Viktor Astaf’ev*, 2nd ed., *Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei 1468* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2014), 173.

⁴⁷⁷ Vikulov, “Avtobiografiia,” 127-128.

Prose movement. The Literary Institute provided an ideal base from which Vikulov was able to expand his Vologda-based network to include other like-minded writers from the Russian periphery. Many of Vikulov's classmates would write for *Nash sovremennik* after Vikulov took over the position of head editor.

Shortly after his graduation from the Higher Literary Courses, Vikulov returned to Vologda to become head of the newly-founded Vologda branch of the RSFSR Writers' Union upon its founding on July 25, 1961. Vologda had come a long way from the days when it could not boast of a single professional writer, in large part due to the efforts of Vikulov, Yashin, the literary critic Valerii Dement'ev, and the poet Sergei Orlov.⁴⁷⁹ After the founding of the Vologda branch, the literary community in Vologda continued to grow, attracting several writers who would later be associated with Russian Village Prose. Unlike writers from the previous generation, who generally stayed in Moscow or Leningrad after completing their higher education, many writers that Vikulov had attended the Literary Institute with decided to settle in Vologda. After her graduation from the Literary Institute in 1962, Ol'ga Fokina, a poet from the Arkhangel'sk region (and the only woman associated with the Village Prose movement) moved to Vologda.⁴⁸⁰ Vasiliï Belov, originally from a village in the Vologda region, moved to Vologda in 1964. In the second half of the 1960s, Belov switched to prose and became the author of many notable works in the Village Prose movement, beginning with the novella *An Ordinary Thing*

⁴⁷⁸ In the Soviet educational system, the *starosta* is the elected leader of a group of students who deals with administrative and disciplinary issues. Vikulov's position as the *starosta* of Astaf'ev's class is mentioned in a recent biography of Astaf'ev. Rostovtsev, *Viktor Astaf'ev*, 297.

⁴⁷⁹ For information about the Vologda branch, see "Regional'noe otdelenie Soiuza pisatelei Rossii," Cultinfo: Kul'tura v Vologodskoi oblasti, n.d., <http://cultinfo.ru/literature/union-of-writers-of-russia/>.

⁴⁸⁰ See "Fokina Ol'ga Aleksandrovna," Cultinfo: Kul'tura v Vologodskoi oblasti, n.d., <http://cultinfo.ru/literature/literature-in-the-vologda-region-personalities/fokina-olga-aleksandrovna.php>.

(*Pryvichnoe delo*) in 1966.⁴⁸¹ From his perch as head of the Vologda branch from 1961 to 1964, Vikulov used the resources of the Writers' Union to strengthen literary life in Vologda. He organized the first-ever meeting of Vologda writers, securing Yashin's attendance.⁴⁸² He tapped the resources of the Writers' Union to give the up-and-coming poet Nikolai Rubtsov a ten-day *kommandirovka* in 1964.⁴⁸³ For a writer who had spent so many years scraping together the necessary resources for a literary career through his connections in Leningrad and Moscow, it must have been particularly satisfying for Vikulov to be able to support Vologda writers in Vologda. By the mid-1960s, with the help of Aleksandr Yashin, Vikulov and his Vologda comrades had successfully turned a city on the Russian periphery into a literary hub.

The Conservative Backlash against Yashin and Solzhenitsyn 1962-1964

Vikulov's network of Vologda writers was growing in strength at a pivotal moment in the formation of the literary movement later dubbed Russian Village Prose. In the first half of the 1960s, the critical line on the situation in Soviet agriculture was still monopolized by the liberal wing of the Russian literary community. As we have seen in Chapter 1, a new trend in literary discourse on the village had developed over the course of the 1950s. The "liberal" journal *Novyi mir*, with onetime peasant Aleksandr Tvardovskii at the helm, was the main force driving the new discourse on the village. As Khrushchev moved to reform Soviet agriculture after the death of

⁴⁸¹ "Belov Vasilii Ivanovich," Cultinfo: Kul'tura v Vologodskoi oblasti, n.d., <http://cultinfo.ru/literature/union-of-writers-of-russia/vasily-ivanovich-belov.php>.

⁴⁸² See Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/44 (n.d., sometime in 1964): 44-46; OR RGB 647/14/44 (September 22, 1964): 49; OR RGB 647/14/44 (n.d., probably October or November 1964): 60.

⁴⁸³ Vikulov to Yashin, in OR RGB 647/14/44 (November 13, 1964): 52.

Stalin, works by Valentin Ovechkin and Vikulov's patron Yashin criticized Party management of the village under Stalin. In 1954, Fëdor Abramov criticized the false optimism of Stalin-era literature on the village, laying the groundwork for what would become a major critique of Soviet literature by the Village Prose movement. Criticism of Soviet rural policy continued to be associated with the pro-Thaw camp in the early 1960s. In 1962 and 1963, *Novyi mir* published several works that not only criticized rural living conditions but sought to rehabilitate the traditional Russian peasant. Aleksandr Yashin's sketch "Vologda Wedding" ("*Vologodskaia svad'ba*") depicted the persistence of both rural poverty and Russian traditions in a village in the Vologda region. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn presented an image of the Russian peasantry that hearkened back to pre-revolutionary conceptions in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (*Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha*) and *Matrëna's House* (*Matrënin dvor*). *Novyi mir*'s "line" on the village was evolving beyond the simple critique of Stalinist mismanagement of agriculture.

As we will see, in the first half of the 1960s, the "conservative" political and literary forces opposed to the Thaw continued to reject the critical rural prose championed by Yashin and the *Novyi mir* writers. The forces of Stalinist restoration in the Writers' Union, which originated in the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the late Stalin era and mobilized to oppose the Thaw in the mid-1950s, found a new champion in the journal *Oktiabr'*. In 1961, the neo-Stalinist warrior Vsevolod Kochetov, who had led the campaign against *Novyi mir* which caused Tvardovskii's removal in 1954, took over the journal. Under Kochetov's leadership, *Oktiabr'*, which had dabbled in liberalism during the tenure of the previous editor Fëdor Panfërov, became, in the words of Evgeny Dobrenko, "the magnet that drew in everything that opposed *Novyi mir*'s liberal position."⁴⁸⁴ This, of course, included the works of Yashin and Solzhenitsyn. In addition to the con-

⁴⁸⁴ Dobrenko, "The Lessons of *Oktiabr'*."

servative writers of *Oktiabr*’, *Novyi mir*’s writers also faced opposition from a group of bureaucrats in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Komsomol. According to Nikolai Mitrokhin, the so-called “group of Pavlov” coalesced around the first secretary of the Komsomol, Sergei Pavlov, from 1962 to 1964. Like the writers around Kochetov’s *Oktiabr*’, the members of this “group” supported an anti-Western, anti-Semitic brand of Soviet patriotism. In the first half of the 1960s, neo-Stalinist “red patriotism” was the dominant strand of thought among Pavlov and his protégés.⁴⁸⁵ The “group of Pavlov” used the Komsomol’s newspaper, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, to criticize Yashin’s and Solzhenitsyn’s depictions of Russian peasant life.

Published in *Novyi mir* in December of 1962, Yashin’s sketch “Vologda Wedding” exposed the poverty and mismanagement in the contemporary Russian village, much as Yashin had done in his controversial short story “Levers” in 1956.⁴⁸⁶ In a departure from the critical rural prose of the 1950s, Yashin included something new: a discussion of the persistence of tradition in the village.⁴⁸⁷ The first group to attack Yashin’s sketch were the authorities in Vologda, who took the sketch as an attack on their management of agriculture. In January of 1963, they went on the offensive. On January 27, 1962, Yashin wrote in his diary that he received a clipping of an article from a Vologda newspaper titled “No, Yashin is not right.”⁴⁸⁸ A few days later, the article, ostensibly written by a student from Vologda, was reprinted in *Izvestiia*, one of the leading newspapers in the country. The author of the piece claimed that Yashin had described village life as it was 20

⁴⁸⁵ See Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 239-249, 338-341.

⁴⁸⁶ Aleksandr Iakovlevich Iashin, “Vologodskaia svad’ba,” *Novyi mir*, no. 12 (1962): 3–26.

⁴⁸⁷ Yitzhak Brudny argues that Yashin’s sketch is a classic example of conservative 1960s village prose because Yashin idealizes “the traditional way of life of the Russian peasantry” and criticizes Party policy for “destroying centuries-old peasant traditions” and leading to widespread social decay. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 52.

⁴⁸⁸ Aleksandr Iashin, “Bobrishnyi ugor: Iz dnevnikov 1958-1968 gg.,” in *Sobranie sochinenii v trëkh tomakh*, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986), 289.

years ago, ignoring more positive recent developments.⁴⁸⁹ *Komsomol'skaia pravda* was similarly quick to pick up the criticism of Yashin's perspective on rural life that originated on the local level. On January 31, *Komsomol'skaia pravda* published an open letter to Yashin, supposedly written by a group of people from Vologda. In their scathing criticism of the sketch, the authors stated that, although Yashin "did not hide his enthusiastic attitude towards old rituals," the wedding traditions he portrayed in the sketch were incorrect (and the old wedding rituals were not practiced in Vologda anymore anyway). The authors accused Yashin of repeating the same mistakes he had made in his 1956 short story "Levers."⁴⁹⁰ After leading newspapers like *Izvestiia* and *Komsomol'skaia pravda* had accused Yashin of an overly negative and archaic portrayal of rural life, other publications would not dare to defend him for fear of contradicting the Party position.⁴⁹¹

Vikulov was present at a readers' conference organized by the Vologda regional committee (*obkom*) to attack Yashin for describing the grim conditions of peasants in the region in the pages of *Novyi mir*. In a letter to *Novyi mir* on February 2, 1963, Vikulov attempted to help Yashin by alerting his journal to the attack on their author in Vologda. Vikulov described how specially recruited "readers" repeated the refrain "Yashin is not right!" and sought to prove that conditions in the village were not as bad as Yashin described.⁴⁹² In a later account, Vikulov stated that the motivating force behind the sham conference was Stal', the same regional ideological secretary who had previously thwarted Vikulov's plan to publish a collection by Yashin in Vologda.⁴⁹³

⁴⁸⁹ A. Beresenev, "Dve repliki: Glavnomu redaktoru zhurnalu 'Novyi mir' A. T. Tvardovskomu," *Izvestiia*, January 30, 1963.

⁴⁹⁰ "Svad'ba s degtem: Otkrytoe pis'mo pisateliu A. Iashinu," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, January 31, 1963.

⁴⁹¹ Vikulov explains this in Vikulov, "Poet i vlast," 242.

⁴⁹² Vikulov to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 2, 1963): 1-4.

⁴⁹³ Vikulov, "Poet i vlast," 243.

Vikulov told *Novyi mir* that he himself did not manage to speak at the conference (in his post-Soviet account of the episode, he says Stal' expressly barred him from doing so), but another attendee did speak up, arguing that Yashin's description of a life in a village in the Vologda region was accurate and they needed to think long and hard about how to address the problems described in the sketch. According to Vikulov, the hall was clearly on the side of the pro-Yashin speaker, and several students who expressed similar views. Their opponents, however, continued to claim that Yashin had insulted their town by mischaracterizing it in the sketch. At the end of the letter, Vikulov addressed Yashin: "Really, A[leksandr] Ia[kovlevich], the machine has been set in motion [*mashina krutitsia*]. I don't know what it's like in Moscow, but here it is impossible to stop it." Still, Vikulov took heart that students had stepped forward to declare that Yashin had spoken "the truth."⁴⁹⁴ With this letter to *Novyi mir*, Vikulov showed his commitment to the liberal journal's position of presenting the "truth" about the situation in Soviet agriculture.

Increasingly concerned about negative reviews of his sketch, Yashin visited Tvardovskii's apartment on February 8 to take a look at the many letters *Novyi mir* had received in response to "Vologda Wedding."⁴⁹⁵ Overall, *Novyi mir* readers interpreted "Vologda Wedding" within an anti-Stalinist framework, arguing that it was important to write honestly about the real condition of the Russian village. With a few exceptions, the readers—many of them from the Vologda region—praised Yashin for accurately describing the difficult conditions in Soviet villages. Reflecting the intensification of de-Stalinization that had taken place after the Twenty-Second Party Congress, many condemned the harsh criticism of Yashin's sketch as a return to Stalinist meth-

⁴⁹⁴ RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 2, 1963): 1-4.

⁴⁹⁵ Iashin, "Bobrishnyi ugor," 290. The letters are collected in a folder in *Novyi mir*'s fond in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art: RGALI 1702/10/84.

ods of hiding the truth.⁴⁹⁶ Readers also reacted to Yashin's portrayal of old Russian wedding traditions, with some seeing them as unfortunate holdovers from the past and others as an important feature of Russian national culture.⁴⁹⁷ Tvardovskii, for his part, saw Yashin's sketch as an important contribution to the journal's overall mission to aid the Party: "Let no one hope that the stance [*liniia*] of *Novyi mir* will change. It is not *Novyi mir*'s stance, but rather the Central Committee's stance," he told Yashin that day in his apartment.⁴⁹⁸ Both Tvardovskii and the readers of *Novyi mir* thus considered Yashin's depiction of village life to be well in line with the journal's pro-Thaw, anti-Stalinist agenda.

While Yashin had Tvardovskii's support, the criticism of his sketch in Vologda and in publications like *Izvestiia* and *Komsomol'skaia pravda* caused him significant professional difficulties. The Stalin Prize-winning poet suddenly found it hard to get his poems published. The censor pulled a cycle of Yashin's poems dedicated to the writer Konstantin Paustovskii from the April 1963 issue of the Leningrad journal *Neva*.⁴⁹⁹ The controversy took a personal toll as well. Yashin wrote in his diary on August 10, 1963, "I haven't written a line this year. All year I've

⁴⁹⁶ Iu. Iurin to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 5, 1963): 7; G. S. Khromov to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 7, 1963): 21; Zakharov to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 7, 1963): 29-31; Anonymous to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 7, 1963): 34; R. Kandelaki to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 7, 1963): 35; Vasilii Korzun to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 11, 1963): 41-43; Petrovskii to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 11, 1963): 44; Pautov to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 28, 1963): 79-84;

⁴⁹⁷ One letter-writer stated that only a "cosmopolitan" could criticize the bride for her adherence to old wedding rituals. He linked criticism of these traditions with the destruction of historic churches, allegedly perpetrated by "cosmopolitans," showing the influence of recent agitation around this issue by Vladimir Soloukhin and others. K. Parantsev to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 6, 1963): 16. For other positive mentions of tradition, see Vasilii Korzun to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 11, 1963): 41-44; I. Kholodilov to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI (February 12, 1963): 46-47; Andrei Panov to the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, in RGALI 1702/10/84 (February 28, 1963): 85-86.

⁴⁹⁸ Iashin, "Bobrishnyi ugor," 290.

⁴⁹⁹ Central State Archive of Literature and Art of St. Petersburg (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva Sankt Peterburga, TsGALI SPb) 359/2/84 (December 2, 1963): 70-71 in A. V. Blium, ed., *Tsenzura v So-*

suffered a hangover after this famous wedding.”⁵⁰⁰ Having incurred the wrath of the conservative literary establishment, Yashin was even less able to serve as a patron to Vikulov.

“Vologda Wedding” was not the only controversial work published in *Novyi mir* in the waning months of 1962 that addressed the condition of the Russian peasantry. In November of 1962, *Novyi mir* published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, former camp inmate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s novella about the daily life of a Russian peasant and former prisoner of war in the Stalinist labor camps.⁵⁰¹ The publication of this remarkable account of life in the Gulag was the high water mark of the second phase of de-Stalinization that began with the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961; in the words of Polly Jones, it was “an extraordinary gesture of party support for literature about terror victims.”⁵⁰² Due to the sensitive nature of the novella, *Novyi mir* editor Tvardovskii worked closely with Solzhenitsyn and shepherded his manuscript through to publication, ultimately securing approval from Khrushchev himself.⁵⁰³ While the novella’s portrayal of Stalinist repression has attracted the most attention, Solzhenitsyn also sought to make a statement about the fate of the Russian peasant under Soviet rule through the character of Ivan Denisovich Shukhov. In his discussion of the novella in his literary memoir written in 1967, Solzhenitsyn considered the peasant themes critical to its success:

vetskoi Soiuz, 1917-1991: dokumenty, Seriya Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2004), 403-404.

⁵⁰⁰ Iashin, “Bobrishnyi ugor,” 300.

⁵⁰¹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, “Odn den' Ivana Denisovicha,” *Novyi mir* (November 1962): 8-74. Translated in Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, trans. Ralph Parker (New York: Signet Classic, 1993).

⁵⁰² Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: The Stalinist Past as Soviet Culture, 1953-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 150. See also Miriam Dobson, “Literary Hooligans and Parasites,” in *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 215-36; Denis Kozlov, “Finding New Words: Solzhenitsyn and the Experience of Terror,” in *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 209-38.

⁵⁰³ For an overview of Khrushchev’s involvement, see William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 525-528.

I cannot say that I had precisely planned it, but I did accurately foresee that the *muzhik* [peasant man] Ivan Denisovich was bound to arouse the sympathy of the superior *muzhik* Tvardovskii and the supreme *muzhik* Nikita Khrushchev. And that was just what happened: it was not poetry and not politics that decided the fate of my story, but that unchanging peasant nature, so much ridiculed, trampled underfoot and vilified in our country since the Great Break, and indeed earlier.⁵⁰⁴

Although he had been raised by his mother's formerly wealthy, landowning family, Solzhenitsyn was descended on his father's side from a long line of peasants in southern Russia; he remained preoccupied with the condition of the Russian peasantry to the end of his life.⁵⁰⁵ In *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn's hero is a Russian peasant whose fundamental decency and love of honest hard work endures in spite of the brutal environment of the labor camp. Solzhenitsyn depicts the traditional industrious character of the peasantry and shows how the conditions of Soviet life, both inside and outside the camp, work to degrade it.⁵⁰⁶ Solzhenitsyn also touched briefly on the collateral damage of collectivization: in one scene, Ivan Denisovich's squad leader Tiurin, a sympathetic character, reveals that he was expelled from the army when the higher-ups discovered that his father was a *kulak* (rich peasant).⁵⁰⁷ Solzhenitsyn's depiction of a hardworking Russian peasant in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was thus firmly in line with the critical reevaluation of Soviet policy towards the peasantry taking place in the pages of *Novyi mir* in the early 1960s.

⁵⁰⁴ The section of the memoir about *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was written in 1967, after Solzhenitsyn's relations with both Tvardovskii and the Soviet state had already soured. Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 21.

⁵⁰⁵ Michael Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography* (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1984), 25-38.

⁵⁰⁶ See, for example, the discussion of deteriorating conditions on the collective farm to which Ivan Denisovich's family belongs. Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 33-35.

⁵⁰⁷ Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, 69-70.

In January of 1963, Solzhenitsyn elaborated his ideas on the Russian peasantry further in a short story published in *Novyi mir*, *Matrëna's House*.⁵⁰⁸ The novella, set in 1953, presented a grim picture of life in a Russian village under Stalin. The narrator, a teacher, comes to teach in a village school and rents a room from a poor older Russian woman, the titular Matrëna. Over the course of the novella, the narrator comes to appreciate Matrëna's innate kindness and goodness, qualities that go unnoticed by her callous, money-grubbing fellow villagers. In the final pages of the novella, Matrëna is run over by a train. The narrator remarks,

Her moral and ethical standards made her a misfit. [...] We all lived beside her, and never understood that she was that righteous one [*pravednik*] without whom, according to the proverb, no village can stand. Nor any city. Nor our whole land.⁵⁰⁹

In this key passage of *Matrëna's House*, Solzhenitsyn upended the Soviet moral order, locating the moral center of the nation not in the progressive urban worker, but in the person of an elderly village woman. Using the term *pravednik* to refer to Matrëna, Solzhenitsyn evoked the concept of a righteous, exemplary individual that was common in both Russian Orthodox religious culture and Russian literature in the nineteenth century.⁵¹⁰ Matrëna's death under the wheels of a train—which recalls the fate of a very different heroine, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina—suggested that the unyielding forces of modernization threatened to destroy the moral core of the peasantry. As Russian Village Prose developed over the course of the 1970s, the righteous person who stands for morality in an immoral world (usually an older peasant woman) became a common

⁵⁰⁸ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Matrënin dvor," *Novyi mir*, no. 1 (1963): 42–63. Translated in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's House," in *We Never Make Mistakes: Two Short Novels*, trans. Paul W. Blackstock (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1963), 89–138.

⁵⁰⁹ Solzhenitsyn, "Matryona's House," 137–138.

⁵¹⁰ See A. B. Tarasov, "Pravednichestvo," *Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie*, no. 3 (2007): 239–40.

trope of Russian Village Prose.⁵¹¹ Thus, if Yashin introduced discussion of Russian peasant customs to the nascent discourse of Russian Village Prose, Solzhenitsyn initiated the tendency to see the peasantry as a locus of morality, threatened under Stalinist rule.

Khrushchev's endorsement of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* initially shielded the author and his views on the peasantry from criticism.⁵¹² During a notorious meeting with the intelligentsia on December 17, 1962, "the supreme *muzhik*" ranted against the abstract Soviet art and the urban avant-garde who supported it—but called Solzhenitsyn "our contemporary Tolstoy" and patted himself on the back for his role in publishing *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.⁵¹³ In March of 1963, a conservative backlash against Solzhenitsyn's portrayal of the countryside began. On March 2, Vadim Kozhevnikov, the editor of the journal *Znamia*, wrote a review of *Matrëna's House* on the front page of *Literaturnaia gazeta*. Kozhevnikov expressed disappointment that the author of the "wonderful" *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* had written about the village in the style of an earlier era and had failed to notice the positive new developments in village life.⁵¹⁴ On March 17, Khrushchev met again with the intelligentsia, and this time launched into a tirade against young writers and liberals (see Chapter 2). In the aftermath of Khrushchev's outburst, the conservative old guard felt emboldened.⁵¹⁵ On March 22, Sergei Pavlov, the head of the Komsomol and the leader of the "group of Pavlov," wrote an edi-

⁵¹¹ Parthé, *Russian Village Prose*, xi.

⁵¹² As Jones notes, the initial reviews of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* were uniformly positive. Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 150.

⁵¹³ The quotation from Khrushchev comes from Evgenii Evtushenko, who was present at the meeting. Yevgeny Yevtushenko, "Introduction," in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1998: Signet Classic, 1998), xvi. Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 211.

⁵¹⁴ Vadim Kozhevnikov, "Tovarishchi v bor'be," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 2, 1963.

⁵¹⁵ See Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 593-596; Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 213-219.

torial in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* condemning *Novyi mir's* pessimistic depiction of Soviet life, mentioning both Yashin's "Vologda Wedding" and Solzhenitsyn's *Matrëna's House*.⁵¹⁶

On March 24, the attacks continued, this time from the magazine *Ogonëk*, which was edited by the reactionary former leader of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, Anatolii Sofronov. The critic Aleksandr Dymshits, known for his fierce attacks on pro-Thaw writers, published an article in the magazine *Ogonëk* in which he, like Kozhevnikov, praised Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, but likewise accused Solzhenitsyn of ignoring positive improvements in rural life in *Matrëna's House*. Dymshits then went further, attacking Solzhenitsyn's conception of the Russian nation from an orthodox Soviet Marxist perspective. According to Dymshits, the old peasant woman Matrëna was not the moral foundation of the country, as Solzhenitsyn portrayed her, but an anachronism. Rather than "righteous sufferers" (*pravedniki-stradal'tsy*), Dymshits wrote, the country needed "active creators" (*aktivnye tvortsy*) who were capable of remaking the world.⁵¹⁷ Clinging to Soviet Marxist orthodoxy, Dymshits rejected Solzhenitsyn's attempt to revive older models of Russian identity.

Finally, in April 1963, the journal *Oktiabr'*, now a mouthpiece of conservative orthodoxy under Kochetov, weighed in on Yashin's and Solzhenitsyn's views on the village and the peasantry.⁵¹⁸ The critic Nikolai Sergovantsev published a comprehensive refutation of both the negative portrayal of rural life in the Soviet Union and depictions of the Russian peasantry that hearkened back to pre-revolutionary ideas. In spite of Solzhenitsyn's efforts to portray Ivan Den-

⁵¹⁶ See Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*, 220; S. Pavlov, "Tvorchestvo molodezhi—sluzheniu velikikh idealov," *Komsomolskaia pravda*, March 22, 1963.

⁵¹⁷ Aleksandr Dymshits, "Rasskazy o rasskazakh, zametki o povestiakh," *Ogonëk*, no. 13 (March 24, 1963): 30–31. On Dymshits, see Viacheslav Ogryzko, "Pugalo dlia liberalov: Aleksandr Dymshits," in *Sozdateli literaturnykh reputatsii*, 288–333.

⁵¹⁸ For an insightful discussion of *Oktiabr'*'s ideological position under Kochetov, see Dobrenko, "The Lessons of *Oktiabr'*."

isovich as a true representative of the people (*glubokii narodnyi tip*), Sergovantsev wrote, Ivan Denisovich lacked the fighting spirit that defines such characters in Soviet history. While Solzhenitsyn depicted his hero's ability to survive difficult circumstances as a sign of spiritual strength, Sergovantsev dismissed Ivan Denisovich's will to survive as mere accommodation to the tragic circumstances of the camp. "If Shukhov has qualities of a [typical character from the people], then they are inherited not from the Soviet people of the 1930s and '40s, but rather from the patriarchal *muzhik*,"⁵¹⁹ he stated in a not-so-subtle suggestion that Solzhenitsyn's peasant hero had more in common with his pre-revolutionary forebears than the "new Soviet person." Sergovantsev saw a denial of Soviet progress in Yashin's portrayal of the dismal conditions of the peasantry in "Vologda Wedding." He objected to both Solzhenitsyn's and Yashin's portrayals of Soviet society as still divided into rich and poor, exploiters and exploited. "Nothing, in [Yashin's opinion], has changed: as before, all talented, healthy people flee the village; as before, the city robs the peasantry."⁵²⁰ Sergovantsev also rejected Yashin's "elegiac sighing" over the "primitive peasant tools of the past" and other now-useless items. He saw little of value in the traditional rural material culture that Yashin had described.⁵²¹ In his discussion of *Matrëna's House*, Sergovantsev denied that the meek, obedient, victimized character of Matrëna could serve as an example for Soviet Russian women. Throughout their history, the Russian people had embraced peasant rebels like Sten'ka Razin and Emilian Pugachev, not the *pravedniki*. In conclusion, Sergovantsev stated that although Solzhenitsyn and Yashin had peppered their works with captivating details, they had failed to capture the "truth of life" and create heroes and heroines for a new era.

⁵¹⁹ N. Sergovantsev, "Tragediia odinochestva i 'sploshnoi byt,'" *Oktiabr'*, no. 4 (1963):199.

⁵²⁰ Sergovantsev, "Tragediia odinochestva i 'sploshnoi byt,'" 203.

⁵²¹ See Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion of the rehabilitation of rural material culture in national discourse.

With Sergovantsev's article, the orthodox, neo-Stalinist camp had issued a comprehensive refutation of *Novyi mir's* new discourse on the Russian village in the 1960s.

As in the mid-1950s, the conservative wing of the literary establishment found allies in the departments of the Central Committee in their struggle against the revision of Soviet narratives about rural life and the peasantry. In a September 1963 report to the Soviet Central Committee, the Department of Ideology criticized the “one-sided” depiction of Soviet agriculture in Yashin's “Vologda Wedding,” Solzhenitsyn's *Matrëna's House* and Abramov's *Around and About*.⁵²² The latter was a novella published in the Leningrad-based journal *Neva* that traced many of the problems of contemporary Soviet agriculture to the implementation of collectivization.⁵²³ In a key scene in *Around and About*, the middle-aged collective farm chairman who had participated in collectivization wondered whether the problems that exist today resulted from the hasty process of collectivization in 1930.⁵²⁴ Abramov's novella was a far cry from the Stalinist narrative of collectivization, which largely blamed problems in the implementation of collectivization on the dark, ignorant peasantry and the rich peasants known as kulaks.⁵²⁵ In their report, the bureaucrats from the Department of Ideology claimed that the authors made the difficulties in Soviet agriculture seem insurmountable. The report suggests there was little sympathy for a liberal critique of the legacy of Stalinism in agriculture in the Central Committee.

⁵²² RGANI 5/55/41 (September 1963): 278-281 in V. Iu. Afiani, Z. K. Vodop'ianova, and T. V. Domracheva, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1958-1964: dokumenty*, Seriiia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2005), 660-662.

⁵²³ Fëdor Abramov, “Vokrug da okolo,” *Neva*, no. 1 (1963): 109–37. Translated in Fyodor Abramov, *The New Life: A Day on a Collective Farm*, trans. George Reavey (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963).

⁵²⁴ Abramov, *The New Life*, 113-114, 131.

⁵²⁵ On views on the peasantry during collectivization, see Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32-38.

Even as official opposition to the new critical line on Soviet agriculture mounted, Tvardovskii and the *Novyi mir* writers were undeterred. In December of 1963, Tvardovskii wrote in his diary about his new top priority: securing a Lenin Prize for Solzhenitsyn for *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1964.⁵²⁶ Tvardovskii's quest to win the Prize for his new favorite author, however, would founder upon the shoals of the growing opposition to Solzhenitsyn and his depiction of the Russian peasantry from the Stalinist old guard. At the February meeting of the section of the Lenin Prize Committee dedicated to literature, the Russian poet Nikolai Gribachëv raised the issue of Solzhenitsyn's depiction of Russian national character. Gribachëv was a true creature of the 1940s: he had won two Stalin Prizes for his cheerful poetry about the postwar Soviet village and had infamously led the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the Soviet Writers' Union (see Chapter 1). Gribachëv echoed Sergovantsev's critique of the novella's main character, stating that "Ivan Denisovich's entire philosophy can be reduced to one thing—accommodation, survival."⁵²⁷ Gribachëv objected to this on national grounds. "Is this the true Russian character? Nothing of the sort. All of our history testifies to the rebellious spirit of the Russian people, which nothing could beat out of them."⁵²⁸ Despite Gribachëv's reservations, the Committee decided to leave Solzhenitsyn's book on the list of nominees. At the April meeting of the literature section, Gribachëv again criticized Solzhenitsyn for playing into Western stereotypes of Russian passivity: "This is the 'mysterious Slavic soul,' as they call it abroad. 'How do the Bolsheviks manage to rule? Because the Russian people [*narod*] are obedient, patient, the mysterious Slavic soul."⁵²⁹ Justinas Marcinkevičius, a young Lithuanian writer of peasant origins, said that he did

⁵²⁶ Aleksandr Tvardovskii, "Rabochie tetradi 60-kh godov," *Znamia*, no. 09 (2000): 162.

⁵²⁷ RGALI 2916/2/16 (February 6, 1964): 120.

⁵²⁸ RGALI 2916/2/16 (February 6, 1964): 122.

⁵²⁹ RGALI 2916/2/18 (April 7, 1964): 116.

see positive characteristics of the *narod*, such as dignity and love of hard work, in Ivan Denisovich.⁵³⁰ Aleksandr Prokof'ev, a Russian peasant poet and member of the Stalinist old guard, interrupted Marcinkevičius's defense of Solzhenitsyn's portrayal of the Russian peasantry: "It's not good to think that way about the Russian people."⁵³¹ Ultimately, the literature section did not recommend Solzhenitsyn's novella for inclusion in the final list of candidates by a vote of ten to thirteen. Of the ten writers who voted for Solzhenitsyn's candidacy, only one, his editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii, was Russian.⁵³²

At the April plenum meeting of the Committee, Solzhenitsyn's candidacy once again raised the issue of the character of the Russian people, and especially the Russian peasantry. The members of the theater and film section disagreed with the literature section's stated position on the novella, seeking to defend the Soviet credentials of Solzhenitsyn's hero. "The foundation of the character of Ivan Denisovich is not only patience, but also the resilience [*nesgibaemost'*] of the Russian laboring person," argued the Russian film scholar Aleksandr Karaganov.⁵³³ Tvardovskii likewise sought to defend Ivan Denisovich as a Soviet hero: "This is a warrior of labor, a person in the great army of labor who accomplished historic deeds during the Five-Year Plans and in the postwar struggle [...]. To have a disdainful attitude towards a rank-and-file member of this army, I think, is disgraceful—it shouldn't be allowed!"⁵³⁴ During the heated discussion,

⁵³⁰ RGALI 2916/2/18 (April 7, 1964): 119. On Marcinkevičius, see Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵³¹ RGALI 2916/2/18 (April 7, 1964): 120.

⁵³² RGALI 2916/2/18 (April 7, 1964): 143. Solzhenitsyn commented on this striking national divide in his literary memoir, *The Oak and the Calf*: "In the literary section the vote was split in a way that was not at all accidental but quite prophetic: Tvardovskii and all the non-Russians voted for *Ivan Denisovich*; all the Russians except Tvardovskii voted against it." Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf*, 70.

⁵³³ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 8, 1964): 41.

⁵³⁴ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 8, 1964): 84.

Tvardovskii ended up defending the honor of not just Ivan Denisovich, but of Solzhenitsyn himself when Sergei Pavlov, the first secretary of the Komsomol, suggested (falsely) that Solzhenitsyn had been imprisoned in the Gulag as a common criminal.⁵³⁵ Tvardovskii vigorously rejected Pavlov's attempt at character assassination, calling it "impermissible discrimination" against a former prisoner.⁵³⁶

The writer Nikolai Gribachëv, for his part, continued to argue that Solzhenitsyn had smuggled anti-Soviet, pre-revolutionary notions of the Russian peasantry into his novella: "Solzhenitsyn described in the novella the character of an old Russian peasant. There are no Soviet qualities in this character, in essence. Dignity and an ability to work—these are qualities intrinsic to an old Russian peasant who has not been awakened by the revolution, by the battles that are taking place all over the world. Portrayed is an old Russian peasant [*tip starogo krest'ianina*] and he should not be made into the Russian Soviet people."⁵³⁷ Here we see the clearest articulation of Gribachëv's national critique of Solzhenitsyn, which reflected the orthodox Marxist criticism of Solzhenitsyn's peasant characters that critics had expounded earlier in *Oktiabr'* and *Ognonëk*. According to Gribachëv, Solzhenitsyn was reverting to pre-Soviet notions of the Russian peasantry. In his view, the Russian peasant's true nature was rebellious, not patient and submissive. Any return to pre-revolutionary conceptions of the peasantry was an insult to Soviet Russians. Ivan Denisovich's hardworking nature was consistent with older notions of the Russian peasant and so did not truly make him a Soviet hero. The Stalinist old guard flatly rejected Solzhenitsyn's attempt to revise Soviet conceptions of the Russian peasantry. It is worth noting here that, like Solzhenitsyn and Tvardovskii, Gribachëv also had a close connection to the Russian peas-

⁵³⁵ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 8, 1964): 68-69.

⁵³⁶ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 8, 1964): 83.

⁵³⁷ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 8, 1964): 79.

antry—he was born and raised in a village in the western Russian region of Briansk. While de-Stalinization and the Thaw inspired Tvardovskii to reject Stalin and the policies that had so impacted his family, Gribachëv chose a different path, remaining a faithful member of the pro-Stalinist camp.⁵³⁸ He “defended” the Russian peasantry not by criticizing Stalin’s treatment of them, as Tvardovskii and Solzhenitsyn did, but by asserting that the Russian peasant’s nature was fundamentally in line with Soviet values.

After a fierce exchange of views at the plenum on April 8, the Lenin Prize Committee plenum voted thirty-seven to thirty to include Solzhenitsyn on the final list for the secret ballot.⁵³⁹ Although the plenum had voted narrowly to include Solzhenitsyn’s novella on the final list, intervention “from above” on the day of the final vote sealed the work’s fate. On April 11, the day the Committee members were scheduled to vote, the Party’s main mouthpiece *Pravda* published a collection of letters, supposedly from readers, on whether or not *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* should receive the Lenin Prize. The author of the unsigned article stated that most letter writers “all come to the same conclusion: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novella deserves a positive evaluation, but it cannot be considered an outstanding work deserving of the Lenin Prize.” Some letters from readers raised the same issue that had been previously discussed in literary criticism or at meetings of the Committee: that Ivan Denisovich could not be considered an ideal “folk hero” (*narodnyi geroi*). Another writer seemed to reference the issues raised in critical evaluations of *Matrëna’s House*, stating that the author believed in the *pravednichestvo* (righteousness) of all who suffered.⁵⁴⁰ The article nonetheless signaled a withdrawal of support from

⁵³⁸ See Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 5.

⁵³⁹ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 8, 1964): 99.

⁵⁴⁰ “Vysokaia trebovatel’nost’,” *Pravda*, April 11, 1964.

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich by the Party leadership. The Committee voted to remove Solzhenitsyn's novella from the list by a vote of fifty-one to twenty-one.⁵⁴¹ By rejecting Solzhenitsyn's novella, the conservative forces within the Soviet literary and political establishment had successfully sabotaged Tvardovskii's program of de-Stalinization, especially his agenda on Soviet agriculture and the Russian peasantry. The reception of Yashin's and Solzhenitsyn's literary works among the neo-Stalinist conservatives in 1963 and 1964 shows that the conservative establishment was not yet ready to accept a critical revision of Soviet policy in agriculture and Soviet images of the peasantry—at least, not one emanating from the liberals at *Novyi mir*.

Vikulov and Evolving Conservative Discourse on the Village in the RSFSR Union 1964-5

While controversies over Yashin's and Solzhenitsyn's work raged, Sergei Vikulov continued to climb the Soviet literary ladder throughout the mid-1960s. Fortunately for Vikulov, the conservative literary bureaucrats in the RSFSR Writers' Union became increasingly interested in writing on rural topics during this period. Vikulov's rising profile with the RSFSR Writers' Union drew him closer to the conservative literary establishment, and especially RSFSR Union chief Sobolev. At the same time, Vikulov began to inject the liberals' critiques of rural life in the Soviet Union into conversations taking place at the conservative RSFSR Union.

In June 1964, Vikulov attended a plenum of the RSFSR Union of Writers' secretariat in Krasnodar dedicated to the topic of "the problem of the contemporary village in the work of writers of the RSFSR." The discussion at the plenum revealed that, as Vikulov's star was rising in the conservative RSFSR Union, the Union heavyweights were also beginning to adopt a more

⁵⁴¹ RGALI 2916/2/5 (April 11, 1964): 216-225.

critical attitude towards Stalinist policy towards the village. Much of the discussion at the plenum centered around Sergei Zalygin's recent publication in *Novyi mir*, the novella *On the Irtysh* (*Na Irtyshe*), which told the story of a Siberian peasant who is unjustly branded a *kulak* (rich peasant) when he refuses to give up his personal grain to the collective farm.⁵⁴² Although Zalygin was more hesitant to discuss Stalin's role in collectivization in the novella than Tvardovskii would have liked, he nevertheless struck a powerful blow against Stalinist narratives of collectivization by asking the reader to identify with a peasant who is branded a *kulak*.⁵⁴³ In his keynote address at the June 1964 plenum, the critic Lev Yakimenko discussed the novel at length, expressing some reservations but also praising Zalygin for "insisting on the dignity of the working person, advocating for trust in him."⁵⁴⁴ In addition to praising Zalygin, Yakimenko especially highlighted the new trends in writing on the village that had appeared after 1953, tracing the origins of the new style of writing back to Ovechkin's early sketches in *Novyi mir* (see Chapter 1). In their speeches, the Karbardinian poet Alim Keshokov, the Russian writer Viacheslav Pal'man, and the Tatar writer Gumer Bashkirov also spoke positively about *On the Irtysh*.⁵⁴⁵ While Zalygin and other up-and-coming *Novyi mir* writers received frequent mentions in Yakimenko's speech and those that followed, the Stalinist "collective farm novels" of the 1940s were largely ignored (other than a few brief mentions of Babaevskii, who was in attendance). The recent at-

⁵⁴² S. Zalygin, "Na Irtyshe (Iz khroniki sela Krutye Luki)," *Novyi mir*, no. 2 (1964): 3–80. For a discussion of the novella, see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 51.

⁵⁴³ In a diary entry on December 1, 1963, Tvardovskii expressed frustration that Zalygin was unwilling to address the role of Stalin in collectivization, even avoiding using the Soviet leader's name in the text. "It's very sad when the author does not understand [...] that he will find nothing more important, more significant than this theme," Tvardovskii wrote, comparing Zalygin unfavorably with Solzhenitsyn. Aleksandr Tvardovskii, "Rabochie tetrad'i 60-kh godov," 161.

⁵⁴⁴ RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 85-88, quotation from 87.

⁵⁴⁵ RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 112, 119-120, 162.

tacks on Yashin and Solzhenitsyn notwithstanding, voices within the RSFSR Union increasingly supported *Novyi mir's* efforts to revisit the legacy of Stalinism in agriculture.

In his speech at the June 1964 plenum, Vikulov adopted the critical stance that Yashin had taken on ten years earlier at the 1954 Second Congress of the Union of Writers of the USSR, presenting himself as speaking hard truths about Soviet agriculture to power. Vikulov addressed many of the themes that Aleksandr Yashin had written about in controversial works like 1962's "Vologda Wedding." Vikulov said that the villages in Vologda *oblast'* still looked much the same as they had in the years before collectivization, except that now many more houses were boarded up because their owners had moved to cities. He noted the loss of traditional village traditions and lamented the fact that Soviet institutions had not filled the gap. Vikulov's statements were well-received by the assembled writers, critics, and literary functionaries, including RSFSR Union head Sobolev.⁵⁴⁶ Vikulov's Vologda allies Valerii Dement'ev and Sergei Orlov also discussed Vikulov's new poem *Windows to the Dawn (Oknami na zariu)* positively in their speeches.⁵⁴⁷ The positive reception of Vikulov's speech shows the evolution of conservative discourse on the village over the course of the Thaw. A mere ten years prior, the conservative literary establishment had castigated Fëdor Abramov for daring to challenge the rosy depiction of Soviet rural life in Stalinist collective farm novels. Now they praised Vikulov's negative depiction of rural life in Vologda *oblast'*.

Towards the end of the plenum, however, Vikulov's speech became a flashpoint of controversy between conservative RSFSR Union officials and a young liberal critic from *Novyi mir*.

⁵⁴⁶ See Vikulov's and Sobolev's speeches in the transcript of the meeting in RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 144-147, 327-337. See also positive mentions of Vikulov by L. N. Fomenko of the newspaper *Literaturnaia Rossiia* (156, 159) and Nikolai Shundik of the Riazan' branch of the Writers' Union (209).

⁵⁴⁷ RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 102, 105-106, 293-294.

Born in Leningrad to a Jewish family, Iurii Burtin had a longstanding interest in rural issues.⁵⁴⁸ His first publication at *Novyi mir* was a review of Fëdor Abramov's 1958 novel *Brothers and Sisters*, which addressed the difficulties of postwar reconstruction in a northern Russian village.⁵⁴⁹ Burtin was thus well aware that the issues Vikulov raised had long been a topic of discussion in liberal publications. In his speech, Burtin stated that, although he agreed with Vikulov's speech, he thought it was being over-praised. "I wouldn't praise him for bravery," Burtin said. "If we call a simple statement of facts—the obligation of every honest person—bravery, then it speaks poorly of us." He urged the assembled writers to draw broader conclusions from the conditions in Volgodna *oblast'* that Vikulov had described.⁵⁵⁰ Ultimately, Aleksei Kozhevnikov, the chair of the session, cut him off, accusing him of "a disrespectful attitude towards the work of the plenum."⁵⁵¹ In his concluding speech, the Union head Sobolev blasted Burtin for his "literary snobism" and said he knew nothing about Russian literature.⁵⁵² The tiff over Vikulov's speech showed that criticism of the condition of village life was now permissible in the RSFSR Union, but only if made by the right people. As Vikulov was now an insider among the conservative establishment of the RSFSR Union, he was able to articulate the critical perspective on the condition of the Russian village that he learned from Yashin without facing major blowback.

In October of 1964, four months after the RSFSR Union's plenum, Khrushchev was ousted, and Brezhnev came to power. The intelligentsia largely met Khrushchev's departure in Octo-

⁵⁴⁸ Viacheslav Ogryzko, "Narodoliubets epokhi Tvardovskogo: Iurii Burtin," in *A sud' i kto?! Russkie kritiki i literaturovedy XX veka: Sud'by i knigi* (Moskva: Literaturnaia Rossiia, 2016), 464–69.

⁵⁴⁹ Iurii Burtin, "Ispoved' shestidesiatnika," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 2 (2001), <http://magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/2001/2/bur.html>.

⁵⁵⁰ RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 303.

⁵⁵¹ RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 306.

⁵⁵² RGALI 2938/2/41 (June 8-10, 1964): 329.

ber of 1964 with indifference. The RSFSR Union's Third Congress, held in March of 1965, proceeded uncontroversially, in line with Party policy.⁵⁵³ As at the June 1964 plenum, the conservative leadership of RSFSR Union showed increasing interest in wresting the agricultural issue from the hands of the liberals. Union head Sobolev dedicated a portion of his lengthy keynote address to the trends in writing about the village, stating that "the stream of literature on the village has gathered strength and depth, and its flow is now great, confident, and poetic." Although Sobolev did not mention the departed leader, he traced the origins of this new movement in rural literature to Khrushchev's reforms—the 1953 September plenum on agriculture and the Twentieth Party Congress. He praised recent, relatively uncontroversial works by Mikhail Alekseev, Sergei Krutilin, Gavriil Troepol'skii, and Vladimir Soloukhin. According to Sobolev, these authors demonstrated that the peasants' love of the land, significantly degraded under the cult of personality, had been reborn.⁵⁵⁴ Sobolev thus tried to lay claim to a strand of writing about the village that was both post-Stalinist and less controversial than the works by Yashin and Solzhenitsyn published in *Novyi mir*. Later in the Congress, the first secretary of the Moscow city committee of the Communist Party, Nikolai Egorychev, struck an ideologically conservative tone, saying that literature should show a more positive view of Soviet history instead of focusing on repressions and camps. He called *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* "debatable" (*spornoï*) in both an ideological and artistic sense and mentioned also the publication of several other "debatable" works in *Novyi mir*.⁵⁵⁵ The only rebellious moment of the Congress came during the

⁵⁵³ M. R. Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast' v 1950-e--60-e gody* (Moskva: Dialog MGU, 1999), 329, 333.

⁵⁵⁴ L. Sobolev, "Doklad L. Soboleva 'Sovetskaia literatura i vospitanie novogo cheloveka,'" in *Vtoroi s'ezd pisatelei RSFSR. 3-7 marta 1965 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1966), 80-82, quotation from 82.

⁵⁵⁵ N. G. Egorychev, "Rech' N. G. Egorycheva," in *Vtoroi s'ezd pisatelei RSFSR. 3-7 marta 1965 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Sovetskaia Rossiia," 1966), 199-208.

elections for the Union's governing board. Neo-Stalinist conservatives like Sofronov, Kochetov, Gribachëv, Babaevskii, and Sobolev were elected to the board, but with a significant minority of votes cast against them.⁵⁵⁶ The 1964 plenum and the 1965 congress illustrate that although conservative dominance in the Russian literary sphere continued, in line with the developments in Khrushchev's later years, conservative discourse on agriculture had evolved significantly. The rising esteem for Vikulov within the RSFSR Writers' Union allowed him to articulate the liberal critique of the condition of the Russian village for which Yashin had been so harshly criticized. By co-opting writers from the Russian periphery, the conservatives within the RSFSR Writers' Union ended up taking on a much more critical position on agriculture than they had been willing to accept in the 1950s.

Vikulov in Moscow:
Joining the Russian Nationalists at *Molodaia gvardiia*
1966-1969

The true impact of the change in Soviet leadership became clear when a crackdown on literary dissent began late in the summer of 1965. The KGB arrested members of the Ukrainian creative intelligentsia in Kyiv and seized Solzhenitsyn's archive. The literary scholars Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' were arrested for publishing their works in the West. Brezhnev's ideological crackdown did not extend, however, to certain members of the Russian intelligentsia who espoused increasingly heterodox views. As Nikolai Mitrokhin has explained, the second half of the 1960s saw the rise of a network of intellectuals from the "group of Pavlov" whose Russian nationalism was much more overt than that of the "red patriots" associated with Komsomol chief Sergei Pavlov in the first half of the 1960s. As we have seen, Pavlov was a vehement opponent

⁵⁵⁶ Zezina, *Sovetskaia khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia i vlast'*, 334.

of Solzhenitsyn and *Novyi mir*. In the second half of the 1960s, however, a new group of Pavlov's protégés impacted his network's ideology. While the main historical touchstone of the “red patriots” of the “group of Pavlov” had been the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War, the “*pavlovtsy*” who came to the fore from 1965 onwards were much more interested in Russia’s pre-revolutionary heritage—an interest that they shared with Solzhenitsyn. Their Orthodox, monarchist sympathies raised alarm bells for some in the Soviet leadership, but on the whole, as Yitzhak Brudny has argued, Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership adopted an “inclusionary” policy towards these Russian nationalists.⁵⁵⁷ In the second half of the 1960s, Vikulov would move to Moscow permanently and establish ties with this new wave of Russian nationalist intellectuals, completing his conversion to the conservative Moscow-based literary establishment.

The emergence of a newly assertive Russian nationalism complicated cultural politics in the Soviet capital in the second half of the 1960s. In the first half of the 1960s, cultural polemics had revolved around two competing centers: the conservative orthodox Stalinists of Kochetov’s *Oktiabr’* and the reformists of Tvardovskii’s *Novyi mir*. Neither journal espoused a position that could be called Russian nationalist, although Solzhenitsyn’s works in *Novyi mir* did occasionally stray into that territory. As we have seen, in 1963 *Oktiabr’*’s critic firmly rejected both Yashin’s and Solzhenitsyn’s tendency to hearken back to the traditional Russian peasantry. From 1965 onward, however, the journal *Molodaia gvardiia* became a third pole in Russian cultural politics, representing the views of Russian nationalists who appealed to Russia’s pre-revolutionary past. As Evgeny Dobrenko has explained, “the vector ‘liberals/conservatives’ was replaced by a new, more complex one—‘liberals/conservatives and nationalists.’”⁵⁵⁸ The head editor of *Molodaia*

⁵⁵⁷ On the “first phase” of the inclusionary politics of the Brezhnev era (1965-1970), see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 57-93.

⁵⁵⁸ Dobrenko, “The Lessons of *Oktiabr’*,” 50.

gvardiia was Anatolii Nikonov, whom Nikolai Mitrokhin considers one of the most prominent ideologists of the Orthodox, monarchist wing of the Russian nationalists of the “group of Pavlov.” According to Mitrokhin, upon his arrival at *Molodaia gvardiia* in 1963, Nikonov had cleaned house, firing those who did not share his sympathy for pre-revolutionary Russian nationalist ideology. He gave the new members of the editorial board restricted books by Russian philosophers and White Russian émigrés, as well as the pre-revolutionary anti-Semitic tract *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁵⁵⁹ Contemporary archival sources also provide evidence of the emergence of a newly assertive Russian nationalist faction connected to *Molodaia gvardiia*. A 1966 report sent by the Novosibirsk *oblast’* committee to the Soviet Central Committee in Moscow spoke of the division of Moscow intellectuals into “left” and “right” factions, with the latter claiming to uphold the “Russian spirit” and the principles of socialist realism against the “Jewish-nihilist” “left” faction. The report quoted *Molodaia gvardiia* critic Vladimir Chivilikhin speaking about the existence of a “Jewish yoke” in literature.⁵⁶⁰ In 1966, the Russian nationalists at *Molodaia gvardiia* decided to recruit Sergei Vikulov to their cause.

In November of 1966, Vikulov traveled to Moscow to attend a plenum of the RSFSR Union of Writers, where he received an unexpected invitation to join the staff of *Molodaia gvardiia*. According to Vikulov’s account published in 2002, during a break in the proceedings, Nikonov approached him in the hallways and asked if he would become his deputy. In this post-Soviet account of the episode, Vikulov confesses that he was initially confused as to why Nikonov

⁵⁵⁹ Valerii Ganichev, “Velichie i padenie ‘Molodoi gvardii,’” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 9 (1997): 200; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 341-342.

⁵⁶⁰ The anonymous author of the report, who seems to have sympathized with the “right” faction, claimed to have observed these divisions while visiting Moscow for the November 1966 plenum of the RSFSR Union of Writers. RGANI 5/59/56 (December 8, 1966): 9-13 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972: dokumenty, Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva, dokumenty* (Moskva: ROSSPEN Rossiiskaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 2009), 280-284.

asked him and not a writer from Moscow but concludes that Nikonov would have had a hard time finding a supporter of his "patriotic" position in the liberal Moscow branch of the Writers' Union. Nikonov ultimately persuaded Vikulov to join the *Molodaia gvardiia* staff in 1967.⁵⁶¹ While it is unclear who suggested Vikulov to Nikonov, it seems reasonable that Vikulov's rising prominence in the RSFSR Writers' Union may have brought him to Nikonov's attention. Vikulov's arrival at *Molodaia gvardiia* immediately connected him with the Russian nationalists of the "group of Pavlov" at the journal. At the time of Vikulov's arrival, *Molodaia gvardiia* writers like Vladimir Soloukhin were actively agitating for the preservation of "monuments of history and culture," especially pre-revolutionary buildings such as churches (see Chapter 4). Vikulov became involved in Russian nationalist circles in the capital, participating in the activities of the "Russian club," organized under the auspices of the Moscow branch of the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture (VOOPIK).⁵⁶² The "Russian club" was the main discussion forum for Orthodox, monarchist Russian nationalists in Moscow in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵⁶³ Vikulov's position at *Molodaia gvardiia* thus connected him into the Moscow-based networks of the "group of Pavlov."

As deputy editor of *Molodaia gvardiia*, Vikulov became embroiled in a battle between literary critics that illustrates the growing gap between the liberals of *Novyi mir* and the more strident nationalists of *Molodaia gvardiia*. Between 1965 and 1968, the *Molodaia gvardiia* critics Mikhail Lobanov and Viktor Chalmaev elaborated the ideas of the new, more radical Russian nationalist wing of the intelligentsia in a series of articles. As deputy editor of *Molodaia gvardi-*

⁵⁶¹ Sergei Vikulov, "Protivostoianie," in *Na russkom napravlenii*, 6-8.

⁵⁶² On Vikulov's attendance at meetings of the "Russian Club," see Valentin Sorokin, "Obitel' vdokhnoveniia," in *Vospominaniia o literaturnom institute*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Literaturnogo instituta im. A. M. Gor'kogo, 2010), 18.

⁵⁶³ Mitrokhin, *Ruskaia partiia*, 321-325, 355.

ia, Vikulov personally approved the publication of two of Lobanov's and Chalmaev's articles.⁵⁶⁴ The two authors argued that Russia was locked in an intractable battle with the West, and the only way forward was for Russia to return to its ancient national heritage and acknowledge the central role of the Russian peasantry in the preservation of the nation. A heated debate on the ideas of the *Molodaia gvardiia* followed in the pages of several publications as well as at meetings of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union, culminating with a lengthy 1969 article by Aleksandr Dement'ev in *Novyi mir* articulating the anti-*Molodaia gvardiia* position.⁵⁶⁵

In response to Dement'ev's article, *Ogonëk* published an article titled "What Does *Novyi mir* Stand Against?" ("Protiv chego vystupaet *Novyi mir*?") in June of 1969. The piece, which gained the name "Letter of the Eleven" after its many signatories, accused Dement'ev of willfully distorting of the ideas of the *Molodaia gvardiia* critics and of mocking "all those who are connected by bonds of love to their father's country, to their native land, to the village and especially, for some reason, to Russian antiquity."⁵⁶⁶ According to Vikulov, he was not involved in writing the letter, but he signed on upon the request of Sofronov, the longtime editor of *Ogonëk*.⁵⁶⁷ Sofronov's involvement signaled that the conservative Stalinist writers who had so vociferously attacked Solzhenitsyn and Yashin had come on board with the Russian nationalist project of *Molodaia gvardiia*. Having criticized Yashin and Solzhenitsyn for excessive sympathy for the pre-revolutionary Russian peasantry in 1963 and 1964, the advocates of Stalinist restoration now ral-

⁵⁶⁴ Vikulov later wrote that head editor Nikonov was visiting Sergei Pavlov at the time, and hence the responsibility for the articles fell to him. Vikulov, "Protivostoianie," 13.

⁵⁶⁵ Brudny discusses at length Lobanov's and Chalmaev's articles, as well as the response to them, in Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 72-88. See also Aleksandr Dement'ev, "O traditsiakh i narodnosti," *Novyi mir* 3 (1969): 231-46. Translated in A. Dement'ev, "Traditions and Nationality," *Soviet Studies in Literature* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1969): 3-58.

⁵⁶⁶ "Protiv chego vystupaet *Novyi mir*?" *Ogonëk*, no. 30 (July 26, 1969): 27.

⁵⁶⁷ Vikulov, "Protivostoianie," 15. Mitrokhin states that Lobanov, Chalmaev, Sergovantsev, and several other critics wrote the piece. Sergovantsev's involvement signals a shift to a more nationalist line than he had advanced in his article on Solzhenitsyn and Yashin in *Oktiabr'*. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 355-356.

lied to the defense of the village and "Russian antiquity." *Molodaia gvardiia* had absorbed the conservative Stalinist literary establishment into the Russian nationalist project. Vikulov's signature on the "Letter of the Eleven" thus signaled his final, public split with *Novyi mir*, the journal that had supported his patron Aleksandr Yashin. The young Vologda poet who had lived in literary isolation in the 1950s was now a full-fledged member of the network of Moscow-based conservative Russian nationalist intellectuals.

Nash sovremennik as Institutional Base for the Russian Periphery
1968-1970

Vikulov's tenure at *Molodaia gvardiia* firmly enmeshed him in Russian nationalist networks in Moscow, but he was not fated to spend much time working at the journal. In 1968, he was offered the opportunity to bring his Vologda network to Moscow and turn a literary journal into a megaphone for the perspective from the Russian periphery. That literary journal, *Nash sovremennik*, would become the flagship literary journal for the conservative strand of Russian Village Prose in the 1970s.

At January 1968 meeting of the secretariat of the governing board of the RSFSR Writers' Union, Sobolev reported that the Central Committee had slated the journal *Nash sovremennik* for elimination if it was not improved.⁵⁶⁸ Later that year, Sobolev handpicked Vikulov as the journal's new head editor.⁵⁶⁹ Sobolev seems to have gained support for the journal from Mikhail Suslov, who agreed to increase the journal's circulation and length.⁵⁷⁰ Vikulov was tasked with

⁵⁶⁸ RGALI 2938/2/261 (January 4, 1968): 54-55.

⁵⁶⁹ Vikulov, "Chto napisano perom..." 4-5.

⁵⁷⁰ Simon Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature: The Case of Nash Sovremennik, 1981-91*, Studies in Russia and East Europe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 16.

rebooting the journal, which had been struggling for years to compete with other, more popular Soviet literary journals like *Novyi mir* and *Oktiabr*. In his 1996 memoir, Vikulov writes that when he took over the journal in 1968, he knew that no Moscow writer would send them good material because of *Nash sovremennik*'s poor reputation. He would have to look beyond Moscow. "Who did I know?" Vikulov asked himself. "Who did I read and like?"⁵⁷¹

Luckily for Vikulov, while he had been rising in the Moscow literary world, his *zemliaki* at the Vologda branch of the Writers' Union and other literary friends from the Gorky Literary Institute had begun to attract a great deal of attention. In the second half of the 1960s, critics had become increasingly interested in Vikulov's Higher Literary Courses classmates, Viktor Astaf'ev and Evgenii Nosov, as well as his fellow member of the Vologda branch of the Writers' Union, Vasili Belov, linking them with the broader post-Stalinist trend on writing about the village. At discussion of critics at the RSFSR Writers' Union on developments in Russian prose in 1966, the critic L. G. Yakimenko declared that the most successful literature of late had been on "the village theme."⁵⁷² The assembled critics largely agreed, devoting much attention to works by writers from Vologda, such as Vikulov and Belov, as well as Vikulov's Literary Institute classmates Astaf'ev and Nosov. Speaking about literature on the village theme, the critic Lidiia Fomenko praised works by Belov, Vikulov, Nosov, Alekseev, and Astaf'ev and chided the all-Union journals for failing to notice work produced outside the capital city. "Only our big Moscow journals can't see that we have wonderful prose writers in our cities," she complained.⁵⁷³ Another critic, Vladimir Gusev, argued that the regional journals were publishing more interesting work than

⁵⁷¹ Vikulov, "Chto napisano perom...", 7.

⁵⁷² RGALI 2938/2/224 (March 14-15, 1967): 17.

⁵⁷³ RGALI 2938/2/224 (March 14-15, 1967): 30-31.

what was being published in Moscow.⁵⁷⁴ In the eyes of many critics associated with the RSFSR Union, writers in the periphery were thriving creatively, but the Moscow journals had not yet caught up.

The Vologda-based writer Vasilii Belov's 1966 novella *An Ordinary Thing* triggered a particularly heated discussion among the critics at the meeting at the RSFSR Union of Writers. Like Vikulov, Belov was member of the Vologda branch of the RSFSR Writers' Union and a protégé of Aleksandr Yashin.⁵⁷⁵ Belov had initially attempted to publish *An Ordinary Thing* in several Moscow journals, including *Novyi mir*, but he had found that only the regional journal *Sever*, based in Petrozavodsk, was willing to take the risk to publish it.⁵⁷⁶ The controversial novella dealt with topics such as Khrushchev's campaign to limit private plots in agriculture and Soviet state's policy of limiting the internal movement of peasants by refusing to grant them internal passports. Oppressive policies and the temptations of city life threaten to destroy the traditional virtues of the novella's peasant protagonists. The issue of *Sever* with Belov's story circulated widely in journal form and in copies made on a hectograph (an early form of duplication).⁵⁷⁷ *Novyi mir* editor Tvardovskii sent Belov a letter of congratulations, praising the novella for its reflection of the "truth of life."⁵⁷⁸ Abramov pronounced himself "knocked senseless" by the work in a letter to Belov. "Yes, look what a guy came out of the Vologda forests," he declared.

Abramov told Belov that he hoped that he would avoid the criticism that he and Yashin had re-

⁵⁷⁴ RGALI 2938/2/224 (March 14-15, 1967): 221-223.

⁵⁷⁵ Belov and Yashin carried on an active correspondence between 1962 and Yashin's death in 1968. See correspondence in Belov's and Yashin's personal archival collections: OR RGB 647/39/9; OR RGB 889/15/23.

⁵⁷⁶ Vasilii Belov, "Privychnoe delo," *Sever*, no. 1 (1966): 7-130.

⁵⁷⁷ Valentina Chazhengina, qtd. in Galina Akbulatova, "Privychnoe delo Dmitriia Gusarova," *Litsei*, October 1, 2014, <https://gazeta-litsey.ru/culture/literature/24845-privyichnoe-delo-dmitriya-gusarova>; Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 401.

⁵⁷⁸ Aleksandr Tvardovskii to Vasilii Belov, in OR RGB 889/14/17 (June 9, 1966): 2.

ceived.⁵⁷⁹ Belov himself did largely escape official criticism, but in 1968, *An Ordinary Thing* became the subject of a fierce debate in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Molodaia gvardiia*, and *Novyi mir*. The *Molodaia gvardiia* critics argued that the traditional values of the peasantry should guide Russian politics and culture, while the *Novyi mir* critics rejected the idealization of the peasantry, focusing more on the social criticism in Belov's novella.⁵⁸⁰ Thus, when Vikulov became editor of *Nash sovremennik*, one of his Vologda colleagues was at the very heart of Soviet literary conversation.

Nash sovremennik's poor reputation with Moscow-based writers thus ended up being a blessing in disguise, as it forced Vikulov to rely on writers from the periphery at the very time that writers who came from outside the capital city were finally gaining real traction in the literary world. Vikulov's appointment to *Nash sovremennik* thus welded together Vikulov's Vologda-based network of writers based in the Russian periphery with his new friends in *Molodaia gvardiia* nationalist circles in Moscow. Vikulov's approach was, of course, informed by Vikulov's years of toiling in obscurity in Vologda. "I, yesterday's provincial, knew well the humiliating position of writers who worked in the provinces. [...] It was significantly harder for them to get published in the capital-city journals," Vikulov wrote later in his 1996 memoir. Vikulov decided that *Nash sovremennik* "had to become a home for writers from the periphery."⁵⁸¹ Vikulov invited writers from the Vologda branch of the Writers' Union, such as Belov, Ol'ga Fokina, and Aleksandr Romanov to contribute to the journal. He asked his friends Nosov and Astaf'ev from his Literary Institute days. He also brought in Fëdor Abramov and Gavriil Troepol'skii, *Novyi mir*

⁵⁷⁹ Fëdor Abramov to Belov, January 9, 1966, in Fëdor Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, ed. D. S. Likhachev, V. G. Rasputin, and L. Krutikova-Abramova, vol. 6, 6 vols. (Leningrad: Khudozhlit-ra, Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1995), 373.

⁵⁸⁰ See extended discussion of Belov's novella and the critical response in Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 78-84.

⁵⁸¹ Vikulov, "Chto napisano perom," 19.

writers who had been writing about rural issues since the early 1950s. In the late 1960s, Tvardovskii and *Novyi mir* were under serious pressure from the authorities. The longtime *Novyi mir* writers were understandably looking for a more stable home, and *Nash sovremennik*'s focus on the rural Russian periphery made the journal a good fit for Abramov and Troepol'skii. With Vikulov at the helm, *Nash sovremennik* became the unofficial publication for Vologda writers in Moscow, but it also represented rural writers and writers from the periphery more generally.

With Vikulov at the head of *Nash sovremennik*, the once-obscure literary community of Vologda gained a new prominence in the Soviet literary world. In 1969, the Siberian writer Viktor Astaf'ev moved to Vologda. When he arrived in Vologda, Astaf'ev discovered that nearly the entire Vologda branch of the Writers' Union had braved the February chill to meet him at the train station. As Astaf'ev's biographer observed, the warm welcome by the Vologda writers demonstrated that they accepted a like-minded fellow writer into their literary community.⁵⁸² Astaf'ev's move showed that Vologda was becoming its own center of gravity, pulling in rural writers from the periphery who in an earlier era would likely have ended up in Leningrad or Moscow. Vologda had also gained a reputation as a literary center among younger writers. The Kursk writer Ivan Evseenko, who attended the Gorky Literary Institute in the late 1960s and early 1970s, remembered his fellow students from Vologda as a close-knit group, eager to share stories about their literary mentors Astaf'ev and Belov. In a departure from Yashin's days, the writers were treated well by the political authorities in Vologda. Evseenko observed that the Vologda *oblast'* first secretary "understood well that the glory of Vologda was, perhaps, first of all namely its [writers], and not Vologda lace or Vologda butter."⁵⁸³ Whether or not this was strictly true

⁵⁸² Rostovtsev, *Viktor Astaf'ev*, 300.

⁵⁸³ Ivan Evseenko, "Dva Vladimira," in *Vospominannia o literaturnom institute*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Literaturnogo instituta im. A. M. Gor'kogo, 2008), 496-498.

matters less than the fact that the onetime literary backwater Vologda had become an acknowledged literary center thanks in large part to the efforts of Yashin, Vikulov, and other Vologda writers. The periphery had a new prominence in the literary landscape of the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, as the profile of Vologda and the Russian North was rising in the Soviet literary world in the late 1960s, another region in the periphery was also attracting attention: Siberia. In September 1965, the RSFSR Union of Writers and the Central Committee of the Komsomol held a special seminar for young writers in the eastern Siberian city of Chita. The stated purpose of the seminar was to connect young writers in Siberia with publishers and journals, a goal well in line with Sobolev's broader policy of developing literary life outside the restive capital city of Moscow.⁵⁸⁴ Mitrokhin also argues that the traditionalist and monarchist forces of the "group of Pavlov" organized the Chita seminar to make alliances with rural-oriented writers.⁵⁸⁵ The involvement of the Komsomol and its publishing house, as well as the literary critic Vladimir Chivilikhin, suggests a connection to the "group of Pavlov." In his speech at the concluding plenum, Chivilikhin singled out Valentin Rasputin, a young prose writer living in the Siberian city of Krasnoiarsk, as one of the most talented writers in his seminar, mentioning that he had recommended Rasputin's book to the central publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia*. Chivilikhin concluded his speech by saying that he and Viktor Astaf'ev (also present at Chita) had predicted that a great writer would emerge from Siberia.⁵⁸⁶ The first of many of Rasputin's works to be published by the *Molodaia gvardiia* publishing house came out the next year.⁵⁸⁷ The RSFSR Union's

⁵⁸⁴ RGALI 2938/2/113 (September 10, 1965): 54.

⁵⁸⁵ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 396.

⁵⁸⁶ RGALI 2938/2/113 (September 10, 1965): 15-17.

⁵⁸⁷ One of Rasputin's short stories was included in a collection of stories by young writers in 1966. Semen Ivanovich Shurtakov, ed., *Molodye my: rasskazy uchastnikov chitinskogo i kemerovskogo seminarov* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1966).

efforts to promote young writers in the periphery had a decisive impact on Rasputin's fate. In an earlier era, Rasputin could very well have remained in literary obscurity in the periphery: after all, he had lived in Irkutsk and Krasnoiarsk, but he had never studied in Moscow. Rasputin later wrote that had he not met Chivilikhin at the Chita seminar, he likely would have abandoned literature entirely.⁵⁸⁸ Rasputin's career thus illustrates the massive cultural shifts taking place during "the rise of the periphery" over the course of the 1960s. His integration into the conservative networks of the "group of Pavlov" instead of the liberal networks of Tvardovskii's *Novyi mir* also illustrates the changing political orientation of Village Prose in the 1960s.

Rasputin's literary works continued to attract attention in Moscow and at *Nash sovremennik*. At a meeting of critics at the RSFSR Union dedicated to new developments in Russian prose in 1967, the Moscow-based critic Feliks Kuznetsov spoke at length about the appearance of a number of young, talented writers from Siberia, including Rasputin. Although, in Kuznetsov's view, they were being virtually ignored by criticism, they were nevertheless publishing excellent work in regional journals and publishing houses. Kuznetsov connected the new crop of young Siberian writers to Astaf'ev, Belov, Nosov, Zalygin, Yashin, Abramov, and Soloukhin. "Truly," he told the assembled critics, "there is a stream, a current, you could even say a school in our modern literature." Kuznetsov argued that the practitioners of this new school were introducing a new "national spirit" (*narodnost*) into literature. "It's completely obvious that in recent years we are observing a sharp rise in Russian national self-awareness [*samosoznaniie*]. It's a process that is taking place in literature and in life."⁵⁸⁹ As Kuznetsov's speech showed, critics

⁵⁸⁸ Valentin Rasputin, in *Dnevniki, pis'ma, vospominaniia sovremennikov*, by Vladimir Alekseevich Chivilikhin, *Vlastiteli dum* (Moskva: Algoritm, 2008), 550.

⁵⁸⁹ RGALI 2938/2/276 (January 23-24, 1968): 84-87.

were increasingly seeing a common thread in Russian literature, a new “national spirit” emanating from rural writers who were largely based in the periphery.

It was not long until Vikulov took note of Valentin Rasputin. In 1969, Vikulov published a story by Rasputin, who was still relatively unknown in Moscow. Vikulov’s efforts to cultivate the young writer were vindicated when in 1970 Rasputin found success with his novella *The Last Term* (*Poslednyi srok*), published in *Nash sovremennik*.⁵⁹⁰ Rasputin would publish nearly every work thereafter in *Nash sovremennik*, including 1974’s *Live and Remember* (*Zhivi i pomni*), for which he won a USSR State Prize, and 1976’s *Farewell to Matëra* (*Proshchanie s Matëroi*), which became one of the defining works of Soviet literature of the 1970s.⁵⁹¹ This story of a Siberian village on the eve of being flooded by a giant dam project revealed the human cost of Soviet modernization projects on ordinary Russians living in the periphery. The novella’s moral center is a humble peasant woman named Daria, who (like Solzhenitsyn’s Matrëna) is a symbol for the loss of Russian village culture and values.⁵⁹² *Farewell to Matëra* triggered a major press debate on the fate of the Russian village under Soviet rule.⁵⁹³ As we will see in Chapter 6, Rasputin won the USSR State Prize for literature in 1977 (although not without controversy). The fact that Rasputin continued to live in Irkutsk, thousands of miles from Moscow, even after these major career milestones, is a testament to the changing cultural landscape of Russian literature during this period.

⁵⁹⁰ Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” 10; Valentin Rasputin, “Poslednii srok,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 7, 8 (1970): 3–53, 8–54.

⁵⁹¹ Valentin Rasputin, “Zhivi i pomni,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 10, 11 (1974): 2–88, 58–91; Valentin Rasputin, “Proshchanie s Matëroi,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 10, 11 (1976): 3–71, 17–64. Rasputin discussed his long relationship with the journal in Valentin Rasputin, “Eto rodnoi mne zhurnal,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 10 (1996): 6–7.

⁵⁹² For a discussion of the novella’s themes, see Kathleen Parthé, “Foreword: Master of the Island,” in *Farewell to Matyora*, by Valentin Rasputin (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1979), vii–xix.

⁵⁹³ See Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 165–169.

Vikulov's decision to recruit a stable of writers from the periphery for *Nash sovremennik* thus had a major impact on the depictions of the Russian nation and the Russian peasantry in the journal. Village Prose is often described as "idealizing" rural life, but this is a misunderstanding. As Simon Cosgrove explains, the vision of the journal's writers

was not an idealization in the sense that the writers imagined traditional peasant life to be something other than it was. On the contrary, they were themselves largely from peasant stock and were well acquainted with what peasant life was like in Soviet times. The idealization was a literary expression of a duality inherent in the popular nationalist's view of the Russian nation: the loss-laden, nostalgic evocation of an irrecoverable past, and an intense awareness of the harsh realities of the present.⁵⁹⁴

What Cosgrove describes was very much in line with the way that Yashin and Solzhenitsyn were describing life in the Russian village in their works in 1962. In a stunning reversal, however, these views published by the liberal journal *Novyi mir*, and harshly criticized by conservative forces at the time, were now being championed by the conservative RSFSR Writers' Union's flagship journal. The Vologda network's takeover of *Nash sovremennik* centered the periphery in conversations about Russian national identity and injected *Novyi mir*-style critiques of the impact of Soviet rule in the Russian village into mainstream conservative discourse.

Conclusion

The story of Sergei Vikulov and his *zemliaki* in the 1960s illustrates the massive changes taking place in Soviet Russian literature over the course of the 1960s. During this period, writers from the rural Russian periphery rose to increasing prominence. When Vikulov first met Aleksandr Yashin, the famous poet who would become his literary patron, Vologda was a literary backwater. By leveraging his connections with Yashin and other *zemliaki*, however, Vikulov was

⁵⁹⁴ Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature*, 21.

able to begin to build a literary network based in Vologda. For Vikulov, as for many non-Russian writers, central institutions such as the Higher Literary Courses at the Gorky Literary Institute opened up new opportunities to advance in the world of Soviet literature. Traveling to Moscow was an opportunity to make connections that could further one's career, but the relative deprivation faced by Soviet Russian writers on the periphery also helped to hone their sense of identity and feelings of resentment toward Moscow-based elites. Vikulov and his growing network of rural writers based in Vologda benefitted from central authorities' decision to promote supposedly more loyal writers from the periphery and to co-opt the nascent Russian Village Prose movement. In 1968, the RSFSR Writers' Union appointed Vikulov to the position of head editor of *Nash sovremennik*, enabling him to transform the journal as "a home for writers from the periphery"—especially writers from his own Vologda network. As *Nash sovremennik* became a leading voice in conversations about Russian identity over the course of the 1970s, the journal articulated a form of Russian national identity that centered the periphery and the Russian peasantry.

This chapter has also sought to explain how the critical, anti-Stalinist rural discourse of Russian Village Prose found a surprising home in "conservative" literary institutions in the 1960s. While Vikulov started out with his strongest connections to Aleksandr Yashin of the anti-Stalinist *Novyi mir* camp, he gradually expanded his ties to the conservative establishment of the RSFSR Writers' Union and the younger generation of Russian nationalists associated with the "group of Pavlov" and based at the journal *Molodaia gvardiia*. As he migrated to the conservative/nationalist camp, however, Vikulov brought many of the "liberal," anti-Stalinist ideas of Yashin and *Novyi mir* about the village with him. As a result of the incorporation of Vikulov's Vologda network into literary institutions dominated by anti-reform factions, the conservative literary establishment that had so fiercely rejected Yashin and Solzhenitsyn in 1963 and 1964 be-

came increasingly open to harsh critique of the impact of Soviet policies on the Russian village by the end of the 1960s. This amounted to nothing short of a revolution in the conservative stance on the village, which in the 1950s had still been deeply committed to Stalinist discourse about the village.

Finally, the story of the formation, expansion, and ultimate triumph of Vikulov's Vologda-based network reveals the importance of cultural networks in Soviet literature in the 1960s. In the 1950s, Vikulov managed to advance his literary career by leveraging his shared regional and class origins with Yashin and other Vologda writers from rural backgrounds. With the establishment of the Vologda Writers' Union in 1961, this nascent network found a true institutional home and began to attract other writers, first northerners like Vasiliï Belov and Ol'ga Fokina, and later even the Siberian Viktor Astaf'ev. Vikulov solidified his ties to the conservative Russian nationalist intellectual milieu in Moscow during his time at *Molodaia gvardiia*. With Vikulov's appointment to the editor's chair of *Nash sovremennik* in 1968, the Vologda network moved its institutional headquarters to Moscow. The case study of a single literary patronage network reveals the way that networks sought to capture state institutions in order to expand their access to state resources and their influence in the literary world and beyond.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore two aspects of the creation of a rural-based conception of the nation in Soviet culture: the reincorporation of the church into conceptions of national culture and the valorization of rural material culture. As we will see, parallel cultural developments were taking place in Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova simultaneously. In Chapter 6, we will continue to follow *Nash sovremennik's* story into the 1970s through the debates over the nomination of Valentin Rasputin for a USSR State Prize. As we will see, although writers from the Russian periphery benefitted from what Yitzhak Brudny has called a "politics of inclusion" towards Russian

nationalists, the perspective from the Russian periphery still met with resistance from some corners of Soviet literature.

Chapter 4:

Village Writers and the Preservation of Historic Churches: Religion and National Culture in Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, 1960s-1980s

In the 1980 song “Incident at Customs,” the legendary Soviet underground singer Vladimir Vysotskii sang about watching a man attempt to smuggle two fifteenth-century crosses out of the country at Sheremetevo Airport. Approving of the custom agents’ decision to confiscate the crosses, Vysotskii observed,

We get smarter each year anyhow —
We ourselves need crucifixes now, —
They are the riches of our people,
Even if they are hold-overs from the past.⁵⁹⁵

This short vignette encapsulates the ambivalent late Soviet attitudes towards the material inheritance of Russian Orthodoxy. On the one hand, the two crosses reflect “backwards” religion. Nevertheless, many recognize the crosses as “the riches of our people”—a part of national cultural heritage. As usual, Vysotskii was well-attuned to attitudes in Soviet society. Starting in the mid-1950s, Soviet intellectuals became increasingly interested in fifteenth-century crucifixes and other Russian Orthodox treasures. Cultural elites led major pushes to preserve historic churches and other religious buildings in a number of Soviet republics. The revival of interest in historic church buildings was widespread, generating interest among intellectuals in many republics, including the RSFSR, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine, to name a few.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹⁵ “Мы все-таки мудреем год от года —
Распятъя нам самим теперь нужны,
Они - богатство нашего народа,
Хотя и - пережиток старины.”
Vladimir Vysotskii, *Sluchai na tamozhne*, 1980, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFKFcg13mvA>.

⁵⁹⁶ On interest in historic monuments in Lithuania, see Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 119, 143.

Some of the most active participants in these movements were writers who (unlike the Muscovite Vysotskii) were born in villages. This chapter focuses on the involvement of three rural-born writers—Vladimir Soloukhin in Russia, Oles' Honchar in Ukraine, and Ion Druță in Moldova—in the movement to preserve historic churches.

In the decades following the death of Stalin, the pan-Soviet movement to preserve historic churches and monasteries became a means by which writers from villages reintegrated religion into national heritage and culture. Believing religion to be a tool used to oppress the masses, the Bolsheviks had sought to empty national culture of religious content. The Stalinist collectivization campaigns of the early 1930s particularly targeted churches as symbols of "backwards" rural culture and potential sources of opposition to Soviet authority. Even after the mass church closures that accompanied collectivization, religious belief tended to be associated with peasants and rural areas, where it was typically stronger than in the more "progressive" cities. Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw created an opportunity for writers from villages to protest the neglect of historic churches and monasteries, a task that was made more urgent by Khrushchev's attempts to revive the anti-religious fervor of the early Stalin era. Rural-born intellectuals sought to prevent the further destruction of built religious heritage under Soviet rule by arguing that religious buildings were an important component of national cultural heritage—"the riches of our people," in Vysotskii's words. Church preservationists thus sought to reintegrate religion into national history and to articulate the significance of that national history for Soviet citizens. Over time, however, as writers across the Soviet Union saw little progress on the issue of historic church preservation, writers increasingly depicted the Soviet state as neglecting national heritage.

Intellectuals sought to reintroduce religious culture to national identity by engaging in cultural politics. In addition to writing literary texts, they pursued this goal through founding and

taking over state institutions. As discussed in Chapter 3, groups of intellectuals often sought to gain control of state institutions in order to gain access to state funds and (potentially) control over publications that they could use to promote their views to the public. Starting in the Khrushchev era, members of the Soviet intelligentsia began to form grassroots clubs and organizations to promote the preservation of historic "monuments." (In practice, this often meant historic churches and other religious buildings.) The most successful of these organizations managed to gain some state support for their efforts. Finally, in the mid-1960s, Soviet authorities decided to channel the widespread interest in historic church preservation into official "Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture" in each republic. Many advocates for historic preservation were excited by this development and sought to gain control of these organizations, with varying degrees of success. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, however, the failure of the state to provide adequate support for the massive task of preserving the country's many crumbling churches and monasteries led to disillusionment with the Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture. The Soviet state's engagement with the preservationist movement thus backfired, leaving many intellectuals deeply pessimistic about the possibility of achieving their goals within the Soviet system.

The case of the movement for historic church preservation also sheds light on the evolution of Soviet policies towards nationally-minded intellectuals in the union republics in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras. Khrushchev, while hostile to religion, was generally tolerant of expressions of national sentiment among non-Russian intellectuals. He thus allowed several voluntary Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture to be founded in the republics of the south Caucasus while he was in power. Khrushchev remained, however, skeptical of Russian cultural nationalists like Vladimir Soloukhin who sought the establishment of a

similar organization for historic preservation in the RSFSR. The All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture was only founded after Leonid Brezhnev's rise to power in October of 1964. Brezhnev pursued what Yitzhak Brudny called a "politics of inclusion" toward Russian nationalists, with the ultimate goal of transforming them into a force that would support the regime.⁵⁹⁷ I argue that Brezhnev's allies in Ukraine and Moldova, meanwhile, adopted a "politics of exclusion" that marginalized nationally-minded intellectuals, including those who advocated for the preservation of historic churches. In 1968, members of Brezhnev's network within the Ukrainian Party conducted a fierce campaign against Oles' Honchar's novel *Cathedral*, which argued for the importance of historic churches for Ukrainian national identity. In Moldova, meanwhile, where a Brezhnev ally had been head of the Moldovan Party since 1961, the leadership persecuted the writer Ion Druță for his supposed "nationalism," forcing him to abandon the republic in 1965. Druță nevertheless continued to criticize the Moldovan government from his new home in Moscow, slamming the feeble efforts of the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in a novella he published in a Moscow-based journal in 1973. The varying fates of intellectuals and institutions dedicated to the preservation of historic churches in Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova thus demonstrate the unequal policies adopted towards the nationally-minded intellectuals in the Soviet western borderlands by members of Brezhnev's political network. While preservation advocates in all three republics were ultimately disillusioned by the Soviet state's continuing neglect of churches, the exclusionary politics adopted in Moldova and Ukraine further alienated the Moldovan and Ukrainian cultural elite from the Soviet state.

⁵⁹⁷ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Soviet Conceptions of the Nation and Policies on Church Preservation

Opposition to religion was central to the original Bolshevik vision. As the Bolsheviks associated religion with both the *ancien régime* and backwards peasant practices, they sought to remove religion from early Soviet conceptions of national culture. According to Lenin, every national culture contained elements of the “socialist” and “democratic” culture of the nation’s working class as well as elements of “bourgeois,” “clerical,” and “reactionary” culture.⁵⁹⁸ It followed that religion ought to be rejected as an element of the national culture of socialist nations. The active destruction of built religious heritage was not, however, initially high on the Bolshevik agenda in the decade following the 1917 October Revolution. In fact, much like the French revolutionaries before them, Lenin and the Bolsheviks sought to preserve the cultural riches of the old regime in order to give them back to the people—properly contextualized in a museum setting, of course.⁵⁹⁹ Later advocates for church preservation could thus point to the “Leninist” legacy of cultural heritage preservation as justification for their efforts.

In 1928, the Bolshevik battle against religion intensified significantly in connection with the onset of forced collectivization as collectivization activists sought to stamp out “backwards” peasant culture. As Lynne Viola explains, the collectivization campaign was accompanied by “an all-out war on village religious institutions and symbols.”⁶⁰⁰ Closing the local church and deport-

⁵⁹⁸ “The *elements* of democratic and socialist culture are present, if only in rudimentary form, in *every* national culture, since in *every* nation there are toiling and exploited masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism. But *every* nation also possesses a bourgeois culture (and most nations a reactionary and clerical culture as well) in the form, not merely of “elements”, but of the *dominant* culture. Therefore, the general ‘national culture’ is the culture of the landlords, the clergy and the bourgeoisie.” V. I. Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question,” in *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 20, 45 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 24, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/crnq/index.htm>.

⁵⁹⁹ See Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 76-78.

⁶⁰⁰ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 39. The anti-religious campaign was not limited to Orthodox Christianity. See Sho-

ing the village priest as a *kulak* was often the first step in the collectivization of a village.⁶⁰¹ In rural villages, churches were the center of the community, and the church's bell called peasants together in cases of emergency. Thus, "the closing of a church or the removal of a bell were acts designed to weaken peasant culture and resistance as well as to remind the village of its subject status."⁶⁰² Stalin's assault on the rural church was accompanied by spectacular attacks on urban churches. On December 5, 1931, for example, Soviet authorities dynamited Moscow's famous Church of Christ the Savior to make way for the Palace of the Soviets.

After the furious days of collectivization, state attacks on the property and personnel of religious institutions slowed. As Sheila Fitzpatrick explains in her work on the post-collectivization peasantry, religious belief remained a part of Soviet life throughout the 1930s, especially in rural areas.⁶⁰³ In Vladimir Soloukhin's 1989 memoir of his rural boyhood, *Laughter over the Left Shoulder*, he recounts how his mother taught him religious values and prayed daily before an icon. Soloukhin's older brother, meanwhile, adopted the militant atheism taught in the School for the Youth of the Peasantry. Soloukhin stopped going to church with his mother by the time that he started going to school; the porch of the padlocked church was the setting for many of his boyhood games.⁶⁰⁴

The Second World War prompted a significant realignment in Soviet policy toward the Orthodox Church, opening the door to the reincorporation of religion into national identity. The

shana Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001).

⁶⁰¹ Dimitry Pospelovsky, *Soviet Antireligious Campaigns and Persecutions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 64.

⁶⁰² Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin*, 40.

⁶⁰³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 204-214.

⁶⁰⁴ Vladimir Soloukhin, *Laughter over the Left Shoulder* (London: Owen, 1990), 91-101.

onset of the Second World War led to a resurgence of religious practice among the population in both occupied and unoccupied Soviet territory. This upsurge in religious practice was most significant in occupied Soviet territories such as Ukraine and Moldova, as Nazi occupying forces allowed churches to re-open. In 1943, Stalin allowed the re-establishment of the Moscow Patriarchate and permitted some churches and monasteries to re-open.⁶⁰⁵ The Russian Orthodox Church thus joined the increasingly long list of Russian national symbols that had been (at least partially) rehabilitated since the mid-1930s.⁶⁰⁶ After the war, as Catriona Kelly has argued, the association of the restoration of churches that had been destroyed during the war with broader efforts to rebuild after the Nazi occupation gave the cause of church preservation an unexpected boost.⁶⁰⁷

During the late Stalinist period and the early Khrushchev years, the state and the Moscow Patriarchate reached an uneasy *modus operandi*.⁶⁰⁸ Khrushchev's Thaw and de-Stalinization did not translate into greater freedom for the Orthodox Church or greater attention to the country's crumbling churches. Quite the contrary: even as Khrushchev was repudiating Stalinist terror, he

⁶⁰⁵ See Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin's Holy War: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v XX veke*, 215-216, 347; E. Iu. Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, New York; London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 68-73.

⁶⁰⁶ See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), especially Chapter 10.

⁶⁰⁷ Catriona Kelly, *Socialist Churches: Radical Secularization and the Preservation of the Past in Petrograd and Leningrad, 1918-1988* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2016), 11.

⁶⁰⁸ In the western regions of Galicia (Ukraine) and Bessarabia (Moldova), which were only fully integrated into the Soviet Union after the war, relations with the Orthodox Church during this period were complicated by the larger process of Sovietization. In western Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church became a tool of Sovietization, used to stamp out the Uniate Catholic and Autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, which had grown under Nazi occupation. In Moldova, this period in Church-state relations was also tumultuous. Popular, localized mobilization around churches that had been closed or were slated for destruction was not uncommon in Moldova during this period. Miner, *Stalin's Holy War*, 163-204. V. I. Pasat, "'Pravoslavie v Moldavii: Kratkii istoricheskii ocherk (1953-1960 gg.)'" in *Pravoslavie v Moldavii: vlast', tserkov', veruiushchie: 1940-1991: sobranie dokumentov v 4 tomakh*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2009), 43-60.

launched a new assault on the church.⁶⁰⁹ Khrushchev's wide-ranging attack on all aspects of Russian Orthodox Church life led to a nearly 50% decline in the number of officially operating churches from 1958 to 1966.⁶¹⁰ During the period of the anti-religious campaign, there were several high-profile cases of peasant mobilization around churches and monasteries that were threatened with closure, particularly in Moldova and other recently Sovietized western borderlands⁶¹¹. Khrushchev's city-planning policies, meanwhile, often led to the destruction of churches in urban areas as well.

While peasant protestors attempted to keep churches and monasteries open for religious purposes, growing movements of nationally-minded intellectuals sought to save them as important works of national culture.⁶¹² Khrushchev's relaxation of censorship as a part of his policy of de-Stalinization created a space for intellectuals across the Soviet Union to call for the restoration of churches that had been neglected since the 1930s. Even as church and monastery closures once again rocked the countryside, a new type of state-sponsored volunteer organization began to emerge in the Soviet Union: Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture. In the spirit of other social (*obshchestvennye*) organizations promoted under Nikita Khrushchev, these societies were intended to replace state bureaucracies with organizations that would har-

⁶⁰⁹ As Mikhail Shkarovskii explains, "Formed as a political actor during the 1930s, [Khrushchev] had dedicated considerable efforts to the destruction of churches in Moscow and in Ukraine. Aside from that, being a particular kind of 'revolutionary romantic,' the new leader of the party sincerely believed in the possibility of the quick construction of communism, in which there would be no place for religious beliefs." Shkarovskii, *Russkaia Pravoslavnaia Tserkov' v XX veke*, 351.

⁶¹⁰ Mikhail V. Shkarovskii, "The Russian Orthodox Church in 1958-64," *Russian Studies in History* 50, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 94.

⁶¹¹ V. A. Kozlov, "Orthodoxy in Revolt: Uprisings Among Religious Believers," in *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, trans. Elaine McClarnand MacKinnon, *The New Russian History* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 163-69.

⁶¹² See Kelly's discussion of the varying goals of believers and preservationists in *Socialist Churches*.

ness initiative from below.⁶¹³ The first three Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture were founded in the South Caucasus, starting with the Georgian SSR in 1959 and then spreading to Azerbaijan (1962) and Armenia (1964).⁶¹⁴ As we will see, the preservation of historic churches became deeply intertwined with the reassertion of the nation in public discourse. As the political and intellectual elites of the South Caucasus were particularly enthusiastic about pursuing the goals of nation-building through state institutions, it is not surprising that these state-sponsored voluntary societies first emerged there.⁶¹⁵ As will be discussed further below, Russian intellectuals were also interested in forming a monument preservation organization on the Georgian model, but Khrushchev blocked the creation of a monument preservation society in the RSFSR. At the same October 1964 party plenum that witnessed Khrushchev's fall from power, the Party mandated the creation of republican Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and culture across the Soviet Union.⁶¹⁶ The organizations began to spread beyond the Caucasus to the RSFSR, Ukraine, Moldova, and other republics. Writers often played a

⁶¹³ Moscow liquidated the previous all-Union heritage preservation organization, the State Inspection for the Preservation of Monuments, placing heritage preservation in the hands of republican authorities. See Igor Demchenko, "Decentralized Past: Heritage Politics in Post-Stalin Central Asia," *Future Anterior* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 65-68. On from-below initiatives during the Thaw, see Eleonory Gilburd, "The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s," in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 373.

⁶¹⁴ The Georgian Society had a press organ, *Friends of Monuments of Culture*, dating back to at least 1964. See Sak'art'velos kulturis žeglt'a dac'vis sazogadoeba [Gruzinskoe obshchestvo okhrany pamiatnikov kul'tury], *Žeglis megobari [Druz'ia pamiatnikov kul'tury]*, *Materialuri kulturis žeglebi* (T'bilisi: Gamomc'emloba "Sabčota Sak'art'velo.").

⁶¹⁵ On the South Caucasus, see Claire Pogue Kaiser, "Lived Nationality: Policy and Practice in Soviet Georgia, 1945-1978" (University of Pennsylvania, 2015), Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations (1795), <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1795>; Maike Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 9-31; V. A. Shnirel'man, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001)

⁶¹⁶ This decision referenced in RGANI 5/36/157 (February 17, 1966): 14-15 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura , 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, *Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva , dokumenty* (Moskva: ROSSPĖN Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopediia, 2009), 196-197.

major role in the formation of these institutions, which they hoped would help them move beyond statements of protest into action.

Elite Struggles over Nationalities Policy in the 1950s and 1960s

Because preservationists drew a connection between church and nation, policy towards historic church preservation in the Soviet Union was linked to nationalities policies in the union republics. Policies towards the union republics were an important factor in the struggle for power at the top echelons of the Soviet political elite after the death of Stalin in March of 1953. In the months following Stalin's death, Lavrentii Beria sought to strengthen his position by appealing to national republican elites who were disgruntled with the pro-Russian policies of the later Stalin years. After Beria's downfall in June of 1953, Khrushchev—who had been head of the Ukrainian republic from 1938 to 1949—took over the position of champion of the national republican elites.⁶¹⁷ Until the late 1950s, Khrushchev promoted economic decentralization and greater official tolerance for expressions of national sentiment in the republics, both of which strengthened his position in the union republics. Khrushchev's modest Thaw on national expression was a break with the Russocentric policies of late Stalinism and a return to the spirit of the earlier years of Stalin's rule, when the flowering of each individual nation received more emphasis.⁶¹⁸ Because Khrushchev came to power by opposing the pro-Russian policies of the late Stalin era, he was not a natural ally for nationally-minded Russian intellectuals. Khrushchev's nationalities policies were consistent with the broader spirit of his approach in the 1950s, which involved a

⁶¹⁷ Michael Loader, "Beria and Khrushchev: The Power Struggle over Nationality Policy and the Case of Latvia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 10 (December 2016): 1759–1792.

⁶¹⁸ See Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.

repudiation of later Stalinist policies such as the 1937 purges and a revival of the utopian spirit of the early 1930s.

Khrushchev's position in the union republics weakened in 1958, when a wave of purges of top republican leadership on charges of "nationalism" began. The charges against union leaders were largely based on allegations of favoritism towards native cadres at the expense of Russians. From 1958 to 1961, the central Soviet leadership removed Party chiefs in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Moldova, and Tajikistan. They were replaced by a new crop of republican Party leaders with a mandate to crack down on nationalism.⁶¹⁹ Although some scholars have identified Khrushchev as the impetus behind the purges of the national republican leaders, recent scholarship suggests that an anti-Khrushchev, neo-Stalinist coalition of Soviet leaders including Vladimir Semichastnyi, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Mikhail Suslov was behind the purge.⁶²⁰ One of the few republics that was spared was Ukraine, which was so dominated by Khrushchev's political allies that a purge would have been political suicide. As Ukraine was not subject to an anti-nationalist purge, Shelest, who was affiliated with Khrushchev's ally Nikolai Podgornyi (Ukr: Mykola Pidhornyi) in the Politburo, was able to continue the nationalities policies of the 1950s through the 1960s in Ukraine. It was only after Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964 that crackdowns on the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia began, ultimately culminating with a wave of arrests and the replacement of Shelest by the Brezhnev-backed Shcherbyts'kyi in 1972. As we will see, the battles between these high-level political networks with differing outlooks on the management of the national culture had significant impacts on the

⁶¹⁹ Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy toward the Nationalities in the Soviet Union: From Totalitarian Dictatorship to Post-Stalinist Society*, trans. Karen Forster and Oswald Forster (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 228-241, 245-254.

⁶²⁰ See Michael Loader, "The Khrushchev Thaw and Soviet Latvia: National Politics 1953 - 1961" (King's College London, 2015), 250-253. Note: Updated version provided by the author.

leadership of the union republics. Republican leaders in turn shaped policy towards monument preservation.

Russia: Vladimir Soloukhin and the Russian Church Preservation Movement

By the early 1960s, a significant movement for the preservation of monuments had emerged among nationally-minded Russian intellectuals in the RSFSR. As discussed above, the Russian Village Prose writer Vladimir Soloukhin was first exposed to Russian Orthodoxy during his rural boyhood. Through his involvement in the preservationist movement, Soloukhin, along with other Russian nationalist intellectuals, argued for the preservation of built religious heritage as an integral part of Russian national culture. Explicitly rejecting the destruction of churches under Stalin during the 1930s, they also implicitly rejected the Leninist doctrine that marginalized religion as an element of the culture of socialist nations. In order to advance their cause, Soloukhin and other participants in the church preservation movement sought the establishment of a Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in the RSFSR starting in the early 1960s. They only found success, however, after Khrushchev's ouster and Brezhnev's rise to power in 1964. Brezhnev's politics of inclusion towards Russian nationalist intellectuals allowed for the creation of the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture (Rus: Vserossiiskoe obshchestvo okhrany pamiatnikov istorii i kul'tury, or VOOPIK). Russian nationalists initially managed to gain control over VOOPIK, but ultimately found themselves marginalized. By the 1980s, Soloukhin had become profoundly disillusioned by what he saw as the Soviet state's failure to preserve an integral aspect of Russian national culture—its historic churches and monasteries.

Although Khrushchev was not particularly sympathetic towards Russian cultural nationalists, his Thaw allowed nationally-minded Russian intellectuals, particularly professional preservationists and Russian Village Prose writers, began to air their grievances about the state's disregard for cultural heritage preservation. Historic church preservation reemerged as an important issue during the early days of the Thaw. In 1955, a small letter to the editor appeared in *Literaturnaia gazeta*. In the letter, archaeologist Nikolai Voronin and medievalist Dmitrii Likhachëv decried the neglect of treasures of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century wooden church architecture in the Russian North. It was the first of many campaigns by these two leading scholars of old Russian history to preserve Russia's architectural legacy.⁶²¹ In 1956, a group of Moscow-based intellectuals, including the preservationist Pëtr Baranovskii, sent a telegram to Khrushchev protesting the closure of the State Inspection for the Preservation of Monuments.⁶²² Meanwhile, writers associated with the nascent Village Prose movement also began to raise this issue in the Russian and all-Union press. Efim Dorosh's *A Village Diary* (published in *Literaturnaia Moskva* in 1956) and Vladimir Soloukhin's *Vladimir Country Roads* (published in *Novyi mir* in 1957) portrayed ancient churches, many of them crumbling from neglect, as an essential part of the Russian landscape.⁶²³ *Vladimir Country Roads* discussed a twelfth-century church that had fallen into ruin, as well as successful efforts to preserve the churches of the ancient city of Suzdal'. In *Vladimir Country Roads*, the white churches of Suzdal', peasant folk traditions, even historic no-

⁶²¹ A. Moroz et al., "Nel'zia tak otnosit'sia k pamiatnikam narodnogo zodchestva," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 15, 1955. See discussion of Likhachëv's involvement in preservation in Vladislav Zubok, *The Idea of Russia: The Life and Work of Dmitry Likhachev* (London; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2017).

⁶²² See the discussion of this episode in Igor Demchenko, "Decentralized Past: Heritage Politics in Post-Stalin Central Asia," *Future Anterior* 8, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 65-6.

⁶²³ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 48, 55.

ble country estates were all elements of the pre-revolutionary Russian past that were worth preserving.⁶²⁴

In the 1960s, preservationists in Moscow and Leningrad founded grassroots organizations to promote their cause, hoping ultimately for the founding of a state-sponsored voluntary society. The acknowledged leader of the church preservation movement in Moscow was Pëtr Baranovskii, a restorationist trained in the late Imperial period. He led a multi-generational group of Russian intellectuals who were dedicated to the goals of documenting, defending, and restoring historical monuments. Baranovskii's group of preservationists met first as a weekly reading group dedicated to old Russian literature, history, and art starting in the late 1950s. This group eventually became formalized as the "Rodina club," which in May of 1964 became the first legal Russian organization specializing in the preservation of monuments.⁶²⁵ Like the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth that will be discussed below, the Rodina club was oriented towards students and initially received support and publicity from the Komsomol.⁶²⁶ Meanwhile, in St. Petersburg, Dmitrii Likhachëv and other scholars also mobilized around preservationist causes, and a preservationist club called the Club of the Friends of Leningrad boasted around 400 members.⁶²⁷ Despite popular support for the preservationist cause among intellectual elites in Russia's leading cities, however, Khrushchev's administration continued to refuse petitions to create an RSFSR

⁶²⁴ Vladimir Soloukhin, "Vladimirskie prosëlki," *Novyi mir*, no. 9–10 (1957): 82–131, 75–134. Translated in Vladimir Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, (New York, Dutton 1967, 1967), 104–106, 198–207. See also Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 55.

⁶²⁵ Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953–1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 301, 308. See also Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 68.

⁶²⁶ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 309–310.

⁶²⁷ Kelly, *Socialist Churches*; Denis Kozlov, "The Historical Turn in Late Soviet Culture," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 3 (2001): 596–597; Zubok, *The Idea of Russia*.

voluntary organization for the preservation of monuments.⁶²⁸ Khrushchev was understandably hesitant to support a quasi-nationalist Russian heritage preservation society that could serve as an organizational base for his enemies, and prevented its founding until he was finally toppled in 1964.

The preservationist movement in Moscow and Leningrad attracted enthusiastic support from Village Prose writers like Vladimir Soloukhin, who argued for the founding of a Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture in the RSFSR following the Georgian example. As Yitzhak Brudny explains, the anti-religious campaign that started in 1958 further motivated writers with rural roots to become involved in church preservation. Recently urbanized intellectuals like Soloukhin were more likely to know the people targeted by the anti-religious campaign: Russian Orthodox believers, most of whom were “elderly, poorly educated, non-skilled, collective farmers.”⁶²⁹ In an essay titled “Preserving the Past is Thinking about the Future” (“*Berech’ proshloe — dumat’ o budushchem*”), published in the Leningrad literary journal *Neva* in 1962, Soloukhin wrote glowingly about the activities of the Georgian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of Culture. “I do not see a reason why such societies could not exist in other republics of our country, including the Russian Federation,” he wrote. “This society could have its own museum, its own journal, some essential resources, and the main thing—

⁶²⁸ During the June 1963 plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a group of writers led by N. Petrov, P. Korin, and D. Shmarinov gave Khrushchev a letter requesting the creation of a Russian voluntary society for the preservation of monuments and a central administrative organ. He refused the request. See discussion in RGANI 5/36/157 (February 17, 1966): 14-15 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva, dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN Rossiiskaiia politicheskaiia enttsiklopediia, 2009), 196-197.

⁶²⁹ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 44.

social initiative.”⁶³⁰ Soloukhin clearly sought access to the state resources that an official institution could provide.

Soloukhin’s essay, moreover, shows that Russian preservationists were well aware that their counterparts in Georgia were benefitting from inclusionary policies in the Georgian republic that provided state support for nationally-minded intellectuals. As we will see time and time again, inclusionary politics in one republic tended to have spillover effects in others, as intellectuals were quick to note when their colleagues in other republics seemed to be receiving preferential treatment. In the early 1970s, an author writing in the underground Russian nationalist *samizdat* journal *Veche* even cited Khrushchev’s refusal to allow the creation of a monument preservation society in the RSFSR as evidence of a “sinister” policy of discriminating against Russians in favor of non-Russian nationalities.⁶³¹

In the mid-1960s, Soloukhin became affiliated with a broader network of Russian nationalist intellectuals who hearkened back to the country’s pre-revolutionary past as a source of Russian national identity. As discussed in Chapter 3, a group of intellectuals associated with the “group of Pavlov” associated Sergei Pavlov, the head of the Central Committee of the Komsomol from 1959 to 1968, began to promote their brand of pre-revolutionary Russian nationalism in the Komsomol journal *Molodaia gvardiia*. In May of 1965, the journal published a letter from a group of Russian intellectuals, including the writer Leonid Leonov and the painter Pavel Korin that redeemed churches by arguing that they reflected the genius of the Russian peasant, and therefore, the nation:

⁶³⁰ Vladimir Soloukhin, “Berech’ proshloe—dumat’ o budushchem,” *Neva*, no. 11 (1962). See reprinted edition in Vladimir Soloukhin, *S liricheskikh pozitsii* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1965), 185.

⁶³¹ Articles from *Veche* were reprinted in the Russian émigré journal *Volnoe slovo*. O. M., “‘Survey’ o russkom natsionalizme,” *Vol’noe slovo*, no. 17–18 (1975): 157. Dunlop discusses both the *Veche* article and the Soloukhin article in John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 66-67.

We must battle with the self-righteous opinion of narrow-minded people that churches and other religious buildings are only objects of religious significance, that under golden cupolas can be found only the ‘opium of the masses’—because their creator, the Russian peasant, in a form that was accessible to him, imprinted on his work the labor, suffering, sacrifice, intellect, and accomplishments of the people [*narod*]⁶³²—the highest artistic creation of the nation of each epoch can be found in these buildings.

With the advent of Brezhnev’s politics of inclusion toward Russian nationalists, these arguments did not fall on deaf ears. In July of 1965, the year after Khrushchev’s ouster, the RSFSR Council of Ministers announced the formation of the All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historic and Cultural Monuments.

As soon as the founding of VOOPK was announced, however, the battle for control of the new institution began. The announcement of the formation of the organizational committee of VOOPK provoked a backlash when it became evident that the committee was dominated by bureaucrats and conspicuously lacking in members of the Russian nationalist intellectual movement. In a letter published in October 1965, a group of cultural figures, including three Village Prose writers (Efim Dorosh, Aleksandr Iashin, and Soloukhin) wrote a letter of protest that was published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.⁶³³ Ultimately, as Nikolai Mitrokhin explains, the head of the VOOPK organizational committee, vice chair of the RSFSR Soviet of Ministers Viacheslav Kochemasov, was a quiet Russian nationalist. He was connected with the Russian nationalist patronage network led by Aleksandr Shelepin, who had helped organize the overthrow of Khrushchev in the Politburo. VOOPK’s organizational committee also ultimately included other prominent members of the Russian nationalist intelligentsia, such as the painter Il’ia Glazunov (associated with the “group of Pavlov” and the journal *Molodaia gvardiia*) and “Rodina club” found-

⁶³² Sergei Konnenkov, Pavel Korin, and Leonid Leonov, “Beregite sviatinuiu nashu!,” *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 5 (1965): 216–19. See Brudny’s analysis of this article in Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 68–69.

⁶³³ Efim Dorosh et al., “Ne ochen’ udachnoe nachalo,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 30, 1965. On the founding of VOOPK see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 68–69; Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism*, 69.

er Baranovskii.⁶³⁴ As Brudny explains, “The creation of VOPIK was the culmination of mounting pressure by Russian nationalist intellectuals for action on the issue of historic preservation and a clear reversal of Khrushchev's policies in this area.”⁶³⁵ Now that Khrushchev was in forced retirement, the era of the politics of inclusion toward Russian nationalists had begun in earnest.

In his speech opening the founding congress of VOPIK in June of 1966, Kochemasov seemed keen to play down the growing divide between the Leninist theory of national culture and the concept of the Russian nation being put forward by the preservationists. While rejecting the hostile attitude of the past towards churches and calling them “great artistic treasures, the talented creations of the people [*narod*],” he also attempted to emphasize the importance of a class-based approach to monuments based on Marxist-Leninist principles. The churches were “witnesses to national genius” but also had “reactionary origins.”⁶³⁶ The preservationists who spoke at the congress were less concerned with sticking to a strictly class-based understanding of the role of religious art in national history. Voronin, Likhachëv’s ally in Leningrad, emphasized that monuments of history and culture were “archives of the history of our people” and warned Kochemasov not to downplay the significance of religion for medieval monuments.⁶³⁷ Baranovskii decried the “epoch of nihilist attitudes towards monuments of culture” (an oblique reference to the early Stalin era) and called for the reconstruction of the St. Michael Golden-Domed

⁶³⁴ On Kochemasov’s connection to this network, as well as Russian nationalists in VOPIK, see Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 100-101, 316.

⁶³⁵ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 69.

⁶³⁶ GARF A-639/1/6 (June 8-9, 1966): 39-41.

⁶³⁷ GARF A-639/1/6 (June 8-9, 1966): 55-63.

Monastery in Kyiv, which had been dynamited in 1936⁶³⁸. Overall, the founding congress of VOOPK served to confirm the significance of churches to Russian national history and culture.

Russian nationalist intellectuals were initially successful in gaining control of VOOPK and using its resources to promote their conception of the Russian nation. Mitrokhin reports that from the second half of the 1960s to the beginning of the '70s, the Russian nationalists considered VOOPK their informal headquarters.⁶³⁹ The preservationist movement began to have an influence on people outside Russian nationalist intellectual networks. In their book on the "world of the Soviet person" in the 1960s, Pëtr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis identified 1965 as a key moment in the cultural turn towards "Russian antiquities" in part because VOOPK was founded in that year. "It was namely then that monasteries began appearing on the covers of popular journals," and historical preservation began to seep into the popular consciousness, they reported. If VOOPK was the institutional home of the preservation and promotion of Russian heritage, then for Vail' and Genis, Soloukhin was the author who, "with his talented and simple books acquainted the Sixtiers with their *rodina* [homeland]."⁶⁴⁰

In 1966, Soloukhin issued a strong statement connecting churches to national history in his essay *Letters from the Russian Museum (Pis'ma iz russkogo muzeia)* in the journal *Molodaia gvardiia*. Soloukhin condemned the Stalinist reconstruction of Moscow in the 1930s as a violation of Lenin's policy on historic preservation that led to the destruction of the majority of the historic monuments in the city. He listed historic church after historic church that had been destroyed during that period, leaving gaping holes in the fabric of the city. He particularly mourned

⁶³⁸ GARF A-639/1/6 (June 8-9, 1966): 84-101. Decades later, Oles' Honchar was involved in the reconstruction of the St. Michael Monastery.

⁶³⁹ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 318.

⁶⁴⁰ Pëtr Vail' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 2nd ed. (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2013), 275-276.

the demolition of the Church of Christ the Savior, which, he noted, had been built with donated funds to commemorate Russia's victory over Napoleon. Soloukhin called the destruction of the Church of Christ the Savior ripping up their own "roots." Admitting that the old city of Moscow may have been "archaic" and "deeply Russian," Soloukhin complained that the reconstruction of the 1930s had stripped it of its national character, transforming it into nothing more than an "middling European" city.⁶⁴¹ Brudny argues that Soloukhin's identification of historic churches with the Russian nation in *Letters from the Russian Museum* testifies to the growing power of the "single stream" (*edinyi potok*) theory of Russian history. The "single stream" theory rejected the Leninist idea of a division between proletarian and bourgeois culture: "The essence of Russian history was no longer the class struggle but an unending struggle of the Russian people as a whole, led by the tsars and the princes of the Orthodox Church, against foreign domination."⁶⁴² By arguing that churches were a fundamental part of Russian history that had to be preserved and celebrated, Soloukhin was remaking cultural conceptions of Russian national identity.

Letters from the Russian Museum contributed to a revival of interest in Russian national culture. As Liudmila Barykina, editor at the *Molodaia gvardiia* publishing house, later wrote, *Letters from the Russian Museum* and Soloukhin's 1968 work *Black Boards* (discussed in Chapter 5) shook the Russian intelligentsia, which previously had been more oriented towards Western models of culture.⁶⁴³ The journal *Molodaia gvardiia* received so many letters that they published readers' responses to *Letters from the Russian Museum* over several issues.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴¹ Vladimir Soloukhin, "Pis'ma iz russkogo muzeia," *Molodaia gvardiia* 1966, no. 9 (September 1966): 242-245.

⁶⁴² Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 72.

⁶⁴³ Liudmila Barykina, "Nam ukhodit' nel'zia!," in *Zhizn' zamechatel'nogo izdatel'stvo* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo "Molodaia gvardiia," 1997), 113.

⁶⁴⁴ Barykina, "Nam ukhodit' nel'zia!," 114. See, for example, "Po povodu 'Pisem iz russkogo muzeia,'" *Molodaia gvardiia*, no. 4 (April 1967): 278-94.

Indeed, the attention that Soloukhin's work attracted in some quarters began to worry the KGB. According to an August 15, 1968 report by the KBG to the Central Committee, after the publication of *Letters from the Russian Museum*, the Russian émigré community began to support Soloukhin as a "as a 'protester' and 'fighter' against the official line." Indeed, the report implies that Russian émigrés—whose views on the Russian nation were likely to be quite distant from the official Soviet one—were likely influencing Soloukhin's views. The authors note that Soloukhin carried on a friendly correspondence with people who lived in the US, England, and France and occasionally received books of émigré literature from abroad.⁶⁴⁵

Some began to wonder whether Soloukhin's support for historic church preservation was turning into unacceptable sympathy for Russian Orthodoxy. In January of 1971, the Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences under the Central Committee of the Communist Party produced a report that criticized rising interest in religion among the intelligentsia and identified several problematic works by Soloukhin, including *Letters from the Russian Museum* and *Black Boards*. In some intelligentsia circles, the authors reported, it has become fashionable to have an icon in one's apartment, to wear a cross, to speak about the "historical services" of the church and the "moral dignity" of religion, and to speak ironically about atheism. Regarding Soloukhin, they conceded that he is right to be concerned about the barbaric attitudes towards monuments of culture in the past and to call for the preservation of works of ancient Russian architecture, sculpture, and art. However, they explained, not all of his ideas are acceptable. The report's authors stat that Soloukhin's works contain elements of a one-sided approach to the church and he tends to identify the national (*narodnoi*) with church (*tserkovnaia*), Russian, and Orthodox culture. His works are full of idyllic admiration of church antiquity and

⁶⁴⁵ RGANI 5/60/61 (August 15, 1968): 129 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura , 1965-1972* , 580-581.

old church traditions, they complained. The authors conclude their section on Soloukhin by noting that he is just one of several authors at the journal *Molodaia gvardiia* with mistaken opinions on religion.⁶⁴⁶ Indeed, in 1981, ten years after the report was written, Soloukhin published “Pebbles in the Hand,” his justification for the existence of God, in the journal *Nash sovremennik*. Soloukhin’s official declaration of his theism was confirmation of what many had suspected for years.⁶⁴⁷

The 1971 report’s swipe at the *Molodaia gvardiia* authors, combined with the fact that it was forwarded to the Central Committee with a note signed by deputy head of the department of propaganda Aleksandr Yakovlev, indicate that it was an early salvo in the anti-nationalist campaign that unfolded in 1972. Yakovlev became well-known for his November 1972 article “Against Anti-Historicism,” which reflected concern over rising nationalism among Russians and non-Russians alike. Yakovlev was particularly critical of Russian Village Prose writers, whom he considered to be reactionaries.⁶⁴⁸ He warned that the preservation of pre-revolutionary monuments should not lead to the rehabilitation of the tsarist past. The anti-nationalist campaign of 1972, which also led to the sacking of the head of the Ukrainian SSR, Petro Shelest, took the wind from the sails of the Russian nationalists for a time. However, it did not fundamentally change Brezhnev and Suslov’s commitment to inclusionary politics towards Russian nationalists.

⁶⁴⁶ RGANI 5/63/143 (January 28, 1971): 1-18 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972*, 877-887.

⁶⁴⁷ Simon Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature: The Case of Nash Sovremennik, 1981-91*, Studies in Russia and East Europe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 43.

⁶⁴⁸ Richard Pipes, *Alexander Yakovlev: The Man Whose Ideas Delivered Russia from Communism* (DeKalb, IL: NIU Press, 2015), 17-18.

In April of 1973, they removed Yakovlev from his position on the Central Committee and sent him to Canada as the new Soviet ambassador.⁶⁴⁹

It is clear that by the late 1960s, Soloukhin was increasingly critical of both Stalinism and Leninism. In 1968, the KGB reported that Soloukhin made dangerous statements in his public and private conversations, calling Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn “the standard of sincerity and honesty in literature” and said he shared Solzhenitsyn’s views on the cruelty (*zhestokost’*) of the Bolshevik Revolution.⁶⁵⁰ That Soloukhin was flirting with a brand of Russian nationalism that went well beyond what was officially tolerated as part of Brezhnev’s politics of inclusion is confirmed by the recollections of Barykina, who spoke with Soloukhin frequently in the 1970s as an editor at the *Molodaia gvardiia* publishing house: “Doubtlessly, by the start of the 1970s Soloukhin had come to the deep conviction (he read [works by] V.I. Lenin, about Lenin, archival documents and memoirs published abroad that were not accessible to the broader reading public), that the October coup in Russia was a tragedy prepared by bitter enemies [*nenavistnikami, vragami*] of the state power of the Orthodox state [...]”⁶⁵¹ Soloukhin was starting to question the very foundations of the Soviet state. His tendency to celebrate pre-revolutionary Russian culture, already evident in 1957’s *Vladimir Country Roads*, which celebrated historic churches, praised traditional peasant crafts, and called for the restoration of noble estates destroyed during the revolution, had only become more pronounced over time. His advocacy for the preservation of historic churches, which he sustained over three decades, reflected his repudiation of Leninist concep-

⁶⁴⁹ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 98-102.

⁶⁵⁰ RGANI 5/60/61 (August 15, 1968): 129 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972*, 580-581.

⁶⁵¹ Barykina, “Nam ukhodit’ nel’zia!,” 111.

tions of national culture and his embrace of the “single-stream” theory of history that included the Russian Orthodox Church as a key contributor to Russian national identity.

As the 1970s wore on, the Russian nationalist intelligentsia became disappointed in the potential for VOPIK to become a vehicle for promoting their views among the population. The authorities repeatedly denied requests for a press organ from which the organizations supporters could propound their views to the wider public. The rapid growth of the organization made it difficult for the nationalists to transmit their ideology to the regional activists. Significantly, VOPIK did not get its own journal, *Pamiatniki otechestva* (*Monuments of the Fatherland*), until 1980. As Mitrokhin reports, after its founding VOPIK divided into two groups: those who mostly wanted to talk about Russian nationalist issues, and people who were truly interested in historic preservation for its own sake. The former group included the “Russian club,” which was founded under the auspices of the Moscow branch of VOPIK in 1967. This discussion club discussed Russian history, politics, and culture from a perspective that, like Soloukhin’s, could hardly be described as Marxist. After the closure of the “Russian club” in 1972 as part of Aleksandr Yakovlev’s anti-nationalist campaign, the non-nationalist preservationists started to dominate the organization. The Russian nationalists eventually abandoned VOPIK, preferring instead to congregate at the offices of the journals *Molodaia gvardiia* and *Nash sovremennik*.⁶⁵²

In 1980, Soloukhin published a landmark essay, “Time to Gather Stones,” which advanced two arguments: that religious heritage was inseparable from Russian history and that Soviet authorities had entirely failed to preserve it.⁶⁵³ In the essay, Soloukhin told the history of the Optina Monastery, which is located in the Kaluga oblast’ in Russia. Soloukhin demonstrates how this

⁶⁵² Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 318-324.

one monastery is connected to the history of Russian culture through thousands of tiny threads. Like Soloukhin's previous works, it integrates church history into a broad and deep vision of Russian history. He shows how the Optina Monastery is connected to Pëtr Kireevskii's nineteenth-century project to collect Russian folk songs, the results of which are held in the monastery's library. He also discusses Pëtr's brother Ivan Kireevskii, one of the founders of the nineteenth-century intellectual movement of Slavophilism. Soloukhin discusses the monastery's connections to Russian literature. The monastery played a key role in the lives of the nineteenth-century literary giants Lev Tolstoy, Nikolai Gogol', and Fëdor Dostoevsky. The latter set key scenes of his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* at the Optina Monastery. As Soloukhin explains, Alësha Karamazov's personal transformation, known to readers all over the world, "took place in the heart of Russia, in the maelstrom of her contradictions, and in the full flower and brilliance of her beauty—at Optina Monastery of Kozelsk."⁶⁵⁴

Soloukhin continues on for many pages, lovingly detailing Optina Monastery's many connections with the Russian past. He then records his discussion of historic preservation with Vladimir Desiatnikov, an art historian and founding member of VOPIK, in the car on the way to see Optina. They discuss the fact that historic cities like Vladimir and Suzdal'—close to the heart of Soloukhin, who was born in the Vladimir region—and many small churches in Moscow have been restored. VOPIK has done its part, but it is forced to fight for each monument individually, and they can hardly do much with the miserly sums that they receive. Once Soloukhin and Desiatnikov arrive in the area of the monastery, they speak with several locals who witnessed the liquidation of the monastery (probably during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign, although it

⁶⁵³ Vladimir Soloukhin, "Vremia sobirat' kamni," *Moskva*, no. 2 (1980): 186–212. Translated in Vladimir Soloukhin, "A Time to Gather Stones," in *A Time to Gather Stones: Essays*, trans. Valerie Z. Nollan (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 163–223.

is not specified). Finally, they arrive at Optina itself. "...How can I describe in a word what Optina looks like now?" Soloukhin writes,

There is a word—debris. The remains of the red brick wall look like they have eroded from the top of melted away. The monastery's towers', similarly, appear to have eroded or melted away. One cannot, however, describe the cupola of the Cathedral of the Entrance of the Holy Virgin into the Temple as having 'melted away' from the top, for that would be an understatement. The cathedral has been decapitated, and without its cupolas the remains look like drums hanging in the sky. The Kazan church to the south of the cathedral has been decapitated in just the same way. The Vladimir church (once used as a hospital) has disappeared entirely. Melted away.

Soloukhin concludes the essay with a monologue by Desiatnikov in the car ride home. He hopes that the monastery can be rebuilt and turned into a tourist destination. "In the final analysis," Desiatnikov says to Soloukhin, "this is the beauty of our earth, this is our culture, the is the measure of how civilized we are...."⁶⁵⁵

Although the essay ends a hopeful note, the overall impression given is grim. The Optina Monastery, in pre-revolutionary times a thriving hub for pilgrims and Russian intellectuals alike, has been reduced to a forlorn heap of stones by anti-religious campaigns and official neglect. As Brudny explains, Soloukhin's essay was part of a broader attack in the early 1980s by Russian nationalist intellectuals on the government's and party's continued failure to preserve monuments of Russian culture. Discussing the legacy of decades of advocacy in an essay in *Nash sovremennik* in 1982, Soloukhin forlornly concluded: "My previous book could have contained not four [preservationist] essays but twenty-four. I suspect, however, that the effect would have been the same."⁶⁵⁶ In the final account, Soloukhin and the VOPIK activists had succeeded in getting

⁶⁵⁴ Soloukhin, "A Time to Gather Stones," 188.

⁶⁵⁵ Soloukhin, "A Time to Gather Stones," 212, 222.

⁶⁵⁶ Soloukhin, qtd. in Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 141. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 140-142.

the Soviet state to recognize, in principle, the importance of preserving churches and monasteries as integral parts of Russian culture. This amount to a true about-face on the conception of national culture as envisioned by Lenin. Yet the continued failure of state institutions like VOPIK to actually deliver, however, left Russian nationalist intellectuals like Soloukhin profoundly disillusioned with the prospects for realizing their vision of Russian national revival and renewal through Soviet institutions.

Ukraine: Oles' Honchar and the Battle Over *Cathedral*

As in the RSFSR, during the Thaw there was a resurgence of interest in national issues in the Ukrainian SSR in which the preservation of historic churches played an important role. Intellectuals who participated in the Ukrainian cultural revival of the early 1960s began to advocate for the preservation of historic churches, first through informal organizations and later through the Ukrainian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture, founded in 1966. The culminating moment for the Ukrainian discourse around church preservation, however, was the publication of Oles' Honchar's 1968 novel *Cathedral*, which was a fictional work based on the campaign to protect a real-life Ukrainian Cossack cathedral in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Like Soloukhin, Honchar sought to re-integrate religious heritage into national culture, denying the separation of Ukrainian national culture into strict class-based categories. Unlike Soloukhin, however, Honchar sought to reconcile his Soviet Ukrainian identity with his belief in the importance of religious heritage to national culture. While Soloukhin hearkened back to pre-revolutionary Russian culture as a source of national identity, Honchar sought a return to the 1920s when, in his view, Ukrainian culture had flourished thanks to "Leninist" policies.

Although Honchar's version of the preservationist discourse seems on its face to be significantly less threatening than Soloukhin's, the backlash against Honchar was much greater. Even as they flirted with religion and other aspects of pre-revolutionary Russian nationalism, Soloukhin and other Russian nationalist intellectuals benefitted from the "politics of inclusion" towards Russian nationalists supported by Brezhnev. The head of the Ukrainian SSR, the Khrushchev appointee Petro Shelest, likewise pursued a "politics of inclusion" towards nationally-minded Ukrainian intelligentsia (although his ability to dictate policy toward the intelligentsia was significantly reduced after Brezhnev came to power). The campaign against *Cathedral* was one of the first signs that Shelest's power was waning, and the Brezhnev-affiliated Dnipropetrovsk network in Ukraine was on the rise. The Dnipropetrovsk network's war against *Cathedral* augured a coming "politics of exclusion" that would drive the Ukrainian cultural revival into full-fledged dissidence after Shelest's fall from power in 1972.

Oles' Honchar at first seems an unlikely candidate for the role of champion of church preservation. Honchar, a World War II veteran, first rose to prominence in the Soviet Ukrainian literary world with the publication of his trilogy *Standard-Bearers* (Ukr: *Prapornostsi*), which was published between 1946 and 1948.⁶⁵⁷ Ukrainian literary scholar Iryna Zakharchuk calls the trilogy "the signature statement of the presentation of the experience of the war in the Ukrainian version of the socialist realist canon."⁶⁵⁸ The novel was immensely popular (the Sixtiers poet Dmytro Pavlychko reported that every graduate of his secondary school read it "two, maybe

⁶⁵⁷ For an overview of Honchar's career, see V. I. Kuz'menko, "Oles' Honchar (1918-1995)," in *Istoriia ukrains'koï literatury XX - poch. XXI st. U tr'okh tomakh*, ed. V. I. Kuz'menko, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Kyïv: Akademvydav, 2014), 148–60.

⁶⁵⁸ Iryna Zakharchuk, "Militarna strategiia sotsrealizmu," *Slovo i chas*, no. 10 (October 2006): 51–60.

three times”) and it won its author two Stalin Prizes.⁶⁵⁹ Honchar continued his focus on the World War II theme with the publication of his novel *Men and Arms* (1958-9), which won the Shevchenko State Prize in 1962. In 1959, Honchar was elected head of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union at their Fourth Congress. He cemented his place in the all-Union literary canon with the publication of his novel *Tronka* in 1963.⁶⁶⁰ The novel, which focused on a contemporary Ukrainian village, contained criticism of Stalinism in the form of the character of Yatsuba, a former camp guard and a “dinosaur of the period of the cult [of personality].” “He can't think, and he has no need to think. But he can destroy churches that are architectural monuments or he can fence in a certain territory with barbed wire [...],” Honchar writes about Yatsuba.⁶⁶¹ Honchar was thus already connecting church preservation to anti-Stalinism in the early 1960s. *Tronka* emerged as the consensus choice for the 1964 Lenin Prize, besting the much more controversial novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.⁶⁶² Having won his country’s highest prize in literature in 1964, Honchar was by the mid-1960s thoroughly ensconced in both the Ukrainian and all-Union literary establishments.

The Ukrainian literary world, however, was shifting under Honchar’s feet. As in other Soviet republics, Khrushchev’s Thaw brought a new generation of intellectuals to the fore. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a generation that would become known as the “Sixtiers” (*shistdesiatnyky*) began to coalesce. Its first wave included literary critics like Ivan Dziuba and

⁶⁵⁹ Dmytro Pavlychko, “Oles’ Honchar (Idy za mnoiu!),” in *Spohady*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Kyïv: Iaroslaviv Val, 2015), 134.

⁶⁶⁰ Oles’ Honchar, “Tronka: Roman v novelakh,” *Vitchyzna*, no. 2, 3 (1963): 3–79, 7–93. Translated in Oles Gonchar, “Tronka: A Novel in Novellas,” trans. Natalia Lukoshkova and Hilda Perham, *Soviet Literature*, no. 6, 7 (1964): 22–124, 15–131.

⁶⁶¹ Gonchar, “Tronka,” *Soviet Literature* no. 6, 91.

⁶⁶² See Chapter 3; Erin Hutchinson, “*Ivan Denisovich* on Trial: Soviet Writers, Russian Identity, and Solzhenitsyn’s Failed Bid for the 1964 Lenin Prize,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian & Eurasian History*, forthcoming.

Ievhen Sverstiuk, as well as a crop of young lyric poets.⁶⁶³ As Heorhii Kas'ianov explains in his history of the birth and development of the Ukrainian opposition movement, the Sixtiers' search for new literary and artistic forms beyond socialist realism led them to national and social issues. The defense of Ukrainian language and culture and the popularization and renewal of national history and ethnography became core concerns for a segment of the Ukrainian intelligentsia.⁶⁶⁴

As in the RSFSR, nationally-minded students and intellectuals began organizing grass-roots groups to promote their ideas. An independent student club focusing on national culture emerged in Kyiv, much like Baranovskii's "Rodina club" in Moscow. Starting in 1959, students of the Kyiv Theater Institute and Conservatory began roving the streets, filling them with the sounds of traditional Christmas caroling (*koliaduvannia*). As Kenneth Farmer explains, the focus on caroling reflected an increased urban interest in "authentic" folk music from the rural tradition. City Party officials initially opposed the caroling groups but received orders to support them after a complaint appeared in the pages of *Izvestiia*. In 1960, the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth was founded under the auspices of the city Komsomol.⁶⁶⁵ The Club of Creative Youth expanded its activities to include literary evenings and trips to Ukrainian cultural monuments. Hryhorii Lohvyn, an art historian who was "fanatically dedicated to the history of Ukrainian church

⁶⁶³ Major figures among the Sixtiers include Tbilisi-born Armenian director Sergei Parajanov and lyric poets such as Lina Kostenko, Dmytro Pavlychko, Ivan Drach, Vitalii Korotych, and Vasyl Symonenko. The phenomenon of the Ukrainian Sixtiers is well-documented in the secondary literature. See Jaroslaw Bilocerkowycz, "Ukrainian Opposition and Dissent: A Historical and Contemporary Survey," in *Soviet Ukrainian Dissent: A Study of Political Alienation* (Boulder; London: Westview Press, 1988), 15–53; Kenneth C. Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era: Myth, Symbols, and Ideology in Soviet Nationalities Policy*, Studies in Contemporary History ; v. 4 (The Hague ; Boston ; London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980); H. V. Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni: ukrains'ka intelihentsiia v Rusi oporu 1960-80-kh rokiv* (Kyiv: Lybid', 1995); George S. N. Luckyj, "The Ukrainian Literary Scene Today," *Slavic Review* 31, no. 4 (December 1972): 863–69; Benjamin Tromly, "An Unlikely National Revival: Soviet Higher Learning and the Ukrainian 'Sixtiers,' 1953–65," *Russian Review* 68 (October 2009): 607–22.

⁶⁶⁴ Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 18.

⁶⁶⁵ See Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era*, 118-120. On the Club of Creative Youth, see Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 18-19.

painting and architecture,” led trips to cultural monuments across Ukraine in the early 1960s. These trips led to the creation in 1962 of a list of threatened historical monuments and a letter to the Ukrainian Central Committee, which the leading Ukrainian poet Maksym Ryl’s’kyi delivered.⁶⁶⁶ As the case of the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth shows, the strategy of organizing grassroots initiatives was a common tool of cultural politics during the Thaw. As in the case of the “Rodina” club in Moscow, the Komsomol apparently sought to co-opt such “from below” initiatives among students and intellectuals in Kyiv.

Because of the Ukrainian Party’s strong connections with Khrushchev, Ukraine did not experience the anti-nationalist purges and campaigns that characterized this period in other Soviet republics. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian Central Committee Secretary for Ideological Affairs, Andrei Skaba, accused several young writers of “idealizing the past” and sympathizing with “bourgeois nationalism” and Western literary trends at a Ukrainian Party plenum in August of 1962.⁶⁶⁷ As the head of the Ukrainian Union of Writers, Honchar sought to strike a balance between the demands of the ideological secretary and the younger generation of Writers’ Union members. As Serhy Yekelchuk explains, however, the nationally-minded younger writers were not exiled from establishment cultural institutions. They remained “at the very center of the cultural-production sites where a Soviet Ukrainian culture was being made.”⁶⁶⁸ Honchar himself sympathized with the Ukrainian cultural interests of the younger generation. In a diary entry dated January 2, 1963, he praised the carolers from the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth who had visited the offices of the Writers’ Union, and said he defended them from others who criticized

⁶⁶⁶ Kas’ianov, *Nezhodni*, 20-21.

⁶⁶⁷ Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era*, 99. Luckyj, “The Ukrainian Literary Scene Today,” 864.

⁶⁶⁸ Serhy Yekelchuk, “The Early 1960s as a Cultural Space: A Microhistory of Ukraine’s Generation of Cultural Rebels,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 59.

them.⁶⁶⁹ Honchar's attempts to accommodate the Ukrainian cultural revival got more difficult as the conflict between the authorities and the Sixtiers intensified. In the fall of 1964, Kyiv city authorities shut down the Club after its members started investigating a mass grave of victims from 1937 that was discovered in the suburbs of Kyiv.⁶⁷⁰ While the "Rodina" club in Moscow was eventually absorbed into VOOPK, the members of the Club of Creative Youth were increasingly pushed into dissidence. After the closure of the Club, unsanctioned public literary events became increasingly common, and participants were sometimes detained by police.⁶⁷¹ The diverging fates of the two clubs shows that while the politics of inclusion was waning in Ukraine, it was rising in the RSFSR.

The closure of the Club was a sign of what was to come. Under Khrushchev, the leader of the Ukrainian Party, Petro Shelest, had pursued an inclusionary policy towards the critically-minded faction among the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Kas'ianov argues that Shelest did this in order to make the case for greater Ukrainian autonomy vis-à-vis Moscow. But the balance of power in Moscow shifted after Brezhnev, Aleksandr Shelepin, and Vladimir Semichastnyi deposed Khrushchev from his position as leader of the Soviet Union. Unlike Khrushchev, the new authorities viewed Shelest's bid for greater autonomy with suspicion.⁶⁷² In late August of 1965, the Ukrainian KGB arrested nearly two dozen members of the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia in Kyiv and several western Ukrainian cities. This wave of arrests, which coincided with the KGB's confiscation of Solzhenitsyn's manuscripts and the arrests of *Novyi mir* literary critics Andrei

⁶⁶⁹ Oles' Honchar, *Shchodennyky : u tr'okh tomakh*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Kyiv: Veselka, 2002), 308.

⁶⁷⁰ Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 21.

⁶⁷¹ Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era*, 113-114.

⁶⁷² Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 64. See also discussion of Shelest's cultural policy in Jaroslaw Pelenski, "Shelest and His Period in Soviet Ukraine, 1963-1972: A Revival of Controlled Ukrainian Autonomism," in *Ukraine in the Seventies*, ed. Peter J. Potichnyj (Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press, 1975), 283-306.

Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel', was likely dictated by the center. Among the arrested was the literary critic Ivan Svitlychnyi, who was one of the major organizers of the Ukrainian cultural revival among the intelligentsia. In his report to the Ukrainian Central Committee on August 31, 1965, Ukrainian KGB head V. Nikitchenko alleged that these members of the intelligentsia had been using the pretext of the defense of Ukrainian culture to attract others to their nationalist and anti-Soviet views.⁶⁷³ On September 4, during the premiere of Sergei Paradjanov's film *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, the literary critic Ivan Dziuba stood up and made a speech criticizing the arrests as a return to the terror of 1937. The administration of the theater quickly put an end to Dziuba's speech, but the arrests and Dziuba's protest shook the literary community.⁶⁷⁴ In his memoir, Petro Shelest writes that, at a meeting in November of 1965, Honchar defended Svitlychnyi and Dziuba, encouraging Shelest to keep them in the fold and prevent them from going down the nationalist path⁶⁷⁵.

Honchar again advocated for an inclusionary policy towards the Sixtiers when Dziuba sent his treatise *Internationalism or Russification? (Internatsionalizm chy rusyfikatsiia?)* to the Ukrainian leadership in late 1965.⁶⁷⁶ The document critiqued current Soviet nationalities policy in Ukraine as a violation of the "Leninist" nationalities policies, a reference to the policy of

⁶⁷³ HDA SBU 16/1/952-944 (August 31, 1965): 1-12.

⁶⁷⁴ See Bogumiła Berdychowska, Aleksandra Hnatiuk, and Roksana Kharchuk, "Tsia knizhka zminyła use moie zhittia... Rozмова z Ivanom Dziuboiu," in *Bunt pokolinnia: Ievhen Sverstiuk, Ivan Dziuba, Mykhailyna Kotsiubyn's'ka, Mykhailo Horyn', Mykola Riabchuk : rozмовy z ukraїns'kymy intelektualamy* (Kyiv: Dukh i litera, 2004), 118. See also the KGB report on the event, HGA SBU 16/1/952-944 (September 6, 1965): 253-254.

⁶⁷⁵ P. Iu. Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete: dnevniki i vospominaniia chlena Politbiuro TsK KPSS*, Nash XX vek (Moskva: Tsentrpoligraf, 2016), 269.

⁶⁷⁶ Translated into English as Ivan Dziuba, *Internationalism or Russification?: A Study in the Soviet Nationalities Problem*, 3rd ed. (New York: Monad Press for the Anchor Foundation; distributed by Pathfinder Press, 1974).

Ukrainization in the 1920s.⁶⁷⁷ When Shelest convened a commission of Ukrainian writers, historians, and Central Committee cultural bureaucrats to condemn the work in January of 1966, Honchar refused to participate.⁶⁷⁸ In his letter to Shelest, Honchar argued that repressions and arrests were not the best way to deal with Svitlychnyi's and Dziuba's ideological mistakes. Moreover, he wrote, Dziuba was right to call attention to the declining status of the Ukrainian language in the republic.⁶⁷⁹ While Shelest was "offended," he nevertheless protected Honchar from "hotheads" like CPU secretaries Ivan Hrushetskii and Oleksii Vatchenko, who very nearly called for Honchar's exclusion from the Party. Shelest offered the job of the head of the Writers' Union to the hardliner Oleksandr Korniiichuk on January 28.⁶⁸⁰ Honchar wrote in his diary that he had a difficult conversation with Shelest, at the end of which he offered him his resignation. Honchar lost his position as a member of the Ukrainian Central Committee in March. "With my statement against repressions, I called down repression on myself," he wrote in his diary.⁶⁸¹

The events of 1965-1966 notwithstanding, Shelest did not entirely abandon his policy of supporting the cultural aims of the nationally-minded Ukrainian intelligentsia. When the 1966 Fifth Congress of Writers of Ukraine finally took place in November of 1966—it was delayed

⁶⁷⁷ The appeal to Leninist ideals was a common feature of both Ukrainian and Russian dissident discourse. As Serguei Oushakine has observed, Soviet samizdat publications generally did not challenge the dominant discourse of Soviet society and are better understood through a Foucauldian paradigm of "mimetic resistance" rather than James Scott's conception of "hidden transcripts." Serguei Alex. Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," *Public Culture* 12, no. 2 (2001): 191–214.

⁶⁷⁸ Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 271-272.

⁶⁷⁹ "List pershoho sekretaria pravlinnia SPU O. T. Honchar pershomu sekretarevi TsK KPU P. Iu. Shelest z privodu politychnykh represii shchodo ukrains'koï intelihentsiï," in P. T. (Petro Tymofiiiovych) Tron'ko, O. H. Bazhan, and Iu. Z. Danyliuk, eds., *Ternystym shliakhom do khramu: Oles' Honchar v suspil'no-politychnomu zhytti Ukraïny 60-80-i rr. XX st. : zbirnyk dokumentiv ta materialiv* (Kyïv: Ridnyi kraj, 1999), 54-56. Honchar was known to donate money to special funds that were set up to help writers who were fired from their jobs after the 1965 crackdown. See Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 69.

⁶⁸⁰ Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 272-273.

⁶⁸¹ Honchar, *Shchodennyky* vol. 1, 370, 372.

several times to allow the anger over the 1965 mass arrests to die down— Petro Shelest greeted the assembled writers with a surprisingly strong statement of support for the Ukrainian language.⁶⁸² In his report as head of the Writers' Union, Honchar oriented himself towards national issues and echoed Shelest's statement, declaring that "the language of the people is our greatest national treasure, and we must all take care of it, including with authoritative government measures."⁶⁸³ The KGB's post-mortem reports on the Congress show the writers divided on national issues⁶⁸⁴. The writers quoted in the reports generally agreed that Honchar had staked out a relatively strong position on the language question, although they differed in their evaluation of it. One writer complained that Honchar had "thrown a bone" to the nationalists, while another thought he had successfully co-opted the position of the nationalists. The Kyiv-based writer Borys Kharchuk praised Honchar, saying that the time for people "who are not only communists but sons of their nation" had come. He added that the writers consider Honchar the only person worthy of leading their organization. Another Kyiv-based writer concurred, stating that the most important result of the Congress was that Honchar fought off the efforts of the Party leadership to get rid of him and was reelected to the position of head of the Writers' Union.⁶⁸⁵ With Honchar at the helm, the Writers' Union would continue to be a (relatively) big tent for both conservative and nationally-minded writers.

In 1966, Ukrainian authorities seemed to address one of the issues around which the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth had mobilized: the neglect of cultural monuments, especially churches.

⁶⁸² Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 68. Pelenski, "Shelest and His Period in Soviet Ukraine," 286-7.

⁶⁸³ Oles' Honchar, "Ukrains'ka radians'ka literatura naperedodoni velykogo p'iatdesiatyrichchia. (Dopovid)", in *V z'izd pys'mennykiv Radians'koi Ukraïny, 16-19 lystopada 1966 roku. Materialy z'izdu*. (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1967), 59.

⁶⁸⁴ HDA SBU 16/1/958-950 (November 17-22, 1966): 162-169, 171-181, 184-187, 203-206.

⁶⁸⁵ HDA SBU 16/1/958-950 (November 17-22, 1966): 169, 167, 180, 205.

Petro Tron'ko, who served as the deputy minister of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, spearheaded the founding of the Society. In the mid-1960s, Tron'ko shepherded several Ukrainian cultural initiatives, including the twenty-six volume *History of the Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian SSR* (1967-1974).⁶⁸⁶ As in the case of VOPIK, preservationists raised the question of who would control the organization. The sculptor Ivan Honchar (no relation to Oles', see Chapter 5), who participated in the founding of the Society, was concerned that it was dominated by bureaucrats who cared little for the preservation of monuments.⁶⁸⁷ Yet one person who lived in L'viv in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, remembered that the meetings of the local branch of the Society provided a "legitimate" place where "it was permissible to talk about the history of Ukrainian culture, about Ukrainian architecture."⁶⁸⁸ Tron'ko's pet projects made it seem possible that the Ukrainian leadership would continue meeting the nationally-minded intelligentsia halfway. Those hopes were dashed with the explosion of controversy around Oles' Honchar's 1968 novel *Cathedral*.

Honchar's fourth novel *Cathedral* was serialized in the Ukrainian literary journal *Vitshyzna* starting with the January 1968 issue.⁶⁸⁹ The novel is set in a Ukrainian village called Zachiplianka on the banks of the Dnipro. Zachiplianka's landscape is dominated by two structures: the steel mill where most of its inhabitants work and an eighteenth-century Ukrainian Cos-

⁶⁸⁶ Holovna Redaktssia Ukrains'koi radiats'koi entsyklopedii and P. T. Tron'ko, eds., *Istoriia mist i sil Ukrains'koi RSR v dvadtsiaty shesty tomakh*, 26 vols. (Kyiv: Hol. red. Ukrains'koi rad. entsyklopedii AN URSSR, 1967-1974); Oleksandr Nezhyvyi, "Ideologiiia proukrains'kogo derzhavnyka," *Pam'iatki Ukraïny*, no. 11-12 [231-232] (December 2016): 13.

⁶⁸⁷ Ivan Honchar, "Iz shchodennykiv I. M. Honchara," in *Maister, abo Terny i lavry Ivana Honchara*, ed. Natalka Poklad and Vasyl' Iarenko (Kyiv: MAUP, 2007), 465-469.

⁶⁸⁸ Eleonora Havrylyuk Narvselius, *Ukrainian Intelligentsia in Post-Soviet L'viv: Narratives, Identity, and Power* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012), 193.

⁶⁸⁹ Oles' Honchar, "Sobor: roman," *Vitshyzna*, no. 1 (1968): 16-69. Translated into English as Oles' Honchar, *The Cathedral: A Novel*, Translation Series (St. Sophia Religious Association of Ukrainian Catholics); No. 2 (Washington: St. Sophia Religious Association of Ukrainian Catholics, 1989).

sack cathedral whose nine domes are lit nightly by the blasts from the steel furnace. Since the eighteenth century, Ukrainian intellectuals had mythologized the Zaporizhian Cossacks as the heroic predecessors of the Ukrainian nation.⁶⁹⁰ By linking the steel mill with the Cossack cathedral, Honchar attempted to link Soviet Ukrainians with their heroic Cossack past. Unfortunately, the Cossack heritage represented by the cathedral has been neglected. The cathedral no longer functions—it serves as a grain storehouse—and it has long been surrounded in scaffolding that was put up to create the illusion that it was being restored. Despite the decrepit state of the cathedral, the close-knit village community is rocked when Volodymyr Loboda, a careerist Komsomol official, announces his plans to replace it with a shopping complex. The novel’s protagonist, a young, idealistic student named Mykola Bahlay, unites with his fellow villagers to prevent Loboda from enacting his plan to tear down the cathedral.

In the novel Honchar carefully empties the symbol of the Cossack cathedral of any threatening association with religion. Now that the “potbellied priests” have been driven from the church, Honchar explains, the Zachiplianka villagers can enjoy the timeless architectural beauty of the cathedral without fearing a return to religious exploitation and obscurantism. When Loboda tells the old villager Shpachykha that he is planning on tearing down the cathedral, she is dismayed, even though she had “been in the vanguard to have it closed.” As with Soloukhin’s icons in *Black Boards* (see Chapter 5), the cathedral’s ritual purpose is forgotten, and it is now understood as a reflection of national genius.⁶⁹¹ Moreover, according to the novel’s protagonist, the national genius reflected in the construction of the cathedral is of universal value: “A cathedral like this doesn’t belong to you or me; more correctly stated, it does not belong to us alone. It

⁶⁹⁰ Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York, NY: Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015), 150-151.

⁶⁹¹ Honchar, *The Cathedral*, 72, 27-28.

belongs to only to the nation which created it, but to all the people of the planet!” Unlike the dull Soviet apartment buildings described elsewhere in the novel, the cathedral is the Ukrainian gift to the universal heritage of mankind, their contribution to posterity.⁶⁹²

The Cossack cathedral is frequently connected to two other key symbols in the novel: the natural features of the Dnipropetrovsk region and Zachiplianka’s steel factory. As Bahlay muses at one point, “The cathedral has something elemental about it, a primordial greatness, like the steppes or the Dnipro, or the black industrial bastions swaddled in eternal smoke.” The steel factory, which is fronted by a giant monument to the Titan of Labor, represents the heroic early accomplishments of Soviet industry. Significantly, Honchar traces Bahlay’s heritage back to the “dynasties of steelworkers” who worked at Cossack foundries in the area, and later the steel factory. Honchar thus establishes continuity between the Cossack past, the heroic days of the Revolution, and the Soviet Ukrainian present. The three symbols of the cathedral, nature, and the factory connect the Zachiplianka villagers to the past and the spiritual values of their ancestors.⁶⁹³

In contrast to Bahlay, the novel’s primary antagonist, Volodymyr Loboda, is a true philistine who thinks that ethnic kitsch can stand in for real historical treasures. This becomes obvious in a conversation he has with Bahlay. “Cathedrals...Cossack sabers...huts!” he grouses. “All of that is history’s legacy, the rubbish of past ages, how can you not understand that?” Speaking about the shopping center that will replace the demolished cathedral, he says, “Everything can be designed in Cossack style; on the cafe’s facade we can have a Cossack standing with a spear.” By the end of the conversation, Loboda has revealed his contempt for Ukrainian history: “Monument—what the devil makes it a monument? [...] What's so architectural about it? It's just histo-

⁶⁹² Honchar, *The Cathedral*, 215.

⁶⁹³ Honchar, *The Cathedral*, 26-28.

ry's rubbish, and nothing more! We still have to discover what those antediluvian Sich Cossacks of yours wanted to prove by it!" He continues, "Some Skrypnyk got it into his head to make it into a monument; he enters it into the register and we're afraid to even come close to it."⁶⁹⁴ The reference to the Ukrainian Bolshevik leader Mykola Skrypnyk is particularly revealing. Skrypnyk was closely associated with the policy of cultural Ukrainization in the 1920s, the "paradigmatic national communist" of the era of the so-called "Leninist nationalities policy."⁶⁹⁵ The character of Loboda is an indictment of Soviet officials who have strayed from the Ukrainization policies of the 1920s.

Volodymyr Loboda is a character type that Chingiz Aitmatov would later dub a *mankurt*—an individual who is morally adrift because he has forgotten his past (see Chapter 6). Loboda's lack of a moral compass is demonstrated through his treatment of his aged father Izot, an honored steelworker of the Ukrainian republic. Loboda has sent him to live in the Veteran Steelworkers' Home instead of welcoming him into his own home. His hands still blackened from his days as a steelworker, Izot is the embodiment of the heroic era of Soviet industry. Unlike his son, Izot cares deeply about the fate of the cathedral, and the spiritual values it represents.⁶⁹⁶ Volodymyr's unwillingness to care for his father is not only a personal failing, it shows his lack of respect for the past and his inability to carry on the Soviet Ukrainian legacy represented by Izot. Honchar's portrayal of Volodymyr Loboda's relationship with his father gives the novel its emotional punch. It also became the novel's downfall.

⁶⁹⁴ Honchar, *The Cathedral*, 93-95.

⁶⁹⁵ The reference also contains tragic overtones, as Skrypnyk committed suicide in 1933 after the Ukrainian Politburo condemned his actions in support of Ukrainization. For a discussion of the "Skrypnyk Affair," see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 345-356.

⁶⁹⁶ Honchar, *The Cathedral*, 143.

Although Honchar had tried to reconcile the Soviet and the national in his novel and connect his cathedral to Cossack history instead of religion, many writers were not convinced. On March 20, the novel, not yet translated into Russian, received a positive write-up from Leonid Novichenko, a leading Ukrainian literary critic, in the Moscow-based newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta*.⁶⁹⁷ A KGB report sent to the Ukrainian Central Committee on March 22, 1968, gives the impression that the literary community was divided on the novel. The writers who approved of the novel tended to be people whom the KGB already considered to be “inclined towards nationalism.” The young poet Mykola Kholodnyi, for example, said he was happy to see the preservation of historic monuments addressed in the novel.⁶⁹⁸ The novel’s critics objected to what they saw as Honchar’s negative, even “anti-Soviet,” portrayal of Soviet life. “What spitefulness!” said the L’viv writer Nikolai Dalekii-Alekseev. “Everything Soviet, according to Honchar, is aimed against people, and the ideal is old Cossackdom!” Honchar’s choice to name his novel after a religious building—a cathedral—raised a cloud of suspicion. Many writers stated that they had heard that the Vatican wanted to nominate *Cathedral* for a Nobel Prize, suggesting concern over Catholic meddling in a republic where the Uniate faith had supposedly been stamped out.⁶⁹⁹ The criticism of the novel took on an entirely new character after the plenum of the Central Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party held on March 29, 1968. Towards the end of the plenum, the head of the Dnipropetrovsk region, Oleksii Vatchenko, unexpectedly began to attack Honchar’s novel, which he called ideologically flawed, dangerous, and libelous. He accused

⁶⁹⁷ Leonid Novichenko and Semen Shakhovskii, “V rabochem poselke nad Dneprom: O romane Olesia Gonchara ‘Sobor,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 20, 1968.

⁶⁹⁸ Kholodnyi would be arrested for “anti-Soviet propaganda” in 1972. See documents from HDA SBU in V. M. Danylenko, ed., *Politychni protesty i inakodumstvo v Ukraïni (1960-1990)* (Kyïv: Smoloskyp, 2013), 97-99, 117-125.

⁶⁹⁹ HDA SBU 16/1/970-961 (March 22, 1968): 240-245.

Honchar of helping bourgeois propagandists by showing Soviet life in a negative light. He then pivoted to attacking the critics who had praised the novel, the Writers' Union, and the Party bodies that oversaw it for allowing such a work to appear. Petro Shelest, caught off-guard, attempted to dodge this obvious attack on his leadership on the cultural front by saying that he had not read the novel, but it seemed that it was being overly praised in the press. He concluded his comments by expressing his confidence that the republic's readers will openly express their evaluations of it.⁷⁰⁰

According to Shelest's memoir, after the plenum Honchar met Shelest in his office for a conversation about *Cathedral*. Honchar expressed his concern over the fact that the publication of the Russian translation of his work in the journal *Druzhba narodov* was being held up by negative evaluations of his work in the republican press, especially in the Dnipropetrovsk oblast' newspaper. Shelest gave his own evaluation of Vatchenko's reasons for attacking Honchar.

The first secretary of the oblast committee [of the Party], O. Vatchenko, obviously, sees in the "main character" his own persona. In *Cathedral* there is depicted a person in a leadership role who considers himself a highly principled communist, but he puts his father, an old skilled worker of the metallurgical factory who is now retired, in a rest home in order to get rid of the "extra burden." All the facts correspond — it is set in the Dnipropetrovsk *oblast'*. Vatchenko's own father is in a rest home. Vatchenko is rude, uncultured, spiteful, he hates all of humanity. Only in this is the essence of and the reason for Vatchenko's hostility to Honchar. Although the latter in every way promises that he did not have Vatchenko concretely in mind for the negative character in his novel *Cathedral*.⁷⁰¹

The idea that Vatchenko persecuted Honchar because he saw himself in the character of Volodymyr Loboda is a well-established part of the mythology around the novel *Cathedral*. Although Shelest repeats this story here, in fact he must have been well aware that Vatchenko had other motives as well.

⁷⁰⁰ TsDAHOU 1/1/2056 (March 29, 1968): 72-74, 156. An excerpt of the transcript can also be found in *Ternystym shliakom do khramu*, 84-86.

Vatchenko's attack on Honchar, which carried an implied criticism of Shelest's management of culture in the republic, was just one shot in a larger battle for control over the Ukrainian republic and, indeed, the Soviet Union as a whole. When Khrushchev consolidated his power over the Soviet Central Committee in 1957, he began to appoint colleagues from his days running the Ukrainian republic to top positions in the central apparatus. Two Ukraine-based officials who benefitted from Khrushchev's promotions were Nikolai Podgorny and Leonid Brezhnev.⁷⁰² Shelest was associated with the "Kharkiv group" led by Podgorny, a rival to Brezhnev.⁷⁰³ During the period in which Shelest was first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, he was locked in a power struggle with the Brezhnev-backed Dnipropetrovsk patronage network, of which Vatchenko was a member. Brezhnev had been born in the Dnipropetrovsk region, and he spent three years (1947-1950) in the same position that Vatchenko now occupied. The core of Brezhnev's patronage network, the most powerful all-Union network in the late 1960s and 1970s, were people he had worked with in Dnipropetrovsk.⁷⁰⁴ Especially after Brezhnev gained control of the Communist Party in October of 1964, Party cadres from Dnipropetrovsk had climbed the career ladder with alacrity, receiving high-level appointments in both Ukraine and the central apparatus.⁷⁰⁵ Vatchenko was thus a very well-connected opponent, one with extensive connections in Brezhnev's network in Ukraine and Moscow.

⁷⁰¹ Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 316-318.

⁷⁰² Serhii Plokhyy, *Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation, from 1470 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 283-4.

⁷⁰³ Joel C. Moses, "Regional Cohorts and Political Mobility in the USSR: The Case of Dnepropetrovsk," *The Soviet Review* 3, no. 1 (1976): 87; John P. Willerton, "Patronage Networks and Coalition Building in the Brezhnev Era," *Soviet Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 1987): 183.

⁷⁰⁴ Willerton, "Patronage Networks and Coalition Building in the Brezhnev Era," 183.

⁷⁰⁵ Moses, "Regional Cohorts and Political Mobility in the USSR: The Case of Dnepropetrovsk," 64-66.

Following a well-established Soviet formula, Vatchenko sought to demonstrate that the republic's workers and collective farmers unanimously opposed *Cathedral*. He personally ordered ground-level party organizations in the Dnipropetrovsk oblast' to discuss the novel.⁷⁰⁶ On April 19, party officials and rank-and-file workers condemned the novel's portrayal of workers' lives and the behavior of Soviet leaders at meetings of party activists held in the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia oblasts.⁷⁰⁷ On May 15, Vatchenko sent a report on the meetings to Shelest.⁷⁰⁸ Meanwhile, starting in early April, the Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhia oblast' newspapers published a series of articles criticizing *Cathedral*'s portrayal of workers' lives.⁷⁰⁹ Vatchenko made sure that Shelest heard the "voice" of the republic's readers loud and clear.

Meanwhile, preservation activists like the sculptor Ivan Honchar defended *Cathedral*, arguing that religious heritage was a part of national culture, and that there need not be a contradiction between the Ukrainian past and the Soviet Ukrainian present. In a letter responding to one of the negative reviews of *Cathedral* in the Dnipropetrovsk newspaper *Zoria*, Ivan Honchar attempted to convince the author that there was nothing anti-Soviet about preserving a monument of culture like the Cossack cathedral depicted in the novel. Referring to Lenin's support of early preservation projects, Ivan Honchar wrote that true communists should appreciate the importance of learning from the achievements of the past. Moreover, "the destruction of a Ukrainian church is equal to the destruction of the history and culture of the people," he explained.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁶ Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 77.

⁷⁰⁷ See TsDAHOU 1/54/50 (April 19, 1968) and 1/54/126 (April 19, 1968) in *Ternystym shliakhom do khramu*, 114-119, 119-123.

⁷⁰⁸ TsDAHOU 1/25/20 (May 15, 1968): 23-31.

⁷⁰⁹ See, for example, an April 17 article in *Zaporiz'ka pravda*. "Ni, ne pro nas tsei roman," reprinted in *Ternystym shliakhom do khramu*, 107-113.

⁷¹⁰ SBU of Odessa oblast 24994-P/9 (n.d.) in *Ternystym shliakhom do khramu*, 134-138.

Both the political and literary tide began to turn against Honchar. By the end of April, *Radian'ska Ukraïna*, the main newspaper of the Ukrainian Communist Party, began to publish articles criticizing the novel. On April 26, an article by two unknown literary critics appeared in its pages. The condemnation of *Cathedral* in the most important republican newspaper was a sign that Vatchenko had allies in the capital city as well. After the appearance of the negative article, many *oblast'*-level newspapers followed suit. Another, more devastating blow followed when the head of the Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, the academician Mykola Shamota, published a critical review of *Cathedral* in *Radians'ka Ukraïna* on May 16. After this, few literary scholars were willing to stand up for Honchar.⁷¹¹

As the battle over *Cathedral* raged on in Ukraine, Honchar's opponents in the Writers' Union also sought to draw Moscow into the struggle. On April 30, an anonymous group of writers, identifying themselves as party members, wrote a letter to the Politburo in Moscow. They condemned "the Ukrainian nationalists who are entrenched in the Writers' Union" and especially Honchar, whom they accused of committing "ideological sabotage" with his novel *Cathedral*. They expressed concern that the Ukrainian Central Committee's new ideological secretary, Fedir Ovcharenko, did not seem willing to crack down on Honchar. Although Shelest is never mentioned in the letter, the obvious implication is that the Ukrainian Communist Party leadership was far too tolerant of dangerous nationalists. The letter ends with a plea for the Central Committee in Moscow to send a commission to intervene. This was just one of several similar letters received by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

⁷¹¹ Honchar took this article "like an accusation from a public prosecutor," remembers Valentyna Honchar. V. D. Honchar, *"Ia poven liubovi--": spomyny pro Olesia Honchara* (Kyïv: Saksent Plus, 2008). 112-113. See also V. K. Koval', *"Sobor" i navkolo soboru* (Kyïv: Vyd-vo "Molod", 1989), 101-103.

during the *Cathedral* controversy.⁷¹² On June 4, the Ukrainian KGB wrote a report on the grim mood in the Ukrainian Writers' Union. It stated that some within the ranks were claiming that Honchar was encouraging nationalists at the expense of more ideologically correct writers. There were calls for Honchar to retire.⁷¹³ The hardline faction within the Ukrainian Writers' Union had clearly mobilized in support of the campaign against Honchar.

On May 6, the chair of the all-Union KGB, Iurii Andropov, penned a report on *Cathedral* that was circulated among members of the Soviet Central Committee. Andropov was a Brezhnev appointee (although not a member of the Dnipropetrovsk group himself), and the KGB at this time was dominated by members of the Dnipropetrovsk patronage network.⁷¹⁴ "In its contents, *Cathedral* is a politically dangerous work that promotes elements of nationalism and portrays Soviet reality in a distorted light," Andropov stated bluntly. Andropov argued that Honchar idealized the Cossack past while denigrating the Soviet present. He seemed most disturbed by Honchar's portrayal of the state and its officials in the novel. According to Andropov, the Soviet apparatus in the novel is dominated by pen-pushers and bureaucrats who use their authority for personal gain and allow violations of the law to go unpunished. Andropov was much more concerned with the novel's supposed nationalist and anti-Soviet overtones than its treatment of religion, but he did conclude by repeating the charge that the Pope intends to nominate *Cathedral* for a Nobel Prize.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹² RGANI 5/60/60 (April 30, 1968): 151-152, in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, 481-484.

⁷¹³ HDA SBU 16/1/973-964 (June 4, 1968): 275-279.

⁷¹⁴ Willerton, "Patronage Networks and Coalition Building in the Brezhnev Era," 200, fn12.

⁷¹⁵ RGANI 5/60/61 (May 6, 1968): 68-70, in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura , 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, 484-486.

In his memoirs, Shelest writes he attempted to mobilize his patron Podgorny and other Moscow-based allies in defense of Honchar. In June he spoke with the head editor of *Izvestiia*, one of the most important Soviet central newspapers, and suggested that he publish a sympathetic review of *Cathedral*. Shelest also mentions that he spoke to Podgorny, who said, “Honchar is a good writer, but like all creative workers he has his opinions that do not always correspond with the official position. It's necessary to continue supporting Honchar in every way. If he is subjected to baseless criticism, let alone treated in a biased and unobjective manner, then all this will be used against us in the bourgeois press.”⁷¹⁶ In her memoir, the author’s wife, Valentyna Honchar, reports that Podgorny and Honchar met during the time that *Cathedral* was under attack. Podgorny and Honchar were on friendly terms; both had grown up in the Poltava region, so they were *zemliaki*. When Honchar started to tell the story of his persecution, Podgorny indicated that he already knew all about it by gesturing to a stack of documents on his desk. The document on top: a KGB report condemning *Cathedral*.⁷¹⁷ These two conversations suggest that *Cathedral* had indeed become a flash point for conflict between the Kharkiv network, headed by Podgorny, and Brezhnev’s Dnipropetrovsk network.

It was a conflict that Shelest and Podgorny increasingly seemed to be losing. In a June 4 article in the central newspaper *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, A. Ulanov, the first secretary of the Dnipropetrovsk city committee of the Communist Party, wrote that the Dnipropetrovsk workers prefer their own socialist city and factories to Honchar’s cathedral.⁷¹⁸ By placing the Cossack cathedral in opposition to the factory and city, Ulanov implicitly rejects Honchar’s assertion that

⁷¹⁶ Shelest, *Da ne sudimy budete*, 331. Indeed, the Ukrainian KGB reported that rumors had already begun to spread in the Ukrainian emigré community about the removal of *Cathedral* from circulation. HDA SBU 16/1/973-964 (June 13, 1968): 109-110.

⁷¹⁷ V. D. Honchar, “*Ia poven liubovi—*,” 118.

⁷¹⁸ A. Ulanov, “Chelovek, vremia, gorod,” *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, June 4, 1968.

the religious heritage of the Cossack past can be reconciled with Soviet Ukrainian identity. When *Izvestiia*'s review of *Cathedral* was published on June 12, it was not sympathetic to Honchar as Shelest had hoped. The author, Nikolai Fed', criticized Honchar for his negative portrayal of Soviet life and his idealization of the Cossack past (ignoring the novel's positive portrayal of the glorious early days of the Soviet Union).⁷¹⁹ Meanwhile in Ukraine, the third printing of the novel at the publishing house *Radians'kyi pys'mennyk* was affected by the growing controversy in the press. *Radians'kyi pys'mennyk* was supposed to produce 115,000 copies of *Cathedral*, but only 25,000 were actually printed and sent to booksellers.⁷²⁰

Shelest and Honchar were already losing the battle for *Cathedral* on both the republican and all-Union level by the summer of 1968, but the ideological crackdown following the crushing of the Prague Spring ultimately doomed them. The Prague Spring had been particularly worrying to Soviet officials working on cultural issues because they believed that the Czechoslovak intelligentsia had played a role in driving Czechoslovak First Secretary Alexander Dubcek's demands for "socialism with a human face." On the night of August 20-21, the Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia to put an end to the Prague Spring. On the eve of the invasion, the all-Union Central Committee Department of Culture sent a letter to the Politburo that cited Fed's criticism of the novel in *Izvestiia* and reported that the Russian translation from the novel had been withdrawn from the journal *Druzhba narodov*.⁷²¹ *Cathedral* would not be published in Russian until 1987, when it was finally published as part of the "Library of *Druzhba narodov*" series (see Chapter 7). In the months following the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, there was

⁷¹⁹ N. Fed', "Dostoinstvo iskusstva," *Izvestiia*, June 12, 1968.

⁷²⁰ According to the former head editor of *Radians'kyi pys'mennyk*, Dmytro Mishchenko, Petro Shelest was rumored to have had a hand in the eventual distribution of the 25,000 books. Koval', "*Sobor*" i navkolo soboru, 12.

⁷²¹ RGANI 5/60/60 (August 20, 1968): 166, in *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura , 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, 484.

increasing censorship and oversight of the press. On January 7, 1969, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union issued a directive on the responsibility of heads of organs of press, radio, television, cinema, and institutions of culture and art for the ideological-political level of materials that they disseminated. This directive made it extremely risky to publish anything that might be considered ideologically suspect. On March 3, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine put out its own version of the directive. It singled out *Vitchyzna*, the journal that had published *Cathedral*, and criticized the newspapers that had published positive reviews of it. *Cathedral* was removed from libraries.⁷²² Honchar remained on as head of the Writers' Union, but his book was officially condemned.

The campaign against *Cathedral* made it a symbol of resistance among the partisans of the Ukrainian cultural revival. On November 28, 1968, the head of the Ukrainian KGB reported that a letter had been circulating among a segment of the creative intelligentsia in Kyiv.⁷²³ Addressed to V. V. Shcherbyts'kyi, head of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, and Dmytro Pavlychko, a Sixtiers poet and secretary of the Ukrainian Union of Writers, this letter from "the creative youth of Dnipropetrovsk" chronicled attacks on members of the creative intelligentsia in Dnipropetrovsk who had spoken out in favor of Honchar's novel. The author of this letter, whom we now know to be the young poet Ivan Sokul's'kyi, stated that Vatchenko had gathered all the leaders of the party organizations of the region's press organs, and ordered them to demonstrate that the working people were against *Cathedral*. Those who had praised the novel or refused to toe the new line were fired from their jobs and expelled from the party.

⁷²² Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 80-81.

⁷²³ HDA SBU 16/1/981-970 (November 28, 1968): 203-213. Ivan Grygorovych Sokul's'kyi, "List tvorchoï molodi m. Dnipropetrovs'ka," in *Tvory: v desiaty tomakh*, ed. Viacheslav Chornovil and Valentyna Chornovil, vol. 3, 10 vols. (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2002), 87-99, <http://archive.khpg.org/index.php?id=1205789631>.

Sokul's'kyi complained about the obvious double standard being applied to Russian and Ukrainian preservation advocates. He noted that the KGB spread rumors that the preservation of Ukrainian historical heritage (*starovyna*) was a mask for nationalism. What then to make of the “flood of materials on the defense of Russian historical heritage in Russian publications,” he asked, in what was undoubtedly a reference to many of the Russian works discussed above. Sokul's'kyi's letter shows that nationally-minded Ukrainians were well aware of the rising interest in church preservation in Russia. Echoing the complaints of his Russian counterparts, Sokul's'kyi wrote that the neglect of historic churches and their destruction in anti-religious campaigns was thus “barbaric.” Much like the Russian intellectuals who had envied the Georgian monument society, Sokul's'kyi pointed out that intellectuals in other republics were receiving more favorable treatment. Russians were allowed to advocate for church preservation, while Ukrainians were called nationalists for doing the same thing. But, Sokul's'kyi argued, Ukrainians had a right to defend their national dignity. He even quoted a statement by Soloukhin that “If I were born a Ukrainian, I wouldn't become a Russian for anything.” His letter demonstrates that the “politics of inclusion” towards Russian writers like Soloukhin could have spillover effects in the non-Russian Soviet republics.⁷²⁴

Mocking local KGB claims that Honchar's novel served to mobilize “Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism,” Sokul's'kyi pointed instead to the massive violations of Leninist nationalities policy in the city of Dnipropetrovsk, where there was not a single Ukrainian-language kindergarten or school.⁷²⁵ Like Honchar and Dziuba, he called for a return to Ukrainization and other Leninist nationalities policies of the 1920s. Sokul's'kyi's facility with Marx and Lenin did not save him,

⁷²⁴ HDA SBU 16/1/981-970 (November 28, 1968): 211, 212, 209.

⁷²⁵ HDA SBU 16/1/981-970 (November 28, 1968): 209.

however. In January of 1970, the Ukrainian *samvydav* (Rus: *samizdat*) publication *Ukraïns'kyi visnyk* reprinted the “Letter of Creative Youth of Dnipropetrovsk” and reported that Sokul’s’kyi had been arrested by the KGB on June 17, 1969. For the “Letter” and other activities, he was sentenced in 1970 to four-and-a-half years in a camp for “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda.”⁷²⁶

Soon Sokul’s’kyi’s letter was not the only document about *Cathedral* that was circulating in *samvydav*. Ievhen Sverstiuk, a literary critic of the Sixtiers generation, had been an active participant in the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth before he lost his job because of his involvement in the Ukrainian cultural revival. Following the attacks on Honchar’s novel, Sverstiuk wrote an essay titled “A Cathedral in Scaffolding” which circulated in *samvydav* in Ukraine. In the essay, Sverstiuk writes that the cathedrals built by the Ukrainians’ Cossack ancestors “glow invisibly in the depths of our national consciousness,” reminding them of eternal values that will outlive the fleeting material values of modern times. Like Honchar, Sverstiuk does not locate the value of the cathedrals in their religious significance. Rather, the cathedrals bear witness to the national past and the spiritual values of their Cossack ancestors: “When the ground gives way under our feet, we involuntarily try to find support. We seize a page from an old chronicle, cherish Cossack relics and our cathedrals of the past—as the lost secrets of spiritual survival. After all, they had the miraculous power to turn men into heroes.”⁷²⁷ In Sverstiuk’s essay, religious heritage has been fully reincorporated into Ukrainian national culture.

Unfortunately, the Soviet state, according to Sverstiuk, had lost its way and was unable to ensure the transmission of the spiritual values represented by the cathedral. The title of the essay

⁷²⁶ V. Ovsiienko and Kharkivs’ka pravozakhysna hrupa, “Lyst tvorchoï molodi Dnipropetrovs’ka,” Glossary, Virtual’nyi muzei: Disidents’kyi rukh v Ukraïni, March 11, 2006, <http://archive.khpg.org/index.php?id=1162537379>.

referred to the scaffolding that the authorities put up around the cathedral in Honchar's novel in order to give the false impression that they were restoring it. Sverstiuk hearkened back to Lenin's legacy on historic preservation. "Lenin, even during the revolution, wrote about the preservation of monuments and about taking over all the cultural riches created by mankind in the course of history," he explained. Stalin, in contrast, had destroyed basic human decency, the foundation of civilization, and had reduced human life to a single material goal: the fulfillment of the Plan. The only way to counteract Stalin's damage to the moral foundation of society was for individuals to grow a backbone—and this could only be achieved by discovering the "national customs, traditions, and treasures" that the cathedrals represented. The Volodymyr Lobodas of the world had to be resisted. Only by returning to the values of the Cossacks and the policies of Lenin could Soviet Ukrainians save themselves from spiritual bankruptcy.⁷²⁸

Vatchenko's campaign against Honchar doomed Sverstiuk's vision for a renewed Soviet Ukrainian society based on the spiritual values of the cathedral. The victory of the Dnipropetrovsk network and the loss of the Podgorny network in the battle over *Cathedral* heralded a new phase in "exclusionary politics" in Ukraine. The Ukrainian cultural revival was increasingly pushed to the margins of the official Soviet institutions where it had once thrived. As we have seen, members of the Sixtiers generation increasingly turned to *samvydav* to spread their ideas. Honchar stepped down as head of the Ukrainian Writers' Union in 1971. The respected writer Iurii Smolych replaced him in the position. However, as Myroslav Shkandrij has observed, Smolych's newly-promoted deputy Vasyl Kozachenko seemed to hold the real power to deter-

⁷²⁷ Ievhen Sverstiuk, "A Cathedral in Scaffolding," in *Clandestine Essays*, (Littleton, Colo.: Published by the Ukrainian Academic Press for the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1976), 17, 21, 29.

⁷²⁸ Sverstiuk, "A Cathedral in Scaffolding," 25, 27.

mine who was in compliance with the ideological dictates of the Party.⁷²⁹ In the first several months of 1972, following a 1971 decision of the Politburo in Moscow to crack down on *samizdat*, the Ukrainian security services arrested approximately one hundred of members of the intelligentsia, mostly “Sixtiers” like Ivan Dziuba, Ivan Svitlychnyi, and Ievhen Sverstiuk. Those who did not ultimately recant were sentenced to seven years of imprisonment in a camp and five years of internal exile. Shelest did nothing to prevent the new wave of repression, which was harsher and more extensive than the first wave in 1965.⁷³⁰

The crackdown on the Ukrainian intelligentsia turned out to be a prelude to Shelest’s own fall from power. After *Cathedral*, Shelest had continued to attempt to bridge the increasing divide between nationally-minded Ukrainians and the broader Soviet community. In his 1970 book *O Ukraine, Our Soviet Land*, Shelest “tried to produce a work acceptable to Ukrainian sensibilities while at the same time affirming the Ukraine’s place in the Soviet multinational state,” in the words of Soviet historian Lowell Tillet. The work quickly sold out its print run of 100,000 copies.⁷³¹ On May 19, 1972, shortly after the arrests of the intelligentsia, at a plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Petro Shelest was removed from his post as head of the Ukrainian SSR. Vatchenko was the only party official from Ukraine who spoke at the plenum where Shelest was sacked.⁷³² Shcherbyts’kyi, a member of Brezhnev’s Dnipropetrovsk patronage network, replaced Shelest as head of the republic. The significance of

⁷²⁹ Myroslav Shkandrij, “Literary Politics and Literary Debates in Ukraine 1971-1981,” in *Ukraine After Shelest*, ed. Bohdan Krawchenko (Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies; University of Alberta, 1983), 55.

⁷³⁰ See Kharkivs’ka pravozakhysna hrupa, “Arrests of the Ukrainian Intelligentsia 1972-1973,” Glossary, Virtual’nyi muzei: Disidents’kyi rukh v Ukraïni, November 8, 2006, <http://archive.khpg.org/index.php?id=1162989185>. Kas’ianov, *Nezhodni*, 121-141.

⁷³¹ Lowell Tillet, “Ukrainian Nationalism and the Fall of Shelest,” *Slavic Review* 34, no. 4 (December 1975): 767, 755.

⁷³² Roman Solchanyk, “Politics and the National Question in the Post-Shelest Period,” in *Ukraine After Shelest*, ed. Bohdan Krawchenko (Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies; University of Alberta, 1983), 7.

Shelest's firing was made even more clear when in April of 1973 the journal *Kommunist Ukrainy*, an organ of the Ukrainian Communist Party, published a denunciation of the book that faulted it for idealizing the Zaporizhian Cossacks and failing to sufficiently stress the positive impact of Russia and Russian culture on Ukraine through its history. When *O Ukraine, Our Soviet Land* was removed from shelves, it too began to circulate in *samvydav*, a startling fate for a book written by the (now former) first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party.⁷³³

The new Ukrainian Party chief did not waste time implementing exclusionary policies towards nationally-minded intellectuals in Ukraine. In October of 1972, the Ukrainian Central Committee harshly criticized the Ukrainian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture. Implying that the Society was promoting a nationalist agenda, they accused its employees of idealizing the past and failing to present a class-based approach to history. They claimed that the organization was not spending enough time promoting monuments associated with the military or the 1917 revolution. The Central Committee ordered the Society to purge their staff of employees with "doubtful social reputations" and "ideologically unclear views."⁷³⁴ The message of the new republican leadership was clear—the Society should adopt a strictly class-based approach to historic preservation, one that favored Soviet military monuments over churches. As "exclusionary politics" in Ukraine grew more severe under Shcherbyts'kyi, the novel *Cathedral* itself became a symbol for the nationally-minded Ukrainians. In his 1989 book on *Cathedral*, Koval' called it a "litmus test" for an entire generation of Ukrainian readers and writers.⁷³⁵ As a result of Vatchenko's successful campaign against the novel, Honchar's historic

⁷³³ Tillett, "Ukrainian Nationalism and the Fall of Shelest," 752, 756-7.

⁷³⁴ TsDAHOU 1/10/1180 (October 3, 1972): 9-12.

⁷³⁵ Koval', "*Sobor" i navkolo soboru*, 10. In the introduction to a 1999 collection of documents dedicated to Honchar and *Cathedral*, the editors likewise called the novel a litmus test for the intelligentsia that immediately revealed their

Cossack cathedral thus became a double symbol of both Soviet Ukrainian national history and its repression by the Soviet state.

Moldova: Ion Druță and the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture

When Shelest was removed from power in 1972, Ukraine experienced what many other republics had undergone over a decade earlier. The Ukrainian leadership, due to their strong ties with Khrushchev, did not experience the round of anti-nationalist purges that took place in the USSR from 1958 to 1961. The case of Moldova, which experienced anti-nationalist campaigns and purges from 1959 to 1961, illustrates the impact of those purges. The Khrushchev-appointed leader of the MSSR, Zinovie Serdiuk (Rus: Zinovii Serdiuk), was no cultural liberal, but his replacement in 1961 by Ivan Bodiul ushered in a new era of anti-nationalist exclusionary politics that hardened throughout the 1960s and ossified in the 1970s. Through comparison of the fate of a preservationist author in Moldova with the Russian and Ukrainian cases, we can see the impact of Bodiul's policies on national culture in Moldova. Ion Druță's particular brand of rural-based Moldovan cultural nationalism had firmly established him as the *enfant terrible* of the MSSR in the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapter 2). After being forced to flee the republic in 1965, he published a novella, *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* (Rus: *Zapakh speloi aivy*) in a Moscow-based journal that attacked the MSSR leadership's policy toward Moldovan cultural heritage. It focused particularly on the preservation of a monastery bell-tower that Druță, like Soloukhin and Honchar, argued was an essential part of his nation's culture and history. The fact that Druță was able to avoid the exclusionary politics in Moldova by publishing in Moscow illustrates that Brezh-

position on Russification and the preservation of the "spiritual shrines of their own people (*narodu*).” *Ternystym*

nev's politics of inclusion towards Russian nationalists in the RSFSR sometimes allowed non-Russian authors to evade politics of exclusion in their native republics, thus reinforcing rural-based conceptions of the nation across the USSR.

The anti-nationalist campaign reached Moldova in early 1959. On January 9, 1959, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova criticized the Moldovan journals *Chiparuș* and *Nistru* for publishing critical articles on the activities of the republic's collective farms and the nationalities policy. These accusations were repeated in a plenum of the Communist Party of Moldova in September, when several writers were accused of nationalism.⁷³⁶ Amid these accusations of "nationalistic tendencies" and the "idealization of the past" in the cultural sphere, the head of the Moldovan Party, Zinovie Serdiuk, an ethnic Ukrainian with close ties to Khrushchev, was removed.⁷³⁷ In May of 1961, Serdiuk was replaced by Ivan Bodiul, a Moldovan from Ukraine with ties to Brezhnev's network. Bodiul was the first ethnic Moldovan to lead the republic, but he had been born outside its borders and spoke Russian as his primary language. He owed his political rise to his connections to Brezhnev, who had been the head of the MSSR from 1950 to 1951.⁷³⁸ Bodiul took power with a mandate to control manifestations of nationalism in Moldova.

One of Bodiul's chief antagonists among the republic's writers was Ion Druță, who despised him for his conspicuous lack of support for the Moldovan language. Druță had already clashed with Bodiul over his play *Casa mare* in 1961-2 and his novel *Steppe Ballads* in 1963

shliakhom do khramu, 11.

⁷³⁶ Ruslan Șevcenko, *Viața politică în R.S.S. Moldovenească (1944-1961)* (Chișinău: Pontos, 2007), 65.

⁷³⁷ Serdiuk had worked with Khrushchev in Ukraine and was also his brother-in-law. Igor Cașu and Mark Sandle, "Discontent and Uncertainty in the Borderlands: Soviet Moldavia and the Secret Speech 1956-1957," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 4 (2014): 618.

(see Chapter 2). Their antagonism continued in 1965, when the Moldovan party bosses expressed their dissatisfaction with Moldova Film's production of Druță's novella *The Last Month of Autumn* (see Chapter 6). Druță's frustration boiled over at the Third Congress of the Union of Writers of Moldova, held in Chișinău on October 14-15, 1965. In an interview in Moscow in 2016, Druță stated that he decided to bring up the controversial issue of the Latin alphabet specifically in order to antagonize the Moldovan leadership.⁷³⁹ In Soviet Moldova, the Moldovan (Romanian) language was written using the Cyrillic alphabet, which many Moldovan intellectuals saw as dividing them from the Romanian linguistic community, which had transitioned to using the Latin alphabet over the course of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴⁰ The positive reaction in the hall ("prolonged applause" according to the official transcript) surprised even Druță.⁷⁴¹ Druță's speech was probably the most dramatic of the congress, but other authors spoke passionately about the inferior state of the Moldovan language in the republic and the need to preserve cultural heritage.⁷⁴² Pavel Boțu, an up-and-coming young poet, criticized the fact that significant cultural monuments, such as the Căpriană monastery, had fallen into disrepair.⁷⁴³ Despite the controversy at the Congress, the Party bureau of the Writers' Union wrote in their report that it had been a success.⁷⁴⁴

⁷³⁸ Igor Cașu, "*Politica națională*" în *Moldova sovietică (1944-1989)* (Chișinău: Cardidact, 2000), 62. Willerton, 188.

⁷³⁹ Ion Druță, interview with the author, June 20, 2017.

⁷⁴⁰ Matthew Ciscel, "A Separate Moldovan Language? The Sociolinguistics of Moldova's *Limba de Stat*," *Nationalities Papers* 34, no. 5 (2006): 576-578.

⁷⁴¹ AOSPRM 51/42/151 (October 14-15, 1965): 107.

⁷⁴² For an overview of the Congress by a participant, see Mihai Cimpoi, "Un congres al scriitorilor cu impact istoric," *Akados* 39, no. 4 (2015): 127-31.

⁷⁴³ AOSPRM 51/42/151 (October 14-15, 1965): 146.

⁷⁴⁴ AOSPRM 276/1/18 (October 25, 1965): 61.

The Moldovan Party leadership disagreed. On November 17, Bodiul delivered a speech at a meeting of the Party cell of the Union of Writers in which he attacked the writers who had been outspoken at the Congress while simultaneously attempting to address some of the concerns they had raised, such as the development of the Moldovan language and the preservation of monuments. He criticized “certain people in the republic” for displaying “national limitedness,” and being insufficiently educated in the spirit of internationalism. “They sometimes make incorrect judgements and even make attacks of a nationalist character,” he stated.⁷⁴⁵ In a letter to the Central Committee in Moscow on November 29, Bodiul noted the presence of nationalistic tendencies among some of the younger writers at the Congress, singling out Aureliu Busuioc, Gheorghe Malarciuc, and Druță. He specifically noted Boțu’s concerns about the preservation of monuments and expressed his dismay at Druță’s “pro-Romanian” speech.⁷⁴⁶ A December 3 decision by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova harshly criticized the congress, stating that the writers (especially Busuioc, Malarciuc, Druță and the critic Mihai Cimpoi) had made false claims about the neglect of national culture in the republic and displayed unhealthy nationalist attitudes. At the same time, the Presidium made several concessions to the writers, promising to expand publication in the Moldovan language and making provisions for the founding of a Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture.⁷⁴⁷ The writers’ rebellion at the Congress had resulted in censure for some, but also the founding of a monument preservation society to channel rising national sentiment among the Moldovan writers.

⁷⁴⁵ AOSPRM 51/42/116 (November 17, 1965): 47, 55.

⁷⁴⁶ RGANI 5/36/148 (November 29, 1965): in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura , 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, 100-107. See also AOSPRM 51/25/101 (November 29, 1965): 121-127.

⁷⁴⁷ AOSPRM 51/25/25 (December 3, 1965): 21-24.

The MSSR Soviet of Ministers approved the organizational charter of the Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture on February 28, 1966.⁷⁴⁸ The correspondence of the organization, led by the director of the Institute of Language and Literature of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences Nicolae Corlăteanu, indicates that during the late 1960s and early 1970s, they focused on the preservation of cultural sites, such as the graves of Moldovan writers and the historic monastery at Orhei Vechi, as well as military monuments and mass graves from World War II. While it is difficult to evaluate the overall impact of the society, the fact that in 1971 they sought permission to grant religious organizations status as collective members of the Society does suggest they sought to integrate religious heritage into their preservation activities. (The request was denied.)⁷⁴⁹

Druță had no opportunity to participate in the new Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture because he had already fled the republic in 1965. After his speech at the Third Congress, Bodiul called Druță and the other members of the leadership of the Union of Writers to the Central Committee to explain themselves. As they were walking towards the Central Committee building, near the triumphal arch on the main square of Chișinău, Ion Ciobanu, the head of the Union of Writers, delicately suggested to Druță that it was time for him to settle permanently in Moscow.⁷⁵⁰ But Druță did not forget about the organization that was founded because he and the other writers had caused such a stir.

⁷⁴⁸ AOSPRM 2454/1/1 (February 28, 1966).

⁷⁴⁹ See the correspondence of the Society in AOSPRM 2454/1/3 (1966), 2452/1/9 (1968), 2454/1/12 (1970), 2454/1/16 (1971). The request can be found in ANRM 3011/10/463 (June 16, 1971): 41-45.

⁷⁵⁰ Ion Druță, "Kogda, kak i pochemu uekhal Drutse iz Moldavii," in *Ora jertfirii: proză, publicistică, scrisori* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovei, 1998), 56-57.

In September of 1973, Druță published the novella *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* in the liberal-leaning illustrated journal *Iunost'* (*Youth*).⁷⁵¹ The novella told the story of Horia Holban, a youth from the northern Moldovan region of Bucovina who becomes fascinated with local history thanks to his history teacher, Ilarie Turcu. He continues his studies with Turcu as a student at the history faculty of Chișinău State University, where he meets and falls in love with Jeanette, a fellow student from a village near the Căpriană monastery. After graduating, Turcu helps Horia find a position as an inspector at the newly-founded Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture. Horia buys himself a camera, learns how to draw architectural sketches of old buildings, and begins hitchhiking across Moldova to collect information about historic monuments. After each trip, he brings back suitcases full of materials. Horia eventually learns, however, that he would have been better off staying at the headquarters of the Society and spending his time solving crossword puzzles like his boss Balțatu. Balțatu is clearly less than thrilled with Horia's expeditions, and Horia begins to realize that his trips are causing conflict between his former professor Turcu and Balțatu. Over time, the opposition from Balțatu causes Turcu to sour on Horia's preservationist efforts as well. The issue finally comes to a head when Balțatu asks Horia to stand in line for him to buy spare parts for his car. Turcu calls Horia an idiot for refusing to complete the everyday humiliating tasks expected of a subordinate of a man like Balțatu. Horia realizes he has no choice but to leave the Society for good. As a parting kindness, Turcu secures Horia a position as a history teacher in his wife's village.

The Aroma of Ripe Quince is a clear indictment of government-sponsored preservationist efforts in Moldova in particular, and Moldovan cultural policy in general. The Moldovan Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture had clearly failed to fulfill the hopes

⁷⁵¹ Ion Drutse, "Zapakh speloi aivy," *Iunost'*, no. 9 (1973): 4-44.

of Moldovan intellectuals. Nationally-minded intellectuals had not managed to gain control of the organization—instead it was dominated by bureaucrats. The official organization that is supposed to protect national monuments squelches true grassroots preservationist efforts. In Druță's opinion, the Moldovan authorities are hostile to Moldovan culture. The novella is thus a strong indictment of the Soviet state's failure to preserve national culture.

Much like Soloukhin and Honchar, Druță shows how a church building is an irreplaceable part of national history and culture in *The Aroma of Ripe Quince*. While working in Căpriană, Horia begins to educate his students about the history of a bell-tower near the neighboring monastery. Druță links his bell-tower with a figure from the glorious national past: the Moldovan national hero Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great). According to the legend that Druță recounts in the novella, the fifteenth-century prince took refuge at the Căpriană monastery after a military defeat. There a monk chided him for retreating from the field of battle, ultimately spurring him to gather a new army and defeat his enemies. In thanks, Ștefan cel Mare built the bell-tower and made his finest soldiers the bell-ringers. Like the young Ukrainian student Mykola Bahlay, Horia sees the religious building as a priceless symbol of the national past. He tries to inspire his students to save the decaying bell-tower, but, like Bahlay and the Zachiplianka villagers, he runs into opposition from the local authorities—in this case, the director of the school, Baltu. While Horia is away from the village, the bell-tower burns down, plunging him into despair. Despite the tragedy, Horia still believes that his calling as a teacher requires him to soldier on by teaching the young generation about their heroic national history.

In his 2011 memoir, Druță writes that the Moldovan Party leadership sought to prevent the circulation of the journal in Moldova by suspending its sale at newspaper kiosks. Druță also reports that Boris Polevoi, the editor of *Iunost'*, told him that the Moldovan authorities asked him

to retract the issue of the journal and ban Druță from its pages. According to Druță, Polevoi, who had been a frontline correspondent for *Pravda* during the Second World War, gave an unprintable “soldierly reply.”⁷⁵²

Druță’s novella may have infuriated the Moldovan authorities, but it gained the support of the Moscow-based publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia*, which was controlled by Russian nationalists. In 1974, *Molodaia gvardiia* published the novella in book form as part of a larger collection of Druță’s recent works.⁷⁵³ Founded as the publishing house of the Komsomol, *Molodaia gvardiia* had from the early 1960s been dominated by Russian nationalists affiliated with the “group of Pavlov” that dominated the Central Committee of the Komsomol. Throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, the publisher actively supported Russian nationalist writers in general, and Village Prose writers like Soloukhin in particular.⁷⁵⁴ The publisher had a history of supporting Druță in his conflicts with Moldovan authorities: they had stood up for him at a meeting at the Soviet Central Committee when, at the behest of the Moldovan Party, the Department of Propaganda challenged Druță’s depiction of the postwar famine in his 1968 novel *Burden of Our Kindness*.⁷⁵⁵ In the afterward to the volume, the critic Valentin Oskotskii reiterated many of the points that Druță raised in *The Aroma of Ripe Quince*. Oskotskii wrote that the bell-tower at the Căpriana monastery “reminded present generations of [...] the heroic traditions of national history.” He also noted the similarity between Druță’s work and that of the Russian Village Prose writers.⁷⁵⁶ *Molodaia gvardiia*’s support for Druță shows that the politics of inclusion towards Russian Village Prose

⁷⁵² Ion Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii: mărturii și spovedanii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2011), 54.

⁷⁵³ Ion Druță, *Vozvrashchenie na krugi svoia: povesti* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1974).

⁷⁵⁴ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 256-268.

⁷⁵⁵ Zoia Iakhontova, “Koe-cto iz zhizni redaktsii prozy,” in *Zhizn' zamechatel'nogo izdatel'stva*, 162. The volume in question was Ion Druță, *Bremia nasheĭ dobroty: roman* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1969).

⁷⁵⁶ Valentin Oskotskii, “Chetyre etiuda k protretu Iona Drutse,” in *Vozvrashchenie na krugi svoia*, 386-387, 371.

writers could also benefit non-Russian writers who wrote about similar themes, thereby reinforcing rural-based nationalism in non-Russian republics as well as the RSFSR.

In 1977, the Moldovan authorities sent a series of letters to all-Union bodies in Moscow complaining about continued support for Druță's works by all-Union journals, publishers, and theaters. The immediate trigger for this flurry of letters was the premiere of Druță's controversial play *Holy of Holies* (Rus: *Sviataia sviatykh*) at the Central Theater of the Soviet Army in Moscow, but Moldovan authorities took pains to complain about *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* as well. An April 6 letter from secretary of the Central Committee of the Moldovan Communist Party I. Kalinin to the State Committee of the Soviet of Ministers on Publishers, Printing and the Book Trade complained about the publication of Druță's works by central publishers, making specific mention of the publication of *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* by the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia*.⁷⁵⁷ An April 14 letter from I. Kalinin to the Central Committee in Moscow laid out the Moldovan Party leadership's case against the novella. Much like the critics of *Cathedral*, Kalinin said *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* was critical of modern Soviet life. Druță romanticized the past, identifying the patriarchal old ways as the essence of national character. The Moldovan Communist Party secretary complained that *Molodaia gvardiia* had ignored negative reviews of the novella in the republican press in Moldova. He objected to Oskotskii's afterward, as well as the publication of positive reviews of the novella in the RSFSR and all-Union press. Support for Druță by Moscow-based literary institutions was harmful, Kalinin stated, because Druță had a detrimental effect on public opinion in the MSSR and made the Party's work with other Moldovan intellectuals difficult.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁷ AOSPRM 51/44/7 (April 6, 1977): 15. Special thanks to Irina Nicorich for locating this document.

⁷⁵⁸ RGANI 5/73/424 (April 14, 1977): 22-26, in N. G. Tomilina and T. Iu Konova, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978 : dokumenty : v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, 2 vols., Seriiia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva.

The Moldovan Party's appeal to central authorities reveals the difficulty of maintaining exclusionary politics in one republic while the regime was pursuing inclusionary politics towards Russian nationalists. As Druță's example illustrates, the Soviet Union was a relatively integrated cultural space. When thwarted by exclusionary politics at the republican level, Druță was able to set up shop in Moscow and take advantage of Brezhnev's inclusionary politics towards nationalists at publishing houses like *Molodaia gvardiia*. In Moscow, Druță managed to maintain good relationships with the liberal camp as well as the nationalist camp, publishing at the liberal journals *Novyi mir* and *Druzhba narodov* as well as the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia*. The fact that his subject matter dovetailed nicely with that of the Village Prose writers earned him the sympathy of the Russian nationalists. The support that Druță received in the Moscow literary world allowed him to influence Moldovan literature from afar. His ability to speak to national issues from the relative freedom of Moscow set him up to be a symbol of the national movement of the late 1980s.

But why did Druță manage to avoid the exclusionary politics of a Brezhnev client while Honchar's novel *Cathedral* fell victim to exclusionary politics in Ukraine? Here the factor of strong patronage connections to political and cultural elites in Moscow is key. Vatchenko was able to rally the all-Union KGB against Honchar's novel and place negative reviews in central publications. Bodiul, while sharing Vatchenko's connections to the Brezhnev network, failed to do so. The Moldovan Party officials' lack of influence in Moscow is illustrated by the response of Vasiliu Shauro, head of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee in Moscow, to their complaints about Druță. In a June 6 letter, Shauro, whom Brudny identifies as one of the architects of the politics of inclusion towards Russian nationalists, granted that Druță's works

Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPĖN, 2011), 84-87. This document can also be found at AOSPRM 51/44/3 (April 14, 1977): 63-65.

have ideological shortcomings, but complained that the Moldovan Central Committee had been inconsistent on Druță, first criticizing his play *Casa mare* as ideologically harmful in 1960, then awarding him the MSSR State Prize in 1967. In 1976 the MSSR Ministry of Culture had recommended the play *Holy of Holies* for translation and staging in theaters across the country; now they were characterizing it as harmful. He also noted that the play had received positive reviews in several publications, including *Pravda*. In the end, Shauro acceded to some of the Moldovan Party's demands, but refused to ban Druță outright.⁷⁵⁹ Despite the protestations of the Moldovan Party, Druță continued to receive cover from the political patrons of Russian nationalists in the center. One can only speculate as to the exact reason for this, but it seems clear that there was much less political will in the center to marginalize a leading Moldovan intellectual than a leading Ukrainian one, even though both Honchar and Druță had adopted similar stances on the importance of religious heritage for national culture.

Ivan Bodiul ran the Moldovan Party for nineteen years, finally graduating to the position of deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, in December of 1980. His successor, Semion Grossu (Rus: Semën Grossu), seems to have adopted a milder policy toward Druță. Druță had apparently written Moldovan-language manuscript of *The Aroma of Ripe Quince* called *The Bell-Tower* (Rom: *Clopotnița*) in the 1970s, but it had never been published in Druță's native republic.⁷⁶⁰ Finally, in 1984, *The Bell-Tower* was published in Chișinău.⁷⁶¹ Much of what had been hinted at in the 1972 Russian-language version was stated more boldly in the

⁷⁵⁹ RGANI 5/73/424 (June 6, 1977): 26-27 in N. G. Tomilina and T. Iu Konova, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978*, 124-125.

⁷⁶⁰ The edition of *The Bell-Tower* published in Chișinău in 2017 lists its date of completion as 1972. A 1975 letter from Moldovan literary critic Vasile Coroban to Druta published in a document collection contains a reference to *Bell-Tower*. See Ion Druță, *Clopotnița*, 8th ed. (Chișinău: Cartier, 2017). Vasile Coroban, "Din scrisorile inedite adresate lui Ion Druță," in *Fenomenul artistic Ion Druta*, ed. Ion Druță and Mihail Dolgan (Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2008), 603.

1984 Moldovan version. For example, at the end of Horia's conversation with his former professor Turcu, Druță writes, "In a moment of illumination, [Horia] realized that this Ilarie Turcu was neither a man of science, nor a man of honor, nor a peasant from a peasant nation, as he had believed at the beginning."⁷⁶² In *The Bell-Tower*, Turcu is not simply an opportunist, but a betrayer of the Moldovan "peasant nation." The publication of *The Bell-Tower* in 1984 suggests a shift from the politics of exclusion that had characterized the Bodiul era. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the early 1980s brought a relaxation of the restrictive cultural policy to the MSSR. It was a prelude for what was to come. During perestroika, Druță would return to his home republic, ultimately emerging as the godfather of the Moldovan national movement (see Chapter 7).

Conclusion

Vladimir Soloukhin, Oles' Honchar, and Ion Druță all had different approaches to religion in their works, but all portrayed religious built heritage such as churches and monasteries as an important part of national culture in their works. Advocacy for the preservation of historic churches and monasteries in the Soviet Union became a means by which intellectuals from villages sought to re-incorporate religion—often stigmatized as a backwards aspect of rural life—into Soviet conceptions of the nation and its history. This was inherently threatening to the class-based conceptions of national culture promoted by Lenin and Stalin because it denied the existence of separate "bourgeois" and "popular" national cultures and presented the nation's history as a cohesive whole. It also amounted to a quiet form of de-Stalinization, as the height of church closures had been during Stalin's "Great Break" in the early 1930s.

⁷⁶¹ Ion Druță, *Clopotnița* (Chișinău: Literatura artistică, 1984).

⁷⁶² Ion Druță, *Clopotnița*, 8th ed. (Chișinău: Cartier, 2017), 122.

The movement to preserve historic churches and monasteries reveals a great deal about the role of institutions in cultural politics in the era of Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Organizations to promote the preservation of historic buildings arose spontaneously across the Soviet Union in the Khrushchev era, and some ultimately gained a measure of state support. In the mid-1960s, Soviet authorities began to sponsor the creation of voluntary Societies for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture across the USSR. Initially, networks of nationally-minded intellectuals hoped to seize control of these organizations; in the case of the RSFSR, they did succeed in doing this for a time. The state's efforts to channel the energies of the cultural intelligentsia into these organizations ultimately backfired, however, when they failed to live up to intellectuals' expectations. Over time, the narrative of the preservation of churches and monuments became a story of the state's neglect of national heritage in works such as Honchar's *Cathedral*, Druță's *The Aroma of Ripe Quince*, and Soloukhin's "A Time to Gather Stones."

The favoritism that Brezhnev and his political network showed towards nationally-minded Russian intellectuals further compounded the disillusionment of the advocates of historic church preservation in Ukraine and Moldova. Brezhnev and his allies adopted a "politics of inclusion" towards Russian Village Prose writers like Soloukhin while at the same time working to marginalize nationally-minded writers with similar views in Ukraine and Moldova. In the case of Ukraine, an official smear campaign against Oles' Honchar's 1968 novel about the preservation of a historic church turned it into a symbol of the oppression of Ukrainian national identity by the Soviet state. Moreover, the case of Ion Druță illustrates that the "politics of inclusion" towards Russian nationalists could undermine efforts to exclude national intellectuals elsewhere. The Moldovan Party's efforts to marginalize Druță from the cultural sphere failed because he found support among the cultural elite in Moscow, who looked favorably on his preservationist

views because they resonated with what Russian Village Prose writers were advocating. In the end, the Soviet state's involvement in the preservationist discourse undermined its own legitimacy. The persecution of prominent Ukrainian and Moldovan preservation advocates and the overall failure of the Soviet state to adequately preserve historic churches contributed to a broader narrative among the nationally-minded Soviet cultural intelligentsia that the Soviet system was not just anti-church, but anti-national as well.

In Chapter 5, we will examine the efforts of several rural-born intellectuals to preserve another aspect of the traditional village world: rural material culture. Much like the church preservationists argued that abandoned and neglected churches were an important part of national heritage, collectors in Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova salvaged everyday objects from pre-revolutionary rural life from attics and rubbish heaps and re-imagined them as treasures of national culture. Over time, they too became cynical about the Soviet state's commitment to the preservation of national heritage.

Chapter 5:
Gathering the Nation:
Soviet Collectors, the Village, and the National Idea

Starting in the late 1960s, the Ukrainian artist Ivan Honchar began a massive project. By that point in his life, Honchar had already accumulated an impressive collection of ethnographic and historical materials on trips to towns and villages of the Ukrainian SSR. Honchar displayed his collection in his Kyiv home, which he opened to visitors. Now, he began crafting the pages of what would become an eighteen-volume “album” dedicated to his collection. Working in a large format (30 x 41.5 cm), he crafted individual “plates” based on the materials he had collected at each site.⁷⁶³ Each page featured historical photographs, detailed reproductions of folk motifs from local crafts, and hand-inked captions. Over the course of two decades, Honchar created approximately 1500 such plates. What is perhaps most remarkable about this massive undertaking is that Honchar had no way of knowing whether his albums would ever see the light of day. By the time he started making the plates, Honchar had already been asked by government officials to shut down his “house-museum” and donate his sizable collection to state museums. Forced to stop giving tours of his beloved collection to visitors, Honchar channeled his energy into making plate after plate, each one a window into the past of a single Ukrainian village or town.

Ivan Honchar’s album, and the collection of Ukrainian folk art upon which it was based, reflected a singular vision of Ukrainianness that was rooted in the folkways of the pre-revolutionary rural world. Honchar’s fanatical devotion to his collection was certainly unique, but his interest in collecting rural material culture was not unusual in the 1960s. This chapter will

⁷⁶³ A selection of the plates can be found in this collection: Ivan Makarovych Honchar, *Ukraina ta ukraïntsi: Istoryko-etnografichnyi mystets'kyi al'bom Ivana Honchara Ukraina ta ukraïntsi : vybrani arkhushi* (Kyïv: UTsNK “Muzei Ivana Honchara”; PF “Oranta,” 2006).

examine the collecting activities of three Soviet intellectuals who returned to the rural settings in which they were born in order to gather the cultural heritage of the nation. While the names of Ukrainian sculptor Ivan Honchar, the Russian writer Vladimir Soloukhin, and the Gagauz poet Dmitrii Kara Choban may be unknown to the English-speaking reader, they were important figures in the revival of interest in national culture in the Soviet Union that began during Khrushchev's Thaw and extended through the Brezhnev era. All three of these figures sought to embody a certain "national idea" with their respective collections. We will first examine how each intellectual came to understand the Soviet state's relationship to national culture and how he came to the practice of collecting around a "national idea." Then we will explore their practices of collecting in order to better understand their conception of the "national idea." As we will see, all three saw the village as the natural place to find national culture. Rural material culture, including devotional objects such as icons as well as traditional village crafts, had been targeted as part of what Lynne Viola refers to as the "war on tradition" that accompanied Stalinist collectivization.⁷⁶⁴ The act of collecting transformed these everyday village objects, consigned to the rubbish heap by Soviet modernization, into national treasures. The three collections examined here thus reflected and contributed to a reassertion of the importance of rural traditions to national culture.⁷⁶⁵ Finally, we will examine the ways in which these collections dedicated to the "national idea" brought them into contact with the Soviet state, which all three saw as failing in its duty to preserve national culture.

The stories of these three collections provides an alternate lens for understanding evolving ideas of the nation in the Soviet Union in the last three decades of its existence, one that

⁷⁶⁴ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 39-44.

⁷⁶⁵ See also discussion of Aleksandr Yashin's 1962 sketch "Vologda Wedding" in Chapter 3.

highlights "from below" initiatives instead of official policies. As much of the history of the Soviet Union has focused on the role of the state, it is not surprising that state-sponsored Soviet museums have received more attention than individual collectors. Indeed, museums have fascinated scholars of empire ever since Benedict Anderson famously analyzed the colonial museum as a tool of imperial rule in Southeast Asia.⁷⁶⁶ Several historians have explored the ways in which Soviet museums produced and disseminated official Soviet ideology.⁷⁶⁷ This chapter takes a somewhat different approach, one that is more akin to Maya Jasanoff's cultural history of collecting in the British empire.⁷⁶⁸ Instead of focusing on the ways in which the Soviet state have used museums to express particular narratives, this chapter sheds light on the ways that national intellectuals developed their own ideas of the nation in dialogue with the ideology presented in state museums. Ivan Honchar, Vladimir Soloukhin, and Dmitrii Kara Choban sought to make their rural-based conceptions of the nation concrete through the practice of collecting. Like Sergei Vikulov (Chapter 3) and participants in the church preservationist movement (Chapter 4), both Honchar and Kara Choban sought to found institutions through which they could promote their views. Both became frustrated and disillusioned, however, when Soviet authorities were unwilling to support the narratives of the nation that their collections embodied. Examining the lives and collections of these three figures helps us to better understand how Soviet intellectuals worked in, around, and against state institutions to realize their visions of the nation.

⁷⁶⁶ Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 178-184.

⁷⁶⁷ See Victoria Donovan, "'How Well Do You Know Your Krai?' The Kraevedenie Revival and Patriotic Politics in Late Khrushchev-Era Russia," *Slavic Review* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 464-83; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), especially Chapter 5.

Ivan Honchar: Collector of Ukrainian Folk Art

Ivan Honchar's understanding of Ukrainian national culture, which he sought to capture in his collection of Ukrainian folk art, was first forged by local institutions during his rural Ukrainian childhood, which straddled the fateful year of 1917. Migrating to Kyiv in the late 1920s, Honchar experienced first-hand the Soviet policy of state-sponsored "Ukrainization," which engendered in him a strong belief that the Soviet state ought to protect national culture. In his later years, Honchar would look back to the 1920s as a golden age for Ukrainian culture to which he desperately hoped to return.

Honchar was born in 1911 in the village of Lip'ianka in the Kyiv region of the Ukrainian SSR. Born thirteen years before Soloukhin and twenty-two years before Kara Choban, he was the only collector examined here to be old enough to remember the late imperial period and the revolutions of 1917. As Honchar was growing up in Lip'ianka, Ukrainians were enjoying much more cultural freedom than they had in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Lip'ianka boasted a branch of the Ukrainian cultural society *Prosvita*, which had proliferated in Ukraine after the loosening of restrictions on Ukrainian language and culture in the Russian empire in the wake of the 1905 Revolution.⁷⁶⁹ During the early days of Soviet power in Ukraine, Lip'ianka still had a functioning church and religious school, which Honchar attended until it was closed in 1920. From a young age, Honchar was exposed to both religious faith and the Ukrainian national faith—sometimes simultaneously, as in the case of a church service held in honor of the Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko. After the church school in Lip'ianka closed, the religious el-

⁷⁶⁸ Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

⁷⁶⁹ On *Prosvita* see Paul R. Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 405.

ement in Honchar's education faded away, but the national element did not. Honchar transferred to a secular school that, according to his memoir written many decades later, was full of "patriotic" Ukrainian teachers and managed by a "patriotic" principal. There he studied Shevchenko and learned Ukrainian history from Marxist historian Matvii Iavors'kyi's textbook.⁷⁷⁰ As Serhii Plokhly has explained, Iavors'kyi's books, ubiquitous in the 1920s, countered the Russian imperial ideology that held that the Ukrainians were simply one constituent element of a tripartite Russian nation. Iavors'kyi helped create a new Soviet Ukrainian identity that affirmed their existence as a separate nation.⁷⁷¹ During this transitional period, when Russian imperial ideology challenged and a new Soviet Ukraine was being born, a number of village institutions inculcated a sense of a distinct Ukrainian identity in this peasant boy.

In 1927, Honchar joined millions of other Ukrainian peasants who flooded to the republic's cities in the 1920s. Maksym Korostash, a musicologist, ethnographer and teacher in Kyiv who was originally from Honchar's native village, heard about Honchar's artistic talent and came to Lip'ianka to convince him to apply to study at an artistic-industrial professional school in Kyiv. Korostash became Honchar's guide to the thriving Ukrainian cultural environment in Kyiv. In the 1920s, Soviet authorities aimed to make Soviet power feel more "native" to ethnic Ukrainians by encouraging Ukrainian language usage in the largely Russophone cities of the Ukrainian SSR.⁷⁷² As Honchar writes in his memoir, "This was the stormy and interesting period

⁷⁷⁰ Ivan Honchar, "Oderzhymist'," in *Maister, abo terny i lavry Ivana Honchara*, ed. Natalka Poklad and Vasyl' Iaremenko (Kyiv: MAUP, 2007), 61-67. The exact date when Honchar composed *Oderzhymist'* is unknown; Lidia Dubykiv's'ka at the Ivan Honchar Memorial Archive believes that it was most likely written in the 1970s, or possibly the 1980s. The positive view of the 1920s that Honchar presents in his memoir is rather typical of Ukrainian intelligentsia discourse from the 1960s onward.

⁷⁷¹ Serhii Plokhly, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 367.

⁷⁷² On linguistic Ukrainization, see George Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923-1934*, *Soviet and East European Studies* 84 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University

of the rebirth of Ukraine, the period of NEP. My patron [Korostash] was an active participant in this rebirth and taught me to be the same. The slogan “Ukrainization” and the forging of national cadres was on the top of the agenda everywhere. I remember how more than once Maksym entered into fierce debates in defense of his native language in the tram car or on the street [...]”⁷⁷³ During the decade-long period when Ukrainization was in full swing, rural Ukrainian migrants to the cities were often able to find a viable Ukrainian-speaking sphere in the cities, especially in the world of the arts. Unlike previous generations of Ukrainian migrants to the city, Honchar was able to attend a Ukrainian-language school, enjoy Ukrainian-language theater and opera, and read Ukrainian-language periodicals and books.

Korostash helped Honchar navigate this newly Ukrainized cultural space. Although he mocked Honchar for being a “hick,” Korostash taught him that the only way to improve himself was to become a “conscious” (*svidomyi*) Ukrainian and cultured consumer of modern Ukrainian theater, books, and opera. He introduced Honchar to members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia: ethnographers, folklorists, and writers whom Korostash met through his membership in an ethnographic commission under the auspices of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. He also gave Honchar a first-hand example of what ethnographic work looked like when he brought back his notes on peasant Ukrainian songs he had collected on his ethnographic expeditions.⁷⁷⁴ These formative years in Kyiv solidified Honchar’s sense of his own Ukrainian identity and introduced him to an older generation of Ukrainian intelligentsia who were dedicated to the preservation of

Press, 1992); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 75-124.

⁷⁷³ Honchar, “Oderzhymist’,” 92.

⁷⁷⁴ Honchar, “Oderzhymist’,” 93-99.

Ukrainian folk culture. Becoming a cultured and conscious Ukrainian meant preserving, not discarding, rural traditions.

After graduating from the artistic-industrial professional school in 1930, Honchar spent the next several years studying agricultural science and working at various jobs while painting and sculpting on the side. Living in the city, he escaped the effects of the widespread famine that followed the collectivization of agriculture in Soviet Ukraine in 1933 and was able to send food to his relatives in the village.⁷⁷⁵ He began serving in the active military in 1936, but he continued to sculpt. In either 1938 or 1940 (accounts differ), Honchar's patron and friend Maksym Korostash, who since 1934 had been living in Belarus to avoid repression, was arrested. He was never seen or heard from again.⁷⁷⁶ Honchar served in a communication battalion in World War II. Like many Red Army soldiers, he joined the Communist Party during the war.⁷⁷⁷ Honchar participated in the storming of Berlin in 1945. After the war, he returned to civilian life, and began an active career as a sculptor, exhibiting his works in both Kyiv and Moscow in the 1940s and 1950s.⁷⁷⁸ In 1960 he was granted the title of Honored Artist of the Ukrainian SSR.

Having witnessed the widespread destruction in Soviet Ukraine that resulted from the war, Honchar had become concerned about the preservation of Ukrainian culture and had begun gathering works of folk art. In 1957, he began conducting systematic field expeditions around

⁷⁷⁵ Honchar, "Oderzhymist'," 115-131; Ihor Poshyvailo, ed., "Osnovni daty zhyttia i tvorchosti Ivana Makarovycha Honchara [1911-1993]," in *Ivan Honchar. Spohady pro I. M. Honchara* (Kyiv: UTsNK "Muzei Ivana Honchara," 2007), 12-14.

⁷⁷⁶ Lukiia Koval', "Svitli spohady zalishilisia dosi," in *Ivan Honchar. Spohady pro I. M. Honchara*, 204-6.

⁷⁷⁷ Lidiia Dubykiv's'ka at the Ivan Honchar Memorial Archive told me that Honchar joined the Party around the time of the Battle of Kursk in 1943. Many Red Army soldiers joined the Party over the course of the Second World War. During the war, a record of killing German soldiers became the main basis by which soldiers could enter the Party, which made the ranks of the Party more open to soldiers of potentially doubtful class origin. This policy likely benefited Honchar, who noted in his memoir that his father had been briefly arrested as a class enemy during collectivization. Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City That Defeated the Third Reich*, trans. Christopher Tauchen and Dominic Bonfiglio (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 34-5. Honchar, "Oderzhymist'," 112-114.

Ukraine with the purpose of collecting Ukrainian material culture.⁷⁷⁹ Much like Soloukhin's collection of icons discussed below, Honchar's collection of folk art was guided by a "national idea." As Honchar later wrote,

Through tenacious creative work, I had gained a reputation as a leading sculptor and had laid myself a material foundation. This gave me the opportunity to act on my long-awaited dream: to begin building a house and to set off on a trip around Ukraine in order to get to know her national artistic culture [*narodnu mystets'ku kul'turu*], to reproduce her enchanting colors in paintings and drawings, and to collect historical and ethnographic materials.⁷⁸⁰

Starting in 1960, he displayed these items in his home, which he opened to visitors. A sign outside his door read "Ivan Makarovich Honchar. Admission of visitors and excursions. Saturday and Sunday, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm." By the late 1960s, he had collected approximately 7,000 items.⁷⁸¹ Honchar's museum was part of a broader cultural moment in the Ukrainian SSR. During the Thaw, ideological controls in Ukraine had loosened, and national-cultural issues came to the forefront of the consciousness of the Ukrainian creative intelligentsia.⁷⁸² In this context, Ivan Honchar's house-museum (*khata-muzei*) became a cultural phenomenon, a popular destination for a new generation of Ukrainian intellectuals known as the "Sixtiers."⁷⁸³

⁷⁷⁸ "Osnovni daty zhyttia i tvorchosti Ivana Makarovycha Honchara [1911-1993]," 12-14.

⁷⁷⁹ Lidiia Dubykivs'ka and Tetiana Fugal', "Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara," in *Ivan Honchar. Spohady pro I. M. Honchara* (Kyïv: UTsNK "Muzei Ivana Honchara," 2007), 25, 35.

⁷⁸⁰ Ivan Honchar, "Tak tse pochalosia," in *Maister, abo terny i lavry Ivana Honchara*, ed. Natalka Poklad and Vasyl' Iaremenko (Kyïv: MAUP, 2007), 167.

⁷⁸¹ Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', "Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara," 26-27, 36.

⁷⁸² For an analysis of the Thaw in Ukraine and the Sixtiers phenomenon, see H. V. Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni: ukrains'ka intelihentsiia v Rusi oporu 1960-80-kh rokiv* (Kyïv: Lybid', 1995), 12-46.

⁷⁸³ Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', "Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara," 36.

Vladimir Soloukhin: Collector of “Black Boards”

Vladimir Soloukhin and Ivan Honchar shared many common experiences in their early lives: rural childhood, service in World War II, success in a creative profession in the city. But differences in age and nationality contributed to their differing understandings of Soviet rule and its relationship to national culture. Having migrated to Kyiv in 1927, Honchar had enjoyed the fruits of state-sponsored Ukrainization in the city and had largely escaped first-hand experience of collectivization and other upheavals that transformed rural life in the 1930s. Soloukhin’s childhood, meanwhile, was deeply impacted by state-sponsored anti-religious campaigns and collectivization, which made no accommodation for Russian national culture. As a result, Soloukhin tended to look back to the pre-Soviet era as a Russian golden age.

Soloukhin was born in the village of Alepino in the Vladimir region in 1924. His family was large, “patriarchal” (as he later put it), and relatively well-off.⁷⁸⁴ His grandfather owned two small factories where he and the other family members produced wax and bricks. During the campaign to set up collective farms in the Soviet countryside in the early 1930s, Soloukhin’s family was dispossessed as kulaks (rich peasants). Their property was sold and the second floor of their house was turned into a village club.⁷⁸⁵ While he tended to gloss over these events in his earlier works, later in life, Soloukhin bitterly denounced the impact of collectivization on the Russian peasantry in his 1990 memoir *Laughter over the Left Shoulder*.⁷⁸⁶ In that memoir, Soloukhin also recalled how Soviet anti-religious education drove a wedge between his mother, a religious believer who prayed daily before her icons, and his older brother, a militant atheist who

⁷⁸⁴ Vladimir Soloukhin, “Ia shël po rodnoi zemle,” *Laureaty Rossii. Avtobiografii rossiiskikh pisatelei*, no. 4 (1985): 207.

⁷⁸⁵ Soloukhin, *Laughter over the Left Shoulder*, 28-37, 128-130.

once tried to carry all her icons up to the attic.⁷⁸⁷ Remembering the early Soviet decades as a time of tumult and dislocation, Soloukhin preferred to look back to the late imperial period as a time of Russian cultural flourishing.

After graduating from the seven-year school (*semiletka*) in a neighboring village, like many rural youths at the time Soloukhin entered technical school in an urban center, moving to the city of Vladimir. In 1942, a year after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the eighteen-year-old Soloukhin began serving in a military division in Moscow. When his military service concluded at the end of the war, he managed to publish his first poem in a Moscow-based publication. This poem, “Rain on the Steppe” (“*Dozhd’ v stepi*”), helped him gain entry to the prestigious Gorky Literary Institute.⁷⁸⁸ Soloukhin joined a generation of Russian *frontoviki*, or front-line veterans, who entered the Gorky Literary Institute *en masse* in the late 1940s. Many of them, including Mikhail Alekseev and Iurii Bondarev, would ally with the conservative, neo-Stalinist faction of the Soviet Writers’ Union in the 1950s and go on to hold important posts in the RSFSR Writers’ Union after it was formed in 1957.⁷⁸⁹ Soloukhin’s path from village to the Red Army and finally to literature was typical for nationally-minded Russian writers during this period. A year after his graduation from the Gorky Literary Institute in 1951, Soloukhin became a member of the Communist Party.

⁷⁸⁶ See Kathleen Parthé’s discussion of Soloukhin’s 1960 work “A Drop of Dew” in Kathleen Parthé, *Russian Village Prose: The Radiant Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 25-27.

⁷⁸⁷ Soloukhin, *Laughter over the Left Shoulder*, 91-101.

⁷⁸⁸ Soloukhin, “*Ia shël po rodnoi zemle*,” 208-210.

⁷⁸⁹ Nikolai Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003), 152-156.

In 1957, Soloukhin made his first literary splash with *Vladimir Country Roads*, a prose work published in the country's leading journal, *Novyi mir*.⁷⁹⁰ *Vladimir Country Roads* was a travelogue with a twist: it described Soloukhin's efforts to explore his own native region. The work struck a chord with readers, establishing him as one of the leading writers of the literary movement that would come to be called Village Prose. Soloukhin later wrote that he received thousands of letters reacting to *Vladimir Country Roads*.⁷⁹¹ Readers as diverse as Svetlana Allilueva (Stalin's daughter) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote him fan letters in response to the book.⁷⁹² Although *Vladimir Country Roads* did not focus on collecting specifically, it reflected Soloukhin's general interest in the local, pre-revolutionary history of the countryside. In one episode, Soloukhin and his companions visit a village known for its legendary horn blowers. Soloukhin learns that this tradition had all but died out but receives a homemade traditional horn to take home with him as a gift.⁷⁹³ This short episode foreshadowed Soloukhin's later turn towards collecting pre-revolutionary rural material culture.

In the early 1960s, Soloukhin became better acquainted with the artist Il'ia Glazunov, who was to play a key role in converting his Soviet patriotism into a love for pre-Revolutionary Russia. Glazunov was born and raised in Leningrad by a family that traced its origins to the Baltic nobility and the merchant class. Despite the differences in their social origins, Glazunov and Soloukhin became friends, and Glazunov imparted his love for historic churches and icon col-

⁷⁹⁰ Vladimir Soloukhin, "Vladimirskie proselki," *Novyi mir*, no. 9–10 (1957): 82–131, 75–134. Translated in Vladimir Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia* (New York, Dutton 1967).

⁷⁹¹ Soloukhin, "Ia shël po rodnoi zemle," 213.

⁷⁹² V. N. Afanas'ev, ed., *Prozrenie: kniga chitatel'skikh pisem Vladimiru Soloukhinu*, Biblioteka Blagotvoritel'nogo fonda "Entsiklopediia Serafima Sarovskogo." (Moskva: Golos-Press, 2010), 8-17, 20-21.

⁷⁹³ Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, 176-186.

lecting to Soloukhin.⁷⁹⁴ Under Glazunov's influence, Soloukhin developed his ideas about the importance of the preservation of pre-revolutionary Russian culture, which found expression in his late-1960s prose works *Letters from the Russian Museum* (see Chapter 4) and *Black Boards* (*Chernye doski*).⁷⁹⁵ In both works, Soloukhin exhorted his readers to act to preserve Russia's disappearing religious cultural heritage. While *Letters from the Russian Museum* was a jeremiad lamenting the loss of Russia's historic churches, *Black Boards* focused on Soloukhin's adventures collecting historic icons. Soloukhin begins the book with a paean to collecting, which he describes as "more than just a diversion: it's a kind of disease, or rather a passion."⁷⁹⁶ Soloukhin is not content with simply collecting shells or stamps, however; he is interested in the ideas behind the collection. He praises famous pre-revolutionary Russian collectors like Princess Mariia Tenisheva and Pavel Tret'iakov who "were guided by a specifically Russian idea."⁷⁹⁷ Like the predecessors he cites, Soloukhin also wants to express a "Russian idea" in his collection: that icons are an essential part of Russian cultural history. Early on, he draws a distinction between the icon as an object of religious devotion and the icon as "a work of art, a painting of historical value and national importance." Having shorn icons, seemingly, of their religious significance, he classifies them as part of Russian national history: "if you are a Russian, it is your duty to have heard of Pushkin and Dostoyevsky, the Tale of Igor's Raid, the battle of Kulikovo, the

⁷⁹⁴ See Aleksei Makeev, *Taina chernoi doski. Vladimir Soloukhin* (Rossiia 1, 2008), https://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/4909; V. M Zubok, *Zhivago's Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 242-245.

⁷⁹⁵ The latter was published in the journal *Moskva*, which was helmed by Mikhail Alekseev, whom Soloukhin had met during their days at the Gorky Literary Institute. Vladimir Soloukhin, "Pis'ma iz russkogo muzeia," *Molodaia gvardiia* 1966, no. 9 (September 1966): 236–78; Vladimir Soloukhin, "Chernye doski. Zapiski nachinaushchego kollektionera," *Moskva*, no. 1 (1969): 129–87. *Black Boards* is translated in Vladimir Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

⁷⁹⁶ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 7.

⁷⁹⁷ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 9.

church of the Intercession on the river Nerl, the Tret'iakov Gallery, Rublëv's Old Testament Trinity and the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir."⁷⁹⁸ Through his collection, Soloukhin seeks to restore the icon to its rightful place in the pantheon of Russian culture and history and thereby reassert its significance for every Russian.

By some accounts, in the 1960s Soloukhin became a sort of missionary of the collecting ethos to the Moscow intelligentsia. Collecting was one of the many ways that intellectuals sought to fashion a particular type of Russian identity for themselves. In their 1988 book on the “world of the Soviet person” in the 1960s, the émigrés Pëtr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis described Soloukhin as one of the ideological lodestars of what they termed the “Rusism” (*rusizm*) of the 1960s: “The generation raised on [foreign cultural influences] got to know its *rodina* [homeland] through Soloukhin's talented and simple books.” According to Vail’ and Genis, Soloukhin’s school of thought was oriented around the collection and consumption of material objects: “The path to Rusism lay through material culture, in practice taking on a culinary-domestic character. A member of the intelligentsia placed a pair of bast shoes on his television, pinned a postcard of ‘St. George and the Dragon’ to the wall, and drank garlic-infused alcohol while listening to [the album] *Rostov Bells*.”⁷⁹⁹ The historian and ethnographer Mikhail Guboglo, who in the 1960s was a student at Moscow State University, remembers a similar trend in the 1960s and 1970s. “A significant part of the creative intelligentsia was seized by a burst of spiritual upheaval, including the collection of icons, ancient samovars, spinning-wheels and similar works of applied art and items of traditional culture,” he writes. Like Vail’ and Genis, Guboglo also attributes what he

⁷⁹⁸ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 15-16.

⁷⁹⁹ *Rostov Bells* [*Rostovskie zvony*], released by the Soviet record label Melodiia in 1963, was a recording of the bells of the Uspenskii cathedral of the Rostov kremlin. Pëtr Vail’ and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: mir sovetskogo cheloveka*, 2nd ed. (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo AST, 2013), 276-277.

calls the “collecting boom” to the influence of Soloukhin.⁸⁰⁰ Collecting “Russian” items from rural culture was a means of self-fashioning among members of the intelligentsia in Moscow and an important part of the intellectual *zeitgeist* of 1960s.

Dmitrii Kara Choban: Collector of the Gagauz Village

Unlike Honchar and Soloukhin, Dmitrii Kara Choban was not born into a community that possessed the trappings of a well-established modern national culture. The Gagauz ethnic group to which he belonged had not even been counted in a census until 1930, three years before he was born. Kara Choban’s path to collecting for the “national idea” was thus intimately connected with the development of modern national cultural institutions among the Gagauz in the twentieth century. Kara Choban was deeply involved in efforts to institutionalize Gagauz national culture during Nikita Khrushchev’s Thaw in the late 1950s, and later looked back to those days as a model for Soviet state-sponsored national cultural development.

The Gagauz are Turkic-speaking ethnic group that practices Russian Orthodoxy and lives predominantly in southern Moldova and the Odessa region of Ukraine. During the Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Gagauz and Bulgarian peasants from the Balkans migrated to the territory of Bessarabia in the Russian empire. Throughout the nineteenth century, the tsarist state did not recognize the Gagauz peasants of Bessarabia as an independent ethnic group, leaving them out of the 1897 census.⁸⁰¹ “It’s curious that in the Bendery and Izmail *uezdy*, everyone knows perfectly well who the Gagauz are and in no way confuses them with

⁸⁰⁰ M. N. Guboglo, *Antropologiya povsednevnosti*, Studia historica (Moscow, Russia) (Moskva: IaSK, Iazyki slavi-anskoi kul'tury, 2013), 366, 408.

⁸⁰¹ Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 211.

Bulgarians, but officially, the Gagauz do not exist,” wrote the Russian army officer and ethnographer V. A. Moshkov in his ethnographic account of the Gagauz published at the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁰² After the 1918 Romanian annexation of Bessarabia, the Romanian state recognized the Gagauz as a distinct ethnic group and included them in the 1930 Romanian census.⁸⁰³ Dmitrii Kara Choban was born in 1933 to a family of Gagauz peasants in the village of Beșalma in what was then the Bessarabian region of the Kingdom of Romania. Aside from some modest efforts to publish in the Gagauz language in the interwar Romanian period, during the early part of Kara Choban’s life, there was very little in the way of a written Gagauz literary culture.⁸⁰⁴ Thus, growing up in the Gagauz village of Beșalma, Kara Choban spent his early years in an environment where “everyone” recognized the Gagauz as an ethnic group, but they nevertheless lacked many of the markers of a “modern” nation.

After the Soviet annexation of Bessarabia at the conclusion of the Second World War, the late Stalinist state did little to encourage the development of Soviet Gagauz national culture, in contrast to the radical nation-building projects enacted in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁸⁰⁵ There was no effort made to further codify or otherwise promote a Gagauz written language; Gagauz children in the newly Sovietized Moldovan SSR attended Russian-language schools. Dmitrii Kara Choban’s last years in Beșalma coincided with the postwar famine that took the lives of over a

⁸⁰² V. A. Moshkov, *Gagauzy Benderskogo uezda: etnograficheskie ocherki i materialy* (Kishinev: Tipografia Centrală, 2004), 10.

⁸⁰³ Institutul Central de Statistica (Romania) and Sabin Manuila, *Recensământul general al populației româniei din 29 decembrie 1930*, vol. 2 (București: Editura Institutului central de statistica, 1938), xxiv.

⁸⁰⁴ During the interwar period, there were some efforts by a Gagauz cleric to compile a Gagauz grammar and dictionary and translate religious texts into Gagauz, and a total of 10 books were published in the Gagauz language, the majority using the Cyrillic alphabet. See AOSPRM 51/21/283 (June 18, 1957): 54; Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 211.

⁸⁰⁵ On nation-building during the Cultural Revolution, see Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 154-156.

hundred thousand people in the Moldovan SSR alone in 1946-1947.⁸⁰⁶ The extremely difficult circumstances of rural life in the MSSR during the late Stalinist period likely prompted Kara Choban's move to the city of Kharkiv in the Ukrainian SSR to work in construction in 1950. After completing his eighth-grade education at a night school for working youth, Kara Choban served in the Soviet Army in the Far East from 1952 to 1955.⁸⁰⁷ After leaving the army, Kara Choban spent two years studying at the Republican Fine Arts School in the Moldovan capital of Chişinău before leaving in 1957 to study at a pedagogical school in the south of Moldova.

While Kara Choban was working, studying, and serving in cities thousands of miles from Beşalma, Soviet ethnographers and Turkologists began traveling in the opposite direction, coming from Moscow and St. Petersburg to visit the newly-incorporated Gagauz regions.⁸⁰⁸ In 1948, Liudmila Pokrovskaia, then a student studying under the Turkologist N. K. Dmitriev in the Department of Turkish Philology at Leningrad State University, visited the south of the Moldovan SSR for the first time. Over the course of the next several years she made many trips to the Gagauz-inhabited regions in Moldova, ultimately writing a dissertation on Gagauz songs and joining the Institute of Linguistics (Russian: *Institut iazykoznaniiia*) of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in Moscow.⁸⁰⁹ In 1957, the Moldovan Party authorized Pokrovskaia and the Gagauz teacher Dionis Tanasoglu to create an officially-sanctioned alphabet for Gagauz on the basis of Cyril-

⁸⁰⁶ On the famine in Moldova, see Chapter 6; Igor Caşu, *Duşmanul de clasă: represiuni politice, violenţă şi rezistenţă în R(A)SS Moldovenească, 1924-1956*, 2nd ed. (Chişinău: Cartier, 2015), 189-233.

⁸⁰⁷ Details on Kara Choban's early life drawn from a text provided to visitors at the D. Kara Choban National Gagauz Historical-Ethnographic Museum.

⁸⁰⁸ Three young ethnographers who visited in 1948 did send a letter to Stalin requesting the development of an official alphabet for the Gagauz, but their plan did not come to fruition. Mikhail Nikolaevich Guboglo, *Russkii iazyk v etnopoliticheskoj istorii gagauzov: (vtoraia polovina XX veka)* (Moskva: Staryi sad, 2004), 7.

⁸⁰⁹ L. Baurchulu, "Ee znaiut tiurkologi mira: K 50-letiu nauchno-pedagogicheskoj deiatel'nosti L. A. Pokrovskoi," *Vesti Gagauzii*, September 19, 1998.

lic.⁸¹⁰ The exact motivations for this decision are unclear, but Mikhail Guboglo, a Gagauz ethnographer and historian, argues that the promotion of the Gagauz language was part of the broader social opening that took place during Khrushchev's Thaw.⁸¹¹

Dmitrii Kara Choban became an active participant in the Gagauz national Thaw of the late 1950s. From 1958 to 1961, Gagauz pupils received instruction in Gagauz up until the second grade, and Gagauz language was taught as a subject from the fifth until the tenth grades.⁸¹² Kara Choban was among the first group of teachers who graduated from training courses for the new Gagauz instructors. On one of her trips, the linguist Liudmila Pokrovskaia met Kara Choban and encouraged him to apply for the Gorky Literary Institute. He applied for a spot—with an application entirely in verse—and began studying at the correspondence division of the Literary Institute in 1958.⁸¹³ He taught the Gagauz language at a school in Beşalma and traveled to Moscow for shorter periods of study. At the Literary Institute, Kara Choban was part of the Russian poet Valerii Dement'ev's poetry seminar. In a 1966 article, Dement'ev wrote that Kara Choban, wearing a threadbare suit from the village store, always sat quietly in the back of the class. One day, Kara Choban approached him with a book and told him that his poems were published in it. It was *Budjak Voices* (Gagauz: *Budzhaktan seslär*), the first collection of literature and folklore in the Gagauz language, published in 1959. Dement'ev discovered that this quiet student sitting in the back was writing poetry for Gagauz language textbooks and producing amateur films that he

⁸¹⁰ Hülya Demirdirek, "(Re-)Claiming Nationhood through the Renativization of Language: The Gagauz in Moldova," in *Nationalism in Late and Post-Communist Europe*, ed. Jahn Egbert (Munich: Nomos, 2008), 239.

⁸¹¹ Guboglo, *Russkii iazyk v etnopoliticheskoi istorii gagauzov*, 35. Krista Goff makes a similar argument about non-titular nationalities in Azerbaijan during the same period. Krista Goff, "'Why Not Love Our Language and Our Culture?' National Rights and Citizenship in Khrushchev's Soviet Union," *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 27–44.

⁸¹² Guboglo, *Russkii iazyk v etnopoliticheskoi istorii gagauzov*, 118.

⁸¹³ Liudmila Marin, interview with the author, February 3, 2017.

called “Gagauz novellas.” Dement’ev, a literary critic from a village in the Vologda region of the RSFSR, likely saw in Kara Choban some of the same qualities he admired in prominent Village Prose writers. “It was impossible not to love how this short, quiet student lit up when he talked about his new plans and new ideas, how he was filled with the inspiration of love towards the people from his region [*zemliaki*], ready to serve them day and night,” Dement’ev recalled.⁸¹⁴ While at the Literary Institute, Kara Choban wrote his first book of poetry, *First Word (Ilk laf)*, which was published in 1963. The poems in *First Word* reflected Kara Choban’s study of the oral folk traditions of Gagauz poetry.⁸¹⁵

All too quickly, however, the state support for Gagauz language and culture from which Kara Choban had so benefitted began to dry up. Starting in 1959, Moldovan authorities began to receive petitions from parents asking that their children be transferred out of Gagauz language classes and into Russian classes. On the basis of these complaints, the Central Committee of the Moldovan Communist Party determined that the local authorities were in violation of the law that guaranteed parents the right to determine the language of their child’s education. In 1961, the Moldovan Ministry of Education issued a directive eliminating Gagauz-medium education.⁸¹⁶ As a Gagauz-language instructor, Kara Choban was devastated. According to his daughter, Liudmila Marin, he continued to teach courses in Gagauz on an informal basis for several years after the schools officially returned to Russian-language education. In 1965, he began working as a librarian in Beşalma and became a member of the Soviet Writers’ Union.

⁸¹⁴ Valerii Dement’ev, “Priznanie v liubvi (Pis’ma iz Moldavii),” *Moskva*, no. 2 (1966): 203-204. See also Chapter 3.

⁸¹⁵ P. A. Chebotar’, *Gagauzskaiia khudozhestvennaia literatura: 50-80-e gg. XX v.: ocherki* (Kishinev: Shtiintsa, 1993), 50.

⁸¹⁶ AOSPRM 51/20/279 (1960): 110-111.

At some point, Kara Choban hatched the idea of founding a Gagauz historical-ethnographic museum in Beşalma. Mikhail Guboglo, who studied at Moscow State University at roughly the same time that Kara Choban was attending courses at the Gorky Literary Institute, traces the origins of the museum back to the broader movement of collecting (*dvizhenie sobiratel'stva*) spearheaded by Soloukhin and other Moscow-based intellectuals: “The credo of collecting relics from the past [*sobiratel'stvo stariny*], under the banner of which arose a powerful intellectual movement of collecting in the 1960s and 1970s, was understood by D[mitrii] Kara Choban and many of his colleagues and contemporaries at the Moscow Gorky Literary Institute as a social assignment from their own people, as a call to save cultural patrimony from decay and destruction [...].”⁸¹⁷ Kara Choban’s daughter Liudmila Marin attests to the fact that Kara Choban’s interest in collecting pre-dated his years at the Gorky Literary Institute but agrees that his experience in Moscow may have concentrated his attention on the idea of collecting exhibits for an ethnographic museum. Given the similarities in the broad outlines of Soloukhin’s and Kara Choban’s biographies—rural childhood, experiences of military service in urban settings, studying at the Gorky Literary Institute—it is not surprising that they both were drawn to collecting objects connected with the national past. Kara Choban officially founded his museum on September 16, 1966, when he moved his collection of historical and ethnographic items into the former building of the Beşalma village soviet. The task of collecting items about the history and folk traditions of the Gagauz people became Kara Choban’s life’s work.

⁸¹⁷ Liudmila Marin, interview with the author, February 3, 2017.

The Practice of Collecting and the National Idea

As we have seen, Ivan Honchar, Vladimir Soloukhin, and Dmitrii Kara Choban came from different parts of the Soviet Union but shared a similar life trajectory. Born in villages, they migrated to cities as young adults for education, employment, or mandatory military service. Along the way, they absorbed lessons about the Soviet state and its relationship to national culture. While Honchar and Kara Choban saw first-hand the positive results of state support for national culture, Soloukhin's experiences with collectivization and the anti-religious campaign in the 1930s seem to have made him much more skeptical of the potential for the Soviet state to play a positive role in the protection of rural Russian traditions. Having become relatively successful members of the creative intelligentsia, all three found themselves nevertheless drawn back to the rural settings from which they had come. In this section, we will examine each collector's practice in order to better understand the content of the "national idea" they sought to capture in their collections. What did the process of collecting look like? What motivated them to collect material culture from villages? How did their collecting activities reflect changing attitudes toward rural life?

Honchar, Soloukhin, and Kara Choban were not armchair collectors. They added to their collections by traveling to specific locations (usually rural, but not always), speaking to local residents, and either purchasing particular items or receiving them as gifts. In order to find national culture, our amateur collectors had to dig into particular places. This required intimate engagement with local, usually rural settings. In each of the three cases, rural spaces emerge as a privileged place to find "national" objects. Honchar, Soloukhin, and Kara Choban relied on direct contact with older residents and other sources of local history knowledge to help them find the best items for their collections. Their methodology of collecting is reminiscent of the longer tra-

dition of central and eastern European ethnography, in which researchers conduct short trips to collect materials on folk and rural traditions of their own societies.⁸¹⁸

Honchar was already familiar with the practice of ethnographic field research as practiced in Ukraine in the 1920s from his days of living with the ethnographer and musicologist Korostash. Thus, it is not surprising that when he began collecting items for his museum in 1957, he adopted a similar model. Lidiia Dubykivs'ka and Tetiana Fugal' describe how Honchar leveraged local knowledge and his own artistic credentials in order to build his collection on his "field expeditions":

First of all, he sought out contacts from the representatives of the local intelligentsia, artists, poets, musicians, writers, some of which were his long-time acquaintances. Through them he found out about the existence of family archives, asked the names of old-timers. The accounts of the others of the history of the region [*raion*], its architectural monuments, and artistic crafts and artisans allowed him to find old artisans and collectors. His enthusiasm as a local historian and his intuition as an artist, and his love of Ukraine and Ukrainian opened for him the doors of many homes. They gave him family photographs, gave or sold him family relics.⁸¹⁹

On his trips, Honchar made detailed field notes and often sketched the places he visited and the items that he found.⁸²⁰ Honchar collected everything from embroidered towels to ceramics to icons. He also gathered historic books and old photographs. Over the course of several decades, Honchar traveled to hundreds of towns and villages across the republic, gathering homemade examples of Ukrainian folk art. After his museum opened to the public, Honchar also solicited

⁸¹⁸ See Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology," in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 27-28. For an in-depth discussion of traditions of ethnographic field work in Moldova, see Jennifer R. Cash, *Villages on Stage: Folklore and Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova*, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia; v. 26 (Berlin: Lit, 2012), 105-135.

⁸¹⁹ Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', "Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara," 25.

⁸²⁰ Honchar's field notes from the 1960s and 1970s are held in the Ivan Honchar Memorial Archive in Kyiv.

donations from visitors.⁸²¹ He made detailed, numbered catalogs of the items in his museum, including a short description and the place of origin in each entry.⁸²²

Soloukhin's method for collecting historic icons was broadly similar to Honchar's. Soloukhin begins traveling to look for icons while spending the summer in his home village of Alepino in the Vladimir region. Although in theory Soloukhin might have searched for icons in an urban setting, an artist friend specifically advised him to look for icons in the Vladimir countryside because "there are plenty of derelict churches thereabouts."⁸²³ Villages thus emerge as a privileged site of collecting for Soloukhin because abandoned and repurposed churches still litter the rural landscape—a legacy of the anti-religious campaigns that accompanied collectivization in the early 1930s. In order to identify icons in Vladimir *oblast'*, Soloukhin also drew on a longer tradition of local history (*kraevedenie*) and studies of the "little homeland" (*malaia rodina*) that flourished in the Russian empire in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸²⁴ He consulted a 1893 book by the Vladimir historian Vasilii Dobronravov, *A Historical-Statistic Description of Churches and Parishes of Vladimir Eparchy*, in order to find the names of churches that had held particularly rare or significant icons.⁸²⁵ Following the descriptions in the book, Soloukhin and his companions often found only a heaps of rubble or collective farm storehouses where once there was a church. Another tactic Soloukhin employed was to ask the first old woman he saw in a vil-

⁸²¹ Honchar stated that he asked visitors for old items at the 1970 Party meeting of the Union of Artists dedicated to his museum. TsDAHOU 302/3/65 (December 1, 1970): 32.

⁸²² See MAH KN-12912 (1969) and MAH KN-12913 (1970-1971).

⁸²³ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 28.

⁸²⁴ On these and other related movements in the Russian empire, see Vera Tolz, "Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 261–90; Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society, and Civilization in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod*, Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

lage where old icons can be found. Soloukhin's collecting expeditions typically involved long conversations with village old-timers, from whom he often manages to wheedle an icon.⁸²⁶

Dmitrii Kara Choban's method of collecting objects for his Gagauz historical-ethnographic museum also relied on his intimate familiarity with rural communities. From his home base in the Gagauz village of Beşalma, Dmitrii Kara Choban traveled all over southern Moldova in the search for exhibits for his museum. "They knew him in every Gagauz village," reports the Gagauz literary scholar Pëtr Chebotar'.⁸²⁷ In his 1970 report to the Moldovan Ministry of Culture, Kara Choban reported that he and other museum employees conducted four expeditions that year to four Gagauz towns and villages, spending three to four days at each site collecting ethnographic materials and making field recordings. They collected embroidered pillowcases, rugs, and homemade clothing. They filmed wedding rites in the village of Avdarma and also took photographs of the interiors of Gagauz dwellings.⁸²⁸ In an article for the Moldovan literary journal *Kodry*, the Gagauz writer I. Topal described the experience of wandering around Gagauz villages with Kara Choban, who always kept an eye out for the very oldest houses. In one such house, Kara Choban and Topal crawled up into the attic in search of items for the museum. "His director's suit and tie significantly suffered that evening from spiderwebs and dust," Topal recalled. Once Kara Choban had found what he wants in the attic, he smiled and told Topal: "We need to take out the bags with the items for the exhibits right now. The master of the house might change his mind."⁸²⁹

⁸²⁵ An eparchy is a province of the Russian Orthodox Church. V. Dobronravov" and V. Berezin", *Istoriko-statisticheskoe opisanie tskervei i prikhodov" vladimirskoi eparkhii* (Vladimir: Tipo-Litografiia V. Larkova, 1893).

⁸²⁶ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 42-47, 50, 63.

⁸²⁷ Chebotar', *Gagauzskaiia khudozhestvennaia literatura*, 68.

⁸²⁸ ANRM R-3011/10/404 (January 12, 1971): 102.

⁸²⁹ I. Topal, "Muzei v Beshalme," *Kodry*, no. 2 (1979): 99-102.

An important idea motivating these trips to the countryside was the belief that national material culture was quickly disappearing. All of the collectors felt that they were in a race against time. As Topal writes in his account of collecting with Kara Choban, “*Promedlit’ oznachalo poteriat*” —to delay meant to lose. All three collectors saw themselves as saving precious items of national culture from ruin. In his writings on his field expeditions, Honchar described situations in which he pulled icons out of puddles of oil or saved a painting that its owner had hidden in straw for fear of being called a nationalist.⁸³⁰ Soloukhin recounted many similar stories in *Black Boards*. Underlying these accounts is the perception that national material culture, especially that which is located in rural spaces, was under threat due to neglect.

After the collectors “salvaged” a neglected item of national culture, they proceeded to reimagine it as a museum-quality piece and recontextualize it by displaying it in their collection. In Soloukhin’s case, this meant a painstaking process of restoration. Soloukhin titled his work on collecting icons *Black Boards* because that was an accurate description of the state of the icons when he initially discovered them on his collecting trips. As he explains, icons had traditionally been coated with a protective layer of drying oil, which blackened over time. The restoration process involved carefully removing that layer to reveal the underlying painting. In one of the book’s most evocative descriptions, Soloukhin describes the process of removing this oil: “All the black came off on the cotton wool, and the place where it had been was ablaze with vivid red and deep blue. It took one’s breath away. I felt as if I had seen a miracle: it was unbelievable that such intense, radiant color had lurked beneath the repellent, dull black surface.” Although Soloukhin does not make this explicit in the text, the process of cleaning an icon is clearly a metaphor for the rediscovery of lost Russian culture. Restoring an icon “was like looking at a bright

⁸³⁰ Honchar, “Iak tse pochalosia.”

screen from the dark of an auditorium—a screen showing a different period of time, a different beauty, a life other than ours. Another planet, another civilization, a mysterious, fairy world.”⁸³¹ While Honchar and Kara Choban usually did not need to conduct such an arduous restoration process, the very act of pulling old clothes, or disused farm implements, or historic documents out of trunks and dusty attics and placing them in a museum was a form of transformation in its own right. It often involved a radical reimagining of items that, like many of Soloukhin’s icons, had been kept but not necessarily treated as treasured pieces of national culture. Discussing his practice of soliciting donations of “old things” (*stari rechi*) from museum visitors in 1970, Honchar stated that he did this so that they would become *tsinnym*— a Ukrainian word meaning valuable, expensive, important.⁸³² The ascription of proper value to “old things” was at the heart of the collectors’ project.

The radical nature of the transformation of these items from trash into museum-quality treasures can be understood by examining the reactions to Kara Choban’s collecting. One thing that his contemporaries agree on is that Kara Choban was widely considered to be an eccentric (*chudak*). At the time, many Gagauz people could not quite understand why Kara Choban dedicated his life to collecting their dusty, old stuff. As Chebotar’ wrote about the villagers whom Kara Choban encountered on his collecting expeditions, “Many considered him to be an eccentric [*chudak*] and they were not wrong.”⁸³³ Liudmila Pokrovskaia, the Turkic linguist who initially encouraged Kara Choban to apply to the Gorky Literary Institute, wrote about Kara Choban, “He was a completely selfless person, an eccentric [*chudak*]—such people hold up the world. He who thinks of himself, of his own wealth, after him nothing will remain. But after Kara Choban

⁸³¹ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 22-23.

⁸³² TsDAHOU 302/3/65 (December 1, 1970): 32.

⁸³³ Chebotar’, *Gagauzskaiia khudozhestvennaia literatura*, 68.

remained great riches, the inheritor of which is an entire people.”⁸³⁴ While Kara Choban did receive support for his collecting endeavors from fellow Gagauz scholars and his local collective farm, it was nevertheless difficult at the time for many of his fellow Gagauz villagers to reconceptualize everyday items as valuable cultural heritage worth putting in a museum and to see the man rummaging around in their attics as a steward of national culture.

This conceptual leap seems to have been less difficult for members of the nationally-minded intelligentsia in Russia and Ukraine. If the visitors to Honchar’s museum tended to see him as a national hero and not an eccentric, it was likely because the process of developing a national consciousness that valued rural culture was much further along in Ukraine. Honchar’s collecting was in line with other cultural developments taking place in Kyiv in the 1960s. There was an explosion of interest in rural folk music among the urban youth and intelligentsia during this period. Caroling groups under the auspices of the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth and unofficial ethnographic choral ensembles such as *Homin* and *Zhaivoronok* caused a sensation with their performances of Christmas carols and “authentic” folk music in the 1960s.⁸³⁵ Similarly, as discussed above, some members of the Moscow intelligentsia adopted Soloukhin’s collecting *credo* and started display items such as samovars, bast shoes, and old icons in their homes. The collecting spirit embodied by Kara Choban, Soloukhin and Honchar thus reflected a broader reinterpretation of the value of rural material culture.

⁸³⁴ Pokrovskaia, qtd. in Chebotar’, *Gagauzskaiia khudozhestvennaia literatura*, 68.

⁸³⁵ See Kas’ianov, *Nezhodni*, 18-20; Kenneth C. Farmer, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the Post-Stalin Era: Myth, Symbols, and Ideology in Soviet Nationalities Policy*, *Studies in Contemporary History* 4 (The Hague; Boston; London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980), 117-120.

Intellectuals, the Soviet State and the National Idea

Thus far, this chapter has explored amateur collecting activities of private citizens in the 1960s. But why did Honchar, Soloukhin, and Kara Choban consider such private initiatives necessary? Certainly, for the collectors discussed here, collecting was a pleasurable activity in and of itself. As Soloukhin wrote, "I am a collector, and that must be my whole excuse. And the best I can wish the reader is that he too should be one, if only for a short time."⁸³⁶ Yet when we analyze the activities of our three collectors, we see that all three were motivated to build a collection dedicated to the national idea in order to fill a gap left by state institutions. Soloukhin was dissatisfied with the lack of attention paid to the preservation of icons. Honchar lamented the lack of representation of Ukrainian culture in local history museums. Kara Choban founded the first Gagauz ethnographic museum on the basis of his collection because no such institution existed. Moreover, all three were critical of the state's preservation efforts (or lack thereof) and often blamed it for neglect and active destruction of culture heritage. What they ultimately sought was a more activist state that would aggressively promote and preserve national culture.

One of the experiences that sparked Soloukhin's interest in icons was a modest exhibition on historic icons that he visited at Leningrad's Russian Museum in 1966.⁸³⁷ Soloukhin was frustrated by the dearth of such exhibitions and what he saw as a broader state campaign to stamp out religious cultural heritage. In *Black Boards*, Soloukhin made it clear that the Soviet state bears responsibility for the neglect and active destruction of icons. Soloukhin recalled that in his days as a young Pioneer in the 1930s, those schoolchildren who destroyed their parents' icons "were

⁸³⁶ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 12.

⁸³⁷ Makeev, *Taina chernoi doski*.

held up as a shining example.”⁸³⁸ Although those days are over, on his trips to villages in the Vladimir region, Soloukhin frequently discovered that the historic icons he sought had been destroyed through misuse. In his native village of Alepino, many icons were lost forever because they were used to make crates for potatoes.⁸³⁹ Recounting the fate of icons such as these, Soloukhin laments,

This magnificent art of our forefathers...owing to all kinds of events and circumstances, how many specimens have already been lost! Old, defaced icons have been thrown into the river, burnt at crossroads, cleared out of attics. Others are being lost at this very moment. Is it not a noble occupation to find and save them, to preserve even a single one of these paintings, to spend one's own earnings on cleaning and restoring it so that others can admire its beauty?⁸⁴⁰

It is telling that Soloukhin writes about spending "one's own earnings" on the preservation of icons. Indeed, the icon restoration that Soloukhin describes does not take place in state museums, but in the studios of artists such as Glazunov and Pavel Korin, who owned one of the largest private collection of icons in Russia.⁸⁴¹ The reader is left wondering why this important work is being left up to amateur enthusiasts.

Soloukhin's private collecting activities did not go unnoticed by official bodies.

Soloukhin was a prominent advocate for the founding of All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture (known by the acronym VOPIK) and frequently mentioned it in his works (see Chapter 4). At the founding congress of VOPIK, however, L. I. Aksenova, the director of the Vladimir-Suzdal' museum preserve in Soloukhin's home region, complained in her speech about famous writers buying up ancient artifacts in the area. She says

⁸³⁸ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 13.

⁸³⁹ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 30.

⁸⁴⁰ Soloukhin, *Searching for Icons in Russia*, 33.

that they even followed one such writer. When pressed by the audience, she named Soloukhin as the guilty party. Aksenova stated that it would be better for writers to give these artifacts to a museum that would preserve them for the people than to keep them for themselves.⁸⁴² This brief moment at the VOPIK Congress suggests a degree of antagonism between museum officials and private collectors like Soloukhin.

Some began to question whether some of Soloukhin's personal practices suggested an unacceptable sympathy for Russian Orthodoxy and pre-revolutionary Russia. According to Jane Ellis, a scholar of the Russian Orthodox Church, the late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed "the return of large numbers of the intelligentsia to the Russian Orthodox Church."⁸⁴³ This intelligentsia trend increasingly became cause for concern. In the late 1960s, rumors began to spread that Soloukhin wore a ring bearing the image of Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia who was executed by the Bolsheviks. At a series of Party meetings of the Moscow branch of the Writers' Union in 1967 and 1968, Soloukhin admitted to his fellow Party members that he did wear such a ring, but claimed it was a mere family heirloom, and not a political statement.⁸⁴⁴ In January of 1971, the Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences sent a report the Central Committee of the Communist Party that criticized rising interest in religion among the intelligentsia and singled out several problematic works by Soloukhin, including *Black Boards*. The

⁸⁴¹ After Korin's death in 1967, his widow approached the Ministry of Culture and the Tret'iakov Gallery regarding the acquisition of his collection. In 1968, Korin's house was turned into a museum under the auspices of the Tret'iakov Gallery.

⁸⁴² GARF A-639/1/6 (June 8-9, 1966): 43-44.

⁸⁴³ Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History* (London; Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), 287.

⁸⁴⁴ Wearing an image of Nicholas II could easily be construed as a religious as well as a political statement due to his family's perceived martyrdom at the hands of the Bolsheviks. Nicholas II and his family were canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in 1981 and by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000. For excerpts of the discussion of Soloukhin's ring at Party meetings in Dmitrii Zubarev and Vladimir Kuznetsov, "Persten' i partbilet: Skazka o tom, kak odin monarkhist piat'sot kommunistov obmanul," *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, no. 23 (1997), <http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/1997/23/zubarev.html>.

authors mentioned the consumption of religious material culture discussed above, critiquing the new trend among the intelligentsia for hanging an icon in one's apartment and wearing a cross. Regarding Soloukhin, they conceded that he was right to call for the preservation of works of ancient Russian architecture, sculpture, and art. However, they were concerned that he tended to identify the national (*narodnoi*) with church (*tserkovnaia*), Russian, and Orthodox culture.⁸⁴⁵ Soloukhin's problematic fascination with pre-revolutionary Russian material culture and the views he expressed in his publications may have led to efforts on the part of the state to limit his intellectual influence on readers. In a 2008 documentary on Soloukhin, the Russian prose writer Aleksandr Artsibashev stated that after the publication of *Black Boards*, there was something of a taboo on requesting his books in bookstores, and his works were often quite difficult to find.⁸⁴⁶ On issues of religion, Soloukhin and the Soviet state viewed each other with mutual suspicion.

Like Soloukhin, Dmitrii Kara Choban sought to compensate for what he saw as an absence of state support for national culture. As a Gagauz language teacher and poet, Kara Choban had been an active participant in the state-sponsored development of Gagauz national culture during the Thaw. When the Gagauz language was entirely removed from the curriculum in 1961, Kara Choban was bereft. As the village school no longer required his services as a Gagauz language instructor, Kara Choban took a job as the village librarian and began actively working to found the first Gagauz historical-ethnographic museum. The museum was initially supported on a volunteer basis, but after a year began to receive month donations from the nearby "Pravda" collective farm. Unlike Soloukhin, who appears never to have sought out state support for his

⁸⁴⁵ RGANI 5/63/143 (January 28, 1971): 1-18 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972*, 877-887.

⁸⁴⁶ Makeev, *Taina chernoï doski*.

collecting activities, Kara Choban actively courted officials for financial support, reflecting his more positive view of the Soviet state's role in supporting national culture.

Starting in July of 1969, the museum began to receive state funding from the MSSR Ministry of Culture, which paid for two staff members for the museum.⁸⁴⁷ Kara Choban's annual reports to the Ministry of Culture reveal continued dissatisfaction with the level of support that he received, however. In his report for the year 1970, Kara Choban complained that he and his staff were working seven days a week and paying people out of their own pockets.⁸⁴⁸ The next year, Kara Choban again complained to the Ministry that he was forced to pay 1,500 rubles out of his family budget for materials for museum exhibits. He asked for the museum to be placed in a higher category, which would mean additional funds for staff.⁸⁴⁹ The museum was closed from 1972 to 1974 as they relocated to a better building. In his report on the progress of the relocation in early 1975, Kara Choban once again requested the elevation of museum to a higher category, arguing that it was "the only essential condition under which they will be able to open the museum and begin to successfully conduct the broad and valuable work that has been planned."⁸⁵⁰ Of course, there is nothing particularly unusual about a museum director complaining about a lack of funding, but Kara Choban's contemporaries agree that Kara Choban encountered more than his fair share of problems with bureaucrats. As the literary scholar Chebotar' put it, "He fought with bureaucrats his entire life: he fought for a building for the museum, then he insisted on his vision for the format of one or another exhibit, or he secured the publication of his books."⁸⁵¹ As

⁸⁴⁷ This information drawn from a text provided to visitors at the D. Kara Choban National Gagauz Historical-Ethnographic Museum.

⁸⁴⁸ ANRM R-3011/10/404 (January 12, 1971): 103.

⁸⁴⁹ ANRM R-3011/10/557 (January 14, 1972): 81.

⁸⁵⁰ ANRM R-3011/10/1061 (January 8, 1975): 124-125.

⁸⁵¹ Chebotar', *Gagauzskiaia khudozhestvennaia literatura*, 68.

Guboglo explained, “When Kara Choban stormed the ministerial offices in Chisinau or Moscow, the slick, bored bureaucrats sitting in their comfortable chairs laughed at the rather eccentric [*chudakovatym*] provincial.”⁸⁵² Guboglo later glossed the period from 1962 onwards as the “time of mankurtization” in Gagauz cultural life, a reference to Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov's 1980 fable about a slave (*mankurt*) who has lost his identity.⁸⁵³ Over time, a narrative emerged that government officials cared little for the preservation of Gagauz traditions.

Even more alarming, from Kara Choban’s perspective, was a decision made in 1982 to transform his Gagauz historical-ethnographic museum into a museum of the history of the village of Beşalma and the “Pravda” collective farm. The museum became a branch of the Comrat local history museum (*istoriko-kraevedcheskii muzei*).⁸⁵⁴ Local history museums, which proliferated after local history (*kraevedenie*) was rehabilitated as a discipline in 1956, had a very different focus than ethnographic museums. As Victoria Donovan explains, local history museums fostered Soviet patriotism by encouraging local communities to integrate local figures into larger Soviet historical narratives.⁸⁵⁵ Although Kara Choban’s museum also sought to write the Gagauz people into broader Soviet narratives, the focus of the museum was always on the Gagauz people, not local history.⁸⁵⁶ In contrast to Kara Choban’s museum, local history museums in the Ga-

⁸⁵² Guboglo, *Antropologîia povsednevnosti*, 396.

⁸⁵³ Guboglo, *Russkii iazyk v etnopoliticheskoi istorii gagauzov*, 99-117. For the story of the *mankurt*, see Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988). See Chapter 6 for a discussion of this text.

⁸⁵⁴ This information drawn from a text provided to visitors at the D. Kara Choban National Gagauz Historical-Ethnographic Museum.

⁸⁵⁵ Donovan, “How Well Do You Know Your Krai?”

⁸⁵⁶ The bulk of the museum reports focus on ethnographic collecting, but Kara Choban occasionally mentions Soviet-themed exhibits. For example, in 1975 the museum featured new panels titled “30 Years Since the Victory over Fascist Germany” and “What the Collective Farm ‘Pravda’ is Fighting for in 1975.” ANRM R-3011/10/1242 (1975): 180-181.

gagauz-populated regions of Moldova focused much more on Soviet narratives than on Gagauz ethnographic materials.⁸⁵⁷

In response to the placement of his ethnographic museum under the Comrat local history museum, in July of 1983 Kara Choban wrote a letter to the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Iurii Andropov.⁸⁵⁸ In the letter, he condemned the decision to place his historical-ethnographic museum under the direction of the Comrat local history museum as an act of chauvinism and discrimination. Kara Choban claimed that this decision was made after a meeting at the Moldovan Ministry of Culture in which the participants discussed a supposed rise in nationalism among the Gagauz. Kara Choban strenuously objected to this reorganization on the grounds that the museum would no longer be able to serve as a repository of the “history, material culture, folklore, literature, and art of the [Gagauz] nationality.”⁸⁵⁹ Instead of being concentrated in one place, he feared that the museum’s collection would be dispersed throughout different museums. In other words, his collection would be turned into a mere local history museum, and no longer express the “national idea.” Kara Choban was deeply disappointed by the failure of Soviet authorities in Moldova to promote Gagauz national culture as they had during the Thaw.

Like Kara Choban, Honchar also sought to fill a gap left by existing state museums. The experience of state-sponsored Ukrainization left Honchar with the enduring idea that the state’s role is to promote national culture. Honchar found existing state museums entirely lacking. As he wrote,

⁸⁵⁷ For example, the local history museum in the town of Ceadir-Lunga referenced ethnographic collecting in their 1972 report but stated that “The fundamental attention of the collective in the past year was oriented towards displaying the achievements of the workers of the *raion* over the years of Soviet rule in the last 50 years, on those changes that took place in our *raion* in those years.” ANRM R-3011-10-730 (1972): 111-114.

⁸⁵⁸ Guboglo reproduces this letter in its entirety, although its provenance is not entirely clear. Guboglo, *Antropologija povsednevnosti*, 437-439.

⁸⁵⁹ Guboglo, *Antropologija povsednevnosti*, 439.

Both before and after the war, I saw plenty of our local history and historical museums, where Ukraine was shown as impoverished, barren—especially its past, national culture [*narodna kul'tura*], ethnography, and most of all—national art [Ukrainian: *narodne mystetstvo*]. [...] It was a pity, and shocking to the depths of the soul that such a great nation as Ukraine, rich in heroic and tragic history, in national culture, folklore and ethnography, was so miserably portrayed in these museums. I will not even talk about the fact that Ukraine does not have its own national ethnographic museum, which all other cultured countries in the world have.⁸⁶⁰

Honchar clearly believed that local history museums were not doing enough to promote Ukrainian culture. He also had a different idea of the sort of folk art that should be preserved in museums. In contrast to the Kyiv State Museum of National Decorative-Applied Art, Honchar's museum featured art made primarily at home, outside the state artisan production system.⁸⁶¹ Honchar thus sought to supplement what he saw as the inadequacies of the existing network of state museums in Ukraine by dedicating his museum to homemade Ukrainian folk art.

When he opened the museum to the public in 1960, Honchar hoped that it would receive official recognition.⁸⁶² In Thaw-era Ukraine, such grassroots cultural initiatives coexisted with state institutions and often gained state support. For example, the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth, a nationally-oriented cultural club that started as an independently-organized caroling group, received Komsomol sponsorship in 1960 (see Chapter 4).⁸⁶³ Serhy Yekelchuk argues that this “proactive drive to inhabit, redefine, and expand the national cultural space they shared with the cultural establishment” was characteristic of the Ukrainian Sixtiers.⁸⁶⁴ However, the relationship between the Soviet state and the nationally-minded Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia that patron-

⁸⁶⁰ Honchar, “Iak tse pochalosia,” 206.

⁸⁶¹ Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', “Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara,” 28.

⁸⁶² Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', “Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara,” 36.

⁸⁶³ Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 18-20.

⁸⁶⁴ Serhy Yekelchuk, “The Early 1960s as a Cultural Space: A Microhistory of Ukraine's Generation of Cultural Rebels,” *Nationalities Papers* 43, no. 1 (2015): 47.

ized Honchar's museum and the Club of Creative Youth began to deteriorate in the mid-1960s. The arrests by the Ukrainian KGB of dozens of members of the intelligentsia in August of 1965 on the charge of spreading nationalist and anti-Soviet views profoundly alienated the nationally-minded members of the cultural intelligentsia from the state.⁸⁶⁵ The persecution of the literary critic Ivan Dziuba in 1966 for the circulating *Internationalism or Russification?*, a treatise that criticized Soviet language policy in Ukraine for its supposed deviation from Leninist principles, further widened the gap. In the growing confrontation, Honchar clearly stood on the side of the Sixtiers. Yet while the literary critic Dziuba had become a *bête noire* for the Ukrainian authorities, Honchar was seemingly still in their good graces. In 1966, the film studio Ukrkinokhronika produced a film about Honchar, *Sonata on an Artist (Sonata pro khudozhnika)*. In March of 1967, the Committee on Cinema under the Soviet of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR included it in a screening of films recommended for circulation abroad. Later that year, the Ukrainian Society of Friendship sent five copies of the film to Soviet cultural organizations and embassies in Europe and North America.⁸⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Honchar's alignment with the nationally-minded intelligentsia began to raise official suspicions. Honchar first came to the KGB's attention in March of 1967, when they reported that he had supposedly sculpted a bust of Dziuba, photographs of which circulated among the intelligentsia.⁸⁶⁷ A month later, the KGB sent a report on Honchar's museum to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine. In the report, they alleged that Honchar used his museum to "indoctrinate certain visitors of the museum in a nationalist spirit." According to the report, Honchar made statements during his tours accusing the Communist Party and the Soviet

⁸⁶⁵ See the KGB report on the arrests: HDA SBU 16/1/952-944 (August 31, 1965): 1-12.

⁸⁶⁶ TsDAHOU 1/25/869 (August 23, 1973): 46.

⁸⁶⁷ HDA SBU 16/1/959-951 (March 6, 1967): 228-230.

state of conducting a policy of Russification and intentionally destroying monuments of Ukrainian culture. The KGB recommended purchasing Honchar's collection and transferring the best items to state museums.⁸⁶⁸

A year later, the KGB sent another report to the Ukrainian Central Committee, stating Honchar continued to receive visitors at his museum and to make objectionable statements about nationalities policy in Ukraine. Honchar had allegedly complained to visitors that you cannot hear the Ukrainian language spoken in Kyiv. Honchar was also said to help circulate old publications on the national question as well as *samvydav* (Russian: *samizdat*, self-published materials) by Solzhenitsyn and Dziuba. The allusions to language use in Kyiv and older works on nationalities policy indicate that, like Dziuba, Honchar was advocating for a return to the Ukrainization policies of the 1920s (see Chapter 4).⁸⁶⁹ This time, the report elicited a meeting between Honchar and the Central Committee secretary on ideology, Fëdor Ovcharenko. In his diary, Honchar recorded his outrage at the KGB accusations that Ovcharenko had repeated to him. His reaction indicates his frustration at what he saw as the state's refusal to support national culture: "They are 'blaming' me for saying to people in parting that they should awaken the consciousness of others, that they should love their Homeland, that they should be nationally conscious and not shun their native language, that they should hold on to the memory of their culture. Here it is, the "great political subversion" [*velika kramola*]. *That is what the highest institutions of the state should be doing, not just me...* [emphasis added]" Moreover, Honchar was insulted that Ovcharenko, who had once visited his museum, now stood in judgment of him, instead of speaking to

⁸⁶⁸ HDA SBU 16/1/960-952 (April 1, 1967): 149-150.

⁸⁶⁹ HDA SBU 16/1/972-963 (May 13, 1968): 233-235.

him as a Party comrade.⁸⁷⁰ The meeting revealed the gap between Honchar's idea of what Soviet policy on national culture should be, and the reality of Soviet Ukraine in the late 1960s.

In June of 1969, the Central Committee received yet another KGB report on Honchar's problematic comments on issues of national culture during tours in his museum. This time, according to a report from the Department of Culture of the Ukrainian Central Committee, Rostislav Babiichuk, the Ukrainian Minister of Culture, and Petro Tron'ko, the deputy chair of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers, went to speak with Honchar. Tron'ko had spearheaded several state-sponsored Ukrainian cultural initiatives, so the Central Committee may have thought that Tron'ko could reason with Honchar. Babiichuk and Tron'ko encouraged him to transfer his collection to a state museum, but Honchar categorically rejected the offer.⁸⁷¹ Six months later, Tron'ko and Ovcharenko went to speak with him again. Honchar criticized official institutions for not helping him to expand the territory of his museum. Honchar refused to give over his materials to the State Museum and was informed that there was no question of his creating a museum on the basis of his private collection. Like Kara Choban, Honchar was reluctant to allow his unique collection to be dispersed among existing state museums. After the meeting, the Party cell of the Union of Artists was ordered to bring Honchar under control as a Party member.⁸⁷²

Five months later, in May of 1970, the Central Committee received yet another report from their Department of Culture. According to a KGB report they had received, the conversations with Tron'ko and Babiichuk had not changed Honchar's behavior, nor had his conversation with the head of the Union of Artists, Vasil' Borodai. The Department of Culture recommended a

⁸⁷⁰ Ivan Honchar, "Iz shchodennykiv I. M. Honchara," in *Maister, abo Terny i lavry Ivana Honchara*, 490.

⁸⁷¹ Tron'ko was involved in the founding of the Ukrainian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture (of which Honchar was a founding member) and the twenty-six-volume series *The History of Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian SSR*. See Chapter 4.

⁸⁷² TsDAHOU 1/25/183 (December 31, 1969): 107.

ban on visiting Honchar's collections, arguing that only officially-sanctioned collections could accept visitors. They also brought the issue to the attention of the Party cell of the Union of Artists, which exercised control over Honchar as a Party member.⁸⁷³ In November of that year, the Department of Culture reported that Honchar had finally said that he would consider moving his collection to the State Museum of Ukrainian Art.⁸⁷⁴ In December, Honchar's museum was the subject of a lengthy Party meeting at the Union of Artists, where Honchar's fellow artists harshly criticized him for dedicating more time to his museum than to art.⁸⁷⁵ The cultural policy of the Ukrainian Party that had been hardening since Brezhnev's ascension to power in 1964 became increasingly exclusionary as Ukrainian Party chief Petro Shelest's power waned in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Despite harsh official criticism, Honchar never ultimately agreed to donate his collection to state museums.

On April 18, 1972, about a month before Ukrainian Party chief Shelest was removed from office (see Chapter 4), Ivan Honchar was expelled from the Party for continuing to expound "anti-Party views on the national question."⁸⁷⁶ Honchar was banned from receiving visitors to his museum.⁸⁷⁷ After Shelest was replaced as head of the republic by Brezhnev ally Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyi, the new Central Committee secretary of ideology, Valentyn Malanchuk, led the fight against "Ukrainian nationalism." During this period, Honchar was effectively excluded from public life.⁸⁷⁸ According to Georgii Kas'ianov, Honchar limited the number of visitors to

⁸⁷³ TsDAHOU 1/25/363 (May 22, 1970): 27.

⁸⁷⁴ TsDAHOU 1/25/183 (November 20, 1970): 109-110.

⁸⁷⁵ TsDAHOU 302/3/65 (December 1, 1970): 11-101.

⁸⁷⁶ Liubov Krupnyk, "Ivan Honchar i vlada," <https://honchar.org.ua/p/ivan-honchar-i-vlada/>. The quotation is from TsDAHOU 1/32/657: 134.

⁸⁷⁷ Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', "Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara," 33.

⁸⁷⁸ Dubykivs'ka and Fugal', "Kraieznavcha diialnist' Ivana Honchara," 34; Krupnyk, "Ivan Honchar i vlada."

his museum, although he never shut it down entirely.⁸⁷⁹ Accounts of his persecution by Soviet authorities began to circulate in *samydav* and illicit leaflets starting in 1972.⁸⁸⁰ Ukrainian dissidents saw in the fate of Ivan Honchar and his museum yet another example of the state persecution of Ukrainian culture in the 1970s.

It is clear from this examination of the cases of Soloukhin, Kara Choban, and Honchar that all three blamed Soviet authorities for failing to take adequate measures to preserve what they saw as priceless national cultural heritage. Based on the state-sponsored destruction of icons that he witnessed, Soloukhin was much more suspicious of the state's role in preserving national culture, which is presumably why he kept his collection entirely private. Their collections oriented around a "national idea" were thus a response to perceived failures of the Soviet state. The fact that both Kara Choban and Honchar founded museums on the basis of their collections prompted a more sustained engagement with Soviet authorities. Both petitioned state authorities to support their museums, and Kara Choban's museum actually received state funds—although never as much as he would have liked. Ultimately, both museum directors encountered difficulties as a result of accusations of nationalism from state officials. Although Soloukhin did not seek to found a museum on the basis of his icon collection, his activities still raised eyebrows and engendered suspicion from the authorities. In all three cases, a narrative emerged that the Soviet state was persecuting these collectors because of their advocacy for national culture.

⁸⁷⁹ Kas'ianov, *Nezhodni*, 83.

⁸⁸⁰ See coverage of this in the sixth issue of the dissident journal *Ukrains'kyi visnyk* [*The Ukrainian Herald*]. English translation: *Dissent in Ukraine: An Underground Journal from Soviet Ukraine* (Baltimore: Smoloskyp Publishers, 1977), 159-161. The leaflets are discussed in HDA SBU 16/3/4 (November 22, 1973): 67 in V. M. Danylenko, ed., *Politychni protesty i inakodumstvo v Ukraini (1960-1990)* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2013), 359-362.

Conclusion

All of the three intellectuals discussed here sought to pursue their own visions of the “national idea” through their collections. Each envisioned a national culture that was firmly rooted in the rural past. Having identified lacunae in state support for national culture, they exercised their own private initiative to fill in that gap beginning in the 1950s and 1960s. In many ways, all three were products of the atmosphere of voluntarism and “from-below” citizen initiative that Nikita Khrushchev actively encouraged during the Thaw.⁸⁸¹ Soloukhin’s collecting was the least civic-minded, as he never sought to share his icon collection with the broader public. Because he viewed the Soviet state’s anti-religious activities negatively, he did not seek state support for his icon collecting. His collecting activities reflect his own self-fashioning as an Orthodox intellectual, an image he seems to have covertly cultivated from the 1960s onward despite his membership in the Communist Party. Yet even here we see a public goal—he clearly saw himself as saving neglected icons for future generations.

Honchar’s and Kara Choban’s stories reveal the ways in which Soviet intellectuals engaged with state institutions in their efforts to pursue their own visions of national culture. Honchar founded his museum to respond to what he saw as a lack of authentic Ukrainian folk art in state museums. Although he felt it was the state’s duty to collect and preserve these artifacts, he willingly spent his own time and money collecting Ukrainian folk art from villages and towns across the republic and displaying them in his private home. He had initially hoped to receive state sponsorship for his house-museum, but his stance changed as the Soviet state increasingly marginalized and persecuted the nationally-minded Ukrainian intelligentsia after 1965. After he

⁸⁸¹ See Eleonory Gilburd, “The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s,” in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 373.

came under increasing KGB scrutiny, high-ranking officials in the Ukrainian SSR pressured him to donate his collection to the state. Honchar ultimately refused, an act which cost him his membership in the Party and his position as a leading Soviet Ukrainian artist. After years of hoping for a return to the Ukrainization policies of the 1920s, he ultimately lost his faith in the Soviet state's stewardship of national culture. Dmitrii Kara Choban seems to have had the most faith in the Soviet state's sponsorship of national culture; he sought and ultimately received funding from the Moldovan Ministry of Culture. He became increasingly frustrated, however, that the maintenance of his public museum continued to strain his own private resources. When the museum was placed under the control of a local history museum in 1983, Kara Choban despaired, fearing the obliteration of his life's work to promote Gagauz national culture. He committed suicide in 1986 after the untimely death of his wife. The fates of Honchar's and Kara Choban's museums in the Soviet period reveal the fate of the Thaw-era voluntarist spirit in the 1970s and 1980s and the disillusionment with the Soviet state among the nationally-minded Soviet intelligentsia.

The passion for collecting rural material culture that emerged among certain segments of the Soviet intelligentsia in the 1960s in response to the perceived failures of the Soviet state continues to have a place in the post-Soviet world. The rural-based visions of national culture that Honchar and Kara Choban captured in their collections found stronger state support in independent Ukraine and autonomous Gagauzia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Their museums have both fared well in the post-Soviet period. In 1988, at the height of perestroika, a number of state institutions and private individuals nominated Ivan Honchar for the Shevchenko State Prize, the highest honor for a Ukrainian cultural figure.⁸⁸² In February of 1989, he won for his "many years of creative work and research on the collection and popularization of national art [*narod-*

⁸⁸² See TsDAMLM 979/1/1177 (1988-1989).

noho mystetsva].”⁸⁸³ The National Ivan Honchar Museum was founded in Kyiv in 1993 shortly after the death of the museum’s founder. Today it is housed in a building next to the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, an ancient monastery which is one of the most visited tourist sites in Ukraine. In addition to displaying Honchar’s collection, the museum hosts events where adults and children can learn more about Ukrainian traditional crafts and folklore. In 2006, it began publishing reproductions of the massive album based on his collection under the name *Ukraine and Ukrainians*.

Dmitrii Kara Choban did not live to see the end of the Soviet Union, but his collection lives on. He is buried next to his wife in a grave a short walk from the museum. After her death in 2009, the Turkic linguist Liudmila Pokrovskaia was buried alongside them. The museum has borne Kara Choban’s name since 1988. After the establishment of the Gagauz Autonomous Territorial Unit in 1994, the museum was renamed the Dmitrii Kara Choban National Gagauz Historical-Ethnographic Museum. Today the museum, headed by Kara Choban's daughter Liudmila Marin, represents Gagauz culture to visitors from all over the world.

The fate of Soloukhin’s collection was less happy. By the end of the Soviet period, restored icons had considerable monetary value. In the last years of his life, Soloukhin lost his collection when his home in Alepino was robbed. Soloukhin was so wounded by the robbery that he refused to return to Alepino and spent his last years in the Writers’ Union dacha settlement at Peredelkino. He died in 1997. Soloukhin would have been happy, nevertheless, to have seen the completion in 2000 of the reconstructed Church of Christ the Savior, for which he actively campaigned (see Epilogue). A firm believer in the importance of Orthodox culture for Russian na-

⁸⁸³ See the record of the voting of the Shevchenko Prize Committee: TsDAMLM 979/1/1154 (February 22, 1989): 27.

tional identity, he would likely be pleased by the close relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the state in Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Chapter 6:

Village Writers and the Cultural Politics of State Prizes: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Brezhnev Era

On October 16, 1964, *Novyi mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii quoted a sentence from *Pravda* in his diary: "The Plenum of the CC CPSU has approved the request of comrade N. S. Khrushchev regarding his release from his duties as First Secretary of the CC CPSU, member of the Presidium of the CC CPSU and the Chair of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR in connection with his advanced age and the worsening state of his health."⁸⁸⁴ As Tvardovskii knew, Khrushchev's retirement had nothing to do with his age or health. He had been forced from power by a group of top Party leaders in the Presidium of the Central Committee led by Leonid Brezhnev. The editor of the country's leading pro-Thaw literary journal spent the next several days deep in thought about the legacies of the Khrushchev era as it came to a close. As we have seen, Khrushchev's rise to power and his denunciation of the Stalinist "cult of personality" at the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses had allowed Tvardovskii, the son of a dekulakized peasant, to publish works that challenged the treatment of the peasantry under Stalin. *Novyi mir* had been a place where Russian and non-Russian writers alike could reassert the significance of the peasantry in their visions of their respective nations. But in his later years, Tvardovskii reflected, Khrushchev had closed his eyes to the "dark forces" who opposed the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses. He had refused to stand up for Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn when those "dark forces" had scuttled his bid for the Lenin Prize *One Day in the Life of Ivan*

⁸⁸⁴ See entries for October 16, 1964, and October 18, 1964, in Aleksandr Tvardovskii, "Rabochie tetradi 60-kh godov: 1964 god," *Znamia*, no. 12 (2000), <https://magazines.gorky.media/znamia/2000/12/rabochie-tetradi-60-h-godov-2.html>.

Denisovich in 1964 (see Chapter 3). Despite the disappointments of his later years, Khrushchev's removal nevertheless signaled the end of an era—and the beginning of a new one.

While scholars generally agree with Tvardovskii's assessment that the transition from the Khrushchev era to the Brezhnev era was a major turning point in the history of Soviet literature, there is little agreement on how to characterize the Brezhnev period in mainstream Soviet intellectual life. During the time of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*, it became common to refer to the Brezhnev period as the era of "stagnation" (*zastoi*), a time when the Soviet leadership halted de-Stalinization, stifled Khrushchev's Thaw, and enforced ideological conformity.⁸⁸⁵ Indeed, as early as the summer of 1965, the KGB conducted operations across the USSR to squash dissent, arresting the writers Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel' for publishing their works abroad, seizing Solzhenitsyn's manuscripts from their hiding place, and arresting dozens of members of the Ukrainian cultural intelligentsia for supposed nationalism. In the late 1960s, a slow but steady official campaign against *Novyi mir* began, leading to Tvardovskii's removal as editor in 1970.⁸⁸⁶ Polly Jones has argued that, after an initial increase in discussion of the Stalinist "cult of personality" in the early Brezhnev era, the Soviet leadership had shut down overt criticism of the Stalinist cult by the early 1970s.⁸⁸⁷ The perception that de-Stalinization was gradually halted under Brezhnev tends to reinforce the idea of the 1970s as a time of stagnation.

When we look at the literature on national intellectuals in the Brezhnev era, however, we see less evidence for the idea of "stagnation" in national culture. Scholars of Russian national-

⁸⁸⁵ On the history of the idea of "stagnation," see Dina Fainberg and Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Stagnation and Its Discontents: The Creation of a Political and Historical Paradigm," in *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era: Ideology and Exchange* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), vii–xxii.

⁸⁸⁶ See Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 10.

⁸⁸⁷ Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: The Stalinist Past as Soviet Culture, 1953-69* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 6.

ism, including Yitzhak Brudny, Geoffrey Hosking, and Nikolai Mitrokhin, have argued that the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev supported Russian Village Prose writers as part of a policy that Brudny calls a "politics of inclusion" towards Russian nationalists.⁸⁸⁸ As we have seen in Chapter 3, Sergei Vikulov and his Vologda network of Russian Village Prose writers turned the journal *Nash sovremennik* into a powerful voice arguing for the reorientation of Russian national identity around the rural periphery. Jeremy Smith has argued for a similar strengthening of support for national intellectuals in the non-Russian republics, arguing that republican leaders in the Brezhnev era sought to solidify their power by “developing the national character of their republics,” in part through the “relaxation of controls on the production of culture.”⁸⁸⁹ Indeed, recent scholarship on the Caucasus and Baltic republics in the late Soviet period suggests that, in the words of Claire Pogue Kaiser, “citizens [...] increasingly inhabited nationality *through*—rather than in spite of—Soviet institutions and collectives.”⁸⁹⁰ In Lithuania, for example, in the 1970s a generation of nationally-minded writers from the countryside, many of whom held leadership positions in the Lithuanian Writers’ Union, promoted a “rustic turn” in Lithuanian culture that advocated a “a return to the rural, pre-modern roots of identity.”⁸⁹¹ In this chapter, we will see that republican

⁸⁸⁸ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); N. Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia: dvizhenie russkikh natsionalistov v SSSR, 1953-1985 gody* (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2003).

⁸⁸⁹ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 218.

⁸⁹⁰ Kaiser’s statement refers specifically to Georgia. Claire Pogue Kaiser, “Lived Nationality: Policy and Practice in Soviet Georgia, 1945-1978” (University of Pennsylvania, 2015), Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations (1795), <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/1795>, vii. On the Caucasus republics, see Maike Lehmann, “Apricot Socialism: The National Past, the Soviet Project, and the Imagining of Community in Late Soviet Armenia,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 9–31; Arseny Saparov, “The Alteration of Place Names and the Construction of Soviet Identity in Soviet Armenia,” *Cahiers du monde russe* 44, no. 1 (March 2003): 179–98; V. A. Shnirel’man, *The Value of the Past: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology, 2001).

⁸⁹¹ Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 125; Vilius Ivanauskas, “‘Engineers of the Human Spirit’ During Late So-

authorities in the Armenian SSR, while not as inclusive as some, likewise allowed vigorous debate about national identity to take place in the literary world, making space for writer Hrant Matevosyan's rural-based conception of the nation along with competing "urban" conceptions.

Yet as we have seen in Chapters 4 and 5, the increasing exclusion of intellectuals who promoted alternative, rural-based conceptions of the nation from the public sphere in Ukraine and Moldova certainly created an intellectual environment that many later characterized as "stagnant." The rise of Brezhnev's political network saw the application of a "politics of exclusion" towards nationally-minded intellectuals in Ukraine and Moldova that foreclosed debates on the place of the village in national identity that were happening elsewhere. In the early 1960s, Ukrainian Party leaders had grudgingly tolerated a Ukrainian cultural revival that was oriented towards rural and folk culture. After Brezhnev came to power in 1964, however, central authorities began to force the republican leadership's hand, authorizing KGB crackdowns on "nationalist" Ukrainian intellectuals. In 1968, Brezhnev-aligned forces in the republic launched an attack on Oles' Honchar, the country's leading writer, for his novel *Cathedral* (see Chapter 4). More outspoken intellectuals, like the sculptor Ivan Honchar, found themselves socially marginalized and harassed by the authorities (see Chapter 5). The replacement of Shelest with the Brezhnev-backed Shcherbyts'kyi ushered in an era of harsh exclusionary policies in Ukraine. A "politics of exclusion" in Moldova began in even earlier, beginning with the appointment of Ivan Bodiul, another Brezhnev-aligned leader, in 1961. Bodiul feuded with Ion Druță, the republic's leading prose writer, ultimately driving him and other leading Moldovan intellectuals to Moscow. But as we will see, Bodiul was ultimately less successful than the Ukrainian authorities in suppressing

cialism: The Lithuanian Union of Writers Between Soviet Duties and Local Interests," *Europe-Asia Studies* 66, no. 4 (June 2014): 645–65.

alternative conceptions of the nation, as many Moldovan intellectuals found support for their ideas in the capital city.

Overall, the Brezhnev era appears to have been a contradictory period for national intellectuals. This chapter explores the cultural politics of state literary prizes in order to shed light on the fate of nationally-minded intellectuals during this supposedly "stagnant" period. Examining the nominations of Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan, the Moldovan writer Ion Druță, and the Russian writers Fëdor Abramov and Valentin Rasputin for republican and all-Union state prizes, it argues that debates about the nation continued to be dynamic even under conditions of heightened censorship. The relationship between the Soviet state and the nation (embodied in the peasantry) was hotly contested at the highest echelons of the Soviet cultural elite. Moreover, the discussions of Druță's, Abramov's, and Rasputin's works show that the reevaluation of the Stalinist treatment of the peasantry did not cease in the Brezhnev era. Soviet writers from villages published—and sometimes even won major literary prizes for—works that drew attention to the mistreatment of peasants in both the Stalin era and the present day. A common thread that runs through the films and literary works discussed in this chapter is the mutual estrangement of peasants and the Soviet state. While writers limited their criticism to specific state policies, given the assumed connection between peasants and the nation, it did not require much imagination to come to the conclusion that a state that disregarded its peasant population was hostile to the nation itself. These works thus injected a powerful critique of the relationship between the Soviet state and the peasant/nation into mainstream Soviet intellectual discourse.

The existence of inclusionary policies towards nationally-minded Russian writers was a major factor that enabled Soviet writers of all nationalities to engage in these potentially inflammatory discussions. As a result of the "politics of inclusion" towards Russian nationalists, Rus-

sian Village Prose writers like Abramov and Rasputin won major prizes, elevating the criticisms of the Soviet treatment of the peasantry that they managed to get into print despite harsh pre-publication censorship. The celebration of Russian Village Prose in the center also provided a boost to writers from the republics like Matevosyan and Druță who adopted a similarly rural-based conception of the nation. Moscow-based cultural elites who were sympathetic to Russian Village Prose also supported their work. Strikingly, the transcripts of prize committees and other central Soviet bodies demonstrate that Soviet cultural elites often managed to defy republican authorities, revealing that they retained a great deal of power to determine the direction of culture even under Brezhnev.

The adoption of a politics of inclusion was much more fraught in the non-Russian republics than in the RSFSR, as the defenders of Soviet orthodoxy continued to see non-Russian nationalism as an ever-present threat. The policies towards nationally-minded intellectuals in the republics thus tended to fall somewhere on a spectrum between inclusion and exclusion. As we will see in the case of Hrant Matevosyan, Armenia falls closer to the pole of inclusion. The Armenian leadership did not embrace Matevosyan but allowed him to articulate his critique of the state's treatment of the Armenian peasant. He eventually won an Armenian State Prize in 1983—but only because preparations were underway in the center to give him a USSR State Prize.

Moldova is an example of a republic where the leadership adopted an extreme politics of exclusion, forcing leading intellectuals like Ion Druță to find refuge in the welcoming arms of the Moscow cultural elite. As the case of Druță's nomination for the USSR State Prize for his novel *Burden of Our Kindness* shows, the Moldovan leadership was so hostile to its nationally-minded writers that they actively sought to prevent them from winning all-Union prizes. Soviet cultural elites who sympathized with Druță's rural-based conception of the nation fought back against the

Moldovan leadership, only backing down after a direct order from the central Party. An examination of the cultural politics of state prizes thus reveals that although policies towards national intellectuals on the republican level varied during the Brezhnev era, the inclusionary politics towards Russian Village Prose had the overall effect of boosting rural-based conceptions of the nation in non-Russian republics as well.

On State Prizes

State prize competitions were an important part of the cultural politics in both the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, when they became major battlegrounds for determining the future of Soviet ideology as expressed in literature. Prizes for literature and other forms of cultural production had existed in the Soviet Union since the creation of the Stalin Prize in 1939, but they proliferated over the course of the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to the Lenin Prize, which had been revived as a prize for cultural and scientific achievements in 1956, the annual USSR State Prize was instituted in 1966. Over the first two decades of the postwar period, most republics also began to award republican State Prizes.⁸⁹² In addition to press and lifelong prestige, prizes also had significant monetary value: a USSR State Prize included an honorarium of 5,000 rubles. Prizes were supposed to recognize works could be both artistic and ideological models for the rest of Soviet literature, and the debates of the State and Lenin Prize Committees often revolved around which work best fulfilled both criteria. Because they were supposed to recognize works that served as model for the rest of Soviet literature, the state prize committees became sites of struggle among factions of the political and cultural elite over the depiction of the nation.

⁸⁹² On the history of republican and all-Union prizes in the USSR, see Miroslav Leonovich Butrin and Vitalii Naumovich Kutik, *Pisateli--laureaty premii SSSR i soiuznykh respublik* (L'vov: Vyshcha shkola, 1980), 10-19.

The transcripts of state prize committees are valuable sources because they provide a window into both intellectuals' debates over conceptions of the nation as well as the state's response. State Prizes were awarded by committees composed primarily of leading cultural figures as well as bureaucrats from the creative unions. They met in different “sections” dedicated to literature, art, film, etc., to consider nominations from Soviet cultural institutions such as publishers, journals, and the creative unions. The nominees who gained the support of a majority of the Committee members through multiple rounds of voting over the course of several months were included on the final list. Winners were required to gain three-fourths majority of the votes on a secret ballot. As we will see, in practice, political authorities exercised control over the outcomes in a number of subtle and not-so-subtle ways. At the same time, the Committee members resisted the efforts of political authorities to simply dictate the outcomes. The prize deliberations forced Committee members to articulate their own ideas about what Soviet literature should be and negotiate with writers from different political-cultural factions. The transcripts of the discussion, where available, are particularly revealing for this reason.⁸⁹³ In order to understand the intersection between cultural production and politics during this period, this chapter analyzes the transcripts of State Prize discussions, as well as the works considered for State Prizes, their journeys to page and screen, the press debates around these works, and reactions to them by both members of the intelligentsia and Soviet officials.

⁸⁹³ The availability of transcripts in archives varies widely. Full transcripts are available for all-Union prizes such as the State and Lenin Prizes, as well as the Moldovan State Prize. Somewhat less detailed transcripts are available for the Ukrainian SSR's Shevchenko Prize. More cursory meeting minutes are available for the Armenian State Prize. The transcripts for the RSFSR's State Prize for literature, the Gorky Prize, do not appear to have been preserved.

Hrant Matevosyan and the Ambivalent Armenian Politics of Inclusion

In the Armenian SSR, as in the RSFSR, authorities made limited but real space for intellectuals to debate the nature of the nation. Armenian intellectuals responded by engaging in vigorous debates about the place of villages and cities in Armenian national identity. During the stormy six-year tenure of first Party secretary Yakov Zarobyan in the first half of the 1960s, Armenian intellectuals who actively pushed the boundaries of the Thaw were subject to periodic repression (see Chapter 2). Cultural policy became calmer and more inclusive under his successor, Anton Kochinyan, who took office in 1966. This was good news for the Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan, a literary exile under Zarobyan who was allowed to re-enter the Armenian literary world under Kochinyan and went on to win an Armenian and a USSR State Prize. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Matevosyan argued forcefully for the importance of representing the peasant perspective on contemporary Soviet Armenian life. In works like the 1969 film adaptation of Matevosyan's novella *We of the Mountains* and his 1970 novella *Hangover*, he depicted peasants' feelings of alienation and estrangement from Soviet urban life, which for Matevosyan very much included representatives of Soviet authority. While Matevosyan was never a favorite of Soviet Armenian authorities, the inclusionary politics they adopted nevertheless allowed him to spread his views on the page and on screen. Despite the many obstacles that *We of the Mountains* encountered during production, it became a classic of Armenian cinema and was ultimately recognized as part of director Henrik Malyan's 1975 Armenian State Prize for film. Matevosyan also benefitted from the politics of inclusion towards Russian Village Prose writers in the center, as he continued to find favor among the Moscow cultural elites who saw similarities between his work and Russian Village Prose. Indeed, it was Matevosyan's Moscow-based allies who provided the push needed to get Matevosyan an Armenian State Prize in 1983. He went on to win a

USSR State Prize the following year. The politics of inclusion brought this onetime literary exile into the mainstream, granting both an audience and legitimacy to his rural-based critique of Soviet modernity.

The Armenian politics of inclusion developed in the wake of a half-decade of controversies during the later years of Khrushchev's Thaw. During Yakov Zarobyan's tenure as Armenian first Party secretary from 1960 to 1966, the Armenian Central Committee frequently intervened in Armenian literary affairs. The crackdowns in literature were sometimes linked with Khrushchev's periodic "freezes," while on other occasions they happened in response to local issues.⁸⁹⁴ One of the most striking examples of heavy-handed political interference in literature during the Zarobyan years was the official criticism of the young Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan's 1961 sketch "Ahnidzor" and his subsequent exclusion from the Armenian literary world. (See Chapter 2.) Matevosyan's controversial sketch highlighted the impact on rural residents of agricultural policies such as consolidation of smaller collective farms (*kolkhozy*) into larger state farms (*sovkhozy*) and reductions in permitted private livestock holdings. The Central Committee's criticism of Matevosyan's sketch effectively barred him from publishing his works in Armenia for several years. In 1965, Matevosyan was finally able to publish a major work, his novella *We of the Mountains*, in the Russian-language journal *Literaturnaia Armeniia*—but Armenian-language journals refused to publish it. With the help of friends in the Armenian Writers' Union, that year Matevosyan was able to secure a spot in the two-year Higher Screenwriting

⁸⁹⁴ For the Armenian response to an all-Union "freeze" in 1962-3, see Leon Mikirtitchian, "Armenian Literature," in *Discordant Voices: The Non-Russian Soviet Literatures, 1953-1973*, ed. George Stephen Nestor Luckyj (Oakville, Ont.: Mosaic Press, 1975), 18-19; HAA 170/1/145 (undated, likely March 1963): 1-20. For other interventions by the Central Committee into literary affairs, see, for example, criticism of Khristofor Tapaltsyan's *War* (Arm: *Paterazm*) in HAA 1/45/12 (November 26, 1965): 136-138; criticism of the press for overly negative depictions of Soviet life in HAA 1/45/13 (December 17, 1965): 16-19.

Courses in Moscow. The Higher Screenwriting Courses provided Matevosyan an escape from his difficult situation in Armenia and a chance to make connections in a new industry: film.

Living in Moscow for two years enabled Matevosyan to restart his career after several years in the wilderness in Armenia. Particularly important were the connections he made with other Soviet intellectuals in Moscow. In 1966, a number of positive reviews *We of the Mountains* appeared in influential Moscow-based publications, putting pressure on Armenian publishers. Meanwhile, things in Armenia were changing. On April 24, 1965, a major unsanctioned demonstration had taken place in Yerevan commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Armenian genocide.⁸⁹⁵ In February of 1966, Zarobyan was relieved of his post as first Party secretary at a plenum of the Armenian Communist Party and replaced by Anton Kochinyan. In 1967, the Moscow-based publisher *Molodaia gvardiia* released *We of the Mountains* in Russian. The pressure from all-Union cultural elites, as well as the change in political leadership, seems to have contributed to Armenian publisher *Hayastan*'s decision to finally publish *We of the Mountains* in Armenian as part of the larger collection *August* (Arm: *Ogostos*).⁸⁹⁶

As the case of Matevosyan illustrates, Armenian literature did not experience a new “freeze” in the second half of the 1960s with the change of power from Khrushchev to Brezhnev as had happened in Ukraine.⁸⁹⁷ Indeed, the Armenian Central Committee's management of culture became more inclusive and tolerant of a broader range of perspectives under Kochinyan's leadership. As the Armenian literary scholar Davit Gasparyan has observed, over the course of the 1960s, Armenian prose broadened in its scope and in its range of viewpoints. The major fig-

⁸⁹⁵ For a detailed discussion of the events, see Maike Lehmann, “Apricot Socialism.”

⁸⁹⁶ Hrant Mat'evosyan, *Ōgostos* (Erevan: Hayastan Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1967).

⁸⁹⁷ In an article published in 1975, Leon Mikirtichian noted the lack of a post-Thaw “freeze” in Armenian literature. Mikirtichian, “Armenian Literature,” 24-25.

ures who would dominate Armenian prose through the 1980s, including Matevosyan, Vardges Petrosyan, and Perch Zeytuntsyan, entered the literary arena in the 1960s.⁸⁹⁸ All three were involved in the liveliest literary debate of the 1960s, the subject which was the depiction of national character in literature and the relative merits of urban and rural settings. This press debate, which took place from 1968 to 1970 and spanned five publications, demonstrates the vitality of debates about the nation in Armenia during this period, as well as the inclusive nature of Armenian cultural politics in the Kochinyan era. It is reminiscent of debates over the place of the village in Russian identity that took place between *Novyi mir* and *Molodaia gvardiia* in the mid-1960s (see Chapter 3) and over Valentin Rasputin's *Farewell to Matëra* in the late 1970s (discussed below). Both sides in the Armenian debate expressed their views, at times acrimoniously, but the Armenian authorities never stepped in to stop the conversation.

The 1968-1970 press debate revolved around two broad questions: First, can urban spaces be national? Second, can rural spaces be modern? The first shot of the debate was fired by Vardges Petrosyan in March of 1968 with an article in *Garun (Spring)*, the youth-oriented literary journal of which Petrosyan was the head editor. A writer of so-called “urban prose,” Petrosyan was one of the leading writers in late Soviet Armenia. He won the Armenian Komsomol's literary prize in 1968 for his short stories, and he would go on to win the Armenian State Prize in 1979 for his 1969 work *Armenian Sketches* (Arm: *Haykakan Ēsk'izner*) and his 1978 novel *The Last Teacher* (Arm: *Verjin usuts'ich'ë*). Petrosyan continued as head editor of *Garun* until 1975, when he became head of the Armenian Writers' Union. In the article, Petrosyan argued that Armenian society was modernizing, and that Armenian national identity needed to evolve beyond an exclusive emphasis on rural life and traditions to include modern, urban life. Petrosyan com-

⁸⁹⁸ D. V. Gasparyan, *Hay grakanut'yun*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (Erevan: Zangak-97, 2002), 76. See also the summary of the debate in V. A. Grigoryan, *Hrant Mat'evosyan* (Erevan: Haykakan SSH GA Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1989), 49-52.

plained about the limited conception of Armenian national identity that he saw in literature. Why, he wondered, can't a young person who reads the Moscow-based publications *Inostrannaia literatura* (*Foreign Literature*) or *Iunost'*, drinks cocktails at Yerevan's fashionable Aragil Café, and listens to the Beatles on his transistor radio be considered a "national" character? Why do critics consider young Armenian urbanites to be mere imitations of characters from foreign literature, while automatically considering all rural characters to be representatives of the Armenian national character?⁸⁹⁹ After all, Petrosyan pointed out, Armenians have lived in cities since the tenth century. According to Petrosyan, the bias against urban settings in Armenian literature resulted in village writing, particularly the works of Hrant Matevosyan, receiving the lion's share of the praise, while many equally worthy examples of urban prose were overlooked.⁹⁰⁰ Petrosyan pled for an expansion of "national character" to include Armenia's burgeoning urban population.

Petrosyan's complaints about the overemphasis on rural settings in Armenian literature notwithstanding, in June his journal published a rather positive review of Matevosyan's 1967 collection *August* by the critic Levon Hakhverdyan.⁹⁰¹ While largely avoiding the question of urban and rural settings that Petrosyan had raised, Hakhverdyan emphasized that Matevosyan's work posed important questions about modern life and expressed himself in a modern style.⁹⁰² Hakhverdyan thereby asserted that Matevosyan's rural settings could be just as modern as Petrosyan's cities.

⁸⁹⁹ Vardges Petrosyan, "Havasarum bazmat'iv anhaytnerov," *Garun*, no. 3 (1968). Translated in Vardges Petrosian, "Uravnenie so mnogimi neizvestnymi," *Literaturnaia Armeniia*, no. 10 (1968): 65.

⁹⁰⁰ Petrosian, "Uravnenie so mnogimi neizvestnymi," 71, 73.

⁹⁰¹ Levon Hakhverdyan, "Hrant Mat'evosyani ardzakë' inch'pes or mez nerkayanum ē," *Garun*, no. 6 (1968): 45–49.

⁹⁰² Hakhverdyan, "Hrant Mat'evosyani ardzakë," 47.

In July, *Garun* published a response to Hakhverdyan's review penned by Stepan Topchyan, son of Writers' Union chief Eduard Topchyan, in which the author entirely denied the legitimacy of modern literature from a rural perspective.⁹⁰³ In his discussion of *We of the Mountains*, Topchyan complained that both Matevosyan and the critic Hakhverdyan had adopted the anti-modern worldview of the novella's shepherd protagonists. He called the work an "elegy of the irreparable loss of elderly people and the village of olden times, of the degradation of primitive village existence under the destructive blows of modern civilization."⁹⁰⁴ He concluded his review by stating that the path to true literature is far from Matevosyan's village and its "limited thinking."⁹⁰⁵

Matevosyan chose not to respond to Topchyan's harsh criticism of his work and his supposedly anti-modern worldview. In a September article titled "On So-Called Village Writing" in *Grakan tert*, Matevosyan responded to Petrosyan's discussion of national character in urban settings and presented his own view on village and urban literature.⁹⁰⁶ Matevosyan critiqued Petrosyan's division of prose into "urban" and "village" variants, a classification system he found condescending. He concluded his essay by stating, "There is no village writing or urban writing: there is only the human gaze on nature and the world."⁹⁰⁷ Matevosyan thus denied the dichotomy between supposedly more modern urban prose and supposedly more national rural prose.

Several critics jumped in to defend Matevosyan and his choice to write about the contemporary village, which they contextualized within broader Soviet trends. The Yerevan State

⁹⁰³ Step'an T'opch'yan, "Chanaparh depi...Tsmakut," *Garun*, no. 7 (1968): 87.

⁹⁰⁴ T'opch'yan, "Chanaparh depi...Tsmakut," 88.

⁹⁰⁵ T'opch'yan, "Chanaparh depi...Tsmakut," 91.

⁹⁰⁶ Hrant Mat'evosyan, "Ayspes koch'vats gyughagrut'yan masin," *Grakan t'ert'*, September 13, 1968. Translated in Grant Matevosian, "O prizvanii literatury," *Literaturnaia Armeniia*, no. 11 (1968): 61–73.

⁹⁰⁷ Mat'evosyan, "Ayspes koch'vats gyughagrut'yan masin."

University newspaper, *Erevani hamalsaran* (*University of Yerevan*), waded into the debate with an article by Garnik Ananyan, a candidate in linguistics.⁹⁰⁸ Ananyan argued that Matevosyan's prose represented a major leap forward from the relatively simplistic narratives of rural life found in both Stalin-era prose on the village (e.g., the "collective farm novels" of the late 1940s) and early post-Stalin prose (the "Ovechkin school" that emerged in *Novyi mir* in the 1950s).⁹⁰⁹ Far from idealizing village life, Matevosyan sought a deep analysis of both the positive and negative aspects of contemporary rural life. In an article in the Russian-language journal *Literaturnaia Armeniia*, the critic S. K. Daronyan argued that Matevosyan's work was well in line with recent literature on the contemporary Soviet village by Russian Village Prose writers like Sergei Zalygin, Vasiliï Belov, and Vladimir Tendriakov, as well as the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov.⁹¹⁰ Both writers defended Matevosyan by arguing that rural life was an entirely appropriate topic for modern Soviet literature.

Stepan Topchyan doubled down on his position in a May 1969 article titled "Return to the Caves," in which he argued that Matevosyan rejected progress, civilization, and modernity.⁹¹¹ In a crude distortion of Matevosyan's position, he claimed that Matevosyan wanted to take his readers back to the caves in which prehistoric man had lived. According to Topchyan, Critics ignored these errors in Matevosyan's work because they were simply biased in his favor. Shortly after the article appeared in *Grakan tert*, several of Matevosyan's defenders brought up Topchyan's article as an example of the low level of literary criticism in the newspaper at a meeting

⁹⁰⁸ Garnik Ananyan, "Krkin Tsmakut tanogh chanaparhi masin," *Erevani hamalsaran*, November 6, 1968.

⁹⁰⁹ For a discussion of these two modes of writing about the collective farm, see Chapter 1.

⁹¹⁰ S. Daronian, "Traditsii i sovremennost'," *Literaturnaia Armeniia*, no. 12 (1968): 63–70.

⁹¹¹ Step'an T'opch'yan, "Veradardz depi andzavnerë," *Grakan t'ert'*, May 23, 1969.

of the Party cell of the Armenian Union of Writers.⁹¹² The writer Hamo Sahyan, an ally of Matevosyan's, called it a "hooligan" article that never should have been published.⁹¹³ One of the critics present at the meeting, Suren Aghababyan (who, along with Hakhverdyan, had written the first positive review of Matevosyan's sketch "Ahnidzor" in 1961) discussed the debate over urban and rural prose in Armenian literature in an article in the all-Union journal *Druzhba narodov*.⁹¹⁴ Aghababyan complained that Armenian critics continued to refuse to give Matevosyan his fair due even as his work racked up positive reviews in all-Union publications. He harshly criticized Topchyan for treating village literature with "disdain" and conflating backwardness with rural settings. Aghababyan argued that Matevosyan's true intention was to treat villagers as living, breathing characters who were also part of modern civilization.⁹¹⁵ "It means, finally, to see a person there, where, in the opinion of some, there are only 'manure and rakes,' shepherds' whips and pipes," Aghababyan explained.⁹¹⁶ After Aghababyan's article, the debate continued, but moved on to broader questions of the state of Armenian literary criticism.⁹¹⁷

The vibrancy of the debate over the expression of Armenian national character and the relative merits of rural and urban settings in literature shows the results of Armenian inclusionary politics towards national intellectuals. The two sides, with their starkly different views on the place of the peasantry in the modern Armenian nation, were allowed to argue amongst them-

⁹¹² HAA 170/1/220 (May 30, 1969): 113-120.

⁹¹³ HAA 170/1/220 (May 30, 1969): 116-117.

⁹¹⁴ Suren Agababian, "Kritika v otstuplenii," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 10 (1970). Reprinted in Suren Agababian, "Kritika v otstuplenii," in *Sovremennost' i literatura* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1973), 224-47.

⁹¹⁵ Agababian, "Kritika v otstuplenii," 237-242.

⁹¹⁶ Agababian, "Kritika v otstuplenii," 242.

⁹¹⁷ Petrosyan responded to Aghababyan and Hakhverdyan in an article that was reprinted in Vardges Petrosyan, "Khoher grak'nnatatut'yan eritasard serund masin," in *Havasarum bazmat'iv anhaytnerov* (Erevan: Sovetakan grogh, 1977), 364-76.

selves without interference from the Armenian Central Committee. The debate over “urban” and “rural” prose illuminates several aspects of Soviet Armenian discourse about the nation, the village, and modernity. First, it is important to note that all participants in the debate considered the depiction of “national character” to be one of the most important tasks for Armenian literature. Second, the debate illustrates the perception that many writers had that rural characters were somehow more “national” than their urban counterparts. At the same time, the conception that peasants were a dark, backwards class with no place in modern civilization, common among both the Armenian and Russian intelligentsia during collectivization, still had currency in some circles.⁹¹⁸ Despite opposition to Matevosyan among some of the “urban” writers, because of inclusionary politics, there was space for his perspective in Armenian literature. Matevosyan continued to center peasant experiences of modern Soviet life in his work throughout his career.

At the heart of Matevosyan’s novella *We of the Mountains*, adapted into a film in 1969, was a critique of Soviet authorities from a peasant perspective. The film version of *We of the Mountains* ultimately became a key Armenian cultural touchstone of the late Soviet period, and it was one of three works for which director Henrik Malyan won the Armenian State Prize in 1975. The story, based on real events that took place in Matevosyan’s village during the late Stalin era, revolved around a conflict between a tightly-knit rural community (called “the republic of shepherds”) and a police investigator who represents urban Soviet authority.⁹¹⁹ The plot of the script evolved considerably over the course of production, but from the beginning the script highlighted the contrast between the hardworking rural people and meddling Soviet authorities whose inter-

⁹¹⁸ See Mary Allerton Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 107; Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13-15, 29-38.

⁹¹⁹ In 1952, four shepherds from Matevosyan’s village were tried and sentenced for theft. See Nelli Davt’yan, “«Menk’ enk’ mer sareri» irakan patmut’yunn u herosnerë,” *Asparez*, March 29, 2014, http://www.asparez.am/menqenq_mer_sarer-hy/#.XUDAz9NKjOS.

ventions do more harm than good.⁹²⁰ In the final version, four shepherds slaughter and barbecue four sheep who wander into their herd one evening. Although the shepherds settle the conflict by paying the owner of the sheep the very same night, an ambitious police lieutenant catches wind of the story and decides to investigate it as a case of theft. Visiting the village of Antaramech to investigate the shepherds, the lieutenant finds himself drawn into their world and joining in their constant banter. The seemingly friendly relationship between the shepherds and the lieutenant is fraught with danger, however, as the threat of jail time hangs over the shepherds' heads. The lieutenant claims to stand for Soviet law, but the shepherds contest his claim to Sovietness. In a key scene in the final version of the film, the shepherd Ishkhan, played by the actor Frunzik (Mher) Mkrtchyan, well-known to Soviet viewers for his role in the 1967 comedy *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (Rus: *Kavkazskaia plennitsa*), loses his temper during his interrogation by the lieutenant. "I'm the Soviet one!" Ishkhan exclaims angrily. "What kind of Soviet [person] are you? [*Sovetakanë es em! Du inch 'sovetakan es?*]." He continues, "I tend the sheep, I spin the wool, I mow the grass!" When the lieutenant continues to insist that he slaughtered someone else's sheep, Ishkhan simply replies, "What business is that of yours?"⁹²¹ In the film, it is the shepherds and not the ostensible authorities who have a true claim to Sovietness. As we will see, the sharp contrast that Matevosyan drew between the mentality of the urban representatives of Soviet law enforcement and the values of hardworking rural people would prove problematic during the final approval process.⁹²²

⁹²⁰ See the original concept for the script: HAA 1381/9/265 (no later than February 26, 1965): 3-6.

⁹²¹ Henrik Malyan, *Menk' enk', mer sarerë* (Hayfilm, 1969), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaoCu_KIUvY.

⁹²² See also Armenian film historian Siranush Galstyan's analysis of the film. Siranush Galstyan, *Cinema of Armenia: An Overview* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, Inc, 2016), 84-89.

As discussed above, Matevosyan attempted unsuccessfully to publish *We of the Mountains* for several years. Marginalized in the Armenian literary community, Matevosyan decided to try to pivot to film. In February of 1965, he signed a contract with the Armenian studio Hayfilm (Rus: Armenfilm) to write a screenplay based on the as-yet-unpublished novella.⁹²³ Over the summer of 1965, Matevosyan secured the publication of a Russian translations of the novella in *Literaturnaia Armeniia* and submitted the first draft of the screenplay to Hayfilm.⁹²⁴ He continued to work on the screenplay while attending the Higher Screenwriting Courses in Moscow starting in the fall of 1965, submitting a second draft in December of that year. The process of approving the draft was hindered, however, by the lack of a director.⁹²⁵ The problem seemed to be solved when the director Henrik Malyan, who played an important role in the resurgence of Armenian cinema that began in the second half of the 1960s, became interested in the screenplay.⁹²⁶ Even with Malyan attached to the project, however, Hayfilm continued to stall. Malyan would have to wait two years for final approval on the script, however.⁹²⁷ From Moscow, Matevosyan managed to attract interest in the screenplay from Mosfilm, and the threat of a Moscow film crew encroaching on their turf finally spurred Hayfilm into action.⁹²⁸ In March of 1968, the script for *We of the Mountains* quickly advanced through the approval process at Hayfilm.⁹²⁹

⁹²³ HAA 1381/9/265 (February 23, 1965): 1-2 (contract), 3-6 (summary of proposed film).

⁹²⁴ HAA 1381/9/265 (August 25, 1965): 7-10.

⁹²⁵ HAA 1381/9/265 (December 6, 1965): 11-12.

⁹²⁶ On Malyan, Siranush Galstyan, *Cinema of Armenia*, 80-89; P. Rollberg, *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Historical Dictionaries of Literature and the Arts ; No. 30 (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 58, 429-430.

⁹²⁷ Ashot Adamyan and Davit' Mat'evosyan, *Menk' enk'...*, Documentary film, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW7CkvSwpc0>.

⁹²⁸ *Menk' enk'...*; Davit' Mat'evosyan, Interview with the author, April 28, 2017.

⁹²⁹ See HAA 1381/9/265 (March 1, 1968): 16-18; HAA 1381/9/265 (March 19, 1968): 21-32; HAA 1381/9/265 (March 25, 1968): 19-20.

Appealing to familiar Soviet anti-bureaucratic discourse, Hayfilm's artistic council argued in their decision to approve the script that it struck a blow against heartless bureaucratic legalism.⁹³⁰ The USSR Committee on Cinema (Goskino) was less sure of the ideological solidity of the script. In their review of the script in May of 1968, Goskino praised its portrayal of the peasants' sense of justice and their inability to understand the formal-bureaucratic point of view. They objected, however, to the sharp contrast between the shepherds' mentality and the urban point of view represented by the lieutenant. "The division of people into 'urban' and 'rural' residents, living by different moral laws, is not only artificial and naive, but also deeply socially inaccurate," they claimed. Goskino also objected to the undignified portrayal of the shepherds' trial for theft: "In the script, the judge, procurator, and defense lawyer are shown as no less eccentric than the 'accused,' which suddenly gives the whole story the air of a buffoonish slapstick comedy [*neozhidanno pridalo kharakter glupovatogo balagana vsei istorii*]." Goskino approved the text on the condition that their counterparts in the Armenian republican Goskino ensure that the necessary changes were made to the script. In the final version of the film, the trial scene was transformed into a mock trial in the mountains, where the shepherds ultimately turn the tables on the lieutenant and put him on trial. The fate of the shepherds was left ambiguous however—in the final scene they are shown herding their sheep to the slaughterhouse on their way to the trial.⁹³¹

Upon the conclusion of filming in November of 1969, Hayfilm's artistic council presented it to the republican Goskino with a statement that evoked the recent debate about rural and urban literature in which Matevosyan had participated. The artistic council argued that the film

⁹³⁰ HAA 1381/9/265 (March 25, 1968): 20.

⁹³¹ Davit Matevosyan argues that the slaughterhouse is a metaphor for their fate. Davit' Mat'evosyan, Interview with the author, April 28, 2017.

was both modern and “deeply national in its essence.” While it may seem at first glance that the rural characters live “in isolation from civilization,” in fact “the main characters of the film are peasants who are in no way detached from the ‘larger world.’”⁹³² Despite Hayfilm’s efforts to frame the film in the most positive possible light, the filmmakers were nevertheless tense when it came time to screen the final version of *We of the Mountains* for the Armenian Central Committee, fearing that the film would never see the light of day. Luckily for them, the Armenian first Party secretary, Anton Kochinyan, was more favorably disposed towards Matevosyan than his predecessor Zarobyan. According to Matevosyan’s son Davit, Kochinyan sought to protect the film by keeping the second Party secretary a safe distance away from it.⁹³³ Gevorg Hayryan, the president of the republican Goskino, made sure to schedule the film screening during a time when the most orthodox, hardline member of the Central Committee would be out of town. At the screening, the members of the Committee watched in silence. After the film was over, Kochinyan reportedly congratulated the filmmakers and declared it a great film. With Kochinyan’s support, the film was approved.⁹³⁴ As in the RSFSR, where Russian Village Prose had critics as well as supporters among the political elite, there were members of the Armenian Central Committee who did not agree with the policy of inclusion towards nationally-minded intellectuals.⁹³⁵ Nevertheless, the support of highly-placed officials like Kochinyan and Hayryan allowed the film to be released.

⁹³² HAA 1381/9/265 (November 24, 1969): 40-41.

⁹³³ Davit‘ Mat‘evosyan, interview with the author, April 28, 2017.

⁹³⁴ Verzhine Movsisyan and Hrant Matevosyan, interviewed in *Menk‘ enk‘ ...*

⁹³⁵ See Brudny’s discussion of Aleksandr Yakovlev’s attack on Russian nationalists from his position as deputy head of the Department of Propaganda. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 94-102.

In a reversal of Matevosyan's earlier experiences publishing in Moscow, it was the all-Union bodies who threw up roadblocks for his film. In December of 1969, USSR Goskino accepted *We of the Mountains* for distribution.⁹³⁶ Like all films, it received a rating from Goskino for "ideological-artistic quality" that determined the number of copies printed. *We of the Mountains* was given a level three rating out of a possible four, meaning that it was shown exclusively in Armenia and remote districts of the USSR. As Kristin Roth-Ey explains, "Limiting distribution practically guaranteed limited audiences; the regime employed this strategy for controversial works throughout the postwar period."⁹³⁷ *We of the Mountains* nevertheless went on to become one of the most beloved films in the Armenian cinematic canon. The film reached 1.8 million Soviet viewers in theaters and attracted the largest audiences of any film in the republic's theaters in the period from 1970 to 1974. It was second in the overall Armenian box office statistics for the 1960s through the 1980s.⁹³⁸ The director Henrik Malyan received an Armenian State Prize in 1975 for *We of the Mountains* and his films *Triangle* (1967, Arm: *Erankyuni*, Rus: *Treugol'nik*) and *Father* (1973, Arm: *Hayrik*, Rus: *Airik*).⁹³⁹

Much as Goskino's bureaucrats had feared when they reviewed the script for *We of the Mountains*, many have indeed interpreted the film as setting up a dichotomy between urban and rural people. According to Armenian film historian Siranush Galustyan, many contemporary crit-

⁹³⁶ HAA 1381/9/265 (December 18, 1969): 42.

⁹³⁷ *Menk' enk' ...*; Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire That Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 50-52.

⁹³⁸ Statistics drawn from *Menk' enk' ...* and "My i nashi gory," Kinopoisk, n.d., <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/my-i-nashi-gory-1969-225766/>. The highest-grossing film in the 1960s through 1980s in Armenia was Indian director Raj Kapoor's wildly popular 1951 film *Awaara* (*The Vagabond*), which is one of the top twenty films in the Soviet era in terms of overall tickets sold. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 44.

⁹³⁹ Matevosyan was included in the nomination along with 9 others who had worked on Malyan's films. See HAA 1431/5/13 (April 25-30), especially 40.

ics interpreted the film's main conflict as a "confrontation between the village and the city."⁹⁴⁰ In a 1992 book, Armenian film scholar and longtime Hayfilm editor Suren Hasmikyan argued instead, "Matevosyan does not oppose the city to the village, he contrasts the people with roots to those [who] have lost their roots."⁹⁴¹ The filmmakers of a 2010 documentary on the making of *We of the Mountains* interviewed people involved in the making of the film as well as people from Matevosyan's native village of Ahnidzor about what the title of the film means to them.⁹⁴² The responses revolved around conceptions of home and a sense of personal and communal autonomy. "We are our home, we are our homeland [*hayrenik*'] [...] An outsider [*otar*] shouldn't interfere in our union, in our republic, in our family," replied one Ahnidzor resident. Matevosyan's widow Verzhine Movsisyan reflected on the idea of the "republic of shepherds" referenced in the novella. For her, this concept reflected the autonomy of rural communities and the villagers' resistance to outside interference: "We know our work well. Don't prevent us from doing our work [...*mer gortsě menk' lav gitenk': Duk' mer gortsě mi kharnvek*']." Drawing a contrast between the lieutenant, an urban representative of Soviet authority, and the independent-minded "republic of shepherds," the film implies that the latter are the ones who have a true connection to the Armenian homeland.

The fate of the film illustrates the fundamental ambivalence of the Soviet state toward rural intellectuals like Matevosyan even in republics like Armenia where the leadership pursued a policy of inclusion towards nationally-minded intellectuals. Neither Moscow nor Yerevan emerges as a true champion of Matevosyan's rural-based vision of Armenian national identity. While Moscow cultural institutions supported Matevosyan in the early stages of the screenplay,

⁹⁴⁰ Galstyan, *Cinema of Armenia*, 87.

⁹⁴¹ Hasmikyan, qtd. in Galstyan, *Cinema of Armenia*, 88.

⁹⁴² Literally translated from Armenian, the title of the film is somewhat enigmatic: *We Are Our Mountains*.

at later stages the USSR Goskino complained about serious ideological problems with his script. While Armenian republican head Kochinyan pursued a more inclusive policy towards intellectuals than his predecessor, he still had to protect the film from the more hardline members of the Armenian Central Committee. Ultimately, Matevosyan's film teetered on the edge of what was politically acceptable, only narrowly managing to stay on the right side of all-Union and Armenian authorities. In the end, despite the authorities' ambivalence, the film, along with its critique of the alienation of Soviet authorities from Armenian peasants, nevertheless secured an enduring place in Armenian culture.

Matevosyan's prose evolved over the course of the 1970s, focusing even more intently on the inner worlds of rural and recently-urbanized people. A major turning-point was his novella *Hangover* (Arm: *Khumhar*, Rus: *Pokhmel'e*) published in Armenian in 1970, which documented a former peasant's alienation from urban life.⁹⁴³ In this semi-autobiographical novella, the Armenian writer Gevorg Mnatsakanyan struggles to reconcile his memories of his hungry childhood in a postwar Armenian village with the education in contemporary cinema he is receiving at the Higher Screenwriting Courses in Moscow. Alienated by art film and the Moscow intellectual *milieu*, Matevosyan nevertheless hopes that the cultural gatekeepers will approve of his screenplay about a group of Armenian shepherds (a thinly veiled reference to Matevosyan's own screenplay for *We of the Mountains*). In a scene that recalls themes from the 1968-1970 Armenian literary debate, Mnatsakanyan's fellow classmate and would-be lover tells him that, while she likes his screenplay, "it's not possible to produce literature of the twentieth century on a country

⁹⁴³ Hrant Mat'evosyan, "Khumhar," *Sovetakan grakanut'yun*, no. 9 (1970): 12–68. Translated into English as Grant Matevosian, "The Morning After," in *The Warmest Country: Stories by Armenian Writers*, trans. Linda Noble (Moscow: Raguda Publishers, 1991), 191–287. Translated into Russian as Grant Matevosian, "Pokhmel'e," trans. Anait Baiandur, *Literaturnaiia Armeniia*, no. 9, 10 (1973): 6-45, 12–50.

theme.”⁹⁴⁴ The story concludes without a clear resolution to Mnatsakanyan’s internal conflict. Over the course of the 1970s, Matevosyan dived even deeper into the psyches of his rural characters in works like 1972’s *Autumn Sun* (Arm: *Erkri jighě*, later *Ashnan arev*, Rus: *Mat’ idět zhenit’ syna*), which captured the inner life of Aghun, a sharp-tongued, strong-willed village woman coming to terms with her own difficult past as well as her son’s impending marriage to an urban bride.⁹⁴⁵ Unlike *Hangover*, *Autumn Sun* seemed to suggest that the chasm between urban and rural could possibly be bridged.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, in contrast to the early 1960s, the Armenian political leadership was more tolerant in its dealings with the cultural intelligentsia and more favorable towards Matevosyan personally. Matevosyan and Kochinyan even became friends after the latter’s retirement from the position of first secretary in 1975. Kochinyan’s successor Karen Demirchyan, while not as cordial with Matevosyan as Kochinyan, did not seek out confrontation.⁹⁴⁶ Under these conditions, Matevosyan could be relatively certain that his works would see the light of day in his native republic. Meanwhile, he continued to enjoy a positive relationship with the all-Union journal *Druzhba narodov*. Matevosyan also continued to benefit from the similarities between his work and Russian Village Prose. Moscow-based literary critics like Igor’ Dedkov and the *Druzhba narodov* staffers Lev Anninskii and Leonid Terakopian published positive analyses of his work in which they compared him with the Russian Village Prose writers Vasilii Belov and Viktor Astaf’ev, as well as non-Russian writers like Ion Druță.⁹⁴⁷ His improved position notwith-

⁹⁴⁴ Matevosian, “The Morning After,” 256.

⁹⁴⁵ Hrant Mat’evosyan, “Erkri jighě,” *Sovetakan grakanut’yun*, no. 1 (1972): 10–63. Translated in Grant Matevosian, “A Mother Sets Out to Marry Off Her Son,” in *The Orange Herd* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 210–308.

⁹⁴⁶ Davit’ Mat’evosyan, interview with the author, April 28, 2017.

⁹⁴⁷ See, for example, Lev Anninskii, “Oblomki raia: Mir Granta Matevosiana,” in *Kontakty* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1982), 195; Igor’ Dedkov, “Novosti iz Tsmakuta,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 15, 1975; Leonid Tera-

standing, Matevosyan still felt himself to be on the margins of the Armenian literary world. His rival Petrosyan had become head of the Armenian Writers' Union in 1975. Terakopian later recalled that, although he considered Petrosyan to be "a good leader of an eternally boiling, roiling, community of writers," from Matevosyan's perspective, Petrosyan was "fortune's favorite, the darling of the republican leadership."⁹⁴⁸ Matevosyan could not forget his treatment by Armenian literary and political authorities in his early years, nor Stepan Topchyan's harsh attacks on his works. And he continued to experience frustrations with publication. His second collection of novellas and short stories, *Trees* (Arm: *Tsarere*) only appeared in 1978.⁹⁴⁹ According to Matevosyan's son Davit, the local censors slowed the publication of his books, and *Trees* only appeared because the literature editor of the *Hayastan* publishing house, Mushegh Galshoyan, shepherded it through to publication.⁹⁵⁰ Despite the politics of inclusion toward national intellectuals in Armenia, Matevosyan's acceptance into the Armenian literary world remained partial.

Support from all-Union cultural elites continued to be an important factor in securing that acceptance. Matevosyan only received an Armenian State Prize in 1983, and not in the literature category, but in the theater category for his play "Our Corner of a Big World," which was staged at the Yerevan Dramatic Theater in 1982.⁹⁵¹ According to Davit Matevosyan, the rather peculiar decision to give Matevosyan a State Prize in theater came about because the Armenian Committee had to rush to give Matevosyan a State Prize in 1983 because his allies in Moscow were al-

kopian, *Pafos preobrazovaniia: tema derevni v proze 50 - 70-kh godov*, 2nd ed. (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura 1978), 318-326.

⁹⁴⁸ Leonid Terakopian, "Doroga k Grantu," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 3 (2007): 215.

⁹⁴⁹ Hrant Mat'evosyan, *Tsarere* (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1978).

⁹⁵⁰ Davit' Mat'evosyan, Interview with the author, April 28, 2017. See Galoshyan's entry in Hayk Khach'atryan, ed., *Grakan teghekatu* (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh Hratarakch'ut'yun, 1975), 135-136.

⁹⁵¹ HAA 1431/4/4 (November 16, 1983): 8.

ready undertaking preparations to secure him a USSR State Prize. Also somewhat unusual was the fact that, unlike most of the literature nominees that year, Matevosyan was not nominated by the Writers' Union, but rather by several divisions of Yerevan State University and two factories.⁹⁵² During the brief discussion of candidates at the final meeting of the Armenian State Prize Committee, the theater scholar Ruben Zaryan announced that Matevosyan was long overdue for a prize.⁹⁵³ Matevosyan won with thirty-eight votes in favor and two against.⁹⁵⁴

The next year, Matevosyan's Russian-language collection *Your Kind* (Rus: *Tvoi rod*) was nominated for a USSR State Prize by his publisher, *Molodaia gvardiia*, as well as the journal *Druzhiba narodov*. Although a few in the literature section were not familiar with his work, he received strong support from many of the Russian and non-Russian writers in the section, including Oles' Honchar.⁹⁵⁵ The speech of Vadim Kozhevnikov, the head of the literature section, on Matevosyan's candidacy at the plenary meeting of the USSR State Prize Committee in October of 1984 suggests some of the reasons for the support he received on the all-Union level: "We have noted the brilliant assemblage of Russian master-writers—Rasputin, Astaf'ev, Belov, who have dared to create a new phenomenon in literature dedicated to the village. We considered this to be a Russian phenomenon [...]. It is very interesting that the work of Matevosyan, possessing all the particular literary qualities that these writers possess, insightfully explores this theme [...]." He concluded, "We cannot but be glad that the processes that are taking place in Russian literature have a typical manifestation in our national literatures."⁹⁵⁶ Matevosyan thus appears

⁹⁵² See nominations in HAA 1431/4/5 (1983).

⁹⁵³ HAA 1431/4/4 (November 16, 1983): 17.

⁹⁵⁴ HAA 1431/4/4 (November 16, 1983): 22.

⁹⁵⁵ RGALI 2916/4/264 (March 29, 1984): 5-6; RGALI 2916/4/275 (October 11, 1984): 3.

⁹⁵⁶ RGALI 2916/4/273 (October 16, 1984): 12.

here as a beneficiary of the center's politics of inclusion towards Russian Village Prose writers, many of whom had received USSR State Prizes in previous years. His victory was also the fruit of many years of support that he had received from the staff at the publisher *Molodaia gvardiia* and at the journal *Druzhba narodov*, who as we have seen, also appreciated the connections between his work and the Village Prose writers'. "We celebrated the State Prize awarded to [Matevosyan] as our own journal's victory," recalled *Druzhba narodov*'s deputy editor Terakopian.⁹⁵⁷ Matevosyan's State Prizes were the results of both the politics of inclusion towards Armenian writers in Armenia, as well as the Russian politics of inclusion, which had raised the profile of writing about the village among the Moscow cultural elite.

Examining the cultural politics of the nation in Armenia through the lens of the career of Hrant Matevosyan provides a somewhat different picture than what we have seen in the (rather meager literature) on the period. First, although the Armenians are considered a relatively "old" nation by Soviet standards, Armenian identity was still very much under construction in the 1960s and 1970s. As we have seen in the 1968-1970 debate over rural and urban literature, the very nature of the Armenian nation itself was up for debate. Could an Armenian character be both national and modern? Were urban settings less national than rural settings? What was the place of the Armenian peasant in the rapidly urbanizing Armenian nation? These were questions that concerned the leading intellectuals of the period, and the politics of inclusion ensured a variety of answers. Second, although recent scholarship has reminded us that "the Soviet" and "the national" did not need to be in conflict, Matevosyan's case underscores the deep ambivalence about the relationship between the two that existed, even in mainstream Soviet cultural produc-

⁹⁵⁷ Terakopian, "Doroga k Grantu," 217.

tion.⁹⁵⁸ As a member of the Armenian Writers' Union, Matevosyan was far from a dissident nationalist, but his works in the 1960s and 1970s nevertheless often came very close to suggesting that Armenian peasants were inherently at odds with representatives of Soviet authority. While some Armenians in the USSR may very well have identified with the "local, apricot-colored interpretation of the Soviet project," others had their doubts.⁹⁵⁹

Ion Druță and the Moldovan Politics of Exclusion

As in Ukraine, authorities in Moldova adopted an exclusionary policy towards nationally-minded writers during the Brezhnev era. In fact, as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 4, the Moldovan leadership adopted a politics of exclusion towards nationally-minded writers very early, before Brezhnev's rise to power. Unlike Ukraine, where Petro Shelest pursued a tolerant policy toward the Ukrainian cultural revival in the early to mid-1960s, Moldovan cultural politics were never particularly inclusionary, even during the Thaw. The politics of exclusion intensified with the appointment of Bodiul, a Brezhnev ally, as first Party secretary in 1961.⁹⁶⁰ Bodiul developed a particularly antagonistic relationship with the Moldovan writer Ion Druță dating back to his earliest days as first secretary. Druță's positive depictions of rural life and traditions struck a nerve in a republic where collectivization was a recent memory. Ever the *enfant terrible*, Druță could not seem to resist antagonizing the Moldovan authorities. As we have seen, Druță ultimately left Moldova for Moscow in 1965 after Bodiul condemned his statements at the Third Con-

⁹⁵⁸ See Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism;" Ronald Grigor Suny, "The Contradictions of Identity: Being Soviet and National in the USSR and After," in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17–36.

⁹⁵⁹ Lehmann, "Apricot Socialism," 30.

⁹⁶⁰ See Chapter 2; Igor Cașu, "*Politica națională*" în *Moldova Sovietică (1944-1989)* (Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2000), 62; Ruslan Șevcenko, *Viața politică în R.S.S. Moldovenească (1944-1961)* (Chișinău: Pontos, 2007), 65.

gress of the Union of Writers of Moldova in favor of using the Latin alphabet for the Moldovan language (see Chapter 4).

However, in 1967, the Moldovan leadership attempted a *rapprochement* with Druță, allowing him to win the 1967 Moldovan State Prize for Literature. This brief thaw in relations between Druță and the Moldovan Party officials was short-lived, however. After the publication of Druță's 1968 novel *Burden of Our Kindness* (Mold/Rom: *Povara bunătății noastre*, Rus: *Bremia nashei dobroty*), the Moldovan leadership all but declared war on Druță. This time, it was the depiction of the relationship between the Moldovan peasantry and Soviet authorities that provoked Chișinău's outrage. In the novel, Druță portrayed life in a Moldovan village during the early years of Soviet rule, when rural areas experienced a devastating famine. Druță depicted Soviet authorities hoarding grain while peasants starved. A complicating factor for Bodiul and the Moldovan Party was the fact that, like Hrant Matevosyan, Druță enjoyed strong support among the Moscow literary elite. The conflict between Chișinău and Moscow cultural institutions over Druță showed that, in contrast to the anti-Honchar Party officials in Ukraine, the Moldovan republican authorities struggled to exercise power over cultural elites in Moscow. In Moscow, Druță's novel about postwar Moldovan peasants found support in part because he touched on similar themes as the Russian Village Prose writers, who benefitted from a politics of inclusion from the regime. A showdown between Moldovan political elites and Moscow cultural elites occurred when the Moscow-based journal *Druzhba narodov* nominated Druță for the USSR State Prize, one of the country's top literary prizes. In a Pyrrhic victory, Chișinău managed to block Druță from winning the prize, but their actions convinced many intellectuals that the Moldovan leadership was hostile to Moldovan culture as a whole. *Burden of Our Kindness* ignited a war between the author and Moldovan authorities that would rage for over a decade. Several other

prominent members of the Moldovan creative intelligentsia, including the film director Emil Loteanu and the stage director Ion Ungureanu saw the writing on the wall in the late 1960s and followed Druță to Moscow.⁹⁶¹ As the Moldovan politics of exclusion deepened over the course of the 1970s, Druță continued to promote a rural-based version of Moldovan culture and identity from Moscow. Over the course of the 1970s, he continued to depict the Moldovan peasantry and Soviet authorities as being at odds.

Despite his rocky relationship with the Moldovan Party leadership, Druță continued to forge new creative paths in the second half of the 1960s. In 1965, Druță made his first foray into film, writing the screenplay for Moldova Film studio's adaptation of his 1964 story "The Last Month of Autumn."⁹⁶² The lyrical film told the story of an old Moldovan peasant touring the republic to visit his four grown sons who now live far from home.⁹⁶³ The Russian director, Vadim Derbenëv, a graduate of the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (*Vsesoiuznyi gosudarstvennyi institut kinematografii*, or VGIK) known for his previous work as a cinematographer, included many lovingly shot rural landscapes. The film received favorable reviews in *Pravda*, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, and the Russian-language Moldovan newspaper *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*; *Pravda* particularly praised Druță, Derbenëv, and the actor Evgenii Lebedev for the heartfelt depiction of the old peasant.⁹⁶⁴ The film largely avoided overtly political themes, but did feature one scene in which the old man met an old woman who had been deported to Siberia as a kulak. "Having buried everyone near to her in a strange land, having lost her hearing and ability to

⁹⁶¹ Cașu, "Politica națională" în *Moldova Sovietică*, 68-69.

⁹⁶² Ion Druță, "Poslednii mesiats oseni," *Novyi mir*, no. 4 (1964): 68-98.

⁹⁶³ Vadim Derbenëv, *Poslednii mesiats oseni* (Moldova Film, 1965), <https://youtu.be/sYmxGGISMss>.

⁹⁶⁴ Z. Bogdanova, "Dobrota chelovechnosti," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 23, 1965; R. Iurenev, "'Poslednii mesiats oseni,'" *Pravda*, November 30, 1965; V. Shirokii, "'Poslednii mesiats oseni,'" *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, October 1, 1965.

speak, she returned the same indefatigable hard worker that she was when she left,” the narrator informs the audience. This sympathetic portrayal of a peasant victim of collectivization prefigured Druță’s later decision to depict the 1946-1947 famine.

The Last Month of Autumn was one of several films produced by Moldova Film in the mid-1960s that dealt with rural and national themes. Valeriu Gagiu’s 1966 film *Bitter Grain* (also known as *A Taste of Bread*, Rus: *Gor’kie zerna*, Mold/Rom: *Gustul pâinii*) depicted the postwar famine and the challenges of the Sovietization of Moldova, while Emil Loteanu’s film from the same year, *Red Meadows* (Mold/Rom: *Poienile roșii*, Rus: *Krasnye poliany*), was a love story set among shepherds in the present-day Moldovan countryside.⁹⁶⁵ Like Derbenëv, the directors of both films had studied at VGIK. *The Last Month of Autumn* was thus part of a modest flourishing of Moldovan national cinema, driven largely by a younger generation of filmmakers who, like Druță himself, had studied in Moscow.

In 1966, the Moldovan Writers’ Union voted to nominate a collection of Druță’s most significant works for the very first State Prize of the Moldovan SSR.⁹⁶⁶ The new award was to be the republic’s highest honor for creators of literature, music, and art. The overwhelming support that Druță received from the Moldovan writers in 1966 suggested that the bitter divisions between the writers from territory annexed by Romania during the interwar period (Bessarabia) and the writers from Moldovan Autonomous SSR (MASSR), so intense in the first postwar decades, had decreased in importance as a new post-Stalinist generation came of age. As Moldovan historian Igor Cașu notes, the “Transnistrian camp” from MASSR that had once opposed Druță had

⁹⁶⁵ See Peter Rollberg, “Moldova-Film Studio,” in *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 462–64. Gagiu said in a 2007 interview that he based *Bitter Grain* on what he had witnessed visiting his grandmother’s village in 1946-7. See Dmitrii Sidorov, “‘Gor’kie zerna’: 40 let spustia,” *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, March 23, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130126030227/http://www.nm.md/daily/article/2007/03/23/0401.html>.

⁹⁶⁶ Ion Druță, *Piept la piept* (Chișinău: Cartea Moldovenească, 1964).

gradually lost their cultural hegemony as a result of the Thaw.⁹⁶⁷ In their discussion of the nomination, the Moldovan writers referenced Druță's popularity and influence inside and outside of the Moldovan republic, as well as the national character of his work and the lyrical nature of his prose.⁹⁶⁸ A joint meeting held by the Moldovan Union of Writers and the Moldovan-language journal *Nistru* on Druță's nomination showed the deep support he enjoyed among the Moldovan literary community. Vlad Ioviță, an employee of Moldova Film and a recent graduate of the Higher Screenwriting Courses in Moscow, spoke powerfully about Druță's influence on Moldovan literature. Recalling the "disgraceful" state of Moldovan literature in 1954, Ioviță said that when he read Druță's work for the first time in 1954 it "was like an explosion, like a light, like a wake-up call [*deșteptare*]." Speaking about Druță's 1961 play *Casa mare* (see Chapter 2), Ioviță said that the play strengthened their pride in Moldovan literature, and with that "we grew wings." Ioviță concluded his speech by asserting that granting the State Prize to any other author would devalue the prize itself.⁹⁶⁹ Grigore Vieru, the leading Moldovan poet of the post-Stalin generation, made an explicit connection between Druță's peasant characters and the nation. In his mind, Druță's work not only raised the literary level of Moldovan prose, but also powerfully illustrated that "the peasant is a root that keeps the nation alive."⁹⁷⁰ The writers' discussion shows that Druță's work not only had tremendous significance not only for Soviet Moldovan literature, but also cemented the connection between the Moldovan peasant and the nation.

⁹⁶⁷ Igor Cașu, "'The Quiet Revolution': Revisiting the National Identity Issue in Soviet Moldavia at the Height of Khrushchev's Thaw (1956)," *Euxeinos: Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region* 15/16 (2014): 90. Vladimir Beșleagă, a Moldovan writer from the former MASSR territory of Transnistria, said that postwar conflicts between MASSR and Bessarabian writers had more to do with the particular historical experiences of the MASSR literary elites than their regional origins in Transnistria *per se*. Vladimir Beșleagă, interview with the author, February 14, 2017.

⁹⁶⁸ ANRM R-2756/1/6 (September 2, 1966): 1-54.

⁹⁶⁹ ANRM R-2756/1/6 (September 2, 1966): 14-16.

⁹⁷⁰ ANRM R-2756/1/6 (September 2, 1966): 20.

At the plenary meeting of the MSSR State Prize Committee, however, Druță's nomination in the literature category ran into trouble. Although the Writers' Union had nominated *Chest to Chest* (Mold/Rom: *Piept la piept*), a collection that included Druță's major works, the Committee had decided earlier in the year that the collection was too old to be considered.⁹⁷¹ The announcement of Druță's nomination in the newspaper ultimately included only a few of his recent short stories. The exclusion of major works like *Casa mare* and *Steppe Ballads* from Druță's nomination prompted an outcry in the republican press and elicited a complaint from Druță himself.⁹⁷² On October 4, specialists in the areas of literature, visual art, music, and film met in separate sections to discuss the nominees and make recommendations to the broader Committee. During the meeting of the literature section, the prominent poet Andrei Lupan, Druță's longtime patron, proposed expanding Druță's nomination to include *Casa mare* and *Steppe Ballads*. The proposal was unanimously accepted.⁹⁷³ Later in the day, at the plenary meeting of the Committee, several members of the other sections objected to the last-minute change. Ultimately, the Committee voted to push Druță's candidacy to the next year and the 1966 literature prize was awarded to Emilian Bucov, a Bessarabian poet who was considered the "patriarch" of Moldovan socialist realism.⁹⁷⁴ Druță's exclusion from the 1966 MSSR State Prize on a technicality was clearly a disappointment to many members of the Moldovan literary intelligentsia.

In 1967, Druță was nominated once more for the MSSR State Prize for literature, this time for the works *The Last Month of Autumn*, *Steppe Ballads*, "and others." He won (along with

⁹⁷¹ Druță was also initially included in the nomination for *The Last Month of Autumn* in the film category as the film's screenwriter, but the rules did not allow a person to be nominated in multiple categories. ANRM R-2756/1/3 (June 25, 1966): 5-27.

⁹⁷² ANRM R-2756/1/4 (October 4, 1966): 17, 58.

⁹⁷³ ANRM R-2756/1/11 (October 4, 1966): 7.

⁹⁷⁴ ANRM R-2756/1/4 (October 4, 1966): 17-28, 56-57. On Bucov, see Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres*, 272-74.

his mentor Andrei Lupan) by a unanimous vote of the Committee.⁹⁷⁵ His unanimous victory suggests that, in addition to the strong support of the Moldovan creative intelligentsia, Druță's candidacy for the State Prize enjoyed the tacit support of the Moldovan political authorities in 1967. Had the Moldovan Party reconsidered its policy of exclusion towards nationally-minded intellectuals like Druță? Perhaps. Druță himself suggested that the popularity of his works outside Moldova, along with the support of Moscow elites like Khrushchev's son-in-law Aleksei Adzhubei, explained Chisinau's softening its stance towards him in 1967. "It seemed that a little understanding was emerging," Druță wrote in his memoir. However, "it was not meant to be, because at the same time as they were awarding me the State Prize at the Pushkin Theater in Chisinau, they were preparing *Burden of Our Kindness* at the publisher of the newspaper *Izvestiia* in Moscow."⁹⁷⁶ Druță's next work, which criticized the Soviet government's response to the deadly 1946-1947 famine during Moldova's postwar Sovietization, would inspire the Moldovan authorities to pivot back to a "politics of exclusion."

The 1946-1947 famine, which primarily affected the RSFSR, Ukraine and Moldova, struck the Moldovan peasantry particularly hard. It is difficult to know with certainty the number of famine deaths as Soviet authorities sought to hide the true extent of the casualties.⁹⁷⁷ Economist Michael Ellman has estimated that there were between 1 and 1.5 million excess deaths across the USSR as a result of the famine. Moldova lost 5% of its population to famine, the largest percentage of any Soviet republic. According to Ellman, although the drought in 1946 led to a sharp fall in production, the Soviet government nevertheless had sufficient grain stocks in 1947

⁹⁷⁵ ANRM R-2756/1/25 (September 30, 1967): 25.

⁹⁷⁶ Ion Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii: mărturii și spovedanii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2011), 37.

⁹⁷⁷ E. Iu. Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, New York; London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 47.

and 1948 to have prevented mass starvation. Peasants bore the brunt of the famine because, unlike many urban state employees, they typically lacked entitlement to food through the rationing system.⁹⁷⁸ Ellman's analysis of the famine corresponds with what Druță describes in a passage of *Burden of Our Kindness*: "Behind the warehouses of the Pamyntenskii train station for two years great mountains of corn cobs rotted under the rain, but this corn was as far from them [the peasants] as God himself."⁹⁷⁹ Druță witnessed the famine first hand as a teenager in the village of Ghică Voda, where he was the secretary of the village soviet by virtue of being one of the most educated people in the village. In his memoir, Druță recalled scrounging for paper and running around day and night to get the appropriate stamps for the lists of the hungry that the village soviet sent to Soviet authorities to receive food aid. He argued with officials over the amount of food aid, only to find the amounts reduced because so many in the village had already died. Druță writes that the first time he held bread in his hand and slept through the night was the day he was drafted into the Soviet army.⁹⁸⁰ Druță channeled these personal experiences into *Burden of Our Kindness*, which was the first work in Soviet Moldova to suggest that the postwar famine was not caused only by drought but by the negligence of Soviet officials and their disregard for the peasant population.⁹⁸¹

Likely anticipating problems publishing the novel in Chisinau, Druță published *Burden of Our Kindness* first in the Moscow-based journal *Druzhba narodov*, as he had done with his 1961 play *Casa mare* (see Chapter 2). Early reception of the novel in Moscow reflected the ideological

⁹⁷⁸ Michael Ellman, "The 1947 Soviet Famine and the Entitlement Approach to Famines," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24, no. 5 (September 2000): 603–30.

⁹⁷⁹ Ion Druță, "Bremia nashei dobroty," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 1 (1968): 23.

⁹⁸⁰ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 9.

⁹⁸¹ Cașu, "Politica națională" în *Moldova Sovietică*, 67-8.

divisions of the late 1960s in the Soviet metropole and the lively debate taking place over the depiction of rural life in Russian literature (see Chapter 3). The liberal reviewers briefly mentioned the depiction of the famine, likely pleased with the implicit criticism of Stalinism, but were more interested Druță's attitudes towards the village more generally. In April, *Literaturnaia gazeta* published a positive review of the novel by the critic Aleksandr Borshchagovskii, a fierce defender of the liberal wing of Soviet literature.⁹⁸² Borshchagovskii observed that at times Druță's novel was "brave to the point of riskiness [*smelom do riskovannosti*]," noting his discussion of sensitive topics such as the postwar famine and early armed resistance to Soviet rule. He praised the novel as *narodnyi*—close to the people.⁹⁸³ A reviewer in *Novyi mir* mentioned briefly Druță's description of how villagers had to give up their last kernel of grain to the state during the famine, but spent most of the review focusing on Druță's ambivalent attitude towards the changes taking place in rural life.⁹⁸⁴ The novel also received a brief positive mention in an article in *Pravda* by the prominent Russian nationalist critic Vladimir Chalmaev.⁹⁸⁵ Chalmaev's journal *Molodaia gvardiia* was associated with Russian Village Prose. Borshchagovskii's review provoked a response from the ideologically orthodox camp in the form of a critical review by Vasiliu Ivanov. Ivanov glossed over Druță's depiction of the famine in Moldova, mentioning only briefly the problems caused by "drought." What Ivanov did object to was the development of the character of Mircea, a Red Army veteran who rises through the ranks of the collective farm admin-

⁹⁸² In the late 1940s, Borshchagovskii was one of the main targets of the campaign against "unpatriotic theater critics," the opening salvo of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. See Viacheslav Ogryzko, "Pishu bes oslobleniia: Aleksandr Borshchagovskii," in *A sud'i kto?!: Russkie kritiki i literaturovedy XX veka: Sud'by i knigi* (Moskva: Literaturnaia Rossiia, 2016), 399–417.

⁹⁸³ Aleksandr Borshchagovskii, "Zavershenie zamysla: Zametki o romane Iona Drutse," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, April 17, 1968.

⁹⁸⁴ L. Antopol'skii, "Borozda Onakiia Karabusha," *Novyi mir*, no. 7 (1968): 242–46.

⁹⁸⁵ V. Chalmaev, "Traditsii i sovremennost'," *Pravda*, August 7, 1968. On Chalmaev's controversial articles in *Molodaia gvardiia*, see Chapter 3.

istration and “seemingly automatically” begins to lose touch with his fellow villagers.⁹⁸⁶ Much like the critics of Matevosyan’s *We of the Mountains*, Ivanov was concerned that the author portrayed Soviet authorities as alien to ordinary peasants. Overall, the novel’s critical reception in Moscow had relatively little to do with Chișinău’s concerns, reflecting rather the ongoing debates in Russian and Soviet literature.

Meanwhile, in Moldova, Emilian Bucov, now the head editor of the Moldovan journal *Nistru*, asked Druță for the Moldovan version of *Burden of Our Kindness* and, according to Druță’s memoir, quickly published it before anyone in the republic had had the chance to read the Russian-language version in *Druzhiba narodov*.⁹⁸⁷ Druță claims that when Bodiul finally read the novel, he immediately dragged Bucov before the Central Committee to explain himself.⁹⁸⁸ In contrast with the novel’s critical reception in Moscow, Moldovan criticism generally focused on Druță’s groundbreaking depiction of the famine. The one major exception was a review of the novel by literary critic Mihai Cimpoi, which appeared in October in *Zorile Bucovinei*, a Moldovan-language newspaper published in the city of Chernivtsi (Rom/Mold: Cernăuți) in the Ukrainian SSR.⁹⁸⁹ The review, which analyzed only Druță’s literary techniques and barely touched on the plot, could hardly have satisfied the Moldovan Party leadership—which may explain why it appeared in a newspaper in Ukraine.⁹⁹⁰ In November a more critical review by Vasile Coroban appeared in *Moldova socialistă*, the republic’s main Moldovan-language newspaper. While the reviewer was effusive in his praise for the literary merits of the novel, and even gave Druță credit

⁹⁸⁶ V. Ivanov, “Fakty zhizni i khudozhestvennoe obobshchenie,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 29, 1968.

⁹⁸⁷ Ion Druță, “Povara bunătății noastre,” *Nistru*, no. 4, 5 (1968): 3–58, 18–78.

⁹⁸⁸ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 37.

⁹⁸⁹ Cimpoi went on to become the republic’s leading literary critic.

⁹⁹⁰ Mihai Cimpoi, “Sensul dialogului,” *Zorile Bucovinei*, October 5, 1968.

for his evocative descriptions of the famine, he accused Druță of deviating from a truly “historical perspective” on the postwar years. “Describing the realities of life [*realitatea*] in the Moldovan village in the last two decades, Druță concentrates more attention on its negative aspects than on the social and technical progress [that took place] during those years,” Coroban lamented. Coroban suggested that Druță was disconnected from everyday life in the republic because he no longer lived in Moldova. He concluded, “The novel will remain in our literature as one of the great literary achievements, but not, however, as the whole truth.”⁹⁹¹ Citing Coroban’s unfavorable review, a November report to the Party bureau of the Union of Writers of Moldova referred to *Burden of Our Kindness* as “controversial” (*spornoi*).⁹⁹²

A more robust attack on the depiction of the famine in *Burden of Our Kindness* appeared in a book by the Moldovan literary critic I. P. Racul in 1969.⁹⁹³ Referencing the passage from the novel in which people on the brink of starvation are denied access to corn being stored at a train station, Racul wrote, “Druță says openly that the state was the puppet master, that it allowed corn to sit and rot for two years while people were left without [even] seed, dying of hunger.”⁹⁹⁴ Racul compared *Burden of Our Kindness* unfavorably with works on agriculture in the postwar period by Valentin Ovechkin and others (see Chapter 1), complaining that unlike those authors, Druță did not give any positive examples of characters who actively fought to improve the situation in the countryside. Racul complained that Druță depicted village- and *raion*-level leadership as indifferent to the interests of the collective farmers and did not describe the ways in which the So-

⁹⁹¹ V. Coroban, “Povara bunătații noastre,” *Moldova socialistă*, November 14, 1968. It is worth noting that this review differs significantly from Coroban’s opinions of the novel expressed in a private letter to Druță in 1980. See “Scrisorile lui Vasile Coroban” in Ion Druță, *Ora jertfirii: proză, publicistică, scrisori* (Chișinău: Ed. Cartea Moldovei, 1998), 104.

⁹⁹² AOSPRM 276/1/24 (November 26, 1968): 27-28.

⁹⁹³ I. P. Racul, *Articole și studii literare* (Chișinău: Lumina, 1969), 79-87.

viet state helped people in Moldova during the difficult postwar years.⁹⁹⁵ Indeed, Druță's prose was a much more radical critique of the Soviet state than Ovechkin's 1950s sketches. Druță dared to say that Moldovan peasants starved as a direct result of the actions of representatives of the Soviet state.

In 1969, the controversy around *Burden of Our Kindness* began to heat up, and central authorities also began to express concern about the novel's depiction of the treatment of Moldovan peasants by Soviet authorities. While Ukrainian authorities had managed to block the publication of Honchar's *Cathedral by Druzhba narodov* in 1968, Moldovan authorities struggled to exercise much control over the journal. In 1968, *Druzhba narodov* had published *Burden of Our Kindness* as a supplement for subscribers of the journal in a handsome illustrated edition with an anticipated press run of 100,000 copies.⁹⁹⁶ They also nominated it for a 1969 USSR State Prize.⁹⁹⁷ While *Druzhba narodov* promoted their author, some in the all-Union Party apparatus became concerned about Druță's depiction of the famine. In April of 1969, the all-Union Department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) sent—likely upon prompting from Chișinău—a letter to the Central Committee arguing for the removal of the novel from libraries and booksellers. Agitprop complained that Druță's novel obscured the true causes of the famine—which they attributed to the aftermath of the Romanian occupation—and instead portrayed entire Moldovan villages perishing as a result of overzealous grain requisitioning on the part of Soviet

⁹⁹⁴ Racul, *Articole și studii literare*, 81.

⁹⁹⁵ Racul, *Articole și studii literare*, 82-84.

⁹⁹⁶ Ion Panteleevich Druță, *Bremia nashei dobroty*, Biblioteka "Piat' desiat let sovetskogo romana." Pril. k zhurn. "Druzhba narodov" (Moskva: Izvestiia, 1968).

⁹⁹⁷ *Druzhba narodov*'s nomination emphasized Druță's acute social and psychological analysis of the life of the Moldovan peasantry during a complicated time. RGALI 2916/2/515 (December 13, 1968): 113-115.

authorities.⁹⁹⁸ They accused Druță of ignoring Soviet aid to famine-stricken Moldova and the positive transformations that took place in rural Moldova. Echoing Ivanov's negative review in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the letter stated that Druță portrayed collective farm leadership and Red Army officers as alien and distant from the people.⁹⁹⁹ According to Druță, Agitprop's intervention meant that fewer copies were published, and Moscow booksellers had to tell their customers that Druță was a partially banned author.¹⁰⁰⁰

The controversy over Druță's depiction of the famine in Moldova did not come up at the meeting of the literature section of the USSR State Prize, however, when the writers on the committee convened in Moscow for the first round of discussion of the year's candidates in April of 1969. Druță received strong support from the members of the literature section who spoke at the April meeting, several of whom compared him favorably to Viktor Astaf'ev and Fëdor Abramov, two Russian Village Prose writers who were also nominated that year. The Ukrainian writer Oles' Honchar called *Burden of Our Kindness* "one of the biggest events in our literary prose," adding, "it's simply amazing that in a short book he managed to say so much about his people."¹⁰⁰¹ The Russian poet and literary functionary Nikolai Tikhonov observed that Moldovan literature had not had any luck in the State Prize competition, and neither had Druță. He noted that *The Last Month of Autumn* had been nominated in the film category the previous year but

⁹⁹⁸ As the Agitprop bureaucrats may have known, the 1946-1947 famine had also affected areas that had not been occupied during the Second World War.

⁹⁹⁹ "Ob oshibke izdatel'stva 'Izvestiia' i zhurnala 'Druzhba narodov,'" in Ion Druță, *Ora jertfirii: proză, publicistică, scrisori* (Chișinău: Ed. Cartea Moldovei, 1998), 70-72.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețurii*, 39-40. While it is unclear how many copies of this edition were ultimately published, it is currently held by many research libraries in the U.S., Russia, and Moldova.

¹⁰⁰¹ On Honchar, see Chapter 4.

had unfortunately fallen off the list at the last minute.¹⁰⁰² In 1969 Druță would prove himself to be luckless once more. Druță's bid for the 1969 prize appears to have been scuttled by the concerns raised by the Moldovan Party and the bureaucrats of Agitprop. Four days after the literature section voted to advance Druță's candidacy to the next round, Druță wrote a letter to the State Prize Committee pulling his book from the competition. "In connection with the fact that during the republication of the novel *Burden of Our Kindness* there arose the necessity to correct the emphasis of the novel in certain places [*utochnit' otdelnye aktsenty*], I ask you to delay the discussion of my novel to next year."¹⁰⁰³ After Druță's withdrawal from the 1969 competition, the Russian poet Nikolai Gribachëv complained that they no longer had a satisfactory candidate from among the prose writers: "They bumped a candidate to the next year to whom we immediately would have said yes. That was Druță."¹⁰⁰⁴ Ironically, Gribachëv made this comment after vehemently rejected the candidacy of another author, Fëdor Abramov, because he considered his portrayal of life in a postwar Russian village to be too negative. Gribachëv's contradictory positions on Druță and Abramov illustrate how hot-button issues in one republic could appear perfectly benign to writers from another.

Druță was nominated again for the 1970 State Prize after his book was republished a second time in Russian. In 1969, the publishing house *Molodaia gvardiia* published a second standalone edition of *Burden of Our Kindness* in Russian.¹⁰⁰⁵ The publisher, known for their sup-

¹⁰⁰² RGALI 2916/2/415 (April 21, 1969): 72-77, Honchar quotation from 75, Tikhonov from 77. *The Last Month of Autumn* had the strong support of many on the Lenin Prize Committee in 1968, but ultimately failed to make the final list because the majority of the Committee members deemed the year's other two film nominees (Mark Donskoi's *Heart of a Mother* and Mikhail Romm's *Ordinary Fascism*) more ideologically significant. See RGALI 2916/2/349 (October 22, 1968): 38-90; RGALI 2916/2/349 (October 24, 1968): 130-139.

¹⁰⁰³ RGALI 2916/2/515 (April 25, 1969): 116.

¹⁰⁰⁴ RGALI 2916/2/416 (October 10, 1969): 23.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ion Drutse, *Bremia nashei dobroty: roman* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1969).

port for Russian Village Prose authors, already had a relationship with Druță after publishing his earlier work *Steppe Ballads*.¹⁰⁰⁶ According to Sergei Shevelev, a member of the editorial staff of the prose division of the publisher in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Molodaia gvardiia* staffers particularly prided themselves on supporting Druță and other non-Russian authors who faced difficulties in their native republics.¹⁰⁰⁷ (As we saw in Chapter 2, the publishing house had published Matevosyan’s novella *We of the Mountains* in Russian during a time when Armenian publishers in Yerevan refused to publish it.) *Druzhba narodov* then nominated the new edition of *Burden of Our Kindness* for the 1970 USSR State Prize.¹⁰⁰⁸ During the first round of deliberations in April of 1970, Druță advanced easily to the second round by a unanimous vote.¹⁰⁰⁹ Despite the controversy around the book, support for Druță among Moscow-based cultural elites remained strong.

Over the first half of 1970, Chișinău drafted more Moldovan intellectuals into their campaign against *Burden of Our Kindness*. In January, the Moldovan poet Nicolae Costenco, rehabilitated after having spent fifteen years in the camps after the annexation of Bessarabia, published an article in *Moldova socialistă* criticizing several Soviet writers, including Aleksandr Solzheni-

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ion Drutse, *Stepnye ballady*. (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1963).

¹⁰⁰⁷ Shevelev explains: “After the social turmoil of the 1950s, Russian prose took a leap in quality. After a few years the most talented youths from the union republics joined the movement. [...] Naturally, the forces of the ‘old’ writers started to gang up on them: on Chingiz Aitmatov, on Timur Pulatov, on Ion Druță. All at once they started to gang up on many people who were simply very talented, who with their very emergence signified a new quality, a deeper view of life, and with this they pushed the ‘old-timers’ to the side of the road. [...] Moscow wavered—this phenomenon is new, don’t fight with the republics. And the prose editorial board of *Molodaia gvardiia* took a position: the aforementioned authors, to which we must also add Hrant Matevosyan, to the surprise of the local [Unions of Writers], began to put out books directly in Moscow, and not only that, but at Molodaia gvardiia—and somewhere after the second or third [book] the weather slowly started to change in the republics.” Sergei Shevelev, “U nas byla velikaia epokha, ili ne tak zhivi, kak khochetsia (iz zhizni redaktsii prozy ‘MG’ v 60 — 70-e gg.),” in *Zhizn’ zamechatel’nogo izdatel’stvo* (Moskva: Izdatel’stvo “Molodaia gvardiia,” 1997), 172–73.

¹⁰⁰⁸ RGALI 2916/2/515 (October 14, 1969): 117.

¹⁰⁰⁹ RGALI 2916/2/512 (April 2, 1970): 11; RGALI 2916/2/503 (April 6, 1970): 44.

tsyn and Druță.¹⁰¹⁰ In March the same newspaper published a lengthy attack on the novel that reiterated the criticisms that Racul had made in his 1969 book, and added another: that Druță failed to draw a distinction between those who had served in the Red Army and those who had served in the fascist-aligned Romanian army.¹⁰¹¹ The critic Ivan Racul reiterated his criticisms of *Burden of Our Kindness* in a long review in *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, the republic's main Russian-language newspaper.¹⁰¹²

In April, the Moldovan Party expanded its campaign against “distorted” portrayals of the postwar period to include several films produced by Moldova Film in the mid-1960s. Given that the films in question had all been released at least four years prior to the issuance of the Moldovan Party's resolution, it seems likely that the attack was linked to the ongoing fight against Druță. The directive issued against Moldova Film went significantly further than the previous attacks on *Burden of Our Kindness* because it explicitly equated criticism of Moldova's postwar Sovietization with nationalism. The Moldovan Central Committee attacked the studio for producing films that expressed “narrowly national interests,” presented a distorted picture of the postwar years, and misrepresented the Moldovan people's true desire for friendship with the great Russian and other Soviet peoples.¹⁰¹³ *The Last Month of Autumn*, Gagiu's *Bitter Grain*, and Loteanu's *Red Meadows* were among the studio's productions that came in for criticism. Although *The Last Month of Autumn* had received a positive review in *Sovetskaia Moldaviia* upon its release in 1965, the Moldovan Central Committee now criticized *The Last Month of Autumn*

¹⁰¹⁰ Nicolae Costenco, “Esențe,” *Moldova socialistă*, January 24, 1970. Druță believed that Bodiul had “invited” the former camp prisoner to write the article. Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 41.

¹⁰¹¹ D. Tăbăcaru, “O ciatură de băătură amară,” *Moldova socialistă*, March 12, 1970.

¹⁰¹² Ivan Racul, “Pravda zhizni i pozitsiia pisatelia,” *Sovetskaia Moldaviia*, June 25, 1970.

¹⁰¹³ AOSPRM 51/31/9 (April 7, 1970): 41-45.

for expressing sympathy for kulaks who were dispossessed and exiled in the postwar period. The criticism leveled at *Bitter Grain* was very similar to the criticism of Druță's works: that *Bitter Grain* blamed Soviet authorities for the famine, portrayed Soviet officials as indifferent to the sufferings of the population, and downplayed generous Soviet food aid to the Moldovan population. As a result of the Moldova Party's directive, the director of Moldova Film, Leonid Mursa, was fired for his lack of ideological vigilance and "sympathy for nationalist tendencies," and the film *Bitter Grain*—which over 10 million people had seen in Soviet theaters—was removed from distribution.¹⁰¹⁴ Chișinău's politics of exclusion contributed to the ongoing migration of intellectuals from Chișinău to Moscow. Derbenëv, the director of *The Last Month of Autumn*, had already left to work as Mosfilm in 1969; in 1973 the director Loteanu followed him to Mosfilm. Loteanu went on to score a major box office hit with his 1976 film *The Tabor Leaves for Heaven* (Rus: *Tabor ukhodit v nebo*), which sold 64.9 million tickets in the Soviet Union.¹⁰¹⁵

As they were launching their broader campaign against attempts to revisit Moldova's postwar history, the Moldovan Party also trained their sights on the Moscow institutions they perceived as supporting wayward Moldovan intellectuals. In March, Bodiul sent a letter to Aleksandr Romanov, head of the all-Union State Committee on Film (Goskino), that accused the staff of Goskino of over-praising films such as *Bitter Grain* and *The Last Month of Autumn*, deliberately sabotaging the efforts of the Moldovan Party to enforce ideological correctness at the studio. "The members of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Moldova are of the opinion that during the evaluation of a number of films that are particularly harmful from an ideological perspective, the workers of the Committee have deliberately expressed

¹⁰¹⁴ "Gor'kie zerna," KinoPoisk, n.d., <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/44557/>.

¹⁰¹⁵ See Peter Rollberg, "Loteanu, Emil," in *Historical Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 415–17; "Tabor ukhodit v nebo," KinoPoisk, n.d., <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/25085/>.

opinions that are opposed to those held in the Party organs of Moldova and among the public,” Bodiul complained.¹⁰¹⁶ In Romanov’s sharp reply, he reminded Bodiul that both films’ screenplays had originally been submitted to the all-Union body with Moldovan Goskino’s full-throated endorsement. It had been the all-Union Goskino, not the Moldovans, who had required extensive revisions of both screenplays. Romanov also pointed out that both films had received positive reviews in both the Moldovan and all-Union press.¹⁰¹⁷ Having made relatively little traction with his tactless letter to Goskino, Bodiul must have hoped for better luck when he wrote a letter to the USSR State Prize Committee protesting the nomination of Druță’s novel for the USSR State Prize in July. Making the case for why Druță should not be considered for the prize, Bodiul stated that no organization in the MSSR had nominated the novel for the prize, and pronounced it “abnormal” that the all-Union State Prize Committee would consider a work without taking into account the opinions of the people (*narod*) and official organs depicted in it.¹⁰¹⁸ Bodiul also summarized the objections raised in the three negative reviews that had appeared in Moldova, and included them along with his letter.¹⁰¹⁹ As we will see, Bodiul’s letter did indeed make an impact on the deliberations of the USSR State Prize Committee in 1970, but at the expense of damaging the Moldovan leadership’s reputation among the Moldovan and Soviet intelligentsia.

After receiving Bodiul’s letter, the presidium of the State Prize Committee decided, in the words of Soviet Writers’ Union secretary Georgii Markov, to “be guided by the opinion that has

¹⁰¹⁶ RGANI 5/62/90 (March 27, 1970): 58-63. Quotation from 60.

¹⁰¹⁷ RGANI 5/62/90 (April 16, 1970): 45-57.

¹⁰¹⁸ AOSPRM 51/31/93 (July 2, 1970): 104-106. Reprinted in Druță, *Ora jertfirii*, 73-75.

¹⁰¹⁹ Russian translations of the reviews can be found in Druță’s 1970 file in the fond of USSR State and Lenin Prize Committee. RGALI 2916/2/515: 132-155.

been formed in the social circles as well as the leading organs of the republic” and withdraw *Burden of Our Kindness* from consideration.¹⁰²⁰ When Markov presented the presidium’s decision to the literature section of the State Prize Committee, however, the Moldovan representative on the literature section, Andrei Lupan, strenuously objected to Bodiul’s characterization of Druță’s work. Lupan had been Druță’s mentor since Druță’s earliest forays into literature (see Chapter 2). “A communist in the marrow of his bones” (in Druță’s memorable phrasing), Lupan had begun his literary career as a communist writer in Bessarabia during the interwar period, when the Romanian Communist Party was an illegal underground organization.¹⁰²¹ After World War II, he became one of the leading writers in the new Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. Lupan knew well the experience of defending his works from political attacks at the republican level, having weathered a serious attack from a rival faction of Moldovan writers during the *Zhdanovshchina* by leaning on support in Moscow.¹⁰²² “I consider these articles to contain malicious political attacks on Druță himself,” Lupan declared. Pressed on Druță’s ideological stance, he admitted that there were “debatable pages” in the book but insisted that Druță is “absolutely a person of our ideology.” Lupan acknowledged that the novel dealt with complicated and difficult subject matter, but he argued that it was in the Committee’s best interests to develop a sensitive and critical approach to the novel, as it was likely to remain an important work in the canon of Soviet literature. Oles’ Honchar, a writer who had only two years prior experienced a campaign against his novel *Cathedral* instigated from within the Ukrainian republic, weighed in. Although

¹⁰²⁰ RGALI 2916/2/513 (October 13, 1970): 1-27. An excerpt of the transcript of this meeting can be downloaded from Andrei Lupan’s personal webpage. See “Stenograma ședinței secției literare a Comitetului pentru premii URSS - discutarea candidaturii lui Druță pentru înaintarea la Premiul de Stat al URSS,” Andrei Lupan, September 22, 2006, <http://www.andreilupan.com/loaditem.do?id=300100140>. The citations that follow refer to the pagination of the version the transcript on Lupan’s site.

¹⁰²¹ Ion Druță, *Lupaniada: înălțarea și prăbușirea unei epoci* (Chișinău: Editura “Cadran,” 2012), 42.

he did not think it possible to overturn the decision of the presidium, Honchar, the longtime head of the Ukrainian Writers' Union, said that as a Committee they should not lend their support the Moldovan Party's characterization of the novel, noting that it had received a favorable mention in *Pravda*.¹⁰²³ After Markov reiterated that the literature section was not going to discuss the candidacy of *Burden of Our Kindness* any further, the section moved on to other works.

At a meeting on October 16, however, several members of the literature section continued to protest the Moldovan Party's heavy-handed treatment of Druță, showing his strong support among the Soviet literary intelligentsia. Although Markov repeatedly informed the members of the section that Druță's nomination was not up for discussion, the writers ignored him and proceeded to discuss the situation at length. While the Russian writers on the Committee (for the most part a group of longtime literary functionaries) argued that the Committee did not have the right to go against the opinion of the republican Party leadership, non-Russian writers like Lupan, Honchar, and the Kazakh writer Gabit Musrepov understood intuitively that the opinions of republican leadership often had little connection to broader opinion in the republic. Musrepov worried about the precedent they were setting and said that the exertion of pressure on the Committee did not seem quite right.¹⁰²⁴ In his comments on Druță's candidacy, Honchar went further, asserting the right of the members of the Committee to come to their own conclusions on Druță's work. Indeed, for a brief moment, Honchar appeared to be channeling the independent spirit of the recently deposed editor of *Novyi mir*, Aleksandr Tvardovskii:

Of course we can't discuss [*Burden of Our Kindness*] and go against such an authoritative letter, but we need to find a way to explain to these comrades who wrote the letter (and I

¹⁰²² Druță, *Lupaniada*, 38-41; Petru Negură, *Ni héros, ni traîtres: les écrivains moldaves face au pouvoir soviétique sous Staline* (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), 236-43.

¹⁰²³ "Stenograma ședinței secției literare a Comitetului pentru premii URSS...", 2-5.

¹⁰²⁴ "Stenograma ședinței secției literare a Comitetului pentru premii URSS...", 12.

don't consider it convincing, it doesn't change my attitude towards the book) that addressing the Committee in such a way is not entirely correct. After all, we don't simply take dictation [*my zhe ne rabotaem po diktatu*], as Georgii Mokeevich [Markov] stated. The C[entral] C[ommittee] and the government can judge for themselves, but that's why the [State Prize] Committee was founded—so that here the truth would become clear. We still feel that this is an issue of conscience for the members of the Committee.¹⁰²⁵

The conflict in the literature section revealed the growing friction between writers used to the intellectual freedom of the 1960s and the Party with its increasingly tight grip on culture. The Moldovan Party was more than willing to violate the norms of Soviet cultural politics by standing on their rights as republican Party officials. At the same time, as Honchar's speech to the literature section demonstrated, their heavy-handed approach did little to affect Druță's positive reputation among the Soviet literary elite—and may have possibly improved it.

Meanwhile, Lupan was deeply upset by the Moldovan Party's actions. Although he refused to argue with the presidium's decision to remove the novel from discussion, Lupan sought to show the other Committee members that the Moldovan Party had a longtime policy of marginalizing loyal Moldovan intellectuals. Indeed, Lupan all but accused the Moldovan Party of deliberately undermining Moldovan literature. For the last twenty years, he explained, the Moldovan Party had sabotaged the candidacy of all its nominees for Lenin, State, and Stalin Prizes, leaving Moldova as the only Soviet republic with no major Soviet prizes in literature or any other creative art. In the late Stalin years, the Moldovan authorities had caused Emilian Bucov's nomination for the Stalin Prize to be withdrawn—twice—and had also sabotaged the nominations of Lupan and the poet Bogdan Istru. In the latter case, Lupan reported, he had been held personally responsible for the nomination as head of the Moldovan Union of Writers. (Now, Lupan noted in an aside, these supposedly seditious works are included in all Moldovan textbooks.) "For a long time, we didn't dare to address the [State Prize] Committee," Lupan explained. "We knew that

¹⁰²⁵ "Stenograma ședinței secției literare a Comitetului pentru premii URSS...", 13.

certain people from the republic would not forgive us this, would try with all their might and power to put us in our place, simply to humiliate and discredit us.” Finally, in 1965, Lupan stated, they received permission to nominate Bucov once more. This time, however, according to Lupan the Moldovan Party organized a letter-writing campaign in the republic to destroy Bucov’s reputation.¹⁰²⁶ Even worse than the smears against Bucov’s character in the letters, Lupan said, were the statements in the letters that Moldovan literature was a “nonentity” that nobody needed. Lupan also saw the hand of the Moldovan Party in the last-minute removal of *The Last Month of Autumn* from consideration for the 1968 USSR State Prize. And now, he complained, they were being asked to removal of Druță’s novel *Burden of Our Kindness* from consideration, and once again for supposed political reasons.¹⁰²⁷

In the final moments of his speech, Lupan reiterated his faith in Soviet Moldovan literature—and his conviction that the Moldovan Party was intractably hostile to it: “I am convinced that Moldovan literature and art stands in the first ranks of Party literature and art, and that our works do honor to the republic. They are worthy of the respect of the people and our motherland. We have given everything to illuminate our feelings through these ideas. We brought these works to the people,” he stated. Lupan then returned to the subject of the letter-writing campaign that he insisted was instigated by the Moldovan Party to sabotage Bucov’s candidacy in 1965:

I know that this has nothing to do with the Committee, but I ask you to go to the archive, and you will see that there are organized letters in which it is written “who needs Moldovan literature?” All of these letters come from one hand [*Vse eti pisma odnogo pocherka*].

Maybe it is worth thinking a bit about what this all means. Why do such letters come from Moldova?¹⁰²⁸

¹⁰²⁶ Lupan noted that these letters are held in the archive, and indeed they are held in RGALI in the file 2916/2/196. In many of the letters, Bucov is accused of being a drunk and a rapist.

¹⁰²⁷ “Stenograma ședinței secției literare a Comitetului pentru premii URSS...,” 16-18.

¹⁰²⁸ “Stenograma ședinței secției literare a Comitetului pentru premii URSS...,” 18-18a.

Lupan then sat down, allowing the members of the committee to contemplate the answer to his rhetorical question. He knew that the decision had already been made and was resigned to Druță's elimination from the State Prize competition. Although it did not change the outcome of the Committee's deliberations, his speech nevertheless made it quite clear that Lupan, a loyal Party member, felt driven to openly criticize the Moldovan Party leadership's exclusionary policies after years of frustration. The Moldovan Party may have won the battle against *Burden of Our Kindness*, but they had lost Andrei Lupan, one of the most loyal members of the Soviet Moldovan intelligentsia.

Chișinău's politics of exclusion, on full display at the 1970 State Prize deliberations, set the tone for the Moldovan Party's relationship with Druță and the Moldovan intelligentsia for the rest of the decade. The struggle over the 1970 USSR State Prize showed the lengths that Moldovan authorities would go to rein in rebellious intellectuals. Druță writes in his memoir that in the aftermath of the fight over *Burden of Our Kindness*, he feared for his future in the Soviet Union. He recounts a meeting in 1970 with Elizar Mal'tsev, a Stalin Prize-winning novelist who was then organizational secretary of the Party cell of Moscow writers, in which Mal'tsev jokingly asked Druță if he was going "east" or "west." The implication was that Druță was either headed east to prison or defecting to the West. But it seems that the authorities in Chișinău ultimately had little control over Druță as long as he remained in Moscow. After *Burden of Our Kindness*, Druță increasingly focused his attention on the Moscow stage. The publication of Druță's next work, the play *Doina* (also known as *Semănătorii de zăpadă*), had been in limbo for some time, but then the Moscow journal *Teatr* suddenly published it. The publication of the play opened the

door for *Doina* to be performed at the Maiakovskii Theater.¹⁰²⁹ Once again, however, support from Moscow cultural institutions had undermined Chişinău's efforts to marginalize Druţă.

Inside the Moldovan SSR, however, the Moldovan Party still had the power to induce Moldovan intellectuals to condemn Druţă. In 1971, at the Thirteenth Congress of the Communist Party of Moldova, Moldovan Union of Writers head Pavel Boţu criticized Druţă in his speech, accusing him of losing sight of historical truth in his recent work.¹⁰³⁰ In 1973, the Russian-language Moldovan journal *Kodry* published an article that reiterated many of the criticisms that had been made of *Burden of Our Kindness*.¹⁰³¹ In response, Druţă circulated an open letter to the journal's editorial board in *samizdat*. Responding to criticism that he focused too much on the postwar famine, Druţă appealed to his personal experiences. "Working as the secretary of a village soviet, at the age of seventeen I recorded the deaths of nearly a third of my fellow villagers," he wrote. Appealing to a conception of morality rooted in the rural community, he continued, "the moral norms by which my ancestors lived and by which I try to live do not allow me to walk by the graves of my fellow villagers pretending that I do not know who, when, and under what circumstances they were buried there." Responding to criticism of the scene in the novel in which a former Red Army soldier met a former officer from the Romanian army, Druţă pointed out that this was an everyday occurrence in Moldova: "Go to any village and you will find people who served in Antonescu's army, at the same time that their neighbor went all the way to Berlin with the Red Army." To expect eternal hostility between these former enemies was unreal-

¹⁰²⁹ According to Druţă, the editorial board of *Teatr* published *Doina* in a fit of pique after their head editor was fired. Druţă, *Îngerul supravieţuirii*, 42-47.

¹⁰³⁰ AOSPRM 51/31/1 (February 24-27, 1971): 327.

¹⁰³¹ M. Novokhatskii, "Na uroven vremeni (Po povodu stat'i V. Kravchenko 'Prodolzhenie dostoinstv')," *Kodry*, no. 6 (1973): 142-49. Novokhatskii wrote the article in response to V. Kravchenko, "Prodolzhenie dostoinstv (Polemicheskie zametki o tvorchestve Iona Druţă)," *Kodry*, no. 4 (1973): 116-35.

istic: “If the journal *Kodry* thinks that these people still stand to this day threatening each other with axes as a sign of the irreconcilability of their class positions, then the journal is sorely mistaken.”¹⁰³² Excluded as he was from public discourse in Moldova, Druță could only discuss these experiences—shared by many Moldovans of his generation—in a *samizdat* open letter.

Indeed, as a result of the politics of exclusion, frank discussion among Moldovan intellectuals was increasingly taking place in private settings in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Party’s attacks on *Burden of Our Kindness* had shown that discussion of the collateral damage of the postwar Sovietization of Moldova was off-limits. Moldova’s historic cultural links with Romania were also taboo: Bodiul had declared Druță’s call for the return to the Latin alphabet at the 1965 Congress of the Union of Writers of Moldova a manifestation of nationalism. This did not mean that Moldovan intellectuals stopped discussing these issues, however. As the politics of exclusion drove discourse from the public sphere, certain ideas found a home in more private intellectual settings like literary circles. In a meeting of the Party cell of the Moldovan Writers’ Union held in 1968, one writer alleged that the literary circle associated with the journal *Nistru* had discussed the issue of the Latin alphabet, leading to “the inflaming of the passions of the youth.” (*Nistru* editor Emilian Bucov vigorously denied the accusations.)¹⁰³³ Petru Negură argues that the gap between intellectuals’ public and private stances widened during this period. In private, Moldovan intellectuals were increasingly skeptical of the very models of Soviet Moldovan identity that they promoted in public. Such enforced hypocrisy was naturally demoralizing for writ-

¹⁰³² Ion Druță, “Otkrytoe pis’mo redkollegii zhurnala ‘Kodry,’” in *Ora jertfirii*, 76–82. See also Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 54.

¹⁰³³ AOSPRM 276/47/24 (November 26, 1968): 6, 8.

ers.¹⁰³⁴ In a 2017 interview, the Moldovan writer Vladimir Beșleagă recalled a widespread sense in the Brezhnev-era Moldovan literary community that most writers had “sold out” to the authorities. Harsh censorship and pressure from the authorities also contributed to low morale.¹⁰³⁵ Bodiul’s politics of exclusion in Moldova may have produced the public discourse that Moldovan authorities wanted, but it increasingly alienated writers from the state.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, Druță continued to enjoy enough support among the Moscow political and cultural elites to see his plays performed at some of the most prestigious theaters in Moscow, even as Moldovan authorities continued to throw up roadblocks. Indeed, his plays were popular across the Soviet Union, particularly in Russia and Ukraine.¹⁰³⁶ In his plays, Druță continued to focus on the difficult postwar period in Moldova. Druță’s 1972 play *Birds of Our Youth* (Rus: *Ptitsy nashei molodosti*, Rom/Mold: *Păsările tinereții noastre*) focused on two older characters reflecting on the transformation of their village after the Second World War. Perhaps because the content of the play was less inflammatory than that of *Burden of Our Kindness*, Chișinău allowed the play to premiere in Chișinău in October of 1972.¹⁰³⁷ *Birds of Our Youth*

¹⁰³⁴ Petru Negură, “Engineering Moldovan Identity: Moldovan Writers from Stalinism to the Independence,” *CriticAtac*, October 30, 2012, <http://www.criticatac.ro/engineering-moldovan-identity-moldovan-writers-stalinism-independence/>. See also Negură, *Ni héroes, ni traîtres*, 368.

¹⁰³⁵ Vladimir Beșleagă, interview with the author, February 15, 2017.

¹⁰³⁶ In 1998, the Moldovan critic Georghe Cincilei estimated that Druță’s plays had been staged a total of 290 times. The bulk of the productions were in Russia (165) and Ukraine (61). Moldovan theaters had staged Druță’s plays only 10 times. Gheorghe Cincilei, “Ion Druță în lumina rampei: geografie și statistică,” *Moldova suverană*, September 3, 1998.

¹⁰³⁷ See playbill for the Luceafărul Theater’s later staging of the play held in GTsTM im. Bakhrushina 729/2/303 (1975). Druță believes that a Moldovan production of the play in the city of Bălți (Rus: Bel’tsy) was banned by the city Party organs; however, archival evidence from the Bălți city Party committee fond does not seem to support this. G. Karaush, the former head of the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Bălți city committee, wrote in an article in the now-defunct publication *Bel’tsy onlain* that he censored, but did not ban the performance of the play. In 1973, *Sovetskaia kul’tura* reviewed the Bălți production. L. Zhukova, “Grani npravstevnogo konflikta,” *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, February 13, 1973.

was Druță's only play to premiere in Moldova during the Soviet era.¹⁰³⁸ In 1972, the Central Theater of the Soviet Army and the prestigious Malyi Theater premiered their own productions to largely favorable reviews.¹⁰³⁹

Druță used his position as a successful playwright to help another Moldovan intellectual escape Chișinău's exclusionary politics. In his memoir, Druță recounts how the head director of the Malyi Theater, Boris Ravenskikh, had asked him to recommend a Moldovan director for *Birds of Our Youth*. Druță suggested Ion Ungureanu, one of the many young graduates of Moscow's Boris Shchukin Theater Institute who worked at Chișinău's progressive Luceafărul Theater.¹⁰⁴⁰ Druță warned Ravenskikh that Ungureanu was in trouble with the authorities in Chișinău, but Ravenskikh replied that he did not care what they thought in Chișinău.¹⁰⁴¹ Having established a foothold in Moscow with *Birds of Our Youth*, Ungureanu went on to direct for the Central Theater of the Soviet Army (including Druță's *Holy of Holies*) and television studio Ostankino.¹⁰⁴² In an interview for a 2008 documentary, Ungureanu described Chișinău's cultural policy as a sort of "Chernobyl" that sent intellectuals like him and Druță fleeing for Moscow.¹⁰⁴³

¹⁰³⁸ Cincilei, "Ion Druță în lumina rampei."

¹⁰³⁹ See reviews of the productions: G. Iur'eva, "Mezhdu nebom i zemeli," *Teatr*, no. 6 (1973): 40-45; V. Komissarzhevskii, "Pole dushi tvoei," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, January 24, 1973; Nina Velekhova, "Zemlia liudei," *Pravda*, January 31, 1973; Leonid Zorin, "Vernutsia li aisty?," *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, May 26, 1973. In 1974, the Malyi Theater's production was produced for television. Ion Ungureanu, Boris Ravenskikh, and I. Gerasimova, *Ptitsy nashei molodosti* (Tsentral'noe televidenie, 1974), <https://youtu.be/dwqK4qIO2d0>.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Founded in 1960, the Luceafărul Theater was associated with the Thaw and new movements in Moldovan theater. On the history of the Luceafărul Theater, see "Teatrul Republican 'Luceafărul,'" *Moldovenii*, January 17, 2011, <https://www.moldovenii.md/md/section/355/content/641>.

¹⁰⁴¹ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 49.

¹⁰⁴² See "Ungureanu Ion," *Moldovenii*, n.d., <https://www.moldovenii.md/md/people/337>.

¹⁰⁴³ Aleksandr Smirnov, "Ion Drutse," *Teatral'naia letopis'* (Moskva: Kul'tura, September 1, 2008), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN8vj0SSIN8>.

Moldovan authorities were much more hostile to Druță's play *Holy of Holies*, which, like *Burden of Our Kindness*, was set during the time of the postwar famine and addressed the relationship between Moldovan peasants and Soviet authorities. At the heart of the plot was a confrontation between two veterans: the simple peasant Călin and the Moldovan official Gruia. In 1975, several theaters held readings of the play, but they were hesitant or unable to stage it.¹⁰⁴⁴ In Leningrad, for example, the Komissarzhevskaiia Dramatic Theater found their production held up by the censor.¹⁰⁴⁵ Druță sought to publish the play to show theaters it was acceptable to stage. In his memoir he recounts how in 1976 *Holy of Holies* still languished at the Committee of Censorship of the Ministry of Culture, which was hesitant to send it to Glavlit for their approval. Ultimately, Druță sent a letter to the Minister of Culture, now Pētr Demichev, who agreed to meet with Druță. Demichev ultimately ensured that the Ministry sent the play to Glavlit, who gave it final approval.¹⁰⁴⁶ Finally in 1977, the play premiered at the Central Theater of the Soviet Army (in a production directed by Ungureanu) and received a rave review in *Pravda*.¹⁰⁴⁷ *Pravda*'s review elicited a harsh letter from Bodiul to the newspaper's editor V. G. Afanas'ev on March 17. According to Bodiul, Druță's works showed "pathological hostility to the Party's leading cadres," whom he portrayed as "betrayers of the national interest" and "destroyers of unique folk traditions." They accused Druță of having a nationalist, pro-Romanian orientation.¹⁰⁴⁸ All-Union

¹⁰⁴⁴ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 65-66.

¹⁰⁴⁵ TsGALI SPb 359/2/130 (November 18, 1975): 83-88 in A. V. Blium, ed., *Tsenzura v Sovetskom Soiuze, 1917-1991: dokumenty*, Seriiia Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2004), 481-483.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 68-71; "Scrisoarea lui I. Druță către ministrul culturii al URSS P. N. Demichev în legătură cu stoparea piesei Sfânta Sfințelor," in *Fenomenul artistic Ion Druță* (Chișinău: Tipografia Centrală, 2008), 551-52.

¹⁰⁴⁷ G. Kozhukhova, "Chuvstvo dostoinstva," *Pravda*, March 12, 1977.

¹⁰⁴⁸ AOSPRM 51/44/7 (March 17, 1977): 12.

authorities seemed inclined to agree, at least to some extent: on April 4, a report from the deputy Minister of Culture to the Soviet Central Committee faulted the play for portraying Soviet authorities as distant from ordinary citizens.¹⁰⁴⁹ On April 12, the Moldovan Central Committee continued their letter-writing campaign against Druță with a letter to Minister of Culture Demichev in which they complained that the play (like *Burden of Our Kindness*) portrayed Soviet authorities as depriving Moldovan peasants of food. They particularly objected to a final scene in which the Moldovan government official Gruia decides to resign rather than continue to implement orders from Moscow.¹⁰⁵⁰ On April 14, the Moldovan Central Committee made a familiar complaint to the Central Committee, faulting central journals and publishers for continuing to release Druță's harmful works. They particularly objected to the portrayal of Moldovan authorities' actions during the postwar famine in *Holy of Holies*.¹⁰⁵¹ Clearly, Moldovan authorities still feared Druță's portrayal of the role of Soviet authorities during the 1946-7 famine.

The Soviet Central Committee's response to the Moldovan authorities' complaints about *Holy of Holies* was similar to Goskino's response to Bodiul's 1970 letter: while they admitted that there were problems with Druță's works, they faulted the Moldovan authorities for adopting an inconsistent policy towards him. After all, the Central Committee bureaucrats stated, the Moldovan authorities had granted Druță a State Prize in 1967. They had even recommended *Holy of Holies* for production on Soviet stages just a year earlier! Moreover, they pointed out, *Holy of Holies* had received positive reviews in *Pravda*, as well as *Sovetskaia kul'tura* and even the Ar-

¹⁰⁴⁹ RGANI 5/73/424 (April 4, 1977): 19-21 in N. G. Tomilina and T. Iu. Konova, eds., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978 : dokumenty : v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, 2 vols., Serii Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva. Dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2011), 76-78.

¹⁰⁵⁰ AOSPRM 51/44/7 (April 12, 1977): 16-17.

¹⁰⁵¹ RGANI 5/73/424 (April 14, 1977): 22-26 in Tomilina and Konova, 84-87.

my's newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda*.¹⁰⁵² While the USSR State Prize Committee had felt obligated to cave to the Moldovan authorities' demands in 1970, the more powerful bureaucrats of the Soviet Central Committee did not feel the same way. In the face of widespread support for Druță among the Moscow-based intelligentsia, the Soviet Central Committee adopted a policy of balancing between the interests of the Moldovan authorities and the capital city intelligentsia. Strikingly, even in an era of increased censorship and repression in the sphere of culture, the cultural elite in Moscow continued to have a significant degree of influence over the Soviet Central Committee.

Like Matevosyan, throughout the “long 1970s,” Druță drew on his first-hand knowledge of rural life to write literary works that depicted the divide between Soviet authorities and the peasants they sought to govern. Druță's works illuminated the plight of Moldovan peasants who suffered at the hands of the state: the dekulakized woman in *The Last Month of Autumn*, the starving peasants in *Burden of Our Kindness*, and the World War II veteran Călin in *Holy of Holies*. Much like Druță's *The Smell of Ripe Quince* portrayed Moldovan authorities as hostile to the Moldovan national history embodied in the historic Căpriana bell tower (see Chapter 4), Druță's works on the postwar period suggested that Soviet authorities did not always have the interests of Moldovan peasants at heart.

Moldovan authorities responded to Druță's challenge to Soviet Moldovan narratives of the nation by doubling down on a “politics of exclusion” towards nationally-minded intellectuals that they had embraced periodically since the 1940s. Although at first Moldovan authorities had attempted to placate Druță and his supporters among the Moldovan intelligentsia by awarding him the 1967 Moldovan State Prize for literature, they turned against him after *Burden of Our*

¹⁰⁵² RGANI 5/73/424 (June 6, 1977): 26-27 in Tomilina and Konova, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978*, vol. 2, 124-125.

Kindness, fearing that his works showed Soviet authorities as hostile to rural Moldovans.

Chișinău's campaign against nationally-minded intellectuals like Druță drove other prominent cultural figures like the film director Emil Loteanu and the theater director Ion Ungureanu to leave the republic for work in Moscow. Chișinău's policy also deeply alienated less outspoken Moldovan intellectuals like Andrei Lupan. As a result of the politics of exclusion that affected Druță and many others, the Moldovan cultural intelligentsia became increasingly alienated from Moldovan authorities, questioning their commitment to supporting Moldovan national culture.

Druță's career in the 1960s and 1970s also demonstrates the limits of a republican-level politics of exclusion in a cultural system as layered and integrated as the Soviet Union's. As we have seen, the concerns of the Moldovan Party were not always relevant to all-Union political and cultural elites. Members of the Soviet intelligentsia in Moscow and elsewhere liked Druță's plays and novels because they resonated with discussions of rural life in Russian literature. Druță's works continued to be published and performed in Moscow in spite of the protestations of Moldovan authorities. Moldovan authorities could harass institutions that supported Druță, but ultimately, they could not stop many institutions from promoting Druță's work. They managed to prevent the USSR State Prize Committee from awarding Druță a prize for literature in 1970, but they could not always convince all-Union political authorities to step in. The Soviet Central Committee apparatus, seeking to balance the interests of the Moldovan Party and the Moscow-based intellectuals, acceded to the Moldovan Party's demands that they suppress Druță's work only occasionally. Even during the period of so-called "stagnation," the opinions of Moscow-based cultural elites mattered to Soviet authorities. As a result, Druță was allowed to continue his successful career over the course of the 1970s, promoting an alternative conception of Soviet Moldovan identity that centered the peasant perspective on the nation and its history.

Fëdor Abramov, Valentin Rasputin, and the Russian Politics of Conditional Inclusion

Of the three republics considered here, the RSFSR was the one with the most inclusive policies towards nationally-minded writers. As Brudny explains, after Brezhnev's rise to power in 1965, the regime allowed an "unprecedented" degree of debate on Russian national issues. There was a struggle over inclusionary policy between its supporters and its opponents in the ideological apparatus (led by Aleksandr Yakovlev) from 1971 to 1973, but after Yakovlev's decisive defeat, the Soviet leadership doubled down on the policy, which continued throughout the 1970s.¹⁰⁵³ Although Russian Village Prose writers received official support due to the politics of inclusion, they fit somewhat uncomfortably into the role of regime cheerleaders. Many were not Party members, and those who were tended to identify with Tvardovskii and his principled anti-Stalinism. As Nikolai Mitrokhin has observed, the Village Prose writers tended to be the most anti-Stalinist group among the intellectuals with connections to the Russian nationalist "group of Pavlov."¹⁰⁵⁴ The anti-Stalinist influence of *Novyi mir* remained embedded deep in the literary movement's DNA. As we have seen in Chapter 3, even as Sergei Vikulov moved towards the Russian nationalist "conservatives," he retained an element of his onetime patron Aleksandr Yashin's critical perspective on the treatment of peasants in the Soviet Union. In this section, we will examine the ambiguous position of two Russian Village Prose writers who often criticized the state's policies towards the Russian peasantry, yet also benefitted from the inclusionary policies towards nationally-minded Russian writers in the Brezhnev era. Fëdor Abramov and Valentin Rasputin both received the USSR State Prize in the second half of the 1970s, but not without controversy. Their works, which depicted collective farmers suffering as a result of Soviet poli-

¹⁰⁵³ See Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 57, 94-102.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 353.

cies, particularly under Stalin, often had more support among the “liberals” than the more doctrinaire Russian writers on the State Prize Committees. Both experienced significant pre-publication censorship of their works and even then, saw negative reviews of their books appear in the press. Both were called in for conversations at the Central Committee about the contents of their work. Their inclusion was conditional on softening their critique of the state’s treatment of the Russian peasantry. Nevertheless, the decision to award State Prizes to Abramov and Rasputin could not but raise their profiles considerably. It inevitably resulted in the mainstreaming of their critiques of Soviet policies towards the Russian peasantry.

The first decade of Fëdor Abramov’s literary life gave little indication that he would one day win a prestigious State Prize. Abramov entered the Soviet literary world with his controversial 1954 article “People of the Kolkhoz Village in Postwar Prose,” which criticized the yawning gap between the optimistic portrayals of the postwar village in the Stalin Prize-winning “kolkhoz novels” of the late 1940s and the realities of postwar village life. As discussed in Chapter 1, Abramov’s article, along with several others that appeared in *Novyi mir* in the year after Stalin’s death, stirred up a literary controversy that ultimately resulted in the first firing of the journal’s head editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii. Abramov followed up his now-infamous criticism of late Stalinist depictions of collective farm life with his 1959 novel *Brothers and Sisters* (*Bratia i sēstry*), which dramatized the Priasliny family’s struggle for survival in a northern Russian village during the Second World War. The novel was based on the conditions Abramov witnessed in 1942 when he was convalescing in his native northern *raion* of Pinezh’e after being wounded during the defense of Leningrad. “I couldn’t not write *Brothers and Sisters*,” he later wrote. “In front of my eyes was the picture of living, actual reality, it stuck in my memory, it demanded to be written about. The great achievement of the Russian *baby* [peasant women], opening up in 1941 a sec-

ond front that was perhaps no less difficult than the front of the Russian *muzhik* [peasant man, referring here to peasant soldiers]—how could I forget about it!”¹⁰⁵⁵ Even after Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin, Abramov had great difficulty publishing *Brothers and Sisters*. He waited for two years as Moscow journals (in his words) “kicked around” the novel before *Neva*, a journal based in his adopted home of Leningrad, agreed to publish it. Abramov followed up the 1959 publication of *Brothers and Sisters* with 1963’s *Around and About*, also in *Neva*. The official backlash against *Around and About*, which included several passages criticizing the methods of the collectivization of agriculture under Stalin, ruined Abramov’s relationship with *Neva* (see Chapter 3). By the time that *Around and About* was garnering criticism from the apparatus of the Soviet Central Committee’s Department of Ideology, Abramov was already deep into a sequel to *Brothers and Sisters* that would address the difficult aftermath of the Second World War. “Six years I wrote the novel [*Two Winters and Three Summers*],” Abramov later recalled, “Six years of meditation and tears over the joyless everyday life of the postwar village, over its fatherlessness [*bezottsovshchinoi*], over the fate of the shoeless, poorly-clothed, and eternally hungry family of the Priaslino, the living future of Russia...”¹⁰⁵⁶

Abramov did ultimately find a journal willing to consider publishing his novel on the harsh conditions of life in the postwar village: *Novyi mir*. Well aware that his 1954 article had contributed to the firing of the *Novyi mir* editorial board, he did not initially have high expectations when he sent the novel to them in July of 1967. “I sent my novel to *N[ovyi] m[ir]*,” he wrote to his fellow Village Prose writer Vasilii Belov, “but there is no hope of publishing it. The

¹⁰⁵⁵ Abramov, qtd. in Liudmila Krutikova-Abramova, “Posleslovie,” in Fëdor Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 1, 6 vols. (Leningrad: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura” Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1990), 603.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Fëdor Abramov, “Ob Aleksandrom Tvardovskom: Nezavershennye vospominaniia,” in *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, ed. D. S. Likhachev, V. G. Rasputin, and L. Krutikova-Abramova, vol. 6, 6 vols. (Leningrad: Khudozhlit-ra, Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1995), 169–70 (quotation from 170).

Party and the people, they say, don't need our scribbling."¹⁰⁵⁷ Abramov was both surprised and elated when he received a letter from *Novyi mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii with high praise for the novel. "I have not read a manuscript in a long time that could in places move me, an un-sentimental person, to tears and cause me to constantly think about it while reading and re-reading," he wrote to Abramov. Tvardovskii particularly praised the novel for confronting a subject that had not yet been seriously addressed in literature: the harsh conditions of rural life in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.¹⁰⁵⁸ Trying to convey the impact of Tvardovskii's words on him, Abramov later wrote, "The whole country knew Tvardovskii almost by heart, and as for us, the *derevenshchiki* [Village Prose writers], there is simply nothing to say—we idolized him, and being published in *Novyi mir* was considered a great honor."¹⁰⁵⁹

Many challenges lay ahead, however, and Abramov and Tvardovskii had many disagreements over how to edit *Two Winters and Three Summers* to get it past the censor. Once again Abramov despaired of ever publishing it in a letter to Belov. "In November I lived in Moscow for two weeks on account of the novel. They cut it up, hacked it up, the poor thing—you wouldn't recognize it. Even then, there's no hope of publishing it."¹⁰⁶⁰ In February of 1968 he wrote to Belov again: "They literally raped me at *Novyi mir*, threw everything critical [*ostroe*] out of the book." Still, he worried that it would not pass the censor. "The only thing that still makes me happy is that letter from Tvardovskii that I received back in the fall," Abramov

¹⁰⁵⁷ OR RGB 889/8/9 (August 3, 1967): 24-25. An excerpt from the letter is reprinted in Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 6, 375.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Aleksandr Tvardovskii to Fëdor Abramov, August 29, 1967, in A. Tvardovskii, *Pis'ma o literature, 1930-1970* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985), 321-24.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Abramov, "Ob Aleksandrom Tvardovskom," 173.

¹⁰⁶⁰ OR RGB 889/8/9 (December 9, 1967): 26-27.

sighed.¹⁰⁶¹ *Two Winters and Three Summers* finally appeared in the first three issues of *Novyi mir* in 1968.¹⁰⁶² In April he wrote to Belov: “Yes, my novel (in castrated form) is being published.”¹⁰⁶³

Even after the rather harrowing experience of editing *Two Winters and Three Summers*, Abramov remained fiercely loyal to *Novyi mir* and Tvardovskii. And Tvardovskii was loyal to Abramov as well. The critic Pëtr Stokov attacked the novel in the pages of *Ogonëk*, the magazine edited by the neo-Stalinist reactionary Anatolii Sofronov, claiming that Abramov had given an unjustifiably negative portrayal of rural life after the war because he had overgeneralized based on the experiences of a village in a particularly difficult situation.¹⁰⁶⁴ In response, Tvardovskii nominated *Two Winters and Three Summers* for a USSR State Prize to show that the journal supported its author. “From then on,” Abramov later wrote, “for me *Novyi mir* became a home.”¹⁰⁶⁵

In 1969, however, *Novyi mir* was increasingly under fire from forces in the state and the Soviet intelligentsia. On January 7, 1969, the Central Committee issued a resolution titled “On the Raising of Responsibility of the Heads of Organs of the Press, Radio, Television, Film, and Institutions of Culture and Art for the Ideological-Political Level of their Published Materials and Repertoire” that would later justify sanctions against journals like *Novyi mir* that published controversial material.¹⁰⁶⁶ In June of 1969, the neo-Stalinist Sofronov allied with the Russian nation-

¹⁰⁶¹ OR RGB 889/8/9 (February 12, 1968): 28. An excerpt is reprinted in Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 6, 375-376.

¹⁰⁶² "Dve zimy i tri leta." *Novyi mir*, nos. 1, 2, 3 (1968): 3-67, 10-69, 68-132.

¹⁰⁶³ OR RGB 889/8/9 (April 3, 1968): 29-30.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Pëtr Stokov, “Zemlia i liudi,” *Ogonëk*, no. 22 (1968): 27.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Abramov, “Ob Aleksandrom Tvardovskom,” 178.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 95-96.

alist forces of *Molodaia gvardiia* to organize an attack on Tvardovskii and *Novyi mir* in the form of an open letter in *Ogonëk* signed by 11 writers. Referring to a recent polemic by *Novyi mir* staff member Aleksandr Dement'ev against Russian nationalist essays in *Molodaia gvardiia*, the letter accused *Novyi mir* of a snobbish rejection of “all those who are connected by bonds of love to their father’s country, to their native land, to the village.”¹⁰⁶⁷ Given *Novyi mir*’s longstanding support for rural prose, this argument was disingenuous at best. The signatories included the new editor of *Nash sovremennik*, Sergei Vikulov (see Chapter 3). “What a bastard your Vikulov is!” Abramov wrote to Belov, knowing that Belov was part of Vikulov’s Vologda-based network of Village Prose writers. “I have in mind his ‘patriarchal’ battle against *Novyi mir*: I do not understand what is going on there. And how will *Novyi mir* escape again?” he wondered.¹⁰⁶⁸ In July, the campaign against *Novyi mir* in the upper echelons of the Soviet government continued. Glavlit sent a report to the Central Committee detailing several instances of unacceptable content in the issues of *Novyi mir* sent to the censor for approval. One was Abramov’s novella *Pelageia*, which the censor deemed harmful for its overly negative portrayal of rural life in the 1950s and early 1960s. The report concluded that the editorial board of *Novyi mir* was not fulfilling its obligations under the new law.¹⁰⁶⁹ In August, the Department of Culture sent a report to the Central Committee detailing their thus-far unsuccessful efforts to bring Tvardovskii and the journal in

¹⁰⁶⁷ “Protiv chego vystupaet Novyi mir?,” *Ogonëk*, no. 30 (July 26, 1969): 27.

¹⁰⁶⁸ OR RGB 889/8/9 (September 25, 1969): 50-53, quotation from 53.

¹⁰⁶⁹ The censor had nevertheless allowed *Novyi mir* to publish *Pelageia* in June. RGANI 5/61/82 (July 15, 1969): 296-305 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972 : dokumenty*, Kul'tura i vlast' ot Stalina do Gorbacheva , dokumenty (Moskva: ROSSPEN Rossiiskaiia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia, 2009), 703-711; Fëdor Abramov, “Pelageia,” *Novyi mir*, no. 6 (1969): 31-71.

line. The authors of the report cited the *Ogonëk* letter as example of serious criticism of *Novyi mir* that had appeared in the Soviet press.¹⁰⁷⁰

While *Novyi mir* was fighting for its literary life, the debate over the 1969 USSR State Prize was also taking place. Discussing *Two Winters and Three Summers* in April, the members of the State Prize Committee's literature section praised Abramov for his deeply "national" depictions of Russian peasant life, but several members of the literature section raised doubts about his depiction of the relationship between peasants and the state. For writers like Georgii Markov and Oles' Honchar, both of whom did not ultimately end up voting for Abramov in 1969, the most appealing aspect of the book was its "national" aspect—Abramov's depiction of life in a northern Russian village.¹⁰⁷¹ (Ironically, at this time *Novyi mir* was under fire for supposedly rejecting the close connection to the "native land" that Abramov's work embodied.) As in the 1964 discussion of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (see Chapter 3), the non-Russian writers in the section generally supported Abramov, while several Russian writers—mostly functionaries known more for their important positions in the literary bureaucracy rather than their literary output—were more critical. The Russian writer Nikolai Gribachëv, whose Stalin Prize-winning poetry had gained him a reputation as one of the "varnishers" of postwar rural life, said that the main flaw of *Two Winters and Three Summers* was that it portrayed the state and the collective farm as being in opposition. Markov, a politically orthodox writer who was at that time being groomed for the position of head of the Soviet Writers' Union, agreed: "[The state] appears only as an extractor of food products [*dobytychik produktov*]."¹⁰⁷² Meanwhile, the

¹⁰⁷⁰ RGANI 5/61/82 (August 6, 1969): 306-308 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1965-1972*, 711-713.

¹⁰⁷¹ See speeches by Oles' Honchar and Georgii Markov. RGALI 2916/2/415 (April 17, 1969): 24-28.

¹⁰⁷² RGALI 2916/2/415 (April 17, 1969): 21. On Markov, see John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Inside the Soviet Writers' Union* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 88.

Bashkir poet Mustai Karim (Rus: Karimov) urged his fellow writers to consider the context: “I have also read the book and in many aspects I agree with you. [...] But the time that is discussed there is 1946. This is after the war. Kolkhoz life in those years was very difficult. The state only took from the village.”¹⁰⁷³ Despite the concerns raised by Gribachëv and Markov, Abramov managed to advance to the next stage of consideration.

In a May letter to a friend, Abramov expressed hope that his nomination for the State Prize would at least make it a bit easier to deal with criticism in the future. “I have little hope of receiving the prize (alas, they by no means always award to it to [real] literature), but it is nevertheless pleasant to be on the list.” Recalling how district-level officials had organized a campaign against his 1963 work *Around and About*, forcing the inhabitants of Abramov’s native village to denounce him in an open letter, Abramov wondered what the local “pen-pushers” (*chinushi*) would say now that he had been nominated for a State Prize: “Will they really trample my novel as ‘dangerous’ even now?”¹⁰⁷⁴ For an author who had had such a stormy career, official approbation of his work seemed to promise real benefits.

Abramov’s prediction that he would not win the prize in 1969 turned out to be correct. In the second round of deliberations, the perception that *Two Winters and Three Summers* negatively depicted both the Soviet state and the collective farm system was fatal to Abramov’s candidacy. At the literature section meeting in October, Gribachëv complained that, like many recent works on the village, the novel seemed to attack collectivization and collective farm life.¹⁰⁷⁵ Announcing that he would vote for Abramov “to the end,” the Moldovan poet Andrei Lupan praised

¹⁰⁷³ RGALI 2916/2/415 (April 17, 1969): 22.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Letter from Fëdor Abramov to M. F. Shcherbakov, May 12, 1969, in Fëdor Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 6, 264. The local “smear campaign” against Abramov is discussed in Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 50.

¹⁰⁷⁵ RGALI 2916/2/416 (October 20, 1969): 6.

Abramov's "concrete understanding of *kolkhoz* life." "These terrible difficulties surprise no one," he said, but Abramov's novel shows how real, ordinary people had pulled the village "out of the abyss."¹⁰⁷⁶ In response, the Russian literary scholar Georgii Berdnikov stated that literary critics who had written about Abramov's novel had provided examples "that speak not only of the difficulties, but also of unheard-of harshness [*zhestokost'*] in relation to the people that [Abramov] loves and knows, of the unheard-of harshness of the people in leadership positions." He concluded that in the novel "the negative, hard, and difficult sides of village life are artificially concentrated, artificially strengthened, underscored, overemphasized, obscuring other sides of life, for example, patriotism."¹⁰⁷⁷ The latter issue was the standard neo-Stalinist complaint against the portrayal of rural life in *Novyi mir*, familiar from the 1963 campaign against Solzhenitsyn's *Matrëna's House* and Aleksandr Yashin's "Vologda Wedding" (see Chapter 3). Gribachëv made the comparison to 1963 explicit: "When we speak about Abramov, let's remember that we have seen works on this subject before. Let's remember *Matrëna's House* and a number of works where *kolkhoz* life was described in the exact same way."¹⁰⁷⁸ Although Abramov's advocates argued for him to the end, his candidacy was narrowly rejected at a later meeting of the literary section by a vote of five in favor and seven against.¹⁰⁷⁹

Ultimately, the 1969 State Prize debate over Abramov's work laid bare the inherent contradictions of the politics of inclusion. *Two Winters and Three Summers* reflected an intimate knowledge of village life in Abramov's native region, which, was a quality that the neo-Stalinists and Russian nationalists increasingly claimed to value. (Indeed, it was the basis for their attack

¹⁰⁷⁶ RGALI 2916/2/416 (October 20, 1969): 13.

¹⁰⁷⁷ RGALI 2916/2/416 (October 20, 1969): 16, 17.

¹⁰⁷⁸ RGALI 2916/2/416 (October 20, 1969): 20.

¹⁰⁷⁹ RGALI 2916/2/416 (October 22): 43.

on *Novyi mir* in 1969.) But it was Abramov's close connection to the Russian North and its people that led him to criticize the actions of Soviet state that, in his view, contributed to their suffering after the Second World War. Like Druță, Abramov considered it a moral duty to portray the suffering of his fellow villagers. In 1969, the politics of inclusion towards Russian writers did not yet allow the ideologically doctrinaire writers on the committee to overlook Abramov's criticism of the policy of the Soviet state towards the peasantry and his tendency to highlight the difficult aspects of rural Soviet life. The failure of Abramov's candidacy in October of 1969 was simply one of many ominous signs for the beleaguered *Novyi mir*. Early in 1970, the editorial board of *Novyi mir*, including its head editor Aleksandr Tvardovskii, was dismissed.¹⁰⁸⁰

Writing in his diary in November of 1969, Abramov was bitterly disappointed at the impending firing of Tvardovskii—and what he saw as the willingness of the Soviet intelligentsia to approve the decision. “If you were to hold a referendum... 97% would probably approve the closing of *Novyi mir*. That is what is horrible,” he wrote. “Twenty-five writers submitted a protest vote against the expulsion of Solzhenitsyn. Twenty-five out of seven or eight thousand. Just think about these numbers! Yes, they're driving Tvardovskii out of literature, our first poet... It means that we do not need talent. Talent is dangerous to us. And in general, we do not need literature. We need only a semblance, a surrogate.”¹⁰⁸¹ After agonizing over whether or not to express his private qualms publicly, Abramov finally decided to send a letter protesting Solzhenitsyn's expulsion to the Soviet leadership, a decision which he believed contributed to press attacks on *Two Winters and Three Summers* and his 1969 novella *Pelageia*.¹⁰⁸²

¹⁰⁸⁰ For a detailed account of the last year of *Novyi mir*, see Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi mir*, 295-322

¹⁰⁸¹ Abramov, qtd. in Liudmila Krutikova-Abramova, “Posleslovie,” in Fëdor Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 2, 6 vols. (Leningrad: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura” Leningradskoe otdelenie, 1991), 566–603.

¹⁰⁸² Krutikova-Abramova, “Posleslovie,” in *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 2, 570. Even before Abramov sent the letter, Glavlit criticized *Pelageia* in a report to the Central Committee for supposedly showing that village

Abramov also faced serious difficulties with the publication of the third volume of the series about the Priasliny family, 1973's *Paths and Crossroads (Puti-Pereput'ia)*.¹⁰⁸³ In the third volume of the series, also published in *Novyi mir*, Abramov focused more intensely on the question of collective farm management in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The plot dramatized the confrontation between Party bureaucrats formed during the Second World War, when the state made relentless demands on the peasantry, and a new generation of leaders that were beginning to move away from the Stalinist methods of agricultural management. While rejecting the rural policy of the late Stalinist period, Abramov also sought to demonstrate the complexity of the conflict over different styles of management through multilayered characters.¹⁰⁸⁴ Like the other novels about the Priasliny family, *Paths and Crossroads* was subject to intense pre-publication “editing” at *Novyi mir*. The novel then ran into trouble with the censor, ultimately requiring the formation of a special committee formed of four secretaries from the Union of Writers and two representatives from the Central Committee. The committee requested more than fifty changes to the novel; Abramov was particularly dismayed at requests that he change his depiction of the living conditions of the peasantry during the last years of the Stalin era. Then, after Abramov made the required changes, the novel was unexpectedly and mysteriously pulled from publication.¹⁰⁸⁵ In January of 1973, Abramov appealed directly to the Central Committee's secretary of ideology, Demichev, complaining about the interference of unknown bureaucrats in the publication pro-

leadership failed to value peasants' honest labor. RGANI 5/61/82 (July 15, 1969): 296-305 in N. G. Tomilina, ed., *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura*, 703-711.

¹⁰⁸³ Fëdor Abramov, “Puti-pereput'ia,” *Novyi mir*, nos. 1-2 (1973): 3-114; 5-58.

¹⁰⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion of *Paths and Crossroads*, see Gilda Baïkovitch, “Abramov's Brothers and Sisters and the Depiction of Rural Life in Soviet Russia,” in *The Life and Work of Fedor Abramov*, ed. and trans. David Gillespie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 38-40.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Abramov described the situation in a letter to Belov: “My novel was already set up in type and paginated, and there should have appeared the signal to publish the first issue [of the year], but then the head [*glavnyi*] interfered and that was that—the novel was removed from the issue.” OR RGB 889/8/9 (January 4, 1973): 74-75.

cess. Abramov's letter seemed to have helped—the issues of *Novyi mir* containing his novel finally appeared on newsstands at the beginning of 1973.¹⁰⁸⁶

But Abramov's struggle over *Paths and Crossroads* was not over. On April 8, 1973, V. N. Yagodkin, a secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Communist Party, harshly criticized the novel at a meeting of secretaries of the Party organizations of the creative unions of Moscow. Sensing black clouds ahead, Abramov once again appealed to Demichev and received an audience. He recorded his April 12 meeting with Demichev in his diary. According to Abramov, Demichev him, "it's not your best work," and explained that his descriptions of postwar rural life were inaccurate. "We did not have a famine after the war [...], we quickly liquidated the postwar destruction, and there were no failures of Party policy."¹⁰⁸⁷ Demichev's statements amounted to a flat repudiation of Khrushchev's 1950s criticisms of Stalinist agricultural policy (see Chapter 1). "It seems to me that the Party did not make use of all opportunities," Abramov replied. "In the postwar years the military methods of managing the country became entrenched—that is what is being discussed. And how can this be denied?" According to Abramov, over the course of their two-hour meeting, Demichev refused to concede any mistakes in Party management of agriculture.¹⁰⁸⁸ Demichev's statements, which contradicted both Abramov's first-hand observations of the postwar countryside, as well as one of Khrushchev's major criticisms of Stalin, must have been head-spinning for the writer.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Krutikova-Abramova, "Posleslovie," in Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 2, 580-81.

¹⁰⁸⁷ In her chapter on the 1946-1947 famine, Russian historian Elena Zubkova cites statistics from historian V. F. Zima, who has estimated that malnutrition affected 100 million people in the Soviet Union in the postwar years. E. Iu. Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1957*, trans. Hugh Ragsdale (Armonk, New York; London, England: M. E. Sharpe, 1998), 47.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Abramov, qtd. in Krutikova-Abramova, "Posleslovie," in Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 2, 582-83.

Demichev's position on Abramov's novel was not anomalous; there appears to have been a segment of the Party elite and the creative intelligentsia that sought the rehabilitation of late Stalinist agricultural policies. In July 1973, a ten-page article appeared in *Oktiabr'* that called Abramov's negative portrayal of the postwar village in *Paths and Crossroads* "a literary lie [*khudozhestvennaia lozh'*]." ¹⁰⁸⁹ The author, Vladimir Staroverov, argued on the basis of statistics, as well as his personal experience living in a village in the postwar period, that Abramov's picture of the depopulated, poor, hungry, and demoralized village of Pekashino in the late 1940s and early 1950s was inaccurate. Yes, Staroverov argued, there had been difficulties, but they were not as bad as Abramov had portrayed, and they had passed quickly. ¹⁰⁹⁰ This position does not appear to have been dominant, however. Articles from Abramov's defenders quickly appeared in publications such as *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Vechernii Leningrad* and *Pinezhskaia pravda* (the newspaper of Abramov's native *raion*). In November, critics and writers at a discussion of the novel at the Leningrad branch of the RSFSR Writers' Union gave the novel an overwhelmingly positive evaluation. ¹⁰⁹¹ The controversy over the novel gradually dissipated.

Given the many difficulties that Abramov encountered in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it seems surprising that in 1975, his three novels about the Priasliny family (*Brothers and Sisters*, *Two Winters and Three Summers*, and *Paths and Crossroads*) were nominated for a USSR State Prize. Even more surprisingly, Abramov won. What had changed in the period between the rejection of his candidacy in 1969 and his victory in 1975? As Yitzhak Brudny notes, a number of important Party officials in charge of ideology were replaced after the April 1973 plenum of the

¹⁰⁸⁹ Vladimir Staroverov, "K portretu poslevoennoi derevni," *Oktiabr'*, no. 7 (1973): 197–206, quotation from 206.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Contemporary scholarship confirms the accuracy of Abramov's overall portrayal of life in postwar Soviet village. See Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁹¹ Krutikova-Abramova, "Posleslovie," in Abramov, *Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh*, vol. 2, 583–84.

Central Committee, including Demichev and Aleksandr Yakovlev, an ardent anti-nationalist.¹⁰⁹²

This changing of the guard seems to have led to a renewed commitment to the politics of inclusion towards nationally-minded Russian writers on the part of Soviet authorities. One sign of this is the sudden spate of USSR State Prizes to Russian Village Prose writers.

The 1975 State Prize debates suggest an intensification of inclusionary politics and an increased effort to co-opt Russian Village Prose writers. Whereas in 1969 Abramov's candidacy had lacked support from the more doctrinaire Russian writers and literary functionaries in the literary section of the State Prize Committee, in 1975 he had their support. In the first round of discussion in the literary section, writers like Markov and Gribachëv who had previously had reservations about Abramov expressed their support for his trilogy. They stated that they did not agree with his portrayal of the kolkhoz system, but made it clear that this was no longer a dealbreaker.¹⁰⁹³ At the plenum discussion, Abramov was clearly the leading candidate, advancing to the next round with the unanimous support of the members of all the sections.¹⁰⁹⁴ In the second round of deliberations in the literature section held in October, Markov (now the head of the Soviet Writers' Union) granted that "some moments in this work are stronger than others," but called Abramov's trilogy: "a major work by a great writer." In response to criticism from Mikhail Zimianin, head editor of *Pravda*, that the novels shared some of the (unspecified) weaknesses of Village Prose, Markov replied that Abramov had "corrected" many aspects of the trilogy over the years. (As head of the Soviet Writers' Union, Markov was surely aware of the special committee

¹⁰⁹² Aleksandr Yakovlev was transferred from his position as head of the Department of Propaganda (1969 to 1973) in the wake of his anti-nationalist article "Against Anti-Historicism." Demichev moved from the Department of Ideology to the Ministry of Culture in 1974. Evgenii Tiazhelnikov, a supporter of the Russian nationalists at *Molodaia gvardiia*, became head of the Central Committee's Department of Propaganda. Meanwhile, Vasily Shauro, one of the main supporters of inclusionary politics, remained in charge of the Department of Culture. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 100-101.

¹⁰⁹³ RGALI 2916/2/849 (June 4, 1975): 5-8.

that had suggested a number of changes to *Paths and Crossroads* in 1972.¹⁰⁹⁵) At the meeting of the plenum, the Ukrainian writer Oles' Honchar, who had voted against Abramov in 1969, presented the literature section's unanimous decision to support Abramov's candidacy this time around. In his speech, Honchar emphasized both Abramov's willingness to heed criticism of his work, as well as his deep understanding of the character of the people of the Russian north.¹⁰⁹⁶ In 1975, members of the literary establishment were clearly willing to overlook the more critical aspects of Abramov's work, especially because he had shown himself willing to tone down his harsher criticisms during the arduous "editing" and censorship process.

The story of Fëdor Abramov's State Prize illustrates the contradictory and conditional nature of the politics of inclusion towards nationally-minded Russian writers. Abramov at first appears as an unlikely candidate for a State Prize in the supposedly "stagnant" Brezhnev era. Like Druță and Matevosyan, Abramov had been a literary troublemaker since the very start of his career due to his stubborn insistence on representing the harsh realities of Soviet rural life. Had he been born in Moldova or Ukraine, he could have easily followed the path of Druță or even the Ukrainian literary dissidents, but the politics of inclusion towards Russian Village Prose ultimately kept him within the "big tent" of Russian literature. For Soviet authorities in the Brezhnev era, keeping Abramov within the tent came at the cost of allowing his anti-Stalinist views on Soviet agriculture to spread. For Abramov, staying within the tent meant significantly toning down his critiques of the Stalinist state's treatment of the peasantry of the Russian north.

Abramov's acceptance by political authorities and literary gatekeepers was always conditional. According to the writer Gleb Goryshin, after winning the State Prize Abramov sought to

¹⁰⁹⁴ RGALI 2916/2/834 (June 9, 1975): 17-24.

¹⁰⁹⁵ RGALI 2916/2/850 (October 13, 1975): 5-8.

¹⁰⁹⁶ RGALI 2916/2/835 (October 22, 1975): 11-12.

publish a speech he had written for the occasion in *Literaturnaia gazeta*. The paper rejected it, claiming that in the speech Abramov was seeking to “rehabilitate” *Novyi mir* and its editor Tvardovskii. Abramov reportedly declared: “They tell me that there is a Central Committee resolution. This resolution will be the death of me,” said Abramov. “What does it mean? I have been awarded the State Prize, and yet I am unable to say what I want? *Literaturnaia gazeta* is an organ of the state, but it doesn't give two hoots about public opinion! No, I won't speak at the ceremony. I won't do anything. To hell with them!”¹⁰⁹⁷ Goryshin recounted how later, he spoke with an employee of *Literaturnaia gazeta* about the episode. “It was not I who refused Abramov,” she said. “There are others who stand behind me. They know about this at the C[entral] C[ommittee].” She explained the true significance of the State Prize in the eyes of the authorities: “Abramov thinks that if they gave him the State Prize, then that means he can do whatever he wants. [...] But above they think about it in the opposite way: a Prize adds additional responsibilities. The laureate of a Prize does not speak only for himself...”¹⁰⁹⁸ In his diary, Abramov recorded his reaction to the episode: “Everyone says: now you are independent, now you do not have to give a damn about anyone. A laureate! But they did not even give this laureate a chance to speak on the occasion of the awarding of the prize. Speak according to the dictates of the bureaucrats from *Literaturka* [*Literaturnaia gazeta*], and that's it.”¹⁰⁹⁹ The USSR State Prize meant prestige, Union-wide fame, and a monetary award of 5,000 rubles. What it did not afford a writer

¹⁰⁹⁷ Gleb Goryshin, “Moi mal’chik, eto ia. Dokumental’noe povestvovanie.” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 6 (1994): 164. English translation from Georgii Tsvetov, “Fedor Abramov and Russian Village Prose,” in *The Life and Work of Fedor Abramov*, ed. and trans. David Gillespie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 25.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Goryshin, “Moi mal’chik, eto ia,” 164.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Fëdor Abramov, *Tak chto zhe nam delat'?: iz dnevnikov, zapisnykh knizhek, pisem : razmyshleniia, somneniia, predosterezheniia, itogi* (Sankt-Peterburg: Zhurnal “Neva,” 1995), 46.

like Abramov was a real platform from which he could enact Tvardovskii's program of telling the unvarnished "truth" about Soviet life.

Abramov's 1975 USSR State Prize was the first of four back-to-back victories by Village Prose writers in the late 1970s. He was followed by Mikhail Alekseev in 1976, Valentin Rasputin in 1977, and Viktor Astaf'ev in 1978. Of them, probably the most famous was Valentin Rasputin, a writer from Irkutsk whom the Moscow-based Russian nationalist critic Vladimir Chivilikhin had "discovered" at the seminar for young writers held in Chita in 1965. The editor of *Nash sovremennik*, Sergei Vikulov, had recruited Rasputin for his journal, which was establishing a niche for itself as a home for writers from the rural Russian periphery. Rasputin won the State Prize in 1977 for his 1974 novella *Live and Remember*, but his victory was not without controversy. His more recent novella *Farewell to Matëra* was originally included in the nomination but removed during the deliberation process. Even as the political and literary authorities sought to co-opt Rasputin, they found that they could not accept his rural-based critique of the impact of Soviet modernization on Russian villagers in his 1976 novella *Farewell to Matëra*. By elevating Rasputin with a State Prize, however, they nevertheless ended up amplifying his message that Soviet development policies disregarded the interests of many rural Russians.

Rasputin's novella *Live and Remember*, published in *Nash sovremennik* in 1974, created a major literary splash.¹¹⁰⁰ Rasputin said that the plot was inspired by a brief moment in his war-time childhood when he saw a captured deserter who was being marched through his village.¹¹⁰¹ Set in the waning days of the Second World War, it tells the story of Nastëna, a woman who discovers that her husband Andrei, a soldier in the Red Army, has deserted. Wounded for a third

¹¹⁰⁰ Valentin Rasputin, "Zhivi i pomni," *Nash sovremennik*, no. 10, 11 (1974): 2-88, 58-91.

¹¹⁰¹ Kathleen Parthé, "Foreword: The Good Soldier's Wife," in *Live and Remember*, by Valentin Rasputin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), vi.

time but denied leave, Andrei escapes from the army and returns to live in a deserted cabin near their Siberian village. Attempting to help Andrei survive, Nastëna is forced into a life of subterfuge, which intensifies after she becomes pregnant with Andrei's child. The novella ends in Nastëna's tragic suicide when the local authorities discover that Andrei has been hiding and that Nastëna has been helping him.

The novella broke with Soviet orthodoxy in a number of different ways. Rasputin presented a strikingly different view of the war than the heroic narrative of the great Victory promoted by Soviet authorities during the Brezhnev era. Like Abramov, he highlighted the crushing sacrifices borne by ordinary villagers far from the front. As the war veteran and Village Prose writer Viktor Astaf'ev wrote to Rasputin in a 1974 letter, *Live and Remember* was about “the tragedy of the war, namely the people's war [*narodnaia voina*].”¹¹⁰² Of course, not all readers were pleased with Rasputin's approach—the novella received a negative review in the military newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda* because it focused on the story of a wartime deserter. Ultimately, the secretariat of the governing board of the RSFSR Union of Writers was convened to discuss the novel. At the meeting Iurii Bondarev, a veteran and leading author of “war prose,” reportedly silenced the critics with his strong defense of *Live and Remember*.¹¹⁰³ In addition to highlighting the tragic side of the war, the novella also showed the impact of collectivization on its hero, Nastëna.¹¹⁰⁴ Early in the novella, we learn that her father was killed “in the first troubled year of collectivization” and her mother died in 1933 from starvation. She and her sister survive only by

¹¹⁰² Viktor Astaf'ev to Valentin Rasputin, December 20, 1974, Vologda, in Viktor Astaf'ev and Valentin Rasputin, *Prosto pis'ma*, ed. O. V. Loseva, Biblioteka memuarov “Blizkoe proshloe” (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2018), 27-30. Original: OR RGB 914/1/16: 1-5.

¹¹⁰³ Sergei Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 9 (September 1996): 11.

¹¹⁰⁴ Rasputin expressed reservations about the wisdom of collectivization at a 1977 board meeting of *Nash sovremennik*. See RGALI 622/7/3 (August 24, 1977): 41-42.

abandoning their native village and going begging.¹¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as Kathleen Parthé has argued, the novella's hero Nastëna behaves in accordance with peasant, not Soviet, values. Forced into an impossible choice between her duty to her husband and her duty to state and community, Nastëna chooses her husband. "The value system that allows—even forces—Nastëna to act differently is drawn from the patriarchal village, where it is not acceptable for a wife to turn her husband over to outside authority," Parthé explains.¹¹⁰⁶ *Live and Remember* was less overly anti-Stalinist than Abramov's work; it simply existed outside of the traditional Soviet values system.

Live and Remember's heterodox perspective on issues such as the war and rural life seem to have endeared it to a broad swath of the Soviet intellectual elite. As *Nash sovremennik* editor Vikulov wrote to Rasputin in 1974, some readers were "grumbling" about Rasputin's choice of a deserter for a main character on the eve of the thirtieth anniversary of the Victory, but many—the majority, he thought—were "praising the thing."¹¹⁰⁷ The dynamic that Vikulov described was evident at the discussions at the 1976 USSR State Prize Committee. At the first round of discussion of the literature section held in October 1976, writers as diverse as the village poet Sergei Orlov (a longstanding member of Vikulov's Vologda network), the Sixtiers poet Robert Rozhdestvenskii, and the Ukrainian writer Oles' Honchar spoke out in favor. The only reservation was raised by the editor of *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Aleksandr Chakovskii, who stated that he agreed with the RSFSR Union of Writers' position on the novella but was still not entirely convinced that it should receive a State Prize. The section nevertheless unanimously decided to advance

¹¹⁰⁵ Valentin Rasputin, *Live and Remember*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 9.

¹¹⁰⁶ Parthé, "Foreword: The Good Soldier's Wife," viii.

¹¹⁰⁷ Sergei Vikulov to Valentin Rasputin, OR RGB 914/4/28 (November 3, 1974): 1.

Rasputin to the second round.¹¹⁰⁸ Five days later, however, the literature section convened again to discuss the possibility of delaying Rasputin's candidacy to the following year due to the large number of candidates that year. The Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov, a reliable liberal on the Committee, stated "We have all read and continue to read [Rasputin], especially *Live and Remember*. There is no doubt that he is one of the strongest and most interesting representatives of Russian literature. Thank God that talents like him have appeared." Aitmatov supported the idea of delaying his candidacy to the next year because he thought that Rasputin's forthcoming *Farewell to Matëra* would be even better. While Orlov and several others objected to the proposal to delay Rasputin's candidacy, it had the strong support of the USSR Union of Writers head Markov, and passed narrowly in a 6-5 vote.¹¹⁰⁹ The decision to delay the candidacy proved controversial at the plenum, with many Committee members voicing misgivings, but ultimately the motion to delay Rasputin's candidacy until 1977 passed narrowly.¹¹¹⁰ The unwillingness of many of the Committee members to delay the candidacy shows the true groundswell of support for Rasputin among the Soviet intelligentsia.

Farewell to Matëra, published in *Nash sovremennik* in October and November of 1976, proved to be much more controversial than *Live and Remember*.¹¹¹¹ Much like the other authors discussed in this chapter, Rasputin drew on his personal experiences in order to present a peasant perspective on Soviet policies that affected the lives of people in rural areas. Like many of his fellow Siberian villagers, Rasputin became a "development refugee" when in 1961 a new hydroelectric complex on the Angara River necessitated the relocation of his native village of Atalanka

¹¹⁰⁸ RGALI 2916/3/33 (October 13, 1976): 11-12

¹¹⁰⁹ RGALI 2916/3/33 (October 18, 1976): 35-40. Aitmatov quotation from 36.

¹¹¹⁰ RGALI 2916/3/32 (October 21, 1976): 10-25.

¹¹¹¹ Valentin Rasputin, "Proshchanie s Matëroi," *Nash sovremennik*, no. 10, 11 (1976): 3-71, 17-64.

from the flood zone.¹¹¹² *Farewell to Matëra* told the story of a similar village slated for flooding. The novella's moral center is an elderly woman named Darya, who watches as the only home she has ever known is gradually dismantled. In one key scene, Darya comes upon a group of men who have been ordered by officials to destroy the village cemetery as a "sanitary" measure. Representing the forces of memory and respect for the past, Darya leads a group of villagers in a spontaneous defense of the graves of their relatives, driving away the cemetery's would-be destroyers.¹¹¹³ Darya cannot understand why her grandson is so eager to trade their native village for electricity and a job at the hydroelectric station.¹¹¹⁴ The novella disrupted Soviet discourses of progress and development by presenting a perspective from an "unimagined community," defined by Rob Nixon as a community that must be hidden from view in order to maintain "a highly selective discourse of national development."¹¹¹⁵ Episodes like the destruction of the cemetery underscored the divide between Soviet officials and ordinary villagers.

Rasputin's criticism of the impact of massive development projects on the lives of Siberian peasants did not go unnoticed by Soviet authorities. Much like Matevosyan, Druță, and Abramov, Rasputin was accused of portraying the Soviet state as acting against the interests of rural people. In January of 1977, Glavlit sent a report to the Soviet Central Committee that criticized a number of works appearing in *Nash sovremennik* in 1976, including *Farewell to Matëra*. The censor objected to the "unflattering picture of the resettlement of *kolkhozniki* to new places

¹¹¹² Kathleen Parthé, "Foreword: Master of the Island," in *Farewell to Matyora*, by Valentin Rasputin (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1979), xvi. Anthropologist Thayer Scudder pioneered the study of "development refugees." See Thayer Scudder, "Development-Induced Relocation and Refugee Studies: 37 Years of Change and Continuity among Zambia's Gwembe Tonga," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6, no. 2 (1993): 123–152.

¹¹¹³ Valentin Rasputin, *Farewell to Matyora*, trans. Antonina Bouis, European Classics (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 16-23.

¹¹¹⁴ Rasputin, *Farewell to Matyora*, 102-111.

¹¹¹⁵ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 150.

in connection with the construction on the Angara,” in particular the scene depicting the destruction of the cemetery, the portrayal of resettlement sites as “not suitable for life,” and the characterization of Soviet authorities as “ignorant and unintelligent people.” “The interests of the residents of Matëra are set up in contradiction to the interests of the state that is constructing the GES [hydroelectric station] on the Angara.¹¹¹⁶ A spirited debate over the novella and its stance on tradition and technological progress began in the pages of the leading Soviet newspapers and literary journals.¹¹¹⁷ In March, the Central Committee Departments of Propaganda and Culture called Vikulov in for a meeting and reminded him of his obligations under the 1969 resolution that raised the responsibility of editors for material published in their journals—the same resolution that they had used to target *Novyi mir*.¹¹¹⁸ According to Vikulov, Rasputin was invited to a meeting at the Central Committee with Secretary of Ideology Zimianin, who reportedly told him that “he did not depict Siberia as it was in reality, he idealized the patriarchal way of life and the customs of the Siberians and viewed progress skeptically, even antagonistically.” During the exchange, Vikulov reports, “it appeared that the Secretary knew Siberia better than Rasputin, a Siberian.”¹¹¹⁹ Much like Abramov and Druță, Rasputin was told that his views, based on his firsthand experience of rural life, were invalid.

By the time that the literature section of the USSR State Prize Committee convened for their first round of deliberations in May of 1977, the tide had already turned against *Matëra*. So-

¹¹¹⁶ RGANI 5/73/422 (January 20, 1977): 1-9 in Tomilina and Konova, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978*, vol. 2, 15.

¹¹¹⁷ See detailed discussion in Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 166-169.

¹¹¹⁸ RGANI 5/73/422 (March 1, 1977): 10-11 in Tomilina and Konova, *Apparat TsK KPSS i kul'tura, 1973-1978*, vol. 2, 53-54.

¹¹¹⁹ Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” 12. According to Brudny, Zimianin “was hardly a committed supporter of inclusionary politics, but he enforced it as long as this policy constituted the party’s official line.” Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 100.

viet Writers' Union head Markov noted that critics had pointed out that Rasputin had failed to adequately explain why the village was being flooded in the first place. "I had hoped that it would be a very strong and modern piece, but it did not turn out that way. Clearly, that remains in the future," he said. The assembled members of the literature section voted to remove *Farewell from Matëra* from the nomination, leaving only *Live and Remember*.¹¹²⁰ Rasputin easily advanced through later stages of deliberations, and was awarded the 1977 State Prize by a unanimous vote of the Committee.¹¹²¹ If Abramov's victory in 1975 had been the culmination of Tvardovskii's focus on rural reform as editor of *Novyi mir*, then Rasputin's victory in 1977 was the vindication of Vikulov's decision to make *Nash sovremennik* into "a home for writers from the periphery" after taking over the journal in 1968. The two editors, different in many ways, had nevertheless succeeded in their long campaigns to bring rural perspectives to the center of Soviet literature.

Rasputin was the first of the Village Prose writers from Vikulov's *Nash sovremennik* to receive the USSR State Prize, but he would not be the last. He was followed by Viktor Astaf'ev for *Queen Fish (Tsar'-Ryba)* in 1978 and Vasiliï Belov for *Harmony (Lad)* in 1982. As Yitzhak Brudny has discussed, while *Nash sovremennik*'s authors were winning accolades and prizes, the journal was still subject to harsh censorship.¹¹²² The journal received a harsh rebuke for their November 1981 issue, into which Vikulov's deputy Iurii Seleznev had managed to pack four controversial pieces while Vikulov was away on vacation. (One piece in the issue, *Fortieth Day [Sorokovoi den']* by the V. Krupin, had a character who declared, "We never had *serfdom* here,

¹¹²⁰ RGALI 2916/3/77 (May 17, 1977): 5-7.

¹¹²¹ RGALI 2916/3/85 (October 10, 1977): 8; RGALI 2916/3/84 (October 18, 1977): 85; RGALI 2916/3/84 (October 21, 1977): 196.

¹¹²² See Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 132-134.

but we had *collectivization!*”) After a December 1981 meeting of the secretariat of the governing body of the Writers’ Union, Seleznev was fired. According to Simon Cosgrove, the episode was symptomatic of a breakdown in relations between *Nash sovremennik* and previously supportive cultural bureaucrats.¹¹²³ In June of 1982 Vikulov was once again invited to the Central Committee, this time in response to another report by the censor criticizing several works slated for publication in the journal.¹¹²⁴ One of the objectionable works was “Seven Versts to Heaven” [“*Sem’ verst do nebes*”], a text by Abramov about his relationship with Aleksandr Yashin. The essay detailed how their shared persecution in 1963—Yashin for his “Vologda Wedding” and Abramov for his *Around and About*—brought the two writers together (see Chapter 3). In the essay, Abramov made no secret of the fact that both he and Yashin considered the criticism of their works unfair. “Quit worrying about that nonsense!” Yashin counsels Abramov, “We should walk proudly [*nado gogolem khodit’*], we write the truth and we don’t have to ask for forgiveness from every son-of-a-bitch.”¹¹²⁵ In September Glavlit sent a letter to the Soviet Central Committee complaining that Abramov rejected Party criticism of his and Yashin’s works in the text, which was slated to be published in October.¹¹²⁶ In October, the head of the Department of Propaganda Evgenii Tiazhelnikov and the head of the Department of Culture Vasilii Shauro spoke with Vikulov, and he agreed to remove Abramov’s essay from the issue.¹¹²⁷ Even twenty years

¹¹²³ Simon Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature: The Case of Nash Sovremennik, 1981-91*, Studies in Russia and East Europe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 47-52.

¹¹²⁴ RGANI 5/88/133 (June 10, 1982): 11-12.

¹¹²⁵ The essay was later published in a collection of memoirs about Yashin by his fellow northerners. Fëdor Abramov, “*Sem’ verst do nebes*,” in *Zemliaki pomniat: Aleksandr Iashin v vospominaniakh severian*, ed. V. A. Oboturov (Arkhangel’sk: Severo-Zapadnoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1988), 161.

¹¹²⁶ RGANI 5/88/133 (September 28, 1982): 18-20.

¹¹²⁷ RGANI 5/88/133 (October 19, 1982): 41.

after the criticism of *Around and About*, Abramov did not have the right to rehabilitate his and Yashin's two groundbreaking critical works on the state of the Russian village.

Nash sovremennik's support for Village Prose writers, along with its nonfiction essays on environmental and agricultural issues, led to another lengthy report in 1983.¹¹²⁸ A report prepared for the Central Committee in September of 1983 stated that in 1982 and 1983, Glavlit had raised objections to works in *Nash sovremennik* twenty times, making it the second-most criticized journal after *Novyi mir*, with 39 objections.¹¹²⁹ Thus, as we have seen in the cases of Abramov and Rasputin, USSR State Prizes did not necessarily make life much easier for the editorial board of *Nash sovremennik*. Prestigious literary awards were not a *carte blanche*. The politics of inclusion allowed Village Prose writers to spread their critical perspectives on rural issues, but only within certain limits. Their harshest criticisms of Soviet officials' disregard for the needs and interests of the Russian peasantry could not see the light of day. At the same time, however, Village Prose writers like Abramov and Rasputin managed to publish, in huge print runs, books that vividly illustrated the estrangement of the Russian peasantry from representatives of the Soviet state.¹¹³⁰

Conclusion

In 1980, the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov published a novel in *Novyi mir*, *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years*, that in 1983 would win him his second USSR State

¹¹²⁸ RGANI 5/8/88 (February 8, 1983): 22-34.

¹¹²⁹ RGANI 5/89/88 (September 5, 1983): 153.

¹¹³⁰ Between 1971 and 1982, over 5 million copies of Abramov's books were published and over 3.4 million copies of Rasputin's books were published. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 105.

Prize.¹¹³¹ Aitmatov's novel had little to do with peasants *per se*, but nevertheless seemed to capture the issues that rural writers had been grappling with throughout the Brezhnev era. The novel told the story of a group of Kazakhs attempting to give the deceased leader of their small railroad settlement a Muslim burial at a traditional cemetery, only to find themselves blocked because it is part of a rocket launch site. At the end of the novel, in a scene reminiscent of the one in *Farewell to Matëra*, they discover that the Ana-Beiit cemetery they have been traveling to the whole time is slated for destruction. The most memorable aspect of the novel was not its plot, however, but rather a "legend" that Aitmatov inserted in the text—the legend of the *mankurt*. Aitmatov told the story of a group called the Zhuan'zhuan who, in the process of conquering the region where the Ana-Beiit cemetery was located, subjected captured warriors to a special form of torture that erased their memories. A warrior who had gone through this torture "lost his memory of the past forever. He had become a *mankurt*, or slave, who could not remember his past life."¹¹³² Aitmatov described the characteristics of these slaves who had been alienated from their own pasts, from their own memory:

The *mankurt* did not know who he had been, whence and from what tribe he had come, did not know his name, could not remember his childhood, father or mother—in short, he could not recognize himself as a human being. Deprived of any understanding of his own ego, the *mankurt* was, from his master's point of view, possessed of a whole range of advantages. He was the equivalent of a dumb animal and therefore absolutely obedient and safe. He never thought of trying to escape. For any slave owner, the most frightening thing was the possibility of a revolt of these slaves, since each slave was a potential rebel. The *mankurt* was the exception: he was absolutely impervious to any incitement to revolt, quite innocent. He knew of no such passions. As a result, there was no need to keep him confined, to guard him and even less to suspect him of having any sinister intentions. The *mankurt*, like a dog, only recognized his masters. He would have nothing to do with other

¹¹³¹ Aitmatov had won the State Prize in 1968 for *Farewell, Gulsary!* He was also a laureate of the Lenin Prize (see Chapter 2). Chingiz Aitmatov, "I dol'she veka dlitsia den': Roman," *Novyi mir*, no. 11 (1980): 3–185. Translated in Chingiz Aitmatov, *The day lasts more than a hundred years*, trans. John French (London: Futura Macdonald & Co, 1984).

¹¹³² Aitmatov, *The day lasts more than a hundred years*, 135.

people. All his thoughts were concerned with satisfying his belly's needs. He had no other worries. He performed the work given to him blindly, willingly, and single-mindedly.¹¹³³

According to legend, a woman called Naiman-Ana had once traveled to find her captured son, remind him of his true past, and bring him back home with her. But when she met him, she found that he was a *mankurt*. He refused to acknowledge her as his mother and attacked her, fatally shooting her. The place where the mother was buried became Ana-Beit, the cemetery in which the novel's protagonists attempt unsuccessfully to bury their patriarch.¹¹³⁴

In their works of the 1960s and 1970s, the writers discussed in this chapter drew on their past experiences to shed light on what they saw as the mistreatment of peasants by the Soviet state. They attempted to show how the disregard of state officials for rural people had led to the alienation of peasants, historically considered the most “national” social group, from the state. Some, like Abramov and Druță, wrote historical works inspired by their memories of the late Stalin era, while others, like Matevosyan and Rasputin, drew on their memories of events that had taken place in their native villages in order to address the high-handed treatment of rural people in the present day. Like the mother in Aitmatov's legend, they sought to fight enforced forgetting and the denial of past and present wrongs. As Druță wrote in 1973 about his novel addressing the 1946-47 famine in Moldova, they believed that “the moral norms by which my ancestors lived and by which I try to live do not allow me to walk by the graves of my fellow villagers pretending that I do not know who, when, and under what circumstances they were buried there.” As the Soviet Union increasingly urbanized, rural writers feared that a people that had forgotten their peasant pasts would lose their moral moorings, their sense of rootedness. Aitmatov's legend of the *mankurt* articulated their fear that the abuse suffered by the peasantry—and

¹¹³³ Aitmatov, *The day lasts more than a hundred years*, 136.

¹¹³⁴ Aitmatov, *The day lasts more than a hundred years*, 146.

importantly, *the subsequent denial of that abuse*—would eventually cause the nation to lose its own sense of itself.

The fact that a work as potentially inflammatory as Aitmatov's *The Day Lasts Longer Than a Hundred Years* received a USSR State Prize also illustrates another major theme of this chapter: the continued evolution of national discourse after the Thaw even in a time of intensified censorship and repression. As we have seen, despite the harsh censorship and the adoption of a politics of exclusion in some republics, national culture did not stagnate during this period. Rural writers like Matevosyan, Druță, Abramov, and Rasputin continued to attempt to push the conversation forward by drawing attention to the mutual alienation of the Soviet state and the peasantry. Their works suggested that the Soviet state had become distant from the peasant, and by extension, the nation. The adoption of a "politics of inclusion" in some republics, particularly the RSFSR, which set the tone for the rest of the country, allowed this discourse to become mainstream. Moscow-based cultural elites, taking their cues from the officially-permitted Russian Village Prose movement, supported writers from the republics like Druță and Matevosyan. As we have seen, even during the Brezhnev era the prestige of the top echelon of the Soviet culture elite was such that their opinions could sometimes override those of weak republican Party officials who sought to rein in their rebellious writers. The State Prizes that writers like Matevosyan, Abramov, and Rasputin won only solidified the legitimacy of the rural-based conceptions of the nation that they promoted.

At the same time, the refusal of many in the political and literary establishment to acknowledge the events that rural writers described increased their sense of frustration and alienation. This alienation was most intense among those who were subject to republican "politics of exclusion" towards nationally-minded intellectuals, including Moldovan writers like Druță and

the Ukrainian intellectuals described in Chapters 4 and 5. The Moldovan political leadership was so hostile to Druță's perspective that they torpedoed his bid for a USSR State Prize in 1970. The policy of the Moldovan Party, along with the harsh censorship regime in the republic, alienated many loyal Moldovan intellectuals. The overall intensification of censorship in the Brezhnev era ensured that even those intellectuals who lived in republics like the RSFSR and Armenia where authorities adopted a politics of inclusion experienced similar frustrations. As Abramov's experience shows, if anything, the receipt of a State Prize only heightened their disillusionment, because they found it did not afford greater freedom to raise the issues that they wanted to bring to the public. Over the course of the Brezhnev era, then, the Soviet state was losing the support of a significant segment of its own cultural elite—a development that would have a tremendous impact in the mid-1980s, when *glasnost'* arrived.

Chapter 7:

Writers as Environmental and National Activists during *Glasnost*’ and *Perestroika*

“The earth remains silent.

What are you, our silent earth, and how long will you remain silent?

And are you indeed silent?”

—Valentin Rasputin, *The Fire*, 1985

During the momentous years of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika*, writers—particularly writers from villages—seemed to be everywhere. Writers’ Unions across the USSR boiled with activity. Writers who had previously allowed their fiction to speak for itself began to write passionate opinion pieces in the newspapers. Others put down their pens and ascended the podium, becoming leading figures in nationalist organizations. In Ukraine, a “writers’ bloc” led by Oles’ Honchar and other Ukrainian writers emerged in response to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, was instrumental in the founding of the national movement Rukh.¹¹³⁵ In Lithuania, the village writer Justinas Marcinkevičius and other members of the Lithuanian Writers’ Union began raising the issues of language, culture and the Stalin-era displacement of peasants from the land, ultimately founding the popular nationalist organization Sajudis.¹¹³⁶ In Moldova, Ion Druță and other prominent members of the Moldovan Writers’ Union helped to organize the Moldovan Popular Front.¹¹³⁷ “At the meetings, at the rostrum, on radio and television, all writers and writers,” Druță later recalled.¹¹³⁸ In Armenia, writers joined with faculty from Yerevan State University to organ-

¹¹³⁵ Serhii Plokhyy, *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 285-316.

¹¹³⁶ Violeta Davoliūtė, *The Making and Breaking of Soviet Lithuania: Memory and Modernity in the Wake of War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 154-168.

¹¹³⁷ Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 131-134.

¹¹³⁸ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 112.

ize mass protests on environmental issues and later, the status of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Russian Village Prose writers were no less active. Sergei Zalygin stepped into the shoes of his mentor Aleksandr Tvardovskii, publishing a flood of previously unpublished works as editor of *Novyi mir* and championing Gorbachev's reforms.¹¹³⁹ Unlike their non-Russian colleagues, however, many Russian Village Prose writers opposed Gorbachev's reforms. The conservative RSFSR Writers' Union emerged as one of the primary opponents of *glasnost*' and *perestroika*, veering into strident nationalism and anti-Semitism.¹¹⁴⁰

During the late 1980s, then, many rural-born writers embraced the role of "writer-activist" and advocate for the nation.¹¹⁴¹ Environmental advocacy helped many of them find their voices as national spokesmen early on. Throughout Soviet history, environmental protection had been a relatively "safe" topic through which writers, scientists, and public health officials could raise concerns about the consequences of Soviet industrial development. This chapter traces the emergence of a strand of rural-based environmentalism in the post-Stalin period before focusing on the environmental activism of the Russian writer Valentin Rasputin, the Ukrainian writer Oles' Honchar, and the Moldovan writer Ion Druță during the late 1980s. It argues that rural writers made a unique contribution to Soviet environmental discourse by framing their arguments around the impact of environmental destruction on ordinary Soviet people, particularly those in rural areas. Their particular brand of activism grew organically out of their understandings of themselves as members of a group that had been oppressed by both Stalin and his successors—the peasantry. Their environmentalism was an environmentalism of the oppressed, a "Sec-

¹¹³⁹ On Zalygin, see Yitzhak M. Brudny, "Between Liberalism and Nationalism: The Case of Sergei Zalygin," *Studies in Comparative Communism* XXI, no. 3/4 (Autumn/Winter 1988): 331–40.

¹¹⁴⁰ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 192–258.

¹¹⁴¹ On the concept of the writer-activist, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 14–16.

ond World” counterpart of the “environmentalism of the poor” and the environmental justice movements that emerged in the “Third” and “First” Worlds, respectively.

As we have seen in Chapter 6, during the Brezhnev era, village writers warned readers that a gap had opened up between the Soviet state and the peasant/nation. By the mid-1980s, that gap had become a chasm. The environmental writings of Rasputin, Honchar, and Druță increasingly depicted Soviet authorities as inimical to the interests of the peasantry and the nation. Rasputin railed against the industrial pollution of Lake Baikal’s freshwater reserves, characterizing Soviet industrial planners’ attitudes towards Siberia and its people as “colonial.” Honchar blamed central Soviet ministries (and the Ukrainian republican authorities who did nothing to stop them) for inflicting the Chernobyl nuclear disaster on the Ukrainian population. Druță, for his part, wrote a searing article in *Literaturnaia gazeta* accusing the Moldovan leadership of poisoning a generation of children with agricultural chemicals. Environmentalism was an early, breakthrough issue that helped these writers to assume the role of public advocates for their respective peoples against the abuses of the Soviet state.

During the period of *perestroika* and *glasnost*’, as during the Thaw, the cultural intelligentsia became a conduit through which reforms championed by the center spread to the periphery, where the republican leadership often resisted them. As Serhii Plokhy explains, “Through his policy of *glasnost*’, Gorbachev had encouraged local cultural elites to rebel against local party authorities in the name of *perestroika*.”¹¹⁴² As during the Thaw, central institutions and networks of intellectuals helped spread the message of reform (see Chapter 2). Although arising out of particular national contexts, the activism of all three writers was boosted by connections with central literary institutions like *Literaturnaia gazeta* and the example of like-minded writers from

¹¹⁴² Plokhy, *Chernobyl*, 299.

other republics. In part because it had historically been a relatively "safe" topic, environmentalism was often an early means by which *glasnost*' spread. Rasputin's advocacy for the protection of Lake Baikal against the depredations of Soviet industry in major Soviet publications was an early sign of *glasnost*'. Later on, the Soviet Writers' Union and *Literaturnaia gazeta* supported Rasputin's efforts to found his Baikal Movement for the protection of the world's freshwater reserves. For his part, Honchar frequently referred to Russian writers' activities to protect Lake Baikal in connection with his own environmental activism around Chernobyl. Honchar and other Ukrainian writers appealed to publications in Moscow to publish works that local Ukrainian publications would not touch. In Druță's native Moldova, where the state of the environment became a major issue in 1987, the newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta* supported writers' efforts to raise the issue, allowing *glasnost*' to penetrate into the republic despite the best efforts of its reactionary republican leadership. Writers' environmental activism during *glasnost*', although it often wore national garb, was a quintessentially Soviet phenomenon, facilitated by the metropole.

Having gained experience acting as public figures through their environmental activism, writers were ready at the crucial moment when the Soviet public sphere was opening up. Writers from rural backgrounds, including Rasputin, Honchar, Druță, Vasiliï Belov, and Chingiz Aitmatov, participated in the Congress of People's Deputies, a representative body elected by free elections in the Soviet Union in 1989. The Congress became the stage upon which many writers made the leap from environmental advocates to national spokesmen, ready to speak about the political issues they saw affecting the nation. At the Congress of People's Deputies, even the rural writers who expressed the gravest doubts about Gorbachev's reforms questioned whether the Soviet state had their nation's interest at heart. In the end, rural writers abandoned the Soviet state in favor of the nation.

Towards a Typology of Soviet Environmentalism

While earlier accounts of Gorbachev-era environmentalism portrayed it as essentially appearing out of nowhere, more recent scholarship has emphasized the long history of environmentalism in the Soviet Union from its earliest days through the 1980s.¹¹⁴³ The environmental advocacy of Russian writers, as well as writers of other nationalities, has nevertheless remained relatively marginal to the study of environmentalism in the USSR. In histories of Soviet environmentalism, scholars often quote Russian Village Prose writers like Valentin Rasputin and Sergei Zalygin, but relegate their activism to the margins of their analysis in favor of the activities of scientists.¹¹⁴⁴ The existing scholarship on the environmental writings of rural writers has generally analyzed the works of Village Prose writers from the perspective of the development of Russian nationalism.¹¹⁴⁵ Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that Village Prose environmentalism is not “true” environmentalism because writers instrumentally raised environmental issues as a cover for nationalism.¹¹⁴⁶ Jane Dawson famously argued that the environmental movements of the late

¹¹⁴³ See, for example, Jane I. Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). Recent examples of scholarship on environmentalism in the Soviet Union before *perestroika* and *glasnost* include Nicholas Breyfogle, “At the Watershed: 1958 and the Beginnings of Lake Baikal Environmentalism,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 1 (January 2015): 147–80; Laurent Coumel, “A Failed Environmental Turn? Khrushchev’s Thaw and Nature Protection in Soviet Russia,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 40 (2013): 167–189; Katja Doose, “Green Nationalism? The Transformation of Environmentalism in Soviet Armenia, 1969-1991,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2019): 181–205; Douglas R. Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachëv* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1999).

¹¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Breyfogle, “At the Watershed;” Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

¹¹⁴⁵ Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Simon Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature: The Case of Nash Sovremennik, 1981-91*, Studies in Russia and East Europe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Anna Razuvalova, *Pisateli-"derevenshchiki": literatura i konservativnaia ideologiia 1970-kh godov*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie. Nauchnoe prilozhenie 146 (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015).

¹¹⁴⁶ N. M. Dronin and J. M. Francis, “Econationalism in Soviet Literature,” *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 45, no. 1 (2018): 52.

Soviet era were mere surrogates for nationalist sentiment, which could not be expressed openly until the very last years of the Soviet Union's existence.¹¹⁴⁷ As several scholars have pointed out, however, this approach is problematic for a number of reasons.¹¹⁴⁸ As Laurent Coumel and Marc Elie put it, "environmental demands are never born out of pure ecological considerations."¹¹⁴⁹ Environmental justice movements in the United States and the global South are often linked to broader social issues.¹¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the interweaving of environmental and national discourses in the Soviet context is hardly unique.¹¹⁵¹ This chapter considers where the environmental advocacy of writers from villages—Russian and non-Russian—fits within a broader typology of Soviet environmentalism. It argues that their environmental writings most resemble what scholars of environmentalism have understood under the rubric of the "environmentalism of the poor" or "environmental justice" because they emphasize the impact of environmental destruction on marginalized communities.

Although our knowledge of environmentalism in the USSR before perestroika has increased greatly in the last twenty years, there has been relatively little scholarly analysis of the different strands of environmentalism that evolved in the USSR. Some scholars have recognized the existence of different forms of Soviet environmentalism that emerged among different groups

¹¹⁴⁷ Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism*.

¹¹⁴⁸ Melanie Arndt and Laurent Coumel, "A Green End to the Red Empire? Ecological Mobilizations in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States, 1950-2000: A Decentralized Approach," *Ab Imperio*, no. 1 (2019): 105–24; Laurent Coumel and Marc Elie, "A Belated and Tragic Ecological Revolution: Nature, Disasters, and Green Activists in the Soviet Union and the Post-Soviet States, 1960s-2010s," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 40 (2013): 157–65; Doose.

¹¹⁴⁹ Coumel and Elie, "A Belated and Tragic Ecological Revolution," 162

¹¹⁵⁰ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*; Joan Martinez-Alier, "The Environmentalism of the Poor: Its Origins and Spread," in *A Companion to Global Environmental History*, by J. R. McNeill and Erin Stewart Mauldin (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2012), 513–29.

¹¹⁵¹ See, for example, Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity, 1885-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

at different times, but thus far there has not been a systematic attempt to trace the evolution of various strands of environmental activism over time.¹¹⁵² In the scholarly literature on environmentalism outside of the USSR, however, there have been many efforts to distinguish between types of environmentalism. The categories tend to be divided based on the aims of the environmental movement, as well as the social origins of the activists. These categories can provide some preliminary lenses through which to analyze the various strands of the Soviet environmental movement and begin to understand the contribution of rural intellectuals to its development.

Preservationism is a form of environmentalism that emphasizes the importance of preserving “untouched” nature in preserves, refuges, and national parks. Well-established in the historical literature on environmentalism in the U.S., where it is epitomized by the figure of John Muir, preservationism is characterized by the preservation of nature for its aesthetic, and not productive, qualities.¹¹⁵³ For this reason, preservationism is sometimes dubbed the “cult of the wilderness.”¹¹⁵⁴ While earlier iterations of preservationism emphasize the importance of wilderness for maintaining the American frontier spirit and masculine virility, postwar preservationism moved towards scientific and biological justifications. Preservationism in the U.S. has historically been associated with wealthy elites.¹¹⁵⁵ In the Soviet Union, the preservationist ethos is best embodied by the movement of Soviet naturalists, based in state-sponsored organizations such as VOOP, who advocated for the creation and maintenance of ecologically pristine *zapovedniki*, or

¹¹⁵² See, for example, Coumel, “A Failed Environmental Turn?;” Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*. Oleg Yanitsky created a detailed typology of the forms of Russian environmentalism, but with an exclusive focus on the late Soviet and post-Soviet period. Oleg Yanitsky, *Russian Greens in a Risk Society: A Structural Analysis*, Kikumora Publications. Series B 11 (Helsinki: Aleksanteri-instituutti, 2000).

¹¹⁵³ Thomas Raymond Wellock, *Preserving the Nation: The Conservation and Environmental Movements, 1870-2000*, American History Series (Arlington Heights, Ill.) (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 2007), 1-11.

¹¹⁵⁴ Martinez-Alier, “The Environmentalism of the Poor.”

¹¹⁵⁵ Wellock, *Preserving the Nation*, 2, 5-6.

nature preserves.¹¹⁵⁶ Soviet scientists, sometimes in alliance with non-scientists, formed the basis of the movement. As in the U.S., the Soviet preservationist movement first put forward scientific as well as non-scientific, spiritual justifications for their advocacy. Scientist-activists transitioned to solely scientific arguments over the course of the 1920s, however, as their aesthetically-based arguments failed to gain traction in a country increasingly dominated by a Bolshevik materialist mindset. While the Soviet preservationists of the movement for *zapovedniki* were surprisingly successful at achieving their goals, even under Stalinism, the abstract scientific justifications for their activism tended to isolate them from the everyday environmental concerns of Soviet citizens.

Conservationism is a form of environmental activism that aims at the efficient management and use of natural resources. In the U.S., advocacy for what today is often called “sustainable development” can be traced back to the utilitarian conservationism of Gifford Pinchot, the founder of the U.S. Forest Service. Like preservationism, conservationism in the U.S. has historically been associated with white, privileged elites.¹¹⁵⁷ In the Stalinist Soviet Union, nature protection could sometimes be justified by a purported positive impact on industrial development; physicians, for example, argued successfully for the conservation of lands around health resorts on the basis that they boosted the health and productivity of the working population.¹¹⁵⁸ The conservationist perspective (with strong Russian national undertones) also found expression in literature in Leonid Leonov’s 1953 novel *Russian Forest* which criticized unsustainable logging

¹¹⁵⁶ The pioneering work on VOOP is Weiner’s *A Little Corner of Freedom*.

¹¹⁵⁷ Wellock, *Preserving the Nation*, 2-3, 8.

¹¹⁵⁸ See Johanna Conterio, “Curative Nature: Medical Foundations of Soviet Nature Protection, 1917–1941,” *Slavic Review* 78, no. 1 (2019): 23–49.

practices.¹¹⁵⁹ Laurent Coumel argues that the Thaw contributed to a shift among scientists “from preservationism to a large-scale environmental outlook” that emphasized the enlightened use of resources to ensure that they remained available in the long term. This emphasis on the need to thoughtfully manage natural resources is evident in scientific activism for the preservation of Lake Baikal in the 1950s and early 1960s.¹¹⁶⁰ One enduring legacy of this environmental Thaw may have been the founding of student activist groups, such as the Nature Protection Brigades (*druzhiny po okhrane prirody*) and the *Kedrogradtsy*, who experimented with better resource management in Siberian forests. Through engagement with youth groups, Soviet scientists spread their ideas beyond the scientific elite and broadened the ranks of Soviet environmental activists.¹¹⁶¹

Other forms of environmental activism have advocated for (and often emerged from) populations who feel the impact of environmental destruction. In the United States, middle-class, educated activists, inspired by Progressive ideology, focused their activism on the state of the environment in cities instead of in the “wilderness.”¹¹⁶² Their aims were often broadly similar to the *environmental justice* movement in the United States, a movement by and for poor and marginalized communities that often bore the brunt of industrial pollution. The environmental justice movement can be considered a subset of the *environmentalism of the poor*, a concept that has emerged from scholarship on environmental activism in the global South and postcolonial stud-

¹¹⁵⁹ On *Russian Forest*, see Dronin and Francis, “Econationalism in Soviet Literature,” 54-56; Boris Thomson, *The Art of Compromise: The Life and Work of Leonid Leonov* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 218-227; Razuvalova, *Pisateli-“derevenshchiki*,” 295-303.

¹¹⁶⁰ Preservationist impulses were also strong in Baikal activism. Breyfogle, “At the Watershed.”

¹¹⁶¹ Coumel, “A Failed Environmental Turn?,” 174-175, 185-186; Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, 319-333.

¹¹⁶² Wellock, *Preserving the Nation*, 6.

ies.¹¹⁶³ This form of environmental activism is based in communities whose livelihoods, health, and homes are threatened by the environmentally unsound practices of governments and multinational corporations. It often emerges from conflicts over resource extraction and waste disposal. Scholars who focus on the environmentalism of the poor have argued that because poor, rural communities depend directly on the land and its resources for their livelihood, they bear the brunt of environmental destruction and tend to have “a strong motivation to be careful managers of the environment.”¹¹⁶⁴ These three forms of environmentalism have been under-studied in the Soviet context. This may be because, as Melanie Arndt and Laurent Coumel have argued, “environmentalism in the Soviet Union has been approached primarily as an *elite* phenomenon viewed from the *center*.”¹¹⁶⁵

This chapter argues that Soviet writers from village origins played a role in refocusing Soviet environmental activism around the impact of harmful environmental practices on ordinary, often marginalized people in the post-Stalin era. While Arndt and Coumel lump writers in with other “elite” groups like scientists, I argue that the social origins of village writers gives their advocacy certain qualities of the environmentalism of the poor. Analyzing the activism of intellectuals from rural backgrounds as part of the broader category of the environmentalism of the poor is not unprecedented. In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon studies the literary advocacy of a group of “environmental writer-activists” from Africa, the Middle East, India, Caribbean, the U.S., and Britain who sought to “amplify the media-

¹¹⁶³ For an overview of the concept of the environmentalism of the poor, see Martinez-Alier, “The Environmentalism of the Poor.”

¹¹⁶⁴ Martinez-Alier, “The Environmentalism of the Poor,” 513.

¹¹⁶⁵ Arndt and Coumel, “A Green End to the Red Empire?,” 108.

marginalized causes of the environmentally dispossessed.”¹¹⁶⁶ Like the Soviet writers analyzed in this chapter, most came from poor, rural backgrounds and were the first in their families to attend college.¹¹⁶⁷ His description of their particular social position applies equally well to Soviet writers of rural origins: “Having extricated themselves improbably from impoverished circumstances [...] they stand above the immediate environmental struggles of the poor yet remain bonded through memory (and through their own vertiginous anxieties) to the straitened circumstances from which they or their families recently emerged.”¹¹⁶⁸ As we will see, from the early days of the Thaw, Soviet writers of rural origins drew attention to the impacts of unfettered industrial development and pollution on Soviet citizens, especially rural residents, centering the perspectives of the communities from which they came. Like other variants of the environmentalism of the poor, their writings make reference to spiritual and other nonmaterial issues but focus on the perspectives of the people most closely affected by environmental destruction.

Environmental Advocacy of Village Writers before *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*

It is a common misperception that Russian Village Prose writers appealed to abstract concepts of the nation in their environmental writings. In fact, people—usually, but not always, rural populations—were a key part of the framing of environmental issues in their Soviet variation on the “environmentalism of the poor.”¹¹⁶⁹ It is not particularly surprising that writers from rural

¹¹⁶⁶ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 5.

¹¹⁶⁷ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 26.

¹¹⁶⁸ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 26-27.

¹¹⁶⁹ As Razuvalova has observed, the Village Prose writers sometimes disappointed the literary critics who championed them because they were consistently interested in “non-metaphorical soil” and “non-metaphorical forests,” not the abstract concepts that said soil and forests represented. Razuvalova, *Pisateli-“derevenshchiki,”* 284.

backgrounds would seek to place larger social and economic issues within the context of individual lives—this is, after all, what writers do—but it is the reason writers from villages were an important voice in the post-Stalin environmental movement in a number of republics. Writers brought environmental protection out of the conference halls and the pages of specialized scientific journals and into the homes of readers. They made the human costs of unfettered industrial development visible to a Soviet readership that was likely encountering some of these issues in their everyday lives. Emphasizing the negative impacts of industry on ordinary people, writers from rural backgrounds criticized the mentality of fulfilling the plan at all costs. They contrasted purely material values with spiritual values, advancing a sophisticated critique of Soviet modernization. When writers' environmental activism took center stage in the 1980s, it built upon the themes they had developed in the decades leading up to *perestroika* and *glasnost*'.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, even before Russian Village Prose had coalesced as an acknowledged genre, authors associated with the nascent literary movement began to address environmental concerns. Vladimir Soloukhin's travelogue *Vladimir Country Roads*, published in 1957 in *Novyi mir*, was the first work in the movement that later gained the name Village Prose to address environmental concerns.¹¹⁷⁰ In *Vladimir Country Roads*, Soloukhin described the places he saw and the people he encountered as he explored his native Vladimir region. In one episode, Soloukhin visits the industrial town of Kolchugino, where factories pollute the surrounding area. Soloukhin frames his discussion of pollution there in terms of its impact on Soviet citizens. Bathing in the Peshka river near a village, Soloukhin learns that there are no fish in the river because they are downstream of Kolchugino. When he asks about this problem at the indus-

¹¹⁷⁰ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 55; Vladimir Soloukhin, "Vladimirskie prosëlki," *Novyi mir*, no. 9–10 (1957): 82–131, 75–134. Translated as Vladimir Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, trans. Stella Miskin (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1967). In addition to Soloukhin, Sergei Zalygin and Boris Mozhaev also addressed environmental concerns in their journalistic works during this period. See Razuvalova, *Pisateli*—"derevenshchiki", 284–285.

trial and transport section of the district committee, one person confirms that a factory in the town releases acid into the river on a regular basis, complaining, “I can't water my own vegetable garden. Everything dies—cabbage, carrots, onions. It is not only the fish, but even the microorganisms cannot survive.”¹¹⁷¹ Soloukhin discovers that the factory had been allocated funds for filters but had failed to install them. Measures to protect the health of people and wildlife are a low priority, according to Soloukhin: “But if the filters were not made, no great harm would be done, no inquiries would be made, no one would notice. The fish would disappear? People would fall ill because of the water? Well, in the first place, it is never certain what is the cause of people’s falling ill. Our job is construction according to the plan.”¹¹⁷² Soloukhin grounded his account of environmental destruction not in abstract appeals to the environment or economic efficiency, but in the legitimate health concerns of people living in and around a small industrial town.¹¹⁷³

In Armenia, intellectuals began raising environmental issues during the early days of the Thaw. By the early 1950s, the level of the water in Lake Sevan, the largest lake in the Armenian republic and a popular vacation spot, had dropped dramatically due to the diversion of the water for hydroelectric power generation. Writers and other members of the creative intelligentsia led the charge in protesting the rapidly diminishing water level, raising the issue at the Writers’ Un-

¹¹⁷¹ Translation adapted from Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, 85.

¹¹⁷² Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, 85-86. Soloukhin may have been aware of a recent upswing of scientific discussion around the issue of water pollution. His concern over the health impacts of water pollution were shared by a group of Soviet scientists and health experts who in the second half of the 1950s challenged the Stalinist medical and scientific orthodoxy that sanctioned the dumping of untreated industrial waste in rivers on the grounds that waterways cleansed themselves. See Christopher Burton, “Destalinization as Detoxification? The Expert Debate on Industrial Toxins under Khrushchev,” in *Soviet Medicine: Culture, Practice, and Science* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 237–57.

¹¹⁷³ Soloukhin also devoted several pages to praising the local forestry station and criticizing the logging industry. His arguments in this section are more in line with Leonov’s conservationist approach in *Russian Forest*. See Soloukhin, *A Walk in Rural Russia*, 86-89.

ion discussion of the Twentieth Party Congress in April of 1956.¹¹⁷⁴ In 1961, Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan's addressed the unrestricted exploitation of natural resources from the perspective of the people in Matevosyan's native village of Ahnidzor. In the sketch "Ahnidzor," Matevosyan lyrically describes the Tchragtat forest and the nature surrounding his village. In his account, the river even speaks literary Armenian, giving the natural world a national tinge. Then, after the construction of a funicular makes the mountain more accessible, the aggressive logging of the forest begins. The villagers discover to their chagrin that they lack any real control over the land where they have lived for a century. The narrator is dismayed to see nature reduced to its bare economic value. "The Tchragtat grove was wood, got it?" he says with mock cynicism. "And here I was thinking that that dense forest was a symbol of wild beauty." The narrator's view of the forest, rooted in the experience of living nearby, is contrasted with the perspective of a logger, who tells him, "But from the point of view of the plan, it's good now, man, and also from the point of view of wages..." To add insult to injury, the farm management discovers that the loggers have been stealing the *sovkhos*'s hay harvest as well.¹¹⁷⁵ The story of the logging of the Tchragtat forest underscores the fact that the villagers have little control over the issues that directly affect their lives. They are at the mercy of outside forces who will be gone as soon as the natural resources in their area have been exhausted. Matevosyan's first-hand account of environmental destruction in a rural setting emphasized what would become a major theme in his work: the tendency of state actors to disregard peasants' desires and needs.

In Ukraine, Oles' Honchar, a leading prose writer and head of the Ukrainian Writers' Union repeatedly raised environmental issues over the course of the 1960s, addressing both indus-

¹¹⁷⁴ See the speech of Baghish Hovsepyan in HAA 170/1/73 (April 4, 1956): 7. On the Armenian intelligentsia and Lake Sevan, see N. Ia. Zarobian, *Iakov Zarobian i ego epokha* (Erevan: Izd-vo RAU, 2008), 148-150.

¹¹⁷⁵ Hrant Mat'evosyan, "Ahnidzor," in *Erker: 2 hatorov*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Yerevan: Sovetakan grogh, 1985), 16-21.

trial pollution as well as hydroelectric dam projects that submerged large swaths of the Ukrainian countryside underwater. In his literary works and public statements, Honchar protested the lack of concern for the individuals affected by these two forms of development and called for greater public control over the decision-making process. “They say that it is necessary to transform, to improve nature,” Honchar said in his speech to the 1966 Congress of the Union of Writers, seeming a bit skeptical. He then declared that “broad social opinion” must be taken into account when making decisions about the environment: “every incursion into the affairs of nature must have the approval of the entire people [*vsenarodnoe razreshenie*].” Honchar was particularly critical of the flooding of farmland, “the riches of the nation,” under “new, senseless seas” as part of hydroelectric projects. He cited Russian writers’ defense of the Russian forest, Lake Baikal, and the Volga river as a positive example for Ukrainian writers.¹¹⁷⁶

In his 1968 novel *Cathedral*, Honchar demonstrated the dangers of industrial development without regard for the interests and will of the people in his native Dnipropetrovsk region. Like Soloukhin, Honchar emphasized how untreated factory pollution harmed the health of workers and Soviet citizens. “There is soot on everything—the benches, the trees,” one character explains. “Tons and tons of it fall on the city each day. They have been talking for a while now about installing catches, filters, but meanwhile they’re filtering more with their tongues.”¹¹⁷⁷ Honchar also addressed the creation of flood zones for hydroelectric stations through the character of Izot Loboda, a retired steelworker who finds respite in the Skarbne swamps. Fearing that a proposed hydroelectric station will lead to the flooding of the swamps, Loboda goes on a tirade about previous hydroelectric dam projects: “It would be like over there near Kakhovka, where

¹¹⁷⁶ TsDAMLM 590/1/633 (November 16, 1966): 27-28.

¹¹⁷⁷ Oles’ Honchar, *The Cathedral: A Novel*, (Washington: St. Sophia Religious Association of Ukrainian Catholics, 1989), 63.

half of Ukraine was flooded, where they thought they were building a sea, but built a mire instead! And now it rotted away, stinking across the whole of Ukraine!”¹¹⁷⁸ Like Matevosyan and Soloukhin, Honchar drew readers’ attention to the impact of environmental destruction on the people who lived in close proximity to it.

In an article that appeared almost simultaneously in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Honchar and a group of illustrious Ukrainians from the arts, medicine, and engineering acknowledged the important role of hydroelectric stations in power generation, but called on readers to consider “the other side” of their construction.¹¹⁷⁹ *Literaturnaia gazeta* had gained a reputation for environmental advocacy because it had published many articles in defense of Lake Baikal in the second half of the 1960s.¹¹⁸⁰ Arguing against the proposed Mogilev-Podol’skaia hydroelectric station, Honchar and his fellow authors relied on conservationist arguments, emphasizing the loss of fertile agricultural lands and other natural resources under the floodwaters. They criticized the short-term economic thinking behind the designs of such projects, noting that their engineers failed to take into account long-term economic costs because “the cheaper the project, the bigger the prize...” The authors of the article also drew attention to the non-economic impacts of hydroelectric stations. Honchar’s fellow authors included Mykhailo Stel’makh, winner of the 1961 Lenin Prize for his epic novels of Ukrainian village life, and Hryhorii Lohvyn, an architectural historian and advocate for the preservation of historic churches. Together, they reminded readers that the area in the flood zone was not an empty space: it encompassed important ethnographic sites such as historic village houses, unique monuments of architecture, and archeological sites.

¹¹⁷⁸ Honchar, *Cathedral*, 63.

¹¹⁷⁹ O. Gonchar et al, “Skol’ko my teriaem,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, April 3, 1968.

¹¹⁸⁰ Donald R. Kelley, “Environmental Policy-Making in the USSR: The Role of Industrial and Environmental Interest Groups,” *Soviet Studies* 28, no. 4 (1976): 570–89.

Seventy-eight villages, a river preserve, and other “irreplaceable places” were threatened with destruction. As Rob Nixon has observed in his analysis of megadam projects, narratives of national development depend on “hid[ing] from view communities that inconvenience or disturb the implied trajectory of unitary national ascent.”¹¹⁸¹ By titling their article “What We Are Losing,” Honchar and his fellow signatories made the communities in the flood zone visible to readers, forcing them to consider the true costs of generating hydroelectric power.

Honchar was part of a growing group of Soviet writers who opposed the flooding of lands for hydroelectric energy generation. In the early 1960s, the Village Prose writer Sergei Zalygin scored “one of the more memorable victories of the nature protection movement” with a series of articles in *Literaturnaia gazeta* that played an important role in the successful opposition to the construction of the Lower Ob' hydroelectric station.¹¹⁸² The most dramatic statement in opposition to the flooding of rural lands for hydroelectric power generation appeared in 1976 in the pages of the journal *Nash sovremennik*: Valentin Rasputin's novella *Farewell to Matëra*. Like many of his fellow Siberian villagers, Rasputin became a “development refugee” when in 1961 a new hydroelectric complex on the Angara River necessitated the relocation of his native village of Atalanka from the flood zone.¹¹⁸³ Rasputin drew on his personal experience of displacement in order to make the peasant victims of development visible for Soviet readers. *Farewell to Matëra* told the story of a Siberian village on the eve of its flooding. The novella's moral center is an elderly woman named Darya, who watches as the only home she has ever known is

¹¹⁸¹ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 150.

¹¹⁸² Weiner, *A Little Corner of Freedom*, 416-417.

¹¹⁸³ Kathleen Parthé, “Foreword: Master of the Island,” in *Farewell to Matyora*, by Valentin Rasputin (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1979), xvi. Anthropologist Thayer Scudder pioneered the study of “development refugees.” See Thayer Scudder, “Development-Induced Relocation and Refugee Studies: 37 Years of Change and Continuity among Zambia's Gwembe Tonga,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 6, no. 2 (1993): 123–152.

gradually dismantled. In one key scene, Darya comes upon a group of men who have been ordered by officials to destroy the village cemetery as a “sanitary” measure. Representing the forces of memory and respect for the past, Darya leads a group of villagers in a spontaneous defense of the graves of their relatives, driving away the cemetery’s would-be destroyers.¹¹⁸⁴ The flooding of the cemetery means a loss of “place-based connections to the dead” that link the past, present, and future.¹¹⁸⁵ Valuing the sense of continuity in with the past that she can only experience in her native village of Matëra, Darya cannot understand why her grandson is so eager to trade it for electricity and a job at the hydroelectric station.¹¹⁸⁶ The novella disrupted Soviet discourses of progress and development by presenting a dissonant perspective from an “unimagined community,” defined by Nixon as a community that must be hidden from view in order to maintain “a highly selective discourse of national development.”¹¹⁸⁷ As we have seen in Chapter 6, *Farewell to Matëra*’s critique of Soviet modernization provoked a heated debate in the press and the novella was ultimately removed from Rasputin’s (successful) nomination for the 1977 State Prize.

Rasputin’s criticism of Soviet attitudes towards and treatment of the environment, which remained somewhat in the background of *Farewell to Matëra*, became more pronounced in his 1985 work *The Fire (Pozhar)*, which was set in a town founded to house the villagers displaced by the flooding of the Angara.¹¹⁸⁸ Rasputin explained his decision to shift his setting in a 1978

¹¹⁸⁴ Valentin Rasputin, *Farewell to Matyora*, trans. Antonina Bouis, European Classics (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 16-23.

¹¹⁸⁵ See Nixon’s discussions of Arundati Roy’s work on the damming of India’s Narmada River in Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 162.

¹¹⁸⁶ Rasputin, *Farewell to Matyora*, 102-111.

¹¹⁸⁷ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 150.

¹¹⁸⁸ Valentin Rasputin, “Pozhar,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 7 (1985): 3-38. Translated in Valentin Rasputin, “The Fire,” in *Siberia on Fire* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989).

interview in *Literaturnaia gazeta*: “I had to write *Matëra*, just as sons, no matter what they are like, have to say farewell to their dying mother. In a certain sense this story was a turning point in my work as a writer. One can no longer return to Matëra—the island has been flooded. It looks as though I am going to have to move to a new settlement, along with the inhabitants of the village, who are dear to me, and see what will happen to them there.”¹¹⁸⁹ Twenty years after the events in *Farewell to Matëra*, the former residents of the village have settled in a hastily constructed town that still lacks many of the basic services they were promised. The town exists to serve the state logging industry, which will clear-cut the surrounding forest before eventually abandoning the town. Rasputin contrasts the short-term mindset embodied by the logging industry with the long-term environmental perspective of the collective farmers in the now-lost Matëra. While the Matëra villagers had an incentive to preserve the land they farmed year after year, the Soviet logging industry has little regard for the environmental consequences of its poor logging practices. They know they will move on to another region soon. Much like scholars of the “environmentalism of the poor,” Rasputin argues that because the Matëra peasants “rely directly on the land and its natural resources and services, they have a strong motivation to be careful managers of the environment.”¹¹⁹⁰ As Anna Razuvalova has argued in regard to the Village Prose writers, Rasputin’s “ecology of the natural environment” is a part of a broader “ecology of culture.”¹¹⁹¹ The itinerant loggers’ disordered relationship to the natural world in *The Fire* is mirrored in their social relationships: they treat the people of the town with as little regard as they

¹¹⁸⁹ V. Pomazneva, “Valentin Rasputin: Ne mog ne prostit’sia s Matëroi,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 16, 1977, translated in V. Pomazneva, “Valentin Rasputin: I Had to Say Goodbye to Matëra,” *Soviet Studies in Literature* XIV, no. 3 (Summer 1978): 41–46.

¹¹⁹⁰ Martinez-Alier, “The Environmentalism of the Poor,” 513.

¹¹⁹¹ The term “ecology of culture” was introduced in a 1979 article by the Russian academic and historical preservationist Dmitrii Likhachëv. Razuvalova, *Pisateli-“derevenshchiki,”* 286.

treat the forest, leading to social breakdown. Writing from the perspective of people who have experienced firsthand the “collateral damage” of Soviet modernization, Rasputin developed a broad critique of the far-reaching social and cultural impact of Soviet environmental destruction in *The Fire*.

Although several of the works discussed here generated heated political controversies, with the exception of *Farewell to Matëra*, these controversies usually did not revolve around their treatment of environmental issues. The environmental themes of *Farewell to Matëra* did provoke a negative critical reaction. Unlike the other literary works, in which environmental issues were just one of many issues that the authors raised, the flooding of villages on the Angara was central to the plot and themes of *Farewell to Matëra*. Literary critics responding to the novella argued that Rasputin had failed to address the positive outcomes of hydroelectric dam construction, and these critics’ arguments were the primary reason that the literature section of the State Prize Committee decided to remove it from Rasputin’s nomination, leaving only his earlier work *Live and Remember*.¹¹⁹² These examples show, as others have argued, that environmental issues were a relatively “soft” way to express a dissenting view of the impact of industrial development on Soviet citizens—particularly rural citizens. As Razuvalova has argued, writers often limited their criticisms to the activities and decisions of particular ministries or industries, which made their arguments less threatening.¹¹⁹³ Rural writers’ framing of the issue around the harms inflicted on ordinary people may very well have provided additional cover, as it complied with the Party’s exhortations that literature should be “close to the people.” Much like Soviet naturalists were able to appeal to the abstract value of science in their arguments in favor of preserva-

¹¹⁹² See Georgii Markov’s comments at the literature section of the State Prize Committee. RGALI 2916/3/77 (May 17, 1977): 5-6.

¹¹⁹³ Razuvalova, *Pisateli-“derevenshchiki,”* 278, 286.

tionism, rural writers' decision to frame their arguments around appeals to the health and well-being of "the people" made them more acceptable and persuasive in a Soviet context.

Valentin Rasputin and the Baikal Movement

As we have seen, in the decades since the 1950s, writers from rural backgrounds had developed a sort of Soviet "environmentalism of the poor" that highlighted the negative impacts of industrial development on the rural communities from which they originated. Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* gave writers greater freedom to discuss environmental issues. The environment became a cause through which writers assumed a greater public role, setting them up to take center stage during the national movements of the late 1980s. The most prominent environmental activist among the Russian Village Prose writers during the period of *glasnost* was Valentin Rasputin, whose advocacy for the preservation of Lake Baikal generated a huge amount of public discussion. Over the course of the 1980s, Valentin Rasputin went from being a fiction writer who emphasized environmental themes to a public figure best known for his *publitsistika* and civic activism. Rasputin's environmental activism in the 1980s presents us with something of a paradox. It is possible to see "two Rasputins" moving along parallel tracks. One Rasputin increasingly emphasized the national and spiritual aspects of his environmentalism, sometimes adopting a stance that could even be characterized as "preservationist" because it advocated for the protection of Lake Baikal as Russian national heritage. This Rasputin is a Russian nationalist, but not necessarily pro-Soviet: he understands Siberia as existing in a colonial relationship with the center and rails against Soviet "technocrats" who are willing to trade people's health for economic gain. But when we look closer at Rasputin's writings and activities in the 1980s, we also see another Rasputin—an "eco-internationalist" who advocates a global "environmentalism of the poor," orient-

ed towards the health of everyday people who depend on lakes and rivers as sources of fresh drinking water. This Rasputin formed his Baikal Movement in collaboration with a diverse coalition of Soviet writers and with the support of Soviet institutions like *Literaturnaia gazeta* and the USSR Writers' Union. Even as Rasputin moved towards a more explicitly Russian nationalist critique of Soviet authorities, the environmental movement that he founded was a quintessentially Soviet phenomenon.

Rasputin became Baikal's most famous defender, but the movement to protect Baikal had deeper roots. As Nicholas Breyfogle has explained, a movement for the protection of Baikal originated among scientists in response to the "unprecedented industrial development and economic intervention in the lake's watershed" after the Second World War.¹¹⁹⁴ In the mid-1960s, after it became clear that the initial push by scientists to protect Baikal had failed to deter Soviet industry from further development in the Baikal area, a number of Russian writers got involved in the campaign against the construction of two cellulose factories at Baikal. They included Vladimir Chivilikhin, a literary critic associated with both the neo-Stalinist journal *Oktiabr* and the Russian nationalist journal *Molodaia gvardiia*, and Mikhail Sholokhov, a member of the neo-Stalinist camp who was an inspirational figure for the Russian nationalists.¹¹⁹⁵ *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the newspaper of the Soviet Writers' Union, published many articles on the state of Baikal starting in 1965.¹¹⁹⁶ Rasputin, who at that time was just beginning to break into the Soviet literary world, was surely aware of the movement to protect Baikal, especially considering his

¹¹⁹⁴ Breyfogle, "At the Watershed."

¹¹⁹⁵ On Chivilikhin, see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 55-56; Vladimir Chivilikhin, "Svetloe oko Sibiri," *Oktiabr*, no. 4 (1963): 151-172. Sholokhov called for the protection of Baikal in his speech to the Twenty-Third Party Congress in 1966. On Sholokhov's political orientation during this period, see Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 159.

¹¹⁹⁶ Kelley, "Environmental Policy-Making in the USSR," 581.

relationship with Chivilikhin, his literary “godfather” (see Chapter 3). In the late 1960s, Rasputin purchased a small house on Baikal and began to spend significant amounts of time there.¹¹⁹⁷

Starting in 1969, central Soviet authorities issued a number of regulations and decrees regarding the protection of Baikal. The new regulations (and their apparent failure to halt the damage to the lake) received coverage in the 1970s in publications such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Pravda*, and *Komsomol'skaia pravda*.¹¹⁹⁸ In a 1976 interview in *Voprosy literatury*, Rasputin discussed the issues that concerned him most in Siberia—environmental issues: “First of all, like everyone else I am concerned about fate of Baikal. Even now, fresh water is the greatest treasure. Baikal is a freshwater repository on a world level. Preserving this water is our greatest task. If we do not responsibly manage this water, our descendants will not forgive us.” Rasputin stated that he considered the protection of the environment to be an important issue for the state and the entire people. “A writer cannot pass indifferently by that which concerns everyone. It is his civic and literary duty,” he explained.¹¹⁹⁹ The comments in *Voprosy literatury* foreshadowed Rasputin’s shift towards a greater public role in the 1980s, as well as his later emphasis on the need to preserve freshwater resources.

In the first half of the 1980s, Rasputin began publishing nonfiction articles (*publitsistika*) on the need to preserve Baikal and Siberian nature in general. It was a departure from the 1970s, in which Rasputin had written almost exclusively fiction. His writings combined a preservationist impulse with the attention to the impact of nature on humanity that had characterized the ear-

¹¹⁹⁷ Andrei Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin, Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei 1579* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 2016), 212.

¹¹⁹⁸ Kelley, “Environmental Policy-Making in the USSR,” 582-585. *Komsomol'skaia pravda*'s 1970 report on the continuing pollution of the lake even after the 1969 regulation called down the anger of Central Committee Secretary Pëtr Demichev on the newspaper and its editor, Boris Pankin. Liudmila Semina, “O legandakh «Komsomol'skoi pravdy»,” *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, n.d., <https://www.kp.ru/putevoditel/interesnye-fakty/zhurnalisty-legendy-komsomolskoj-pravdy/>.

lier environmental advocacy of rural writers. In a 1981 article in *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, Rasputin argued that Baikal held a unique spiritual significance that overrode its economic significance. “Baikal was created as the crowning glory and mystery of nature not for industrial requirements but so that we might drink from it to our heart’s content—water being its primary and most priceless resource—admire its sovereign beauty and breathe its cherished air,” he wrote.¹²⁰⁰ For Rasputin, Baikal had become “the symbol of our relationship to nature.”¹²⁰¹ In 1983, Rasputin co-wrote a letter in *Sovetskaia kul'tura* with two longtime Baikal activists, Grigorii Galazii, head of the Limnological Institute on Lake Baikal of the Siberian Academy of Sciences, and the writer Mark Sergeev. The letter called for the protection of Baikal’s Sandy Bay (*Peschanaia bukhta*) from uncontrolled development for tourism. The article was the first example of cooperation between Rasputin and the Siberian scientific community.

In a 1984 essay published in *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, “Your Siberia and Mine,” Rasputin articulated an increasingly preservationist approach to the Siberian environment, framing it as a peasant perspective on the land.¹²⁰² Recounting a conversation with an old peasant from his native village, Rasputin sums up his simple, yet profound, attitude towards the natural world in one phrase: “I never harmed my own land.”¹²⁰³ The peasant’s concern for his land is held up as a model for people as a whole. Later in the essay, a personified Siberia speaks to the people, asking to be treated “like your native land, with love and concern.” Siberia pleads, “do not subjugate me

¹¹⁹⁹ Valentin Rasputin and Evgenii Osetrov, “Byt' samim soboi,” *Voprosy literatury*, no. 9 (1976): 142–50.

¹²⁰⁰ Valentin Rasputin, “Baikal,” *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, July 12, 1983, translated in Valentin Rasputin, “Baikal,” in *Siberia on Fire*, trans. Gerald Mikkelson and Margaret Winchell (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 187–93.

¹²⁰¹ Rasputin, “Baikal,” 193.

¹²⁰² Valentin Rasputin, “Moia i tvoia Sibir’,” *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, January 5, 1985, translated in Valentin Rasputin, “Your Siberia and Mine,” in *Siberia on Fire*, 169–79.

¹²⁰³ Rasputin, “Your Siberia and Mine,” 174.

any longer.”¹²⁰⁴ Arguing against the rapacious exploitation of Siberia’s resources, Rasputin subtly echoed the arguments of the nineteenth-century *oblastniki* who protested that European Russia treated Siberia like a colony.¹²⁰⁵ In *Farewell to Matëra* and *The Fire*, Rasputin had dramatized the impact of unrestrained industrial development on the Siberian peasantry; in “Your Siberia and Mine” he shows that the Siberian land itself is in need of protection—the same sort of protection that a peasant shows for his own land.

In the first, cautious year after Mikhail Gorbachev’s election to General Secretary in March of 1985, Rasputin amplified his rhetoric on both Siberia and Baikal. Using the loaded language of colonialism, Rasputin sharply critiqued Soviet industrial policy in Siberia, highlighting its negative impact on both the environment and the health of the local population. In an interview in *Izvestiia*, one of the country’s leading newspapers, Rasputin explicitly tied Soviet economic policy in Siberia to the long history of calling Siberia a colony and treating it as such.¹²⁰⁶ According to Rasputin, colonial attitudes towards Siberia manifested themselves in a lack of concern for Siberia’s nature, considered inexhaustible, as well as Siberia’s inhabitants. Rasputin discussed several environmental concerns in Siberia, emphasizing above all the need to keep the air, water, and land clean in order to preserve the health of the people. He complained that all too often economic necessity trumped every other argument when it came time to discuss the construction of yet another polluting plant. The topic of clean water led Rasputin to the subject of Baikal, and he criticized unnamed government ministers who continued to support the cellulose

¹²⁰⁴ Rasputin, “Your Siberia and Mine,” 178.

¹²⁰⁵ See discussion of the *oblastniki*’s influence on Rasputin in Margaret Winchell and Gerald Mikkelson, “Translators’ Introduction: Valentin Rasputin Since The Fire,” in *Siberia, Siberia* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 14-16.

¹²⁰⁶ Valentin Rasputin and L. Kapeliushnyi, “Posluzhit’ otechestvu Sibir’iu,” *Izvestiia*, November 3, 1985.

plants despite the demonstrated harms to the lake's water. He concluded that in order to fix these problems, they would need both openness (*glasnost*) and true patriotism.

Speaking to the Sixth Congress of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR in December of 1985, however, Rasputin spoke not of Siberia, but of Russia as a whole.¹²⁰⁷ The RSFSR Union of Writers, founded in the 1950s as an institutional base for neo-Stalinist conservatives in the literary establishment, had been taken over by the Russian nationalist intellectual movement in the 1970s.¹²⁰⁸ Rasputin was one of several Russian writers to raise the issue of the environment at the Congress, showing a growing mobilization around this issue among nationally-minded Russian writers from both the more “liberal” and “conservative” wings.¹²⁰⁹ He began his speech by declaring that “Today perseverance and talent are no longer enough, and clean hands and good intentions are not enough — as never before, a writer needs civic steadfastness and maturity.” His words announced his intention to participate more actively in Soviet life, a promise he would make good on in the coming years. As inspiration, Rasputin cited his mentor Vladimir Chivilikhin's 1963 article on Baikal, “The Bright Eye of Siberia,” as well as Zalygin's activism against the Lower Ob' Hydroelectric Station. Speaking about the need to protect Lake Baikal, Rasputin connected it to Russia as a whole, as well as the longer traditions of Russian literature:

Russia looks to us to assume sponsorship over Lake Baikal, the Altai cedar and the sacred soil of the Russian North. [...] Russian literature has always, in all times, responded above all to the needs of the fatherland. Each of us has his own plot in the common literary field, a plot on which the writer can be of the greatest benefit. But if we imagine our

¹²⁰⁷ “Vystupleniia uchastnikov s”ezda: Valentin Rasputin (Irkutsk),” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 18, 1985, translated in “Valentin Rasputin (Irkutsk),” *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 37, no. 52 (January 22, 1986): 8.

¹²⁰⁸ On the founding of the RSFSR Union of Writers, see Chapter 1. On the takeover of the RSFSR Union by Russian nationalist intellectuals, see Brudny, *Reinventing Russia* (especially Chapter 7); Mitrokhin, *Russkaia partiia*, 369-378.

¹²⁰⁹ See speeches at the Congress by the conservative war prose writer Iurii Bondarev and the liberal Village Prose writer Sergei Zalygin: “Vystupleniia uchastnikov s”ezda: Iurii Bondarev (Moskva)” and “Vystupleniia uchastnikov s”ezda: Sergei Zalygin (Moskva),” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 18, 1985.

common field not abstractly but concretely, it will be Russia. There is no life for us, and we have nothing to say, apart from Russia.

Rasputin assured the assembled writers that “a healthy internationalist feeling rests on national feeling.” Yet it is clear from the speech that Rasputin’s newfound sense of activism, and particularly his environmental activism, was now tied much more explicitly than in the past to the idea of the Russian nation. He concluded his speech by saying, “Courage is the writer’s spiritual quality. And it is composed of basic, vital concepts of the homeland, in all its historical destiny.” Rasputin’s speech connected environmental protection to the idea of Russia as a whole, a concept that in his mind seemed to be distinguished from the Soviet central government that threatened the Siberian environment.

In the winter of 1985-1986, the campaign to protect Lake Baikal once again seized public attention, and Rasputin began to assume a greater role in the struggle. “Practically all the major Moscow papers—*Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, *Komsomol’skaia pravda*, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*—had raised another ruckus about the fate that had befallen the ‘sacred sea,’” Rasputin wrote in January of 1986 in his “Baikal Diary.”¹²¹⁰ In February, shortly before the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress, at which Gorbachev announced his program of radical reforms under the slogans of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika*, *Izvestiia* published a lengthy interview between Rasputin and officials from the Ministry of Forest and Cellulose-Paper Industry, titled “We Only Have One Baikal.”¹²¹¹ Rasputin confronted the representatives of the ministry with the fact that the cellulose factory polluted the lake water, which people in the surrounding area were known to drink. The ministry itself had admitted that drinking the water could lead to endocrinological diseases. The minister, Mikhail Busygin, nevertheless maintained that the water from the factory did not have a negative impact

¹²¹⁰ Valentin Rasputin, “Lake Baikal,” in *Siberia, Siberia*, trans. Margaret Winchell and Gerald Mikkelsen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 166-67.

on Baikal, while Rasputin said he had evidence that half of the water area of Baikal had been contaminated with materials that are dangerous for humans, animals, and microorganisms. During their conversation, Rasputin tried, seemingly to no avail, to convince the minister that the policy of taking as much as possible from nature without considering the future undermined both the economic and spiritual needs of future generations. After the meeting had ended, Rasputin reflected that “the wood and paper industry [*Lesbumprom*] is now, in essence, the master of Baikal. Not you and I, comrades [...]” His statement echoed the longstanding complaint of rural writers that the people had no control over the decisions of Soviet industry that affected them. In the end, Rasputin expressed frustration that neither the recommendations of the Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences, nor the regulations on the pollution of the lake seemed to have any effect on the Ministry, which continued to raise its duty to fulfill the decisions of the Party and government “like a shield.”

In the words of Rasputin’s biographer, Rasputin’s article in *Izvestiia* “can only be described as ‘explosive.’”¹²¹² Like Rasputin’s interview on Siberia, “We Only Have One Baikal” elicited a flood of letters from readers. The readers’ letters in response were overwhelmingly supportive of Rasputin and critical of the government’s response to the issue.¹²¹³ One of the saddest letters came from a reader from Ulan-Ude, a city located on the Trans-Siberian Railroad not far from Baikal. M. S. Aleksandrov described watching the environment of the lake degrade over the last fifty years, concluding, “Rasputin’s article is correct in all respects—except one—he still

¹²¹¹ Valentin Rasputin, “Baikal u nas odin,” *Izvestiia*, February 17, 1986.

¹²¹² Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin*, 222.

¹²¹³ One exception was a collective letter from 495 employees of the Baikal’sk cellulose plant. OR RGB 914/6/47 (Baikal’sk, Irkutsk oblast’, RSFSR, 1986): 1-6.

believes. I do not believe.”¹²¹⁴ Letters from readers with a long-term connection to Baikal were an exception, however. Most came from people who had visited the lake only briefly, or who had never visited. Many readers said they had followed the issue in the press for twenty years, mentioning the literary intelligentsia’s campaign from the second half of the 1960s. Readers mentioned examples such as a 1965 article by Leonid Leonov in *Literaturnaia gazeta* and Mikhail Sholokhov’s 1966 speech at the Twenty-Third Party Congress.¹²¹⁵ Their letters show the long-term impact of writers’ mobilization around the protection of Baikal. Readers understood the preservation of Baikal as a civic or national duty—although they had many different ways of defining what that meant. “I am a citizen of the Soviet Union and I cannot remain indifferent,” wrote Liudmila Bimikevich.¹²¹⁶ Other readers associated Baikal with their “Homeland” (*Rodina*) or “Fatherland” (*Otechestvo*), using generic, non-national terms like Rasputin himself often did.¹²¹⁷ Still others considered Baikal “our Russian treasure [*nashe rossiiskoe chudo*]” or expressed pride in it as “a Russian person [*kak russkii chelovek*].”¹²¹⁸ Overall, the letters show that the environmental activism of Rasputin and his fellow writers had played an important role in helping many Soviet citizens feel invested in the fate of Lake Baikal, mediated through their own conceptions of the homeland.

¹²¹⁴ OR RGB 914/6/34 (M. S. Aleksandrov, Ulan-Ude, RSFSR, 1986): 1-3.

¹²¹⁵ OR RGB 914/6/49 (L. K. Batsina, doctor and veteran of Great Patriotic War, Krasnogorsk, Moskovskaia oblast’, RSFSR, 1986): 1; OR RGB 914/6/50 (Elizaveta Konstantinovna Bedarëva, Ust’-Kalinogorsk, Kazakh SSR, April 22, 1986): 1. Batsina is likely referencing Leonid Leonov, “O bol’shoi shchepe,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 30, 1965.

¹²¹⁶ OR RGB 914/6/53 (Liudmila Nikolaevna Bimikevich, February 17, 1986): 1.

¹²¹⁷ See, for example, OR RGB 914/6/46 (Radyk Vladimirovich Babykin, engineer and invalid of the Great Patriotic War, Kazan’, RSFSR, February 18, 1986): 1; OR RGB (Ashot Parupakovich Aladzhan, chair of the Kirovakan branch of the Geographical Society of the Armenian SSR, Kirovakan, Armenian SSR, March 1, 1986): 1; OR RGB 914/6/41 (Georgii Alekseevich Aliab’ev, doctor and toxicologist, Leningrad, RSFSR, February 26, 1986): 5.

¹²¹⁸ OR RGB 914/6/44 (N. M. Astapkovich, Khar’ov, Ukrainian SSR, February 17, 1986): 1; OR RGB 914/6/49 (L. K. Batsina, doctor and veteran of Great Patriotic War, Krasnogorsk, Moskovskaia oblast’, RSFSR, 1986): 2.

The upswing in activism resulted the formation of a State Commission on Baikal in February of 1986. Meanwhile, at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress held from February 25 to March 6, Gorbachev officially launched his policy of *glasnost*, which had already been in the air ever since he had taken over as General Secretary. At the Eighth Congress of the Soviet Union of Writers in July, Rasputin expressed his frustration with the lack of progress on the issue that concerned him most—"the fate of our native land."¹²¹⁹ "*Glasnost*' is a remarkable thing, as we have had the opportunity to see in the past year and a half, but when *glasnost*' exists only in the name of *glasnost*', and not in the name of results and change, that, of course, is not enough," he told the assembled Soviet writers. Rasputin protested the umpteenth revival of the plan to divert major Siberian rivers to Central Asia for irrigation purposes, stating that the completion of the plan "would be criminal and have a tragic effect on the land and culture of the North and the central Russian Republic." Linking the fate of Russia to that of other Soviet republics, he added, "First on the land of Russia, then on the land of Chingiz Aitmatov, Olzhas Suleimenov, Hrant Matevosyan, and so forth," naming several writers associated with environmental activism. (Rasputin's more internationalist tone, appropriate for a gathering of writers from across the Soviet Union, may have rung hollow, coming as it did after a defense of Viktor Astaf'ev's story "Catching Gudgeon in Georgia" ("*Lovlia peskarei v Gruzii*"), which the Georgian writers had called an attack on the Georgian people.¹²²⁰) Rasputin concluded with an update on the State Commission on Baikal, which, he reported, had not met once in four and a half months. According to Rasputin, the new draft law on Baikal proposed by the Commission "contained the same old thing: intensify, require, take into consideration, etc." It did nothing to address the continuing problem of

¹²¹⁹ "Vystupleniia uchastnikov s"ezda: Valentin Rasputin (Irkutsk)," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 2, 1986, translated in "Valentin Rasputin (Irkutsk)," *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, No. 31 (September 3, 1986): 8-9.

pollution from the cellulose plants. Rasputin concluded by announcing that he, a group of Russian writers, and, hopefully, writers from other Soviet republics, planned to appeal to Gorbachev personally. Just a few months after Gorbachev's declaration of radical reforms at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress, Rasputin was already disappointed by the lack of progress on environmental preservation.

In March of 1987, Rasputin published a major article in *Pravda*, the Soviet Union's leading newspaper, that juxtaposed the technocratic economic calculations of Soviet planners with the morality of the "tillers" of the land.¹²²¹ Rasputin first expressed his frustration with continued bureaucratic intransigence on the issue of Baikal, accusing the industrial bureaucrats and their pet scientists of obfuscation and outright dishonesty on the impact of pollution on the lake. Rasputin went further than he had in his previous public statements, rejecting wholesale the ideological underpinnings of Soviet industrial development in favor of a peasant's ethical stance towards the land:

We are not owners of the nation's soil but merely its tillers, reaping nourishment and prosperity; the land is the mother and nurturer of the people, their eternal refuge, their sole dwelling place, to which nothing more can be added from the outside. And when out of this populace individuals appear who believe that the earth is put together wrong and must be rearranged, what's dangerous is not that they appear but that we allow ourselves to follow their lead as though they were prophets.¹²²²

In Rasputin's view, Soviet society was increasingly dominated by "technocrats" who stood in opposition to morality, spirituality, and true patriotism. Morality had become "the stepchild in the family, allowed to sit at the table when guests are present but banished into a corner when no

¹²²⁰ On the controversy over the story at the Congress, see Cosgrove, *Russian Nationalism and the Politics of Soviet Literature*, 97-98.

¹²²¹ Valentin Rasputin, "Chto imeem...: Baikal'skii prolog bez epiloga," *Pravda*, March 11, 1987, translated in Valentin Rasputin, "What We Have: A Baikal Prologue Without an Epilogue," in *Siberia on Fire*, trans. Gerald Mikkelson and Margaret Winchell (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 194-201.

¹²²² Rasputin, "What We Have," 196.

outsiders are around.”¹²²³ Rasputin’s criticisms of Soviet industrial development had been implicit in his work since *Farewell to Matëra*, but now they were being stated explicitly in *Pravda*, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party. In July, Soviet industrial bureaucrats announced their intention to move the factory to a nearby location on the Irkut River. In the eyes of the Baikal defenders, this was meaningless—the waste from the factory would eventually flow into Baikal regardless. Another wave of mobilization began, and Rasputin published articles against the plan in *Sotsialisticheskaia industriia* (*Socialist Industry*) and *Sovetskaia Rossiia*.¹²²⁴

Meanwhile, Rasputin was making connections with other ecologically-minded writers in the Soviet Union and the industrialized world, forming the basis of an international coalition of writers that would become the Baikal Movement. In August of 1986, he had visited Japan, where he discussed ecological issues with Japanese writers. In his March 1987 editorial in *Pravda*, Rasputin had emphasized that ecological destruction was a pan-Soviet problem. “Those who come after us will not forgive us,” he declared. “In Russia they will not forgive us for ruining Lake Baikal and the Volga River, in Belorussia for the Pripet Marshes, in Armenia for Lake Sevan, in the Ukraine for the Dnipro River and Chernobyl, in Latvia for the Western Dvina River—everywhere, everywhere, everywhere...”¹²²⁵ In August of 1987, Rasputin invited six Soviet and seven Japanese writers to convene at Baikal for the founding meeting of the “Baikal Movement.” Rasputin played the primary role of organizer, the Soviet Union of Writers provided support, and Zori Balayan, an Armenian journalist at *Literaturnaia gazeta*, gathered journalists from central and local newspapers and television studios around the nascent movement. The participants, which also included Irkutsk *oblast*’ committee officials, employees from the ecological minis-

¹²²³ Rasputin, “What We Have,” 198.

¹²²⁴ Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin*, 223.

¹²²⁵ Rasputin, “What We Have,” 196.

tries, and activists from social organizations, visited the cellulose plant and other problematic local industries. Then they convened in the Irkutsk *oblast'* House of Writers for an intense discussion of the issues.¹²²⁶

The discussion of the Soviet and Japanese writers who gathered at the House of Writers focused on the concrete harms importance of protecting Baikal and other freshwater lakes as sources of clean drinking water. Among the Soviet writers were two other Russian Village Prose writers, Viktor Astaf'ev and Vasilii Belov. Like Rasputin, they had both written about ecological issues and were associated with the journal *Nash sovremennik*. The Soviet writers reported on pollution in the USSR, while the Japanese writers informed the attendees about the pollution of Lake Biwa, the largest freshwater lake in Japan, and the spread of “Minimata disease,” or methylmercury poisoning, a painful condition caused by the industrial pollution of the marine environments upon which many of Japan’s citizens depended for their livelihoods.¹²²⁷ Zori Balayan spoke about an issue that had long concerned the Armenian literary intelligentsia—the depletion of Lake Sevan for the purposes of generating hydroelectricity, which in turn fueled the growth of the chemical industry in the Armenian republic. A month earlier, Balayan had written an article for *Literaturnaia gazeta* about polluting chemical plants in Yerevan that had attracted significant attention to the issue of pollution among the Armenian and broader Soviet public.¹²²⁸ According to Balayan, all freshwater sources in the republic ultimately depended on Lake Sevan, meaning

¹²²⁶ Zorii Balayan, “Zakon nadezhdy,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 19, 1987; “Obshchee delo chelovechestva: Zaiavlenie uchastnikov ‘Baikal’skoi vstrechi,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 19, 1987; Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin*, 224.

¹²²⁷ “Obshchee delo chelovechestva: Zaiavlenie uchastnikov ‘Baikal’skoi vstrechi,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 19, 1987; On Minimata disease, see Brett L. Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Book (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010), 137-175.

¹²²⁸ Protests against the chemical industry in Armenia began in October of 1987. Zorii Balayan, “Erevan v bede,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, June 24, 1987; Doose, “Green Nationalism?,” 192-195.

that the draining of the lake could have catastrophic consequences.¹²²⁹ Rasputin, for his part, eschewed the spiritual and national elements of his environmental activism and likewise focused on health. He told the audience at the House of Writers that water, air, and earth—the sources of life on Earth—had become sources of illness and premature death. Referencing an issue that was surely on the minds of many of those in attendance, the April 1986 disaster at Chernobyl, Rasputin stated, “The atom cannot be peaceful. Chernobyl showed this.” He concluded by emphasizing that the issue of the contamination of drinking water could not wait for a solution: “Tomorrow will be too late.”¹²³⁰

Thus, the speakers at the first meeting of the Baikal Movement, following the tradition of environmental writing established by Village Prose and other rural Soviet writers, emphasized the concrete harms that environmental destruction—in this case, a lack of clean drinking water—inflicted on the population. In their declaration, published in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the writers of the “Baikal movement” stated that “Freshwater lakes and all sources of drinking water are the common heritage of the peoples of the world; the problem of their rational use and preservation is the common problem of all of humanity.”¹²³¹ While the issues of the rational conservation of resources and the need to protect fragile biological ecosystems were certainly raised during the meeting, the environmentalism of the Baikal Movement bore the greatest resemblance not to conservationism or preservationism, but rather environmental justice and the “environmentalism of the poor.”

¹²²⁹ Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin*, 225-226.

¹²³⁰ Zorii Balayan, “Zakon nadezhdy,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 19, 1987.

¹²³¹ “Obshchee delo chelovechestva: Zaiavlenie uchastnikov ‘Baikal’skoi vstrechi,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 19, 1987.

After their initial meeting at Lake Baikal, the writers of the Baikal Movement continued to highlight the international and all-Soviet nature of their cause by meeting at Lake Sevan in the Armenian SSR in the summer of 1989. The Union of Writers of the USSR provided resources to enable writers from across the USSR who wrote on ecological topics to attend. At a discussion held at one of the sanatoria on Sevan, the Armenian poet and Stalin Prize winner Silva Kaputikyan gave an impassioned speech in which she referred to the use of water from Sevan for industrial purposes as an affront to morality and national spiritual traditions.¹²³² In an article published later in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the Armenian journalist Balayan drew a parallel between *Literaturnaia gazeta*'s advocacy for Lake Baikal dating back to 1958 and his own pre-*perestroika* articles on Lake Sevan in the newspaper.¹²³³ Much like the writers discussed in Chapter 2 and the Ukrainian writers discussed below, Balayan found it much easier to publish his critical works in *Literaturnaia gazeta* than in the local press. The attendees at Lake Sevan watched the Japanese documentary *Minimata Disease: Sources and Testimonies*, which featured haunting footage of people with mercury poisoning in extreme pain.¹²³⁴ In his speech at Lake Sevan, Rasputin said that the documentary evoked "an apocalyptic reality" and expressed his worry that the large quantities of mercury being released by factories into the Angara were bringing his *zemliaki* (fellow countrymen) to a similar disaster. Wondering aloud if humanity would be able to come to their senses before the next catastrophe, he declared, "It's not water we are saving, but everything alive on this mixed-up planet."¹²³⁵ Rasputin's focus was not on the need to preserve ecosystems as such, but on the health of the world's population. The 1989 meeting at Lake Sevan

¹²³² Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin*, 227-28.

¹²³³ Zorii Balayan, "Ubit' kapliu—ubit' zhizn'," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 29, 1989.

¹²³⁴ Rumiantsev, *Valentin Rasputin*, 229. For a description of the film, see Walker, *Toxic Archipelago*, 12-15.

¹²³⁵ "Kaplia zhizni," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 4, 1989.

showed that, far from being a narrow, nationalist cause, the Baikal Movement was making connections to other Soviet republics and other countries and broadening its cause to include the global problem of preserving access to clean, fresh water.

After the meeting at Lake Sevan, a large group of participants in the Baikal Movement continued their conversation at another threatened Soviet lake: Lake Balkhash in Kazakhstan. Writers there were also mobilizing around the cause of freshwater lakes: the Writers Union of Kazakhstan had already organized a Committee on the Problems of Aral and Balkhash.¹²³⁶ Valentin Rasputin and Vasiliï Belov, meanwhile, having been elected as representatives of the USSR Writers' Union to the Congress of People's Deputies, traveled on to Moscow, where they would speak to the assembled deputies in June.

Examining Rasputin's environmental activism in the 1980s, we can see the development of two Rasputins: Rasputin the Russian nationalist, and Rasputin the eco-internationalist. The former is the Rasputin we see at the 1985 RSFSR Congress of the Union of Writers. It is also the Rasputin we know well from the secondary literature on Russian nationalism—the Rasputin who criticizes the influence of Western culture, the Rasputin who defends the ultra-nationalist organization Pamiat'.¹²³⁷ Yet the latter Rasputin is important to understand as well. This is the Rasputin who see the global impact of water pollution, who forges ties with writer-activists from other Soviet republics and Japan. This Rasputin increasingly came to understand environmental destruction as a threat not just to Siberians or Russians, but to all Soviet citizens and, ultimately, humanity as a whole.

¹²³⁶ See speech by the Kazakh writer Mukhtar Shakhanov at the 1988 plenum of the Soviet Union of Writers. "Plenum Pravleniia Soiuzu pisatelei SSSR," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 9, 1988, translated in "From the 1988 Plenum of the USSR Writers' Union," *Soviet Studies in Literature* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 107.

¹²³⁷ See Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 205-206.

I argue that considering this second “internationalist” Rasputin sheds light on the Russian nationalism of the first Rasputin. Rasputin was able to make common cause with environmental activists in other Soviet republics because they shared a common enemy: the Soviet “administrative-industrial machine.” Rasputin’s Russian nationalism is in many ways anti-Soviet: it is oriented against the center, against the technocratic elites who disregard the needs and interests of peasants, against the Bolshevik program of the transformation of nature. Much like Oles’ Honchar, Rasputin believed that Moscow treated his native region like a colony. Developing the criticisms of Soviet industry that rural writers had been making since the 1950s, Rasputin contrasted Soviet industry’s materialist, exploitative relationship with nature with the peasant’s moral and spiritual understanding of his role as a caretaker of the land. His peasant-oriented national environmentalism also enabled him to make connections with other writers engaged in similar struggles in the Soviet Union and abroad. In Rasputin’s environmental activism, then, we see the separation of the Russian nation from the Soviet state. The environmental harms inflicted on peasants and other ordinary people could not be justified as meaningful sacrifices for the Soviet state or the greater good. They were assaults on the nation. Rasputin’s views on these subjects would become even more clear in his speech to the Congress of People’s Deputies in June.

Oles’ Honchar Under the Sign of Chernobyl

As we have seen, in the 1960s, Oles’ Honchar called attention to the impact of megadam projects and industrial pollution on the Ukrainian population. Honchar’s position as a Lenin Prize winner and the head of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union amplified his message considerably. He also benefitted from his relatively cooperative relationship with Ukrainian party chief Petro Shelest, who adopted a moderate policy toward nationally-minded Ukrainian intellectuals like Honchar and the more radical Ukrainian “Sixtiers.” The rise of Brezhnev and his clients within

Ukraine, however, made life difficult for Ukraine's leading writer. Brezhnev's political network spearheaded the public persecution of Honchar's 1968 novel *Cathedral*, which they accused of painting a grim picture of Soviet life in part due to its portrayal of the negative consequences of hydroelectric dams and industrial pollution (see Chapter 4). In 1971, Honchar stepped down as head of the Ukrainian Writers' Union. In 1972, the Brezhnev network successfully toppled Petro Shelest, replacing him with the Brezhnev client Volodymyr Shcherbyts'kyi. This development spelled the end of the official tolerance for nationally-minded writers. On Shcherbyts'kyi watch, the KGB presented the rebellious Ukrainian intellectuals of the "Sixtiers" generation with the choice of either falling into line or facing arrest and time in a camp.¹²³⁸

The explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor on April 26, 1986, however, galvanized Honchar into resuming his environmental advocacy and ultimately led him to support the Ukrainian national movement. Inspired by Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*' and the mobilization of other Soviet writers around causes like the defense of Lake Baikal, Honchar became a vocal critic of the construction of atomic stations in Ukraine and other large-scale projects that impacted the natural world. He increasingly blamed powerful central institutions in Moscow—and their enablers in the Ukrainian Party leadership—for disregarding the health of the Ukrainian population in their quest for economic development. Over the course of the late 1980s, he linked bureaucratic disregard for the Ukrainian environment with hostility to Ukrainian culture. Honchar was joined by many other members of the Ukrainian literary intelligentsia, who eventually became the organizational force behind the Ukrainian national movement known as "Rukh."

¹²³⁸ See, for example, documents related to the KGB's "prophylactic" work among Sixtiers such as Borys Oliinyk, Ivan Drach, and Ivan Dziuba. HDA SBU 16/1/1121-1193 (April 12, 1976): 97-103; HDA SBU16/1/1116-1050 (April 13, 1976): 252-255; HDA SBU 16/1/1121-1193 (August 2, 1976): 277-286.

Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 signaled the potential for new thinking in the highest echelons of the Party, but this breath of fresh air was hardly felt in Kyiv, where Shcherbyts'kyi was entering his thirteenth year in power. In the 1960s, under Shelest's "politics of inclusion" towards nationally-minded writers, Honchar had been able to publish *Cathedral* in a Ukrainian journal, *Vitshyzna*. But by the 1980s, Honchar had to adopt the strategy of publishing controversial works in the capital city first in order to get around repressive republican authorities.¹²³⁹ On December 12, 1985, Honchar published a short fictional piece in *Pravda* entitled "Black Ravine" (Rus: "Chërnyi iar").¹²⁴⁰ In a December 12, 1985 entry in his diary, Honchar wrote, "I think that only *Pravda* could have published this piece. In Ukraine they either wouldn't have published it, or they would have mutilated it. Well, now, of course, they will publish it in Kyiv."¹²⁴¹ "Black Ravine" told of the 1961 "Kurenivs'ka tragedy" in Kyiv, in which a levee holding back waste products from a brick factory burst, destroying dozens of buildings and killing an unknown number of people. The authorities had hushed up the tragedy, Honchar believed, and those responsible had never been held accountable. In an entry his diary, he explained that he wrote the piece in order to "stand on the side of the people's memory." In the aftermath of the publication of the piece in *Pravda*, Honchar wrote, someone told him that "Black Ravine" was "a little *Cathedral*."¹²⁴² As many writers had done during the Thaw, in the years of *glasnost* Ukrainian writers would repeatedly adopt the strategy of publishing in Moscow where the literary atmosphere was considerably freer than in the republican capital of Kyiv.

¹²³⁹ On the use of this strategy by non-Russian writers during the Thaw, see Chapter 2.

¹²⁴⁰ Oles' Gonchar, "Chërnyi iar," *Pravda*, December 23, 1985.

¹²⁴¹ Oles' Honchar, *Shchodennyky: u tr'okh tomakh*, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Kyïv: Veselka, 2002), 90.

¹²⁴² Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 78.

Honchar's 1985 short story about the deadly consequences of bureaucratic incompetence proved sadly prophetic. Four months after the publication of "Black Ravine," on April 29, 1986, Honchar wrote in his diary, "The reactor at the Chernobyl atomic [station] has exploded." Tens of thousands of people were being evacuated from the surrounding areas, and heightened levels of radiation had been detected in Kyiv and beyond. Tellingly, in his initial entry on the disaster, Honchar interpreted Chernobyl as a national, Ukrainian tragedy—one of many that had occurred under Soviet rule. "God, why has this calamity befallen our people? After the annihilation of [our] language, the destruction of monuments of culture (in Chernihiv, Zhytomyr), now this Chernobyl Hiroshima has fallen upon the children of Ukraine..." Despite the fanfare about Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* at the Twenty-Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in February, Honchar noted that there was no news of the disaster on the radio, just upbeat music. Meanwhile, the city was gripped with anxiety amid rumors that the hospitals were overflowing with casualties. "Can it really be that no one will be held responsible, as with the Kurenivs'ka tragedy?" he wondered. "There was a lot of dissatisfaction expressed on account of 'Black Ravine'—why, they say, did the author need to bring up something long-forgotten? This is why it was necessary," he fumed, "so that this sort of thing would not happen again!"¹²⁴³ Honchar, a Red Army veteran and longtime member of the Ukrainian literary establishment, interpreted Chernobyl as one in a long series of disasters inflicted on the Ukrainian people by incompetent, negligent, and indifferent Soviet authorities. In later entries, he noted that the authorities were already downplaying the explosion of the reactor at Chernobyl. Meanwhile, he recorded, the disaster was in-

¹²⁴³ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 90.

creasingly understood as “the beginning of the end,” a “prelude to the end of the world.” It was an omen, Honchar believed, of what could happen to the entire planet.¹²⁴⁴

Honchar had the opportunity to voice his private thoughts about Chernobyl at the Ninth Congress of the Union of Writers of Ukraine, held in June of 1986. His diary entries in the lead-up to the Congress show that he had come a long way from the days when he attempted to keep the fractious Ukrainian writers from outright rebellion as the young, Stalin Prize-winning head of the Union of Writers in the 1960s. Now Honchar was the one pushing the envelope. In a conversation with republican head Shcherbyts’kyi in the days before the Congress, Honchar pushed him to close down the Chernobyl atomic station. He also expressed his hope that the upcoming congress would be “as democratic as possible,” with the writers allowed to speak freely from the tribunal.¹²⁴⁵ Shcherbyts’kyi largely dismissed Honchar’s demands. On June 5, Honchar gave the opening speech at the Congress.¹²⁴⁶ He described Chernobyl as provoking a tectonic shift in the writers’ worldviews: “These are grim days. No one would understand if we, the writers of our people, pretended that the tragedy of Chernobyl had not affect our entire understanding of the world (*svitovidchuvannia*).”¹²⁴⁷

Having begun his speech by evoking the destructive impact of Chernobyl, Honchar focused the remainder of his speech on the importance of preservation. “Knowing how to preserve—this is the most urgent call of our times,” he stated. In many ways, his speech was a return to the topics he had discussed as the leader of the Union of Writers in his landmark 1966

¹²⁴⁴ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 91.

¹²⁴⁵ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 99.

¹²⁴⁶ Oles’ Honchar, “Vstupne slovo Olesia Honchara,” in *IX Z’izd pys’mennykiv Radians’koï Ukraïny: 5-7 chervnia 1986 roku : materialy z’izdu*, ed. Iurii Mushketyk, Ivan Vlasenko, and V. H Zaporozhets’ (Kyïv: Radians’kyi pys’mennyk, 1987), 7–12.

¹²⁴⁷ Honchar, “Vstupne slovo Olesia Honchara,” 7-8.

report to the Fifth Congress (see Chapter 4). He spoke about the need to preserve “cultural heritage,” “rivers, forests, and air,” and “the language of every people.”¹²⁴⁸ The disaster at Chernobyl had driven Honchar to give voice once more to his concern for the preservation of national language, cultural heritage and nature, issues that had been close to the heart of many rural writers since the 1960s. For the first time since the Fifth Congress, Honchar wrote in his diary, the Congress had not been filled with “empty talk” (*balakanyina*). He noted with approval that the assembled writers had discussed “the most painful problems of the people [*nabolili problemy narodnoho zytтя*]”: the defense of the Ukrainian language and historical monuments, the famine of 1933, the flooding of lands for hydroelectric stations, and the dangers of atomic power plants.¹²⁴⁹ Chernobyl had provided the impetus for the Ukrainian Union of Writers to return to the national issues that had been a vital part of the Ukrainian cultural Thaw of the 1950s and 1960s.

Even in the aftermath of the freest Congress in years, Honchar still felt, however, that *glasnost*’ had yet to truly penetrate Ukraine. The Ukrainian authorities had threatened to block the Ukrainian literary newspaper *Literaturna Ukraїna* from publishing an unedited version of Honchar’s speech. Meeting with Gorbachev in Moscow on June 19 during the Congress of the Union of Writers of the USSR, Honchar told him that the Ukrainian writers had raised important issues at their Congress but complained that “one *glasnost*’ exists for the capital city, and a second for the republics.” He asked the Soviet Central Committee to ensure that writers in the republics had “equal rights.”¹²⁵⁰

¹²⁴⁸ Honchar, “Vstupne slovo Olesia Honchara,” 9-10.

¹²⁴⁹ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 101.

¹²⁵⁰ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 102, 104.

Despite the continued efforts of the Ukrainian Party leadership to tamp down on expressions of dissent from the Ukrainian writers, Honchar continued to develop his thoughts on the significance of Chernobyl in speeches from 1987 onward. In Honchar's view, Chernobyl was symptomatic of a growing global ecological crisis, a crisis that manifested itself in Ukraine in a number of ways. Like the participants in the Baikal Movement, Honchar was concerned about the proliferation of hazardous chemical plants that polluted the water and sickened both children and adults. Like Druță, he expressed concern over the dangers of chemical fertilizers used in agriculture. He protested plans to build more nuclear power plants in Ukraine and advocated for the closing of existing nuclear power plants.¹²⁵¹ Yes, we need energy and chemicals, he admitted, but at what cost? Like many of his fellow rural writers, he urged Soviet economic planners to consider the opinions of the people who were most impacted by the environmental impacts of economic development: "I think that in these cases it is absolutely necessary to consider the will of the people themselves, to study the opinions of the native inhabitants of the region, those who have worked their entire lives on these lands, on these waters, and who are best capable of judging."¹²⁵²

Honchar repeatedly cited the activities of other Soviet writers as inspiration for his environmental activism, revealing the extent to which mobilization around this issue across the USSR encouraged writers in individual republics. Honchar repeatedly praised Russian writers for their defense of Baikal, stating in a May 1987 meeting with students at the Institute of Theater Arts, "We recall how much the Russian writers did to save Lake Baikal, it was difficult, but all the same the voice of the public, the voice of the brave sons of Russia played a role in the ap-

¹²⁵¹ Oles' Honchar, "Dzvony chornobylia: Slovo na vidkrytti Mizhnarodnoho seminaru 'Evrochornobyl'," in *Chym zhyvemo* (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1991), 56–57; Oles' Honchar, "To zvidky zh iavylas' 'zvizda polyn'?" Vystup na Vsesoiuznii tvorchii konferentsii v Leningradi 1 zhovtnia 1987 roku," in *Chym zhyvemo*, 53.

pearance of the directive [Ukr: *postanova*, Rus: *postanovlenie*] to save Baikal.” Honchar lamented, however, that writers were now forced to act like a “squad of firemen,” “throwing themselves into the defense of nature and speaking out against the arbitrary decisions of ministries.”¹²⁵³

Honchar was well aware of activism in other parts of the Soviet Union as well, citing in several speeches the efforts to prevent environmental damage to Lake Sevan in Armenia, the Aral Sea in Central Asia, and the northern Siberian rivers and Lake Ladoga in Russia.¹²⁵⁴

Much like Rasputin, Honchar directed his ire towards the central ministries in Moscow. The problem, according to Honchar, was that the capital-city bureaucrats had long since stopped showing any concern for the impact of their activities on ordinary people. He painted a picture of out-of-control ministries whose foolhardy actions—such as the decision to build Chernobyl not far from Kyiv—threatened human lives. “One gets the impression that we place narrow ministerial interests everywhere above the interests of society, that no one ever asks the opinion of the population on the advisability of the bureaucracy’s latest constructions, and a narrow-minded bureaucrat seized with gigantomania repeats over and over to the entire [Soviet] Union that “science demands sacrifices,” he said at a conference in Leningrad in October of 1987.¹²⁵⁵ This out-of-control bureaucracy was a product of the “stagnation” era, in Honchar’s view, and it was also responsible for another major feature of the Brezhnev era: disregard for Ukrainian culture. In some bureaucratic departments, he stated in a June 1987 interview on all-Union radio, officials had cultivated an attitude of arrogant disdain for monuments of history and culture and had

¹²⁵² Honchar, “To zvidky zh iavylas’ ‘zvizda polyn’?,” 54.

¹²⁵³ Oles Honchar, “Tvoryty liudiane, tvoryty prekrasne: Zustrich z studentami i vykladachami Kyivs’koho derzhavnogo institutu teatral’nogo mystetstva v travni 1987 roku,” in *Chym zhyvemo*, 251.

¹²⁵⁴ Honchar, “To zvidky zh iavylas’ ‘zvizda polyn’?,” 52; “Tvoryty liudiane, tvoryty prekrasne,” 251; Oles’ Honchar, “Zhyty za zakonamy pravdy: Interv’iu korespondentu Vsesoiuznogo radio V. Ablitsovu 12 chervnia 1987 roku v zv’iazku z vykhodom u Moskvi romanu ‘Sobor,’” in *Chym zhyvemo*, 62-63.

sought to drive out the Ukrainian language from schools and other public places.¹²⁵⁶ Honchar thus linked environmental destruction with the destruction of Ukrainian culture. Soulless Soviet bureaucrats, in Honchar's view, cared little for the Ukrainian people, their land, or their cultural traditions. For Honchar, the all-powerful central Soviet ministries represented a clear threat to the Ukrainian nation.

Of course, Honchar had already made a powerful argument about the threat that indifferent bureaucrats posed to the Ukrainian culture and environment in his novel *Cathedral*, which had been repressed shortly after its publication in 1968. The advent of *glasnost*' and the obvious relevance of the novel's themes to the current political moment helped pave the way for the novel's return to Soviet readers in 1987. Tellingly, the novel was republished first in Moscow. The Russian translation of the novel had sat in a cabinet in the offices of the journal *Druzhba narodov* for nearly two decades after it was barred from publication in the pages of the journal in 1968. According to *Druzhba narodov* staffer Elena Movchan, as soon as the first "warming" of *glasnost*' was felt, Sergei Baruzdin, the journal's longtime head editor, ordered that the novel be published as part of their "Library of *Druzhba narodov*" series.¹²⁵⁷ The Russian translation finally appeared in 1987.¹²⁵⁸ In June of that year, Honchar sent a copy to Gorbachev. He wrote in a letter to Gorbachev that his novel had finally become accessible to the all-Union reader after 20 years of persecution thanks to *glasnost*' and democratization.¹²⁵⁹ At a plenum of the governing board

¹²⁵⁵ Honchar, "To zvidky zh iavylas' 'zvizda polyn'?", 53-54.

¹²⁵⁶ Honchar, "Zhyty za zakonamy pravdy," 61-62.

¹²⁵⁷ Elena Movchan, "Moia 'Druzhba narodov': ot ottepeli do perestroiki," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 4 (2019): 214-215.

¹²⁵⁸ Oles' Honchar, *Sobor; Tvoia zaria: romany*, Biblioteka "Druzhby narodov" (Moskva: Izvestiia, 1987).

¹²⁵⁹ Oles' Honchar to Mikhail Gorbachev, June 20, 1987, in P. T. Tron'ko, O. H. Bazhan, and Iu. Z. Danyliuk, eds., *Ternystym shliakhom do khramu: Oles' Honchar v suspil'no-politychnomu zhytti Ukraïny 60-80-i rr. XX st.: zbirnyk dokumentiv ta materialiv* (Kyïv: Ridnyi krai, 1999), 217-222.

of the Union of Writers of Ukraine held the same month, several writers mentioned the return of *Cathedral* with satisfaction. The Sixtiers poet Ivan Drach complained, however, about the local Ukrainian bureaucrats who made it difficult for works like *Cathedral* to appear.¹²⁶⁰ Indeed, *glasnost* was still lagging behind in Ukraine. *Cathedral* was reprinted for the first time in Ukraine since 1968 in the seven-volume set of Honchar's collected works published from 1987 to 1988.¹²⁶¹ It was only in January of 1989 that Honchar received word that the Ukrainian publisher Dnipro was ready to issue a new standalone edition of the novel.¹²⁶²

In 1987, Ukrainian authorities still sought to prevent critical discussion of the Chernobyl disaster and its aftermath in Ukraine. Like Honchar, the Ukrainian writer Iurii Shcherbak used the tactic of publishing in Moscow to get around Shcherbyts'kyi's regime in Ukraine. A Kyivan by birth, Shcherbak did not share Honchar's rural origins, but the two were united by their environmental activism. In the summer of 1987, Shcherbak published his documentary novel *Chernobyl* in the Moscow-based journal *Iunost*. It was based on three months of research in the Chernobyl "Exclusion Zone."¹²⁶³ In the preface to a Ukrainian-language edition of the novel, Shcherbak explained why he felt compelled to publish the novel first in Russian in Moscow:

At that time, in the summer of 1986, the struggle for *glasnost* was only just beginning to unfold, and many areas, Chernobyl among them, remained beyond the bounds of criticism. The tradition of regulating and rationing the Truth, as if it were something in short supply, was still alive. One thing was permitted 'in the center' and another—far less of it and far worse—in the localities. And I was convinced: there was one Truth for everyone, our Truth, the Soviet Truth. There wasn't and couldn't be a 'republican,' 'regional' or 'district' truth.

¹²⁶⁰ TsDAMLM 590/1/1315 (June 16, 1987). See the speeches of Leonid Novychenko (esp. 6-7), Ie. Voloshko (esp. 142), and Ivan Drach (esp. 174).

¹²⁶¹ Oles' Honchar, *Tvory v semy tomakh* (Kyïv: Vyd-vo khudozhnoi literatury "Dnipro, 1987).

¹²⁶² Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 221; Oles' Honchar, *Sobor: roman* (Kyïv: Dnipro, 1989).

¹²⁶³ Ploky, *Chernobyl*, 294.

Shcherbak, a medical doctor by training, had been publishing literary works in Ukraine since the 1960s, and he was quite familiar with the tactics that writers, including Honchar, had been using since the Thaw to get around repressive local authorities. “Upon reflection, when I gave my work to the magazine *Iunost*” he explained, “I had before me the example of Oles’ Honchar, who first published his story of warning ‘The Black Ravine’ in *Moskovskaia Pravda*. In their time the same thing was done by Chingiz Aitmatov, Vasil’ Bykau and Ion Druḑă.”¹²⁶⁴

By 1987, Ukrainian writers were eager to do more than just write about the harm that the Chernobyl disaster had done to the Ukrainian people.¹²⁶⁵ In December of 1987, Shcherbak spearheaded the founding of Ukraine’s first ecological organization, Green World (*Zelenyi svit*). Green World was one of many “informal groups” founded to promote particular causes— frequently the promotion of Ukrainian culture—in 1987.¹²⁶⁶ At the founding Congress of Green World, Honchar gave an emotional speech in which he spoke out against the “indifference and predatory self-interest of ministries, which turns into the rapacious destruction of nature.”¹²⁶⁷

In June of 1988, Gorbachev called the Nineteenth Communist Party Conference, which accelerated the pace of *glasnost*’ and announced the formation of the Congress of People’s Deputies. According to Serhii Ploky, the Conference marked “the turning point in the writers’ efforts to break into the public sphere with their concerns about the harmful effects of the Chernobyl

¹²⁶⁴ Iurii Shcherbak, *Chernobyl: A Documentary Story* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), xiv-xv.

¹²⁶⁵ For an overview of Ukrainian writers’ activism around Chernobyl, see Ploky, *Chernobyl*, especially Chapter 18.

¹²⁶⁶ Roman Solchanyk, “Introduction,” in *Ukraine, from Chernobyl’ to Sovereignty: A Collection of Interviews*, by Roman Solchanyk (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), xiv.

¹²⁶⁷ Description of Honchar’s speech in Oleksandr Beliakov, *Ekolohichna problematyka v zasobakh masovoï informatsii* (Kyïv: VPTs “Kyïvs’kyi universytet,” 2001), 5-6, qtd. in V. M. Halych, *Oles’ Honchar-- zhurnalist, publitsyst, redaktor: evoliutsiia tvorchoï maisternosti* (Kyïv: Naukova dumka, 2004), 222-223.

disaster on public health and the environment.”¹²⁶⁸ The Ukrainian writer Borys Oliinyk presented a petition to the Conference in which he accused the all-Union ministries of cruelty and indifference toward Ukraine and called for the punishment of those responsible for the construction of Chernobyl. Shcherbak’s Green World, along with several other “informal groups,” helped to organize the first mass rally on the environment in Ukraine in Kyiv on November 13, 1988. Although the rally had been officially been permitted by the Ukrainian authorities, they turned the sound system off when the physicist Ivan Makar made a speech calling for the organization of a popular front in Ukraine based on the ones emerging in the Baltic states.¹²⁶⁹ The environmental protests in response to Chernobyl thus provided a catalyst for the emergence of a Ukrainian popular front.

The Kyiv branch of the Writers’ Union of Ukraine took the leading role in organizing an umbrella organization that would unite the various informal groups into a popular movement. Already in October a series of meetings had taken place among the Kyiv writers towards the formation of an Initiative Group. The Sixtiers poets Ivan Drach and Dmytro Pavlychko, both secretaries of the Writers’ Union, were involved in the organizing. The Kyiv branch of the Writers’ Union discussed the draft program of an organization that came to be known as the People’s Movement of Ukraine for Perestroika, or “Rukh” (“Movement” in Ukrainian), on January 31, 1989. The writers’ newspaper *Literaturna Ukraïna* published it on February 16. Although Ukrainian Communist Party ideological secretary Leonid Kravchuk had been present at early organizational meetings at the Writers’ Union, his stance on Rukh turned negative after the emergence of the draft program. From then on, Shcherbyts’kyi and the Ukrainian Communist

¹²⁶⁸ Plokhy, *Chernobyl*, 293.

¹²⁶⁹ Plokhy, *Chernobyl*, 293-298.

Party began a campaign to discredit Rukh.¹²⁷⁰ The Ukrainian Writers' Union thus became the center of support for *glasnost* and *perestroika*—and a target of the republican leadership. As we will see, in Moldova writers also emerged as the leading proponents of Gorbachev's reforms, mobilizing around similar ecological and cultural issues in opposition to the republican leadership.

The early phases of the organization of Rukh coincided with the preparations for the elections to Gorbachev's new Congress of People's Deputies. 1,500 of the 2,250 deputies to the new representative body were elected from territorial districts, while the remaining 750 were selected by various "public organizations," including the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and other all-Union organizations. "The announcement of the recommendations of the Ukrainian Politburo for deputies has been published," Honchar wrote in his diary on January 5, 1989. "Half are bureaucrats, two or three are from the intelligentsia, the author of *Standard-Bearers* and *Cathedral* not among them." Honchar's reaction to his omission from the list in his diary reveals his profound alienation from the Ukrainian authorities. He reflected bitterly on Shcherbyts'kyi's time in office, pronouncing him "even worse than Kaganovich," the Party leader who had overseen the 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine. "Not for nothing are they already saying out loud, 'Shcherbyts'kyi is the cruelest butcher of our people [*naizhorstokishyi kat nashoho narodu*]. Chernobyl is on his black conscience, and he will never wash it away.'" Later in the month, however, Honchar found himself nominated by the USSR Union of Writers for the position of deputy, winning 172 votes out of 182. Several of Honchar's fellow writers, including Shcherbak and Drach, ran for election

¹²⁷⁰ This description of the early days of Rukh is based on Solchanyk, "Introduction," xvi-xvii; Pavlo Movchan, interview with Roman Solchanyk, "The Beginnings of 'Rukh': An Interview with Pavlo Movchan," in *Ukraine: From Chernobyl' to Sovereignty: A Collection of Interviews*, ed. Roman Solchanyk (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 7-10.

to the Congress from territorial districts in Kyiv—in spite of the obstacles that the local bureaucrats sought to throw up in front of them, Honchar noted in his diary.¹²⁷¹

Although he was not running for election from a territorial district, Honchar nonetheless sought to meet with voters, raising awareness of the issues that he and his fellow Ukrainian writers sought to address at the Congress. In a speech to voters on February 3, Honchar addressed the set of issues that had occupied him since the 1960s: the fate of the Ukrainian environment, rural life, and culture.¹²⁷² The speech revealed how, for Honchar, the all-Union problem of environmental destruction led to a critique of Soviet bureaucratic institutions, which he blamed for the destruction of Ukraine's national culture. Asserting that ecology, morality, and national problems were the issues at the front of voters' minds, Honchar observed that writers across the Soviet Union had felt compelled to put away their manuscripts to write articles to address the environmental destruction taking place at Lake Baikal, the Aral Sea, the Volga, and the Dnipro. Chernobyl, Honchar asserted, was a terrible warning sign of what was to come, and he spoke of the need to stop the construction of nuclear power plants and other mega-projects that threatened the environment. The main task of the deputies, he concluded would be to tame the out-of-control ministries who pushed such projects despite the harm they caused to people's health and the environment. Reflecting his rural origins, Honchar then spoke about the phenomenon of the so-called "villages without economic prospects" (Ukr: *neperspektivni sela*, Rus: *neperspektivnye derevni*). While the ministries devoted all their efforts to grand projects, he fumed, people who had worked their whole lives watched their native villages become "half-ruined" as young people left *en masse* for the cities. Honchar then moved on to attacking the ministries as a threat to Ukrainian-

¹²⁷¹ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 219-222.

¹²⁷² Oles' Honchar, "Bil'she sovisti, liudianosti, bil'she pravdy v us'omu: Vystup na zustrichi z vybortsiamy v liutomu 1989 roku," in *Chym zhyvemo*, 329–31.

language schools, folk traditions, and the “defenseless church.” He concluded by expressing his hope that the deputies would help the local authorities stand up to the overweening ministries.

Honchar’s speech to voters in February of 1989 thus reflected an increasing rhetorical opposition between the needs of the Ukrainian republic and the demands of central Soviet institutions. In a diary entry he made that day, Honchar was even more blunt, using the language of colonialism to reflect the relationship between the republics and the center. The leadership of the republic indulges the proponents of atomic power in everything, he complained, even as the latter “hollowed out Ukraine [*ryiut’ Ukrainu*].” Observing that the universities of Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk were now under the control of central Union institutions instead of republican authorities, he wrote bitterly, “What sort of colonialism is this? We [the center] get the universities and Ukraine is left with farms and pig-raising complexes.”¹²⁷³ Like Rasputin, Honchar heaped blame on central Soviet authorities, using the language of colonialism to describe the exploitation of Ukraine by the rapacious ministries.

On March 21, the plenum of the Union of Writers of the USSR elected Honchar to represent the Union of Writers at the Congress of Peoples’ Deputies. In May, both Honchar and Iurii Shcherbak, elected as a deputy from Kyiv, traveled to Moscow to attend the Congress. The Honchar that participated in the Congress of People’s Deputies, however, was quite different than the Honchar that had written *Cathedral* as head of the Ukrainian Writers’ Union in the 1960s. The issues that preoccupied him remained the same, but by 1989, Honchar was increasingly losing his faith in the ability of the Soviet government to develop and protect the environment, rural life, and national culture. Indeed, the central ministries in Moscow seemingly threatened to de-

¹²⁷³ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 225.

stroy the aspects of Ukraine that Honchar held so dear—while Ukrainian Party leaders did nothing to stop them.

Ion Druță and Agricultural Pollution in Moldova

Unlike Valentin Rasputin and Oles' Honchar, the Moldovan writer Ion Druță had not made environmental issues an important theme in his writings before *perestroika*. In the 1970s, his literary works focused on other themes that he had in common with writers from rural backgrounds: the need to preserve historic monuments, especially churches, and the impact of Stalinist policies in agriculture on the rural population in the postwar period (see Chapters 4 and 6, respectively). As in other republics, however, there had been growing interest in environmental topics among Moldovan intellectuals in the years leading up to *perestroika* and *glasnost'*.¹²⁷⁴ In 1987, the environment became an important “breakthrough” topic for nationally-minded intellectuals in Moldova, who succeeded in taking over the Moldovan Writers' Union.¹²⁷⁵ As we will see, *perestroika* and *glasnost'* emboldened the increasingly radical Moldovan intelligentsia, who saw their republic as lagging behind the developments in the rest of the country. In July of 1987, Druță was drawn into the fight for environmental protection when a group of Moldovan scientists asked for his help in publicizing their findings on the impact of pesticides on the health of the population in Moldova, especially children. Druță published the scientists' findings in a powerful article in the central newspaper *Literaturnaia gazeta*. The fact that Druță was drawn into

¹²⁷⁴ For example, in 1983 the MSSR Union of Journalists founded an Ecological Section. AOSPRM R-2955/1/216 (May 14, 1986): 179.

¹²⁷⁵ Charles King focuses exclusively on the politics of language during *perestroika*, while Moldovan scholar Igor Cașu mentions ecological issues briefly. See Igor Cașu, “*Politica națională în Moldova Sovietică (1944-1989)*” (Chișinău: Cardidact, 2000), 77; King, *The Moldovans*, 120-142.

advocacy for environmental causes speaks to the importance of the issue in the early stages of national mobilization in Moldova, as well as Druță's increasingly important role as a national leader in the republic. As in Ukraine, the Writers' Union became the driving force behind the burgeoning national movement in the republic, the Popular Front. In March of 1989 the national movement scored a major coup when several writers, including Druță, defeated Communist Party candidates during the elections for the Congress of People's Deputies.

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the Moldovan literary intelligentsia was demoralized by two-and-a-half decades of rule by Leonid Brezhnev's clients: first Ivan Bodiul, first secretary from 1960 to 1980, and then the current first secretary, Semion (Rus: Semën) Grossu. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Bodiul had zealously pursued "nationalists" among the creative intelligentsia, ultimately driving leading cultural figures like Druță and the film director Emil Loteanu out of the republic (see Chapters 2, 4, and 6). Even the most loyal among the Soviet Moldovan writers had become disillusioned by the situation in the republic. Bodiul's successor Grossu had halted Bodiul's endless campaign against Druță, but the writer remained in exile in Moscow. In 1985 and 1986, Gorbachev replaced a number of republican first secretaries in an apparent attempt to replace leaders associated with Brezhnev-era "stagnation" or tainted by corruption.¹²⁷⁶ Grossu, however, remained in charge of the Moldovan SSR—but increasingly out of step with the changes sweeping the country as a result of Gorbachev's reforms.

Living in Moscow, Druță was not in Moldova when the first tentative signs of *glasnost* in the Moldovan literary world began to appear at the Seventh Congress of the Union of Writers of Moldova in May of 1986. During the Congress, many of the writers complained about the management of Moldovan literature in the "recent past," arguing that the problems with prose

¹²⁷⁶ Dawn Mann, "Gorbachev's Personnel Policy: The Non-Russian Republics," *Report on the USSR*, December 1, 1989, 10.

resulted from the criticism that was directed at authors who sought an honest discussion of the republic's problems.¹²⁷⁷ The screenwriter and journalist Gheorghe Malarciuc took advantage of the freer atmosphere to protest the recent resumption of logging in forests along the Dniester river. Malarciuc argued that writers had a duty to protect their "native nature" against "ecological shortsightedness" in order to preserve this national heritage for coming generations.¹²⁷⁸ Head of the Ecological Section of the Union of Journalists, Malarciuc had a longstanding interest in environmental issues. Already in the 1970s, he had used his position as a correspondent for *Literaturnaia gazeta*, the Soviet Writers' Union newspaper known for its involvement in environmental campaigns, to draw attention to issues such as the problem of soil erosion in Moldova.¹²⁷⁹ Malarciuc also had a reputation as a troublemaker in Moldova, having been criticized by the Moldovan Central Committee in 1965 for his statements at the Third Congress of the Union of Writers of Moldova and in 1970 for his work at the studio Moldova-Film.¹²⁸⁰ Yet the environmental issue was not the sole purview of troublemakers like Malarciuc. The dyed-in-the-wool communist poet Andrei Lupan also chimed in, expressing concern over the rapid expansion of tobacco plantations in the republic.¹²⁸¹ The relatively mild criticisms expressed at the writers' Seventh Congress were a harbinger of what was to come.

¹²⁷⁷ See the article on the Seventh Congress in *Literaturnaia gazeta*: T. Rasskazova and A. Shalganov, "O vremeni, o literature," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, May 21, 1986. See also the transcript of the Congress: AOSPRM R-2955/1/216 (May 14, 1986).

¹²⁷⁸ AOSPRM R-2955/1/216 (May 14, 1986):178-184

¹²⁷⁹ Mitrofan Vătavu and Georghe Malarciuc, "Kuda mchitsia «arabskii skakun»?" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, February 21, 1973. Malarciuc raised the issue of soil erosion and poor land management practices in a discussion of agriculture at the Party cell of the Union of Writers in 1973. AOSPRM 276/47/29 (February 16, 1973): 6.

¹²⁸⁰ On the 1965 Congress of the Moldovan Union of Writers and the criticism of Moldova-Film, see Chapters 4 and 6, respectively. For Party criticism of Malarciuc, see AOSPRM 51/25/25 (December 3, 1965): 21-24; AOSPRM 51/31/9 (April 7, 1970): 41-45.

¹²⁸¹ Rasskazova and Shalganov, "O vremeni, o literature."

In February of 1987, Writers' Union head Pavel Boțu died in a probable suicide, setting off a series of events that would lead to the radicalization of the Moldovan Writers' Union. Boțu had remained head of the Writers' Union throughout the Brezhnev era in part by complying with Chișinău's increasingly harsh cultural policy. In March, the Union's Party cell nominated the writer Ion Ciobanu to replace Boțu.¹²⁸² At the May 1987 plenum of the Moldovan Union of Writers, the assembled writers were much more outspoken in their demand for greater *glasnost*' in the republic, inspired by the actions of writers in the center. Ciobanu started off the plenum with a discussion of *perestroika* in literature in which Village Prose writers played a leading role. He identified Ovechkin's 1950s sketches as the true beginnings of *perestroika* and spoke positively about the rise of talented writers from the Russian regions in the postwar decades, naming the Russian Village Prose writers Fëdor Abramov, Viktor Astaf'ev, Vasiliï Belov, Vasiliï Shukshin, and Valentin Rasputin as examples (see Chapters 1 and 3). Ciobanu said, with a hint of irony, that in recent years, some Moldovan writers and critics had begun to ask, "Why aren't we Abramovs, Aitmatovs, Astaf'evs, Belovs, and Rasputins?" Ciobanu also spoke about the difficulties experienced by Moldovan writers, particularly Druță, who he said had endured more than any other Moldovan writer of his generation. He warned them that the road to *perestroika* would not be easy, that they would need evict "censor and buck-passer" (*tsenzor-perestrakhovshchik*) in their own minds.¹²⁸³

Emboldened, other writers at the plenum leapt on the comparison between Moldovan writers and writers from other republics, complaining that Moldova was falling behind developments in the rest of the country. The prose writer Lidia Istrati said that her colleagues at the

¹²⁸² AOSPRM R-2955/1/220 (March 4, 1987): 5. Ciobanu, considered the founder of the Soviet Moldovan novel, had been head of the Union from 1960 to 1965 before being replaced by Boțu in the aftermath of the outbreak of "nationalism" at the 1965 Congress (see Chapter 4).

Academy of Sciences could not be convinced to read the Moldovan journal *Nistru* but would stand in line for central publications like *Novyi mir*, *Neva*, and *Inostrannaia literatura*. They knew that, unlike the writers from Moldova, the writers from Russia and other republics were not “ruled by fear and compromise [*ne vedom strakh i kompromiss*].”¹²⁸⁴ Referencing the spirit of renewal at the recent plenum of the Soviet Union of Writers, the critic Mihai Cimpoi wondered, “Is it possible that the light from Moscow will not reach our stubborn province?” Cimpoi blamed the secretariat of the Moldovan Writers’ Union for stifling new developments at the Union, complaining that they continued to work “aggressively” in the same old-fashioned way, providing cushy jobs for members of their clique while punishing writers who stepped out of line. Meanwhile, Cimpoi explained, there were real problems that demanded their attention: “barbaric” attitudes towards nature, the loss of authentic values from the past, and the problem of preserving national culture and language. He noted favorably the recent environmental activism of Valentin Rasputin. At the end of his speech, Cimpoi called for the election of Ion Druță as honorary head of the Union and for the election of a new generation of writers on the governing board of the Union.¹²⁸⁵ The perpetual *bête noire* of the reactionary Moldovan leadership, Druță was the perfect symbol of the writers’ movement for greater *glasnost*’ and *perestroika* in the MSSR.

The result of the May plenum was the dramatic overthrow of the leadership of the Union of Writers and its replacement with a group of nationally-minded writers. Druță was elected honorary chair of the governing board of the Union *in absentia*. Druță later wrote in his memoir that he did not want the position, but understood that he was elected to serve as a sort of temporary shield for the writers in Moldova who had been watched and persecuted for many years during

¹²⁸³ AOSPRM R-2955/1/219 (May 18, 1987): 5-13.

¹²⁸⁴ AOSPRM R-2955/1/219 (May 18, 1987): 35-36.

¹²⁸⁵ AOSPRM R-2955/1/219 (May 18, 1987): 97-102.

the era of "stagnation."¹²⁸⁶ The new members of the governing board elected at the May plenum included Cimpoi, Gheorghe Vieru, the leading poet of the 1960s generation, and Nicolae Dabija, the editor of the Writers' Union newspaper *Literatura și arta*.¹²⁸⁷ Under Dabija's editorial leadership, *Literatura și arta* had published numerous articles on environmental topics, including the need to preserve the forests of the Saharna nature preserve on the banks of the Dniester River.¹²⁸⁸ Both Vieru and Dabija would go on to play important roles in the national movement. The organization that Druță once called "the oft-glorified and oft-cursed Union of Writers of Moldova" was now ready to assume a greater public role in the republic.¹²⁸⁹

In July, Druță returned to the republic that he had fled in 1965 as the new honorary leader of the Moldovan Writers' Union. He met with writers, readers, and representatives of the public. At a packed meeting at the House of Writers, he heard speeches about his work by the Union head Ciobanu, the poet Vieru, and the critic Cimpoi and discussed his future creative plans with the audience¹²⁹⁰. While Druță was meeting with the members of the reinvigorated Moldovan Writers' Union, the battle lines over *perestroika* and *glasnost*' were already being drawn in Moldova. On July 16, at a plenum of the Communist Party of Moldova, the head of the MSSR Academy of Sciences, the biologist Aleksandr Zhuchenko, said that the process of democratization and *glasnost*' in the republic were going well, but then harshly criticized the environmental activism of *Literatura și arta* and the new leadership of the Writer's Union on several counts. He ac-

¹²⁸⁶ Ion Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii: mărturii și spovedanii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2011), 111.

¹²⁸⁷ Cașu, "Politica națională" în *Moldova Sovietică*, 77.

¹²⁸⁸ See, for example, Vera Verina, "Rezervația peizajistică «Saharna» e în pericol!", *Literatura și arta*, February 19, 1987; "Salvați pădurea!", *Literatura și arta*, February 19, 1987; Ana Lupan, "Saharna," *Literatura și arta*, March 12, 1987.

¹²⁸⁹ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 111.

¹²⁹⁰ "LG informiruet: Vechera," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 15, 1987.

cused the writers of “hyperlocal patriotism” and said their recent coverage reflected an “anti-scientific, vulgar understanding of the use of the natural environment” that he summarized as “down with chemicals and irrigation.”¹²⁹¹ Citing other articles by *Literatura și arta*, Zhuchenko also insinuated that it was prone to pro-Romanian nationalism. Zhuchenko also accused Malarciuc of spreading false information about the situation in Moldova in the all-Union press.¹²⁹² He clearly perceived the Moldovan writers’ increasingly assertive stance as a threat to the MSSR Academy of Science’s monopoly on environmental expertise.

In his speech to the Moldovan Communist Party plenum, Fëdor Angeli, the head of the Moldovan Information Agency, stated that “*glasnost*’ in the press must be guided” because “certain journalists and representatives of the creative organizations have interpreted the Party’s policy on the democratization of society as freedom from well-known obligations, from responsibility for what they print and say.”¹²⁹³ The chair of the State Committee of the Moldovan SSR on Television and Radio (Gostelradio), S. I. Lozan, chimed in, complaining that one of the new secretaries of the Writers’ Union’s governing board, Dumitru Matcovschi, had demanded in a meeting that Moldovan television and radio broadcast in Moldovan only. According to Angeli and Lozan, the republic’s writers were getting out of hand.¹²⁹⁴

The Moldovan Central Committee agreed. At a July 21 meeting of the Bureau of the Moldovan Central Committee in July, Central Committee secretary Nikolai Bondarchuk delivered a report on the allegations made at the plenum that echoed word-for-word the speeches by

¹²⁹¹ For examples of *Literatura și arta*’s coverage of the proposed Program, see Ion Dediuc, “Să fim la nivelul imperativelor ecologice,” *Literatura și arta*, February 19, 1987; Aleksandru Sefer, “Programul de ocrotire a naturii: cine sînt, de fapt, autorii?” *Literatura și arta*, February 19, 1987.

¹²⁹² AOSPRM 51/71/11 (July 16, 1987): 67-72.

¹²⁹³ AOSPRM 51/71/11 (July 16, 1987): 96.

the critics of the Moldovan Writers' Union. Bondarchuk named several writers, including Malarciuc, whose behavior demonstrated "social demagoguery, nationalist manifestations, and extreme aspirations and ambitiousness." He claimed the writers were now using *glasnost* to settle scores and get revenge for the past.¹²⁹⁵ In their decision on the issue, the Moldovan Central Committee called on the relevant party organs to bring *Literatura și arta* and the Moldovan Writers' Union to heel.¹²⁹⁶

Druță, always ready for a fight with the Moldovan authorities, was drawn into the struggles over environmental issues in Moldova. In his memoir, he recounts how on his visit to Moldova he met with several ecological scientists in Pushkin Park in Chișinău. Walking the tree-lined paths, they discussed the overuse of pesticides in Moldova and the consequences for the Moldovan population, especially children. He traveled to the Moldovan regions, returned to Chișinău, and consulted with doctors, chemists, and schools. He discovered that there were 150 schools in the republic for handicapped children. *Literaturnaia gazeta* was willing to publish Druță's article on the situation but was looking for solid support in case the article provoked a "storm." The Moldovan scientists then refused to stand behind the information they had given Druță, but Druță found supporters from among the Russian scientists in Moscow, including the biologist and member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences Aleksei Yablokov, who would go on to publish a major article on the harms of agricultural pesticides in *Pravda* later in the year.¹²⁹⁷

¹²⁹⁴ The three speeches, including the attacks on Malarciuc and Matcovschi, are summarized in the summary of the plenum in *Pravda*. B. Evladov, "Vremia konkretnykh del: Moldaviia," *Pravda*, July 18, 1987.

¹²⁹⁵ AOSPRM 51/71/67 (July 21, 1987): 2-6.

¹²⁹⁶ AOSPRM 51/71/62 (July 21, 1987): 7-9.

¹²⁹⁷ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 110-111. A. Iablokov, "Igra protiv vrediteli," *Pravda*, October 26, 1987.

Druță's ability to mobilize support from the Moscow-based scientific community gave *Literaturnaia gazeta* the confidence to move forward with the publication.

Meanwhile, on the eve of the publication of Druță's article, the Moldovan Party first secretary Semion Grossu and other members of the Central Committee met with the republic's writers at the Central Committee headquarters in Chișinău. In their discussion with Grossu, the writers brought up a range of issues, but the ecological question and the recent criticism of the Writer's Union and *Literatura și arta* were at the top of the agenda. Malarciuc kicked off the meeting by protesting the attacks made by "highly-placed people, the highly-paid representatives of the leadership of the republic" on "journalist-ecologists and writers who are fulfilling their civic duty without any self-interested motives, without material reward, without even any encouragement, and, as you see, at risk to their good name." According to Malarciuc, the Moldovan leadership had reverted to the methods of the previous first Party secretary, Ivan Bodiul, and had begun suppressing criticism of the management of the environment in the republic. Malarciuc announced that in a few days the Moldovan writers would be appealing directly to Gorbachev in a letter. He also mentioned that Druță's article would be appearing in *Literaturnaia gazeta* the following day. "It is a pity that at home the opportunity to serve the Party and the people is lacking," he remarked.¹²⁹⁸ Malarciuc's speech showed how Gorbachev's reforms had shifted power in the republic. Confident of support in the center, Moldovan writers in the MSSR were increasingly empowered to subvert the republican authorities. The strategies of the Bodiul era, which had kept a lid on writerly protest in the MSSR even as they failed to prevent figures like Druță from expressing dissenting views in Moscow, were losing their effectiveness.

¹²⁹⁸ AOSPRM 51/71/170 (July 28, 1987): 1-7.

Moreover, the writers' meeting at the Central Committee showed that the ecological issue had broad support among the writers, and not just radicals like Malarciuc. In his speech, Andrei Lupan, the elder statesmen of the Moldovan writers, attempted to calm his colleagues, but expressed a similar sense of urgency about the environmental situation in the republic. Perhaps Malarciuc was showing too much "local patriotism," Lupan admitted, but he deserved the highest praise for mobilizing them in defense of the environment, the number one issue in the republic. "Our republic is overpopulated, completely poisoned, and saturated with chemicals," he stated, "We must do something extreme."¹²⁹⁹ For his part, first Party secretary Grossu engaged with the writers, frequently contradicting them, but ended by saying that the Central Committee would study the issues they raised.¹³⁰⁰ Grossu's decision to hold the meeting with the writers, as well as his relative equanimity in the face of their defiance, showed that the Moldovan leaders realized that they could no longer deal with their restive Writers' Union through the repressive methods they had so frequently applied in the past.

Druță's full-page article in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on July 29, framed by the same peasant-oriented perspective as Rasputin's writings on Baikal, made chilling allegations about the health effects of decades of agricultural pesticide use on Moldova's population.¹³⁰¹ He began with a meditation on the Moldovans' love of the native region, or *malaia rodina*. Now, he informed his readers, "some kind of doom was hovering over" the regions that were so dear to his heart. The leaders of the republic had been determined to transform the dry and densely populated Moldovan countryside into a "garden" to show to foreign visitors. For a quarter century, the country became a playground for experimentation with agricultural chemicals, which breathed life into

¹²⁹⁹ AOSPRM 51/71/170 (July 28, 1987): 57-64.

¹³⁰⁰ AOSPRM 51/71/170 (July 28, 1987): 93.

¹³⁰¹ Ion Drutse, "Zelenyi list, voda i znaki prepinnania," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, July 29, 1987.

the leaders' most "phantasmagoric" plans. "From morning until evening, almost year-round, airplanes with pesticides circled in the air," Druță wrote. The airplanes dropped a "secret dust" on the fields—and the workers—below. That which they did not drop from planes they mixed with seeds, mixed with water, and spread onto great expanses of land. Under pressure to report to higher-ups that they have overfulfilled the plan, the people who till the land had become the "prisoners in the hands of completely irresponsible people." In Druță's article, national, rural, and environmental themes were intertwined; the leadership of the Moldovan republic was an enemy of both the people and the land.

Druță reported that the use of chemical pesticides had gotten completely out of control in the republic, with devastating consequences on the health of the population. Collective farms were given free license to spray pesticides, an average of 22.5 kilograms per hectare, he wrote—10 times more than in the rest of the country. The overuse of pesticides caused a cascade of problems that ultimately impacted the health of the republic's children. When the summers are dry, the wind blows a chemical dust on villages and gardens and into the faces of people. When it rains, the water sweeps the chemical pesticides from the fields and dumps them into valleys, leaving them a dead zone for plants. The pesticides enter into people's bodies through berries and vegetables. The most dangerous are nitrates, which attack the immune and reproductive systems. According to Druță, it was children who bore the brunt of the chemicalization of agriculture. It was no secret, he wrote, that after the expansion of the use of chemicals, children with mental disabilities began to be born. Schools for sick children have proliferated, and in the grade books of village schools there are always the names of 5 or 6 perpetually absent students with no marks beside their names. Druță said that scientists at the Moldovan Institute of Hygiene had concluded that if some of this was attributable to alcohol, the rest was due to the use of agricultural chemi-

icals. Moreover, the labor of schoolchildren and student was often used to gather the republic's harvest of fruits, vegetables, and tobacco—bringing even more young people into contact with agricultural chemicals. Like other rural writers, Druță emphasized the concrete impact of economic policies on the health of the people who lived on the land.

The Moldovan writers were the first to sound the alarm, Druță said, but the republican authorities had failed to react. The policies of *glasnost*' and *perestroika* meant little when the people in power in the republic were unwilling to support them. As a result, *glasnost*' and *perestroika* in Moldova were still “alone and defenseless,” he informed his Soviet readers. Skimming the pages of *Sovetskaia Moldaviia* with the news from the latest Moldovan Communist Party plenum, he wrote, one would think that everything was blue skies in the republic, with one dark cloud: The Union of Writers of Moldova and its newspaper *Literatura și arta*. Comparing *Sovetskaia Moldaviia* with the issue of *Pravda* containing Gorbachev's speech to writers and members of the press, Druță could not help but marvel at the “tact, trust, and respect” towards the writers that Gorbachev displayed. “I understand that Chișinău is not Moscow, that between them are about 1,500 kilometers, but it is not million or billions, after all!” Druță wrote. From the security of his position in Moscow, Druță drew Soviet readers' attention to the threat that the Moldovan leadership posed not only to the health of the MSSR's population, but also the policies of *glasnost*' and *perestroika* in the republic.

The Moldovan Party leadership interpreted the article as an attack on their leadership—and as a sign that the writers were drawing support from the center. The members of the Bureau of the Central Committee agreed that the situation with the writers was getting out of hand; it had become, in Grossu's words, “nearly unmanageable.”¹³⁰² In their eyes, the writers willfully mis-

¹³⁰² AOSPRM 51/71/66 (August 1, 1987): 74.

understood the meaning of Gorbachev's reforms. Mircea Snegur, the Central Committee secretary in charge of agriculture was critical of "recent events in the Union of Writers."¹³⁰³ Snegur, along with Nicolae Țău, who also criticized Druță's article at the meeting, would later defect from the Moldovan Party establishment and combine forces with the rebellious writers.¹³⁰⁴ But in 1987, Snegur remained a staunch opponent of the writers. As the republic's top agricultural official, he was directly responsible for the policies Druță was criticizing.¹³⁰⁵ For his part, Grossu understood that Druță's criticism of agricultural policy in the article—much like Rasputin's critique of Soviet industrial development in Siberia—undermined the moral stance of the Moldovan leadership: "Druță supports Malarciuc's views—this is an amoral economy, because it's an amoral policy, the result of which is an amoral ecology."¹³⁰⁶ Even worse, Grossu stated, the writers seemed inspired by the ideological pronouncements being made in the center, as evidenced by their frequent references to Gorbachev and the Central Committee of the Community Party of the USSR.¹³⁰⁷ He concluded that the Moldovan leadership needed to travel to Moscow to sort out the situation. The writers seemed to think that they had "immunity," protection from above. The sudden appearance of a number of articles by Druță and other leaders of the Moldovan Writers' Union in *Literaturnaia gazeta* could hardly be an accident, he concluded.¹³⁰⁸ Grossu, by 1987 one of the few remaining Brezhnev appointees left standing in the republics, clearly understood that Gorbachev's reforms were weakening his position *vis-à-vis* the writers.

¹³⁰³ AOSPRM 51/71/66 (August 1, 1987): 45.

¹³⁰⁴ On Snegur and Țău, see King, *The Moldovans*, 135-136.

¹³⁰⁵ AOSPRM 51/71/66 (August 1, 1987): 46.

¹³⁰⁶ AOSPRM 51/71/66 (August 1, 1987): 79

¹³⁰⁷ AOSPRM 51/71/66 (August 1, 1987): 74.

¹³⁰⁸ AOSPRM 51/71/66 (August 1, 1987): 79.

Unable to read the writing on the wall, the Moldovan leadership returned to its old methods of dealing with recalcitrant members of the cultural intelligentsia in September, when they called Dabija, the editor of *Literatura și arta*, to the Central Committee for a working-over. Ivan Calin, chair of the MSSR Soviet of Ministers, expressed his concern over the tone of the newspaper's "tendentious" and "unhelpful" coverage of ecological issues.¹³⁰⁹ Members of the Moldovan leadership also objected to "ideologically harmful" materials that had appeared in the newspaper on topics such as the 1946-1947 famine and the relationship with Romania.¹³¹⁰ While the Central Committee Bureau did not fire Dabija (as they might have in a previous era), their directive on *Literatura și arta* outlined the ways in which the newspaper would be brought under control.¹³¹¹

While Dabija made the appropriate gestures of contrition at the meeting at the Central Committee, events later in the year showed that the Moldovan writers, feeling empowered by *perestroika* and *glasnost*, clearly had no intentions of backing down. On October 21, *Literaturnaia gazeta* had published several responses to Druță's article, including one by Zhuchenko, the head of the Academy of Sciences who had attacked *Literatura și arta*'s ecological coverage at the Communist Party plenum.¹³¹² At an October 30 plenum of the Moldovan Union of Writers, the assembled writers showed they were not cowed. The poet Ion Hadîrcă, a secretary of the governing board, mocked Writers' Union critics like Zhuchenko, stating that, according to their logic, *Literaturnaia gazeta* was a "dangerous bastion of Soviet nationalism" because it had pub-

¹³⁰⁹ AOSPRM 51/71/82 (September 22, 1987): 38.

¹³¹⁰ AOSPRM 51/71/82 (September 22, 1987): 37-38, 46, 54

¹³¹¹ AOSPRM 51/71/83 (September 22, 1987): 40-46.

¹³¹² See "Rezonans: «List zelenyi, voda i znaki prepinariia», «Krik zemili»" *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 21, 1987.

lished critical articles by writers like Druță, Malarciuc, and others.¹³¹³ In a reference to the Moldovan “politics of exclusion” practiced during the Bodiul years (see Chapter 6), Dabija spoke about how the Moldovan leadership had forced Druță, film director Emil Loteanu, and stage director Ungureanu to leave the republic and settle in Moscow. He said that the Moldovan Central Committee was making progress on convincing these leading cultural figures to return, but complained that there was still a significant amount of inertia from the past.¹³¹⁴ At the Writers’ Union plenum, it was evident that the Moldovan Central Committee’s attempts to bring the cultural intelligentsia in line had come to naught.

Examining the events of 1987 in Moldova, we can see the tipping point when the balance of power between the conservative republican leadership and the increasingly radical writers shifted. The environmental issue, championed first by *Literaturnaia gazeta* journalist Gheorghe Malarciuc, then by the newspaper *Literatura și arta*, and finally by Ion Druță, became a breakthrough issue for the Moldovan writers, who began taking on a leading political role in society. Many of the writers who were active at this early stage, including Druță, Dabija, Malarciuc, Matcovschi, Cimpoi, Vieru, Hadîrcă, and others, went on to become important figures in the national movement in Moldova, which became a mass movement with the founding of the National Front on May 20, 1989. A key factor in their increasing boldness was the support of the center. The writers drew inspiration not only from Gorbachev’s rhetoric of *glasnost*’ and *perestroika*, but also the activism of the Russian Village Prose writers and the support provided by *Literaturnaia gazeta* at a key moment. As we have seen, Grossu and the Moldovan Central Committee leader-

¹³¹³ AOSPRM 51/72/8 (October 30, 1987): 24.

¹³¹⁴ AOSPRM 51/72/8 (October 30, 1987): 139.

ship recognized that developments in the center were undermining their position, that the ground was shifting under their feet, but seemed unable to respond to the changing situation.

The writers gained momentum in 1988. As in Ukraine, the Writers' Union joined forces with several "informal" organizations that had sprouted up in the republic. Along with the members of the literary circle "Alexei Mateevici" and the "Democratic Movement in Support of Perestroika," the writers founded the movement that would become the Popular Front of Moldova in September of 1988.¹³¹⁵ In March of 1989, the Moldovan "informals," as they were called, outperformed candidates from the upper echelons of the Moldovan Communist Party in the elections for the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. The informals won 10 of the 16 seats they contested. Among the winners were Druță, the editor Dabija, and the poet Vieru.¹³¹⁶ Going into the Congress of People's Deputies, the Moldovan writer-activists had become important public figures.

In the end, however, unlike in Ukraine and Armenia, the environmental issue did not become a major issue around which the Moldovan public mobilized.¹³¹⁷ As Charles King explains, the language issue became paramount in Moldova starting in 1989. This issue appealed to rural Moldovan migrants to the republic's cities because it stood to reverse the longstanding linguistic advantage of the urban Russian speakers with whom they competed for jobs. It also served the interests of the younger generation of Party leaders like Snegur and Țâu. As Moldovan speakers of Bessarabian origins, they could use the language issue to mobilize against the older generation of Party leaders, many of whom, like Grossu (and Bodiul before him), were Russian-speaking

¹³¹⁵ Cașu, "Politica națională" în Moldova Sovietică, 77.

¹³¹⁶ King, *The Moldovans*, 127.

¹³¹⁷ On Armenia, see Doose, "Green Nationalism?"

Moldovans who had grown up outside the republic proper.¹³¹⁸ To King's analysis, we can add the fact that the agricultural secretary Snegur and the other young Party leaders who defected to the side of the informals clearly had no incentive to push the environmental issue, as it would have amounted to announcing that they had overseen the poisoning of the Moldovan population and the destruction of the republic's natural landscapes. Thus, although the environmental issue helped catapult the writers to an unprecedented position of power in the Moldovan republic, it was ultimately rather marginal to the national mobilization that followed.

The 1989 Congress of People's Deputies: Writers as National Spokesmen

The elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, held in March 1989, marked a watershed moment for rural writers and the Soviet Union as a whole. Soviet writers had long sought to influence Soviet politics but competing in elections for positions outside the Writers' Union was a new stage in their transition to political actors. As we will see, the writers who were elected as deputies helped turn the Congress into a real forum for discussion of the issues convulsing the Soviet Union in the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

The elections to the Congress of People's Deputies, while the freest in the Soviet Union since elections to the ill-fated Constituent Assembly in 1917, were not entirely democratic. While two-thirds were elected from territorial regions, a third were selected by "public organizations" such as the Communist Party and the Writers' Union of the USSR. Ten deputies were allotted to the Writers' Union of the USSR, and the seats were hotly contested. In the end, self-consciously rural writers made up 7 of the 10 who were elected: Honchar, Rasputin, the Russian Village

¹³¹⁸ King, *The Moldovans*, 138-141. King states that their primary opponents were the older generation of Transnistrian leaders, but in fact many of these Party leaders came from Moldovan-populated regions of Ukraine.

Prose writer Viktor Astaf'ev, the Belarusian war prose author Vasil' Bykau, the Russian Village Prose writer and editor of *Novyi mir* Sergei Zalygin, the Lithuanian poet and prose writer Justinas Marcinkevičius, and the head of the Moldovan Writers' Union Ion Ciobanu. Chingiz Aitmatov, Vasiliï Belov, and the Ukrainian Sixtiers poet Borys Oliinyk (Rus: Boris Oleinik) were appointed as deputies from the Communist Party list.¹³¹⁹ Other writers ran for election in territorial regions, often defeating Communist Party candidates. The Ukrainian writer and environmental activist Iurii Shcherbak and the Russian Sixtiers poet Evgenii Evtushenko were both elected in this way. As we have seen, the Moldovan writers Ion Druță, Grigore Vieru, and Nicolae Dabija were all elected from territorial districts in Moldova. As Druță later wrote proudly, "at the Congress of Deputies of the Soviet Union, the head of the Moldovan delegation was formed by writers, the rest were Party workers that no one had ever heard of."¹³²⁰

The Congress opened on May 25, 1989, under the shadow of violence: the killing of 21 people at a Georgian national demonstration by the Soviet military in Tbilisi on April 9. The events made a tremendous impression on Honchar, who was haunted by reports of peaceful protesters being gassed and beaten with truncheons and shovels. "Butchers! Butchers! This is an evil empire. It cannot be changed," he wrote in his diary.¹³²¹ The events in Tbilisi made a deep impression on other non-Russian writers, who likely feared a similar response to popular protests in their own native republics. The Congress revealed a growing political divide among rural writers at the Congress on other issues as well. The non-Russian writers generally aligned themselves with *perestroika* and *glasnost*, while the Russian Village Prose writers rejected *glasnost*

¹³¹⁹ The Armenian writer Hrant Matevosyan and the Russian Village Prose writers Vladimir Soloukhin and Boris Mozhaev also ran, but ultimately dropped out. V. Malukhin, "Debaty pisatelei," *Izvestiia*, January 20, 1989; "Plenum pravleniia Soiuza pisatelei SSSR: Itogi vyborov," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, March 29, 1989.

¹³²⁰ Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 112.

¹³²¹ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 235.

as the corruption of the public sphere. Yet all rural writers made substantive criticisms of the Soviet state and all assumed the role of national activists, speaking on behalf of their respective nations. Their arguments at the Congress that Soviet authorities disregarded the interests of the ordinary people and the nation were the logical extensions of criticisms they had made in their recent environmental activism and, indeed, over the course of their literary careers.

In his speech to the Congress on June 2, Druță spoke in favor of the need for reform, especially on national issues. Druță had won his seat through at the Congress through a hard-fought electoral struggle, and he was caustic about the status quo in Moldova. He started off his speech on a humorous note, reminding the assembled delegates that although Brezhnev had risen through the Dnipropetrovsk Party apparatus, he had gotten his start as first Party secretary of Moldova: “Respected comrade president! Respected colleague deputies! I would like to begin by making a protest against the Dnipropetrovsk deputy who from this rostrum claimed that he was the representative of the ‘homeland of stagnation.’ The entire world knows that this is not the case. Everyone knows that stagnation got off the ground in the Moldovan hills.” Druță made it clear that pro-*perestroika* forces in his native republic now needed the center’s support. “We would like to ask Moscow to help us get rid of the ruins of stagnation. Of course, you can say that this is our problem. But we do not know how to get a handle on this question, and, to tell the truth, we do not have a box big enough to send all of it back to Moscow,” he quipped. Druță’s remarks reflected the mood of the Moldovan writers, who were frustrated with the policies of the Brezhnev-appointed leadership of the republic.¹³²²

Druță raised the two issues that were prominent in the minds of the non-Russian national writers: the events in Tbilisi and the status of the national languages in the non-Russian repub-

¹³²² I. P. Drutse [Ion Druță] in Patrick J. Rollins, ed., *First Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR 25 May-9 June 1989: The Stenographic Record*, vol. 2, 2 v. in 1 vols. (Gulf Breeze, FL.: Academic International, 1993), 2-4.

lic. Expressing his belief that the protests in Georgia reflected a “national rebirth” that was sweeping the country, Druță proposed a ban on the use of military force against Soviet citizens. “The nation is in turmoil and we are all looking and listening” in order to see what will happen next in places like Riga, Chișinău, L’viv, and Kyiv, he said. In Moldova, as in Ukraine and other non-Russian republics, the language issue was roiling public debate. Druță expressed concern about the practice of mixing Russian with the local language, which was common across the Soviet western borderlands. Going a step further than Aitmatov, he wanted the state to protect the national languages by making them the sole official languages.¹³²³ His attention now focused on the national mobilization taking place across the USSR, Druță made only a passing reference to the environmental issues he had advocated in 1987.

In his speeches to the Congress, Chingiz Aitmatov showed the public persona he had developed since he first captured the attention of the literary world during the Thaw: the moderate anti-Stalinist, advocate for the peasantry, and spokesman for “national” issues, especially in the Central Asian republics. In his first speech on May 27, Aitmatov played the moderate, urging his fellow delegates to move slowly for the sake of the success of *perestroika*.¹³²⁴ In his second speech on June 2, however, he seemed emboldened. Aitmatov affirmed his support for socialism but rejected the crimes that had been committed in the name of socialism in the Stalin era.¹³²⁵ Although Aitmatov had written about environmental issues since 1970’s *The White Ship*, at the Congress, he focused on emerging national issues. Referring to the events in Tbilisi, he said that

¹³²³ Russian was the official language of all Soviet republics with the exception of the Caucasus republics, where the languages of the titular nationalities also had official status.

¹³²⁴ Ch. Aytmatov [Chingiz Aitmatov] in Patrick J. Rollins, ed., *First Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR 25 May-9 June 1989: The Stenographic Record*, vol. 1, 2 vols. in 1 vol. (Gulf Breeze, FL.: Academic International, 1993), 128-129; Rollins, *First Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 70-72.

¹³²⁵ Those familiar with Aitmatov’s background would have caught the brief reference to his father’s execution during the purges of 1937-38.

the republics needed national sovereignty. He praised the Russian language (in which he had been publishing his works for many decades) but threw his support behind the emerging movements to support local languages in the republics. “In short, the national languages of the republics, which were long ignored locally, must be given most favored linguistic status in order that, being reborn, they may take their rightful place,” he stated.

Both environmental and national issues were paramount for many of the Ukrainian deputies, several of whom had run on ecological platforms. Yet they struggled to make themselves heard. Complaining in his diary that it was “difficult for the republics to make it to the podium,” Honchar did not speak at the Congress.¹³²⁶ Iurii Shcherbak and Alla Yaroshinskaya, a journalist from Zhytomyr who had won her seat on the basis of her investigative reporting on Chernobyl, were both stymied in their initial attempts to make speeches about the effects of the disaster. Yaroshinskaya was only allowed to speak after appealing personally to Gorbachev.¹³²⁷ In his speech, the Ukrainian poet Borys Oliinyk called for the closure of the Chernobyl power station, warning that “if there are one or two more Chernobyls, God forbid, there won't be anyone left on either side to fight about language and culture.” He echoed Honchar’s rhetoric about the need for the republics to protect the environment and national cultural heritage from the abuses of the central ministries.¹³²⁸

Honchar’s diary entries from the Congress reflect his strong sympathies for the pro-*perestroika* forces at the Congress, including the dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov and the

¹³²⁶ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 242.

¹³²⁷ Ploky, *Chernobyl*, 306-312.

¹³²⁸ “S”ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR,” *Izvestiia*, June 2, 1989. English translation of Oliinyk’s speech in “The Congress of the USSR People’s Deputies. Verbatim Report,” *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 26 (July 26, 1989): 6.

delegates from the Baltics.¹³²⁹ Shocked by the events in Tbilisi, Honchar was dismayed by the positive response in the hall to the speech by General Igor Rodionov, whom he blamed for the violence deployed against the Georgian protestors. “I truly feel as if I am among fascists,” he wrote in his diary, powerful language for a Soviet veteran of the Second World War.¹³³⁰ Along with Shcherbak and several other Ukrainian delegates, Honchar sent a statement condemning Rodionov’s speech and the events at Tbilisi to the Secretariat to be read from the podium. The Secretariat rejected it. “That’s the sort of ‘democracy’ we have here,” he wrote.¹³³¹ The Congress deepened Honchar’s alienation from Soviet authorities—and many of his fellow Soviet citizens.

Fresh from the meeting of the Baikal Movement at Lake Sevan, the two Russian Village Prose writers at the Congress of People’s Deputies, Vasiliï Belov and Valentin Rasputin, shared their fellow writers’ frustration with the center’s policies. Their skepticism of *perestroika* and *glasnost*’ put them at odds with their non-Russian colleagues, however. In contrast to the non-Russian writers, Belov and Rasputin aligned themselves with conservative, anti-reform forces at the Congress. Both writers yearned for the buttoned-up approach to culture of the pre-*glasnost*’ era. Rasputin spoke of the need to restrain the excesses of democracy, citing Plato’s famous maxim that tyranny emerges from democracy. Pluralism of opinion was good, he said, but the pluralism of morality was “more dangerous than any bomb.”¹³³²

Championing local interests against policies adopted in Moscow, both Belov’s and Rasputin’s speeches reflected both the center-periphery dynamics that had been part of Russian Village Prose since the 1960s, as well as the mood of many of their fellow rural writers. Belov dedi-

¹³²⁹ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 239-243.

¹³³⁰ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 240.

¹³³¹ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 241.

¹³³² Rasputin in Rollins, *First Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 139.

cated much of his attention to issues connected to the peasantry.¹³³³ Reflecting criticisms he had been making of the collective farm system since 1966's *An Ordinary Thing*, he called for private ownership of land and greater local control over agriculture. He attacked the Ministry of Water Management's hydroengineering projects in the Volga region, and complained that Soviet science did not benefit ordinary people. "In Moscow, academicians are a dime a dozen, space and all sorts. But why in my village does the peasant still mow hay in the same method as he did in the 12th century?" he wondered. "And how can we respect such a science which gave us Chernobyl?"¹³³⁴

Rasputin also directed his anger against the central Soviet ministries. Reminding the assembled deputies that all their efforts to build a new, just state would come to naught if they could not prevent an impending ecological catastrophe, he called for the discussion of large-scale nature transformation projects by a commission of the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies. Referring to the recent meeting of the Baikal Movement at Lake Sevan, Rasputin told the Congress about the Japanese documentary they had watched on Minimata disease, which was caused by mercury poisoning. "The terrible pictures showing the torment and the scale of the misery made one's hair stand on end," he stated. He warned the delegates that mercury deposits near the site of the proposed Katunskaja hydroelectric station could cause similar sickness in the local population.¹³³⁵ Far from "declar[ing] that a powerful state was the ultimate goal of the

¹³³³ In a moment of rare agreement between the pro-*perestroika* reformers and the conservatives, Evgenii Evtushenko expressed support for his Belov's stance in favor of reversing the Stalin-era condemnation of expropriated kulaks. See Ye. A. Yevtushenko [Evgenii Evtushenko] in Rollins, *First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 41.

¹³³⁴ V. I. Belov in Rollins, *First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 13-16.

¹³³⁵ V. G. Rasputin in Rollins, *First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 138-141.

Russian nationalist movement," as one scholar has argued regarding Rasputin's speech, Rasputin rejected the destructive actions of Soviet industry in the regions.¹³³⁶

Consistent with Belov's and Rasputin's criticism of central authorities was their argument that central Soviet institutions did not represent ethnic Russians. A quirk of the Soviet administrative structure was that the RSFSR lacked many of the institutions that existed in the national republics. Bodies like the all-Union Central Committee and the all-Union Academy of Sciences essentially stood in for "Russian" ones. Because the RSFSR lacked its own institutions, Belov argued, Russian regions like the Non-Black Earth Region had not received their own fair share of resources. The administrative structure of the Soviet Union also contributed to a tendency to blame Russians for the actions of the central Soviet bodies, he claimed.¹³³⁷ Rasputin, meanwhile, argued that the central "administrative-industrial machine" oppressed Russians as much as non-Russians. Addressing his fellow deputies, he stated, "The blame for your misfortunes lies not with Russia but with that common burden of the administrative-industrial machine, which has turned out to be more terrible to all of us than the Mongolian yoke, and which has humiliated and plundered Russia as well, to a point of near suffocation."¹³³⁸ This argument reflected the position expressed in his writings on Baikal, in which he had accused central authorities of treating Siberia like a colony. The statements of the two Village Prose writers showed that the Soviet state was losing legitimacy with Russians, as well as non-Russians like Honchar and Druță.

Indeed, in Rasputin's view, Russians were the true victims of Soviet nationalities policy. Rasputin denied the existence of Russian chauvinism in the Soviet Union, complaining that Rus-

¹³³⁶ The quotation is from Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 228. While other Russian nationalists did support a strong state during *perestroika*, I do not see grounds in the text of Rasputin's speech for Brudny's interpretation.

¹³³⁷ Belov in Rollins, *First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 14.

¹³³⁸ Rasputin in Rollins, *First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 141.

sians were not allowed to express the same sort of national sentiments as non-Russians without being labeled chauvinists.¹³³⁹ Rasputin's stance as the champion of the Russian regions and the Russian peasant against an overweening Soviet state made it difficult for him to admit that Russians also possessed significant advantages in the Soviet Union. Although they shared many of the same concerns about the abuses of the Soviet central ministries as their non-Russian colleagues, a wide gap appeared between the Russian Village Prose writers and the non-Russian writers on national issues in the USSR.

The election of rural writers like Aitmatov, Druță, Honchar, Belov, and Rasputin to the Congress of People's Deputies was the logical conclusion of the increasingly activist stances they had taken over the course of the 1980s. Each writer, regardless of nationality, sought to speak on behalf of the nation, which they increasingly saw as threatened by Soviet policies. For Rasputin, Honchar and Druță, their roles as environmental advocates had been a bridge to national activism, a transition that was evident at the Congress. While environmental issues remained paramount for some, like Rasputin, for others more explicitly "national" issues like language took precedent. The violent suppression of a peaceful demonstration in Tbilisi was particularly chilling to non-Russian writers from republics like Ukraine and Moldova where the national movements were gaining steam. While they shared their non-Russian peers' concern about the policies adopted by central authorities, the Russian Village Prose writers sought to stress the particular victimization of Russians by Soviet authorities. Coming from a position that stressed the victimization of the Russian peasant, they were unwilling to grant their colleagues' point that Russians also experienced significant privileges in the Soviet Union. Thus, at the Congress we

¹³³⁹ Rasputin in Rollins, *First Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR*, vol. 2, 140-141.

can see writers from rural origins collectively distancing themselves from the Soviet state at the same time as the Russian Village Prose writers began to pull away from their non-Russian peers.

Conclusion

Already in the first half of 1989, events in the national republics of the Soviet Union had reached a tipping point. After the Congress, they began to accelerate faster than anyone at the Congress of People's Deputies could have guessed. In the summer of 1989, nationalist demonstrations took place in the Baltic states, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus. Violent interethnic clashes began to occur in a number of republics.¹³⁴⁰ In Moldova, on August 27, 1989, the Moldovan Popular Front hosted a "Great National Assembly" (*Marea Adunare Națională*) in the central square in Chișinău, attracting 500,000 people.¹³⁴¹ "The so-called Moldovan revolution, crowned by the Great National Assembly, was also in large part devised and realized by writers," Druță later wrote in his memoir.¹³⁴² Druță and other Moldovan writers spoke to a crowd that was waving Romanian flags. The passage shortly thereafter of a language law making Moldovan the official language heightened interethnic tensions in the republic, tensions that would eventually result in a violent secessionist conflict in the region of Transnistria. In November 1989, republican leader Semion Grossu was sacked, but his successor Petru Lucinschi was no more successful than he had been. Mircea Snegur and other members of the younger generation of Moldovan Party leadership defected from the republican Party establishment; the Popular Front became more

¹³⁴⁰ See Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 85-88.

¹³⁴¹ King, *The Moldovans*, 127-130.

¹³⁴² Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii*, 112.

radical in its demand for unification with Romania. As in many republics across the Soviet Union, the Communist Party lost control of the situation in the republic. On August 27, 1991, the Moldovan parliament declared independence.

In Ukraine, meanwhile, the founding Congress of Rukh in September of 1989 marked the formal beginning of the national movement. At the Congress, Honchar played the role of elder statesman, delivering the opening speech. Of all the problems they faced, Honchar told the assembled delegates, perhaps the most urgent was the ecological problem. Chernobyl had revealed the weaknesses of the Soviet bureaucratic state and the need for the republics to have greater sovereignty. As the republican authorities had shown no willingness to bring the central ministries to heel, Honchar declared, it was up to public organizations like Rukh and Green World to reflect the true will of the people.¹³⁴³ Rukh's program, approved at the Congress, included a section on the environment that called for the closure of Chernobyl.¹³⁴⁴ In his diary, Honchar wrote about his great happiness upon seeing the national emblems and flags and the inspired faces of young people in the crowd. "After this I can die," he wrote. The end was near, and a new era was approaching.¹³⁴⁵ Honchar's diary entry turned out to be prophetic. Two weeks later, he recorded the departure of "the butcher of Ukrainian culture," the Ukrainian republican head Shcherbyts'kyi.¹³⁴⁶ The new republican leadership attempted to compromise, agreeing in the summer of 1990 to shut down Chernobyl, but it was too late. By October 1990, Rukh was offi-

¹³⁴³ See Oles' Honchar's speech in *Ustanovchyi z'їzd Narodnoho rukhu Ukraїny za perebudovu, 8-10 veresnia 1989 roku: stenografichnyi zvit = Congrès constitutif du Mouvement populaire d'Ukraine pour la reconstruction, 8-10 septembre 1989: sténogramme* (Nanterre: Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine, 2000), 1-4.

¹³⁴⁴ See Ralph Lindheim and George S. N. Luckyj, eds., "Program of the Popular Movement for the Restructuring of Ukraine," in *Towards an Intellectual History of Ukraine: An Anthology of Ukrainian Thought from 1710 to 1995* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 341-62.

¹³⁴⁵ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 252.

¹³⁴⁶ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 256.

cially supporting independence from Ukraine. On August 24, 1991, Leonid Kravchuk, the one-time ideological secretary and opponent of Rukh who was now the speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, stood with the Rukh activist Volodymyr Yavorivskyi in the Ukrainian parliament as they asked the members to hold a referendum on Ukrainian independence. The measure passed, and on December 1, 1991, Ukrainians voted to leave the USSR.¹³⁴⁷

As events were spiraling out of control in the non-Russian republics, Gorbachev tried in vain to keep the Soviet Union together. The Russian Village Prose writer Sergei Zalygin proved to be an enthusiastic supporter of Gorbachev's policies from his position as editor of *Novyi mir*.¹³⁴⁸ Gorbachev received no help, however, from the conservative Russian nationalist wing of the literary world, which was busy attacking *perestroika* as a failed policy in their famous "Letter of the Seventy-Four," published in *Literaturnaia gazeta* on March 2, 1990. The letter was published with the signatures of *Nash sovremennik* editor Sergei Vikulov and many of the journal's writers, including Valentin Rasputin, Vasili Belov, Vladimir Soloukhin. Rejecting both Gorbachev, the man who wanted to keep the Soviet Union together, and Boris Yeltsin, his liberal rival who promoted an independent Russia as a possible alternative, many Russian nationalist intellectuals, including those on the governing board of the RSFSR Writers' Union, ultimately threw their support behind a "Russian Communist Party." This organization, opposed to both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, blended Russian nationalism with communism.¹³⁴⁹ It was a strange outcome for the Russian Village Prose writers, who had consistently criticized Soviet policies towards the peasantry, the ultimate result of the coalition that *Nash sovremennik* editor Vikulov had forged

¹³⁴⁷ Plokhy, *Chernobyl*, 315-319.

¹³⁴⁸ On Zalygin, see Brudny, "Between Liberalism and Nationalism."

¹³⁴⁹ Brudny, *Reinventing Russia*, 247-251.

between Village Prose writers and conservative forces in the literary world beginning in the 1960s (see Chapter 3).

Writers' environmental activism did not cause the collapse of the Soviet Union, of course, but it was one of many sparks that led to the conflagration that brought down the Soviet state. Writing about environmental protection in the 1980s, rural writers who were better known for their fiction assumed a greater role in public life. In their environmental writings, they argued that the Soviet government's industrial and agricultural policy—its *raison d'être*—was harmful to the people and, by extension, the nation. Ultimately, their arguments served to delegitimize central Soviet authorities. The ecological issue became a way that *glasnost*' spread across the Soviet Union, supported by central literary institutions. As Gorbachev spearheaded initiatives like the Congress of People's Deputies as part of his policies *glasnost*' and democratization, rural writers like Rasputin, Honchar, Druță, and Belov began to take an even bigger role in public life, using their new freedoms to assume the role of spokesmen for the nation. Their speeches there revealed the widening gap between the Soviet state and those who claimed to speak for the nation. While the conservative Russian Village Prose writers ultimately found a way to square their allegiance to the nation with their opposition to central Soviet policies, many of their peers in the non-Russian republics did not, with fateful consequences.

Epilogue

In an interview conducted in December of 1990, about a year before the Soviet Union collapsed, Hrant Matevosyan described his own journey from his native village of Ahnidzor to the wide world of Soviet literature and back again. He described how as an ambitious youth he “escaped” from his native village, abandoning it to his lazier, less studious classmates. “Years later,” he said, “I fell back from my world of ‘world literature,’ ‘glory,’ and ‘big shots,’ to the world of my ‘backwards’ friends, I fell back to the village—and what did I see? I saw that they also had a flourishing civilization...it was a touching, precious thing. [...] I saw that they had remained the same upstanding sons of the land, they had preserved the character of a villager, of an Armenian.” Matevosyan explained that he cherished the hope that enough remained of what he had witnessed in the village to fuel a national rebirth, “so that the country could be called Armenia again, so that it could be a moral example, a moral leader for the world.”¹³⁵⁰

Matevosyan’s story is the story of a generation of intellectuals who left the poverty of the Stalin-era village behind in the postwar decade to seek their fortunes in the big city—be it Yerevan, Chişinău, Irkutsk, or Moscow. At first, they struggled to find their place in elite Soviet literary institutions, often feeling themselves at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* their more “cultured” and sophisticated urban peers. Ultimately, however, they came to see their village backgrounds as an asset. The village was not, as they say in Armenian, *hetamnats*, or backwards, as the dominant Soviet culture would have them believe. The rural culture they had grown up in, the rural culture they had seen attacked under both Stalin and his successors, was in fact the foundation of nation-

¹³⁵⁰ Hrant Mat’evosyan, “Mer naxnin hima menk’ enk’,” interview with Edik Baghdasaryan, *Lusavorich’*, December 4, 1990, in Hrant Mat’evosyan, *Es es em: harts’azruyts’ner* (Erevan: “Oskan Erevants’i” hratarakch’ut’yun, 2005), 31-32, http://hrantmatevosian.org/hy/works/id/mer_naxnin_hima_menq_enq.

al culture. Matevosyan, along with Ion Druță, Valentin Rasputin, Oles' Honchar, Fëdor Abramov, and many other Soviet intellectuals, ultimately came to believe that Soviet authorities were hostile to both peasants and the nation. In the years between the death of Stalin and the rise of Gorbachev, they managed to spread their views by working both in and around official Soviet literary institutions. By the mid-1980s, they had become leading national writers.

Rural Issues on the Eve of the Collapse of the Soviet Union

With the arrival of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* in 1986, many village writers could finally express their views on the village and the nation more or less openly. The issues that writers from villages championed—acknowledgement of the miserable treatment of peasants under Stalin, respect for the place of religion in national culture, appreciation for rural traditions, the need to mitigate the impact of environmental destruction on the health and well-being of ordinary people—finally became major topics of free public discussion during *glasnost'*. As we have seen in Chapter 7, environmental advocacy became a major means through which writers from villages articulated their concerns about the Soviet state's detrimental effect on the nation. In Ukraine, Armenia, and elsewhere, protests that initially began in response to environmental issues transformed into broader protests over national issues. Another major mobilizing issue, language, also had a rural-urban element for non-Russian writers, particularly in the western borderlands.¹³⁵¹ In republics like Ukraine and Moldova, the cities were largely Russian-speaking while the countryside was dominated by the local language, a pattern that dated back to the tsarist era. Rural migrants to the city had historically faced reduced employment prospects and even social stigma if

¹³⁵¹ For an excellent analysis of the urban-rural dynamics of language politics in Moldova during *perestroika*, see Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), especially Chapter 6.

they refused to adopt Russian as their primary language. Except in the three republics of the South Caucasus, the languages of the titular nationalities had no official status in the non-Russian republics. Starting in 1989, language laws that raised the status of the language of the titular nationality began to proliferate in the non-Russian republics. Language laws were a rural issue because they stood to benefit rural migrants to the city first and foremost. During *glasnost*, both Druță and Honchar both spoke out repeatedly in favor of increasing the status of the language of the titular nationality in Moldova and Ukraine, respectively.

During *glasnost*, the de-Stalinization of discourse on the Soviet village also continued as writers from rural backgrounds began to speak more frankly than ever before about the Stalinist oppression of the rural population. As during the Thaw, the Stalinist crimes that most affected the urban intelligentsia, namely the 1937 purges and the Gulag, returned to the public conversation, particularly with the publication of Anatolii Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat* (*Deti Arbata*) in *Druzhba narodov* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (*Arhipelag GULAG*) in *Novyi mir*, respectively. But discussion of topics like collectivization, dekulakization, and famine was also an important part of "filling in the blank spots" of Soviet history. In the early days of *glasnost*, the Belarusian writer Vasil' Bykau (Rus: Bykov) won the 1986 USSR State Prize for his 1983 work *Sign of Misfortune* (Bel: *Znak biady*, Rus: *Znak bedy*), which condemned collectivization as immoral.¹³⁵² Works on collectivization by Russian Village Prose writers that *Nash sovremennik* editor Vikulov had been unable to publish in the 1970s finally saw the light of day. The liberal Village Prose writer Boris Mozhaev caused a literary sensation with the second installment of his novel that depicted collectivization, *Peasant Men and Women* (*Muzhiki i baby*),

¹³⁵² Vasil' Bykov, "Znak bedy," *Druzhba narodov*, no. 3, 4 (1983).

in the journal *Don* in 1987.¹³⁵³ He won the USSR State Prize in 1989 for the work. Vasiliï Belov published the last installment of his anti-collectivization novel *On the Eve (Kanuny)* in *Novyi mir* in 1987, as well as a sequel, *The Year of the Great Break (God velikogo pereloma)* in 1989.¹³⁵⁴ Belov, reflecting his turn towards extreme nationalism, increasingly resorted to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories to explain the fate of Russia and its peasantry under Soviet rule.¹³⁵⁵ The 1932-1933 famine in Ukraine, previously a taboo subject in literature, became a major topic of discussion.¹³⁵⁶ Ion Druță had repeatedly written about the 1947-1948 famine from the security of Moscow the 1960s and 1970s, but now Moldovan writers living in Moldova began to raise the issue.¹³⁵⁷ In 1987, Moldovan authorities finally lifted the 1970 ban on the 1966 film *Bitter Grain*, which depicted collectivization and the famine in Moldova (see Chapter 6).¹³⁵⁸

A revival of interest in “authentic” village culture, often with explicit anti-Soviet connotations, took place during the *glasnost*’ era. As discussed in Chapter 5, during the 1960s the Ukrainian sculptor Ivan Honchar began displaying his collection of rural folk art in his Kyiv apartment, much to the chagrin of the Ukrainian authorities. Honchar suffered years of social ostracism after the transition to harshly exclusionary policies towards nationally-minded intellectu-

¹³⁵³ Boris Mozhaev, “Muzhiki i baby,” *Don*, no. 1–3 (1987). *Literaturnaia gazeta*, for example, hosted a roundtable at a collective farm about the novel. “Iz proshlogo—trudnyi put’. Kruglyi stol ‘LG’ sovместno s zhurnalom ‘Don,’” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, April 6, 1988. See also Yitzhak M. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State, 1953-1991* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 298-299 fn7.

¹³⁵⁴ Vasiliï Belov, “Kanuny: Khronika kontsa 20-kh godov,” *Novyi mir*, no. 8 (1987): 6–81; Vasiliï Belov, “God velikogo pereloma: Khronika deviati mesiatsev,” *Novyi mir*, no. 3 (1989): 6–95.

¹³⁵⁵ Kathleen Parthé, “The Dangerous Narrative of the Russian Village,” in *Russia’s Dangerous Texts: Politics between the Lines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 86-87.

¹³⁵⁶ The censors routinely cut references to the famine in Soviet Ukrainian literature until *glasnost*’. See George Stephen Nestor Luckyj, *Ukrainian Literature in the Twentieth Century: A Reader’s Guide* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1992), 69, 78, 107.

¹³⁵⁷ The newspaper *Literatura și arta* began discussing the famine in 1987, see AOSPRM 51/7/1/82 (September 22, 1987): 37. Druță’s mentor Andrei Lupan raised the issue of the famine during a meeting with the Moldovan Central Committee, for example, see AOSPRM 51/71/170 (July 28, 1987): 63.

als in the early 1970s. In 1989, Ivan Honchar was awarded the republic's highest honor for a cultural figure, the Shevchenko Prize, for his efforts to preserve national culture.¹³⁵⁹ Interest in rural traditions manifested in other ways as well. In Moldova, for example, the 1980s saw the emergence of so-called *folcloric* dance ensembles that performed the traditional dances of specific villages—a reaction against the more generic “national” dances performed by official Soviet ensembles. As anthropologist Jennifer Cash explains, “Performances by *folcloric* ensembles drew tears from urban audiences in the 1980s and early 1990s when they performed traditions that reminded audience members of their home villages, [...]. At the height of the national movement, folkloric ensembles often participated in anti-Soviet rallies, and audiences easily associated authentic folklore with an anti-Soviet political stance.”¹³⁶⁰ The national movements' embrace of rural traditions during *glasnost*' ensured that they would have a place in the national culture of the new nation-states.

With the loosening of restrictions on religion, some village writers saw an opportunity to address another historical wrong: the destruction of churches and monasteries by Soviet authorities in the 1930s. Village writers had been arguing for decades that the destruction and neglect of historic churches and monasteries was an affront to national culture. The Russian Village Prose writer Vladimir Soloukhin had first criticized the 1931 destruction of Moscow's Church of Christ the Savior in his 1966 *Letters from the Russian Museum*. In 1988, he condemned the destruction of the church on the Soviet television program *Pozitsiia*. That same year, an initiative group was founded to rebuild the Church; Soloukhin was elected as its chair. The reconstruction of the

¹³⁵⁸ On *Bitter Grain*, see AOSPRM 51/71/32 (March 10, 1987): 147-160.

¹³⁵⁹ See the nominations for Honchar by individuals and institutions in the fond of the Shevchenko Prize in TsDAMLM 979/1/1177.

¹³⁶⁰ Jennifer R. Cash, *Villages on Stage: Folklore and Nationalism in the Republic of Moldova*, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia, v. 26 (Berlin: Lit, 2012), 97.

Church ultimately began in 1994, and Soloukhin's funeral service was held in the still-unfinished church upon his death in 1997.¹³⁶¹ The rebuilt Church of Christ the Savior is now one of the most prominent landmarks in the Moscow city center. As we have seen in Chapter 7, during the period of *glasnost*, Oles' Honchar's novel *Cathedral* finally returned to Soviet readers after having been suppressed in 1968. While the novel was a fictionalized account of the struggle to save a Cossack cathedral in Honchar's native Dnipropetrovsk region, in November of 1992, Honchar wrote in his diary about another cathedral—St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery, which until its destruction in 1934 stood in the very center of Kyiv. "One of the biggest crimes of Stalinist vandalism was the destruction of St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in 1935 [*sic*]. A crime before world culture! The future Ukraine must certainly rebuild this masterpiece of the twelfth century [...]." ¹³⁶² On April 5, 1993, Honchar wrote that a new organization to rebuild the Golden-Domed Monastery was soon to be registered with the government—and that he had been elected its president.¹³⁶³ Honchar did not live to see the Monastery reopened in 1999—he died in 1995—but a plaque crediting him with initiating its reconstruction was affixed to its walls in 2011. The All-Ukrainian Fund for the Reconstruction of Prominent Monuments of Historical-Architectural Heritage, founded by order of Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma in 1996, bears Honchar's name.¹³⁶⁴ Soloukhin and Honchar both played important roles in returning historic religious buildings to the centers of the capitals of new national states after 1991.

¹³⁶¹ "Spasti khram pryzivaet sem'ia znamenitogo pisatel'ia Soloukhina," *Vesti Vladimir* (Vladimir: GTRK Vladimir, May 30, 2014), <https://vladtv.ru/society/57094/>; Anna Semenova, "Khram, kotoryi razrushil Iosif," *Gazeta.ru*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/12/03/10399205.shtml>.

¹³⁶² Oles' Honchar, *Shchodennyky: u tr'okh tomakh*, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Kyiv: Veselka, 2002), 439.

¹³⁶³ Honchar, *Shchodennyky*, vol. 3, 464.

¹³⁶⁴ The first head of the governing board of the fund was none other than Petro Tron'ko, the force behind several Ukrainian cultural initiatives in the 1960s, including the founding of the Ukrainian Society for the Preservation of Monuments of History and Culture (see Chapter 4). Ia. V. Veremnych, "Vseukraïns'kyi fond vidtvorennia vydatnykh pam'iatok istoriko-arkhitekturnoi spadshchyny im. Olesia Honchara [Elektronnyi resurs]," in *Entsyklopedi-*

The Break-up of the USSR

The central government's hold on the periphery became more tenuous as the national movements continued to gain support in the Baltic states, Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus in 1989 and 1990. Moscow struggled to control the situation in the Caucasus and Central Asia after eruptions of ethnic violence, and violent suppressions of demonstrations by Soviet troops were widely criticized. On August 20, 1991, a group of conservatives within the Soviet leadership sought to restore order by attempting a coup, holding Gorbachev under house arrest in Crimea while Russian president Boris Yeltsin rallied protestors against the coup from atop a tank. The coup ultimately failed, but in its wake ten republics declared independence from Moscow. In December of 1991, Yeltsin, along Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine and Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus, met and signed the Belavezha Accords, which declared that the Soviet Union had been dissolved. Finally, on December 25, 1991, Gorbachev resigned from his position as president of the Soviet Union and the Soviet flag was lowered over the Kremlin. The Soviet Union had ceased to exist.

The post-Soviet transition was difficult, particularly for rural regions. The market reforms that took place in most former Soviet republics in the 1990s made a few oligarchs fabulously wealthy, but most ordinary people struggled to survive the prolonged economic depression that lasted throughout the 1990s. Rural areas in particular suffered from the collapse of Soviet agriculture. New states like Armenia and Moldova lost significant percentages of their population to labor migration. In the 1940s and 1950s, village writers had usually moved to regional urban

ia istorii Ukraïny, ed. V. A. Smolii and Institut NAN Ukraïny. Institut istorii Ukraïny, vol. 1 (Kyiv: V-vo "Naukova dumka," 2003), 663–64, http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Vseukrainskyj_fond.

centers. Now a new generation of migrants to the city, the citizens of independent but economically devastated states, sought work abroad in Russia, Europe, and elsewhere.¹³⁶⁵

The Fate of Soviet Cultural Politics

The last years of the Soviet Union were, in the words of Yitzhak Brudny, “the zenith of politics by culture.” But with the official end of Soviet censorship in 1990, politics could finally come fully out into the open. One consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Party-state was the end of the longtime relationship between political authorities and cultural producers that created the phenomenon of cultural politics. The new post-Soviet states rarely had the funds to support culture at the level that the Soviet state had, nor the drive to spread ideology through culture. The decline of state sponsorship of culture and the introduction of market forces to the cultural world often came as a shock to writers, who had grown used to a relatively comfortable standard of living and state support for their activities. By the 1990s, the *kommandirovki* (business trips) and *tvorcheskie otpuski* (sabbaticals) paid for by the Writers’ Unions and other cultural institutions were often a thing of the past. In a 2001 interview, for example, Rasputin spoke wistfully about the days when the publisher *Molodaia gvardiia* had paid for travel and other expenses associated with writing his 1991 book *Siberia, Siberia*.¹³⁶⁶ Writers were often dismayed by the loss of state support for their activities. In a 1999 interview, Matevosyan, who in 1996 had become head of the Armenian Writers’ Union, expressed his views on the importance of state support for litera-

¹³⁶⁵ There is a growing literature on transnational migration from rural areas of the former Soviet Union. For a perspective from Moldova, see Leyla J. Keough, “Globalizing ‘Postsocialism:’ Mobile Mothers and Neoliberalism on the Margins of Europe,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2006): 431–61.

¹³⁶⁶ Valentin Rasputin, interview with Vasili Vasilievich Kozlov, “Veiut li vikhri vrazhdebnye?,” *Russkii vostok*, no. 38–40 (October 2001): 12–13.

ture: “National literature requires national protection. If as a nation [...] we want to be a part of world culture, it is necessary that as much as much help and support as possible is forthcoming for writers.”¹³⁶⁷ But the relationship between the state and cultural producers had changed. While some Soviet-era practices continued in a modified form, such as the awarding of prizes to writers, overall the relationship between the state and writers came shifted away from the socialist model.

The break-up of the USSR also fundamentally changed the web of institutions that had structured the literary world and knit the country’s fifteen republics together. Some institutions, like the Soviet Writers’ Union, were simply liquidated. In 1992, a successor organization, the International Society of Writers’ Unions, was formed. It lacked, of course, the power over writers’ careers and futures that had made the Soviet Writers’ Union such a formidable institution. Two competing Russian writers’ unions ultimately emerged after the collapse of the USSR, reflecting the political polarization of the Russian literary community. In 1991 a group of writers broke away from the Union of Writers of Russia, the successor to the conservative RSFSR Union of Writers, to form a more liberal group, the Union of Russian Writers. In the newly independent states, the republican Writers’ Unions continued to exist, but without the power and resources of the Soviet state behind them, they were increasingly irrelevant to younger generations of writers.

Other Moscow-based institutions like the journal *Druzhba narodov* and the Gorky Literary Institute continued to exist, but without the strong state backing that made them so central to Soviet writers’ lives. *Druzhba narodov*, for example, struggled to survive the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Olga Breininger explains, with the dissolution of the Soviet state, Soviet literary

¹³⁶⁷ Hrant Mat’evosyan, interview with Lilit’ Seyranyan, “Grakanut’yan bats’ darpaner pasharvats zhoghovurd,” *Zhamanak*, February 23, 1999, in Mat’evosyan, *Es es em*, 352, http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/grakanutian_bac_darpaner_pasharvac_joxovurd.

journals entered a crisis, experiencing a massive decline in circulation and influence in the new, post-Soviet literary field, where they no longer served as the sole gatekeepers to the literary world.¹³⁶⁸ In 1989, *Druzhba narodov* had reached a peak circulation of 1.1 million copies, largely on the strength of Rybakov's hit novel about life under Stalinism, *Children of the Arbat*. The journal's circulation began to decline even before the break-up of the USSR, a shift that reflected the "coming crisis of the multinational Union," in the words of the journal's longtime critic Lev Anninskii. By 1991, witnessing the rise of interethnic conflict and separatist nationalism in the USSR, members of the editorial board had started to joke grimly that they were changing the journal's name from *Friendship of the Peoples* (*Druzhba narodov*) to *Enmity of the Peoples* (*Vrazhda narodov*). A precipitous decline of the journal's circulation continued in the 1990s: falling to 50,000 in 1994, 11,000 in 1996, 6,000 in 1997. Even as the editorial board struggled to keep the journal alive, they continued to publish important works such as 1997's *Voices from Chernobyl* (*Chernobyl'skaia molitva*) by future Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich.¹³⁶⁹ The decline of all-Union literary institutions like *Druzhba narodov* after 1991 meant that there were few common literary spaces that united writers in the newly independent states.

Many writers from rural backgrounds mourned the loss of the Soviet multinational literary community in retrospect. As we have seen, many of them would not have had careers without the intervention of Moscow-based cultural institutions. In a 1999 interview, Matevosyan recalled how he and his friends in Moscow had cheered on the Americans and Europeans when they attacked the Soviet state, not realizing how much it had formed them, that they were "the bearers of the empire." Only after the collapse did they realize how important the friendships across na-

¹³⁶⁸ Olga Breininger, "A Scholarly Look at 'Thick' Journals Today: The Crisis of the Institution," *Russian Journal of Communication* 6, no. 1 (January 2014): 1–12.

tional lines really were, how remarkable it was just to casually play pool with someone from the Far East in a Moscow dorm, he explained. “Now, in these narrow times it is impossible to live, these circumstances make us smaller, they grind us down, they provincialize us, they cut us off from the world,” Matevosyan said.¹³⁷⁰ Matevosyan’s Russian friend Andrei Bitov, whom he had met in one of those Moscow dorms, described similar ambivalence about the collapse of the multinational Soviet state:

Not that I have any nostalgia, not that I think those were good times. I'm happy about the changes. But, for instance, the empire we had—the empire we've lost—wasn't only a negative phenomenon. Certainly, there was a lot of fakery about it—we hated all those fake words, 'Friendship of the Peoples', 'Internationalism', and so on. But still there was the sense that this was a domestic space, that we were a family of sorts...¹³⁷¹

Matevosyan’s and Bitov’s statements illustrate that Soviet cultural institutions played an important role in bringing Soviet writers together and uniting them in a broader “affective community.”¹³⁷²

Not all writers shared Matevosyan’s enthusiasm for the multinational Soviet literary community, however. Many writers from the conservative wing of the Russian Village Prose movement felt a strong attachment to the Soviet Union and its literary institutions, but not their multinational nature. Long after the USSR collapsed, for example, Sergei Vikulov continued to stew with anti-Semitic resentment over what he perceived as the supposedly inferior position of

¹³⁶⁹ Lev Anninskii, “Desiat’ let, kotorye rastriasi mir. ‘Druzhiba narodov’ 1989 - 1999,” *Druzhiba narodov*, no. 2–11 (1999). The collected articles are available online at <http://xn--80aabggdk2dkbof7a.com/druzhiba-narodov>.

¹³⁷⁰ Hrant Mat’evosyan, interview with Hovik Zardumyan, “Zruyts’ner Hrant Mat’evosyani het,” in Mat’evosyan, *Es es em*, 492–495, http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/zruicner_hrant_matevosyani_het.

¹³⁷¹ Andrei Bitov, interview with Sally Laird, in Sally Laird, *Voices of Russian Literature: Interviews with Ten Contemporary Writers* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 84.

¹³⁷² Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Contradictions of Identity: Being Soviet and National in the USSR and After,” in *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*, ed. Mark Bassin and Catriona Kelly (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17–36.

Russian writers in the Soviet literary world.¹³⁷³ In post-Soviet writings he repeatedly complained that Russians had been treated as “aborigines” in Moscow literary institutions dominated by Jews and other non-Russians.¹³⁷⁴ For some xenophobic Russian nationalists, Russians—and the Russian language—were the true victims of Soviet internationalism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Vikulov and other far-right Russian nationalists sought to distinguish between true “Russian” literature, and “Russian-language” literature written by writers who were not ethnic Russians—an attempt to ethnicize a language and literature that had once been the common property of the Soviet Union’s many nationalities.¹³⁷⁵

Living through the End of an Empire

Like many former Soviet citizens, writers from rural backgrounds were shocked by the changes that the collapse of the Soviet Union brought. The collapse of the USSR showed these “national” writers how truly Soviet they were. As discussed in Chapter 7, prominent Russian Village Prose writers such as Valentin Rasputin and Vasilii Belov rallied to the side of anti-Gorbachev forces in the late 1980s, ultimately adopting an ideology that blended communism with Russian nationalism. Divides emerged among the Russian Village Prose writers over whether the crumbling Soviet state ought to be preserved. While Rasputin had vigorously condemned Moscow’s treatment of the periphery throughout the 1980s, the threat of the impending

¹³⁷³ See, for example, Sergei Vikulov, “Protivostoianie,” in *Na russkom napravlenii: zapiski glavnogo redaktora 'Nashego sovremennika': (1970-1980 gody)* (Moskva: Izdat.-Poligraficheskii Tsentr FGUP “Medservis” Minzdrava Rossii, 2002), 4–27.

¹³⁷⁴ Vikulov, “Protivostoianie,” 15; Sergei Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” *Nash sovremennik*, no. 9 (September 1996): 18.

¹³⁷⁵ Kathleen Parthé, “The Empire Strikes Back: How Right-Wing Nationalists Tried to Recapture Russian Literature,” *Nationalities Papers* 24, no. 4 (1996): 601–24; Vikulov, “Chto napisano perom...,” 19.

collapse of the Soviet Union apparently caused him to reconsider his stance on the importance of a strong Soviet state. On July 23, 1991, his signature, along with the signatures of several other Russian nationalist intellectuals, appeared below a manifesto in the newspaper *Sovetskaia Rossiia* titled “Word to the People.” “Our homeland, our country, a great state given to us for safe-keeping by history, nature, and our glorious ancestors, is being destroyed, is breaking, is drowning in darkness and oblivion,” the statement read, calling on citizens of the USSR to rally to save the country.¹³⁷⁶ Other Russian Village Prose writers, however, did not share Rasputin’s conviction that the Soviet Union needed saving. Viktor Astaf’ev, one of the most prominent Russian Village Prose writers who published in Vikulov’s *Nash sovremennik* in the 1970s and 1980s, publicly criticized “Word to the People” and expressed his disappointment that Rasputin had signed it.¹³⁷⁷ Astaf’ev, along with *Novyi mir* editor Sergei Zalygin, ultimately sided with the literary “liberals.”¹³⁷⁸ One wonders what side Fëdor Abramov, who died quite disappointed with the state of the USSR in 1983, would have chosen.

Not surprisingly, the Russian Village Prose writers who opposed Gorbachev were also bitterly opposed to Boris Yeltsin’s new Russia. Rasputin, for his part, regretted the collapse of the Soviet state, believing like many Russian nationalists that it eventually would have shed its communist internationalism and evolved into something more closely resembling a Russian national state. In a 2001 interview, Rasputin pronounced the moral decline of Russia during the post-Soviet years to have been “a thousand times worse” than he could have predicted. He continued to see the village as the moral salvation of Russia, declaring that “villagers, living among

¹³⁷⁶ “Slovo k narodu,” *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, July 23, 1991, <http://sovross.ru/articles/505/8235/comments/3>.

¹³⁷⁷ See Astaf’ev’s defense of his action: Viktor Astaf’ev, “Druzei svoikh ia nikogda ne predaival,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 20, 1991.

¹³⁷⁸ Parthé, “The Dangerous Narrative of the Russian Village,” 89.

nature and on the land, and not on asphalt” were much less likely to be “led astray in the den of iniquity of democracy and the market.”¹³⁷⁹

Rasputin’s and Vasilii Belov’s political stances and anti-Semitic statements led many in the Russian literary community to re-evaluate the legacy of Russian Village Prose, which some critics began to see as “protochauvinist, even profascist Russian literature.” By the late 1990s, many Russian Village Prose writers, stung by the backlash to their political activities, had either withdrawn from public life or had simply become irrelevant.¹³⁸⁰ The Village Prose writers experienced something of a revival in the Putin era, when their conservative, nostalgic worldview once again dovetailed with the ideological preferences of the governing elite. In 2000, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a longtime admirer of Russian Village Prose, awarded Rasputin his eponymous literary prize. In 2002, Rasputin received the Order of Merit for the Fatherland from Russian President Vladimir Putin. Over time, Russian literary opinion has come to respect Rasputin’s creative accomplishments, if not the political views he began to express in the 1980s. Upon Rasputin’s death in 2015, Russian cultural critic Dmitrii Bykov pronounced *Farewell to Matëra* the finest example of Russian prose in the 1970s, but lamented, “Rasputin is an example of how a false, hateful ideology destroyed a first-class talent.”¹³⁸¹

Like many former Soviet citizens, the Moldovan writer Ion Druță found himself living outside the boundaries of his native republic when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Having lived in Moscow since the Moldovan authorities drove him from the republic in 1965, Druță decided to remain in the former Soviet metropole. His decades in Moscow had given him a very

¹³⁷⁹ Rasputin, “Veiut li vikhri vrazhdebnye?”

¹³⁸⁰ Parthé, “The Dangerous Narrative of the Russian Village,” 88-89.

¹³⁸¹ Dmitrii Bykov, “Zhertva. Uroki Rasputina,” *Novaia gazeta*, March 16, 2015, <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2015/03/16/63427-zhertva>.

different opinion on Moldova's future path than that held by many of his colleagues in the Moldovan Writers' Union, who supported Moldova's reunification with Romania. Druță wrote in his 2011 memoir that he was taken aback by the increasingly strident pro-Romanian nationalism that he encountered in the Moldovan Writers' Union when he finally returned for a visit as the organization's newly-elected president in 1989.¹³⁸² Many in the Moldovan Writers' Union saw union with Romania as the ultimate rejection of Soviet rule in Moldova, but Druță refused to repudiate the concept of Moldovan identity, which his pro-Romanian colleagues saw as an artificial Soviet imposition.¹³⁸³ Although he had been a leader of the Moldovan national movement, Druță ultimately broke with the Moldovan Popular Front after it came out in favor of unification with Romania. In 1994, he spoke in favor of maintaining Moldovan independence at a meeting of the anti-pan-Romanian group Moldovan Civic Alliance.¹³⁸⁴ To this day, Druță continues to live in his apartment in Moscow.

A naturally shy person, Matevosyan did not play a leading role in the Armenian national movement as Druță and Honchar had in their respective republics. As in Moldova and Ukraine, the Armenian national movement had initially mobilized around environmental issues, but the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Armenian-majority territory of Nagorno-Karabakh soon overtook the environment in importance. The late 1980s and early 1990s in Armenia were defined by the war with Azerbaijan over the disputed region, which produced severe economic hardship, tens of thousands of casualties, and hundreds of thousands of refugees on both sides. In 1996, in a profound reversal for the former black sheep of the Armenian literary

¹³⁸² Ion Druță, *Îngerul supraviețuirii: mărturii și spovedanii* (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2011), 112-114.

¹³⁸³ On Druță's attempt to bridge Moldovan and Romanian identity, see Roxana Adina Humă, "The Mioritic Nation – an Alternative Approach to Moldovan National Identity," *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 3 (2016): 397–415.

¹³⁸⁴ King, *The Moldovans*, 153-155.

world, Matevosyan became head of the Armenian Writers Union, a job that he professed to hate.¹³⁸⁵ He entered a prolonged period of literary silence, struggling to finish new works. “It is both difficult and necessary to continue,” he told an interviewer in 2002. Surveying the economic and political dysfunction of independent Armenia in the 1990s, it seemed to Matevosyan that he and his fellow countrymen had lost their Soviet homeland, but had not yet managed to build the new Armenia that they had dreamed of.¹³⁸⁶ Reflecting on the collapse of the Soviet Union, which at one time he had celebrated, he told an interviewer, “Happy are those who live in peacetime, even in a dictatorship. [...] And unhappy are those who live in the conditions of the collapse of an empire, even Genghis Khan's. Here we are living in the conditions of the collapse of an empire, even if we called it a kingdom of evil. Unhappy are we.” He concluded, “We just still don't know what we've lost.”¹³⁸⁷

¹³⁸⁵ Mat'evosyan, “Grakanut'yan bats' darpaner pasharvats zhoghovurd,” 353.

¹³⁸⁶ Hrant Mat'evosyan, interview, “Ev dzhvar ē sharunakelē, ev anhrzhesht ē sharunakelē,” *Orran*, September 4, 2002, in Mat'evosyan, *Es es em*, 480-485 (quotation from 484), http://hrantmatevossian.org/hy/works/id/Ev_djvar_e_sharunakely_ev_anhrajesh_t_e_sharunakely.

¹³⁸⁷ Mat'evosyan, “Zruyts'ner Hrant Mat'evosyani het,” 493, 495.

Note on Transliteration

This dissertation follows a modified American Library Association - Library of Congress (ALA-LC) transliteration system for Russian. A few commonly used names are rendered as they typically appear in English (for example, Maxim Gorky). Names with an initial “ia” have been spelled as “ya” in the text for the sake of readability (for example, Aleksandr Yashin instead of Aleksandr Iashin). I have attempted to spell non-Russian names appearing in Russian texts as they would be spelled if transliterated from the original language of the name. However, in the footnotes these names appear as they would if transliterated from the original Russian so that readers can more easily locate sources (for example, Ion Drutse instead of Ion Druță).

For Ukrainian, this dissertation follows the ALA-LC system.

I have followed the ALA-LC transliteration system for Eastern Armenian but have simplified it in the text for the sake of readability. Footnotes of Armenian-language sources are rendered in strict ALA-LC format.

In the Soviet period, the Moldovan language was written using the Cyrillic alphabet. In both the text and footnotes, Moldovan/Romanian words and names are spelled using the Latin alphabet currently in use in Moldova and Romania.

Bibliography

Archives

Armenia

HAA Hayastani azgayin arkhiv
Armenian National Archive

Moldova

ANRM Arhiva Națională a Republicii Moldova
National Archive of the Republic of Moldova

AOSPRM Arhiva Organizațiilor Social-Politice din Republica Moldova
Archive of Social-Political Organizations of the Republic of Moldova

Russia

GARF Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii
State Archive of the Russian Federation

GTsTM Gosudarstvennyi tsentral'nyi teatral'nyi muzei imeni A. A. Bakhrushina
A. A. Bakhrushin State Central Theater Museum

OR RGB Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka
Manuscript Division of the Russian State Library

RGALI Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva
Russian State Archive of Literature and Art

RGANI Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii
Russian State Archive of Contemporary History

TsGAM Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Moskv
Central State Archive of Moscow

Ukraine

DAKO Derzhavnyi arkhiv Kyivs'skoï oblasti
State Archive of Kyiv Region

HDA SBU	Haluzevyi derzhavnyi arkhiv Sluzhby bezpeky Ukraïny Sectoral State Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine
MAH	Memorial'nyi arkhiv muzeiu I. M. Honchara Ivan Honchar Memorial Archive
TsDAHOU	Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads'kikh ob'iednan' Ukraïny Central State Archive of Social Organizations of Ukraine
TsDAMLM	Tsentral'nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv-muzei literatury i mystetstva Ukraïny Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine

Soviet Press

An asterisk indicates a Russian-language periodical in a non-Russian republic.

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Druzhba narodov
Izvestiia
Komsomol'skaia pravda
Literaturnaia gazeta
Literaturnaia Moskva
Molodaia gvardiia
Novyi mir
Ogonëk
Pravda
Sovetskaia kul'tura
Teatr
Voprosy literatury
Znamia

Armenian SSR Periodicals

Garun
Grakan t'ert'
*Literaturnaia Armeniia**
Sovetakan grakanut 'yun

Moldovan SSR Periodicals

*Kodry**

Literatura și arta

Moldova socialistă

Octombrie/Nistru

*Sovetskaia Moldaviia**

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