



Gaito Gazdanov: Russian émigré literature at Harvard

Citation

Dienes, Laszlo. 1997. Gaito Gazdanov: Russian émigré literature at Harvard. Harvard Library Bulletin 7 (4), Winter 1996: 21-37.

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42665570>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)



Gaito Gazdanov in 1950

Gaito Gazdanov: Russian Émigré Literature at Harvard

László Dienes

The twentieth century has turned out to be unusually harsh on Russia and her culture. It began with large-scale emigration, motivated primarily by ethnic conflict and economic conditions. Soon afterwards, but still before World War I and the Bolshevik coup of 1917, a number of Russian writers, painters, performing artists, and musicians went to work in Western Europe (Merezhkovsky, Stravinsky, Diaghilev's *Ballets russes*, Kandinsky, and many others). Real exile and emigration started, however, in and after 1917 when the Revolution precipitated a massive exodus of the Russian intelligentsia, seeking refuge and cultural freedom in Paris, Berlin, and other capitals of Europe. This "wave," taking place between 1917 and 1925 or so, and active in Europe mostly between the two world wars, is usually called the "First Wave" and is commonly considered the most creative, the most influential, and the most significant emigration from Russia. A "Second Wave" that was relatively insignificant culturally resulted from World War II. The third, so-called "Jewish emigration"—the wave of Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Prize winner and U.S. poet laureate, but which also included a number of non-Jewish writers and artists, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn—took place mostly during the repressive 1970s and 1980s, and it did produce a significant body of work in the West in literature as well as in several of the other arts. Finally, a "fourth," again primarily economic, emigration is happening now, in the post-Soviet period. Whether it will produce any significant cultural contribution is doubtful, since artists and writers are now free in Russia itself. Moreover, they can also freely move back and forth between their country and the West, so we can hardly speak about exile any more.

The "first wave" included some of the greatest prose writers of twentieth-century Russian literature, such as Vladimir Nabokov and the Nobel Prize winner Ivan Bunin, as well as some of its best poets, such as Marina Tsvetaeva and Georgy Ivanov. This emigration felt it had a mission to preserve the great traditions of nineteenth-century Russian culture as well as to maintain and continue the artistic explosion of the Silver Age (ca. 1890–1925), and even to offer a modernist, experimental, creative continuation to it. Some in the 1920s and 1930s even believed that the center of genuine Russian culture was not in Moscow but in Paris. Now, two thirds of a century later, many have come to agree, in Moscow as well, with this assessment.

Gaito Gazdanov (1903–1971) belonged to this "first wave," and he, too, has now been rediscovered in post-Soviet Russia as one of its more remarkable

LÁSZLÓ DIENES teaches in the Department of Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

ГАЙТО ГАЗДАНОВ.	
Полное собрание сочинений.	
Том I.	Га Гавайские гитары. Рассказы.
Том II.	Гостиница Грядущего. Рассказы.
Том III.	Ветер у Клар. Роман.
Том IV.	Алексей Шувалов. Роман.
Том V.	Индийский океан. Роман.
и три дополн. тома:	
1 ^{бис}	Кооперация как система.
2 ^{бис}	Железный лем. Роман d'atome et d'angoisse.
3 ^{бис}	Система фискального обложения во Франции по теории Миркина Фукевича.

Figure 1. A description of the contents of a non-existent "Complete Collected Works" edition from the earliest surviving composition notebook (Paris, probably 1929-1930) [bMS Russ 69 (1), f. 20v].

In a disarmingly naive and vain, yet forgivable, fashion, the young and then largely unknown Gazdanov imagines a "collected works" edition of his fiction, much of it as yet (around 1930) still either unwritten or merely in progress!

writers. Often compared in the 1930s to Vladimir Nabokov as “the other” most talented and most promising prose writer of the so-called “young generation” (those young émigrés who started their literary careers after the revolution in the emigration, as opposed to those who left Russia as already published authors)—and even seen as the main “disciple” of Proust in Russian letters—Gazdanov nevertheless never acquired the fame of his compatriot in the West. The reasons for this are rather clear. One is that Gazdanov never switched to a major European language (as Nabokov did to English), even though he possessed French to near perfection. He felt that the kind of prose he wrote had to be created in the language that was “in one’s blood”; it had to be the language the heart and the mind thought and dreamt in—automatically, unconsciously, involuntarily. To put it simply, it had to be one’s truly “native” tongue. This explains the other reason why Gazdanov’s works (and most of his translations into English and other European languages) have not achieved a Nabokovian fame. In contrast to the playful and often purely cerebral bravura of Nabokov’s stylistic fireworks and formal inventiveness, Gazdanov’s translucent, almost hidden style (realizing the ancient dictum of “ars est celare artem”)—psychologically oriented and aimed at exploring and describing the minutiae of the human psyche (where invention, as Tolstoy pointed out, has no place)—is totally embedded in his deceptively simple, yet very smooth and melodious Russian. His prose has to be re-composed into the chamber music of English, and few have lived up to the task so far. The small Russian émigré reading public, able to hear his music, valued him highly for it, and one of its best, most perceptive critics was quite prophetic: “I am convinced,” wrote in 1970 George Ivask (Ph.D., ’52), himself a minor émigré poet, “that the day will come when the collected works of Gaito Gazdanov will be published not in Paris or New York, but in Moscow.” (See figure 1.) The day has come, although we had to wait for the collapse of Communism and the writer’s posthumous “literary” return to his homeland, to the land of his language, for his discovery by his real, and large, audience (the Russian reading public in Russia itself) and for a determination of his true place in the pantheon of twentieth-century Russian literature. This reassessment is now in process: since 1988 more than fifty Gazdanov publications have appeared in post-Soviet Russia, culminating in 1996 in a three-volume “collected works” edition. His popularity can be measured by the fact that all his editions sell out very quickly, and magazines and journals have been eager to publish his stories or serialize his novels. Some of his works were even published in a series entitled “Bestseller.”

The timing of an exhibition of materials from the Gazdanov archive at the Houghton Library of Harvard University,¹ and the publication in this issue of the *Harvard Library Bulletin* of a full bibliographical description of the holdings of the entire archive, also reflect—and are a response to—the surge of interest in the writer, shown especially by literary scholars from post-Communist Russia, many of whom, we know, are eager to work on the archival materials. It is also hoped that the exhibition—tracing a literary life in exile, its trials and tribulations from the Paris of 1920s to the Moscow of the 1990s—and the publication of the archive’s catalog will give new impetus to renewed Gazdanov studies in the

¹ “Gaito Gazdanov and Russian Literature in Exile,” Houghton Library, Harvard University, 3 December 1997 through 27 February 1998.

United States as well, and will rekindle a general interest in researching, and in fact reassessing, the Russian émigré cultural contribution to twentieth-century Western culture.

Gaito Gazdanov² was born in St. Petersburg in 1903 into a middle-class Russified family of Ossetian origin. His father was a forester whose job required extensive travel, so the young boy grew up all over Russia. Tragedy struck the family very early on. Before he became a teenager, Gazdanov had lost both of his sisters and his father. The precocious boy not only read much but was ready to strike out on his own very early. When history came to help him in this, he did not long hesitate. By the age of sixteen—in 1919—he left his mother and his school to fight as a soldier on the side of the Whites in the Russian Civil War that followed the 1917 Bolshevik coup. The Whites lost, they “evacuated” through the Crimea to Turkey in 1920, and the very young Gazdanov thus started life in exile. The first years (in Turkey, in Bulgaria, then in France from 1923 on) were extremely difficult: hard physical labor, unemployment, even homeless life on the streets awaited him.

Yet by the second half of the 1920s he was a writer, participating in the richly active literary life of the Russian Paris, and regularly publishing in the emigration’s second most important literary journal, *Volia Rossii* (*The Will of Russia*, nine short stories during 1927–1931), whose main editor, Marc Slonim, was the young Gazdanov’s discoverer and first mentor. In the late 1920s he also attended the Sorbonne for a while, and it was around this time that he found the money-earning occupation that sustained him financially for the next 25 years or so, while at the same time leaving him enough free time to continue to be a writer: night-time taxi driving.

The year 1930 was a turning point in Gazdanov’s literary career. His first novel *Večer u Klër* (*An Evening with Claire*, published as a separate book around the end of 1929) was an enormous critical and popular success. His name became a household word in the Russian emigration, and this was only reinforced by the general opinion that the best short story published in the spring of 1930 in the first issue of a brand new (and somewhat scandalous) literary journal called *Chisla* (*Numbers*) was his. Within a year Gazdanov was a regular contributor to the emigration’s most prestigious literary journal *Sovremennye zapiski* (*Contemporary Annals*), until then mostly a bastion of the respectable “older generation” (eight short stories and two novels from 1931 to 1940). The following year, in 1932, with the advice and support of Mikhail Osorgin, a well-known “older” writer and one of Gazdanov’s patrons, Gazdanov entered the Parisian Russian Masonic lodge Northern Star.

In retrospect, the mid and late 1930s appear to be one source for the relative neglect that awaits Gazdanov for the rest of his life. Although he remained well known and respected among educated Russian émigré readers, he did not acquire international fame, nor did he get a truly fair and accurate appraisal of his work even among the émigré critics. The great success of his first novel was not repeated with either of the other three novels written before the war, even though every one of them was entirely comparable, perhaps even superior, to *Večer u Klër*. His second novel, *Istoriia odnogo puteshestviia* (*The History of a*

² See Appendix for a chronological table of Gaito Gazdanov’s life and work.

Journey), published in a somewhat garbled form and only in installments in *Sovremennye zapiski*, reached the Russian émigré public mostly in 1935, that is to say, five years after *Večer u Klér*. It took another three years before the novel came out as a book, but by 1938 the emigration—and the whole world—was in crisis, and the impending war interrupted literary careers. The same unfortunate timing might have been the cause for the critical neglect of both Gazdanov's third and fourth novels. Neither *Polet* (The Flight), a sensitive psychological piece written with an impeccable sense for style, published—incomplete—in the last three issues of *Russkie zapiski* (Russian Annals, 1939) before the journal closed down, nor *Nochnye dorogi* (Night Roads), a powerful portrayal of Russians in the Parisian underworld, published—also incomplete—in the very last issues of *Sovremennye zapiski* (1939-40), before that journal closed down, evoked much reaction. They were overshadowed by the war. Had Gazdanov managed to publish these novels closer to the middle of the decade—and in their entirety, and as separate books—he would surely be remembered as a true rival to Nabokov.

Everything changed after the war. The “first wave” was essentially dead, or dying. An entirely new political and cultural configuration emerged, with its own new hopes and expectations, and with the old hopes and expectations abandoned. The publishing and cultural center of the emigration moved to America, specifically to New York, to the *Novyi zhurnal* (The New Journal), which is where Gazdanov published nearly all his post-war works, all of his five new novels and his less than ten new short stories. Economically times were hard for the first few years after the war, but by the late 1940s fortune seemed to be smiling on Gazdanov. Two of his novels, *The Specter of Alexander Wolf* and *Buddha's Return*, were translated into English, even if inadequately, and both were published in England and America in 1950 and 1951. There followed French, Italian, and Spanish translations of the former novel (1951-55) and a New York TV play based on it. These editions brought in some income and moderate critical praise, including comparisons to Albert Camus. The taxi years came to a close in the early 1950s when Gazdanov accepted the invitation to go to Munich to work for the newly opened Radio Liberty. He worked as one of the Radio's editors from the beginning of its existence in 1953 until his death in 1971. Whether because of the work at the Radio or for other reasons, a clear break occurred in Gazdanov's creative evolution in the 1950s. He wrote much less (five and a half novels and less than ten short stories during the thirty-year period from 1941 to 1971 as opposed to four novels and about twenty short stories during the twelve years between 1929 and 1941), and the tenor of his works also underwent changes. The willingness to reprint older pre-war pieces, suggesting the absence of new ones, may also be a sign of crisis in Gazdanov's personal and creative life.

During the war years he started a new genre, new for him, a novel that combined elements of thrillers and detective novels with the same psychological orientation and the “philosophizing” that characterized his pre-war works. These novels, *Prizrak Aleksandra Vol'fa* (The Specter of Alexander Wolf, written ca. 1944-46 and published in Russian 1947-48) and *Vozvrashchenie Buddy* (Buddha's Return, written ca. 1948-49 and published in Russian 1949-50) have the elements that hold out the promise of popular and commercial success (unlike the very dark and pessimistic tones of *Nochnye dorogi* or the Mozartian blend of lightness and tragedy masterfully achieved in *Polet*).

Everything we know about Gazdanov suggests that he was not after popular and commercial success, but he may well have been intrigued to see if he could pull off a combination genre that would be at the same time high art and also popularly accessible and enjoyable fiction. The fact that these novels were translated (and inspired TV and movie writers) suggests at least partial success. Nevertheless, Gazdanov was probably dissatisfied with the results and did not feel the mix was working as well as hoped. His last three novels, *Pilgrims* (Pilgrims, written 1950 and published in Russian 1953–54), *Probuzhdenie* (The Awakening, written ca. 1964, although probably started in the early 1950s, and published in Russian 1965–66) and the “youthful” *Èvelina i ee druž'ia* (Evelyne and Her Friends, written in the second half of the 1960s, although probably also started originally in the early 1950s, and published in Russian 1968–71) all represent, to various degrees and in various ways, a return to the pre-war Gazdanov. *Pilgrims* still has some of the elements of the thriller, but it is the beginning of a new allegorical “existential humanist” Gazdanov for whom the meaninglessness of life, imposed on life by the element of chance, is gradually dissipating, replaced by an emerging belief that it is our moral duty to do what we can in spite of it all. This humanistic position is especially clearly advocated in the parable of *The Awakening*, where the author gave himself the very difficult task of describing in great detail the slow recovery of a mentally disturbed person thanks to the care and love of another—who does the caring because he just has to and because he wants to, and not because he thinks (or hopes) that his efforts will be successful. Gazdanov’s last completed novel, *Evelyne and Her Friends*, is a key work, youth and prior achievement revisited, contemplated, and meditated upon with the wisdom of age. It is, somewhat surprisingly, given the writer’s overwhelming pessimism and dark vision in most of his works, a joyous piece, a celebration of life, all of its mysteries and metamorphoses transformed—in its very words, on the pages in front of our eyes—into art.

Looking back now, the slight critical response to Gazdanov’s works after World War II is astonishing. Russian émigré writers in the 1950s and 1960s lived a truly heroic life: they worked and published in a near void. They had very few Russian readers in the West, and to the masses of readers in the Soviet Union they were totally inaccessible, their works banned, even their names unmentionable—as was the case for Gazdanov himself who never saw his name in “Soviet print” all his life. Also, most émigré writing did not get translated into the major Western languages. Thus, the Western public had no opportunity to get the full picture. Even the political climate was against them to a large extent, for stereotypical images of Russian émigrés as tsarist aristocrats, White Army officers, and reactionary monarchists wishing to restore autocracy were still common, especially among left-leaning liberals or intellectuals sympathetic to the Soviet experiment, who often also doubted the possibility of creating anything of value in exile, far from one’s native land and from its living language and its current problems. Even today some people in the West are surprised to learn that many of the cultural leaders of the first Russian emigration, that is, founders and editors of leading émigré newspapers and journals, for example, were liberals or even former revolutionaries in pre-1917 Russia. For these émigrés their relentless anti-Communism did not at all mean an automatic pro-tsarist position.

Gazdanov is a good example of this complex political stance. He certainly detested and hated the primitiveness and the brutality of the Soviet system, yet he was no supporter of a return to tsarist Russia. He was capable of saying in one of his novels that the Reds were morally right in the civil war. He even considered returning to Russia at some point (albeit for very personal reasons), and he had no reservations about participating in the French resistance movement or helping Soviet partisans who found themselves in France during World War II. Neither did he have any political or philosophical reservations ten years later about working for Radio Liberty, whose main purpose was to break the Communist stronghold over the hearts and minds of the millions of people who were entrapped behind the Iron Curtain, subject to endless Marxist propaganda. Gazdanov was a real democrat. When the Parisian association of Russian émigré writers and journalists decided to exclude from its ranks all those émigrés who chose to take out a Soviet passport during the post-war, pro-Russian euphoria, Gazdanov sent a letter of resignation on the grounds that the association was not democratic enough to tolerate all shades of political opinion. And he did this while at the same time breaking off personal contacts with several of his old friends precisely for their taking out a Soviet passport! (See figure 2.)

Gazdanov died in Munich at the end of 1971, after a relatively short bout with lung cancer. His body was transferred to France and buried in the Russian cemetery of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois near Paris where so many other exiles have found their last abode. But Gazdanov the writer did not die. His afterlife started immediately after his death. An unfinished novel, *Perevorot* (The Coup), was published posthumously, and the first researcher—the author of this article, having been inspired by a unique seminar on Russian émigré literature taught by Professor V. M. Setchkarev at Harvard—visited the writer's widow in Paris and began the study of his works in 1975. By 1982, a book was ready for publication, and in that same year there appeared the present author's bibliography of "Gazdanoviana" in the Parisian series of bibliographies dedicated to Russian émigré writers.³ There were a few minor, not-too-well-chosen, reprints of Gazdanov short stories at the beginning of the 1980s, and some better ones in the second half of the decade.⁴ An attempt to bring out a two-volume collection in Paris failed. Back in 1975, I also succeeded in convincing the writer's widow to donate the entire archive to Harvard University (and the Houghton Library to accept it), and indeed the manuscripts were mailed to Rodney G. Dennis, Curator of Manuscripts, in a number of packages during 1976 and 1977. My other interests, however, led me away from Gazdanov after 1982. For most of the 1980s, Gazdanov was still banned in the Soviet Union and forbidden territory for Soviet scholars, while there continued to be little interest in him among U.S. scholars and critics. In this era of benign neglect, there unexpectedly appeared a fine translation into English of Gazdanov's first and still most famous novel, *An Evening with Claire*, in 1988.⁵

³ L. Dienes, *Russian Literature in Exile: The Life and Work of Gajto Gazdanov* (Munich: O. Sagner, 1982); *Gajto Gazdanov: Bibliographie* (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1982).

⁴ The Parisian Russian newspaper *Russkaia mysl'* (Russian Thought) reprinted minor works such as "Intellektual'nyi trest" (An Intellectual Trust) and oth-

ers. The journal *Strelets* (New York and Paris) did better by republishing *Nochnye dorogi* (Night Roads) (April–November 1988) and four very good short stories, including "Vechnii sputnik" (The Night Companion), between 1985 and 1987.

⁵ *An Evening with Claire*, tr. Jodi Daynard (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988).

The political changes in the Soviet Union and the start of the return of émigré literature to Russia in the late 1980s promised new interest in Gazdanov and new opportunities for Gazdanov publications and Gazdanov research. My very first contacts with Soviet scholars interested in Gazdanov date back to this time, and by 1991 I made the decision to return to work on Gazdanov. A wonderful opportunity in the beginning of the 1990s, very much in tune with the times, was a brand new enterprise by Dutch enthusiasts for Russian literature to publish a new series of scholarly works and literary reprints in Holland. I grabbed the opportunity to offer the publisher the idea to include in his series *Polet* (The Flight), Gazdanov's only novel never before published in its entirety. He accepted my proposal, and this fine piece of subtle and refined prose appeared in an elegant, beautifully produced edition in 1992, more than half a century after its first, incomplete, edition in Paris in 1939.⁶

The real turning point in Gazdanov's afterlife started in the late 1980s—not in the West, but rather in Gorbachev's new “glasnost” Russia. Openness meant initially (around 1987 and 1988) a cautious beginning of republication in the Soviet Union of many of the previously banned émigré works. The gates soon burst open, however, and the years 1988–1990 witnessed a veritable orgy of repressed works exploding on the pages of nearly all Soviet publications. This return to the homeland of much of émigré culture and literature was so flood-like, so quick and so overwhelming, that it practically created a backlash, and by 1990 a certain degree of indifference and fatigue had set in. The very first Gazdanov publications in the former Soviet Union occurred at about the same time in 1988, both in Moscow and in Vladikavkaz (then still called Ordzhonikidze), the capital city of Ossetia, the ethnic homeland of the writer. However, these publications were mostly in inappropriate, little known or minor journals, such as a propaganda publication for Russians abroad or an army magazine or something called *Rural Youth*.⁷ Several among the initial serial publications, which were often chosen for being politically relatively innocuous, were also abridged. The first book-form publications, as opposed to serials, appeared only in 1990, that is to say, at the tail end of the flood and at a time when the Russian reading public was nearly incapable of absorbing any more. Although the two Moscow collections of 1990 were Soviet-style editions, that is to say huge by Western standards, 75,000 and 100,000 copies respectively, their size was small in comparison to editions of Nabokov's works, which often numbered in the hundreds of thousands, with totals even in the millions.⁸ Apparently one of the leading literary journals, *Novyi mir* (New World), was considering serialized publication of *An Evening with Claire* on its pages early enough—around 1988—to guarantee a major impact but decided instead to publish Solzhenitsyn. Although an entirely understandable decision for the times politically, it still may have contributed to the belatedness and relatively unfor-

6 *Polet* (The Flight) (The Hague: Leuvenhoff Publishing, 1992), vol. 5 in the series *Russian Emigré Literature in the Twentieth Century: Studies and Texts*.

7 *Nochnye dorogi* (Night Roads) (excerpts), *Literaturnaia Osetiia* (Vladikavkaz) 71 (1988); “Pis'ma Ivanova” (Ivanov's Letters), *Golos rodiny* (Moscow) 34 (1988); *Vecher u Klër* (An Evening with Claire), *Sovetskii voïn* 4–5 (1990); “Smert' gospodina Bernara” (The Death of

Monsieur Bernard), *Sel'skaia molodezh'* 7 (1990).

8 *Vecher u Klër: Romany i rasskazy* (An Evening with Claire: Novels and Short Stories), ed. S. S. Nikonenko (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1990); *Prizrak Aleksandra Vol'fa: Romany* (The Specter of Alexander Wolf: Novels), ed. S. S. Nikonenko (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990).



Figure 3. Ms. title-page of "Aleksi Shuvalov. A Novel. Paris. 1930," from the second of Gazdanov's composition notebooks dating from 1930 [bMS Russ 69 (2)]. An attractive "Constructivist" title-page in Gazdanov's own hand for an imaginary future edition of a novel-in-progress that he never finished.

tunate circumstances in which Gazdanov's "return" to Russia took place. In addition to the Moscow "literati," several scholars from Ossetia have been instrumental in helping Gazdanov's return to Russia, as well as specifically to Ossetia (a Caucasian republic with its own language that Gazdanov himself did not know or use). The Ossetian motivation for interest in Gazdanov and their desire to "adopt" him is based largely on patriotic sentiment, although a few young scholars from there appear to have found some genuinely "Ossetian" features in Gazdanov's work, in his use of the Russian language and in his characters and plots.⁹

Because of all the facts mentioned above, Gazdanov did not become a household name among the Russian reading public in the late 1980s or very early 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the subsequent collapse of the publishing industry, the general economic dislocation and the turmoil of a slow and painful transition to a market economy in the 1990s further hindered Gazdanov's rediscovery. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that in spite of all the unfavorable conditions we can count over fifty Gazdanov publications by now, and they include a three-volume collected works of nearly all of Gazdanov's published oeuvre. My own travels to Russia in the early 1990s contributed to some of these publications. I was especially pleased to be able to get some Gazdanov works (as yet unpublished in Russia itself) published in some of the leading or new, post-Soviet, publications. For example, one of Gazdanov's finest novels *The Flight* was first published in Russia (soon after the version in Holland in 1992) in its entirety in 1993 in *Druzhba narodov* (The Peoples' Friendship), a journal leading in the rediscovery of Russia's "lost literature." Among the entirely new, post-Soviet forums, the unusual journal *Drugie berega* (Other Shores) distinguished itself by its interest in publishing the works of Gazdanov.¹⁰ All these publications and the surge of interest among Russian publishers and literary scholars, many of them young and "post-Soviet" in spirit and outlook and eager to look at his manuscripts and to prepare them for publication, made it clear to me that the time has come to do everything I could to make the Gazdanov archive available for scholarly research. During 1995-1997 I contributed extensively to the preparation of the catalog of the Gazdanov archive by describing in great detail for Leslie A. Morris, Curator of Manuscripts and the catalogers of the Houghton Library the contents of the collection. This catalog, based on that description, is now published in this issue of the *Harvard Library Bulletin*.

9 R. Bzarov, "O Gaito Gazdanove" and A. A. Khadartseva, "K voprosu o sud'be literaturnogo naslediiia Gaito Gazdanova," both in *Literaturnaia Osetiia* (Vladikavkaz) 71 (1988); F. Kh. Khadonova, "Vozvrashcheniia zhdushchii," *Literaturnaia Osetiia* (Vladikavkaz) 73 (1989); R. Kh. Totrov, "Mezhdu nishchetoi i solntsem" (Afterword to *Večer u Klër...*) Vladikavkaz: Izdatel'stvo IR, 1990; A. Cherchesov, "Formula prozrachnosti. Ob odnom romane i nekotorykh osobennostiakh tvorcheskogo metoda Gaito Gazdanova," *Vladikavkaz al'manakh* (Vladikavkaz) 2 (1995); and a talk given by Sergei Kabaloti at the V World Congress of Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, 10 August 1995.

10 *Polet* (The Flight) *Druzhba narodov* (Moscow) 8-9 (1993) and short stories in 6 and 10 (1995); *Piligrimy* (Pilgrims) *Drugie berega* (Moscow) 1-3 (1992-93) and short stories in 4/5 (1994) and 6 (1995); *Gaito Gazdanov Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh* (Collected Works of Gaito Gazdanov in Three Volumes), ed. S. S. Nikonenko, F. Kh. Khadonova and L. Dienes (Moscow: Soglasie Publishers, 1996). An annotated bibliography of Gazdanov in Russia is in preparation. It will provide a comprehensive listing of all post-Soviet publications in Russia from 1988.

The physical size of the Gazdanov archive is fairly small. The entire archive fits into two standard manuscript-size boxes and consists mostly of authorial manuscripts, although it also includes typescript manuscripts (with or without authorial hand-written additions), a few books, offprints, xeroxed material, and individual loose sheets, such as notes, sketches, postcards, and the like. It does not contain any personal items or documents, such as a passport, a birth certificate and the like. The few such items and the photographs the widow had in her possession in 1975 she wanted to keep as long as she was alive. After her death I believe she intended to have them added to the Houghton archive. There are altogether 19 notebooks, nine of them of a smaller size, mostly from the pre-war era, and ten of a larger, more modern looking type, some spiral-bound. (There were more: the writer's widow tore up two notebooks that were mostly empty in front of me, in order to remove the few pages that contained text; examples of this are the manuscripts—still partly bound together—one beginning with the words "Pozdnei noch'iu, v tret'em chasu Èlen" and the other entitled "Prizrak Aristida Vol'fa," both early drafts for the novel *The Specter of Alexander Wolf*). The writer's widow also often added title information, pagination, and occasional explanatory remarks to some of the material. There were also twelve large manila envelopes, containing authorial manuscripts, typescripts and other materials, prepared by the writer's widow (who also wrote on each envelope a description of its contents). A few additional envelopes were made up by me in 1995 in the course of my work when I found loose manuscripts not in any of the widow's envelopes.

Altogether, there are over two hundred items in the collection (counting each title in the notebooks as a separate item), making the Houghton manuscripts archive a nearly complete collection of all of Gazdanov's important works throughout his entire creative life. It contains the manuscripts (sometimes more than one version) of all of Gazdanov's completed novels (except for one, the first novel *Večer u Klèr*). It also contains the manuscripts of nearly all of Gazdanov's short stories, critical essays, and book reviews. This is the only Gazdanov archive in the world; there are no other collections of Gazdanov materials that we are aware of. In fact, as indicated below, it is probable that very few individual Gazdanov-related items (manuscripts, letters by or to him, etc.) are extant anywhere in the world, whether in Paris, the United States, or Russia.

The archive is rich in manuscript versions of both published and unpublished works. In several instances the archive contains more than one manuscript version of a novel or short story, yet none of the manuscripts appears to correspond exactly to the published version. In some cases there are significant differences among the manuscript versions, or even between the manuscript version closest to the published text and the published text itself. Even manuscripts that appear to be essentially identical to the published version (and are even dated the same), often contain variant readings. It is unclear why. Publishers' and journals' archives, when they become available, might help explain the situation. A thorough comparison of the available manuscripts and their published versions, along with an evaluation of the differences, remain to be done. The archive is a gold mine for textual work.

In the case of manuscripts of unpublished works, some appear to be completed, others are clearly unfinished. A quick perusal of some of them suggests that they remained unpublished because the writer himself was not satisfied with

them, had lost interest in them, or had used some of the material elsewhere. For most of his life, Gazdanov did not really have serious problems getting published. If anything, the opposite was true. He knew that he could send off his latest story to one of the émigré journals where he was a “house author” and that it would soon be accepted and published. This being the case, it would be hard to argue that the unpublished manuscripts in the archive are the result of incomprehension, editorial hostility, and the like. Eventually these texts will probably be published in Russia in academic editions that strive to be comprehensive, or in commercial editions claiming to bring to the Russian readers hitherto unpublished material.¹¹

Most texts in the archive are entered into notebooks, though some manuscripts are extant on loose sheets. Gazdanov’s handwriting is small and fine, usually easy to read. Often there are remarkably few corrections, deletions, or additions. This bears out the widow’s claim that Gazdanov wrote “in his sleep,” carrying the story as an unborn baby for years before committing it to paper. But once he was ready to write it down, it came forth in its almost final form, requiring very few changes. A chronological look at the “gestation histories” of some Gazdanov stories, showing the long time that usually elapsed between the real-life event and its fictional reappearance, would also support, and explain, the unusually clean manuscripts. As a rule, Gazdanov put his text on the right-hand page of each notebook opening, leaving the left side blank for changes, notes, or comments. This, combined with the fact that Gazdanov made relatively few changes, has resulted in manuscript notebooks that are generally very clean and clear looking. There are, however, exceptions. The notebooks from the early 1930s are exceptions, for Gazdanov was clearly trying to use every square inch of paper surface, probably to save money. In some of these early notebooks Gazdanov sometimes continues a story elsewhere in the notebook on the left-hand side of the opening, interpolated with another story on the facing pages! By contrast, some of the later notebooks have plenty of blank pages left in them. Curiously, the early notebooks contain some title pages or tables of contents designed by the writer for imaginary editions of his works. (See figure 3. See also figure 5.) There are no actual drawings, and only a few diagrams demonstrating plot or character relationships. (See figure 4.) It seems that the young, as yet mostly unpublished writer, with no (or only one) book to his credit, clearly liked to envision the look of his future publications, so much so that he did not spare space and paper no matter how scarce they were.

Pagination is usually fairly accurate and reliable, often supplied apparently by the writer himself, sometimes probably by his widow. But it is also frequently confused (and confusing), and especially in the novels, inconsistent; here and there numbered pages are missing or there is a mistake in the pagination. Not infrequently the same page number is repeated, usually but not always marked as “bis.” Gazdanov’s spelling is on the whole quite correct, with only a few mistakes (ne for ni) or idiosyncrasies (e.g., -to or -nibud’ always spelled as separate words). Gazdanov’s punctuation is also correct by and large, with few errors or peculiarities. He typically was unwilling to indicate the structure of his works by conventional divisions, such as chapter titles or section numbers; all he does is

¹¹ A preliminary, incomplete, and not entirely accurate checklist of Gazdanov’s unpublished manuscripts—mostly those in the Houghton archive—was included in

the 1982 Paris bibliography. It is now superseded by the new catalog of the Houghton Gazdanov archive.

start new paragraphs, leave some space between them (with or without a flourish of some sort), or continue on a new page. The precise divisions of his manuscripts need to be established and his works eventually republished accordingly, since they determine the fundamental structural rhythm of the prose of his stories. Erroneous decisions have been made, both during Gazdanov's lifetime and posthumously, especially in some of the novels when the publisher had to decide the breaks on his own. (See figure 7.)

Through comparing versions of the same story, one learns that Gazdanov always moves from the more specific and concrete details (often autobiographical or based on real-life events) toward the more general and more universal. For example, in "Smert' gospodina Bernara" (The Death of Monsieur Bernard) where a fully spelled-out name of a French city gets reduced to a "T."; or in "Tret'ia zhizn'" (The Third Life) where reference to an actual year, 1926, which dates the story and makes it in a way more recognizably autobiographical, is eliminated from the published version.

Many of Gazdanov's manuscripts are clearly dated, and an undated manuscript in a notebook can as a rule be reliably dated by its position among other manuscripts, especially when at least some of those are dated. Moreover, since we know that usually very little time passed between the writing and the publication of a Gazdanov piece, we can assume that the date of composition of an undated but published manuscript is very close to the date of its publication. Gazdanov even sent material to be published before it was finished, particularly novels. The manuscript of his second novel, *Istoriia odnogo puteshestviia* (The History of a Journey), is dated 1935, yet the beginning of the novel had already been published in 1934! He seems to have done this several times after the war, with the result that sometimes the published version may not be the final one, or may be somewhat garbled, as happened also with the publication of *Evelina i ee druz'ia*. Sometimes dating is, however, a problem, as when an entire notebook lacks any indication of time. Those notebooks of the 1940s, especially, belong in this category. Occasionally, there are a few, so far mostly unidentified, lines of poetry in the writer's hand. Some might be attempts at poetry by Gazdanov himself (he never published any, and according to his widow, never wrote any), although most are probably quotations of favorite lines, or lines appropriate for the story they accompany.

There are only a few lacunae in the archive. The writer's widow decided to keep a few manuscripts for sentimental reasons; the only such item I can now recall is the notebook manuscript of Gazdanov last, unfinished, novel *Perevorot* (The Coup), but there might have been others. After her death, her niece, Maria Lamzaki, living in Paris, France, presumably inherited all of the widow's possessions, including any Gazdanov materials, as she had, to the best of my knowledge, no other relatives. Maria Lamzaki herself died recently and the whereabouts of her possessions are at the moment unknown. In 1975 the writer's widow gave me a few items as a gift. These are mostly duplicate manuscripts, that is to say, another hand-written text of the same work is in the archive. A few are offprints and typed texts of short stories which she hoped would help in bringing out a collection of Gazdanov's short stories. I intend to donate these materials to the Houghton Library.

Only one period in the writer's life is not represented in the archive, the first few years of artistic activity up to the years 1929-1930. This means that we have

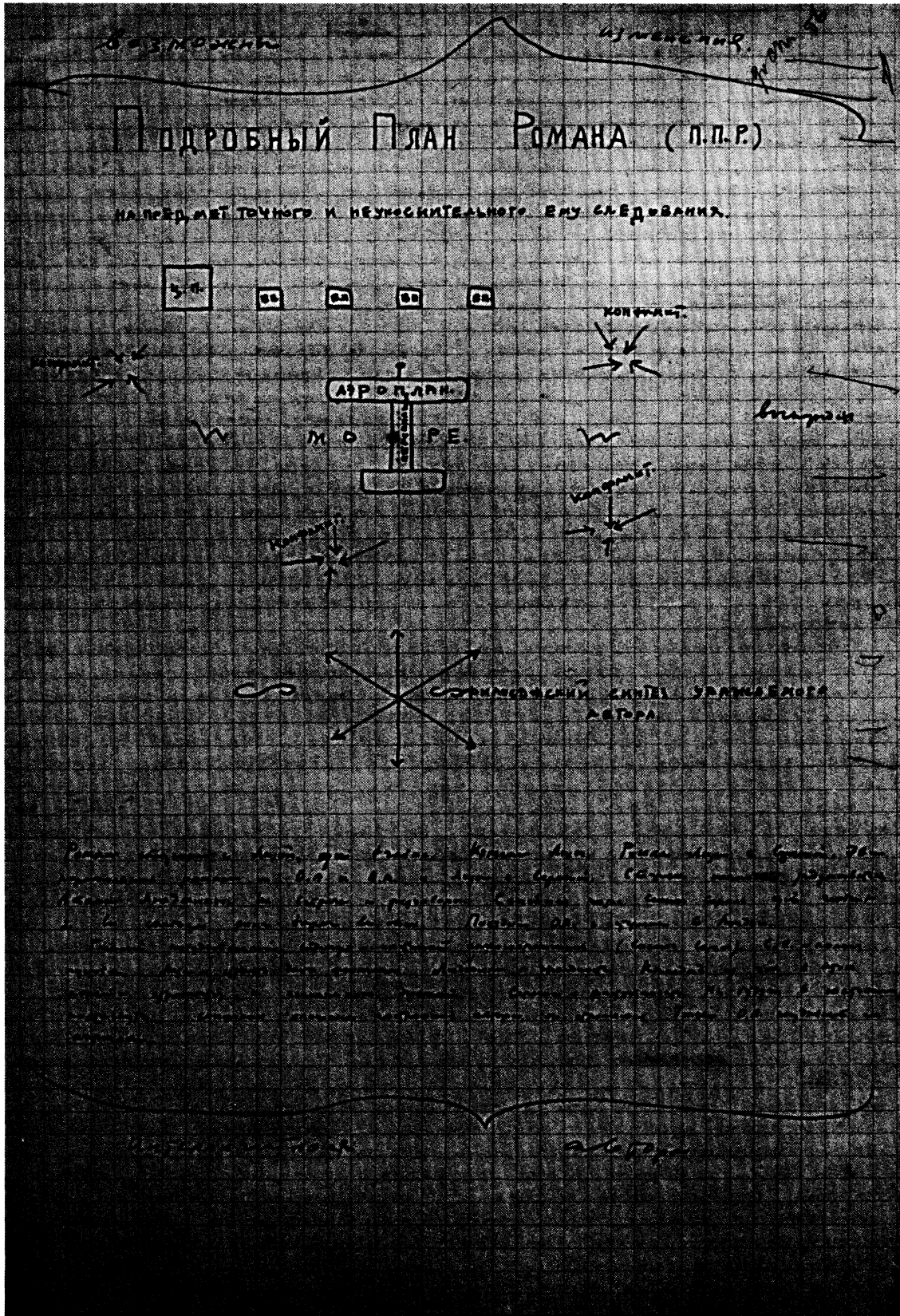


Figure 4. "Detailed plan for the novel," i.e., for Polet (*The Flight*), probably from 1939 [bMS Russ 69 (7), f. 8v]. One of the most fascinating pages in all of Gazdanov's mss., this ironic diagram both contrasts to, and harmonizes with, the light, yet deadly serious, tone of the novel itself.

no manuscripts for the first seven short stories the writer published between 1926 and 1929, and, perhaps most regrettably, no manuscript is extant for the writer's first, and perhaps still most famous, novel, *Večer u Klèr*, published at the very end of 1929 and written most likely in that same year. These manuscripts were not in the possession of the writer's widow in 1975. It is not entirely impossible that they may turn up among the Marc Slonim archive, the *Volia Rossii* archive, or the archive (if there is one) of the publisher of *Večer u Klèr*.

For a variety of reasons, little of Gazdanov's work done at Radio Liberty was found among the papers and manuscripts that constituted the archive in the widow's possession. This was partly due to the fact that in the 1950s and 1960s, when Gazdanov was employed by the Radio in Munich, Germany, they often lived separately. Much of this material was incidental, ephemeral, purely political in nature, probably not considered by the writer himself worth preserving. When I visited the offices and archives of Radio Liberty for the first time in 1975, I still found approximately fifty titles by Gazdanov in the Radio's catalogs, all of which seemed very short and entirely political in content. The fate of these materials is unclear; some sources indicate they were destroyed recently, others believe some of them may still be in the Radio's archives, transferred to Prague a few years ago. His literary materials written for the Radio were cataloged by me, and the best of the unpublished part of this material is now being prepared for publication from photocopies in my possession.

So far, very few items related to Gazdanov have been unearthed in other archives. I have found a few in Amherst College's Whitney collection and in GARF (the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the former TSGAOR) in Moscow. Andrey Ustinov of Stanford University was kind enough to turn my attention to some he had come across, in particular at the Bakhmeteff archive at Columbia University, but also elsewhere in the United States. Parts of Gazdanov's correspondence with fellow émigré writer Leonid Rzhevsky were published in Moscow recently.¹² But the amount is relatively negligible and generally not very significant. This is likely to remain so, even if more items are discovered in the archives of the people and the journals with which Gazdanov had dealings, such as Marc Slonim, Mikhail Osorgin, Vladimir Weidlé, Vladimir Varshavsky, Vadim Andreev, *Sovremennye zapiski*, and *Novyi zhurnal*, for Gazdanov was never a prolific letter writer. Nor did he carry on important literary correspondence with major figures. Most of his letters found so far are business letters of limited interest to publishers or editors. His personal, non-literary, correspondence was very private; hence it is also most unlikely that much of it will ever be made public by those who might still possess it.

In addition to Radio Liberty materials, one other area of Gazdanov's activity was not well represented in the writer's archive: Masonic materials were completely absent. We know that Gazdanov was an active mason, who often gave many lectures at meetings. Whether these talks have been preserved at all, and if so, what their whereabouts are, is unclear. Although the collection in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris may include some, our preliminary research did not lead to any. The private archives of the Russian lodges, if and when they become open to the public, are, however, a very likely source.

¹² Kol'tso A: *Literaturnyi Al'manakh* (Circle A. A Literary Almanac) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1993-94). See also L. Rzhevsky, "Vstrechi i pis'ma. (O russkikh pisateliakh Zarubezh'ia 1940-1960-kh gg.," *Grani* (Munich) 157 (1990).

In all my scholarly work so far I have aimed at providing basic information on the life and work of this writer, as none had been available before; at offering a careful and thorough analysis of the themes and styles of his published works, as none had been made before; and at promoting, especially since 1991, the republication of the major body of Gazdanov's primary, most significant work in post-Communist Russia. I have always felt that such fundamentals must be accomplished before we begin to study and publish in scholarly editions unpublished minor works, unused or discarded manuscripts, variants or early versions of published pieces. Now that all of Gazdanov's essential writings have been published both in the West and in Russia itself the time has come for a detailed scholarly study of these archival materials. Much remains to be done.