



A Russian rendering of The Return of Don Quixote (1952). Over the years, independent Soviet writers, artists, and intellectuals have used Cervantes's hero to symbolize their own high-minded "tilting at windmills." The tragicomic, self-deluding aspect of the role is accepted, even flaunted. "The sole advantage of Don Quixotes," Soviet writer Fridrikh Gorenshtein wryly observed in a recent story, "is that they're ridiculous and go unrecognized."

The Soviets

There are few enduring staples in the average American's diet of news from abroad. The Soviet Union is one of them. In major U.S. daily newspapers, to judge from a 1980 survey, the Soviet Union receives more of the space allotted to foreign news than does any other nation.

Yet the scope of the reporting is fairly narrow, inevitably shaped by the Soviet Union's status as an adversary and superpower, and severely constrained by Moscow's tight controls on foreign journalists. Typically, daily news stories focus on political ups and downs in the Kremlin, on a handful of Soviet dissidents, on Soviet economic gains and losses, on Moscow's diplomatic coups and setbacks around the world. So familiar have the big issues become that a shorthand list suffices to bring some particulars of each to mind: "Poland," "détente," "SALT," "human rights," "Afghanistan."

Among U.S. academics, the focus is somewhat different. Of several thousand scholars working in Soviet studies, the majority concentrate on Russian history or Russian language and literature. Economists and political scientists make up most of the remainder. Relatively few researchers work in anthropology, sociology, philosophy, or religion, fewer still in Soviet art and music or other aspects of popular culture in the USSR.

One result of these understandable preoccupations among journalists and scholars is that even Americans who consider themselves well informed about the Soviet Union—who can trace Yuri Andropov's rise to power, for example, or outline the Soviet negotiating position on arms control at Geneva—often lack a sense of how the country looks to the people who actually live there. That the USSR is a totalitarian state, or attempts to be, is well known. But, in a Russian's daily life, what kinds of accommodations must he make to exist comfortably? How much freedom does he have (and freedom to do what)? Where, if anyplace, is the "give" in the social and political fabric? How efficient is censorship? How far is "too far" for an artist or writer?

There is no simple answer to any of these questions, and the

answer to each may vary from decade to decade or year to year, or even from one person to another. As individuals, the Russians maneuver within the system in ways that at times seem peculiar, at times reckless, at times deceptively circumspect, and at times so subtle as to elude recognition.

A painting (below) entitled "Don't Babble," by Soviet "pop" artists Vitali Komar and Aleksandr Melamid, is daring for reasons a Westerner might not immediately appreciate. When pop art first appeared in the Soviet Union during the early 1970s, the subject matter consisted not of Campbell's Soup cans but of the



officially sanctioned artistic style known as socialist realism. "In capitalist life, in America, you have an overproduction of things, of consumer goods," Komar and Melamid once explained. "Here we have an overproduction of ideology." And that is what they chose to parody.

Their work, however, could never be exhibited publicly. "The Soviet government must have boundaries," novelist Vasily Aksyonov observed at a recent Wilson Center meeting. Fortunately for artist and citizen alike, the boundaries shift. Here Walter Reich describes a recent visit to the Soviet Union and the lives of the people he met. S. Frederick Starr chronicles the influx of rock 'n' roll into the USSR and the government's unsuccessful attempts to bring it under control. John Glad looks at Russian science fiction and the political implications of fantasy.

The cartoons published on the following pages first appeared in *Funny People from the Club of the Twelve Chairs* (Moscow, 1972), edited by Viktor Veselovskii and Ilya Suslov.



THE LAND OF SINGLE FILE

by Walter Reich

The doors of Soviet shops are often arranged so that only one person can enter or leave at a time. If a public hallway is too wide, grille-work is erected to make it narrower, the easier to watch and control. In every store, there is a line in front of the cashier, who gives the customer a receipt proving he has paid for the items he wants, and a line in front of the counter where the receipt is then shown and the items given. In the street, someone opens a box and begins to sell its contents. A line materializes from the masses hurrying home: a line of quiet and resigned faces, of people sometimes innocent of what is being sold but willing to stop for anything that might be available.

Lately, bed linen has been in short supply; the box might contain bed linen. Sometimes it is toilet paper. Sometimes the manager of a restaurant, not having used up his meat delivery that week or having decided to sell part of it for some other reason, sets up a box of it on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant, or in the courtyard behind, inviting a line of customers who know they might not find such meat in a store.

For the foreigner, too, the Soviet Union is a land of single file—more comfortable than for the Soviet citizen, certainly more privileged, but even more controlled. If a hotel has eight doors at its entrance, only one is unlocked, with a guard posted at it to exclude those without passes. A foreigner wishing to meet with a Soviet colleague may not simply walk in off the street. Nor may he even call up and walk in. He has to make arrangements with the proper authorities, who have to give their approval for the meeting, usually long in advance, and only after they have assured themselves that the approval will not lead to trouble, trouble for which the approver might have to pay.

During a recent visit to Russia, this foreigner entered the designated doors, showed the required passes, and obtained the necessary approvals. But he also found other doors to open and nonofficials to see. And in experiencing the control, as well as in evading it, he encountered a life very different from his own.

It is very different, first of all, to be afraid to write. It is an

odd sensation for a visitor who has been a scribbler for years to realize that any scribble might be taken from him at his departure or even before, and used against him—or worse, used against someone he has mentioned by name or even against someone he has left unnamed but recognizable.

Only in the Caucasus, in Georgia and Armenia, did I feel safe taking notes in public. Though Stalin's image is still engraved on Georgian buildings, his name still attached to Georgian streets, and his memory still alive as a local boy who made good, a foreigner writing in a small hand in a tiny notebook on a park bench in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, provokes little notice. And in Yerevan, Armenia's capital, he even elicits friendly interest. "What are you writing about?" curious Armenians asked me every few minutes. "I'm writing about Lenin," I answered, sitting under a huge statue of the man.

Getting and Spending

More than one Armenian asked me for an appointment or, more precisely, pressed one upon me. "I'll meet you under Lenin's statue at 8:00 P.M.!" Or, "You'll have dinner in that restaurant? I'll find you there, don't worry!" Most just wanted to talk with someone from the outside. One, a 38-year-old engineer, brought his young son to our meeting. Learning that I was a physician, the engineer told me that he had just visited a clinic because of some pains, for which he had been given pills. After hearing about the pains—in his chest, in his left arm, and only after exercise—I told him it didn't require a physician to make a diagnosis of possible heart disease.

Had he been told that? He hadn't. Did he know what kinds of pills he'd been given? He didn't. Did anyone tell him about the need for more tests? No. About the need to reconsider his diet and habits of life? No, even though most of the food he ate was fat—butter, cheese, oil, sausage—heavily laced with salt and usually followed by tobacco. I penciled a note suggesting some tests to the doctor he had seen and wondered why this intelligent man had received only veterinary care.

Younger Armenians were more forward. A 16-year-old, like

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The painted word means "white." Westerners would consider this a harmless "sight gag." In the USSR, it is daring political commentary.

a 15-year-old before him and a 13-year-old before him, asked me if I would be willing to exchange my dollars for his rubles, or to sell him a pair of jeans or anything American. I told him I wouldn't. Why won't you? he asked. Because I'm afraid, I explained; the last thing I wanted, I told him, was to visit a Soviet jail. "Don't worry," he assured me, "Soviet law doesn't reach here." He proudly displayed a Japanese calculator watch he had bought on the black market for 150 rubles—about \$210 at the official exchange rate. I told him that in the United States such a watch could be bought, in a store, for \$25. Yes, he said, he knew that, and he was just in the process of figuring out how to get to Los Angeles. Did I know an Armenian-American girl who might come to marry him? He could make it worth her while.

Armenians often asked me, before asking anything else, how much money I earned. An electrician wanted to know how much American electricians made. And American factory workers—how much do they take home? He quickly calculated that many of them earned enough to buy a car every few months. I cautioned him about such simple calculations. Had he heard about housing costs and heating bills? Such expenditures are, by comparison, minuscule in the Soviet Union.

Never mind, he answered. The differences are still amazing.

He earns, he pointed out, 1,800 rubles a year—about \$2,500 at the official exchange rate. True, his apartment is cheap. But it is small and crowded. And true, he earns something on the side—he admitted to doubling his income by illegally painting apartments on weekends, sometimes during his regular working hours, for people who are unwilling to wait five years for their official paint jobs. But the paint costs him dearly: The middleman who sells it to him gets it from a trucker who delivers for the paint warehouse, and the trucker, who had to pay a union secretary 1,000 rubles to land his lucrative job, charges twice the official price for every can, not always of the right color, that he smuggles out.

Unrequited Consumerism

Besides, the electrician and others pointed out to me, there's more to life than a roof over your head and cheap heat. Food staples are affordable, if you're willing to spend your time waiting for them. But so much else is beyond most people's range. A small car costs about 7,000 rubles. And for the privilege of paying that sum, equal to several years of your total income, you have the choice of either waiting a decade for your name to reach the top of the car-purchase list or pushing it to the top by paying someone on the side—unless, of course, you have special connections or earn the privilege of buying a car by your loyal devotion to the factory or the party.

A man's suit, often poorly made, costs as much in Yerevan or Moscow as in New York: 125 to 150 rubles. A vinyl briefcase—leather cases are rarely seen—costs 20 rubles, and a piece of vinyl luggage, 50. A silk scarf is a fantastic luxury at 100 rubles. A color TV is 700 to 800 rubles; a stereo system, 200 to 800; a small gas range, 135; and a clothes washer, 495. Some items are tolerably priced: a man's necktie at 2 rubles; a cup of coffee, mostly ersatz but warm and very sweet, in a stand-up café, at 22 kopecks; a pack of cigarettes, 60 kopecks; and a hula hoop, 2 rubles 20 kopecks. But a soccer ball can set you back 25 rubles; a pair of vinyl shoes, the same amount; a jogging suit, if you must have one, 55 rubles; and a portable typewriter, 150.

In short, except for the necessities, those consumer goods that are available in the Soviet Union, regardless of quality, cost as much as or more than they cost in the West; while Soviet consumers have about one-fourth as much as their Western counterparts to spend on such consumption. What is worse, prices for some consumer goods, including staples, were raised shortly after Yuri V. Andropov, the new Soviet leader, came to power.

And yet, ironically, in a country where consumer goods are unavailable or exorbitantly priced, and where there is little advertising, they form the core of some people's lives, if not in fact then in desire, no less than they do in the West. The home—and mind—of one scientist I met was centered on his video gadgetry. As even a visa to Bulgaria was hard to obtain, he pointed out, there was nowhere interesting to go, and with only *Pravda* and the like on the newsstands, there was nothing interesting to read. And so, he explained, he had plenty of time to tinker with his video recorder; although, he sadly admitted, there was nothing from the official airwaves that he wanted to record.

Toasting Kiev

Which is not to say that the Soviet airwaves carry nothing to commend them. To be sure, much of Soviet television is tiresome—more tiresome, no doubt, to a Soviet citizen than to a curious Westerner. Most movies, for example, seem to be about either the Great Patriotic War or a crisis on a collective farm. In the war movies, the ideals of Marxism-Leninism lead the soldier to victory; or, if he's mortally wounded, then those ideals, expressed through his selflessness and articulated in a protracted final speech, lead his battalion to victory. In the collective farm crisis movies, the chairman, usually young and animated by those same ideals, has to do battle with those who would take the easy road.

In the war films, at least there are battle scenes to liven the action. The collective farm movies, by contrast, are filled with meetings in which the idealistic chairman argues against those of his workers whose faith is imperfect or, back in the capital, against those of his superiors whose vision is less pure. Eventually he manages, through effort and persistence, to gain his objective—to transport the bread across the frozen tundra or grow the wheat where no one thought it could ever grow—and he wins his medal, not to mention the girl.

Some television fare, on the other hand, is extraordinarily professional. For example, in celebration of Kiev's 1,500th anniversary last year, the Soviets aired an extravaganza of awesome proportions executed with utter perfection. A cross between Ziegfeld and Ed Sullivan, it offered to all Soviet viewers—all, because no other television program was allowed to compete with it—act after complicated act, as exquisitely arranged as any Bolshoi production. A hundred Ukrainian dancers were followed by 200 Ukrainian singers. As each act ended after only a few minutes on the giant, multimedia stage, the stage itself

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Refuseniks—they call themselves that, using the English word with the Russian suffix—gather Friday and Saturday evenings in front of the synagogue on Moscow's Arkhipova Street. A policeman passes by occasionally; playing children pay no attention in a yard nearby.

Inside the synagogue, old men chant old tunes. On the wall, in large letters, in Yiddish, is painted a prayer for the well-being of the Soviet government. A young woman with long red hair, carrying a small child, rushes up to the oldest of the men to beg advice. First she tries in broken Yiddish, then discovers that his Russian is as good as hers. It is a domestic problem, and she thought someone in the synagogue could help. The man hesitates. He seems unaccustomed to the role of rabbi—or psychiatrist.

Services, at least this Saturday evening, are in the small chapel on the side, the *bais hamedrish*; there aren't enough worshipers, barely a *minyan*, to make use of the main chapel itself. A middle-aged man approaches a stranger to ask where he is from. Really? America? He wants to know about Israel. Is what he has read really true, that no one can find a job there? That it is impossible to live? That everyone is leaving? That there is nothing to eat?

The refuseniks, for their part, stay outside. Most are not religious, but many speak Hebrew they have learned in small groups, groups whose teachers are harassed and sometimes arrested. A young American Jew, religious, is visiting Moscow with his new bride; they have made plans to emigrate to Israel upon their return to the States; he answers the refuseniks' questions. The refuseniks' Hebrew has a truer accent than his. While my arrival on Arkhipova Street was an accident of schedule, the visit of this American couple was the purpose of their trip. For them it was a *mitzvah* to give succor.

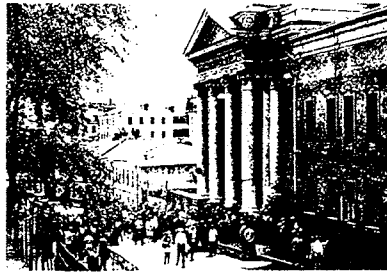
And succor they need. They look crazed. Not crazy, crazed. As Jews, they are already members of a group that has been pushed outside the life of Russia; as refuseniks, they are doubly outside. Fired from their jobs, identified as traitors, all they have is one another—and the occasional foreigner who stops in their city to tell them there is a world outside. During the 1970s, when emigration was at its peak, many Jews had applied for exit visas. In 1979, 51,320 were allowed to go. Since then, the door has virtually been sealed shut, due partly to souring East-West relations and partly to reasons that are still obscure. In 1982, only 2,688 got out. Earlier this year, the rate of

moved off, carrying away the old act and bringing in the new. If the Soviets can fight a war as efficiently and flawlessly as they can put on a show, we are all in trouble.

Still, it is not entertainment to which the Soviet media are most devoted. Television, at least as much as the newspapers, is

emigration fell to a few dozen a month. Those who have sought documents that would permit them to apply to emigrate—a group numbering at least 350,000—have grown increasingly desperate. And most desperate of all are the roughly 15,000 who have actually applied and whose applications have been refused.

One young man standing outside the synagogue, perhaps 20 years old, his speech damaged by a severe lisp, wants to know my views on religion. He is himself very religious. Not only does he wear a hat; he also wears earlocks, like the religious Jews who used to live in Eastern Europe and the Chassidim who now live in Brooklyn. Ten years ago, there was probably no one in Russia who looked like that. Where did he learn to look like that? Even now, there may be only a handful. Are his parents religious? No, he responds, not at all. What do they think of his ways? They have learned to live with them. Where did he learn the laws? He learned Hebrew, and then he read. But what about the traditions, the things that aren't in the books, the things you learn from your home, the things you have to see in order to do? He heard about them, and then he carried them out in his fashion. Does he have a job, looking like that? No, he works as an artist. An artist? Yes, he paints pictures.



One refusenik, in his late 20s, is a former engineer. After applying to emigrate, both he and his wife lost their jobs. Their applications were refused, and they have been without work for two years. He asks me to help him practice his English, which he learned while jobless. I assume he feels desperate, but he tells me that he is not. There is a little food, people help, and it looks as if he might find work as a laborer.

Two economics students carrying briefcases stop by. They do so every Saturday. One, dark, is a Jew from central Asia; the other has a Jewish father and a Russian mother. The half-Jew is upset because someone has just told him that, according to Jewish law, one can be a Jew only if one's mother is a Jew. He wants to be a Jew. I ask him why. He says he feels it in his bones.

—W.R.

a means for the transmission of information; what is regarded as information is only what the government says it is. In the Soviet Union, all people, especially the leaders, want only peace; in the United States, many people, especially the leaders, are itching for war. In the Soviet Union, collective farms and factories

are daily exceeding their most vaunted expectations; in the United States, the results of exploitative capitalism are dragging all sectors of production into an economic abyss.

When, during my visit, U.S. unemployment figures reached a postwar high, a Soviet TV correspondent in New York confided to his audience back home that the true figures were, of course, much higher than those reported by the U.S. government, as could be seen in the accompanying shots of Harlem slums, Bowery bums, and Broadway bag ladies. Yet, the correspondent added grimly, despite the inevitably dismal state of the American economy, the United States was pouring billions of dollars into arms. The screen then filled with Vietnam-era clips of American soldiers boarding troop carriers and American fighter-jets poised menacingly on military runways.

Fooling Some of the People . . .

I began to understand, watching this night after night, what I had been hearing day after day. In talking with waiters, taxi drivers, students, and scientists, I repeatedly heard that, of course, the United States is planning for war. Maybe not all Americans want war, but certain circles in America do. Businessmen do. Reagan does. He refuses to rule out first use of nuclear weapons. He is probably planning a war right now!

When I first heard that, I thought it was a line inevitably fed to a foreigner. But I began to realize that I was hearing it even from those who were willing to express their antipathy to Soviet life and their sympathy with American ways. Could it be that they really believed their own media? It could be. If the same thing is said again and again, in every place one looks, without variation or demurral, how could it not sink in?

One evening, sharing a meal with Russian intellectuals, some of whom had lived for years on the fringes of artistic dissent, and all of whom had deep reservations about Soviet politics and culture, I asked whether I had simply been taken in by those I had met, or whether my sample of contacts was too small or too skewed to reflect common attitudes. I hadn't been taken in, they assured me. The Soviet media have really been successful in presenting the government's case on the question of war and peace. Not everyone believes everything, but many believe much of it. In the large cities, perhaps 50 percent believe 50 percent of it; elsewhere in the country, among groups with little sophistication, the figures may be higher, much higher. What, I wondered, does that portend?

One of the newest fashions among Soviet youth is the sport-

ing of jackets, sweaters, or sweatshirts imprinted with the insignia of American universities: UCLA, Ohio State, Stanford. Those who cannot get the originals create their own. One young Leningrader wore a white jacket with a dark blue Y sewn on the back, the letter in a shape not to be seen on real Yale jackets.

An older fad, popular among all ages, is the wearing of lapel pins. Some of these *znachki* simply depict a monument in Moscow, Leningrad, or some other city, serving thereby to identify the wearer's home town. Most, though, depict revolutionary themes and figures. There is one of Feliks Dzerzhinskii, the first head of the Cheka (forerunner of the KGB), who energetically eliminated the early counterrevolutionaries. But most are of Lenin. There are some of Lenin with a cap, some of him without; some of Lenin within a star, some of him within an iridescent circle. And there are some of Lenin as a child.

The Lenin-child struck me as odd at first, but then as altogether logical. The country is full of cities, squares, streets, and parks named for the man; of monuments built in his image; of houses where he lived, slept, ate, and wrote. Beatification and deification have been going on for some time. Lenin was not only the founder; he was the First Cause. Relics of his life are preserved and cherished, and Russians think nothing of waiting in line for six hours to view his remains.

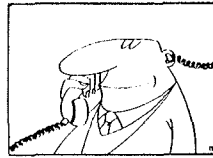
... Some of the Time

Whether Yuri Andropov will ever become the object of a similar process of sanctification is, at this point, still unclear. To be sure, attempts, albeit limited ones, were made to exalt if not sanctify Andropov's immediate predecessor. During much of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, the front pages of Soviet newspapers were plastered with his pictures and speeches, his name was mentioned frequently and everywhere, and his likeness appeared on posters and billboards almost half as often as Lenin's. The building-sized billboard renditions showed, until the very end, a vigorous man in his mid-40s, and were accompanied by a quote from him about the future or about peace. During his last few years, however, such displays were given the lie by the reality recorded by television cameras. The nightly news, though strictly edited, revealed an old man seated in place, not just aging but superannuated. Of such stuff, personality cults were hard to make. Now that he is dead, many of the billboards have come down. Brezhnev is mentioned less and less frequently, though his successor has arranged for an obscure city on the Kama River, formerly named Naberezhnye Chelny or "Dugout

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

I asked a young Leningrad radio engineer why it was so hard to find a telephone directory in the Soviet Union. The question irritated him. "Foreigners always ask me, 'Why don't you have telephone directories?' 'Why don't you have computers?' 'Why don't you have consumer goods?' Well, why do you in America *have* telephone directories? Why do you *have* computers? Why do I have to explain why we *don't*? Why is it so normal to have telephone directories?"

In the Soviet Union, at least, it isn't normal. One person I asked told me that not providing directories saved paper. Another said that it was done for reasons of security: The less access there is to information, the less likely that somebody, especially a foreigner, might use it for some nefarious end. Once, wanting to reach a Muscovite by phone, and not having his number, I asked a hotel clerk for the number of the information operator. The clerk, a middle-aged woman, who until then had always had a smile for me, suddenly looked at me with open suspicion. "The number of the information operator? There *is* no information operator!" "But how do you look up a number?" "You don't look it up; you have to have it." "But how do you get it?" "The person you want to call has to give it to you." "But what if you don't know that person?" "Then why would you want to call him? Besides," she asked, "whom do you want to call?"



—W.R.

Banks," to be renamed in his honor.

In Leningrad, another city named in someone's honor, there is an apartment house with one of the finest views in town. It is situated along the embankment of the grand Neva River, not far from the spot where the cruiser *Aurora*, whose gun supposedly signaled the start of the October Revolution, is moored. For a friend who has lived in Leningrad all his life, that building, identified on no tourist map, symbolizes the modern history of the city and the country better than any other.

"That apartment house was built some years after the Revolution for those persons who had been exiled by the Tsar. They were invited back to the country, and they were 'given' apartments in that building. In this country, by the way, you don't rent an apartment; you're 'given' it. In fact, that word has acquired such a usage here. When you see an old *babushka* lumbering down the street with oranges, and you want to know where she bought them, you ask her, 'Where were they given?'

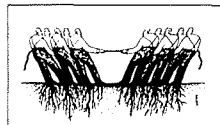
The authorities want you to feel that everything you have is from them, that it was awarded to you as a gift, a kindness.

“Anyway, those apartments in that building were ‘given’ to those former exiles and to Old Bolsheviks. By 1939, at the end of the period of Stalin’s great purges, the building was empty. Then loyal party officials were given apartments in that building, but workers started agitating and complaining. Why give such desirable apartments to party officials when workers have no place to live? And so there was a minor scandal, and the building was emptied again and the apartments ‘given’ to workers. Of course, the party officials found even better apartments elsewhere.”

This same Leningrader is the most “American” Russian I know. Not that he has ever been in America, but he acts like an American in Russia. And that causes him endless trouble.

His main problem is that he likes to be open. He refuses to censor himself. While others simply accept the inconsistencies in Soviet life between what is and what is supposed to be, he makes a point of exposing them. If some act is permitted in theory but forbidden in practice, he deliberately does it and points, as if naively, to the clause in the regulations that permits it. Even—in fact, especially—at his job. The most productive worker there, he gives his superiors only grief. He is always questioning their principles. And his boss has begun, of late, to accuse him of being obsessed, paranoid, crazy.

Once, intending to have dinner at a restaurant, we encountered a line. For me, it was just another Soviet line, and I automatically placed myself at its end. My friend, for his part, walked up to the entrance of the restaurant and peered inside. He saw what those waiting patiently at the head of the line also saw: Half the tables were empty, the waitresses idle and gossiping. He called over the restaurant manager. “What’s going on here?” he demanded of her. “Is this a way to treat Soviet people? Why do we have to wait in line?” She looked at him as if he were mad. The people in line shuffled in embarrassment. He was acting like an American in the land of single file. And I, the American, was embarrassed by my own embarrassment.



THE ROCK INUNDATION

by S. Frederick Starr

In 1946, Winston Churchill declared that an Iron Curtain was descending on Europe, dividing East from West. The metaphor was apt.

As Stalin saw it, the curtain of isolation had two functions. First, it was to shelter the people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe from the disruptive influence of the West. Second, it was to provide a secure environment in which ordinary mortals could be transformed into exemplars of the New Soviet Man.

It never worked this way. Russians, being a resourceful people, found countless ways of drilling at least small holes through the barriers separating them from the West. Through these breaches, they informed themselves on everything from science and technology to modern art, from Harold Robbins to Andy Warhol. Many Soviet citizens became quite capable of forming their own opinions on issues, rather than simply accepting the government's view on the Great Questions of the Day.

Of all foreign influences, those that Soviet leaders feared most emanated from the United States. The fear was justified. It was precisely the United States about which the Soviet public was most curious and from which it was most eager to borrow. In spite of an official Soviet campaign of vituperation, the United States after 1945 emerged in Russian minds as the most pertinent model for their own country's development. For all its power, the Soviet state was unable to dissuade large parts of the educated public from this view.

Soviet popular culture, dominated as it was by American taste and fashion, provides some particularly vivid examples. From the late 1940s through the 1960s, millions of Soviet youths were raised on jazz. So strong was the public's attachment to what the government called "the music of spiritual poverty" that jazz could not be repressed. It had to be co-opted. And so Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, opened jazz clubs across the Soviet Union. For several years during the 1960s, it looked as if this unruly music had been tamed.

But then the public's taste in music suddenly shifted. The government once again found itself in the position of following rather than forming public values. By 1973, Moscow jazz critic Arkadii Petrov could observe ruefully that "Rock has invaded



The Leningrad rock group, Aquarium. The present young adult generation is the first to share fully in European and American popular culture.

the big cities where jazz festivals used to be held, while jazz festivals have moved to small towns. . . ."

Rock music had indeed taken over. The throb of electric guitars was heard where avant-garde free jazz had recently reigned. Songs of reckless desire, broken hearts, and broken lives replaced the abstract improvisations of hard bop. The modern jazz revolution of the late 1950s had been swept aside by the music of the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Stevie Wonder, and the Shadows.

A hint of the change in popular taste was evident as early as 1957 at the VI World Youth Festival in Moscow. Many of the visiting performers shocked the Russians with their bizarre dress and offensive music. The journal *Soviet Culture* received more than a few letters complaining about the foreigners' "stiliagi jackets, trousers, and wild haircuts," and songs like "Crazy Rhythm" and "Rock 'n' Roll."* None of the letter-writers was quite sure whether rock 'n' roll was a song or a style of music, but it certainly was not good. Another early public performance

**Stiliagi*, meaning style-seeking or, more loosely, beatnik.

of rock music in the USSR was in a 1958 theatrical scene representing Hell. And when in 1960 Igor Moiseev's renowned folk-dance troupe worked up a satire on American rock music, it was titled "Back to the Monkeys." Poor Moiseev must have been thunderstruck when Moscow audiences burst into applause at the rambunctious music and remained indifferent to the satire.

In the West, rock music was still in its infancy. Elvis Presley's "Don't Be Cruel" and "Hound Dog" were hit songs in the United States only the year before the Moscow Youth Festival. Yet recordings of these works, not to mention hits by Chubby Checker and Bill Haley, were available even in the Russian provinces within the year, reproduced on x-ray plates. The youth of Khrushchev's Russia soaked up the new music like blotters. Working-class Soviet youngsters were especially receptive. The long-haired imitators of the Beatles who appeared in the provincial city of Petrozavodsk late in 1964 were proletarian *stiliagi*, failing students and dropouts, to whom "making it" seemed a futile, and certainly an uninspiring, dream.

Little Red Devils

Access to the new fashion was even less of a problem after 1967, when the Voice of America inaugurated a program devoted to rock and soul music. The growth of tourism and student exchanges opened unprecedented channels for acquiring the latest recordings by Bob Dylan, Aretha Franklin, the Jefferson Airplane, and others. But finding instruments on which to play the new music was as difficult as it had been for Soviet jazz musicians during the 1920s. Electric guitars were not produced in the Soviet Union. They were, however, manufactured in Poland and East Germany, and exchange students from those countries did a thriving underground business at universities and technical institutes. Guitars sold for 300 to 400 rubles (then equivalent to about \$330 to \$440) during the 1960s, and

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amplifiers—provided they were available—for 1,000 rubles. In 1966, the East German government opened in Moscow a store called Leipzig, offering 10 electric guitars for sale on its first business day. All were sold within minutes to blackmarketers and resold at a 200 percent markup.

Some guitarists built their own equipment. A young Moscow rock musician named Yuri Valov consulted electrician friends, copied published photographs, and “followed straight logic” to construct his own guitar and amplifier. Demand was so great that unofficial manufacturers set up shop in many Soviet cities. Tens of thousands of instruments were produced in the private “second economy” and distributed through the black market. Many of the guitars were terrible, but a few were of exceptionally high quality. Gena Kolmakov, a black-market manufacturer in Odessa, copied Fender and Marshall instruments so beautifully, adding improvements in the process, that foreign musicians visiting Odessa on cruise ships would exchange the genuine articles for his forgeries.

Rock music was, of course, officially banned by the regime, and when the Beatles craze hit Russia during the mid-1960s, efforts to reinforce the ban were strengthened. These efforts backfired disastrously. By reinforcing the sense of generational confinement on which rock music fed, the prohibition created a vital underground culture, featuring such groups as the Eagle, the Guys, the Little Red Devils, the Scythians, and the Melomanes. Most of these bands were organized by students to play for dances at technical institutes and universities, but they all gradually turned professional.

Cultivating Deviance

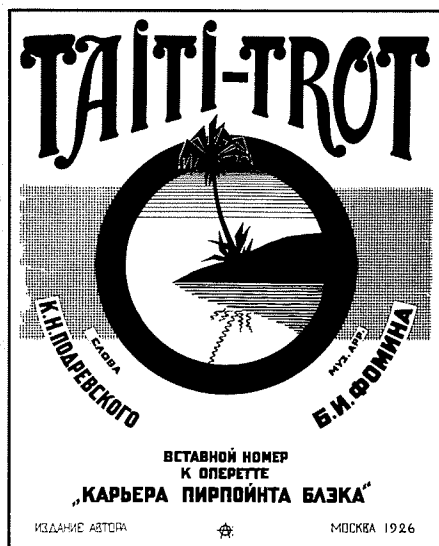
Scores of new rock bands sprang up in the Moscow region every year, but Moscow was by no means the rock capital of the Soviet Union. Baku was several years ahead of Moscow, according to musicians familiar with both cities. Musicians in Riga, Tallinn, and the major cities in the Caucasus were equally quick to take up the latest fashions in rock. All Soviet rock groups during the late 1960s reflected the strong influence of British bands. Cliff Richards’s Shadows were as popular as the Beatles, and the Dakotas and the Animals followed closely behind.

In fact, an Animals’ recording provided the name for one of the best Moscow rock bands of the period, the Winds of Change. Sasha Lehrman was an 18-year-old cello student at the distinguished Gnesin School of Music in Moscow when he became the group’s leader in 1967. He and four other cellists at the school—

two of them promising students of Mstislav Rostropovich—had earlier formed a rock group so successful that Lehrman decided to turn professional. Members of the Winds of Change wrote most of their own lyrics. Their subjects were the classic themes of love and loss, sung with an honesty and sincerity long absent from products of the official music industry. “We were political by being unpolitical,” recalled Lehrman.

Numerous bands, including the Winds of Change, sang many of their lyrics in English. Besides testifying to the Soviet educational system’s commendable emphasis on foreign languages, the practice was a deliberate affront to the older generation. Among the young, English was a cult language, like Latin for the educated of much earlier generations. Terms such as “underground,” “bit grupa,” “rock bend,” “grupi,” and “sashon” (i.e., session, meaning any rock event) came into general usage. Many Soviet rock groups even wrote their original lyrics in English.

The world of rock encouraged “social deviance” as an end in itself. Marijuana and alcohol were common in the rock underground, although hard drugs were rare outside Moscow. Men sported long hair and pleated bell-bottom trousers ornamented with gold buttons down the outer seams; neckties, required of all male students, were abandoned in favor of gaudy open-necked shirts with strings of beads showing. Women wore



As early as the 1920s, young people in the Soviet Union had turned away from “dull, deadly, and gray” official music, preferring Western imports like Vincent Youman’s “Tea for Two,” which Dmitri Shostakovich arranged as a fox trot for orchestra called “Tahiti Trot.”

miniskirts, loose hair, and heavy eye make-up. Every major city acquired sleazy hangouts for the local rock 'n' roll set.

The cultivation of purposeful deviance and outright rebellion among Soviet youth reached a new high with the appearance during the late 1970s of aggressively antisocial punk and heavy metal bands. Such groups deliberately assaulted respectable society with garish costumes, ferocious volume, and obscene lyrics. Most cities managed to stamp out the more offensive bands, but punk groups appeared with some frequency at dances at Batumi and other Black Sea resorts. The nearby Georgian Republic was far more tolerant of rock music than was the Russian Republic, and a number of fairly provocative bands like the Varazi flourished there.

Armenia's "Woodstock"

The combination of enormous public demand and ineffectual official opposition enabled rock music to develop a complex and efficient organizational network. At the center stood a group of private entrepreneurs, the "organizers" (*organizatori*), who formed bands, booked concerts, and accumulated large bankrolls. A few of these promoters were themselves musicians, including a grandson of Presidium member Anastas Mikoyan, who founded the popular and successful band, the Flowers. Most were pure impresarios. Typical was Yuri Eisenspitz, the organizer, manager, and financier of the popular Moscow rock band, the Eagle. Clean-shaven, conservatively dressed, and entirely conformist in appearance, the young Eisenspitz is said to have made a fortune in the unofficial market in furs. His real love was putting together rock events.

To stage the events, Eisenspitz and other organizers took advantage of opportunities to rent the cafés and restaurants that the government makes available cheaply for weddings and anniversary parties. The budget for a typical evening might include: 400 rubles for the hall, 300 rubles for the band, and 500 rubles for food and liquor (purchased in the semilegal "second economy" at bargain prices). To offset these expenses, an organizer might charge 10 rubles a head and expect 200 people, yielding 800 rubles profit, the equivalent of several months' wages for a typical Soviet worker. Eisenspitz deemed it prudent to hire two burly bodyguards to accompany him on his rounds.

To avoid entanglements with the police, promoters like Eisenspitz preferred to stage their events on the outskirts of big cities, at suburban cafés such as the Northern near Moscow. There were police raids from time to time, although until the

late 1960s and early '70s they rarely led to jailings. Indeed, the situation was sufficiently loose and lucrative to attract far more daring impresarios than Eisenspitz. The unquestioned king of Soviet rock entrepreneurs, the Bill Graham of the USSR, was an Armenian, Rafail Mkrtchian. When he burst on the rock scene, "Rafik" Mkrtchian was in his early 40s and balding. Temperamental and shrewd, he remains a shadowy figure, even to those who worked for him. "I never asked about [his background], he never volunteered," recalled Sasha Lehrman.

Particularly murky are Mkrtchian's dealings with Komso-mol in the Armenian capital of Yerevan. Presumably through Mkrtchian's efforts, the Young Communist officials were talked into lending their organization's name to the annual Festival of Rock Music, the first of which he mounted in Yerevan in 1969. For several years, the event was an annual Soviet Woodstock, attended by 5,000–8,000 people daily over several weekends.

Each winter, Mkrtchian scoured the Soviet Union for the best bands and personally invited them to participate in his May festival at Yerevan's Palace of Sports. The events were well advertised locally on billboards, but the rest of the Soviet citizenry learned of the festival only by word of mouth. The musicians dealt exclusively with Mkrtchian. Participating bands came from Moscow, Leningrad, Latvia, Estonia, and Georgia. Their performances were completely free of control by the Repertory Commission or other censors. Thanks to Mkrtchian's protection, Armenia became the Mecca of Soviet rock music.

Cracking Down

The parallels between Mkrtchian's Armenian rock festivals and the Woodstock festival were deliberate, although the former were infinitely more sedate. Mkrtchian even attempted to produce a film of the Armenian Woodstock in 1972. Four of the biggest rock stars in the Soviet Union formed a new group for the occasion. Leonid Berger, formerly of the Orpheus band, played piano and sang in the style of his idol, Ray Charles. The bassist and the guitarist came from the Scythians, while Yuri Fokin, soon to enter an Orthodox Christian monastery but for the time being the best rock drummer in Russia, provided rhythm. The film was produced but never released. Mkrtchian, it seems, had failed to share enough of his profits with Armenian officials. He was jailed for 10 years. Musicians who played in the 1972 festival were interrogated. Eisenspitz and other successful promoters were rounded up as well.

Rock music had gotten out of hand, and most attempts to

curb it were too primitive to be effective. In Leningrad, however, a crisis in 1967 led to a "solution" that was widely emulated elsewhere. One of the most popular local rock bands, the Argonauts, had been engaged to perform at the Polytechnic Institute. The hall was packed with students and rock fans, among whom word had spread that this was to be a wild evening. The fans drank vodka and smoked marijuana in the hall. When the Argonauts performed, a few fans attacked the stage and began shouting and grabbing the musicians. The incident led to a special session of the City Committee of the Communist Party and a decree asserting official control over all vocal-guitar bands in Leningrad. Amateur groups were forbidden to perform in public until they had passed official censorship at the House of Public Creativity. The Leningrad Artistic Council was made directly accountable to the local party.

The Turning Point

The ensuing effort at co-optation penetrated even to the high schools. In 1968, a group of 10th graders at Special English School No. 185 in Leningrad wanted to form a rock band modeled on the Beatles. They were permitted to do so and were even invited to participate in a citywide competition of rock bands run by the Palace of Pioneers. But a special instructor would arrive periodically at the school to check on the band's repertoire. Not only did he review the entire tune list and select songs that were appropriate for the competition, but he provided succinct critical advice, such as "This is too loud," or "This part is too Western." In spite of all his efforts, the final competition, held in the spring of 1968 at the Palace of Pioneers and open only to Komsomol activists, included many long-haired musicians playing pure Western-style rock music.

A more sinister form of surveillance was exercised in Moscow. The most serious attempt to exert official control over rock in the capital came with the creation of the Beat Club at Moscow's Melody and Rhythm Café in 1969. Komsomol was its nominal sponsor. In reality, it was a KGB operation from the outset. Many of the best rock musicians in the capital were enticed onto the new club's board, which then announced that it would hold open auditions for members. Promises of concerts, imported instruments and amplifiers, and foreign tours produced a long waiting list of those wishing to register. But registration was no simple matter. It involved filling out a long questionnaire touching on every aspect of the applicant's biography. Still, the applications flowed in. Once registration was

completed, however, the club's activities began to dwindle. One band was sent on tour to Africa and the Middle East, but suspicions grew among the musicians. When the Beat Club was finally disbanded a year later, everyone was disenchanted except the KGB, which had acquired full dossiers on hundreds of the best rock musicians of Greater Moscow.

This devious episode did not quell the underground rock movement, but it did mark a turning point. Henceforth, rock music became a major concern of Komsomol and the state-run variety agencies. In order to pre-empt the private market, salary ceilings for officially approved musicians were raised enormously. With most of the "organizers" in jail, the leading stars bought off, and the Armenian Woodstock shut down, rock music appeared to have been neutralized by 1972.

"Rah, Rah, Rasputin"

But consumer preferences didn't change. The better rock musicians understood this and tried to stay close to the public's tastes. The Singing Guitars of Leningrad, one of the first official rock groups to appear, succeeded by borrowing heavily from the repertoires and styles of the unofficial groups. Not all official rock musicians felt the need to respond to their audiences, however. After all, the state concert agencies, not the public, directly paid their salaries. Therefore, it was only the bureaucrats who had to be pleased. The Blue Guitars, a commercial outfit under the Moscow Concert Agency, gradually evolved into a bland and old-fashioned variety show. Igor Granov, their businessman-organizer, mixed Russian folk tunes and maudlin ballads with the band's other numbers by the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix. Conservative officials liked the act and sent the group on tour to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America.

For every polished official group like the Blue Guitars, there were dozens that turned to mush under the combined pressures of commercialism, official prudery, and freedom from competition. The Happy Guys were formed in 1968 to present an image of healthy Soviet youths to young audiences. They were a study in officially sponsored prissiness from the start, even though the group boasted several very capable musicians and an eclectic repertoire including many Western tunes. The Balladeers from Minsk were similar, although their use of folk instruments led them down original paths, and their greater distance from Moscow permitted them to be slightly bolder in setting their own course.

The government's commitment to détente during the 1970s

complicated its effort to control rock music. As a sign of improved diplomatic relations with the West, a number of American and European rock bands were permitted to tour the USSR. New York's Joffrey Ballet brought along a small rock group called the Vegetables on their 1975 tour, and the following year the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band performed a foot-stomping blend of rock and country music while on a cross-country tour. In Yerevan, 6,000 fans clapped and danced inside the hall where they performed, while another 15,000 without tickets surged against the outside gates until they were dispersed by police tear gas. Rhythm-and-blues star B. B. King's 1979 tour received no advance publicity but produced hordes of ticket scalpers in every city, as well as a near-riot in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, where two people sat in each seat in the theater.

By the late 1970s, the Soviet bureaucracy had accepted rock music as an unavoidable social reality. Officially sponsored rock festivals were held in various parts of the country, the Estonians taking the lead with the Muusikapäevad in 1979 and the Tartu rock festival in 1980. Lyrics were still closely censored, and anything resembling pornography forbidden. The government tried to foster homegrown tunes drawing on nationalistic subjects. Rock was even exploited for anti-Western propaganda.

Official Soviet efforts to control popular music did succeed in buying off a few rock stars, but at the price of hardening the line between the official and unofficial and of confirming underground groups as the standard-bearers of heroic independence. Foreign influences continued to prevail: In 1979, Bob Dylan's album *Blood on the Tracks* was bringing 150 rubles on the black market in Moscow, more in the provinces. When the British rock group Boney M came to Moscow, it was forbidden to play its big hit, "Rah, Rah, Rasputin, Russia's Greatest Love Machine." Yet within a week, the house band at the rustic Saisare Restaurant in the remote Siberian city of Yakutsk was using its new synthesizer to perform the tune, over and over again. For all their efforts to guide popular taste, Soviet officials were still unable to do more than respond to the vital private market.



BRAVE NEW WORLDS

by John Glad

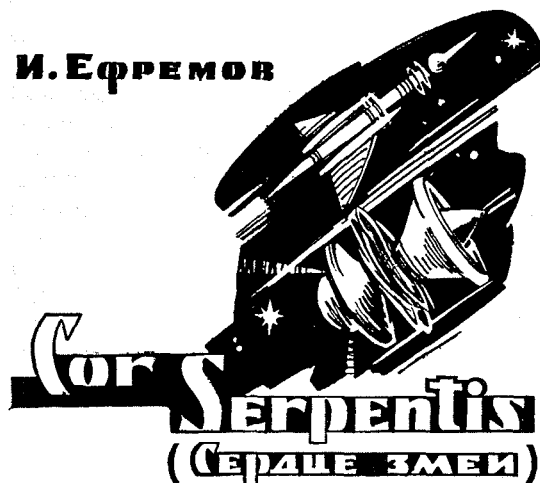
The next time you are in an American bookstore, take a look at the science-fiction section; in some stores, it is almost as big as all of the other fiction categories put together. Walk into a Soviet bookstore these days, and you'll find . . . probably no science fiction at all. Go to a Soviet secondhand bookshop, and your chances of finding science fiction there will be equally slim. But take a stroll past the Moscow Art Theater to where Pushkin Street intersects Kuznetskii Most, and you'll find what you're looking for—though not in a store.

The action is out in the street, where middle-aged men in old-fashioned caps gather in small groups with housewives and bright-eyed teenagers. A man of perhaps 35, wearing a mouse gray jacket, asks you in a low voice if you are a fan of Boris Leonidovich. He has a furtive look about him, and you stare at him in silence for a few seconds before you realize that he is referring to Pasternak. No, you say, you're interested in science fiction. "Aha," he responds, "Sasha's got a few things."

Sasha, it turns out, has volume 14 of a multi-volume anthology of science fiction. The back page says it was published in 1967 in an edition of 215,000 copies, and the list price is 93 kopecks. Sasha will let you have it for only 35 rubles—almost 40 times the official price. Aside from that, he has two well-thumbed issues of the magazine *Baikal*, each containing half of an anti-utopian novel—*The Snail on the Slope*—by Boris and Arkadii Strugatskii.

Anti-utopian fiction has not always received a warm welcome in the Soviet Union, though even the most conservative literary critics recognize that historical forces make some such literature inevitable. (As reviewers E. Brandis and D. Dmitrevskii once observed, "Vicious, slanderous, fantastic novels aimed against Marxism and the socialist state become more and more widespread as the crisis and decay of world capitalism increase.") The editors of *Baikal* were fired in 1968 for publishing the Strugatskii story, and copies of the offending issues were removed from libraries. For the two issues, Sasha wants 140 rubles, the average worker's salary for a month. And he will get it.

To say that science fiction—*nauchnaia fantastika*, or science fantasy, as it is known—is popular in the Soviet Union is an understatement. It is so popular that bookstores could not keep

И. ЕФРЕМОВ

Title page of Ivan Efremov's short story, "Serpent's Heart." More than Sputnik, Efremov's work during the 1950s helped to revive Soviet science fiction. It also sparked debate over what was permissible.

"sci-fi" novels in stock even back in the good old days—over a decade ago—when large quantities of science fiction were still being put out by Molodaia Guardiia, Znanie, Mir, and other publishing houses; and this despite the fact that pressruns of popular literature in the Soviet Union are typically much larger than they are in the United States. (The number of titles appearing in any one year, on the other hand, is considerably smaller.) Today, for reasons I will come to, almost no new science fiction is seeing print in the USSR. Yet the Soviet black market in science fiction, as with so many other consumer goods, is thriving.

The popularity of science fiction is not confined to some privileged "elite." A survey conducted in 1966 revealed that while 38 percent of science-fiction readers had completed higher education, 58 percent had at most a secondary education. While 39 percent of the readership was under age 20, 41 percent was over 30. Sci-fi was for a while a major part of the literary diet of an estimated one-quarter of the USSR's population—a higher proportion than that found in Britain, Japan, or the United States, the three other major consumers (and producers) of science fiction. And science fiction has apparently been quite influential in the Soviet Union. One study during the mid-1960s found that 40 percent of young physicists, astronomers, and astrophysicists first considered taking up their specialties after reading Ivan Efremov's *The Andromeda Nebula* (1957).

What accounts for the appeal of *nauchnaia fantastika*? To

begin with, reading per se is popular in the Soviet Union, there being few other ways to amuse oneself. (Until recently, books were also very cheap—the one item any Soviet citizen could actually afford to “collect.”) Science fiction has little competition from other types of “drugstore” pulp fiction: Louis L’Amour, John Jakes, Trevanian, and Barbara Cartland have no real counterparts in the USSR. Readers embrace sci-fi because much of it is devoid of the “socialist realism” that has enjoyed so long a reign in the Soviet Union. For their part, writers gravitate—or once did—toward science fiction because the shift to a different time period or planet allows them greater latitude politically. The usual official prescriptions about “depicting Soviet reality” are more easily ignored in the (at first glance) otherworldly setting. This “forbidden fruit” aspect, of course, has its dangers.

Urging on the Future

And not every author has been tempted. The writers of science fiction in the USSR have always been a varied lot—like their audience. There was Count Aleksei Tolstoi, a rich boy and distant relative of Leo Tolstoi. He emigrated from Russia after the 1917 Revolution but discovered that royalties were bigger back home and returned. There was Aleksandr Beliaev, a cripple who wrote gothic adventures from his bed. There were and are unrepentant Stalinists like Sergei Ivanov, still around to level critical blasts at “liberals” and other anti-regime types (whose names I prudently omit out of concern for their health). There are former liberals who have discovered that the pickings are richer in the official Writers’ Union circle. (I won’t name them either; who am I to disparage people who are simply trying to get through life by making “small accommodations”?)

I suspect also that science fiction appeals to some quality in the Russian soul. I say this because science fiction and its relatives have long been popular in Russia. Certain characteristics of Soviet society—its materialism, its glorification of technology—may enhance the attraction of science fiction, but the genre,

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or something like it, could be found in *Russian* society two centuries ago. In 1784, Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov wrote his *Voyage to the Land of Ofir*, wherein a shipwrecked Swedish nobleman discovers a somewhat technologically advanced, Rousseauesque society ruled by a benevolent monarch. Then, as now, the censor was no pushover, and the book was not actually published until 1896.

The Russians did not invent the utopian fantasy. Indeed, utopian tales appeared in Russia belatedly—in Shcherbatov's case, 268 years after Thomas More's *Utopia* was published in London and 85 years after François Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse* first appeared in Paris. Even so, the Russians quickly embraced the genre. In official eyes, it is today the most honored form of science fiction, the duty of the communist writer being, as critic Aleksandr Kazantsev put it in 1979, to "urge the people into the future which we are creating."

In 1830, Faddei Bulgarin published his *Believable Fantasies in the Twenty-Ninth Century*. In the novel, the narrator drowns but is entwined in a precious grass, *radix vitalis*, which revives him 1,000 years later. The future world is one of wealth, steam carriages, and submarines. Technology is not an unalloyed blessing, however. As Bulgarin writes, "Each woman carried on her left hand a leather shield covered with impenetrable lacquer to guard herself against immodest [male] eyes armed with telescopic lenses which were quite fashionable."

Retreat from Utopia

Telescopic lenses have not yet come to pass, but one feature of Prince Vladimir Fedorovich Odoevskii's *The Year 4338* (1840), another utopian novel, has. In that tale, people address each other as "comrade." Odoevskii's work, like Shcherbatov's, was a victim of tsarist censorship and circulated in handwritten manuscript form only, anticipating the underground *samizdat* literature of today's Soviet Union. The same was the case with Nikolai Chernyshevskii's revolutionary fantasy *What Is to Be Done?*, which greatly influenced young V. I. Lenin.

The optimistic tenor of Russian science fiction persisted through the 19th century. But in the decade prior to World War I, as if to herald the impending cataclysm of war and revolution, Russian writers took the lead in establishing the *anti-utopian* novel, or dystopia, as a distinct genre. It had been Leo Tolstoi, after all, who noted that while happy families were all alike, unhappy families were unhappy in different ways. The same held true, writers came to realize, for societies. In science fiction,

there was a certain sameness to utopias: Technology is triumphant, the social order humane, and all too often, as Aleksandr Beliaev observed during the 1930s, the characters run around in "clothing that reminds one of ancient Greek togas and tunics." Dystopias, by contrast, offered more variety.

One of the earliest examples of an anti-utopia was Valerii Briusov's *Republic of the Southern Cross* (1907). Briusov describes an industrial society created under glass at the South Pole. All of the people's needs—medicine, food, shelter—are provided by the government so that there is no need for money. Every aspect of the nation's life is regimented, clothing and architecture are monotonous, and meals are taken simultaneously. It is an utterly functional, utterly rational society. Eventually, however, the Republic is shaken by a strange disease—*mania contradicens*. People begin to do and say precisely the opposite of what they intend. The epidemic spreads rapidly. Murder, cannibalism, and violence of all sorts are rampant.

Briusov states that it is up to the historians to determine to what degree the structure of the state was responsible for the Republic's demise, but the message is clear. For obvious reasons, this work leaves modern Soviet critics cold.

Foiling Capitalists

The 1917 October Revolution marked the beginning of what would become a curious boom/bust cycle in the production of science fiction in the USSR: periods of intense creativity interrupted by stretches of enforced inactivity. Thus, little was published during the first years of the Soviet state, as the nation contended with famine and civil war. By the early 1920s, however, the situation began to improve. In 1922, Evgenii Zamiatin wrote *We*, an anti-utopian vision of a meticulously organized society where even one's personal affairs are subject to the will of the Benefactor. The doomed rebels against this system take as their symbol the square root of -1: an imaginary number that mocks the Benefactor's rationalism. Widely translated abroad, *We* influenced both George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. But Zamiatin himself was exiled from the USSR, and his book is available there today only in contraband editions.

In some respects, the period after the Revolution resembled the period just before it. Along with the dystopias, there reappeared the adventure fantasies, Aleksei Tolstoi's best-selling *Aelita* (1924) being but one of many. Foreign works were also popular: Between 1923 and 1930, some 100 science-fiction books by Western writers were translated and published in the Soviet

A CAROUSEL OF WORTHLESS GOODS

The world as it looks—officially—to Moscow has always been reflected in the work of some Russian science-fiction writers. Life in the decadent West is a favorite target. In their story "This Unstable World" from the magazine Fantastika (1966), B. Zubkov and E. Muslin satirize American consumerism and "planned obsolescence." An excerpt:

Swaying and moaning from his ordeal, Price emerged from the subway. Half-naked, he crawled to the nearest clothing automat, dropped in his money and put his feet, arms, and neck into the openings. The automat slapped on one-day shoes, glued on a single-wear collar, stuck on missing buttons, patched his torn clothes with a short-lived plaster, and shoved at him a stylish "Dispose-Hat." . . . The metallic wonder boys turned out flimsy goods, "things for a day," all unreliable, like rope made of dough, and short-lived as ice on a sizzling grill. They were no different than a handful of smoke or dust. Here you could buy books, printed with disappearing ink so that after a week all the pages were blank, or newspapers that turned black so quickly that hourly editions had to be printed. Or perhaps you would like a thin, easy-to-melt skillet or a pillow which soon felt like concrete, or a self-clogging faucet or some perfume which turned to skunk spray after a week. Rusty metal nails or paper televisions . . . Their low cost did not compensate for their awful workmanship, and low prices ruined the consumer. The carousel of worthless goods spun faster and faster, emptying the pockets and the soul.

Price put his last coin into a slot on a yellow post. Part of the sidewalk sprang open, and up came a small bench for a brief rest. After his recent exertions, Price thought he deserved such a luxury. Just then a tiny dog stopped beside the yellow post . . . The dog bared his teeth, causing Price to leap backwards. Stray dogs were murderous! Following the Universal Trade Theory, the company Pomeranians-Dachshunds Limited supplied old ladies with dogs as companions. Since the dogs turned rabid after three weeks, the owners would turn them loose on the street before their guarantee period expired.

Price suddenly plummeted downward—the short rest-bench he had been sitting on had collapsed and withdrawn into the sidewalk.

—translated by John Glad

Union, volumes by Jules Verne and H.G. Wells heading the list. (Wells, who was married to a Russian, once outraged a gathering of Soviet writers when, at a dinner in his honor at the Petrograd House of the Arts, he thanked his hosts for having allowed him to observe their "curious historical experiment.") Inevitably, though, the ascendancy of Marxism-Leninism prompted the

emergence of whole new branches of science fiction—among them, the *roman o katastrofe* and the *krasnyi detektiv* novel.

Iprit (1925), by Viktor Shklovskii and Vsevolod Ivanov, is an example of the latter, the “red detective” genre, in which a common man, against all odds, foils the machinations of the evil capitalists. A Russian sailor who has fled the USSR is shipwrecked in England and mistaken for Tarzan by a millionaire’s daughter. The girl’s father has invented a chemical—Iprit—with which he hopes to create a poisonous, 100-kilometer-wide belt around the USSR to stop the revolution from spreading. He has another chemical that eliminates the need for sleep and that will allow him to produce vast quantities of Iprit by working his minions in London around the clock. The sailor, of course, leads the fight against the millionaire and wins by attacking London with sleeping gas.

Related to the red detective stories are the so-called catastrophe novels, in which the struggle for possession of some scientific invention causes a major disaster—usually in the degenerate West, where such horrors are to be expected—which in turn destroys the global balance of power and usually (but not always) brings about world revolution.

The second half of the 1920s also saw the appearance of Aleksandr Beliaev, whose writings, heavily influenced by Jules Verne, remain especially popular among younger readers. Instead of positing futuristic technological breakthroughs—time machines, space stations, and so on—Beliaev preferred tinkering with human biology. He created characters who could breathe under water (*The Amphibian Man*), fly (*Ariel*), shrink to microscopic size (*The Marvelous Eye*), or use the powers of the brain to control people and objects at a distance (*Ruler of the World*). In *Professor Dowell’s Head*, he explored the implications of head transplants, inspiring one team of Soviet surgeons during the late 1930s to attempt transplants of dogs’ heads.

Science fiction vanished from the shelves once more during the early 1930s: Stalin’s austere First Five Year Plan (1928–33) aimed at providing steel, not books. When sci-fi reemerged later in the decade, the writing was guarded. In the un-utopian conditions of Stalinist Russia, utopian themes virtually disappeared from science fiction. The future—technologically and socially—was treated only in terms of the next few years, since making a “wrong” prediction could be dangerous. With the onset of World War II, science fiction again went underground.

Not until after the war did science fiction begin to regain some of the vigor it had displayed during the 1920s. The death of Stalin in 1953 provided more breathing room, and with the pub-



A satirical view of Soviet publishing, 1934. Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Gogol, and Dickens wait outside an editor's office with their manuscripts. Only the bureaucrat with an "official memorandum" gets in.

lication of Ivan Efremov's *The Andromeda Nebula* four years later, the "thaw" was underway in earnest. After a long winter of "safe" science fiction—children's books in which characters hitch rides on rockets, novels in which the hero builds an electric power plant underground—*The Andromeda Nebula* was received enthusiastically by the Soviet reading public as a refreshing treatment of long-forbidden subjects: the cosmic theme, social relationships, the technological accomplishments of the distant future.

Of course, Efremov's novel had its conservative critics. "Just what planet is being treated," asked one of them indignantly. "Is this really the Earth? After all, in the history of the planet that I. Efremov calls by this name no one has kept in his memory such events as The Great October Revolution, such names as Marx, Engels, Lenin." But the thaw survived such chill blasts, at least for a while. For the first time, authors of science fiction were admitted to the Writers' Union. Science-fiction clubs sprang up everywhere.

Humor and parody became a permanent feature of Soviet science fiction. The traditional melodramatic theme of the sinis-

ter invention run wild was lampooned, for example, in I. Varshavskii's *Delta Rhythm*. A scientist is keeping alive a fused brain mass taken from a group of cats. It is pointed out that brain cells in mammals are virtually identical and that man's intellectual superiority stems from the manner of organization of these cells. The large brain mass is several times the size of a man's, and its abilities in its new, restructured form are unknown. The scientist feels some force taking over his mind when he is in the immediate vicinity of the tank with the brain. He and his doctor decide that he should yield to the force to see what the results will be. He does so—and catches a mouse.

But among some Soviet writers, something deeper was going on, something Isaac Asimov had wondered about in a 1962 introduction to an anthology of translated Soviet science fiction. In the essay, he divided Anglo-American science fiction into three periods. The first, extending from 1926 to 1938, was marked by a predominance of adventure literature with a minimum of attention devoted to technology. The period running from 1938 to 1950 he classified as technology dominant: Plots continued to be adventurous, but technology was emphasized and plausibly described by authors with scientific training. Soviet science fiction more or less repeated this progression, although treatment of truly advanced technical themes was not achieved until the late 1950s. But Asimov noted that the third stage in Anglo-American science fiction—which he called “sociology dominant,” what we might call social criticism—was missing from the anthology. He wondered whether a stage-three tradition was possible to achieve in the USSR.



At that time, Soviet science fiction really was at a stage-two level of development, but was on the verge of breaking into stage three in a big way, albeit not for long.

In general, the 1960s brought a continued loosening of official control over science fiction. After Soviet writers had experimented with new technical themes, they began to test the limits of the new permissiveness by branching out into social criticism—subject matter that had long been derided as peculiarly Western, reflecting the ugly realities of capitalism. (The horrible creatures in H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* were not, it was argued, merely the creations of a talented surgeon but rather "sinister basic images which characterize modern capitalist society.") In the official view, Soviet society was by nature, and by way of contrast, optimistic. Yet during the mid-1960s, fewer and fewer writers of science fiction seemed to agree.

Hard Times, Again

The criticisms were, of course, usually oblique—aimed at fictional societies of the future, or conditions on other planets or, conveniently, in "the West." There was little doubt in Soviet readers' minds, however, that the words on the page were often meant as a commentary on contemporary (and local) reality. Thus, in one story, people of a distant future contemplate whether the housing shortage on Earth will ever be solved. In another, human beings have finally achieved harmony—but at the price of being fused into a lump of limbless flesh, from which peer millions upon millions of passive, despairing eyes.

Works of satire were sometimes more explicit. In *After Rerecording*, by A. Sharov, a character who has been exiled to Siberia is aided by a former professor, who sends him scientific literature, publishes his articles anonymously, pays him the royalties, and eventually hopes to help him return to Moscow and take over his chair when he retires. The former pupil speeds things up by denouncing his benefactor for being connected with an "enemy of the people"—himself. The professor ends up in a concentration camp, and the former pupil gets his position.

By the late 1960s, two brothers, Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii, were writing even bolder tales purporting to describe fictitious future societies that could be recognized as, at best, caricatures of Soviet society. In *The Snail on the Slope*, the authors create a grotesquely inhuman world, ridden with greed, stupidity, and bureaucracy, in which the theme of flight is so predominant that even machines seek escape:

"Probably she [the machine] just couldn't stand it any

more. They shook her on the vibrostand, they tormented her with great self-concentration, they dug around in her inner parts, burned her thin nerves with soldering irons. She choked from the smell of rosin. They forced her to commit stupidities, they created her to commit stupidities, to commit more and more stupid stupidities. In the evening they would leave her, tormented, helpless, in the hot, dry room. Finally she made up her mind to escape, although she knew everything—the senselessness of flight and her own inevitable doom. . . . And now she has surely comprehended all that about which she earlier only guessed—that there is no freedom, that whether all doors are open or shut before you, everything is stupidity and chaos, and there is only loneliness.”

The “dissident” potential of such stories is hard to overlook. By the early 1970s, the authorities had tired of the “lack of positive conceptions” displayed in recent Soviet science fiction; they “drew the appropriate conclusions” and took matters in hand. The word went out. Science-fiction clubs were disbanded. Magazines cut back on the number of sci-fi stories they printed, while book publishers ignored science fiction almost entirely. Pessimistic, critical, or anti-utopian stories were denounced as “totally incompatible with the tasks set before Soviet literature.” Science fiction—once again—had fallen on hard times.

By 1982, the amount of original science fiction published in the Soviet Union every year was estimated to have been reduced to about 500 pages—leaving out translations, reprinted works, and technical scientific material. The writers and the critics have either gone on to other things or emigrated—just one more reflection of the general intellectual climate of the country as a whole. The black market in science fiction today is a black market in *secondhand* science fiction.

And tomorrow? Who knows? An easing of official restrictions? A revival of limited freedom of expression? Or just more of the same? “No one knows what will happen tomorrow,” says the jubilant narrator in Zamiatin’s *We*. “You understand? I don’t know, no one knows; it’s unknown!”

