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Perception and Interpretation

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Don Quixote in Russia in the 1920s-1930s: The Problem of Perception and Interpretation

Slav N. Gratchev

This study logically continues my previous examination of the perception of *Don Quixote* in Russia throughout the early twentieth century and how this perception changed over time. In this new article, which will be the third in a sequence of five, I will again use a number of materials inaccessible to English-speaking scholars to demonstrate how the perception of *Don Quixote* by Russian intelligentsia shifted from being skeptical to complete admiration and even glorification of the hero. Don Quixote was increasingly compared with Prometheus, the most powerful and most romanticized personage of Greek methodology. Indeed, “. . . начав юмористический роман, осмеивающий увлечение современников рыцарскими похождениями, Сервантес и не думал, что потешный рыцарь печального образа постепенно вырастет в гигантскую фигуру страдальца-идеалиста” (“. . . when starting a humorous novel satirizing contemporary fascination with knightly adventures, Cervantes could not have guessed that the amusing Knight of the Sad Countenance would gradually grow into a great figure of the suffering idealist”; my trans; Solomin 91). The situation changed, though, and changed rapidly, during the 1920s to the 1930s. This decade was marked by a fascination with new forms, ideas, movements, and experimentations. The country finally overcame devastation and hunger, class battles were finally behind it, and the Russian intelligentsia readily stepped forward to help the country revive the cultural life that had been almost entirely lost since 1917.

Obviously, the new type of hero was coming to the forefront of the cultural discourse: the practitioner who, without fear, would be ready to sacrifice his life for the common good. And if such a hero could not be created in haste, he could easily be found in the classics. Don Quixote was chosen to become a symbol of the new Soviet man.

Let me start with the theatre. Nikolay Evreinov¹ immediately doubted that Cervantes's only contribution was to make us laugh at the chivalric romances, romances that for the majority of us were unknown in the twentieth century. Obviously, Evreinov was thinking as a practitio-

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ner, a theatre practitioner who, before everything, was imagining the stage and the spectators looking at it. For him all of these literary equivoques, quibbles, and quirks had nothing to do with the new image of a hero who was supposed to behave like a real hero while he was on stage for a couple of hours. As noted, “Неужели заслуга Сервантеса только и была в смертельном ударе по рыцарским романам? О, эти классические объяснения классических произведений! Насколько прав был Гейне, сказав, что перо гения выше его самого, так как захватывает гораздо больше его случайных намерений” (“Was the merit of Cervantes only a fatal blow to the knightly novels? Oh, these “classic” explanations of classical works! How right was Heine,² in saying that the pen of a genius is higher than the author, since it captures much more than his random intentions”; my trans; Evreinov 163). How important it became now for any theatrical director to find in a literary artifact more than it really meant to convey. He had to learn to read between lines, listen to the whisper of ideas that were born from the narration itself. All of this would become indispensable when the silent script all of a sudden acquired its life through numerous actors. Imagine now two of our protagonists on stage having the following dialogue:

“When thou came close to her didst thou not perceive a Sabaeen odor, an aromatic fragrance, a, I know not what, delicious, that I cannot find a name for; I mean a redolence, an exhalation, as if thou wert in the shop of some dainty glover?”

“All I can say is,” said Sancho, “that I did perceive a little odor, something goaty; it must have been that she was all in a sweat with hard work.”

“It could not be that,” said Don Quixote, “but thou must have been suffering from cold in the head or must have smelt thyself; for I know well what would be the scent of that rose among thorns, that lily of the field, that dissolved amber.”

“Maybe so,” replied Sancho; “there often comes from myself that same odor which then seemed to me to come from her grace the lady Dulcinea; but that’s no wonder, for one devil is like another.” (Don Quixote I: 282)

I will ask you, my reader: Which do you like more: the nose of Don Quixote or the nose of Sancho Panza? Would you like to smell in the way Don Quixote does or in the way Sancho does? Would you like to

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see in Aldonsa the beautiful Dulcinea de Toboso, or, in your opinion, let Aldonsa remain Aldonsa forever?

You can think on this and answer to yourself later, but what was important for Evreinov was how to convince the six hundred spectators who came to see the performance that the nose of Don Quixote is infinitely better. It is a very practical question, and for Evreinov the answer was obvious, but the audience members were still in the dark. They needed to be “enlightened.”

It is remarkable that the 1920s to the 1930s, the period that, within reason, could be called the most productive in the Soviet era, can also be compared with the cultural revolution, or cultural Renaissance, so to speak. And as every revolution likes to distribute roles to anyone and anything, the book of Cervantes was assigned a very special role in the process: to become an apology for *donkishotsva* (the way Don Quixote lives and acts). The hero now was supposed to show everyone that his spiritual strength originated from the fact that *he became mad for no reason!* This notion—for no reason!—was, for the epoch of the 1920s, a cornerstone of the new philosophical stance, and the theatre would disseminate this philosophy better than anything else.³

These ideas—to become mad for no reason and to go save the world—encompassed for Evreinov the main pathos of Cervantes’s book. For him, as a theatrical director, to overlook this message in the immortal novel meant to overlook the whole point of *donkichotsva*, its *raison d’etre*,⁴ as well as the possible justification for the sound mind of the hero, whom Cervantes, for the sake of pleasing weak minds, so often and persistently called half-witted that we stopped believing him and understanding his irony. “Впрочем - нельзя научиться понимать Дон Кихота, - его можно только почувствовать. Нельзя уразуметь пения райской птицы, не будучи по природе своей немножко райской птицей. И нельзя уразуметь, а тем более полюбить Дон Кихота, если в душе не живет свой собственный Дон Кихот” (“However, you cannot learn to understand Don Quixote; you can only feel it. You cannot understand the singing of the bird of paradise if you are not, by nature, a little bird of paradise. And you cannot understand, let alone love, Don Quixote, if your own Don Quixote does not live in your soul” my trans; Evreinov 165).

It is hard not to notice that the eye of the theatre practitioner is different from ours, the ordinary reader or spectator. For us “seeing is believing,” as we often say. We believe what we see without questioning the validity of what is presented to us. But for the stage director, it is much more complex; he has to feel the hero as clearly as he feels himself. He has to become a bird of paradise to be able to reproduce its song for his spectators; inevitably he has to fall in love with his

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hero—or no one will believe him. And for the theatre practitioner, this is the essence of everything. Evreinov argues that “Дон Кихот бессмертен. До Сервантеса он уже существовал тысячелетия, только не названный и не описанный. И тысячелетия еще он будет существовать. Дон Кихот бессмертен. Это вы, это я, это он. Может быть даже «они», хотя они в этом никогда не сознаются” (“Don Quixote is immortal. Prior to Cervantes, he already existed for millennia, only not named and not described. And he will exist for millennia. Because Don Quixote is immortal. He is you, he is me, he is him. Maybe he is even “they,” although “they” will never admit it”; my trans; Evreinov 166). In this universality of the hero, Evreinov sees the practical side of Don Quixote; no matter when you decide to revive him, he will always be needed. Because all of us would like to think that we have, at least, some traits of this immortal knight from La Mancha. And we all in the bottom of our hearts want to believe it, although we would never admit it out loud.

Now I would like to turn our attention to Konstantin Lipskerov,⁵ the poet and the painter, to see how different his perception of Don Quixote was from that of Evreinov, the theatre practitioner and theorist. Lipskerov, a talented and refined poet, who is, unfortunately, almost forgotten today, wrote a wonderful sonnet following the classical tradition of a continental French style sonnet. As Lipskerov has never been translated into English, I will supply the translation of this marvelous piece here:

И замком он не счел, как некогда, корчму,
И близился он к ней в своих пробитых латах.
Камзол зеленый был на рыцаре в заплатах;
Покорен Росинант был вечному ярму.

И Санчо вновь роптал: “Сокровищ непочатых
В скитаниях ищущу напрасно. Не пойму:
За вами на осле плетусь я почему?
Я в бедном доме жил спокойнее богатых.

Зарозовел закат над сизыми холмами.
Подняв копье свое, упорными очами
Пронизывая даль, гидальго кротко тих.

Там розы сыпала Прекрасная с ладони,
И теми розами его горели брони,
И таз цирюльника сверкал как нимб святых. (Lipskerov 95)

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This time the castle he did not consider as a tavern,
He was approaching her in armors badly punched.
His camisole was green, and full of patches;
And timid Rosinant continued in his yoke.

And Sancho again murmured: "The untouched treasures
I search in vain, just wander with no aim. I do not understand:
why do I follow you, my Lord?
before I lived as poor but happier than rich."

The sun had risen over the gray hills.
And, raising spear, with persistent eyes,
hidalgo was piercing the distance.

The roses was pouring from the palm of her hand,
And by those roses his armor got burned,
And the barber's basin gleamed like the halo of a saint. (my trans)

What do we hear in this penetrating poetry? The knight does not confuse the castle with a tavern anymore, and he is approaching his Dulcinea "in armors badly punched" to tell her stories about the exploits he performed for her. And in the meantime, as usual, the practical Sancho is scolding his master for his useless bravery and himself for his devotion to this insane knight. But, nonetheless, the sun "had risen over the grey hills," and "the Beautiful" poured the roses from her palm for those who never gave up but remained faithful to their dreams.

What a romantic—and not practical!—interpretation of this glorious story! Do we smile at the hero? Not at all, but we do grin over Sancho, and his soberness does not look attractive to us. We see that the poet's perception of the same hero is quite different from the perception of the theatre practitioner, Evreinov.

Another person who left us a very interesting interpretation of Don Quixote is Yuly Aykhendald⁶ who was quite an original literary critic. His interpretation of Cervantes's hero shows us the sharp transformation that the image of Don Quixote experienced from the 1920s to the 1930s. It is not surprising, given the dramatic changes that Russia was experiencing during that time. The October revolution that was anticipated and greeted by many, even by the intelligentsia who were always suspicious of loud slogans and sky-high promises, turned out to be the bloodiest monster that destroyed the old but still functionable tsarist mechanism of governance. It gave nothing in return, and the typhus, starvation, and terror that followed the revolution killed or drove away

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almost ten million citizens. In less than two years the country was destroyed altogether, but in the beginning of the 1920s, the sun shined again. The cultural life immediately started to revive, and by the mid 1920s reached its apogee, and the devastated souls were again looking for a hero who would fill them with hope—the immortal Don Quixote. As Aykhenvald rightfully noticed:

Сервантес хотел одного, а достиг другого; задумал небольшое, а осуществил великое. Как и его соотечественник Колумб искал Индию, а открыл Америку, так и Сервантес написал сатиру на сюжет времени, но углубил, обобщил и возвел эту сатиру в степень вечной категории духа. Америка больше, чем идея Колумба; творение Сервантеса значительнее своего творца. (16)

Cervantes wanted one but achieved another; he conceived a small but accomplished a great. Like his other countryman, Columbus, who sought for India but discovered America, so did Cervantes; he wrote a satire on his time, but he deepened and generalized it so much and eventually raised this satire to the power of the eternal category. America was more than the idea of Columbus; the creation of Cervantes also grew beyond its creator. (my trans)

I cannot agree entirely with Aykhenvald, and I would like to suggest a slightly different scenario; perhaps, the madness of Don Quixote was just a mask for Cervantes, a convenient way for him to be creative. Perhaps not just Aldonsa/Dulcinea but the entire universe turned out to be in the power of evil wizards. Perhaps they deliberately distorted the true image of everything that we know, love, and value. The poetry was replaced by prose; the beautiful Dulcinea by Aldonsa who smelled like a goat because she worked in the field; the castle by a dirty tavern; the giants by the windmills; the serious by the ridiculous; and the high by the low. And we now need someone with a pure soul and high ideals who can restore the true face of our universe. The literary critic is right—the hero is needed to restore the true image of things; there is work for him to do.

Let's move on and look at poetry again. The next poet we will focus on is quite unusual: Larisa Reisner,⁷ the woman-politician, the woman-diplomat, and a writer with original talent. She left minimal poetry behind her, not even enough to make a little book, and here I would like to offer you one of her poems dedicated to . . . Don Quixote! What

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follows is the “Pallas Athena of the Revolution,” dedicated to the humblest of all knights:

На перепуганных овец,
На поросят в навозной куче
Все молчаливее и круче
Взирает немощный боец.

И вместо хохота и плутней
Пирующих трактирных слуг
Рокочут в честь его заслуг
Несуществующие лютни.

Течет луна, как свежий мед,
Как золото, блестит солома,
Но все растущая истома
Его души не обоймет.

- Неумирающая Роза,
Изгибом пряного стебля,
Какой цветок затмит тебя,
О, Дульсинья из Тобосо!

На ложе каменных дорог
От Кадиса до Сарагосы
Легки, обветрены и босы
Подошвы сладостнейших ног!

Сжимая скипетр иль серп,
Мужичка или королева
Ты - прародительница Ева,
В Едеме твой старинный герб. (Reisner 62)

On frightened sheep,
On pigs in manure heap
More silent and concerned
Now looks the feeble fighter.

Ignoring the laughter of the rascals
Ignoring servants having a feast,
He only hears how in his honor
Sing the non-existent lutes.

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The moon is flowing like honey,
The straws shine like golden creek,
But ever growing languor
Will not defeat his anxious soul.

“Oh, Rose that will never die,
There is no other stem, there is no other
Flower that will eclipse you,
Oh, my Dulcinea from Toboso!

And while you walk on tough roads
From Cádiz to Zaragoza
Light, weather-beaten, barefoot,
And hurt the soles of your legs!

But squeezing scepter or sickle,
You are the peasant, or the queen,
You are the Eve, and old Eden
Still has your old coat of arms.” (my trans)

Here, in this poetry, Don Quixote is again being transformed into a hero who is fully conscious of himself, who knows perfectly well that he has dealt only with the manure of sheep and pigs, and who feels tired of doing that. He looks now where “the moon is flowing like honey,” and “the straws shine like golden creek,” and this is where he hopes to see his incomparable Dulcinea, his “rose that will never die.” He is not practical, like always, and it does not matter to him if she is a peasant or a queen. He knows only one thing: everything starts from her, like from Eve, and only in Eden will he be able to find the real coat of arms that has been lost, or hidden, like the Holy Grail, while earthly things have been damaged or distorted by the power of evil wizards.

But what a beautiful image of Don Quixote this twenty-one year old romantic poet makes, though, at that moment, she did not know that soon she would become the “Pallas Athena of the Revolution,” whose fire would burn her to ashes.

Valery Bryusov,⁸ one of the most notable figures of the Symbolist movement and a poet as well, expressed his perception of Don Quixote and did it in the most practical terms, closing his views with those of Evreinov and Aykhenvald. He noted:

Фикция, вымысел художника, становится действительностью,
входя в сознание читателей, зрителей, слушателей.
Дон Кихот оказал реальное влияние на жизнь, одних

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увлекая благородством своего образа, других остерегая от карикатурности своих подвигов. Пройдя через сознание миллионов, Дон Кихот реален не менее, чем Наполеон. Поэтому правы усердные гиды, показывая туристам на острове Иф темницу, где был заключен граф Монте-Кристо. (3: 422)

The fiction invented by the artist becomes a reality, entering the minds of readers, viewers, and listeners. Don Quixote had a real impact on life, captivating some with the nobility of his image, and guarding others against the caricature of his exploits. Having passed through the consciousness of millions, Don Quixote is as real as Napoleon. Therefore, the zealous guides are right when they show the tourists in the Château d'If the dungeon where the Count of Monte Cristo was imprisoned.⁹ (my trans)

In fact, this is one of my favorite ideas: if a literary image successfully passes through the consciousness of millions, it becomes recognizable as if it were a real person. Don't you think you would recognize Don Quixote the moment you saw him riding on a horse down the road? Or, would you recognize Sherlock Holmes with his pipe, wide raincoat, and a checkered cap with a visor? Or, Monte Cristo with his pale face, black straight long hair, and black clothing? I bet you know them better than you know your neighbor!

Bryusov had many reasons to believe that Don Quixote had made a real impact on our lives when he divided us into two groups: Romantics who would become inspired by his example and Pragmatists who would always be afraid of being caricatured. It is true then: if an image passes through the consciousness of millions, it always becomes practical; in other words, it can be used at times—alas!—even to satisfy political ambitions.

Anatoly Lunacharsky,¹⁰ the omnipotent *people's commissar* (всесильный нарком) as he often was called, who in his influence in cultural affairs was comparable to Leon Trotsky¹¹ in military affairs, quickly understood that the new revolutionary consciousness badly needed its own idols and icons. He wrote a notable article that glorified Don Quixote but from the standpoint of his practical necessity for Soviet society. Although I detest most of the crazy ideas of the Bolsheviks, I would like to offer my readers an opportunity to read parts of Lunacharsky's lecture that he gave at Sverdlov Communist University:¹²

Сервантес сам хорошенько не знал, как относиться к Дон Кихоту. [. . .] Мир силен, а Дон Кихит слаб. Вот это и делает

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его комичным. [. . .] Автор говорит: да, правда, жизнь сера, действительность победила романтику, победила идеализм. [. . .] А как можно разрешить этот вопрос об идеале и действительности? Он может разрешиться только теперь! Только мы, коммунисты, находимся в таком положении, когда самые высокие идеалы человечества становятся не донкихотством, а действительностью, и даже становятся учением. [. . .] Этот роман Сервантеса есть апелляция к будущему. И из этого романа человек взывает: спасите меня, дайте мне свободы, я в этом мире задыхаюсь. [. . .] Но пройдут еще сотни лет, пока начнет осуществляться социализм. И когда социализм начнет осуществляться, Дон Кихоты найдут применение для своего героического романтизма в работе для нашей революции, и они станут не фантастическими рыцарями, а настоящими практиками. [. . .] Мы имеем такое время, когда Дон Кихоты и Санчо Пансы являются очень желательными типами и делаются подлинными борцами за будущее. (175-178)

Cervantes himself did not really know how to relate to Don Quixote. [. . .] The world is strong, and Don Quixote is weak. That is what makes him comical. [. . .] The author says: yes, it's true; life is constant suffering, and reality already won over romance and defeated idealism. [. . .] How can this question about the ideal and reality be resolved? It can only be resolved now! Only we, the Communists, are in a position where the highest ideals of humanity are not becoming quixotic anymore; they are reality, and maybe they are even philosophy. [. . .] This novel of Cervantes is an appeal to the future. And from this novel a man cries: save me, give me freedom, I am suffocating in this world! [. . .] But hundreds of years will have to pass before socialism will be realized. But when socialism is realized, all Don Quixotes will find application for their heroic romanticism while they work for our revolution, and they will no longer be useless knights but real practitioners. [. . .] We live in times when Don Quixotes and Sanchos are very desirable individuals as they will become true fighters for the future. (my trans)

I am sure you experience the same feeling as I do when you read these words; perhaps, you feel upset to see how the idea of Don Quixote can be distorted when it gets into the hands of a fanatic, but we have to admit that Communists knew how to prove the point, no matter how absurd

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it was. What they also knew very well is that inexperienced minds are naïve and very receptive to whatever nonsense you tell them. So, why would they not believe that Cervantes never had a clear understanding of his own hero? And since he did not, continued Lunacharsky, Communists will help him; they will explain to the masses what Don Quixote was all about, and what kind of idea Cervantes really wanted to convey.

To prove his point, Lunacharsky took the easiest way; he put words in the mouth of Cervantes: “life is constant suffering, and reality already won over romance and defeated idealism.” Well, Cervantes is long dead already, so he cannot charge Lunacharsky for slandering. But we can! Because we can read the book over and over again, but we will never find such words in *Don Quixote*: the realist Cervantes was always showing life as it really is—sometimes beautiful, sometimes ugly—but nowhere did he write that this life is not worth living.

Lunacharsky, like any other skillful demagogue, does not try to prove any of his arguments; he knows that they would not withstand the scrutiny, so he moves forward quickly to his favorite theme—the advantages of communism over any other bourgeois ideology. “Only we, the Communists, are in a position where the highest ideals of humanity are not becoming *quixotic* anymore” (my emphasis). We who grew up in the USSR have heard these words so many times before: first from Vladimir Lenin,¹³ who promised the peasants the moon and then took away their passports to hamper their mobility; from Trotsky, who after each speech gave an expensive watch to the nearest standing soldier (but no one knew that he carried hundreds of these previously expropriated watches for such occasions to show people his notorious “generosity”) and then shot all those who dared to retreat from the battlefield.

To hear the same words from Lunacharsky who, like Russian Goebbels,¹⁴ was responsible for making classic literature fit the Communist ideology, is not only natural—it is expected. But his shamelessness while he argued the practical meaning of Don Quixote for the Russian revolution is breathtaking: “when socialism is realized, then all Don Quixotes [pay attention to how he puts the names in plural form!] will find application for their heroic romanticism while they work for our revolution.”

We know that this is what Communists always wanted to instill in the heads of all naïve Soviet citizens: if you are ready and willing to work for the revolution (read: the communist ideology, communist ideals, goals, whatever) then you are a hero, and we will find the proper place for you in society. But if you are not . . .

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Thus, this seemingly innocent speech by Lunacharsky certainly had a very far-reaching practical goal: to give young minds an unmistakably iconic figure from classic world literature, Don Quixote, and present this figure in such a way that it would inspire these minds to serve communism!

This approach, no matter how absurd it may seem today, lasted for almost fifty years and, as a result, made two or even three generations of Russian children detest classic literature and classic literary heroes. As often happens, they wanted to throw out the water but splashed out the child with it. Instead of expressing adoration, the younger generation was mocking the heroes and their ideals; instead of worshipping and imitating their deeds, they were making a caricature of them.

Luckily, even during the darkest times of communism, there were other critics who, in total opposition to the “general guidelines,” did not lose their integrity, did not allow themselves to be fooled by communist propaganda, and continued to read the book differently. They sometimes risked their academic positions and economic well-being as they continued to teach their students to see the forest through the trees and to make a clear distinction between the “official view” on classic literature and what they might really see and discover in it. One of those critics was Mikhail Gershenzon,¹⁵ a prominent thinker and historian of Russian culture, who left us a diametrically opposed impression about our favorite literary hero—Don Quixote. He wrote:

Образ Дон Кихота выражает беззаветную веру в нечто вечное и незыблемое, которое находится вне человека и требует от него служения и жертв. Он весь - преданность своему идеалу, ему жизнь представляется лишь средством к осуществлению идеала. [. . .] Он не рассчитывает, не взвешивает последствий, то есть вероятной пользы своего служения; его решимости ничто не сломит, и неудачи не испугают его, ибо он знает самое главное - зачем он живет на земле. (78)

The image of Don Quixote expresses a whole-hearted faith in something eternal and unshakable that is located outside of man and requires from him service and sacrifice. He is all—the devotion to his ideal; his life helps him realize the ideal. [. . .] He does not calculate, does not weigh the consequences nor the probable benefits of his ministry; his determination will not be broken, and failure will not frighten him for he knows the most important thing—he knows why he lives on this Earth. (my trans)

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Perhaps for the first time during this practical decade, the 1920s to the 1930s, a decade that totally transformed and, in my opinion, deformed the perception of Don Quixote, we hear a voice of reason that tries to re-emphasize the essence of this literary image—strength, wisdom, beauty, and the happiness of having an integral spirit and unyielding will. Classic literature, insisted Gershenzon, long ago, starting from Turgenev,¹⁶ already expressed this view through many outstanding literary characters. As he notes:

Вот тема «Накануне». Тургенев ставит вопрос: идеал человека-быть человеком-птицей, Дон Кихотом, а современный человек сегодня - это Гамлет; при каких-же условиях человек становится Дон Кихотом? На этом вопрос Тургенев ответил образами Инсарова и Елены. Инсаров - Дон Кихот родины, а Елена - Дон Кихот любви. (85)

That is the topic of *On the Eve*.¹⁶ Turgenev raises the question: the ideal of man is to be a man-bird that is Don Quixote, but today's man is Hamlet; under what conditions does a person become Don Quixote? To this question, Turgenev responded with images of Insarov and Elena. Insarov, the Don Quixote of the *homeland*, and Elena, the Don Quixote of *love*. (my trans)

The Love and the Deed are the only lights that “will shine in the darkness” (“Solntse nad mgloyu” 99), believed Gershenzon, “the candle in the night” (99) that will never die.

On this optimistic note, I would like to finish my analysis of the perception and interpretation of Don Quixote in Russia from the 1920s to the 1930s, the decade that was, perhaps, one of the most artistically intense and innovative during the entire Communist era in Russia. It was a time when hopes were high, when people still believed that the most terrible times were already behind them, and no one knew that the darkest time was just about to begin. And Don Quixote will be re-interpreted and re-accentuated again.

Notes

1. Nikolay Evreinov (1879-1953) was a prominent Russian dramatist and theatre theorist. Although many of his views and theories are very controversial, Evreinov, together with Stanislavsky, Reinhardt, and Brecht, will always be remembered as one who forever reformed the theatre of the twentieth century. In 1925 he left the USSR and lived in France until his death.
2. Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) was a remarkable German poet who, despite the commonly accepted belief that the German language is not good for lyrics, proved by his beautiful poetry that it is. His lyrics inspired many famous composers, including Shuman, Schubert, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky.
3. Cinematography was just gaining popularity in Russia; the first Russian Film Studio was founded in 1915 in Moscow by the rich Maecenas Mikhail Trifonov who, falling in love with the newest art—the film—wanted to promote it in Russia. After the Revolution, the studio was nationalized by Bolsheviks and was renamed the Mehzrabprom-Rus and then renamed again (in 1948) the Gorky Film Studio. During the time of the Soviets, the Gorky Film Studio became one of the most popular, specializing in production of children's films. The founder of the studio, Trifonov, was forcefully exiled after the Revolution.
4. Reasonable reason (French).
5. Konstantin Lipskerov (1889-1954) was a Russian Silver age poet and painter. The great connoisseur of the East, he became a brilliant translator of eastern classic poetry. He had a wonderful collection of paintings that was sold in pieces after his death. Unfortunately, the main part of this collection is lost today.
6. Yuly Aykhenvald (1872-1928) was a brilliant and influential literary critic. His most famous book was *Silhouettes of Russian Writers* that continues to be of great interest to literary scholars today. After the Revolution, he moved to Germany where he translated all major works of Schopenhauer into Russian. He died tragically in a train accident.
7. Larisa Reisner (1895-1926), or “Pallas Athena of the Revolution,” as Leon Trotsky called her, became the first female diplomat and military minister of the Bolshevik's government. An extremely beautiful and energetic woman and a talented writer, she left us very interesting memoirs about the revolution in Germany and her life in Afghanistan. She died in Moscow in 1926 after drinking a glass of milk and getting the bacilli of typhus.
8. Valery Bryusov (1873-1924) was one of the principal members of the Russian Symbolist movement. A prominent poet, writer, dramatist, translator, critic, and historian, he was one of the few of his circle who supported the Bolshevik government after the revolution. Later he obtained a prominent position in the Ministry of Culture of the new state, but in 1924 he accidentally caught pneumonia and died shortly after.
9. The reference here is made to the famous novel by Alexander Dumas, *The Count Monte Cristo* (1844). Edmond Dantès, the principal character of the novel, spent 14 years in one of the most terrifying French prisons—*Château*

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d'If—located on a small island in the Mediterranean Sea about one mile from Marseille. “If” in French stands for yew—the common coniferous tree that can be found all over North and South America in different modifications.

10. Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) was the first Soviet Minister of Education. Fluent in many European languages, Lunacharsky had a brilliant education. He became, perhaps, the best liaison between the new Bolshevik government and the “old” academia who, rightfully, distrusted Bolsheviks. Understanding how important culture was for the new Soviet country, Lunacharsky did whatever he could to save academics and the intelligentsia from repressions. For instance, upon his involvement, Mikhail Bakhtin was exiled for just five years instead of serving ten years in labor camps where he would certainly have died.

11. Leon Trotsky (b. Leiba Bronshtein) (1879-1940) was the second most important figure in the Bolshevik government and the creator of the Russian Red Army. After the death of Lenin in 1924, Trotsky’s influence began to wane; by 1927 he was stripped of all previous appointments, and in 1929 he was forced into exile. In 1936 he settled in Mexico, where he was welcomed by Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. In 1940 an agent of NKVD, Ramon Mercader, snuck into Trotsky’s villa and killed him with an axe.

12. In 1918, striving to strengthen the moral spirit and unity of their members, the Bolsheviks founded the Sverdlov Communist University. The university existed until 1937 when it was closed without explanation. During its existence, the university produced more than 10,000 graduates, and at different times people like Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Gorky, and Lunacharsky delivered lectures there. (Yakov Sverdlov [1885-1919] was a person with just four years of school but frantic energy; he became a close friend of Lenin and one of the most important figures in the Bolshevik’s government. He and Lenin together sanctioned the assassination of Romanov’s family; then Sverdlov sanctioned the Red Terror. In 1919 he unexpectedly died, either from the 1918 flu pandemic, or, as some historians argue, he was poisoned by the order of Lenin).

13. Vladimir Lenin (b. Ulyanov) (1870-1924) was the leader of the Bolshevik’s party and its successful coup in October of 1917. A man of exceptional intelligence (he spoke five European languages fluently), titanic energy, mesmerizing oration, and prolific writing, Lenin was also an extremely cruel man ready to shed the blood of thousands of people to achieve his personal goal. The repressions he started right after the Revolution were unprecedented in Russian history: the extermination of Romanov’s family, including children and their servants; the beginning of the Civil War that cost 3,000,000 Russian lives; hunger and the epidemic of typhus that cost another 5,000,000 human lives; and 3,000,000 intellectuals leaving Russia. This is the list, perhaps not exhaustive, of the repercussions of his rule. Lenin died at the age of fifty-four, after his second stroke.

14. Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945) was the Nazi’s Minister of propaganda. Fanatically devoted to Hitler and his ideas, Goebbels replaced him as a Chancellor of the Reich, but he stayed in power one day only, from April 30th

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to May 1st of 1945, after which he poisoned himself together with his six children and wife.

15. Mikhail Gershenzon (1869-1925) was a brilliant literary critic, philosopher, and translator. His penetrating studies about Pushkin and Turgenev have not lost their literary value to this day. Together with Vyacheslav Ivanov, he co-authored *Correspondence Across a Room* (1921). Gershenzon died at the age of fifty-five from an old case of tuberculosis that he neglected to treat for many years.

16. Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) was one of the most important Russian prose writers of the nineteenth century. His works shaped Russian prose in many ways, and some of his books were regarded as revolutionary. His novel *Fathers and Sons* is considered to be one of the major works of nineteenth-century Russian fiction. Gershenzon here makes a reference to the famous essay "Hamlet and Don Quixote" written by Turgenev in 1866. This essay became a cornerstone in future studies of Cervantes in Russian literary scholarship for years to come.

17. *On the Eve* is a novel by Ivan Turgenev published in 1860. The story of the novel is notable: in 1855 one of his friends gave him his autobiographical novel and allowed him to publish it if he wanted to. Turgenev read the story and was quite impressed with it, but the novel was so poorly written that no one would want to publish it. Turgenev re-wrote the entire story, and it would eventually become one of his best novels. Insarov, the main protagonist, is a Bulgarian who came to Russia to study, but when the war between Bulgaria and Turkey broke off, he decided to fight for the freedom of his country. Elena, a Russian aristocratic girl, follows her husband, Insarov, and when he dies from tuberculosis, she continues to fight for the freedom of his country.

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