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**Classical Allusions and Imperial Desire: Problems of Identity in Georgian and Russian Literature**

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A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington  
2012

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Comparative Literature

University of Washington

Abstract

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This dissertation explores cultural and political aspects of the relationship between Russia and Georgia, through the lens of Classical allusions. Since ancient Greek and Roman times, Classical myths and tales have been re-written by successive generations to reflect on critical political and social issues, including questions of empire and national identity. In Russia and Georgia, such a use of the Classics has been perhaps even more marked than in Western Europe. Straddling Asia and the West, Russians appreciate access to the western Classics as a touchstone of their belonging to Europe. Georgia, on Russia's southern border, is actually home to several famous Classical mythological characters, including Prometheus, Medea, and her father Aeëtes, and its claim to these figures provokes a sense of cultural competition with Russia. In negotiating political and cultural control in the Caucasus, Russia, imagining itself as a neo-Roman Empire, may lay claim to ruling the physical space, imaging itself as a harbinger of civilization for the "uncultured barbarians" on its southern border. Georgia, however, has developed its own sense of nationhood, claiming a spiritual hegemony as an empire of humanism, embracing its ties to Hellenism.

Applying a thread of post-colonial theory both to think about Empire from within the hegemonic empire itself, and to listen to voices from the margins, my dissertation is structured on the process of veiling, unveiling, and self-unveiling, and how the use and manipulation of Classical allusions aid in this process.

From the common language of Classical references emerges an intellectual space in which the authors I study, the Russians Andrei Bitov, Liudmila Ulitskaia, the Georgian-Armenian, Bulat Okudzhava, and the Georgian, Otar Chiladze, articulate their hopes, passions and desires, a space for their various voices to be heard. Read together, they tell a larger story about the relationship between Russia and Georgia. Touching upon how empire is conceived, imagined and generated, they reflect their countries' shared and intertwined history that includes conflict, disappointment, the problem of dealing with Stalin's legacy, and a strong desire from both parties to be accepted as full and active members in the increasingly complex post-Soviet world.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first of all to my family.

To the memory of my maternal grandmother, Helen Mills Tolbert, on whose living-room bookshelves I found Homer and Sophocles in Greek, and Ovid and Latin; and tucked away upstairs, volumes of Tolstoy, Chekhov and Nabokov in English translation. In the comfort of her stately farmhouse in southern Idaho, reading the Classics and Russian literature together seemed a natural phenomenon. And to the memory of my father, Morris E. Childs, who, as an aerodynamicist researching supersonic boundary layers, introduced me to the importance of studying areas of turbulence.

And to the living: To all of you for your patience and understanding – you know who you are.

I also would like to thank my extended network of advisers, mentors, and friends: my dissertation chair, Professor James West, for encouraging me to tackle such a topic, and for insisting that I use the Georgian I had the opportunity to study; Aida Abuashvili Lominadze, for introducing me to the complexities of the Georgian language; and the many family friends and relatives who have politely refrained from asking that vexed question – when are you going to finish?

## Introduction

### **Classical Allusions and Imperial Desire: Problems of Identity in Georgian and Russian Literature.**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of us who study Russia felt a need to explore beyond the forbidding and forbidden border of Russia itself, to explore the peripheral republics that comprised the “Friendship of Nations.” My own attempt to grapple with Russia outside of the centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg began with a project I started in 2005, “Legends of the Black Sea: Traces of Classical Culture in Contemporary Russian Literature and Culture.”<sup>1</sup> As a Classicist, I was interested in exploring the contemporary presence of Classical Greek and Roman culture in the Black Sea region, extending my study of the Classics beyond the traditional borders of Troy and the Bosphorus. As a Slavicist, I hoped to better understand how Russia relates to the lands on her southern border, and how Russia and the West relate to each other along an extended East-West border.

In an attempt to understand Russia’s southern periphery, to explore what is East, what West, and how the two relate, the Black Sea region beckons as fertile ground: its shores touch Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and the Crimea, Southern Russia near Sochi, Abkhazia, Georgia, and Turkey, all of which lay claim to being at one time or another the border between East and West. Bulgaria, once part of Thrace, is studded with Ancient Greek ruins, shows signs of Ottoman influence, and is now part of Europe. Romania was home to the Greek colony of Isthria, and the Roman outpost at Tomis, site of Ovid’s exile. It has been part of both Ottoman Turkey and the Austro-Hungarian Empire; and in the late-19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with Bucharest known as the Paris of the Black Sea, it was

claimed by the Romanians to be “an island of Latinity in a sea of Slavdom.” Ukraine and the Crimea were also part of the Greek empire, whose trading centers at Olbia, Chersonesus and Theodosia were meeting grounds for Greeks and the “barbarian” Scythians, Sarmatians, and other nomadic tribes. Further east, Georgia has been at the epicenter of overlapping empires, with its ancient Greek trading posts of Dioskurias and Phasis; Hellenistic Greek artifacts found just outside of its capital, Tbilisi; Roman vases from the hills above Batumi; and castles overrun by the Persians in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the Alazani Valley. Georgia, in particular, lays claim to being at the very crossroads of East and West, with the Caucasus Mountains separating it from Russia in the north and west, and the lands to the east and south opening out to the plateaus of Iran and Iraq, the Mesopotamian basin. But where is the ever-vanishing border between East and West?

Rather than defining a distinct border between East and West, I have found it far more helpful to think of the Black Sea region as an extensive border zone. Over the centuries, all of the countries have indeed been on, close to, or within a political line of demarcation between East and West; they have all felt the effects of being in an area of sustained convergence of various external forces. In such a border zone, turbulence seems inevitable, and the job of a cultural scholar, whether anthropologist, historian, or literary critic involves reading and interpreting patterns within the turbulence. The primary pattern I have chosen to read is that of the traces of and references to the ancient Greek and Roman Classics. Once we have identified cultural particulates, in this case the retellings, adaptations, allusions and references to Classical myths and culture, we can then watch how patterns develop: how the Classical tales and myths spin and refract, how they change in different environments, and take on different hues of meaning.

Although my original interest in such a border zone concerned the Black Sea region as a whole, I have narrowed my scope for this dissertation. The patterning of Classical allusions is particularly marked in the turbulent zone of the Caucasus, in the relationship between Russia and Georgia, and in this dissertation I explore how allusions to Classical myths and legends in selected literary texts have been and continue to be used to articulate issues of national identity, to bring into relief the less than peaceful relations between the two countries; and to express personal identity and trauma felt by authors caught within the forces of authoritarian governments, and the turbulence and tension they have bred.

### **The General Landscape**

More than twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and its former republics are still engaged in a process of redefining themselves: Russia attempting to regain its glory as a world player; the republics trying to maintain the independence they established after the collapse, and to re-articulate their relationships with Russia and with each other. All the while, their eyes have a global focus, to both East and West: towards the United States and the European Union, but also towards the rapidly-changing Middle East of Turkey and Iran, and the east of India, China, and beyond. The world at large is trying to understand this redefinition and the current geopolitical and geo-cultural contours of a landscape that has known many changes over time, yet has stayed in some ways much the same.

One small portion of that landscape, Georgia, has garnered a lion's share of attention, especially in the years since its Rose Revolution in 2003 and the August 2008 war with Russia. Relations between Georgia and Russia, however, have been complex

for centuries.<sup>2</sup> As early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia was caught as a pawn between Russia and both the Ottoman and Persian Empires, and in the 18<sup>th</sup> century found itself parceled out between the Persian Empire, which had overrun much of its Eastern territory in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Russia, as a result of Peter the Great's southern expansion to compete with Persia for rights to the Silk Trade commerce routes that ran through Georgia.<sup>3</sup> By 1801, Georgia had requested Russian protection against Persia, but got more than it asked for: during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Georgians found the power of both their aristocracy and the Georgian Orthodox Church dismantled; and their country serving as the outpost for Imperial Russia's Caucasian Wars, carried on to subdue the fiercely independent mountain dwellers, primarily Moslem, including the Chechens, Daghestanis, and Adyges, and to secure its southern borders with both Turkey, and Persia.<sup>4</sup> Although Georgia was considered to be a military outpost by the Russians, cultural relations developed. Russia's leading Romantic authors, Pushkin and Lermontov, exiled to the Caucasus and traveling with military units, sang the glory of its natural beauty and their personal freedom from the strictures of life in St. Petersburg. Members of the Georgian aristocracy were educated in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and a long tradition of Georgian literature continued to flourish.<sup>5</sup> Georgia enjoyed a few years of sovereignty after the Great October Revolution, from 1919-1921, but was quickly taken over by the Soviet Army and included in the fold of the Soviet Union. In the 1930's, Abkhazia was made a separate Soviet socialist republic, but still united with Georgia, and South Ossetia was made an autonomous province.<sup>6</sup> In addition to, or in spite of being home to Joseph Stalin, né Jugashvili,<sup>7</sup> Georgia became a haven of relative intellectual freedom and artistic creativity. It gave the Soviet Union one of its favorite



bards, Bulat Okudzhava, and provided it with wine, citrus, and tea. Its cinema flourished, and its Black Sea shores provided resorts for elite and non-elite alike to enjoy the warmth and sunshine missing in the northern reaches of the Soviet Union. It also, however, maintained a strong sense of its own culture, in many ways distinct and separate from the supposedly dominant Soviet culture. Georgia produced entertainers and film directors with a Soviet bent, such as Mikhail Kalatozov, but its traditional, national culture was also kept alive by artists and their audiences, by film directors such as Tenghiz Abuladze, Sergei Paradzhanov, Eldar and Giorgi Shengelaia; and authors writing both in Russian and their indigenous tongues: prose writers, such as Nodar Dumbadze, Erlom Akhvediani, and Otar Chiladze; and poets, such as Galaktion Tabidze, Terenti Graneli, Ana Kalandadze, and Lado Asatiani.

### **The Classics in Post-Soviet Identity**

Georgia's relationship with Russia or the Soviet Union over the centuries has never been easy, and it is handy to have a variety of intellectual tools by which to interpret that relationship. For this dissertation, I have chosen to use the lens of the Classics as a means to help read that relationship. How the Classics are reinterpreted and conceptualized often provides clues about what is actually going on in a specific culture at a given time, and is particularly useful when looking at Georgia and Russia in the current climate. As Charles King noted in his recent work, *The Ghost of Freedom*, the various countries of the Caucasus have looked to the ancient past to legitimize viable, newly independent states. His own formulation of the matter is a slightly stretched simile, but captures the rhetoric of the Classics in the process of nation- building:

How might a set of diminutive, irascible states provide for their own security and prosperity? How might they bind themselves, Ulysses-like, against the siren calls of nationalism, chauvinism, and militarism? How might they pool their political and economic resources and reclaim their destiny from two global powers, the United States and the Soviet Union?<sup>8</sup>

This use of the ancient Classics to define national interests and identity is not limited to the Caucasus, or Georgia alone, but is shared with Russia as well, as if laying claim to the Classical heritage is for both countries a key to being distinctly themselves, as well as to belonging to the greater European world.

This use of the Classics can be seen in two works, published in 2000 and 2005, in Georgia and Russia respectively, that illustrate the degree to which each country's relationship to the Classics interfaces with larger processes of cultural redefinition. Even in a globalized world, the educated elites of both countries are grappling with their readings of the Classics, those foundations of Western Culture, and how these readings help articulate their relation with the West and with each other; how the intellectual elites of the two countries understand and describe their past helps to articulate an aspect of their national identity, and situate themselves in the present world.

The two publications are: Askold Ivanchik's lengthy and scholarly work, *On the Eve of Colonization (Накануне колонизации)*<sup>9</sup>; and the proceedings of a conference held in Tbilisi, Georgia, "Hellenic Studies on the Verge [sic: at the Turn] of Centuries [sic: the Century]."

Ivanchik's volume, published in both Berlin and Moscow in 2005, is a fascinating study of the Ancient Greeks' penetration past the Hellespont, and the extent of their knowledge about the peoples and tribes of the Black Sea region, from the time of Homer through the Hellenistic era. Ivanchik has amassed a wealth of information about the Scythians, from their earliest mention in the archaic lyric poet Alkman and Homer, to descriptions of them in Hellenistic authors such as Ephorus and Poseidonius; from the XII century BC, to a period between 626 and 616 BC, before the founding of Rome, when the Scythians held sway over large swaths of Asia and carried out campaigns as far as Palestine and the borders of Egypt.<sup>10</sup> His is a thoroughly scholarly volume, researched at leading Russian and Western centers of Classical scholarship: The Institute of Eastern Studies (Институт востоковедения) and The Center for Comparative Studies of Ancient Civilizations of the Russian Academy of Science (Центр по сравнительному изучению древних цивилизаций Российской Академии наук); the University of Freiburg; and the Center for Hellenistic Studies in Washington, DC. The volume's references are current, footnotes extensive; many of the poets and ancient scholars he refers to are notably arcane, and his quoting of Alexandrian scholia, exquisite.

Yet, for all of its scholarly precision, certain biases emerge that seem to beg the question of what Ivanchik's overall purpose is in researching and writing his volume: how do his biases about the Scythians color his own research? Southern Russia has been identified as the historic land of the Scythians, from Herodotus, *Histories*, Book IV, to Minns' *Scythians and Greeks*, which documents the Scythian archeological finds from the Carpathian Mountains to the Kuban River. A few poets in Russia during the Revolution also identified Russians as Scythians, for example, Blok in his poem, "The

Scythians.” Ivanchik continues to identify southern Russia as the lands of the Scythians, but his new readings of Homer, Ephorus, and others, in their ambiguity, are more conflicted and complex. Ivanchik’s biases emerge most clearly in his concluding pages, where he claims to be trying to correct a blind spot in history, arguing that while the presence of the Scythians was known on the eastern and northeastern borders of Assyria, their role in this region had been marginalized in scholarly studies up until the 1970’s.<sup>11</sup> His job has been to de-marginalize this role, and to reconstruct the image created of them in ancient writers.

While this may be his stated goal, there emerges, however, a kind of confusion about the Scythians which I believe comes in part from a deep ambivalence about admitting that the eastern part of the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the land of ancient Colchis that is part of present day Georgia, was civilized during the time of Homer, might even have been known by the ancient Greeks, and played an active role in shaping their world. What bothers Ivanchik most is the idealization of the eastern Scythians by the Hellenistic scholars Ephorus and Strabo. He suggests that the Greeks knew about the eastern nomads, but argues at length against their idealization; and concludes in the first part of his book that the Homeric Greeks had but scanty information about the tribes on the eastern side of the Black Sea:

...the Greeks of the most ancient epoch thought of the Black Sea as the Ocean. They did not suspect the existence of the north and eastern shores of this sea, and had no kind of contact with them.

...греки древнейшей эпохи воспринимали Черное море как Океан. Они не подозревали о существовании северного и восточного побережий этого моря и не имели никаких контактов с ними. (108)

This is a confusing conclusion to a hundred pages of arguments about Homer's references to the Scythians, and is used to call into question positive descriptions of the Scythians. The crux of his worries seems to be which of those nomadic tribes could possibly have been called "milk-eaters and the most just"? Could one of the Scythian tribes, usually thought of as lawless and barbarian, have been peace loving, even vegetarian? Could there really have been a tribe on the eastern shores of the Black Sea that Homer thought of as most just? He seems to want to allow a Homeric knowledge about certain Scythians, i.e., those in the central and northern plateaus of southern Russia, but not about others, i.e. those farther to the east, in Georgian territory; and he is particularly unwilling to believe that they could have been peaceful, or even blessed. Rather, he suggests that the "blessed ones" in Homer are not Scythians at all, but the Hyberboreans who lived further to the north, and were closer ancestors of the Slavic peoples.<sup>12</sup> In the end, Ivanchik's contradictory arguments seem to disassociate the northern, Slavic Scythians from the eastern, Colchian tribes.

Another curiosity in Ivanchik's text is the paucity of works by Georgian or Ossetian scholars, or anyone from the Caucasus. Although a large part of his discussion is about the Scythians who inhabited the territory of Georgia, Abkhazia, and Ossetia, Ivanchik includes in his bibliography only two Georgian scholars: Otar Lordkipanidze, from a family of prominent archeologists, authors, and historians; and one G. A. Melikishvili.<sup>13</sup> In this oversight, as well as the general lack of mention of Caucasian legends and myths,<sup>14</sup> and the complex reality of the sharing and influences that took place in the region, Ivanchik betrays a certain blind spot in his own scholarship. My purpose here is not to dispute Ivanchik's arguments in detail, and indeed they are impressive, but

rather to note that the very nature and subject of his scholarship play into the continuing contest between Russia, Georgia, and other Caucasian countries as they vie for sovereignty and dominance in the region.

The second work in question, the conference proceedings published in 2000 by the Institute of Classical Philology, Byzantinology and Modern Greek Studies at Tbilisi Javakhashvili State University, has its own curious biases. One in particular parallels Ivanchik's work: of the scholars who participated in the conference on "Hellenic Studies on the Verge [sic] of Centuries [sic]," (i.e. "... at the End of the Century"), only one was Russian, while others were from the United States and Europe, including England, Italy, France, and Greece.<sup>15</sup> It showcased, rather, a wealth of Georgian scholars whose interests ranged from ancient Greek excavations near Tbilisi, to the function of myth in G. Seferis' poetry, and all of whom reflected a strong desire to be part of the European scholarly community, western intellectual currents, and in particular, to strengthen ties between Georgia and Greece, the home of democracy. Indeed, the welcoming addresses for the conference were signed by no less than the countries' respective presidents, Konstantinos Stephanopoulos and Eduard Shevardnadze, who noted that scholars from Greece and Europe were convening in Tbilisi, Georgia, to celebrate "a significant conference on Hellenic studies," and the "long history and intensity of the Greek-Georgian relations, [which] have very few analogies in the world."<sup>16</sup> Shevardnadze praised Stephanopoulos, noting Georgia's move towards becoming part of Europe: "Now that Georgia starts to establish its place in the European and world communities, the friendly support of the Hellenic Republic acquires special significance." (5) Why would the two nations' presidents have offered addresses at a scholarly conference, on

the Classics no less, if the conference and the topic were not significant in building national identity and attempting to reshape the geo-political, geo-cultural landscape of Georgia?

The conference papers themselves also reveal how that identity is being shaped. Those delivered by scholars from the United States and Europe showed no particular interest in Georgia *per se*, but had an interest in religious topics, highlighting the cultural continuity between the Classical Greek and Christian heritage.<sup>17</sup> The papers presented by leading Georgian scholars, however, reflect a concerted effort to connect with contemporary European intellectual trends, moving beyond Soviet-era Marxist criticism, and to emphasize Georgia's connection with the Western literary and cultural heritage. Some embrace recent critical work in philosophy and feminism that has opened up new interpretations in the work of Western classicists: Nino Dolidze's "A New Interpretation of Man and its Function in the Teaching of Sophists (from a Modern Point of View)" (95-97); Ketii Nadareishvili's "The Conception [sic] of Woman in Greek Tragedy in the Context of the Binary Oppositions of Sex Roles" (300-306). Others reflect an effort to demonstrate literary ties between the Greek Classics and Georgian culture: Elguja Khintibidze's "An Example of Classical Greek Thought in Old Georgian Literature" (194-197); Zaza Khintibidze's "Parallelism of Scenes in Homer's Epic and Shota Rustaveli's *The Man in the Panther's Skin*" (198-200); and Rusudan Tsanova's "Mythoepic Aspects of the Dismemberment of the Human Body in Ancient Greek and Georgian Literature (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Vazha-Pshavela)" (395-404). Yet other essays emphasize the extent to which the ancient Greek presence was felt in Georgia: Vakhtang Licheli's "Greeks ("Hellenism") in the Hinterland of Georgia (4<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> cent.

B.C.)” (246-249); Otar Lordkipanidze’s “Classical Archaeology in Georgia (In the Context of History of Relations with the Greek World)” (260-263); Guram Kvirkevelia’s “Hoplite Armour in Colchis” (232-241).

These efforts do, however, produce some curious results as the pendulum of interest swings towards Europe and America. For instance, in emphasizing Platonic thought in Shota Rustaveli’s *The Man in the Panther Skin*, Elguja Khintibidze minimizes the influence of Persian literature on the Georgian national epic. It should be understood, however, that the Persian influence has been researched in Georgian literature, and that linking the work to more Western intellectual concerns represents a recent departure, and at the moment, a more urgent intellectual challenge.<sup>18</sup>

These two works, Ivanchik’s volume on the Scythians, and the conference proceedings, suggest that the Classics do matter: they offer one more lens for reading the current relationship between Georgia and Russia, and how those countries are grappling with redefining themselves in the era of post-Soviet Russia, and European-Unionized Europe.

Particularly fascinating is that the ways in which these contemporary scholars of Russia and Georgia deal with each other and their Classical materials are part of a much larger pattern of how the Classics have been used and manipulated in these two countries. The rhetoric and importance of the Classics is notable in histories dealing with the Caucasus and Russia, and in works of literature set in the area. It is as if the Classics have been used to express an intense rivalry between the two countries, in which establishing a secure link to the shared inheritance of the Classical world of Greece and Rome is tantamount to belonging to the club of the civilized European community. Georgia has



long claimed an extensive connection with the Classical world, beginning with figures from Greek mythology such as Prometheus, Medea, Aeëtes, Hecate, and the Amazons, who all hail from the Caucasus. Russia's claim to a direct link to the Classical world is more tenuous, based solely on its southern area having been home to the Scythians.

### **Previous Scholarship, Present Scope**

A basic premise of this dissertation is that the Classics provide a critical instrument in studying the turbulence that marks the relationship between Russia and Georgia. The ancient Greek and Roman myths, literature, and history that provide the foundation of Western European culture have staying power, and how this material is retold and reused, in different eras and different places, offers a window into the society, culture and times doing the retelling. Indeed, the beauty of the Classical myths is that it seems incumbent on subsequent generations to reinterpret the myths in ways that reflect the realities of their own time and place. Although the myths have an original form at some distant point in time, the multiplicities of retellings have their own nuances of mythologizing, as different historical and cultural needs dictate how they are used and manipulated, and the multiple retellings allow authors to carry on an allusive dialogue about issues in their world.

Authors may use and manipulate references to ancient tales to comment on contemporary issues for a variety of reasons: they may find the mythic material familiar from childhood, a known framework about certain characters, the role of fate, shared human experience, etc. Or, in a closed and closely monitored cultural environment where they might not be able to discuss certain issues as openly as they like, authors can

manipulate the Classical tales, seemingly innocent, familiar cultural material, to provide a kind of code that allows allegorical reading of a text, and thus to engage in oblique discussion, a muted dialogue about current controversies.

Interpreting the reception and use of the Classics is also familiar in European and American literary studies. To name but a few, Simon Goldhill's *Who Needs Greek*, offers a discussion of how the staging and re-staging of the Greek Classics reflected political controversies in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. James Clauss' *Medea* includes essays on variations of the Medea myth in Western Europe and America; Edith Hall's *Medea in Performance: 1500-2000*, reviews performances of the play, *Medea*; George Steiner's *Antigone* discusses the many Antigones that have appeared in world literature, and why. Recently, Oxford University Press has issued several works on the reception of the ancient world in Europe, including Raphael Lyne's *Ovid's Changing Worlds: English Metamorphoses 1567-1632*, and David H.J. Larmour's and Diana Spencer's *The Sites of Rome*. And, any one who follows contemporary renditions of the Classics, whether stage productions or film, will easily see how these are often produced to reflect contemporary issues: Peter Sellar's version of Euripides' *Trojan Women* addresses homelessness and refugees in the 1990's; and a 2008 staging of *Eurydice* at the Seattle Repertory Theatre, told from Eurydice's point of view, explores the father/daughter relationship rather than that between Orpheus and Eurydice. The list of variations and studies is endless.

This tradition of re-interpreting the Classics for a given political or social purpose extends beyond Western Europe and America, into Russia and its near neighbors. While a number of books and articles have been published on the use of the Classics in Russia, the topic has not been exhausted within the field of Slavic Studies, especially as a lens for

understanding the relationship between Russia and Western Europe; Russia and its near neighbors, especially Georgia and the Caucasus; and for exploring other countries around the Black Sea that shared direct contact with the Ancient Greece and Rome.<sup>19</sup>

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the use and manipulation of Classical myths and other Classical allusions in selected works of late- and post-Soviet Russian and Georgian literature. I discuss works which refer to the Classics and use them to address a variety of issues of national importance: to define imperial drives, critique a given political practice or regime, or assert national identity, and air concerns about aesthetic and personal freedom. In order to understand how parts of this pattern work in the late- and post Soviet period, I have found it helpful to understand how the Classics function in selected works of early and late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia authors, in particular Pushkin, Gogol, and Saltykov-Shchedrin. I have then applied practices gleaned from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the late- and post-Soviet authors: to the Russians Andrei Bitov and Liudmila Ulitskaia, who write in Russian; the Georgian-Armenian, Bulat Okudzhava, who wrote in Russian; and the late Georgian author, Otar Chiladze, who wrote only in Georgian. Part of my goal is to explore, first, examples of the use of Classical references in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, and second, how the use of the Classics has survived from Imperial Russia, through the late-Soviet period, and continues in post-Soviet times.

Previous works that provide relevant background to my dissertation include Susan Layton's *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*; Harsha Ram's *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire*; Monika Greenleaf's *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*; Stephanie Sandler's *Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile*; and more

recently, Katya Hokanson's *Writing at Russia's Border*; and Judith Kalb's *Russia's Rome*. Layton and Ram focus on Russia's expansion into the Caucasus in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the interaction and inter-dependency of politics and literature, primarily poetry. Sandler and Greenleaf look more closely at aesthetic elements of Pushkin's poetry, paying less attention to the political. Hokanson, building on her fellow scholars' work, focuses on the intersection of poetry and politics, and how Russian literature about the Caucasus helped to forge Russian national identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in that she devotes much of her discussion to Pushkin's use of the Roman poet, Ovid, her work is perhaps the most relevant and similar to the kind of study I have undertaken. Judith Kalb's *Russia's Rome: Imperial Vision, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940*, focuses on references to Russia as the Third Rome, exploring the role images of Rome play in Russian Modernists' and Symbolists' portrayal of Russian national identity, and includes discussion of Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. All, with different emphases, deal with Classical allusions and their relations to the power structures and political context of the literature they discuss.

Layton, in her 1985 work, examines 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature on the conquest of the Caucasus, exploring how literature was often used both to support the project of imperialism, and allow dissenting opinions about imperialism held by some of Russia's leading authors, in particular Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy. Part of her discussion, dictated by the content of the material, is framed in terms of the Classical genres and classicizing forms then prevalent in Russian literature. She focuses on the Caucasus as a Russian Parnassus, a fertile ground for poetic inspiration. Driven to the Caucasus by exile or restless desire, the poets, in particular Pushkin and Lermontov,

found their equivalent of Byron's and Shelley's Swiss Alps in the mountains and wild landscape of the Caucasus; and, Layton argues, they also found the Caucasus to be a place where they could be free from the strictures of Russian Court society and tsarist bureaucracy. Layton's comments on the Classics are limited to general trends. She mentions, for example, that Pushkin found his Parnassus in the Caucasus, and that Lermontov likened the Highlanders to Homeric characters, but does not look at specific references within specific texts.

Building on Layton's work, Ram further explores the interplay between ideology and literature, politics and poetry during Russia's expansion into the Caucasus. He first examines the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, tracing what he calls the growth of the "imperial sublime," from its beginning in the French-inspired neo-classical Odes written in support of imperial expansion, through "sublime dissent" and the "elegiac sublime" found primarily in the works of Lermontov and Pushkin, which express a more critical, yet ambiguous attitude towards Russia's imperial expansion:<sup>20</sup> the ode was first used to praise the monarchy, but developed into a vehicle for expressing opposition, with the introduction of autobiographical elements into the ode through which a "lyric self" emerged; concomitantly, the ode became sacred, and the poet came to be regarded as a prophet, with a voice that would claim the "holy power of the king":

With the rise of critical Enlightenment values and the growing independence of educated society through the eighteenth century and beyond, the sacred ode would ultimately create the terms and frame for an incipient literary discourse of opposition.<sup>21</sup>

Ram explores the link between language, metrics, and the poetics of empire, and how, taken together, they articulate Russia's sense of itself as a country, and specifically one that is defined vis-à-vis Western Europe. Ram quotes L.V. Pumpianskii, as someone who understood the relationship between Lomonosov's innovative syllabo-tonic metrical system and Russia's post-Petrine desire to be both Russian, and European:

‘To understand the origin of the affair of genius that took place in 1739 [i.e., Lomonosov's revolution in Russian prosody], one must try to imagine that first moment when rapture at the West suddenly (explosively) became rapture at oneself as a Western country... Hence it was possible to profess belonging to both Europe and Russia with the same rapture! ... The awakening of rhythm in linguistic consciousness is connected to this very thing, i.e. the rapturous profession of selfhood.’<sup>22</sup>

Ram notes that selfhood, for Pumpianskii, means *national* self, “an intuition of Russia's greatness that provoked the discovery of ‘style,’ ”<sup>23</sup> and elaborates how Lomonosov's sublime ode became the rhetorical basis for a poetics of imperial nationhood. The odic form, taken from the Pindaric Ode, the Classical Greek poem of praise par excellence, and absorbed through the mediation of French translations, is adapted and made Russian, with Russian rhyme and content, and this transformation constitutes a crucial juncture in Russia's process of self-definition. What is important in Pumpianskii's evaluation is the interdependence between the literary form and the understanding of national selfhood; that Russia first admired the Western forms, and then rejoiced when it successfully adapted and adopted them: internalizing the external Classical forms of the West makes Russia one with the West.

Ram expands his study of the “imperial sublime” to explore how the ode of praise evolves into the voice of dissent, and eventually into the Elegiac, mourning the lost glory of the original impetus of the Russian imperial expansion. He notes briefly how Pushkin, unlike Ovid, refuses to write the kind of self-pitying elegiac that Ovid wrote to Augustus Caesar: “In the poem ‘Iz pis’ma k Gnedichu,’ (‘From a letter to Gnedich,’ 1821) Pushkin distinguishes the ‘free voice’ of his own pipe which ‘does not sing flattering hymns of gratitude’ to Tsar Alexander, from Ovid, who ‘faint-heartedly dedicated his elegiac lyre’ to his ‘deaf idol’ Augustus Caesar (2:35). In Pushkin’s hands, then, the historical elegy became a vehicle of dissent or disenchantment.”<sup>24</sup>

Ram discusses other Classical forms, but in passing, and this is an area that could be explored further. He mentions that the epic was never to take hold in Russia,<sup>25</sup> yet suggests that Pushkin’s later poems, the romantic *Poemy* were “epic,” but given the scope of his project, does not elaborate. He also makes only passing comments about Roman elegies as precedents to the Russian elegy, and ignores forms other than the ode and elegy. Further, Ram’s account of Lomonosov’s prosodic breakthrough makes it sound as if Russia’s acceptance of the Classics, in particular the Ode, and its relationship with the West were a *fait accompli*. I would like to explore, however, the idea that acceptance of the Western Classics was, and continues to be, a point of tension within Russia; and that discerning the role of the Greek and Roman Classics in Russian literature brings with it a history of ambiguity and debate which affects reading the Classics in the relationship between Russia and the Caucasus.

Other scholars have explored the presence and significance of the Classics in Russian literature, several working on Pushkin’s identification with Ovid, and the

extended allegory of Russia as imperial Rome and the Third Rome. Stephanie Sandler, in *Distant Pleasure: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile*, interprets Pushkin's poem "To Ovid" (К Овидию) and Pushkin's account of Ovid's exile in "The Gypsies" (Цыганы), exploring both Pushkin's identification with Ovid, and the ways in which he chooses to differentiate himself from the Roman poet: Pushkin understands Ovid's sorrow, but will not shed tears for that sorrow. Rather, identifying himself as a Slav, accustomed to the northern clime, by poem's end he identifies more with the Greek rebellion of his own era.<sup>26</sup> Sandler notes that by apostrophe and imagined quotations, Pushkin can both point to the sorrow he shares with Ovid of being in exile, and also articulate his own intention to appropriate for himself, rather than just repeat, Ovid's words and experience. While Sandler gives a finely nuanced reading of Pushkin's poem, she reads in isolation, and does not compare, for example, Pushkin's dialogue with Ovid with Gogol's allusions to Ovid, or explore how Ovid is a fulcrum of discussion not only for the trope of exile, but also about the controversies of what it means to imitate, adopt, or appropriate the Western Classics into Russian culture, and what that means in turn for defining Russia's sense of national and cultural selfhood. Sandler also discusses a major contrast between the Roman and Greek references in Pushkin's "To Ovid" (К Овидию): Pushkin clearly identifies Russia with the Roman Empire and the Third Rome, and searching for freedom elsewhere, follows Byron's example and looks to the Greek war against the Turks for inspiration. Pushkin's identification of Russia as the Roman Empire, and Greece with a sense of freedom and authentic civilization, is not limited to Pushkin, or the 19<sup>th</sup> century: it will emerge again in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in Bulat Okudzhava's



late-Soviet novel, *Dilettantes' Journey*, (*Путешествие дилетантов*), discussed below in Chapter IV.

Monika Greenleaf, in *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, discusses the adoption of the Classics in the Golden Age of Russian literature, offering several line by line comparisons between Pushkin's poetry and their Classical precedents, again, mediated through French translations and adaptations. She mentions, but then veers away from the political implications of the Classical references, arguing that focusing on them offers too simplistic a reading of Pushkin. She traces Pushkin's elevation of the poetical fragment as a genre to the German re-discovery of the Classics ushered in by Schlegel and Winkelmann, and the intellectual group "The Atheneum," and to the influence of Lord Byron: "...[his fragments] were poetic exercises in the new mode of the anthological fragment... and at the same time excerpts from Pushkin's "southern" notebook, "fragments" of his creative life... [were written] much in the manner of the exiled Byron."<sup>27</sup> By association, Pushkin's readers could understand the pathos of the Romantic exile that underlies the fragmentary works, including the nature of censorship the fragments had to endure, the poet's distance from St. Petersburg, and the reasons for that distance.

Greenleaf assumes as a given the Aesopian nature of various authors' use of Classical allusions, but tends to dismiss this kind of linkage between poetics and politics as simple minded. She offers an excellent overview of Russia's cultural milieu imbued with neo-classicism, of Count Sergei Uvarov and others' efforts to bring Enlightenment via Classical education to Russia, and of the subversive use to which the Classics were put: from Pushkin's cynical reference to the tsar as Augustus, to Uvarov's homosexual

circle encouraging his preoccupation with Greek antiquity, the Classics were often a means for expressing personal, libertarian freedoms. And yet, she seems to dismiss the importance of research by the Soviet scholar D. P. Iakubovich, who explores the specific teaching of N. F. Koshanskii at Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum.<sup>28</sup> Koshanskii, sharing Uvarov's belief that knowledge of the Classics was essential to Russia's enlightenment, encouraged the young Pushkin and other pupils, first of all to imbibe the Classical texts, but also to read them allegorically: if one understands the most important equation of Augustus Caesar as Alexander I, other parallels fall into place. But he also offered, in his textbook anthology of ancient authors, extensive examples of original Latin and Greek works, so that Pushkin, although he claims to have been bored by Latin classes and that Latin was out of fashion (*Eugene Onegin*, i.11), would have had relatively easy access to works both of those who have become 21<sup>st</sup> century canonical authors, Homer, Aeschylus, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Tibullus, as well as to lesser taught authors such as Sappho, and the Hellenistic poets, Moschus, Bion, and Theocritus. Iakubovich also provides a table of Horace's poems which Pushkin "translated."<sup>29</sup> Greenleaf, again, expresses skepticism about Iakubovich's work, yet notes that one of Pushkin's poems is, for example, closer to Ovid than to Parny, his presumed model, and that "perhaps" Pushkin had access to the original Latin, or at least a dual language text.<sup>30</sup> After her first chapter and her close readings of specific poems, she then branches into more theoretical concerns, discussing Freudian and Lacanian psychological implications of the poems. But it is the "perhaps" of her observations about Pushkin's use of Ovid, and the abundance of specific Classical references others have identified in Pushkin that are intriguing, and provide a background for my discussion of Classical references found in Pushkin, Zhukovsky, Gogol, and

Saltykov-Shchedrin; and reason for continuing to pay close attention to Classical references, both subversive and otherwise, in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Russian and Georgian authors.

Katya Hokanson, in “‘Barbarus hic ego sum’: Pushkin and Ovid on the Pontic Shore” and *Writing at Russia’s Border*, works from a theoretical point of view inspired by Edward Said’s idea of “Orientalism” and Mary Louise Pratt’s ideas of how writing from imperial peripheries often influences the center of the Empire, in fact often defines it.<sup>31</sup> Combining this theoretical approach and borrowing from previous scholarship about Pushkin’s identification with and differentiation of himself from Ovid, Hokanson writes about Pushkin’s “southern” poems, “The Captive of the Caucasus,” “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai,” and “The Gypsies,” suggesting that while Russia had been considered Eastern and Other in Europe, Pushkin, in writing about Russia’s imperial expansion into the Caucasus, and describing the Caucasian Other, actually helped define Russia as more European: it was a colonizer like European countries, and civilized when compared to its southern neighbors. She expands on distinctions between Pushkin and Ovid: where Ovid continued to feel he was a stranger in exile in Tomis, forever faithful to Rome and his emperor Augustus, Pushkin, especially in “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai” and “The Gypsies,” was more comfortable in exile, and described the Chechens, Circassians, and Georgians with more sympathy and understanding than Ovid had the Dacians; and, while supporting the project of imperial expansion, also allowed himself to be more critical of autocratic Russian rule.

My research has been inspired by that of Layton, Greenleaf, Sandler, Ram, Hokanson, and Kalb, and part of my goal in this dissertation is to extend their work on

Classical references in Russian literature in three directions. First, I intend to expand the scope of the genres discussed, to include not only the ode, but also lyric, tragedy, epic, history, and philosophy, as these forms or allusions to the forms present themselves in the authors about whom I've chosen to write. Second, I expand the discussion geographically, extending beyond the Caucasus range to Tbilisi itself, including one Georgian author. And, I intend to expand the discussion chronologically, into the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, exploring how Russian and Georgian authors continue to use Classical allusions to explore and define their national and personal identity, and to articulate the complex relation between Russia and Georgia.

My contribution to the field will, I hope, be three-fold, demonstrating how the ideology of imperialism and authoritarian government, and the struggle with that imperialism and authoritarianism, expressed via the use and manipulation of the Classics, can result in a rich, varied, allusive, often inter-textual dialogue. For background, I provide additional examples from the 19<sup>th</sup> century of how Classical allusions resonated as a kind of shorthand, or code, in writers who wrote both in Russia proper, and in and about the Caucasus. It is not just a matter of Pushkin and others finding aesthetic and personal freedom in a Caucasian Parnassus; or that the Ode first expressed the "imperial sublime," and then became a voice of dissent and elegiac loss for authors writing in and about the Russian empire and the Caucasus, but that Russian authors were also engaged in a much larger discussion about the Classics and Western culture within Russia itself; that it was not just a single genre or form that was adopted as a vehicle for a particular ideological bent, but that the Classics themselves were of vital importance as a vehicle through which issues of imperial and national self-definition were expressed and debated. For example,

through allusions to and manipulations of Ovidian references, Gogol engages with Pushkin in an active literary debate about Russian identity and nationhood, about Western perceptions of Russia, Russia's efforts to outdo the West, as well as personal and aesthetic freedom. Pushkin in turn, while identifying with and differentiating himself from Ovid, also offers in a "translation" of a Horatian ode sharp criticism of elements of Russian culture, responding to Gogol's particular nationalism, expressing his own, and at the same time defending his personal artistic freedom. I also expand the scope of the previous research by bringing in Classical authors and genres others do not discuss at length. By understanding the variety of Classical references used, we see that while Russia is often thought of as a backwater, access to the Classics has given and continues to provide its citizens a referential framework that connects them to a more liberal European worldview, and allows them to carry on a fuller dialogue about human values and freedom than has often been assumed. In bringing the discussion into the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, I explore the continuation of a practice. If the language of the Classics informed the ideology and rhetoric of Imperial Russia's 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the expansion into the Caucasus, and at the same time provided a subversive code for its authors, what kind of use of the Classics persists in late- and post-Soviet Russian and Georgian literature – does it reflect ideological, political, and aesthetic concerns about the Soviet empire, as well as about a resurgent Russia, seemingly intent on re-establishing its role as a leading world power, re-claiming its former sphere of interest in the Caucasus?

### **Why Greece and Rome? The Grecian Caucasus: The Cradle of Whose Civilization?**

One might ask, why are the Greek and Roman Classics so important in reading the relationship between Russia and Georgia, and in particular between Russia and the Caucasus? After all, Russia and Georgia both have mythological traditions of their own, with their own pantheons of native gods: why do they not celebrate these, and not worry about the Western canon? Why the compulsion to frame their relationship in terms of the Classics?

Historically, at least as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of Russia's intense awakening as a national state, and in debates about how Russia should enter into an active relationship with the West, modernize itself, and experience an Enlightenment in its own territory, establishing a direct connection to the Classical world became an obsession. As Richard Wortman has documented, Peter the Great, his father, and their descendents borrowed heavily from the imagery of Imperial Rome to legitimize their power, going so far as to import Latin instructors from the Academy in Kiev, to Moscow, to explain the Latin used in pamphlets about inaugurations, and the symbolism of that literature.<sup>32</sup> Russia's conception of itself as the "Third Rome," a complex imagining that actually began after the fall of Byzantium in Bulgaria, reflects an understanding of the continued importance of the Classical heritage in Europe, as well as the conflicting desires both to compete with the West, and to participate more fully in European history and mythology.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to Russia thinking of itself as the "Third Rome," imagining that it inherited the cultural legacy of ancient Greece was also significant in Russia's efforts to participate in European Enlightenment. In the early years of secularization, and in

debates about establishing an appropriate literary language for a modernizing Russia, Slavophiles laid claim to Russia's deep connection to the Classical heritage of Greece: because of the purported linguistic similarities between Russian and ancient Greek, Russia's proximity to ancient Greek settlements around the Black Sea, Russia, it was argued, shared in the mother-lode of Classical heritage. The desire to identify with ancient Greece, and thereby legitimize Russia's own claim to being a civilized nation is intense. Greenleaf aptly quotes the German romantic Herder (from 1793): "If we do not become Greeks, we will remain barbarians," a sentiment felt perhaps more intensely by the Russians in their attempt to modernize and become more European.<sup>34</sup> As Hokanson notes, no less a figure than Karamzin, in his *History of the Russian State*, a cardinal work that helped define Russian national identity in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by giving it a sense of a legitimate history, stresses the importance of the Greek and Roman histories about Russian lands:

Only in the histories of the Greeks and Romans have been preserved information about our ancient fatherland... The singer of the *Odyssey* also names these [Cimmerians]: 'There is a Cimmerian people,' (he says); and a city of Cimmerion, covered in clouds and fog: for the sun doesn't light this sad country, where deep night reigns constantly.' The contemporaries of Homer also had such a false understanding of the countries of southeastern Europe [i.e. the Caucasus]; but the fable about the gloom of the Cimmerians turned into a common place of centuries, and the Black Sea, most likely, received its name for this reason.<sup>35</sup>

Already, with Karamzin, Greece and Greek sources were crucial for including Russia in the European sphere, and for identifying the Caucasus, i.e. Georgia, as ancient Colchis, as the barbarian Other, about which Homer himself was misinformed.

As mentioned above, in Ram's study, the successful adaptation of a Greek meter into a Russian syllabo-tonic meter that allowed an adequate mode of expression for developing the Pindaric ode, was a pivotal moment in the process of Russia's self-definition as being both Russian, and yet part of Europe.

The claim, then, to being heirs of both Rome and Greece was a significant part of the reception of the Classics in Russia, and literary figures in their "Classical dialogues" play with an oscillation between Greek and Roman allusions and references. As noted above, the first ode to gain prominence was the Pindaric, which, even if mediated through the French translations and theorists such as Boileau, nonetheless allowed Russians both to identify with Ancient Greece via the cultural authority of its literary forms, and to legitimize the new Russian forms. As more lyrical modalities emerged and subjective voices of doubt and dissent began to be articulated, the preferred form to emerge was the elegy, the hurt and personal voices of Ovid, Propertius, and Tibullus.<sup>36</sup> As the Classics became more widely taught and assimilated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, historians and literary figures alike would borrow from Greek or Roman forms and heritage to fit rhetorical and political exigencies of the moment.

If intellectuals in Moscow and St. Petersburg desired to claim both the Greek and Roman cultural heritage as their own, in the Caucasus we see a similar appeal to the Classics, but with a distinct preference for ties to ancient Greece and the Hellenistic world. The Caucasus, and Georgia in particular, are considered to be the home of enough



Greek mythological and historical figures that the region as a whole has a natural, legitimate claim to a close tie to ancient Greece. An American's 1856 account of Imam ShamyI's fight against the Russians offers one of the most complete catalogues I have found so far of Classical figures that hail from the Caucasus.<sup>37</sup>

The Caucasus is celebrated as the scene of some of the most popular fables of Grecian antiquity, as well as of some of the earliest traditions of the race. For while the ark of Noah is said to have grounded on the top of Mount Elbrus before reaching its final resting place on the neighboring Ararat, it was on Kasbek that Prometheus was chained to a rock for having stolen the fire of the gods and given it to mortals. In the mountain land of Colchis, Jason carried off the golden fleece, and Cadmus reaped a harvest of armed men from sowing serpent's teeth in furrows turned by the fire-breathing bulls of Vulcan. Hither wandered that primitive race of men who were driven by the Pelasgi from the regions of Olympus; on an island off the coast the poets located the palace of Aurora, wherein were kept up the perpetual dances and songs of the hours, and where was daily reborn the sun; and finally, between the present Little Kabarda and Svanethi existed, say the traditions, the gallant state of the Amazons, until the heart of their otherwise unconquerable prophetess was taken captive by Thoulme, chief of the Circassians, while long afterwards the famous Nina continued to rule over the heroic sisterhood in Immeritia. (5-6)

Scholars may argue about whether Prometheus was chained to Mt. Elbrus or Mt.

Kazbegi, but his home in the Caucasus is nonetheless deeply imbedded in Western culture.

Mackie intertwines the rhetoric of the Classics with the politics of the day, identifying the Caucasian mountaineers as inheritors of Grecian culture, as fighters for democratic liberty against the Russian imperial, authoritarian rule:

The inhabitants of the upper and more inaccessible mountains have held their independence above all price, fighting for their homes as the mountaineer only will... and the Chieftains who have been tempted by preferment in the Russian army and the glitter of its epaulettes, by the honors of the parades at Tiflis, and even by the imperial champagne, and the sight of the ballet dancers of St. Petersburg, have disdained to sell a birthright of freedom inherited from a thousand generations in exchange for these high-flavored sops of an overreaching foreign despotism....

An intense interest of humanity, therefore, still hangs over this prolonged contest between the force of civilization and those of the primitive state of nature, between the battalions of imperial authority and the bands of democratic liberty... (14)

Further, a current anthropological study of the region is also imbued with terms of the Classics. Bruce Grant, in *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus*, (2009), explores the ramifications of the Prometheus myth and the significance of gift exchange to frame his theory of “the gift” as a tool to understand the history of the Caucasus, from Russia’s “gift” of Empire to the Caucasus; to various iterations of “The Captive of the Caucasus” that have appeared in Russian culture (from Pushkin’s poem, to Russian opera and film, to modern Azeri cinema); to the persistence of what appears from the outside to be violent traditions of thieving, kidnapping, and bride-napping.<sup>38</sup>

Even if Grant’s use of Prometheus to frame his arguments is not completely convincing, his phrase, “The Trade in Famous Ancestors,” certainly applies: as Georgia lays claim to famous Greek figures, including Prometheus and Medea, the trade in their representations has offered plenty of rhetoric and material for study. This attempt to gain understanding, fame, and legitimacy by association with Classical ancestors is shared by Georgian politicians, scholars, and literary figures, as well as American Kartvelologists. Scholars have variously attempted to show similarities and differences between the Greek Prometheus and the Georgian-born Amirani, depending on which side they are keen to promote.<sup>39</sup> Kevin Tuite, in “Achilles and the Caucasus,” has suggested that Georgia is the home of proto-typical Greek heroes; and has argued for the “agonistic” nature of toasting at *supras* (traditional Georgian feasts), using anthropological terminology drawn from the culture of Ancient Greece.<sup>40</sup> Georgian scholars and government alike, in trying

to promote Georgia's identification with the West, both the United States and Europe, and to bolster its independence from its Soviet past and a newly emergent Russia, have actively been using Georgia's ties to the ancient Classical world. Witness a new statue in the main square of Batumi, Georgia's largest port, featuring Medea holding a golden fleece: in the background is an equally large mural portraying Georgia as already part of the greater European Union.<sup>41</sup> Witness as well the 2007 international conference on "The Argonautica and World Culture," hosted by Tbilisi State University, with generous support from the Greek government. Scholars, including two Russians, were invited from major European countries; the entire proceedings were published, with papers on a variety of aspects of the myth of Medea, Jason and the Argonauts, from Early Greek to New Wave Italian film.<sup>42</sup> Georgia's promotion of itself as a full player in the West is bolstered by an emphasis in plastic, literary and scholarly arts on the close ties between Georgia and key founding myths of specifically ancient Greek Classical heritage.

Georgia's active engagement of the rhetoric of the Classics comes at a time when Russia, too, has taken renewed pride in its proximity to the Classical past; again, as if finding parallels in, and proving proximity to and ownership of that history could give either country a greater sense of legitimacy, either by belonging to western European culture, or owning the history as part of its authentic cultural heritage. Thus, Russia has seen a 2002 glossy, abbreviated reprint of highlights from Rostovtsev's 1917 work documenting the ancient Greek settlements in the Crimea and Black Sea region.<sup>43</sup> Further, in various accounts published by the Russian government, which attempt to justify Russia's continued efforts to wage war in the Caucasus, especially in Chechnya, we see a harking back to Russia's historical role in the Caucasus, and republishing of late

19<sup>th</sup> century materials. Two works in particular clearly reference the military glory of both Greece and Rome. One, *The Caucasus in the Heart of Russia* (*Кавказ в сердце России*),<sup>44</sup> is a slim volume that includes selections from Lermontov and Pushkin, as well as a chapter entitled: “The Caucasus – one of the cradles of Russian culture” (“Кавказ – одна из колыбелей русской культуры”) (182-183); and a section: “Why did 19<sup>th</sup> century writers and historians call the subduing of the Caucasus an oral Russian *Iliad*?” (“Почему писатели и историки XIX века называли усмирение Кавказа изустной русской *Илиадой*?”) (300). Identifying Russia’s Caucasian campaign with the most glorified battle of ancient Greece, this quote situates Russia on the Western side of the divide, and yet a difference exists between the Greek *Iliad* and the Russian: the people of Russia do not yet understand the significance of the fight, as the Russian *Iliad* has not yet found its Homer:

“Here came entire generations of heroes,” says V. A. Sollugub, “here were legendary battles. Here arose an entire chronicle of dashing exploits, an entire oral *Iliad*, still awaiting its bard... The Russian people can be proud of its Caucasian soldier, of the height to which a Russian man’s strength can rise.”

Тут прошли целые поколения героев, -- говорит В.А. Соллугуб, -- тут были битвы баснословные. Тут сложилась целая летопись молодецких подвигов, целая изустная русская Илиада, еще ожидающая своего песнопевца... Русский народ может гордиться кавказским солдатом, до какой высоты может подниматься сила русского человека. (185)

Before mentioning the *Iliad*, the author also invokes the Roman Empire, comparing the battle Russia faces in the Caucasus with the battle Rome faced in its attempts to subdue the wild provinces of Britain and Germany, hoping to bring civilization to the northern tribes:

In the midst of constant danger and war these “highly militarized people” for decades were tempered in selfless courage, unexampled in history and recalling only the Roman legions, sent by the “Eternal City” to carry Roman civilization to the forests and mountains of Germany and Britain, dying or reaching their goals, alone among the hostile tribes, spreading Roman power and Roman thought from whatever kind of small fortification.

Среди постоянной опасности и войны этот “войско-народ” десятилетиями закалялся в беззаветном мужестве, беспрецедентном в истории и напоминающем разве только римские легионы, посланные “вечным городом” внести римскую цивилизацию в леса и горы Германии и Британии, умирающие или достигающие своих целей, одинокие среди враждебных племен, распространяющие римскую власть и римскую мысль из какого-нибудь маленького укрепленья. (182)

These references to the Classics come amid discussion of Russia’s role as an Imperial colonizer, the amount of Russian blood shed thus far, and the difficulties and yet importance of the Caucasus for Russia. These passages reveal the ease with which Russia fluctuates in its identification between Greece and Rome, depending on which side is seen as a dominating force.<sup>45</sup>

Equally curious is that while this passage is quoted in one government volume from V. Potto’s *The Caucasian War in Individual Notes, Episodes, Legends, and Biographies* (*Кавказская война в отдельных очерках, эпизодах, легендах, и биографиях*), written in 1885, and Potto is held up as one of the great military historians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this very same passage referencing the *Iliad* and Roman legions is reprinted in 2005, in *The Annexation of the Caucasus to Russia, (Присоединение Кавказа к России)*, as the preface to a work devoted to the unification of Russia with the various countries and peoples of the Caucasus, in order of treatment: Georgia,

Azerbaijan (the “musul’ manskie khanstva”), Abkhazia, Armenia, Chechnya, Dagestan, the Adyge people, and Ossetia.<sup>46</sup>

Yet another contemporary work on the history of the Caucasian wars illustrates one Russian’s intense desire to identify with some form of Classical myth. Iakov Gordin, in a 2008 work, *Why Russia Needed the Caucasus: Illusions and Reality (Зачем России нужен был Кавказ: иллюзии и реальность)*, argues for the historical unity of Russia and the Caucasus, and in a chapter entitled “Cherkessia – a Caucasian Atlantis” (“Черкесия – Кавказская Атлантида”) quotes a fragment of Aeschylus in Russian translation:<sup>47</sup>

And to this evil, time-honored,  
Horrible, my body became accustomed;  
And out of it, from the heat of the sun  
Drops of blood ooze continuously  
And fall on the crags of the Caucasus.

И с этим злом, веками освященным  
Ужасным, тело свыклося мое;  
А из него от солнечного жара  
Сочатся капли крови постоянно  
И на скалы Кавказа упадают.

The point of this quote is not to question or affirm Gordin’s credentials as a Classical scholar, but to note how Gordin casts Russia as a victim, like Prometheus, and has gone to great lengths to trace a quote from a play by Aeschylus play that has come down to us only through a quotation, and from the Roman, Cicero, at that:

The verses cited belong to the second part of Aeschylus’ trilogy about Prometheus. Only the first part has come down to us – “Prometheus

Bound,” and a small fragment of the second. The verses, quoted in an epigraph, were included by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, and have been preserved thanks to that.

Процитированные строки принадлежат второй части трилогии Эсхила о Прометее. До нас дошла только первая часть – “Прометей прикованный” и небольшие фрагменты второй. Стихи, вынесенные в эпиграф, были включены Цицероном в его “Тускуланские беседы” и благодаря этому сохранились. (65)

The weight lent by the Classical allusion is important not only for the rhetorical effect it creates, but for the legitimacy it bestows on those who can do the quoting. The drive to identify with a Classical figure leads authors to track down obscure references, stretching the Classical canon. And, the Classical figures are flexible. Russia can be identified as either a Greek and Roman conqueror; or, as we see here, cast as the heroic Prometheus, victimized by, we suppose, Zeus, in his role of the greater god of the Caucasus.

As Georgians erect a statue of Medea to reflect their desired position vis-à-vis the West and Russia, and find alternate readings of the Medea myth that more closely align with their idea of their national identity, we here see the Russians, too, casting about in ancient mythology to help support, define, and redefine their history. The Classics matter, and are used and manipulated by respective governments and intellectuals to define and promulgate national interests, identity, and nationhood, as well as personal and artistic freedom within and against Russia’s system of authoritarian government. The currency and coinage of the Classics in building a national narrative, in articulating imperial and counter-imperial narratives, is still, so to speak, gold.

## **The Presence of the Classics in Russian and Georgian Literature**

If the rhetoric of the Classics plays a role in current historical, anthropological and political narratives, it is equally, if not more prominent in literary works, and it is the specific purpose of this dissertation to explore how Classical allusions, beginning with coded references in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, and extending to Soviet, Russian, and Georgian literature from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, become a vital commodity for articulating Russian and Georgian national identity, touching both the self-definition of each country, the relationship between them, and personal and aesthetic freedom within the larger socio-political arena. By paying attention to and understanding the references to the ancient texts in later literature, and comparing how different authors treat this material, we find a lens for exploring the authors' attitudes towards their country, and how they fit into world culture. Most fascinating so far has been to track such a consistent use of the Classics: slight references are not to be dismissed, and if you follow them closely, across time, over boundaries and borders, subtexts surface, and meanings emerge.

In many countries on many occasions, the adaptation and reception of the Classics has never been a completely neutral, apolitical process, and this is no exception in Russia, Georgia, and the Caucasus.<sup>48</sup> References to the Classics in Russian literature are often loaded even beyond what one might expect in other European literatures. Given the extensive use of Classical material in Renaissance and Modern Europe and America, to say that someone is like Apollo or Adonis, Athena or Diana, seems relatively straightforward. However, widespread adoption of the Classics was more problematic in Russia, and more often than not, when a Classical figure or trope is mentioned in Russian



literature, a comment is being made about a contemporary issue that an author may not want to comment on openly.<sup>49</sup> Thus, in Russian literature, the Classics serve as a kind of code which can be used by those who understand the references, as a suitable vehicle for commenting on political issues allusively. These references appear in a wide range of genres, including novels, poems, literary criticism, popular detective novels; they oscillate between Roman and Greek, and can vary from a fleeting mention that reveals only the tip of an iceberg of controversy, or can involve the translation of an entire poem, or the restructuring and recasting of an entire myth or mythic cycle.

Rather than focusing on a single genre, such as the ode, or a single author, such as Ovid, and although the task of this kind of interpretation has provided an inspiring challenge, I discuss various genres and authors. I include Classical references as they appear in the texts I discuss: not only Ancient Greek myths as found in Homer and Hesiod, but also material that has been filtered through poets of the Classical period of Athens, such as Pindar and Sophocles; of the Alexandrian period, such as Apollonius Rhodius and Callimachus; and of the Roman poets, in particular Horace and Ovid, but also Catullus and Tibullus. I also treat references to minor, and later Classical writers, for example, Bion of Smyrna, and Appian. I include the wide range of references because these are what the Russians and Georgian authors have chosen to reference, reiterate, and retell, and I try to explore what motivates their choices: how the Classical allusions are manipulated at moments in Russian and Georgian history when their national identity is in question, or when a writer addresses issues of national importance, be it in the midst of empirical expansion, national consolidation, or in re-orienting vis-à-vis the West.

To demonstrate how the use of Classical allusions took shape in Russia, I provide a background in Chapter I, beginning with the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the period after the Decembrist movement, December, 1825, when Russia was redefining itself under the banner of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality, noting the underlying ambiguity towards the Classics, and a sense of conflicted loyalty towards Russia. I discuss the work of Sergei Uvarov, and his project of bringing Enlightenment to Russia via importing Classical education into Russia, and reverberations of that program in Zhukovsky and Pushkin. Reflecting on Pushkin and Ovid's differing sense of loyalty to Russia, I explore how Pushkin identifies openly with Ovid, while Gogol, feeling himself in competition with Ovid, wrote his national epic, *Dead Souls*, as an attempt to outdo the Roman author; and yet in his short story "The Old World Landowners" shares both an affinity with and distance from Ovid. I also discuss an example from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the major upheavals of the abolition of serfdom and a concomitant decline of the traditional social structure, where Saltykov-Shchedrin uses a distinctly Greek tragic subtext in *The Golovlyov Family* to identify ills within the body politic of Russia.

I do not elaborate on the use of the Classics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as there have been several previous studies on this material.<sup>50</sup>

I instead explore how specific authors engage the Classics in late- and post-Soviet Russia, re-iterating old issues, re-using tropes from the previous century, and adding contemporary usages and contemporary concerns. In discussing the late- and post-Soviet times, and the relationship between Russia and Georgia, I suggest that the tensions between the two countries have inspired larger, competing mythologies and interpretations of the Classics, and what they mean for each country.

In Chapter II, from the Krushchev and Brezhnev eras, when Russia was opening up to Western influences and becoming increasingly exposed to both European and American culture, I examine Andrei Bitov's short story, "Penelope" ("Пенелопа"), and selections from his *A Captive of the Caucasus* (*Книга путешествий по Империи*) which reflect respectively on his understanding of various Classical figures, and his attachment, as a Russian author in the tradition of Pushkin and Lermontov, to Georgia and the Caucasus.

In Chapter III, focusing on post-Soviet Russia, I examine Liudmila Ulitskaia's novel, *Medea and her Children* (*Медия и ее дети*), and briefly mention a collection of stories, *The Connecting Line* (*Сквозная линия*),<sup>51</sup> both written during the 1990's when Russia seemed to be in a cultural and political free-fall, vacillating between an initial desire to democratize and identify with the West in the Yeltsin years; and heading towards the early 2000's, with its apparent retrenchment under Putin, who, encouraging Russian nationalism and attempting to reassert a Soviet era sphere of influence in the Caucasus, also seems to be reclaiming a pre-Soviet identity closely related to tsarist Russia.<sup>52</sup> Ulitskaia, like Bitov, includes a host of Classical figures in her portrayal of both late- and post-Soviet Russia, and these references, primarily to Medea, but also to Penelope, Odysseus, and other vaguely defined "pagan" characters suggest Ulitskaia's conception of a post-Soviet Russia that involves a reiteration of the Soviet Union as a family of nations, with Georgia and Georgian descendents at the heart of the Soviet-Russian Empire, disregarding any sense of Georgia's independent nationhood, in fact denigrating Georgians, and obliquely confronting the legacy of Stalin.

In Chapters IV and V, I discuss two historical novels, both written in the late-Soviet period: Bulat Okudzhava's *Dilettantes' Journey* (*Путешествие дилетантов*) and Otar Chiladze's *A Man Walked Down the Road* (*გზაზე უბოძო კაცი მოდოდა*). Both novels lend themselves to allegorical readings, through varied references to the Classics, the first to the image of Russia as the Third Rome (among others), the second to the myth of Medea (among others); and reflect two Georgian authors' different approaches to dealing with Russia, and to understanding Georgian national identity. Okudzhava's novel, I hope, helps to unify the chronological scope of this dissertation. Written in the late-Soviet period (1980), it is set in the time of Nicholas I, and recalls the use of the Classics made by Pushkin, Gogol, and others. It also deals with Russian-Georgian relations from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, addressing Russia's continued occupation of Georgia and the issue of territorial integrity, both of which deeply concern Chiladze. Chiladze's novel, a nominal retelling of the myth of Medea, Jason, and the Argonauts, confronts Russia's aggression towards Georgia, and is a testament to Georgian identity and culture. Discussion of these two novels is particularly topical, as the tension between Georgia and Russia, simmering since the fall of the Soviet Union, continues to threaten the stability of the Caucasus.

To reiterate, the use and manipulation of Western Classics to comment on contemporary controversies has been marked in Russian literature from their introduction into Russia, and continues to this day. Such use is not limited to Russia as such, but is found as well in its near neighbor, Georgia, where it has become prominent as Georgia is trying to renegotiate its old relationship with a supposedly "new" Russia and establish independent contact with the West. It is particularly fascinating to see the continued use

of the dialogue of Classical allusions in the articulation of the relationship between Georgia and Russia -- from Imperial, to late- and post-Soviet times. The battle over who claims closer ties to the Greek and Latin Classics seems to be a matter of heightened concern when either country is facing a crisis of national identity, or about its relation with the West. Allusions to the Classics and how they are manipulated can help us read the turbulent relations between the two countries.

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<sup>1</sup> In the two decades since of the fall of the Soviet Union, interest in the Black Sea region has exploded, along with the number of scholarly and more popular books about the area, including: Neal Ascherson's *The Black Sea: the Birthplace of Civilization and Barbarism* (1996); Charles King's *The Black Sea: A History* (2004); and James Romm's *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography Exploration, and Fiction* (1992).

<sup>2</sup> See Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (2008), for a history of the Caucasus, including the relations between Russia, the Ottoman and Persian Empires, and the Caucasus, with discussion about Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

<sup>3</sup> See Solov'ev's *The History of Russia from Ancient Times (История России с древнейших времен)* (366-373), for an example of how Peter the Great's military leaders maneuvered between the Persians and the Georgians, some of whom converted to Islam and served as leaders in the Shah's army. One in particular, the Georgian prince Vakhtang Leonovich, found his loyalty split: he had converted in order to survive Persian rule, but when the Russians began to move south, requested forgiveness, claiming that in his heart he had never abandoned Christianity; he acted as a mediator between the Russians and the Persians.

<sup>4</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, chapters 1-3. Ronald Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*.

<sup>5</sup> Keldysh, M. V. "The Russian Academy of Science and the Development of Georgian Science in the Pre-Revolutionary Period" ("Российская академия наук и развитие грузинской науки в дореволюционном периоде") (16-40).

<sup>6</sup> King, Charles, *The Ghost of Freedom*, (188-189).

<sup>7</sup> Jugashvili is an Ossetian name, Jugae, to which Stalin's grandfather had added the "shvili" to make it more Georgian. Personal communication from John Colarusso, Professor of Anthropology, McMaster University, CAN, January, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, (245).

<sup>9</sup> My translation of the title. The work itself has not been translated into English.

<sup>10</sup> See Ivanchik, *On the Eve of Colonization (Накануне колонизации)* (243). All subsequent references to Ivanchik's work are noted by page numbers in parentheses. All translations of Ivanchik's work are my own.

<sup>11</sup> Ivanchik, op.cit., (243).

<sup>12</sup> Ivanchik, op.cit., (81).

<sup>13</sup> Ivanchik, op.cit., (249).

<sup>14</sup> See Colarusso, John, *Nart Sagas of the Caucasus*, for discussion of proto-Iranian, Ossetian mythology that influenced Homer; and Tuite, Kevin, "Achilles and the Caucasus" (289-343), for the influence of ancient eastern Black Sea culture on the Greek Classics.

<sup>15</sup> The absence of Russian scholars was also noticeable at a conference held in Tbilisi in 2007, on "The Argonautica and World Culture," mentioned later.

<sup>16</sup> Shevardnadze, "Hellenistic Studies on the Verge of Centuries," August 31, 2000, (5).

<sup>17</sup> These papers included: David Kovacs' "The 'Grammar' of Divine Intervention in Greek Tragedy" (224-227); Judith Kovacs' "Paideia, the Care of the Soul, and Concealment in Clement of Alexandria" (228-231); Chiara Ombretta Tommasi Moreschini (Pisa) on "Androgynous Divinities in Classic and Christian Antiquity" (283-288); and Claudio Moreschini (Pisa) on "The Christian Platonism of Gregory of Nazianzus" (289-294).

<sup>18</sup> Personal conversation with Maka Elbakidze, lecturer at the Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Literature, Tbilisi.

<sup>19</sup> See for example, Judith Kalb's *Russia's Rome: Imperial Vision, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940*; Peter Barta, ed. *Russian Literature and the Classics*; Catriona Kelly's dissertation, *I.F. Annensky and the Classical Ideal*; F.T. Griffiths and S. J. Rabinowitz, *Novel Epics, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and National Narrative*, "Tolstoy and Homer," and *The Third Rome: Classical Epos and Russian Novel (from Gogol to Pasternak)*.

<sup>20</sup> Ram, *Imperial Sublime*, (121).

<sup>21</sup> Ram, op. cit., (60).

<sup>22</sup> Ram, op. cit., (61), quoting Pumpianskii, "K istorii russkogo klassitsizma," (310).

<sup>23</sup> Ram, op. cit., (61).

<sup>24</sup> Ram, op. cit., (186).

<sup>25</sup> Ram, op. cit., (40).

<sup>26</sup> Sandler, *Distant Pleasures*, (45-50; 225; 194).

<sup>27</sup> Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, (73-74).

<sup>28</sup> Greenleaf, op. cit., (60). For an excellent overview of Russia's adoption of Classical materials, see (56-107); for a summary of the prevalence of neoclassical references as a subversive code, see (61-69).

<sup>29</sup> Iakubovich, D. P., "Antiquity in the Works of Pushkin" ("Античность в творчестве Пушкина") (92-159).

<sup>30</sup> Greenleaf, op. cit., (98-102).

<sup>31</sup> Hokanson, Katya, "'Barbarus hic ego sum': Pushkin and Ovid on the Pontic Shore," and *Writing at Russia's Border*.

<sup>32</sup> Wortman, Richard, *Scenarios of Power, vol. I. esp. "Part Two: Olympian Scenarios"* (81-168).

<sup>33</sup> Russia often seems to define itself in the terms of the West, and can never be just itself; at times it desires to be a European nation, rather than the orientalized Other; at others, it is proud of its Eurasian identity. I am aware of Edward Said's theories about "Orientalism," but think they become very circular when applied to Russia and Georgia: Russia, Oriental to the West, has in turn tried to Orientalize the Caucasus, which sees itself as closer to Europe. More applicable, it seems, are the works of Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone" (33-40), and *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, esp. her discussion of contact zones and how the periphery often becomes the center of an empire, given 1) how the Russians describe the Caucasus as the "heart" of Russia, see below; and 2) the importance of the Caucasus in Russia's literary and political history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and during the Soviet Stalinist times.

<sup>34</sup> For discussion of the importance of Greek Antiquity in Russia's self-conception, see Greenleaf, op. cit., (62-63).

<sup>35</sup> Hokanson, "'Barbarus hic ego sum': Pushkin and Ovid on the Pontic Shore," (26), quoting Karamzin, N. M., *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., 3 vols. St Petersburg: I. Einerling, 1842-4: kn 1, t I, II, III, IV.

<sup>36</sup> See Sandler, op. cit., (16-76); Greenleaf, op. cit., (62). See Ram, op. cit., (121 ff.), on "Sublime Dissent," where he discusses elegy, but mentions the Roman authors only by name.

<sup>37</sup> See Mackie, *Life of Shamyl*, (5-6). Although outside the scope of this dissertation, it would be fascinating to research further Mackie's sources for his comments about the Caucasus. Note whose side he is taking: "The principal authors who have recently written on Circassia are Bodenstedt, Moritz Wagner, Marlinski, Dubois de Montpereux, Hommaire de Hell... and from their pages chiefly has been filled the easel with the colors of which I have endeavored to paint the following picture of a career of heroism nowise inferior to that of the most famous champions of classical antiquity, of a war of independence such as may not improperly be compared with the most glorious struggles recorded in the annals of liberty, and of a state of society perhaps the most romantic and the most nearly resembling that described in the songs of Homer which the progress of civilization has now left for the admiration of mankind."

<sup>38</sup> Grant, Bruce, *The Captive and the Gift: Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus*, esp. chapters 1 & 7. I think Grant's attempt to explain so much under the rubric of Prometheus' "gift" of

fire to mankind falls short for a number of reasons, not least of which is that although he claims he is trying to understand the Caucasus from the Caucasian point of view as well as the Russian, he frames his work around an image of Prometheus that is grounded in imperial Athenian Greece; although he addresses this in the early part of his work, he seems to forget that he has chosen as his framework a point of view that has already obscured or occluded that of the opposing side he is supposedly trying to include. His argument works better for explaining Russia's "gift of Empire," but falls short of explaining clearly how the myth applies to Caucasian customs of theft, kidnapping, and bride-napping.

<sup>39</sup> Grant, *op. cit.*, (68-71).

<sup>40</sup> Tuite, Kevin, "Achilles and the Caucasus" (289-343); "Extreme Banqueting: Positive and Negative Agonism at the Georgian Supra;" "Highland Georgian paganism — archaism or innovation?" (79-91).

<sup>41</sup> See appendix, image of the statue of Medea, in Batumi.

<sup>42</sup> See "The Argonautica and World Culture," 2007. Interestingly, one of the two Russians at the conference was Askold Ivanchik, whose interest in the Caucasus and eagerness to meet with international colleagues seemed to trump biases found in his earlier work; he currently teaches in France. The other was M.V. Bibikov, from Moscow, whose paper was entitled: "A la recherche... D'Argonautique Byzantine perdue." (14-19). See Nadareishvili, Ketii, "Medea in the Context of Modern Georgian Culture." (222-229).

<sup>43</sup> Rostovtsev, M.N., *Hellenism and Iranianism in South Russia (Эллинизм и иранство на юге России)* (2002), from a series, "The Cradle of Civilization" (Колыбель цивилизации).

<sup>44</sup> *The Caucasus in the Heart of Russia (Кавказ в сердце России)* (182-183; 300). My translation of the title and other quotes from this work.

<sup>45</sup> *The Caucasus in the Heart of Russia*, (182-183). Other quotes advocating Russia's continued presence in the Caucasus and praising the sacrifices of the Russian people refer to the number of victims and the cultural importance of the Caucasus: "The Caucasus! What Russian heart does not respond to this name, linked by a link of blood and with both the historical and intellectual life of our motherland, speaking about her uncountable victims, and at the same time of her poetic inspirations." (Кавказ! Какое русское сердце не отзовется на это имя, связанное кровной связью и с исторической, и с умственной жизнью нашей родины, говорящее о неизмеримых жертвах ее и в то же время о поэтических вдохновениях.) (182).

The work also explains the Caucasus as a broad, safe border zone between Russia and Asia: "The Caucasus was the key, without which it would have been impossible to take possession of the wide plains, and to block them off from the invasions of ever new tribes and peoples." (Кавказ был ключом, без которого невозможно было овладеть обширными равнинами и запретить их от вторжений все новых и новых племен и народов.) (183); and the difficulties of subduing the periphery: "But the Caucasus was settled by militaristic, proud, and freedom-loving tribes, besieging the peoples who in turn occupied the foothills, and Russia still faced an age-old, persistent [or stubborn, or unyielding, or dogged] battle, from which only the people, and no government, could emerge as victor." (Но Кавказ был населен воинственными, гордыми и свободолюбивыми племенами, осадками народов, поочередно занимавших подножия гор, и России предстояла еще вековая упорная борьба, из которой победителем мог выйти только народ и никакое государство.) (183).

<sup>46</sup> See Makarov and Makarova, (7-10). My translation of the title.

<sup>47</sup> Gordin, (65). My translation.

<sup>48</sup> See Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek?*, for discussions of political and cultural ramifications of reworked Classical productions in Europe.

<sup>49</sup> See others, including Greenleaf, on the Aesopian character of references to Classical materials. Essentially, in Aesopian readings, the Classics serve as a kind of code which can be used by those who understand the references; as a suitable literary vehicle for commenting on political issues that need to be discussed covertly, given the presence of government censors and domestic spies. I am suggesting that some of the references were rather well known, allowing for freer dialogue among the educated elite than is usually assumed.

<sup>50</sup> Studies on the Classics in poets of the Silver Age have been treated in greater detail. See Catriona Kelly, *Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky and the Classical Ideal: Poetry, Translations, Drama and Literary Essays*; Judith Kalb, *Russia's Rome: Imperial Visions, Messianic Dreams, 1890-1940*.

<sup>51</sup> This work has not yet been translated. I have given it a working title, but the Russian term, "skvoznaia" (сквозная), is enigmatic, and has no single English equivalent that captures its full meaning.

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<sup>52</sup> Anders Aslund, in a talk given in Seattle, WA, 2008, gave an economic analyses of Putin-era Russia in which he argued that Putin desires to return Russia to kind of 19<sup>th</sup> century tsardom.



## Chapter I

**The Classics and National Identity: Use and Manipulation of Classical Allusions in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian Literature***Жуковскому*

Когда, к мечтательному миру  
 Стремясь возвышенной душой  
 Ты держишь на коленях лиру  
 Нетерпеливою рукой;...

Ты прав, творишь ты для немногих,  
 Не для завистливых судей,  
 Не для сбирателей убогих  
 Чужих суждений и вестей,  
 Но для друзей таланта строгих,  
 Священной истины друзей...

(Пушкин, том 1, 336)

**The Classics and Russia's Enlightenment in the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Uvarov, Zhukovsky, Pushkin, and Gogol.**

In order to fully appreciate the continued use of Classical allusions in late- and post-Soviet Russian and Georgian literature, it is important to appreciate the use and manipulation of the Classics in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, a period of simultaneous imperial expansion and domestic change, when Russia was extending its role as a world player in the West, and Russians were negotiating their sense of freedom within a government that oscillated between liberality and authoritarian rule. The tendency to use the Classics to reflect on issues of empire and national identity, established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by authors such as Zhukovsky, Pushkin, and Gogol, continued to grow throughout the century, into the early Soviet period, and beyond to late- and post-Soviet authors.

Though the late- and post-Soviet authors I study tend to make more general allusions to

the Classical materials, and fewer, if any, close quotations than the 19<sup>th</sup> century authors, the dialogue of the Classics continues, as more contemporary authors negotiate personal and artistic freedom, and address topics such as the Stalinist legacy in post-Soviet Russia and Russia's re-emergent imperial tendencies towards the former Soviet republics, especially in the Caucasus. It may thus be instructive to look more closely at a few 19<sup>th</sup> century examples of how Classical materials are used, so that in turning to the late- and post-Soviet authors, we can see that although how the Classics are used may change, they still form a touchstone for reflecting on issues of national and personal identity.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, using Classical references to debate issues of Russian national identity, offer criticism, and engage in an allusive dialogue about difficult subjects, flourished. Early in the century the educated elite, at least, possessed an adequate knowledge of Classical materials, to some degree from the original Greek and Latin, to allow the references and allusions to take on significant meaning.<sup>1</sup> Using the Classical materials as a kind of allegory, and the ancient figures and tropes as models and mirrors of their contemporary political actors and social situations, the elite created works that offered both engaging stories of Russian life, and a parallel world of allusive commentary on that life.

In the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the adaptation and reception of the Classics in Russia involved a synergetic mix of neo-classicism, sentimentalism, and romanticism, and it was time of intensely creative literary activity among the poets surrounding Pushkin. Greenleaf and Hokanson have explored Pushkin's use of the Classics, imagining himself as Ovid, in reflecting on his own exile, both on the Western edge of the Black Sea in Tomis, and transported to the Crimea, and casting Russia as a Third

Rome, with the tsars as the Romans Caesars.<sup>2</sup> Layton has also explored the idea of Pushkin's exile in the Caucasus as a sojourn in a Russian Parnassus, a space for more personal and political freedom than he could experience in the northern capital of Moscow.<sup>3</sup> Pushkin and his contemporaries' use of the Classics, however, ran deeper than these few instances,<sup>4</sup> and it is worth looking at other examples to explore the topics on which the allusions touch: Zhukovsky, in an ode to Pindar, humorously comments about the importance of the Classics to the general Russian populace and in Russian culture; Pushkin's version of Horace's Ode III, 30, "exegi monumentum," offers biting criticism of both the Tsar's repressive policies towards members of the Decembrist Revolt, and the fate of Pushkin's own poetry under the censorship of Sergei Uvarov, and possibly Count Benckendorff, then head of the Third Department; his reference to Horace Satire II, vi, raises questions about Russia's Enlightenment, which are in turn explored by Gogol in "The Old World Landowners," who, while focusing on his competition with Ovid, and apparent loyalty to Russia's primacy over the West, also raises the specter of Europe's image of Russia as a cold, backward, repressive country. In their allusions to various Classical materials, all reflect on critical issues facing Russia, and on their own relationship with their motherland: the repressive nature of the Russian social and political structure, especially under Nicholas I; the hypocrisy and decay of the land-owning classes; the authors' own ambiguous loyalty towards Russia. Having been exposed to liberal Western ideas of civil society and personal freedom, they feel a tension of being pulled simultaneously towards the European West, and towards Russia's less than liberal leanings: and they are drawn to express this tension in the Classical allusions they use.

### **Uvarov, Zhukovsky, Pushkin, and Gogol**

The fate of the Classics in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia is encapsulated in the life of Count Sergei Uvarov (1786-1855), who well understood the role the Classics played in the Enlightenment in Europe. Uvarov, who served as the minister of education in the reigns of Alexander I (1801-1825) and Nicholas I (1825-1855), returned from his years as a diplomatic attaché in Vienna, (1807-1809), with the idea that for Russia to reach the same state of development and enlightenment as he had observed in Austria, Russians needed to become truly educated, i.e. to be as versed as their European counterparts in the Classics, Greek in particular. Uvarov was tutored in Ancient Greek for 15 years, wrote scholarly monographs, and corresponded with Europe's leading intellectuals, classicists and classical enthusiasts, including Goethe and the Humboldt brothers.<sup>5</sup>

Desiring to bring Russia to the level of Europe after the Renaissance and Enlightenment, Uvarov was instrumental in instituting education reforms to ensure that Greek and Latin were taught in Russia's leading gymnasia, including the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum, attached to the Summer Palace outside of St. Petersburg, where Pushkin studied along side children of the elite. The educational reforms he promoted, however, embodied a conundrum: they were based on a policy of using European material within a Russian system, with the aim of creating and fostering a Russian national literature.<sup>6</sup> Referring to praise given by the German classicist Heine, that of all European languages Russian is the closest to Greek, Uvarov argued that Greek literature, more than Latin, could serve as a basis on which Russia could create its own literature, but understood as well the importance of Latin. Adding further complexity to his ideas, Uvarov also

believed in an eastern provenance of Russian culture, and drew up plans for the first Institute of Asiatic Studies. His own classical scholarship reflects an interest in eastern influences, as seen in his monograph that discusses the Eleusinian Mysteries in terms of Dionysian ritual, a reading that aligns his interpretation of the Greek religious rituals with tenets of Russian Orthodoxy that emphasize communality and ecstatic religious practices.<sup>7</sup> Uvarov's personal interest in the Classics influenced his overall project for restructuring Russian education, and reflected a tension felt by many Russians between wanting to be fully Europeanized, and yet feeling themselves somehow different, Other, partially Eastern.

Uvarov's efforts to reform the Russian educational system had paradoxical results which played themselves out both in Uvarov's life and in the literature of the time that bears witness to the success of and resistance to his reforms, as well as to the perils that come with adapting a European style Enlightenment into Russian form.

Over the course of Uvarov's life and career, the study of the Classics suffered the vicissitudes of its particular Russian fate. After the 1848 disturbances in Europe, that in Russia were blamed on the influence of the French Revolution, Uvarov's beliefs fell out of favor: both Latin and Greek were both considered unnecessary, and Greek was seen as radically dangerous, capable of fomenting revolution; actual class hours devoted to the Classics in the curricula of leading gymnasia were reduced.<sup>8</sup> By the end of his life, Uvarov was forced into retirement, obliged to indulge his enjoyment of the Classics in the privacy of his country estate, in a study that housed one of the most extensive Classical libraries in Russia, and a large sarcophagus.<sup>9</sup>

Uvarov seems to embody a paradox inherent in the very project of bringing

Enlightenment to Russia via educating people in the Classics.<sup>10</sup> Despite his enthusiasm for encouraging Enlightenment in Russia, Uvarov was also known as the author of the reactionary nationalist motto adopted by Alexander I, “Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Fatherland,” the tri-partite slogan that is at odds with so much of what the Classics have to teach about democracy and civil society: the cultivation of rational philosophy and debate, the importance of an individual, lyric voice; and the exploration of extremes of human passion. Significantly for Russia, however, even though Latin was deemed non-essential, and the authorities eliminated Greek in the gymnasia in the 1850’s, only to reinstate it during the Tolstói reforms of the 1880’s (as a means to discipline young minds, and keep them from “materialism, nihilism, and a most ruinous egotism”),<sup>11</sup> a great deal of Classical literature had been translated into Russian or could be read in French translation, and people were reading, understanding and engaging with the materials, though not without conflict and ambiguity.<sup>12</sup> Once exposed to the ideas of ancient Classical Greece and Rome, to the tenets of European civilization, educated Russians seemed to feel the need to define themselves vis-à-vis the Classical materials, both measuring themselves against Classical authors and heroes, and using them to discuss issues close to their hearts. At times they would see close parallels between themselves and the Classical figures; and at others, if they found a comparison unflattering, or perhaps at odds with Orthodox faith or a desired image of Russia, they did not shy away from adapting the Classics to fit their Russian context. They understood the Classics well, and used the sources as the ancient authors had used them in their own time, to discuss issues of politics, culture and identity, including moments of personal vengeance that resulted from the national political climate.

### Zhukovsky's "Ode to Pindar:" Loving and Questioning the Classical Models

As Ram and others have discussed, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century one of the most prominent literary genres in Russia was the ode, developed from French neo-classical models based on the Pindaric ode. At first a standard for the civic ode used for praising the state, it then yielded place in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the lyric elegy, which served as a vehicle for more personal expression and to voice gentle political criticism.<sup>13</sup> This trajectory for the ode, however, is not as simple as Ram suggests, and even at a time when the lyric elegy offered a means of expressing subdued dissent, the ode, both Pindaric and Horatian, served to articulate the ambiguity felt about adopting western Classics into a Russian context, and to offer pointed political criticism. Creating poems about ancient authors, including Pindar, using Classical terms to frame their poetic manifestos, rendering versions of specific Classical poems, contrasting and comparing Russian and ancient figures, the leading authors kept up a lively discussion dedicated to the fate of freedom and humanity in Russia.

The ambiguity felt about importing the Classics into Russia can be seen even in the works of Zhukovsky, who served as tutor to the Tsar's children.<sup>14</sup> Zhukovsky was known for his elegies and as the romantic singer of sadness and sorrow, as seen in his poem "Aeolian Harp," among others. Steeped in German Romanticism and encouraged by Count Uvarov, he was also involved in the Homer Project, and by the end of his life had completed a Russian version of Homer's *Odyssey*.<sup>15</sup> His translation method, though, is interesting, and illustrates how the Classics were often adapted into Russian. Zhukovsky himself did not know Greek, but relied on an interlinear prose translation

provided by a German colleague to create his version of Homer's poem. Translation is difficult to begin with, but this method allows for more creative interpretation, as well as for a greater margin of error than if a translator knew both languages and could translate directly from the original text. Facing these challenges, Zhukovsky nonetheless persisted, with Uvarov's encouragement, and by 1849 has produced a rendition of the epic poem.<sup>16</sup> Despite, or perhaps in part because of his dedication towards the Classics, Zhukovsky was also capable of writing a poem of biting satire about Pindar that questions Russia's very need for the Classical models, drawing himself, a court poet, into the controversy over the place of the western Classics in Russian culture.

The poem, "Pindar: A Lament" ("Плач о Пиндаре: БЫЛЬ"), dates to December 20, 1814.<sup>17</sup> The lament begins with a conversation between a poet, not the author, who is "a stubborn devotee of Apollo," discussing his poetry with "some sort of learned lady." Sitting on the veranda of a country estate, they compare this Russian poet's verse with that of the ancients. When the discussion turns to Pindar, the poetry turns both mock-rhetorical and sentimental:

Friends! Although it is not entirely news  
 that Pindar was a glorious poet  
 and that he died when he was 30 years old  
 all the same, they started to feel sorry for Pindar.  
 Pindar the great! A Greek! A singer!  
 Pindar, the creator of lofty odes!<sup>18</sup>

Друзья! Хотя совсем не ново,  
 Что славный был Пиндар поэт  
 И что он умер в тридцать лет,  
 Но им Пиндара жалко стало!



Пиндар великий! Грек! Певец!  
 Пиндар, высоких од творец! (172)

The Russian is in iambic tetrameter, lending the poem a rollicking, mocking tone, and as the poem continues to describe how the poet and his companion think of Pindar as a living human being, feeling sorry for him rather than revering him as an unassailable cultural icon, the diction becomes increasingly inflated, with a flourish of Classical tropes, including anaphora and repetitions. When the author asks the rhetorical question, “Why, why did fate send / Pindar to the Styx at 30?” (За что, за что судьба сослала / Пиндара к Стиксу в тридцать лет?), the entire household begins to wail, from the servants to the nanny, to the poet himself, who notes: “And I confess, my friends, / I myself scarce keep from crying” (Да признаюсь вам, друзья, / едва и сам не плачу я). The crying attracts the attention of a neighbor, who, when he hears that someone has died, responds with curiosity and sympathy:

Well, what about this amazing man?

Where was your Pindar born?

How old was he? Young? Old? ...

Married, widowed? Did he want to marry? ...

Did he have time to repent?

In a word, who in the heck is Pindar?

Да что за человек чудесной?

Откуда родом ваш Пиндар?

Каких он лет был? Молод? Стар? ...

Женат был? Вдов? Хотел жениться? ...

Имел ли время причаститься? ...

И словом – кто таков Пиндар?

Learning that the Pindar under discussion lived among the Ancient Greeks, wrote odes,

and died 3,000 years ago, the neighbor grabs his sides and bursts out in loud, contagious laughter. Two lines later, the entire household is laughing with him. The catalogue of people who laugh at the preposterous sorrow for Pindar includes some specifically Russian servants, wielding particularly Russian implements. The lady and poet join in, and even the author admits that he would have been happy to restrain himself, but he just has to confess that he, too, joined in their laughter.

While this scene could represent the author ridiculing his characters' ignorance and sentimentality about Pindar, the poem expresses more sympathy towards the neighbor than towards the poet or the learned lady, and hints at the difficulty of implementing Uvarov's project for introducing European Enlightenment into Russia, based on knowledge of the Classics. Zhukovsky, himself, seems to join in with his fellow countrymen laughing at the absurdity of weeping over Pindar's premature death: what sane person, particularly a self-respecting Russian, no matter what rank, could really weep over a foreign poet who has been dead so long, and Greek, at that? He seems rather to be laughing at the poet's intellectual pretensions: "And he drank down his nonsense with cranberry water," (И вздор свой клюковой водою/... запивал," and includes as objects of his derisive laughter the poet, the learned lady, and others like them, perhaps even himself.

Given Zhukovsky's dedication to translating Homer's *Odyssey* and his many poems on Classical themes, such as "Cassandra," "Achilles," and the "Aereopagus," not to mention "Theon and Eschine," written December 1-11, 1814, and claimed to be an auto-biographical manifesto of his poetic beliefs, replete with references to the Penates, the river Alpheus, Erotes, Bacchus, and thanks to life-giving Zeus, clearly he was not

hostile to the westernizing influences of the Classics. Rather, that an author such as Zhukovsky could write a poem like “Pindar: A Lament” alongside his other works, indicates the ambiguous and paradoxical role the Classics played in Russian culture. A simple, jocular poem about Pindar suggests that although the Classics are the foundations of Western culture and civilization, Russia, in fact, has a character and depth of its own that does not depend on imports from abroad; and given the foreignness of the original Greek sources to Russian culture, and misinterpretation that arises from ignorance about those sources, the attempt to create national forms of Russian literature from the ancient sources is perhaps bound to fail. And yet, a further paradox exists: despite the ambiguous role of the Classics in Russian culture, knowledge of the Classics provides an unspoken, yet vibrant code for those educated enough to understand the allusions to discuss the very issue of the influence of Western culture in Russia.

### **Pushkin: Internal Exile, Censorship, Love, and Empire**

While Zhukovsky was engaged in rendering a version of the *Odyssey* that would bring a version of the Greek epic within reach of the mass of Russian readers, Pushkin deeply supported this effort, understanding the value and the ambiguous role of the Classical materials as well as either Uvarov or Zhukovsky.<sup>19</sup> Pushkin, in turn, had his own relationship with the Classics: while his general references included a wide variety of Greek and Latin names, he did not know Greek well, and tended to favor Latin, which he had studied in greater depth at the Tsarskoe Selo lyceum, for its potent elegance, which he put to use in allusions with biting political criticism.<sup>20</sup>

A famous expression of the ambiguous role of the Classics in Russian culture is

found in a *locus classicus*, so to speak, in *Eugene Onegin*, written during the turbulent years of 1823-1830.<sup>21</sup> In Book I, vi-viii, Pushkin comments on the state of his hero's Classical learning. The narrator claims that Latin has gone out of fashion in high society: Onegin doesn't take his learning too seriously, can't tell an iamb from a choriamb, but is schooled enough to quote a few lines from the *Aeneid*, though with mistakes; he curses Homer and Theocritus, and prefers Adam Smith. But this flippant dismissal of the Classics, and Latin in particular, is Pushkin's own *recusatio*, a rhetorical ploy that belies the deeper attention he, his contemporaries, and successor, Gogol, pay to Classical allusions that touch on the ambiguous relationship of the Classics to Russian culture, and put into relief issues of power, politics, and personal freedom. It is particularly interesting that one of the more detailed studies of Pushkin's use of the Aesopian language of the Classics was written by the Soviet scholar Iakubovich, in 1941: through studying Pushkin and his contemporaries, the Classics, their lessons and their politics, were kept alive, as we will see when we turn to late- and post-Soviet works.

As others have noted, the one Classical author Pushkin is unwilling to abandon in the opening lines of *Eugene Onegin* is Ovid, and Pushkin clearly identifies with the narrator and his character. Onegin may not know his Theocritus and Homer, but his one true genius is "... the science of tender passion" (... наука страсти нежной) of which Ovid had sung, and for which he was most likely exiled:

Why did he end his time on earth,  
His brilliant and rebellious age, as a martyr  
In Moldavia, in the backwoods of the steppes,  
Far from his Italy.<sup>22</sup>

За что страдальцем кончил он  
 Свой век блестящий и мятежный  
 В Молдавии, в глуши степей  
 Вдали Италии своей.<sup>23</sup>

Pushkin here draws pointed parallels between his own and Ovid's temperament, fate, and early exile in Tomis; Pushkin's identification with Ovid has been explored by both Western and Russian scholars, as mentioned above. In addition to referring to Ovid as "Naso," or "The Nose," from the least well-known element of Ovid's full name, Ovidius Publius Naso, Pushkin captures the Ovidian spirit of thumbing your nose at authority, a spirit which Pushkin imbibed, and which he could share obliquely by his naming of Ovid.<sup>24</sup> Pushkin will identify with, and yet differentiate himself from Ovid again in "The Gypsies," a poem from his later exile in the Crimea: he identifies as a poet in exile, but finds he has less praise for his Augustus than did Ovid, who made frequent requests for clemency and expressed his sense of isolation in Dacia.

Other issues, however, including a concern for the quality of Russian rural life, and Pushkin's own internal exile, also emerge from a Latin allusion. Pushkin's bilingual pun in the epithet for Chapter II: "Oh country-side! Oh Russia!" (O rus! / O Русь!), begs a comparison between Horace's Roman country estate with his own, invoking Horace's *Satire*, Book II, 6, that extols the virtues of a simple country life over the luxury and corruption of the city. Appreciating the context of Horace's quote, Pushkin's more knowledgeable peers would have been able to read the implications of his epithet:

My whole day is wasted like this, except for when I pray:  
 Oh, country home, when will I see you? And when drink in  
 from old books, from sleep, from the passing lazy hours,  
 forgetfulness of the troubled life I'm leading now?<sup>25</sup>

perditur haec inter misero lux non sine votis:  
 o rus, quando ego te aspiciam? quandoque licebit  
 nunc veterum libris, nunc somno et inertibus horis,  
 ducere sollicitae iucunda obliviae vitae?<sup>26</sup>

They would have understood that Horace considered his estate an escape from the hubbub of Rome, and in particular from the political pressures of his close relationship with powerful figures. In Rome, Horace faces questions he can not answer, such as ‘Will we be able to defeat the Thracians?’, ‘What’s going on in Dacia?’, with their clairvoyant reference to Ovid’s place of exile and falling from court favor. Horace claims he is far from bored, and eschewing local gossip and chatter, discusses philosophy, but notably, he does not discuss Roman philosophy such as the Epicureans or materialists like Lucretius, but the old books, i.e. the Greeks, including Pythagoras, who espoused a doctrine of the transmigration of souls and encouraged vegetarianism. The satire also includes the parable of the country-mouse and the city-mouse, warning about the dangers of indulging in a rich diet of Roman food, i.e. politics.<sup>27</sup> Horace looks to his estate as a refuge and reward, not as a place of exile; as peace and leisure, not boredom, and certainly not a place to engage in politics.

In *Eugene Onegin*, II, Pushkin creates his own Horatian satire, taking his readers away from the high society of St. Petersburg to the village where Onegin encounters Lensky and Tatiana. The issues he raises are not simple. Although Horace praises his Sabine estate as a space where he and his friends eat simple foods and discuss philosophy, Pushkin expresses ambivalence in the first lines: “The village / countryside, where Evgenii was bored, / was a pleasant little corner.” (Деревня, где скучал Евгений, / Была прелестный уголок). Evgenii, and Pushkin, must find their own amusement in the

rural setting; and Lensky, the image of a European-educated Russian who, steeped in romantic philosophy, also seeks to unite himself with the Russian soul, embodies Uvarov's ideal, and provides a suitable object for derision. Pushkin satirizes this version of Russian Enlightenment: "Enlightenment just hasn't taken hold / In our case, for ever since / All we have learnt is how to mince." (Нам просвещение не престало, / И нам досталось от него / Жеманство, -- больше ничего) (II, 24). He further characterizes this failed project of Enlightenment through Tatiana's mother: as a young woman she was a slave to Rousseau and Richardson, but once married, against her wishes to a man she did not love, she was moved by her husband to her country estate where she lost her European name, Pauline, in favor of Praskovia. Abandoning thoughts of Romantic love, she settled into the habitual traditions of ancestral, patriarchal Russia. Further reflecting on Horace, Pushkin does not seem to consider the Russian countryside as noble as the Roman. Although Evgenii and Lensky discuss philosophy, they also indulge in many luxuries of the gentry, riding, playing cards, attending balls: even though they live at a distance from St. Petersburg, they can not escape its influence.<sup>28</sup> Nor can they escape the politics: while Horace was free to travel to and from Rome, rather than being sent to internal exile at his country estate, Pushkin was exiled to his family estate Mikailovskoe, and to the south of Russia; and wrote this particular satire in exile in Odessa and Kishinyov.

For all his posturing in *Eugene Onegin* about how Latin may be out of fashion, Pushkin belies this stance elsewhere, as he uses both Ovid and Horace as touchstones for his own investigation of the ways of love, for the trials and tribulations of living in his own, contemporary Russia.<sup>29</sup> While he seems to deride the Classics, at the same time he

uses them well, opening up a space to question the backwardness of the Russian countryside, and Russia itself: contrasting, once again, Western European civilization founded on a long history of the Classical material, and the Russian imitation and partial adaptation of it, he questions Russian identity and culture, criticizing his fate as a poet within that culture, yet in a language imbued with the very Classics that are so problematic.

Knowledge of the Classics was spread widely enough among the educated class so that specific imitations and references could be made with a pointed political purpose, and to confront issues of empire and power. In addition to the numerous allusions to Ovid's exile on the Black Sea, Pushkin used Classical allusions to take potshots directly at Uvarov, who, as chief of the department of National Enlightenment, was also the chief Censor, and in the 1830's came into direct and vitriolic conflict with Pushkin. As O.A. Ivanov points out in "The Moscow Observer" (Московский наблюдатель), December, 1835, Pushkin wrote and published a vindictive poem, "On the Recovery of Lucullus: Imitation of the Latin" (На выздоровление Лукулла: подражание латинскому), mocking Uvarov's legendary greed in his premature attempt to claim part of Count D. N. Sheremetov's estate. The count had fallen ill in Voronezh, was rumored to be on his deathbed, then recovered fully, but not before Uvarov had presented himself as the count's heir. This poem enacted Pushkin's vengeance against Uvarov, who, in 1828, had personally gone over the head of Nicholas I to censor eight lines of Pushkin's poem, "Andzhelo;" and in 1835 had ruled that Pushkin's works were subject to the rules of the General Censor. Pushkin was also worried about the prospects of publishing his work, *Journey to Arzrum* (Путешествие в Арзрум). The effect of "On the Recovery of



Lucullus” “exploded like a bomb:” all of St. Petersburg understood the references, and the quarrel.<sup>30</sup>

Consider too, Pushkin’s 1836 translation of Horace’s Ode III, 30, “exegi monumentum.”<sup>31</sup> This poem was familiar enough to Pushkin’s audience to be translated in at least one lady’s album.<sup>32</sup> Pushkin, however, “translates” Horace’s poem into something entirely his own, turning it upside down and giving it a biting political twist. At first glance he seems to have translated the ode almost line for line, thought by thought, and in a specifically Russian idiom. Horace’s Egyptian pyramid becomes Alexander’s Column in St. Petersburg. He concurs with Horace in that, as a poet, not all of him will die, but that his poetry will outlive him. But unlike Horace, Pushkin does not bow to the current political machine, and the term of his immortality is not as long as a pontifex shall climb the Capitoline steps with a silent vestal virgin, but rather, as long as there is one true poet still alive. Curiously, however, Pushkin does not denounce the project of the Russian Empire: rather than being known to the entire Roman and Mediterranean world, his fame will extend to all of Russia, to all of the people who speak all of the languages spoken therein: to Slavs and Finns in the north, and to the Kalmyks of the southern steppes. Where Horace suggests that he will be remembered for introducing Aeolian songs to Italian verse, Pushkin claims that his legacy will be of a moral nature, that of awakening a sense of nobility in the Russian people: “That I awoke noble feelings with my lyre” (Что чувства добрые я лирой пробуждал). At the end of his poem, Horace asks for the laurel to crown his head. At this point of his “translation,” Pushkin veers into openly political territory, underlying his role in extolling freedom under oppression: “That in my cruel century I sang the praises of freedom” (Что в мой

жестокий век восславил я свободу); and in urging mercy, “And I called for mercy for the fallen” (И милость к падшим призывал), referring to the support he was ready to give to those who had been killed or exiled for participating in the failed Decembrist uprising of December, 1825.

Pushkin’s final stanza invoking the Muse adds yet more to the Horatian original. Where Horace makes a rather standard plea to the Muses, Pushkin asks a single Muse to be obedient to a divine behest: not to fear offense, not to ask for a laurel crown, to accept praise or blame with equanimity, and last but not least, “And don’t fight with a fool,” (И не оспаривай глупца). The last line in particular seems a direct insult aimed at the tsar, Nicholas I, who assumed the throne in 1825 after the Decembrist uprising; and the preceding three lines present an exhortation to the Muse to hold her moral ground against the excesses of power the tsar was wont to exercise, and is a strong statement of sympathy from Pushkin, who had been exiled at least twice before he wrote this poem in 1836, and was in exile at the time of the revolt. And, given Pushkin’s recent quarrel with Uvarov, the fool could just as well be the Tsar’s chief Censor. In all, Pushkin’s rendering of this Horatian Ode presents a sophisticated use of the Classical material: Horace’s model had been assimilated and understood on many levels, political and literary. Pushkin is able to insert himself in a dialogue of one court poet to another; and Russia into a more fully integrated dialogue with the West, including sympathy for the rebels and criticism of authoritarian government. Thus, although Pushkin does not renounce the project of the Russian Empire, he does offer barely cloaked criticism of the tsar and the tsar’s exercise of power, and in a form, the Ode, that had once been used largely for praise.

### Gogol and “The Old World Landowners:” Love, Death, Gluttony and Starvation in Russia

Although *Eugene Onegin*'s narrator may pretend that Latin has gone out of style, the debate among poets and prose writers about Russia's Enlightenment and their use of the Classics to articulate that issue is very much alive, and Gogol, too, participates in the dialogue. If Pushkin had used Horace and Ovid to express criticism of Russia's politics of internal exile and censorship, of the backwardness of Russia's rural life, and why certain poets might hesitate to live there, Gogol, in “The Old World Landowners,” echoes Pushkin's concerns, though in a far more defensive, seemingly patriotic tone. In Gogol, the desire to help forge and claim a specifically Russian national identity is more pronounced and conservative, and this is reflected in his conflicted sense of competition between Russia and the Western originals, especially with Ovid.

While Pushkin identifies with Ovid and uses Horace respectfully for political criticism, Gogol, at the beginning of *Dead Souls* claims that he will outdo Ovid; and this in a work which he wrote as a national epic that he hoped would help lead Russia on to greatness and Slavic glory, but which, ironically, he felt he could only write in exile, in the cafés and villages outside Rome.<sup>33</sup> In part, Gogol's relationship with the Classics recapitulates the conflict between the conservative members of his intellectual milieu, such as Uvarov, who favored Greek language and literary forms as models for forming Russian literature, and the more liberal, westernizing authors, exemplified by Pushkin, who preferred to emulate and allude to the Latin models, which exist for Gogol to be outdone. An expression of the conservative view, extolling the virtues of ancient Greek, is found in 1834, in the first issue of Uvarov's magazine, *The Journal of the Ministry of*

*National Enlightenment* (Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения): "...the literature of the ancient Greeks presented us with the first and excellent model of nationality ("...словестность древних греков представила нам первый и прекрасный образец народности).<sup>34</sup> Adhering to this belief, while Gogol claims to vie with Ovid, he more freely takes inspiration from Homer, and the standards of traditional, heroic epic. Various critics point to the likeness in *Dead Souls* between Gogol's similes and Homer's: riffs on the flies buzzing around a loaf of sugar break out into larger meditations, as do Homer's similes which compare the lives of men to the ants or bees that work the meadows.<sup>35</sup> In his story about Cossack warriors, "Taras Bulba," Gogol consciously tried to include epic elements, and in fact re-wrote the work to include more pointed classical references: the soldiers look down from the ramparts with a remarkable Homeric flair, and the horse-hair crests of their helmets distinctly recall certain Trojan heroes.<sup>36</sup>

If Gogol emulates Greek models in "Taras Bulba," a story that celebrates the Cossacks as national Russian heroes, and announces his competition with Ovid in *Dead Souls*, he takes this competition to yet a further degree in his short story, "Old-World Landowners," creating a Russian version of Ovid's Philemon and Baucis from *Metamorphoses*, Book VIII. And yet, nestled in this story, in the specificity with which he alludes to passages from Ovid, we see veiled conflict within Gogol himself about issues he was facing in his own experience of being Russian, and living in Russia. Gogol may indeed have wanted to adhere to Uvarov's code of "Orthodoxy, Authority, Fatherland." He was one of Uvarov's first co-workers, as a result of which he was appointed in 1834 to a brief tenure as adjunct professor of history at St. Petersburg University. He also contributed four articles to Uvarov's *Journal of the Ministry of*

*National Enlightenment* (Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения), including a “A Plan for the Teaching of Universal History” (“План преподавания всеобщей истории”) which outlined goals supporting Uvarov’s ideology: “My goal...is to form the hearts of young students...so that they will not betray their duty, their Faith, their noble honor and their oath – to be loyal to the Fatherland and to the Sovereign.” (“...Цель моя,<...>образовать сердца юных слушателей<...>чтобы<...>не изменили они своему долгу, своей Вере, своей благородной чести и своей клятве – быть верными Отечеству и Государю”).<sup>37</sup> However, despite his attempts to support Russia, writing his national epic, defending his motherland against the negative characterization of Russia in Western authors, Gogol can not escape the problems of authoritarian power, and the expression of personal and political freedom, both for himself and for those he represents in literature emerge in subtle reading of the Classical references he engages.

That Gogol used Ovid as a literary touchstone has been acknowledged by the American scholars Griffiths and Rabinowitz, who comment on the rich variety of discourse in Gogol’s *Dead Souls*:

This mixed form, narratively fantastic and psychologically acute, goes back at least as far as Ovid, whom Gogol occasionally acknowledges (“such a transformation will overtake our Prometheus as even Ovid himself could never think of”...)... and pervasively imitates.<sup>38</sup>

While Griffiths and Rabinowitz comment in passing that Gogol imitates Ovid, they do not go into detail, and it is instructive to look more closely at an extended instance where Gogol imitates Ovid, comparing his story “Old-World Landowners” and a cluster of Books VIII-X of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Beginning his tale, Gogol pointedly comments

that if a painter were to paint a scene from Ovid's tale, he could do no better than to paint these two Russian Landowners: they personify the ideal. And yet, when we read the story, we see traits which make Pulkheria and Afanasy very non-Roman, but rather, most Russian. Instead of observing the ancient Roman ideals of piety, austerity and poverty, and a certain degree of equality in the couple, we see an abundance of cherry trees and pears, a larder stuffed for the winter, servants who pilfer, a wife who hovers over her husband as over an overgrown child, and finally, superstition that reigns as a black cat presages Pulkheria's death.

However, like Pushkin's seemingly flippant remarks about Latin in *Eugene Onegin*, Gogol's almost off-hand remark that Pulkheria and Afanasy are his Russian version of Philemon and Baucis, cannot be taken at face value. Rather than expressing a desire to outdo Ovid, as found in *Dead Souls*, the competition with Ovid in "The Old World Landowners" reveals an identification with Ovid: despite his outward conservative political affiliations, Gogol too, like Pushkin, was a critic and a rebel. The simple mention of Pulkheria and Afanasy represent the tip of an iceberg of Classical references that comment obliquely on a host of conflicts Gogol experienced as a human and creative writer in Russia, of conflicts about Russian national character and the image of Russia in the West.

Despite his nationalistic leanings, Gogol was personally torn between Russia and the West, and conflicted in his loyalty to Russia. In reading the Latin and Russian texts side-by side, one can see Gogol indulging in the time-honored tradition among Classical authors, including Ovid, of allusiveness by which literature is offered as both a work of art and as an invitation to social commentary.<sup>39</sup> As we have seen in our discussion of

Pushkin, re-writing a text allows an author to show off his or her particular artistry, and also allows an author to suggest, and readers to enjoy, veiled commentary on issues in the original text which may have parallels in the writer's own life and times. Understanding the method and details of Gogol's engaging with Ovid, reveals a subtext to Gogol's work which is not immediately apparent. The reading that emerges supports Karlinsky's insights about the subtext of repressed sexuality in many of Gogol's stories which reflect the latter's grappling with the personal freedom to come to terms, or not, with his own sexuality, and with erotic energy in general in a repressive society.<sup>40</sup> In alluding to Ovid's negative portrayal of the Scythian lands that are considered part of southern Russia, it also points to the mixed love Gogol felt for both Italy and Russia, and to his ambiguous feelings toward his country which troubled him, but which he could not, or did not want to write about openly, given Russia's system of censorship, its generally conservative cultural climate.

Thus, although Gogol expresses outward competition with Ovid, perhaps desiring to distance himself from the rebellious Pushkin who identified so openly with Ovid, it is actually no wonder that Gogol himself also felt an affinity to Ovid, but which he could not express it openly. Indeed, parallels and inverted parallels between Gogol and Ovid abound, some of which they share with Pushkin: like Pushkin who wrote *Eugene Onegin* while exiled in the Crimea, Ovid and Gogol wrote their respective national epics, *The Metamorphoses* (and *The Fasti*), and *Dead Souls*, separated from their native lands. Gogol was self-exiled, for many years living in and around Rome where, as mentioned above, he felt free to write *Dead Souls*. Ovid was state-exiled from Rome after writing his *Amores* and *Ars Amandi*, and spent the rest of his life in Tomis, writing works

extolling the Emperor and celebrating Roman mythology, works that he hoped would earn Augustus' favor and the right to return to Rome.<sup>41</sup> Politically, both loved their countries, and yet were in conflict with the existing power structures: Gogol was able to return to Russia, Ovid was never allowed back to Rome. Aesthetically, both loved to play with their narrators' voices, create digressions, mix genres and discourses. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is replete with the vagaries of characters struggling with uncontrollable passions, of those same characters being transformed into trees, flowers, works of natural and literary art. Gogol began his career by writing stories from the countryside, full of human passions, demons, folk legend, and ended with the attempt to write a national epic in *Dead Souls*. In both we see a complex understanding of human nature, and the transformation of that understanding into a highly literate form of art.

Gogol's love for Rome was apparent in many of his writings, which Griffiths and Rabinowitz have noted:

Gogol himself compared living in Rome to reading an epic and savored the palimpsestic quality of the city... one half of it gives off the aroma of the life of paganism, the other half the age of Christianity, and both are the two greatest ideas in the world.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, Ovid exists as such a palimpsest in Gogol, especially in the story, "The Old-World Landowners." However, the palimpsest is not the kind found in Western manuscript traditions, where later Christian texts were written over and all but obliterated earlier pagan, often scurrilous, non-allegorizable texts, but of a kind which allows the pagan and the Christian, or in this case, the pagan and the Orthodox Russian, to exist almost side-by-side. It is a palimpsest that mimics Rome itself, where one can go from



Church to Palazzo to museum, and in a single room see Christian imagery on the walls, and lifting one's head, see images, equally beautiful, from the Classical pagan tradition. Although Gogol does not praise Ovid as a love poet, as does Pushkin, given Gogol's struggles with his sexuality and the expression of human passions in a country such as Russia, to live in a culture with a relative harmonious mix of a pagan past and a Christian present, and which was less repressive than his own, may indeed have been a welcome relief, a feast for his tortured soul.

Renato Poggioli, in his article "Gogol's 'Old-Fashioned Landowners: an Inverted Eclogue'" argues that Gogol's tale offers a subversive reading of Ovid's idyllic version of the story of Philemon and Baucis. Gogol begins his tale with a close resemblance to Ovid's original couple, but turns it on its head. Thus, instead of the pious couple, Philemon and Baucis, whom we see in Ovid living the Roman ideal of noble poverty and marital fidelity, by the end of Gogol's story we see a picture of gluttony, sexual wantonness, and superstition. Poggioli contends that earlier critics such as Belinsky misunderstood the story because they took the comparison of the two couples at a realistic, face value, and "interpreted all too simply and literally its highly complex literary relation with its classical model."<sup>43</sup> Part of Poggioli's assessment that Gogol is a conundrum rings true: "...Gogol, despite his conservative and even reactionary leaning in politics and religion, was one of the greatest subversives of literature, and iconoclasts of art."<sup>44</sup> Yet, I would argue with his statement that Gogol "has destroyed the spirit of the fable, while following the letter of pastoral convention and form."<sup>45</sup> However innovative and subversive Gogol may have been, his iconoclasm includes a certain reverence for previous literary forms: he was an iconoclast not by breaking Ovid's

forms, but by being a sensitive and sympathetic reader of Ovid, by understanding that Ovid himself was subversive and iconoclastic in his own time, and incorporating this understanding into his own work.<sup>46</sup> And, Gogol has much more of Ovid in his mind than the episode of Philemon and Baucis when he writes his story.

Gogol's relationship with Ovid's works is not a question of a single negative inversion, but of multiple inversions, elaborations, resulting in his own original work which incorporates and alters parts of the original. It was common practice in Rome to incorporate pieces of the ancient Roman buildings into more modern ones: pagan columns were cut to make mosaics for Christian churches; whole columns and capitols are found embedded in newer buildings. It is as if Gogol employs this same technique with particular intensity in "Old-World Landowners," taking elements of Ovid, elaborating and combining them, adding his own material to form a particularly Russian story. All the while, the Ovidian allusions glimmer and resonate beneath Gogol's text, as Gogol senses the imbalances, the slippage between discourses, the playing with language beneath the surface of Ovid, and puts them to work. A few threads serve to illustrate how complexly, and how closely intertwined the two authors appear to be.

As a framework for reading the two authors, note the sentence in which Gogol makes an explicit comparison between his characters, Afanasy and Pulkheria, and Ovid's Philemon and Baucis:

If I were a painter and wanted to portray Philemon and Baucis on canvas, I could choose no other models [originals], besides theirs.<sup>47</sup>

Если бы я был живописец и хотел изображать на полотне Филемона и Бавкиду, я бы никогда не избрал другого

оригинала, кроме их.<sup>48</sup>

Gogol's language here is very strong: "theirs" refers to Afanasy and Pulkheria, as if he were suggesting that his Russian couple were in some way more original than Ovid's, that they could indeed provide the model for imagining and painting Ovid's couple. This passage reflects one of the many ways in which Gogol wants to out-do Ovid, anticipating his allusion to Ovid in *Dead Souls*, expressing an underlying conflict about Russia's claim to sharing fully in the cultural heritage of the West.

In this specific reference to Ovid, Gogol problematizes the question of what is original, what secondary, in such a way that his characters are neither original nor copy, but both. This is a confounding thought, but essential to understanding Gogol. One need only think of *The Inspector General*, which is neither pure parody nor satire, nor pure tragedy, but all simultaneously. Another way to look this phenomenon is in Gogol's own terms. He is painting his version of Ovid's characters in strong enough colors to enter into a full-fledged dialogue with Ovid. He is repainting Ovid for a Russian audience, and for himself. But in mentioning Ovid he is performing a kind of Classical *recusatio*: he brushes Ovid aside, and yet by mentioning him at all, keeps Ovid's presence in mind, and Ovid rarely presents a neutral figure.

Ovid tells the story of Philemon and Baucis in Book VIII of his *Metamorphoses*. It is, on first glance, a fairly straightforward, moralistic account of an extremely pious couple who provide food and shelter to Jupiter and Mercury after everyone else in their neighborhood has turned them away. As reward for their piety and services, they are first made keepers of a temple and then transformed into a pair of trees.

The parallel between Gogol's and Ovid's rural settings provides an initial point of

comparison. Both sites are in a state of ruin by the time the authors tell their stories, and share remarkable similarities. In Ovid, we find:

...An Oak-tree stands

Beside a linden, in the Phrygian hills.

There's a low wall around them. ...Not far off

A great marsh lies, once habitable land,

But now a playground full of coots and mergansers.<sup>49</sup>

...tiliae contermina quercus

Collibus est Phrygiis, medio circumdata muro:...

Haud procul hinc stagnum est, tellus habitabilis olim,

Nunc celebres mergis fulicisque palustribus undae.<sup>50</sup>

The two trees that were once Philemon and Baucis are surrounded by a low wall, which, one imagines, formed the precincts of the sanctuary these humble, pious, people tended while they were alive. In Gogol, the presentation is more complex, but with stunning references to Ovid. Gogol gives a similar picture of the ruins and the loss, but it is delayed until he has created his own temple, his own picture, for his own characters.

Thus, two pages into his story, he writes:

To this day I am full of regret, and it sends a strange pang to my heart when I imagine myself going sometime again to their old, *now deserted dwelling*, and seeing the *heap of ruined huts, the pond choked with weeds, an overgrown ditch on the spot where the little house stood*—and nothing more. (2) (My italics.)

...но душа моя полна еще до сих пор жалости, и чувства мои странно сжимаются, когда вообразу себе, что приеду со временем опять на их прежнее, ныне опустелое жилище, и увижу кучу развалившихся хат, заглохший пруд, заросший ров на том месте, где стоял низкий домик – и ничего более. (8)

To complete the picture, their house and buildings, their temple, as it were, are surrounded by a low, modest, wooden fence.

Where in Ovid the couple is present, transformed into trees, in Gogol they are transformed into the houses and yards they once lived in. They are old, familiar:

... like tumble-down picturesque little houses, delightful in their simplicity and complete unlikeness to the new smooth buildings whose walls have not yet been discolored by the rain, whose roof is not yet covered with green lichen and whose porch does not display its red bricks through the peeling stucco. (1)

... как дряхлые живописные домики, хороши своею пестротой и совершенною противоположностью с новым гладеньким строением, которого стен не промыл еще дождь, крыш не покрыла зеленая плесень, и лишенное щекотурки крыльцо не показывает своих красных кирпичей. (7)

In this first image, Gogol has captured the larger sense of an Ovidian transformation, but in a very strange configuration. First, he likens the old couple to the old houses; then, through a series of negatives, executes a reverse transformation: they are not the new houses, but, if you imagine little houses with peeling stucco, covered with lichen, suggestive of bark and other coverings, you get back to the old, original couple, who seem still to live and breath within the decrepit structures. This is suggestive of so many Ovidian transformations where the soul of the human owner is still conscious within the transformed shape, and which often occur at moments where the pain of loss or unfulfilled love is still felt, even after the physical metamorphosis separating lover and beloved has taken place.

Gogol expands on this elegiac moment by way of a hymn, one of his many

inversions of Ovid, which is a hymn to the Russian countryside, to his own art, and also to his own conflicts with Russia. His trees are part of an entire orchard, the catalogue of which begins with plums and apples, mentioned first, in the orchard, in Gogol, but only later in Ovid's account of the story, when he describes the modest feast Philemon and Baucis offer to the gods. (ll. 675). Gogol then expands his list of flora to include cherries, willows, elders, and pear trees. Where Ovid mentions nuts, figs, and dates, Gogol paints far more Russian fare. In further imagining this lost world, he expands his description to include, "a fragrant bird-cherry, rows of dwarf fruit trees, drowned in a sea of red cherries and amethyst plums, covered with lead-colored bloom... a spreading maple in the shade of which a rug is laid..." (2). He punctuates his sense of loss of this scene with highly rhetorical exclamations: "It's sad! I feel sad in advance!" (2) (Грустно! Мне заранее грустно!) (8). He is creating, in short, his own idyllic, yet elegiac, Russian, and yet also Ovidian, setting. As an added touch, the goose which Philemon and Baucis scramble to sacrifice when they realize divinity is in their midst, Gogol has preserved and multiplied: she appears in the courtyard, not as a single goose, but as a mother with a string of goslings.

Another thread to follow is that of the presentation of narrators and the commentary they offer about the events of the story. Ovid is above all highly conscious of his art and artifice, and loves to play with the narrators of his *Metamorphoses*. In the episode in question, a dinner party is in session, and the guests are taking turns outdoing each other in telling stories. The question of piety is in the air, as is the question of an author's role in creating such pictures and stories about piety and outrage. In Ovid, one Pirithous has just complained about the previous story, critiquing the gods' powers:

“These are fairy tales / the gods have no such powers, Achelous, / to give and take away the shapes of things.” (200) (*Ficta refert nimiumque putas, Acheloe, potentes / Esse deos,*” dixit “*si dant adimuntque figuras.*) (ll. 614-615). Ovid then offers Lelex’s rebuttal, telling his story in order to defend the Gods:

...the old man, Lelex, mature in mind as well as years,  
rebuked him: ‘the power of Heaven has no bound or limit;  
Whatever the gods will is done, believe it. (200)

*Ante omnesque Lelex animo maturus et aevo  
Sic ait: “immensa et finemque potentia caeli  
Non habet et, quidquid superi voluere, peractum est.* (ll. 617-619)

At the beginning of their stories, both Ovid and Gogol make a point of establishing the trustworthiness of their narrators: Lelex is characterized as having a mature mind; he has seen the place with his very own eyes: “I myself saw the place.” (*Locum vidi ipse.*) (ln. 622). Gogol makes a similar claim when he begins with a positive statement: “I am very fond of the modest manner of life of those solitary owners of remote villages”, (7) (*Я очень люблю скромную жизнь тех уединенных владельцев*) (1), and then proceeds with the picture he has created in such convincing detail.

However, Gogol puts a spin on Ovid, while seeming to understand the complex narrator behind Ovid’s text. Ovid has split himself, his narrator, into many players: host, Lelex, Theseus, and other guests who add their stories. Gogol consolidates the narrator, and yet loses none of Ovid’s multiplicity, enfolding many of those characters into himself and taking on the role of a very complex narrator: he is one of the many people who have visited the couple and experienced their extraordinary hospitality (like Jupiter and Mercury); he is the person who has seen the place and is now telling about it (Lelex); and

he is the creator of his story (Ovid). Further, where Lelex is an old man, particularly to be believed because of his age, in younger, less mature company, Gogol's narrator was young when he first saw the site, but is now presumably older: he actually presents himself as almost ageless, as he both visited Afanasy and Pulkheria in their prime and is acquainted with their heir. He becomes witness, narrator, deity and demiurge wrapped in one.

Further, Ovid, for the most part, has the framework of mythic characters given to him by his culture. He can then manipulate them to suit his story. Gogol must create his mythic Russian characters almost out of whole cloth, which he does by a series of negations and incantatory repetitions. He begins with a simple statement: "I am very fond of the modest manner of life... I like sometimes to descend for a moment into the sphere..." (1) (Я очень люблю скромную жизнь... Я иногда люблю сойти на минуту в сферу...) (7). He at first refers to the place in the country with the adverb, "ordinary, usual" (обыкновенно), but with the second repetition, of "I like" (люблю) he calls it "unusual," (необыкновенно), suggesting the place is un-ordinarily removed from real life. A rhythmic repetition lulls us into the calm and peace of the idyll: "... so quiet, so quiet..." (... так тиха, так тиха...). And Gogol moves from the personal, direct account, "I saw." to the more general, impersonal "you, one" (ты):

...that for a moment you are lost in forgetfulness and imagine  
 that those passions, desires, and restless promptings of the evil  
 spirit that trouble the world have no real existence, that you have  
 only beheld them in some lurid, dazzling dream. (4)

...что на минуту забываешься и думаешь, что страсти,  
 желания и те беспокойные порождения злого духа



возмущающие мир, вовсе не существуют, и ты их видел  
только в блестящем, сверкающем сновидении. (10)

Gogol reverses the evils of the real world with a dream. These evils are the fictions of Ovid, which Gogol counteracts with his own created, idyllic world. As Lelex verifies his personal vision, “Locum vidi ipse,” so Gogol’s narrator reports from his own experience: “I see from here” (Я отсюда вижу). With his own mature mind, the mind of the writer, Gogol ushers his readers into mythic, ideal realm. Just in case we have missed the point that he is creating characters of mythic proportions, he waxes elegiac in describing them: he looks for their faces in the crowds of St. Petersburg, in the ladies and gentlemen in their frock coats. He expresses pity and sadness at the ruin of their home, and has to wrench himself back to the story, signaling a narrator’s intervention to recall himself to the present day of his story telling: “But let’s return to the story.” (2) (Но обратимся к рассказу.) (8).

Gogol’s rhetoric reflects the doubt that is implied in Ovid. Ovid had created the character of Lelex, who, even with a mature mind had to work hard to convince his audience of the truth of the upcoming story. His introduction anticipates his audience’s disbelief, when he says: “... and so that you will doubt it less.” (... quoque minus dubites. ). And, at the end of his story he reiterates:

The ones who told me

The story, sober ancients, were not liars

Why should they be? And my own eyes have seen

the garlands hanging on the branches... (204)

Haec mihi non vani (neque erat, cur fallere vellent)  
Narravere senes; equidem pendentia vidi  
Serta super ramos... (ll.721-723)

Thus Ovid, too, begs the truth of his story. In Ovid, the events of the “real world,” the excesses of evil are accused of being fiction, and Lelex tells his idyll, while at the same time undercutting its truth. Gogol understands this and accomplishes a similar picture: the ordinary becomes unordinary, it is so calm and peaceful in the country that the evils of the real world seem like a dream, and yet the rhetoric lets the reader know this picture is a work of art, not necessarily reality.<sup>51</sup>

As another point of comparison, Gogol understands how Ovid mixes lyrical and epic within a single work, and uses this mixing of genres to express his own concerns, which take on epic proportions in Russia. He thoroughly understands the lyrical moment in Ovid’s briefly elegiac description of the couple’s humble house, and the meal they offer to the gods. The hut is far from epic, and falls under the rubric of neoteric, following the path of slender, lyric and personal poetry practised by Callimachus, and espoused later by the Roman lyric and elegiac poets, Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius, who wrote in opposition and protest to the epic writers, such as Virgil, who sang the praises of Rome’s founding in his *Aeneid*. Ovid’s version, it seems, echoes, with its own modifications, Callimachus’ “Hecale,” where Hercules visits an old woman and feasts in remarkably similar form to Jupiter and Mercury.<sup>52</sup> We see the same attention to details of humble, prosaic life. And yet, as in Callimachus, Ovid’s description of Philemon and Baucis is also part of a monumental epic. Gogol understands the Ovidian lyric moment, makes his own lyrical contribution, and yet will soon give epic proportions to the characters who have such humble beginnings.

Finally, after Gogol has created his own, elaborate version of the Ovidian setting, established his own condensed and complex narrator, he mentions the characters by

name. But, it is just when he mentions *his* characters that he begins to pull away from the close intertwining of the two texts, and the major inversion of the texts begins:

Ovid's original is short and concise:

A good old woman, Baucis, and her husband,  
 A good old man, Philemon, used to live there.  
 They married young, they had grown old together  
 In the same cottage; they were very poor,  
 But faced their poverty with cheerful spirit  
 And made its burden light by not complaining. (201)

Sed pia: Baucis anus parilique aetate Philemon  
 Illa sunt annis uincti iuvenalibus. illa  
 Consenuere casa paupertatemque fatendo  
 Effecere levem nec iniquia mente ferendo. (ll. 631-634)

Commentators have noted the brevity and balance of these lines, and how they reflect the harmony of the couple's relationship.<sup>53</sup> But Gogol contrasts with Ovid at this point, and differences begin to emerge about the quality of his couple's relationship.

To begin, in Ovid, the couple is “of the same age” (*parilique aetate*). In Gogol, they are not: Afanasy is sixty-five, Pulkheria fifty-five. In Ovid, both partners work equally to entertain the visiting deities. In Gogol, Afanasy lifts his fingers only to eat. In Ovid, the two share jokes, or make light of their situation to help each other endure their poverty. Gogol's couple resembles the original couple in that they share jokes to lighten their “poverty,” but as their poverty is not the same, neither is their humor, and it transpires that Afanasy teases Pulkheria quite heartlessly. He almost always laughs; she is rather serious and almost never laughs. In Ovid, Philemon and Baucis have no servants or slaves: together the two of them form the household and their piety and

marital fidelity seem pure. Afanasy and Pulkheria, however, have many servant girls who get pregnant quite regularly, and although Gogol does not accuse him outright, given that Afanasy is the only male around except for a young adolescent, and given the habit of landowners to take liberties with their servant girls, Afanasy is a prime suspect.

Further, the difference in how the two couples die reveals a complete inversion.

Philemon and Baucis die at the same time, turning into the revered Oak and Linden trees mentioned at the beginning of the episode. In Gogol, however, Pulkheria, dies before Afanasy, and despite the fact that she has appointed a servant to feed and clothe him after she dies, he suffers the indignities of old age, drooling food on himself while his estate deteriorates around him. Thus, although Afanasy and Pulkheria are one of the happier married couples in Gogol, they do not live in complete bliss and harmony, and certainly not with the noble simplicity of their Roman counterparts.

Many readers assume that the two couples provide rare instances in both authors of relative harmony between the sexes. Others, notably Karlinsky and Poggioli, have detected the imbalance in Gogol and pointed to the unnatural, almost total absence of sexuality or erotic energy in an otherwise thoroughly fertile landscape.<sup>54</sup> They both see the gray cat as the emergence of such an energy, which in fact throws off the harmony and leads Pulkheria to decide it is her time to die. This imbalance, however, begins even earlier. And Gogol, again, seems to have been a keen reader of Ovid, sensing the former passion implied beneath the surface of Ovid's story, which can be found in the characters' names. In Greek, Baucis' name derives from the verb: "βαυκιζο" (baukidzo), "to be chaste; either piously, or carried to a prudish extreme," a fitting name for one half of the pious Roman pair. Philomen's name is more suggestive, with its root, "φιλος," "love."

And a related word, “φιλημα” (philema), “a kiss,” coyly implies the sexual energy the couple shared in their youth. Their two names complement each other, suggesting that their erotic energy has been kept in balance over the course of their lives, and within the confines of the immediate story: the couple dies at peace and in harmony, with each other and with nature as well, turned into companion trees.

In Gogol, however, “Afanasy” and “Pulkheria” are more suggestive, and the imbalance of their names explodes any potential harmony between them. Afanasy has at its root the adjective “αφανης” (afanes), or “retired, out of the way,” but also “concealed, hidden:” his sexuality has been hidden, suppressed in the country, under the layers of food he and Pulkheria consume. Pulkheria's name calls to mind the Latin root “pulcher,” or beauty, pulchritude, but rather than being a ravishing beauty, she is an icon of idyllic piety, the picture of idealized, traditional and maternal devotion in a patriarchal society.

Two things seem to be emerging here: both the hidden depth of Gogol's unresolved difficulties with and attitude towards his own sexuality, and to human passion in general; and the development of a glorified picture of an aspect of Russia which is at odds with a Western representation of Russia found in none other than Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Thus, while Ovid says nothing about Philemon's youthful passion, except the hint contained in his name, Gogol briefly mentions that Afanasy was a hussar in his youth, and in true hussar fashion, had carried off Pulkheria against her parents' wishes: lurking behind their mythic peace is an abduction and possible rape. And Gogol lets us know that Afanasy has not forgotten his past: “But he really thought very little about this, at least he never talked about it.” (3) (Но об этом уже он очень мало

помнил, по крайней мере никогда не говорил о нем.) (9). Gogol moves from positive to negative, creating a moment for the reader to question the surface reality of his story. Behind a simple change of verbs, Gogol suggests that neither will he talk about the passion which lies elsewhere, well known in Ovid's texts, but in this text left only to circumstantial evidence. However, if Gogol's readers knew Ovid even a fraction as well as Gogol appears to, they could not but have wondered about all that was being unsaid: all of the evils and sins which Gogol has left out of this particular bit of creative dream, passions about which he is not allowed to talk. In Ovid, the tales which surround Philemon and Baucis abound with the vagaries of human passion: hermaphrodites, rivaling the gods, rape, incest, betrayal, patricide, to name but a few. Surrounded by such stories, Philemon and Baucis are a counterbalance and morally positive example to the "fictions" which are, perhaps, actually more real.

However, as Gogol suppresses the racier parts of the extended Ovidian text, he builds a fabulous picture of the natural abundance of Afanasy and Pulkheria's estate: they live not a life of noble Roman poverty, but one of "noble Russian abundance," which is not flattering for Russia. It is fascinating, though, that while so many of the details of the two stories have changed, the subtext of both suggests criticism of a similarly corrupt and decadent life in their respective cities and courts. Ovid's reminder that Philemon and Baucis use clay bowls rather than the silver and gold found in the luxurious capital finds its way into Gogol's story in off-hand comments about the nouveau-riche: the country folk have clay floors that outshine any parquet in the capital that lackeys fail to keep clean.

Rabinowitz and Griffiths mention in passing that the gluttony and impiety of the

second half of Gogol's story could have been inspired by Ovid's story of Erysichthon.<sup>55</sup> This seems an accurate observation: the episodes of Baucis and Philemon, and Erysichthon follow each other in Ovid, and comparing this sequence with "Old-World Landowners," once again we see Gogol altering and reversing Ovid, this time reminding his readers of uncomfortable truths about Russia as he confronts Ovid's unflattering reference to Russia. Paradoxically, though, Gogol contrasts his picture of Russia's abundance with Ovid's implication that Russia is cold and infertile, and yet at the same time implies criticism of his motherland. In Ovid, all the guests are moved by Lelex's story and his simple conclusion about Philemon and Baucis' piety: "...let the gods look after [good people] still, and let the cherishers be cherished..." (*Cura deum di sint, et qui coluere, colantur*) (724). Another guest then asks for more stories, and the host obliges, and tells the story of Erysichthon, which, as much as being an account of the gods' powers to alter peoples' shapes, is also a picture of complete gluttony and greed. In Gogol, the two episodes are combined in the one story at hand, beginning with Afanasy, who, we are told repeatedly, is gluttonous – not just for food, but for stories as well, as he listens endlessly to his guests, feeding on the entertainment they provide him.

The Latin verb "colo," which means "to cherish," and in a more fundamental sense, "to till and tend the earth," is a fulcrum between the two stories, which turn around caring for the earth, or not, in pursuit of human gluttony. In Ovid's original, Philemon and Baucis tend the earth properly, but Erysichthon's first act of impiety is to cut down a tree sacred to Demeter, for which he is punished by suffering eternally unsatisfied hunger, which culminates in auto-cannibalism. The picture is more complex in Gogol. Against a backdrop of the miraculous abundance of nature, it is Pulkheria who oversees

the estate, making sure enough food is preserved for the winter months. She is painted as a goddess of fertility, and yet everyone, including herself, is also an Erisychthon.

Afanasy is presented as someone who ignores his duty to his estate, and to Demeter, and is duly punished. No matter how much he eats, he cannot eat enough, and suffers continuous stomach-aches and indigestion. While he is humorous in the story, if you remember the noble couple in Ovid, you may sense a veiled criticism in Gogol's text.

If Afanasy has sinned by ignoring his estate, Pulkheria, as a Russian Demeter, is also guilty of misusing the resources of the earth. Gogol recounts the food supplies she hoards, emphasizing how they mold and go to waste in her over-stocked larders and store houses. As in Ovid, felling trees is also presented as an outrage, when the couple's stewards cut down the actual trees on the outskirts of the estate, where Pulkheria rarely visits. The supposed stewards pilfer, steal, and sell sleds they make from the trees, just as the servant-girls and everyone else steal food. When Pulkheria does notice that some hundred-year old oaks are missing, her own complicity is marked, as she rebukes the stewards only lightly through a proverb. "Why is it, Nichipor... that the oaks have been so thinned? Mind that the hair on your head does not grow so thin." (7)(Отчего это у тебя, Ничипор... дубки сделались так редкими? Гляди, чтобы у тебя волосы не были редки) (13). In response, Nichipor lies, saying they had fallen in a storm; Pulkheria appears to accept his ruse, but then proceeds to put up a watch around what appear to be her favored trees: "... near the Spanish cherry trees and the big winter pears." (7) (около шпанских вишень и больших зимних дулей.) (14). It is a pure Gogolian inversion that she prefers to save the edible fruit trees, emblems of her gluttony, imported and out of place in Russia, rather than the oaks, symbols of strength and truth, which the original



Erysichthon cut down; and which Ovid describes in detail,<sup>56</sup> giving epic fury to Erysichthon's violence against the ancient oaks.

Despite the outrages against the earth and implied criticism of the supposed ideal Russian landowners, Gogol's image of an abundant Russia contradicts the image of Russia found in Ovid, where Fames, or hunger, comes from the outer edges of Scythia. His portrayal of southern Russia, and by association the country to the north as well, is of a cold, inhospitable, and sterile landscape:

... There is a place, on the outer rim  
Of icy Scythia, a dismal soil,  
A barren land, a treeless land, a land  
Where no corn grows, but sluggish Cold lives there,  
And Pallor, Fear, and the skinny goddess Famine. (206)

Est locus extremis Scythiae glacialis inoris,  
Triste solum, sterilis, sine fruge, sine arbore tellus  
Fruges iners illic habitant Pallorque Tremorque  
Et ieiuna Fames... (788-791)

It is as if Ovid's Fames dwells on Afanasy and Pulkheria's Russian estate, driving their insatiable consumption and storing of food. In Ovid, at Demeter's behest, Famine comes from the north to torture Erysichthon:

To Erysichthon's palace, where the king  
In the dead of the night, was lying sunk in slumber.  
She twined her skinny arms around him, filled him  
With what she was, breathed into his lips, his throat,  
And planted hunger in his hollow veins... (207)

Ad iussam delata domum est et protinus intrat

Sacrilegi thalamos altoque sopore solutum  
 (Noctis enim tempus) geminis amplectitur ulnis  
 Seque viro inspirat faucesque et pectus et ora  
 Adflat et in vacuis peragit ieiunia venis... (816-820)

Ovid's character was so ravenous that after spending all his treasure on foodstuffs, he sells his daughter for money. She is saved by Neptune, who gives her the gift of being able to change shapes, but her father then sells her in various forms, "now mare, now heifer, now bird..." (at illa / Nunc equa, nunc ales, modo bos...) (873). Finally, he has nothing to gnaw upon except his shrinking self. Gogol represses the grotesqueness of Ovidian text in his own, softening the criticism it would imply about his Russians' gluttony. The negative picture of Scythian lands is not limited to this reference to Erysichthon, but is mentioned by Pushkin as well, in his poem, "To Ovid" (К Овидию): "There the fierce sons of chilly Scythia..." (Там холодной Скифии свирепые сыны...).<sup>57</sup> These images, so it seems, were present in the minds of reading Russians: others authors had read their Ovid carefully, perhaps noticing the discrepancies between Ovid's picture, Pushkin's, and Gogol's. Gogol creates a lovely picture of an abundant Russia, with a slightly humorous picture of noble overindulgence. For those who knew their Classical allusions, however, a remarkable amount of potential criticism is embedded in the same text. The differences between Ovid's original, and Gogol's re-writing indicate, perhaps, the deep layers of anxiety and guilt Gogol felt about his conflicting love for and loyalty to both Italy and Russia; about his conflicted relationship towards the western Classics: understanding them, competing with and appropriating them the same time, but feeling the difference and distance between the original and his own creations.

Both Gogol and Ovid are very conscious of their works as art, but leave the door open for them to be read as social commentary. In Gogol the Ovidian subtext is topsy-

turvy, and Gogol's art lies in the details and the rhetoric. Rather than dismissing Ovid, Gogol uses the Ovidian subtext in a way that is very Ovidian: not wanting to be disloyal to Russia and a Russian way of life, he can satisfy his nationalistic and moralistic readers, creating a picture of a Russian ideal, yet in the slippages in the text he is able to articulate criticism of that same picture. The tale confirms simultaneously Gogol's apparent disregard for and yet very deep appreciation for Ovid, his loyalty to Russian, yet deep admiration for the western Classics, for a more liberal society he saw in those texts. He saw, or felt, many of Ovid's concerns as his own, and brought them "in nova forma... ad sua tempora."

### **Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlyov Family*: Aristotelian Satire and Tragedy in the Mid- to Late- 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Towards the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the reception and study of the Classics in Russia becomes even more complicated. Uvarov and others, understanding the benefits of a Classical education in the process of bringing Enlightenment to Russia, experienced relative success at integrating the study of Latin and Greek into the lyceums and gymnasia, and Latin in many Seminaries. Leading intellectuals and writers understood the Classics well, and were able to use them freely to create meaningful allusive dialogues. After the 1848 Revolutions in Europe, however, Classical education was actively discouraged as a potential source of radical, democratizing ideas. Curricula show that the number of hours devoted per week to Latin decreased, and Greek became more restricted.<sup>58</sup> Instruction in the Classics was reinstated in the educational reform of 1871, under the ministry of D. A. Tolstoi, and for the first time, not only Latin, but also Greek was compulsory. The intent, however, behind teaching the Classical languages was

to discipline the minds of youth who might otherwise be drawn to nihilistic and radical elements in society.<sup>59</sup> Grammar was emphasized: if the youth could keep Greek grammar in their brains, extemporize and write flawlessly, their minds would be sufficiently formed for their future tasks in the service of the fatherland. For a period, only Orthodox texts were allowed, which had not happened before in Russian Classical studies, and which, perhaps, led to a distaste for the Classics, especially Greek.<sup>60</sup> As Kelly notes, given the compulsory education in Greek and Latin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Classics became a tool of repression rather than one of inculcating liberal, humanistic views; the resulting lack of enthusiasm for the subject resulted in a lackluster development of Classical studies in Russia, especially at a time when they were blossoming in Europe, in particular in Germany and England.<sup>61</sup>

However, as distasteful as Greek and Classical studies may have become to the authorities during the reign of Alexander II and after his assassination in 1881, and to the educated public between 1871 Tolstoi reforms and the end of the century, knowledge of the Classics did not disappear from the culture, but had taken firm hold, and continued to provide a touchstone for criticism of Russian culture, as well as a means to claim an original truth for Russian culture that would set it above European Catholic and Protestant rationalism. Social critics such as Saltykov-Shchedrin reveled in the events of the French Revolution, and an analysis of the Classical themes in his novel *The Golovlyov Family* illustrates the subversive and explosive potential of the Classics as subtext in tsarist Russia, used to turn an instrument of repression against those who would repress. It also illustrates differences in how Latin and Greek references are used and interpreted: where Pushkin and Gogol found Ovid and Horace important

touchstones, Saltykov-Shchedrin, a supreme satirist, mentions Ovid only in passing, and prefers allusions to Greek tragedies as a mode of criticism; following an Aristotelian teleological model with an idea of history as progressive, rather than cyclical, he is far more unwaveringly critical of Russia's backwardness.

Since its publication in 1880, critics of Saltykov-Shchedrin's *The Golovlyov Family* have puzzled over its genre: is it a parody of the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century Family Novel, or a tragic tale of the fall of the Golovlyovs, with Porfiry Golovlyov as the main protagonist? For some, Porfiry is an anti-hero; for others he is the victim, albeit despicable, of his own times, an example of the decline of the gentry class, an Oblomov taken to greater depths. Given that Saltykov-Shchedrin wrote in a century when Pushkin created a novel in verse, and Gogol an epic in prose and a comedy of critically biting satire, it was perhaps incumbent upon Saltykov-Shchedrin to pursue this tradition, and indeed mix genres.<sup>62</sup> V.V. Prozorov notes how tragedy and satire go hand in hand:

This is the tragedy of a man, who, even if unconsciously, expends to the full his spiritual stock, loses his moral props in life, and ceases to be his own master....Saltykov-Shchedrin has presented a brilliant example of a satirical work in which laughter dies on the lips, falls silent, and readers are moved to think seriously about the terrible consequences to which moral defects and moral atrophy can lead them.<sup>63</sup>

Prozorov also formulates the question I would like to pursue: "Is it possible to speak of tragedy in respect to a nauseating liar, a man who has lived without conscience or decency?" Of interest here is that while critics consider the tale a tragedy and mention in passing Shakespeare and Dickens, it seems fruitful also to explore the subtext of Greek

tragedies.

Looking at the novel in terms of a Greek tragedy may help us further understand the novel, and see yet again, how the Classical allusions are intertwined in Russian literature as a touchstone for criticism. We can ask a series of questions: Does Porfiry arrive at any real recognition of his sins and failings? How well motivated is his last reckoning? Further, although the setting is late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, to what extent do his characters resemble those of a full-blown Greek tragedy? If ancient, pagan models are lurking in the background, why is no more specific mention made in the novel, or more pointedly, why have any direct references to ancient, pagan plays been suppressed? Does Saltykov-Shchedrin, like Pushkin and Gogol, like the Classical authors they had studied well, indulge in the art of allusion to maneuver around the censors, sprinkling additional salt on already obvious satire?<sup>64</sup>

Saltykov-Shchedrin, born in 1826, attended the Moscow Institute for the sons of the Nobility until 1836, and Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum until 1844. Although his education may not have been perfect, he was a member of the last generation of the elite to benefit from a Classical education that was not curtailed after the European upheavals of 1848, and was drawn into the Westernizing camp of Russians, enamored of the French Socialists Saint-Simon and Fourier. A comparison of the novel with Greek tragedies, in both broad similarities and a few particular details, suggests that Saltykov-Shchedrin had absorbed some Classical education, and had Classical models in mind when he wrote his novel. For example, at the end of *The Golovlyov Family*, Porfiry Vladimiryich walks out into a stormy night to beg forgiveness of his mother who has lain in her grave for about a year, and finds himself in an extreme situation: he has been driven close to madness,

induced in part by drinking; his children have all died; and he has alienated most members of his household. He does not return alive from his graveyard visit, and his death and the imminent death of his niece bring the family saga to a close. (The novel is on record as one of the most depressing of all times.) He could indeed be a Russian King Lear, and yet the novel at this point also calls to mind the denouement of a grand Greek tragedy.<sup>65</sup>

Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, argued that Greek tragedy involves the fall of a noble man, a fatal flaw in the hero who falls, hubris, and a moment of *anagnorisis*, or self recognition, which signals the turning point, or end of the tragedy.<sup>66</sup> *The Golovlyov Family* partakes of these elements, albeit in its own particularly Russian way. Porfiry is a member of the gentry, rather than the aristocracy, and has a multitude of flaws which bring about his downfall. He does, in the end, realize that he has committed some grave errors, and although this recognition comes too late to save his family, he does attempt to beg his mother's forgiveness before he dies. As a purely structural matter, it is traditional wisdom that in a Greek tragedy death occurs off stage, behind closed doors, and is reported to the audience only by a messenger. We see this formality closely observed in Saltykov-Shchedrin's work, with a twist: Porfiry's death is reported to have happened, and Anninka's is reported as imminent.

Contemporary interpretations of Greek tragedies tend to look beyond the general schematic elements Aristotle describes, and admit the plays also involve incest, extramarital affairs, uncontrollable passion, road rage, infanticide, patricide, matricide, and suicide – some of the worst stuff of human life. We also see discussions of gender issues which involve a certain amount of parody, and a healthy discussion of the politics

of power.<sup>67</sup> The Greek tragedies also provide an excellent source of tyrannical patriarchs who meet their doom, partially ordained fate, but also brought about by personal failings. *The Golovlyov Family*, in step with contemporary criticism, includes many of these elements.

While *The Golovlyov Family* may not immediately strike one with its Classical elements, as does, for example, Gogol's "Taras Bulba," where Cossack heroes look down from the ramparts with oddly Homeric helmets, the novel is not without references to Classical literature. Saltykov-Shchedrin mentions by name two of the more obvious classical authors, Homer and Ovid, both with a purpose. Early on, he describes the endless meals Porfiry's family indulges in as Homeric, and the reference is cryptic, yet seems to include both a touch of parody, and a jab at how the Classics were being treated and taught in Russia. Indeed, the meals are epic only in the debased sense of the word, of being endless. Perhaps a stock literary cliché, the meals serve as a refrain to the Golovlyovs' daily life, yet share nothing of the traditional Homeric epic feasts which celebrate the community of heroes fighting for the honor of their kings, who in turn make solemn offering to the gods. Rather, they underscore the anti-heroic qualities of Porfiry and his family: Porfiry uses the meals to torment his household, eating slowly and nattering on in his endless, mindless chatter. As the study of Greek grammar would become associated with mindless torture in schools, the Golovlyovs' epic Russian meals are no more enlightening. No one goes to sleep afterwards particularly satisfied; the only battle they wake to fight is against Porfiry and his endless greed, treachery and despicableness. Although Porfiry is a master of pettifogging greed, and reaches royal moments of madness in his calculations, he is no Achilles. Parody cuts with a two-edged



sword: it recalls the real Homeric heroes, comparing them to their contemporary opposites, and Saltykov-Shchedrin accomplishes a multiple edged attack. While appearing to deflate Homer a notch by the clichéd, sardonic tossing off of a name, discrediting a foreign, Greek, Western hero for the benefit of a Russian, he yet mocks his fellow citizens, his government, their system of education, and level of culture: Could a slow-witted public possibly confuse Porfiry, even for a moment, with some outlandish home-grown hero truly comparable to an ancient Greek hero?

The second reference to a Classical author, Ovid, is equally fleeting, but equally suggestive. More than mid-way through the novel, in a flashback to a time before Arina Petrovna's death, it transpires that the maid, Yevprakseyushka, had become pregnant by Porfiry. Arina Petrovna is shown to reminisce fondly about the number of servant girls she has caught pregnant out-of-wedlock: "this tracking down of her lustful servant girls was the sole romantic element which touched a living chord within her." (167) (сослеживание вожделяющих дворовых девок было единственным романическим элементом, затрагивавшим какую-то живую струну.) (178). This comment is followed by a seemingly irrelevant observation:

It was the belles-lettres of the sort to be found in a thick journal where the reader expects to meet up with studies into fog formation and the place of Ovid's burial—and suddenly, instead of this, he finds: Lo, a distant troika rushes on... (167)

Это была своего рода беллетристика в скучном журнале, в котором читатель ожидает встретиться с исследованиями о сухих туманах и о месте погребения Овидия -- и вдруг, вместо того, читает: Вот мчится тройка удалая... (178)

The reference to a thwarted interest in arcane knowledge about Ovid's grave recalls two

well-known moments in Russian literature, and invokes Pushkin and Gogol, their complex and conflicted attitudes towards Ovid, and the larger cultural questions they invoke. The first part of *Dead Souls*, in which Gogol tries to outshine Ovid, famously ends with the image of a Russian troika rushing to glory in the distant skies. These two moments, Gogol's attempt to glorify a native Russian soul, nationality and destiny, and Pushkin's identification with the exiled Ovid, are juxtaposed to Arina Petrovna's venal interest in her servant girls' sexual behavior, and draw attention to how low the Golovlyovs have fallen, how far rural Russia has fallen from pursuing the ideals of Enlightenment that had brought so much hope at the beginning of the century. In a deft line, Saltykov-Shchedrin calls to mind at least a century of conflict over the Classics, and points to the disjunction between progressive elites, who, with a more refined and grounded knowledge of the Classics, were trying to transform real Russian life as lived by the likes of Arina, Porfiry, and Yevprakseiyushka. Saltykov-Shchedrin's reference, though allusive and fleeting, helps to mourn the loss of Russia's progressive politics, mourns as well, perhaps, the Russian authorities' move away from pursuing the use of the Classics to foster Enlightenment.

As due literary revenge, Saltykov-Shchedrin pours his venom into a grand display of Classical Greek forms and references that underlie his novel.

As in Gogol's "Old World Landowners," names in *The Golovlyov Family* are important, and suggest a lesson well learned from Greek tragedy. Oedipus, or "Oidipous" in its more Hellenized form, means swollen-foot, referring of course to the fact that Oedipus' feet were bound and deformed when he was exposed on the mountainside as an infant.<sup>68</sup> Porfiry and Anninka's names are equally suggestive,

derived, or borrowed directly from ancient Greek. Porfiry's name is the more obvious, from the word for a purple, which, extracted from a rare purple-fish, is the color associated with members of an aristocratic or royal family.<sup>69</sup> In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the ill-fated king walks on purple cloth as he enters his palace to meet his death.

Clytemnestra, in her response, reaffirms that yes, the sea shall forever yield purple:

The sea is there, and who shall drain its yield? It breeds  
precious as silver, ever of itself renewed,  
the purple ooze wherein our garments shall be dipped.<sup>70</sup>

εστιν θαλασσα, τισ δε νιν κατασβεσει  
τρεφουσα πολλης πορφυρας ισαργρον  
κηκιδα παγκαινιστον, ειματον βαφας.<sup>71</sup>

Clytemnestra at this key moment exhibits hypocrisy and utters unctuous words, both traits associated with Porfiry and his “royal” house that is doomed to fall. Further, “porphiry” is used, primarily in Homer, of the roiling sea, and of both gushing blood, and death rushing towards one in battle. As Porfiry's nickname is Judas, otherwise glossed as “the blood-sucker,” his full name and moniker could be translated as “the Royal Bloody Bloodsucker.” Could the reference to royalty also yield a subtext of criticism of Russia's autocratic figures, and not just a parody of a localized gentry tyrant?

Anninka's name reveals further tragic roots, albeit with a more suggestive etymological connection than “Porfiry.” Although in Russian her name is a diminutive of “Anna,” in Greek it is suggestively close to the word for “unconquered” and “unconquerable,” “ανικη.” Not surprisingly, the name reflects Anninka's character: she, more vocally than other members of his household, stands up against Porfiry, and is instrumental in hastening his collapse, convincing Yevprakseiyushka that Golovlyovo is a

truly desolate, and loveless place to waste her life. Again, in a suggestive coincidence, the Greek term, “ἀνίκη” is rare, but used in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, in the ode where the chorus sings of the unconquerable power of love, of how it twists the minds of gods and mortals alike, and leads to family quarrels and death. The chorus sings this ode at a crucial juncture, just after Kreon and Haimon have argued for a last time, and immediately before Antigone is lead out to sing of her betrothal to Hades and death, before she is lead to the cave where she will hang herself in protest against Kreon’s treatment. Although the chorus sings of unconquerable love, it is Antigone’s unconquerable will to resist Kreon that hastens the end of the play: with the death of the last members of his family, Kreon experiences his *anagnorisis*, and is led away in disgrace, like a woman. In a similar spirit of resistance, Anninka encourages Yevprakseyushka's alienation from Porfiry, hastening his isolation; and, is the one who, returning to Golovlyovo, Anninka is the one to entice her uncle to drink. Their final evenings together bring about his self-recognition, desire for forgiveness, and his fateful trip to his mother’s graveside.

A third character also deserves linguistic attention. While Arina Petrovna’s name is not particularly remarkable, her death chamber yields a curiosity, a rare and borrowed word “miasma:”

...The air was heavy and stinky; the stuffiness from the hotly heated fires, from the fumes, spread by the small icon-lamps, and from the miasmai, had become intolerable. (128)<sup>72</sup>

...Воздух был тяжел и смраден; духота от жарко натопленных печей, от чада, распространяемого лампадками, и от миазмов стояла невыносимая. (137)

This room, with the stench and heat from the fire, the smoke from the lamps, sounds like hell itself. While miasma can mean “plague” in Russian, it is also the Greek word par excellence, especially in tragedy, for stain, defilement, and pollution. It is the unknown cause of the pestilence that hangs over the land and causes barrenness of both the crops and the women in the beginning of *Oedipus Tyrannus*. It is the collective guilt and defilement from the murder and incest Oedipus has committed and must confront two thirds of the way through the play. And, it is also the blood-guilt that Kreon is hoping to avoid when he decides to entomb Antigone alive rather than execute her outright for her act of civil disobedience.<sup>73</sup> It is not too strong a word for the kind of crimes Porfiry, and to some extent his mother, have committed within their family circle, and their kind have committed within Russia.

In addition to these linguistic points, as the Golovlyov family approaches its demise, the novel shows more general parallels with, in particular, Sophoclean tragedies. We have a curious overlapping in the cast of characters: a tyrannical uncle, two outcast, orphaned sisters, two dead brothers, and a host of dead or absent mothers. Porfiry, often called “uncle” by his niece Anninka, is not unlike Kreon who, in his insensitive rigidity lords over his family until everyone but he has died. Porfiry and Kreon are, in many ways, twins. Both insist on reinforcing the letter of the “law,” use religion as a crutch to enforce their rule, show no sympathy whatsoever towards family members, all in an effort to hold on to absolute power over their respective domains. In *Antigone*, Kreon, seems incapable of experiencing any feelings that would restore or repair his family, but in tyrannical blindness refuses to allow Antigone to bury her brother, refuses to bless Haimon’s marriage to Antigone, and refuses to listen to the townsfolk and his servants

whispering that he is a fool. His family members can escape his grip only by death: all told, three suicides accrue to Kreon's account by the end of the play.

These gruesome family facts sound all too familiar when we think of Porfiry and the Golovlyovs. Porfiry, too, lacks any human sympathy that would allow him to maintain his family's health. He, too, refuses to bless his one son's marriage, which leads his son to commit suicide; his own brother, Stepa, who returns home to die, openly accuses Porfiry of murdering his son by his lack of forthright communication about his intentions to cut off support. In discussing how best to deal with the family reprobates, Porfiry counsels his mother against setting Stepa up in yet another house of his own. We see here, perhaps, a conflict between a tradition of supporting family unconditionally, and a commercialized attitude toward family ties. While Arina realizes that twelve thousand rubles is a lot to lose, she would not intentionally leave any of her children homeless and uncared for. Porfiry, however, ever a slave to making a profit, advises against any kind of human generosity, and Stepa, unable to fend for himself, dies a miserable death. Further, Porfiry refuses to pay off the substantial debt incurred by his son, causing yet another senseless death. When the news finally reaches him of Petya's death, he wants nothing to do with it: "No, no, no! I don't want to know, I didn't hear and I don't want to hear! I don't want to know about his filthy affairs!" (131) ("Нет, нет, нет! И не знаю, и не слышал, и слышать не хочу! Не хочу я его грязных дел знать!") (140). Porfiry, protesting perhaps too much, exhibits a remarkable, indeed tragic, deafness, and when members of the household accuse him of wrongdoing, he cannot hear their claims. This echoes the chorus in *Antigone* which lets Kreon know how unreasonable his demands are.<sup>74</sup> Porfiry and Kreon vie with each other in the realm of being deaf to their families'

pleas. Kreon's autocratic rage makes the Chorus cower and retreat from their earlier criticism; Porfiry's unctuous chatter only shuts others up. However, unlike Porfiry's sons who are too cowardly to resist, Haimon, a true Greek, taunts his father with hot-blooded advice which further enrages and alienates his father.

The Golovlyovs share yet two other characteristics with Greek tragedy: the perversion of family relations, and the power of the curse. Some legendary families are cursed from their beginnings, and the houses of Atreus, and Oedipus provide famous examples. Laius thought he would escape his fate by exposing the infant Oedipus, but his plan backfires on him, and the ancient curse, that he will die at his son's hand, comes true. As if in a Greek tragedy, the only thing Porfiry truly fears is his mother's curse. Innocent messengers, the orphans, had told her of the power of the curse, which she keeps as a secret weapon until she is pushed to the brink by her son's stinginess: she is finally driven to curse Porfiry when he refuses to help her grandson, Petya. Ironically, however, the curse Porfiry most fears is not the specific curse which fells him, but one that is much larger. Porfiry reacts first with horror at his mother's curses, but then, thinking he is safe, expresses surprise that the results are not as dire as he had anticipated. Irony enters when Arina Petrovna takes a turn for the worse: the force of her hatred towards her son drives her to utter another curse, and the emotional energy of uttering the curse saps her will to live. She retires to solitude, and her last, dying wish is see the two orphans, the two living beings who might have cared for her had she treated them more kindly. After her death Porfiry's life begins to crumble rapidly, and her curse calls forth the larger curse upon the family. Like Oedipus, Porfiry does not understand the full meaning of the curse until he has lived his life blindly, nearly to the end.

Two other victims of Porfiry's greed and stinginess, the orphans Anninka and Lyubinka, play out the tragic theme of incest; and the young, unprotected girls invite yet another level of Classical allusions. Incest is, of course, a constant theme in Sophocles. Antigone and her father are also sister and brother, children of the same mother, and there are hints that Kreon did not have the best of intentions vis-à-vis his nieces. Porfiry clearly feels attracted to Anninka, and to her credit she resists him and leaves Golovlyovo as quickly as she is able. She is not as successful in warding off unwanted attention once she is out in the world, and her uncle does nothing to save or protect either of the girls. Once cast out, the orphans are despoiled as provincial actresses, and reach such misery that they feel decide their only option is to commit suicide. Lyubinka, the more desperate of the two, goes through with her suicide, an acceptable end for a Classical heroine: Antigone hangs herself in the stone cave where Kreon has entombed her alive.

Indeed, had the orphans not left to seek acting careers they might as well have been entombed alive on their estate of Pogorelka. As it is, Anninka feels a living death when she returns to pay respects to her grandmother. Although she did not have the courage to kill herself with her sister, she returns to endure a slower death on her uncle's estate, and she laments that she had not committed suicide earlier: "She should have died then, together with Lyubinka, but for some reason, she remained." (236) (Надо было тогда кончать, вместе с Любинькой, а она зачем-то осталась.) (250). As Anninka thinks about her fate and the number of recent deaths in her family, she reflects:

Golovlyovo – that was death itself, malicious, spiritually empty;  
that was death eternally lying in wait for a new victim ...  
poison, all the sores – everything originated from here. (235)



Головлево – это сама смерть, злобная, пустоутробная; это смерть, вечно подстерегающая новую жертву... Все смерти, все отравы, все язвы – все идет отсюда. (249)

She also compares herself to a worm, making its way from beneath a stone:

And what kind of miserable worm did one have to be in order  
to come crawling out from under such a heap of rocks all cast  
at her at the same time? (236)

И каким ничтожным червем нужно быть, чтобы выползти  
из-под такой груды разом налетевших камней? (250)

Curiously, the complaints of being buried beneath stone and dying childless are also crucial themes in Antigone's final odes:

Pitiful was the death that stranger died,  
Our queen once, Tantalus' daughter. The rock  
It covered her over, like stubborn ivy it grew,  
Still, as she wastes, the rain  
And snow companion her.  
Pouring down from her mourning eyes comes the water that  
Soaks the stone.  
My own putting to sleep a god has planned like hers....  
No marriage-beg, no marriage-song for me,  
And since no wedding, so no child to rear,  
I go, without a friend, struck down by fate... (824-920)

Antigone and Anninka are spiritual twins, each caught in her own era and country, but suffering similar inescapable fates.

In this depiction of the utter decay of Russian rural life, the few references to

Classical themes reflect the degradation of culture and life in the provinces. Anninka and Lyubinka have been acting in provincial theaters, where Anninka has specialized in playing “la nouvelle Helène:”

“In ‘La Belle Helène’ ... she plays the role of Helène in the Theatre.”

“Ah yes ... Helène ... and Paris? ‘Being handsome and young,

he enflamed the hearts of the goddesses.’ Yes, we know it, we do!”

Lyubinka rejoiced. (77)

“В ‘Прекрасной Елене’ ... она на театре Елену играет.”

“Ах да ... Елена ... это Парис? ‘Будуше прекрасен и молод, он разжег сердца богинь’, Знаем! Знаем!” – обрадовалась Любинька. (83)

Sharply satirizing a provincial ignorance of the Classical originals, which the sisters play only in bowdlerized form, this allusion also comments on the tragedy of the girls’ lives. When Anninka returns to Golovlyovo a second and final time, we learn more sordid details of the orphans’ life in the theatre. They have been playing bawds, and their acting is dreadful; collectively they haven’t enough talent to be hired in Moscow. Before Anninka dies, all the roles she has played swim in front of her eyes, including “La Belle Helène” (“Прекрасная Елена”), and she recalls Menelaus being called in from the wings. While acting in second and third-rate burlesques on Classical themes, she is yet living out her own, very real tragedy. Saltykov-Shchedrin, a master of satire, uses a subtext of Classical allusions to reveal the tragedy of Russian life he witnessed surrounding him.

The question comes then, what of catharsis? What do we gain from reading such a novel? What do we gain from reading and re-reading the ancient Greek plays?

Traditional wisdom from Aristotle to the present day says that we should feel cleansed

after watching such a production.<sup>75</sup> Part of the “catharsis” of the Oedipus cycle comes perhaps in seeing two tyrannical kings, hereditary brothers, destroyed by their own selfish blindness. And there is a beneficial effect in seeing all of the gory details of Porfiry’s fall, which Saltykov-Shchedrin had articulated in his introduction to *Provincial Sketches* (*Губернские очерки*): “But I can think that revealing evil, lies, and vices is likewise not without use, the more so that it proposes a full sympathy towards goodness and truth.” (Но смею думать, что обнаружение зла, лжи и порока также не бесполезно, тем более что предполагает полное сочувствие к добру и истине.)<sup>76</sup> Saltykov-Shchedrin thought his satire would benefit Russia, and the subtext of an ancient, near-canonical tragedy adds weight to the bite of satire.

The question remains, why would Saltykov-Shchedrin not make the tragic references more obvious? It is always possible that he, and others, assumed that the references would be clear to those who cared to see them, and that others could glean enough from the text as parody and satire, both adequate forms of criticism in themselves. Another answer to this may also explain why a nod is given to the Homeric nature of the meals, but it is not a theme that is developed, or why Ovid, hugely influential in other debates, is mentioned only in passing. As we have seen with Gogol, a brief mention of Ovid in *Dead Souls*, or an innocent comparison between two characters in “The Old- World Landowners,” may have more depth and history concerning the political debates of the time. It looks, as we read *The Golovlyov Family*, as if we are reading a truly Russian epic, a uniquely Russian tragedy, but perhaps there is more to the story: oblique references to the literature of pagan Greece offer an additional angle from which Saltykov-Shchedrin can critique his fellow countrymen, his country, and his tsar.

<sup>1</sup> See Iakubovich, D. P., “Antiquity in the Works of Pushkin.” (“Античность в творчестве Пушкина”), for a study of the evolution of Pushkin’s familiarity with and use of Classical materials as an Aesopian language, beginning with Pushkin’s education under Koshanskii at the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum, up to February 1825, when Pushkin was placed in internal exile at his estate, Mikhailovskoe, where he turned to deepening his understanding of the Classics, particularly the Roman historians, including Tacitus, Nepos, Livy. Also, see Greenleaf, Monika, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, (61), for mention of the Classics as a code of “Aesopian language” in Pushkin’s correspondence.

<sup>2</sup> Greenleaf, op. cit., (60-62); Hokanson, Katya, *Writing at Russia’s Border*, (106-119).

<sup>3</sup> Layton, Susan, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, (36-37; 48-49; 230).

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Iakubovich’s article, see Amutsin, I. D., “Pushkin and Tacitus.” (“Пушкин и Тацит”) 160-180; and Gippius, V., “Alexandr I in Pushkin’s Notes on The Annals of Tacitus” (Александр I в пушкинских замечаниях на анналы Тацита”).

<sup>5</sup> Whittaker, Cynthia, *The Origins of Modern Russian Education: An Intellectual Biography of Count Sergei Uvarov, 1786-1855*, (28-29; 183-185; 240-242).

<sup>6</sup> Whittaker, op. cit., (100-103); Frolov, “Count Sergei Semenovich Uvarov and Academic Classicism.” (“Граф Сергей Семенович Уваров и академический классицизм”), (273-275).

<sup>7</sup> See Uvarov, Sergei, *Essai sur les mystères d’Eleusis* for a fascinating interpretation of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

<sup>8</sup> Whittaker, op., cit., (146).

<sup>9</sup> Whittaker, op., cit., esp. her final chapter, “The Fall from Power,” (212-243).

<sup>10</sup> See Frolov, E. D., op. cit., (259), for a re-assessment of Uvarov’s appreciation for and role in the spread of Classical education in Russia. Curiously, Frolov credits Whittaker’s study for inspiring his post-Soviet interest in “re-habilitating” Uvarov, de-emphasizing his reactionary politics and praising his efforts to promote the Classics and Classical Studies in Russia.

<sup>11</sup> See Whittaker, op. cit., (146-147) for mention of the reforms of Dimitri Tolstoi.

<sup>12</sup> Iakubovich, op. cit., (97-110), details many of the works Koshanskii taught at the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum, many translated by Komanskii himself, and others translated by Batiushkov; he also discusses translations by Andre Chenier, Parny, and bilingual Russian-Latin, and French-Latin editions that would have made the Classics approachable and familiar to Pushkin and his contemporaries. See Whittaker, op. Cit., (19-29), for further discussion of knowledge of Classical materials, for example, that in 1820, Uvarov, Batiushkov and Dashkov had all published editions of the *Greek Anthology*; and in 1824 Uvarov wrote, “Memoire sur les tragiques greques,” on the works of Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus.

<sup>13</sup> Ram, *The Imperial Sublime*, (197-201).

<sup>14</sup> See Lokotnikova, I. G. “V.A. Zhukovskii and the Tsar’s Family in the Palace of His Imperial Majesty (from Material of the Chamber Journals from 1826-1841. (“В. А. Жуковский и царское семейство в Собственном Его Императорского Величества дворце (по материалам Камер-фурьских журналов за 1826-1841 гг.”), (181-186); and Agamalian, L. G. “Educating the Tsars as a Phenomenon of Russian Culture in the Age of Enlightenment.” (“Царевичество как феномен русской культуры эпохи Просвещения”).

<sup>15</sup> See Rueckert, *Zhukovsky and the Germans: A Study in Romantic Hermeneutics*, for a study of Zhukovsky’s ties to the German Romantics and a discussion of the Homer Project.

<sup>16</sup> Whittaker, op. cit., (27).

<sup>17</sup> Zhukovsky, V., *Poems. (Стихотворения)*, (172-174).

<sup>18</sup> My translation. I offer literal translations, without presuming to recreate Zhukovsky’s poetic effects.

<sup>19</sup> Iakubovich, op. cit., (158). Other contemporaries shared this passion for the Classics, and the early Decembrist society met in groups to discuss Greek and Roman history.

<sup>20</sup> Iakubovich, op. cit., (110-118) on the depth and evolution of Pushkin’s interest in the Classics; and (158)

on Pushkin's appreciation of the genius of the Romans, versus his relative lack of knowledge of Greek; but his overall "deep attention" to the Classical sources, knowing for example, Horace and Virgil's predecessors, Nevius and Ennius.

<sup>21</sup> These would be the years leading up to and following the Decembrist Revolt of December 1825.

<sup>22</sup> Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*. All translations in English are from, Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, 1963, with exceptions noted in the endnote. Here, I have amended Nabokov's translation, which reads, "With what suffering did he end / His brilliant and rebellious age," to more closely reflect the question, "Why..." in the original Russian.

<sup>23</sup> All Russian quotations are from Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse*. (*Евгений Онегин, роман в стихах*), 1984.

<sup>24</sup> My thanks to Professor West, for pointing out this further Classical reference and witticism.

<sup>25</sup> English translations are from Fuchs, *Horace's Satires and Epistles*. (41)

<sup>26</sup> Latin quotes are from Horatius Flaccus, *Opera*. (*Sermonum Lib. II. VI, 59-62*).

<sup>27</sup> For a recent study of how different foods are equated with various political figures, see Mary Jaeger's paper, "Blame the Boletus? Demystifying Mushrooms in Latin Literature," presented at the annual Classical Association of the Pacific Northwest Meeting, March 2010. See also Hokanson, op. cit., (114-119) for a different interpretation of Pushkin's use of Horace.

<sup>28</sup> Iakubovich, op. cit., (110) mentions that Pushkin would have read this satire during his days at the Lyceum, and references the pun, but does not discuss it in detail.

<sup>29</sup> Iakubovich, op. cit., (105-116), offers a table of Horace's poems with which Pushkin was familiar; and discusses a number of poems and authors, including Homer, Sappho, Catullus, Tibullus, Virgil, Bion, Plutarch, Theocritus, and others Pushkin would have known from his days at the Lyceum. Pushkin's dismissal of Latin and Classical literature was indeed a rhetorical ploy.

<sup>30</sup> Ivanov, O.A., "On the Question of the Interrelations of S.S. Uvarov and A. S. Pushkin in the 30's of the 19th Century." ("К вопросу о взаимоотношениях С.С. Уварова и А. С. Пушкина в 30-е гг. XIX века"), (52-53). A few of the offending lines include: "И между тем наследник твой/Как ворон, к мретвечине падкий./Бледнел и трясся над тобой./Знобим стяжанья лихорадкой." (Pushkin, 1957, vol.III (348-349)).

<sup>31</sup> Horatius Flaccus, *Opera*, (Carminum Liber III, XXX). As the editors of Iakubovich's article note, (159), death prevented Iakubovich from writing the chapters on Pushkin's lyric poems of the 30's, including "exegi monumentum" ("Памятник").

<sup>32</sup> Goscilo and Holmgren, *Russia: Culture: Women*, (297-320).

<sup>33</sup> After a vehement reaction to his play *Inspector General*, Gogol fled Russia to live for twelve years in Italy. He actually wrote Part I of *Dead Souls* while in Rome, in the company of a colony of Russian artists and their patrons, including Madame Volkhonskaia, who is buried in the Church opposite the Trevi Fountain, and whose family villa now houses the British Embassy.

<sup>34</sup> Vinogradov, op. cit., (85).

<sup>35</sup> Griffiths, Frederick and Stanley Rabinowitz, *Novel Epics: Gogol, Dostoevsky, and National Narrative*, (67).

<sup>36</sup> Fanger, *The Creation of Nikolai Gogol*, (97). Griffiths and Rabinowitz, op. cit., (44-49) discuss other points of comparison between "Taras Bulba" and Homer's *Iliad*.

<sup>37</sup> Vinogradov, op. cit., (83)

<sup>38</sup> See Griffiths and Rabinowitz, op. cit., (65-66); Judith Kalb, in *Russia's Rome*, also notes this phenomenon in the intellectuals and artists, including Vyacheslav Ivanov and Solov'ov who visited Rome in the 1890's and later and were able to see Classical and pagan art, religion, side by side, in living color.

<sup>39</sup> See Hinds, Stephen, *Allusion and Intertext, Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*.

<sup>40</sup> Karlinsky, Simon, *The Sexual Labyrinth of Nikolai Gogol*, (25-30).

<sup>41</sup> The exact reasons for Ovid's exile remain a mystery to this day: some say Augustus was scandalized by the content of Ovid's *Amores*; others suggest that Ovid had stumbled on some indiscretion by Julia, Augustus' daughter. Whatever happened, Ovid was never allowed back to Rome.

<sup>42</sup> Griffiths and Rabinowitz, op. cit., (42).

<sup>43</sup> Poggioli, "Gogol's 'Old-Fashioned Landowners:' an Inverted Eclogue," (70).

<sup>44</sup> Poggioli, op. cit., (70).

<sup>45</sup> Poggioli, op. cit., (70).

<sup>46</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Gogol was a fully trained Classical scholar, but he had, as did Pushkin and others, a remarkable familiarity with Ovid, whether from the anthologies and texts available to him at the Gymnasium, or by further reading later in his life.

<sup>47</sup> Gogol, N. V., “Old-World Landowners,” (3). All quotes in English are from this edition, with exceptions noted in the endnotes.

<sup>48</sup> Gogol, N. V., “Old-World Landowners” (“Старосветские помещики”) *Collected Works. (Собрание сочинений)* (8-9). All quotes in Russian are from this edition, with exceptions noted in the endnotes.

<sup>49</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries, (200). All English quotations of Ovid are from the Humphries' translation. I have emended his text at the suggestion of Professor West, who kindly pointed out that a “mergus” is in fact a merganser, a diving duck, rather than a diver, which is in fact is a loon.

<sup>50</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. W.S. Anderson. (Book VIII, 621-625). All Latin quotes from Ovid are from Anderson's edition.

<sup>51</sup> It is interesting to remember here some of Gogol's other, questionably reliable narrators, to see an Ovidian text lurking beneath the surface.

<sup>52</sup> Callimachus, *Aetia, Iambi, Hecale and other Fragments*, (181-193).

<sup>53</sup> Anderson, W. S., ed, op. cit., (392).

<sup>54</sup> Karlinsky, op. cit., (62-67); Poggioli, op. cit., (64-65).

<sup>55</sup> Griffiths and Rabinowitz, op. cit., (159).

<sup>56</sup> Ovid, op. cit., Book viii, ll. 738-765.

<sup>57</sup> Pushkin, A. S. Selected Works. (*Избранные сочинения*), (197).

<sup>58</sup> Kelly, *Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky and the Classical Ideal : Poetry, Translations, Drama and Literary essays*, esp. appendices to Chapter 1, (75-78).

<sup>59</sup> Kelly, op. cit., (18-21).

<sup>60</sup> See Anton Chekhov's story, “The Man in the Case,” for a satirical picture of the fate of a Greek instructor in rural Russia.

<sup>61</sup> Kelly, op. cit., (23-25); (28-31).

<sup>62</sup> See Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, a parodic novel in verse; Gogol's *Dead Souls*, an epic in prose, which is both parody and satire; and Gogol's *The Inspector General*, which offers such biting satire and caused such an uproar after it was first staged that Gogol felt he had to flee Russia and find refuge in Rome.

<sup>63</sup> Saltykov-Shchedrin, op. cit., (74).

<sup>64</sup> See Auer, A.P. *Saltykov-Shchedrin and Poetics in Russian Literature of the Second Half of the 19th Century. (Салтыков-Щедрин и поэтика русской литературы второй половины XIX века)*. (44-47), for a discussion on the use of allusive language in the correspondence and publications of Soloviev and Saltykov-Shchedrin.

<sup>65</sup> Shakespeare's modeling his own play on Greek tragedies and themes is another topic, well studied, and not unrelated: educated Russians were well-versed in Shakespeare in translation.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*. NB: However, because Aristotle wrote the *Poetics* in outline form, scholarly questions remain about using his work to define tragedy: Many a good men fall, but the definition of “good” hinges on the definition of “καλος” (kalos), which can mean both good (in moral sense), and noble (i.e. a man of high social standing, but not necessarily “good”). Porfiry may fit into the canon with this latter definition in mind.

<sup>67</sup> Recent criticism of Sophocles' plays has focused on these more “post-modern” concerns. A presentation at a recent American Philological Association meeting, rumored to have brought cheers, was entitled “Oedipus the Queen.” Feminist critics (and others) have written on the gender reversals in “Oidipous Tyrannus,” between Jocasta and Oedipus in particular, and Kreon's and Haimon's heated insults, each accusing the other of acting like a woman. Other critics have focuses on the political of the time between autocratic Sparta and more democratic Athens. See commentary in Blondell, Ruby, *Women on the Edge: Four Plays by Euripides*; and Blondell, Mary, *Sophocles' Antigone*.

<sup>68</sup> NB, Percy Bysshe Shelley borrowed this name and plays with it in his parodic work, “Swell-foot the Tyrant,” a scathing indictment of King Charles and his treatment of his wife in what was known as “The Caroline Affair.” A main player in this drama is also Famine, which turns a family dispute into public, political debate. The work was censored almost immediately by the powers that be, and published only posthumously, with a profuse apology, by Shelley's wife, Mary Shelley. See *The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*.

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<sup>69</sup> I thank Professor Jose Alaniz, for suggesting the association of Porfiry's name with the Greek word for purple. Further interpretation is my own.

<sup>70</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, in Greek Tragedies, I, (34, ll. 958-960).

<sup>71</sup> Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ed. Denniston, John Dewar and Denys Page, (ll 958-960).

<sup>72</sup> I have altered the translation here, substituting "miasmai" for "stench" in Cioran's translation to emphasize the rare use of the Greek-based word in Russian.

<sup>73</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Jebb, Sir Richard, ed., (ll. 1012. 97, 353). "Miasma" is found in *Antigone* as well: ...Take her away at once, and open up/the tomb I spoke of. Leave her there alone./There let her choose: death, or a buried life./No stain of guilt upon us in this case,/but she is exiled from our life on earth. (885-890).

<sup>74</sup> This interpretation of the chorus' intent is open to debate, but it seems judging from Haimon's exchange with his father, public opinion is opposed to Kreon:

Kr: You don't think she is sick with that disease?

Ha: Your fellow-citizens maintain she's not.

Kr: Is the town to tell me how I ought to rule?

Ha: Now there you speak just like a boy yourself.

Kr: Am I to rule by other mind than mine?

Ha: No city is property of a single man.

Kr. But custom gives possession to the ruler.

Ha: You'd rule a desert beautifully alone.

Kr. It seems he's firmly on the woman's side.

Ha: If you're a woman. It is you I care for. (732-741)

<sup>75</sup> I would like to emphasize that it is not exactly clear what Aristotle meant by the term *catharsis*, but contesting its meaning is not within the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>76</sup> Auer, op. cit., (39), my translation.

## Chapter II

### **Lessons from Greece and Rome: Andrei Bitov's "Penelope" and Reflections on Empire, Nature, and Georgia**

As I have tried to show in Chapter I, the use of the Classics to help articulate contemporary problems and questions of empire was firmly established in Russia by the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, interest in the Classics continued to grow after the Tolstoi educational reform reinvigorated the teaching of both Latin and Greek in the gymnasia, the number of archeological excavations in the Crimea and Southern Russia grew, and Western scholars were brought in to Russia to share their expertise with their colleagues.<sup>1</sup> At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Symbolist writers such as Innokentii Annensky, Andrei Bely, Valerii Briusov, and in particular Viacheslav Ivanov were well versed in the Classics and used Classical allusions, both Latin and Greek, widely in their works.<sup>2</sup> The following generation of poets, including Marina Tsvetaeva, Anna Akhmatova, and Osip Mandelstam were also steeped in the Classics, the presence and use of which in their works have been relatively well studied.<sup>3</sup> As Judith Kalb has argued, the practice of using the Classics to reflect on matters of empire continues up to 1940, when the image of Soviet Russia as a further manifestation of Russia as the Third Rome was a thriving mode of propaganda and an entrenched way of debating issues about Soviet Russia, well understood and utilized by Mikhail Bulgakov in his *Master and Margarita*.<sup>4</sup>

In this and the following chapters, I turn to late- and post-Soviet Russia and Georgia, exploring how the use of Classical references, despite vast changes in the political landscape from the 1930's to the 1960's and beyond, and although knowledge of



the Classics may not be as wide-spread as in the Golden and Silver Ages of Russian literature, still serves as a touchstone for questions of empire and nation. Although interpretation of the Classics was influenced by Marxist ideology, as seen in at least one Soviet textbook on the history of Greece, which I discuss below, contemporary authors still value the Classics enough to use them as an Aesopian language for reflecting on contemporary problems. As seen in Pushkin scholarship from the early 1940's, discussed in the previous chapter, the practice of interpreting the Classics as a veiled means of discussing political and cultural issues was thriving during the early to mid years of the Soviet Union: Iakubovich's and others' nuanced understanding of Pushkin and his contemporaries' use of Classical allusions offers testimony to the rigor of at least some Classical scholars in the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I focus on Andrei Bitov's short story, "Penelope," written in 1962, and a collection of essays, *A Captive of the Caucasus*, written between 1960 and 1986 and compiled in 1999, which mix philosophical and cultural reflections from Bitov's travels around the Soviet Union. In "Penelope," using a constellation of Classical references, including Odysseus and Penelope, Bitov articulates concerns about the moral degradation that permeated his experience of Soviet life. As a result of the sense of moral degradation within the Soviet Union, Bitov turned to the Caucasus, in particular Georgia and Armenia, for spiritual sustenance. In discussing *A Captive of the Caucasus*, I focus both on the nature of that spiritual sustenance, and on imperial attitudes towards the Caucasus that, formed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remain imbedded in Bitov's Russian consciousness, and which we will see articulated as well in Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Medea and her Children*. Like many colonial powers that cannot see or hear the voice or voices

of its subjects, Russia's attachment to the Caucasus, and Georgia in particular, is deeply conflicted. Bitov, articulating that conflict, compares his feelings for Georgia and the Caucasus to that of a lover who sees his beloved as his own, and will not allow that beloved to speak; who cannot let that beloved go free.

Andrei Bitov, born in Leningrad in 1937, at the height of the Stalin Purges, is an acclaimed inheritor of the traditions of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, from Pushkin, Gogol and Dostoevsky to Nabokov, and in the late 1950's and early 1960's made an impressive debut as a new Soviet writer of Krushchev's Thaw.<sup>6</sup> His work appeared sporadically and in censored form in Soviet publications during the early 70's through the early 80's, but flourished again in the late 80's, and during glasnost' and perestroika.<sup>7</sup> He has recently been hailed as one of the former Soviet Union's leading postmodern authors; and is one of the literary elders in contemporary post-Soviet Russia.<sup>8</sup>

Andrei Bitov's 1962 short story, "Penelope" ("Пенелопя"), offers a prime example of how the Classics can be used to unveil reflections on the Soviet Empire.<sup>9</sup> When first published, "Penelope" quickly became a hallmark of the new Soviet prose of the 1960's, and its Classical references reflect many troubles facing the late-Soviet Union. Suggesting comparisons between his Soviet hero, Lobyshev,<sup>10</sup> and Western heroes, primarily from Homer's *Odyssey*, the story highlights Lobyshev's consciousness of the degradation of better human values that he participates in daily, in his specifically Soviet existence. Comparing himself with both Classical and contemporary Western heroes as models for moral behavior, Lobyshev expresses his shame and regret about his degradation, yet gives no sense that he can break the pattern in which he is trapped, even when presented with an opportunity to do so. What he does gain, however, is a clear

consciousness of the pervasive moral degradation in which he lives. He wants to be heroic in his Soviet world, but does not measure up to the standards set by Homer and other Classical models; yet it is contact with the Classical figures that helps bring about his new consciousness.

Although this chapter focuses primarily on “Penelope,” it is helpful to understand that other of Bitov’s works, in particular *Pushkin House* (*Пушкинский дом*) (written between 1964 and 1971) and *A Captive of the Caucasus* (*Книга путешествий по империи*)<sup>11</sup> share a preoccupation with Russia’s literary heritage, posing questions about the fate of the Soviet Russian empire. In *A Captive of the Caucasus*, Bitov describes trips he took around the Soviet Union; those to Georgia and Armenia, in particular, are part of his attempt to find a spiritual and intellectual core to replace the sense of an authentic Russia that had been lost in the Soviet transformation, to find values and heroes for himself and his country, and a space that would allow for ideals, beauty and wonder, and a sense of self.<sup>12</sup> These longer works represent Bitov’s personal odyssey, a process that can already be seen in “Penelope,” where Bitov looks, if fleetingly, to replace his illusory, prevaricating Soviet existence with something more wholesome, whole, and untainted.

Bitov finds this space for moral health and wholeness in the Caucasus, and yet a paradox emerges, not unlike that met in Count Uvarov, Pushkin, and others in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Bitov expresses liberal tendencies in critically examining his Soviet existence, as he does in “Penelope,” he nonetheless feels loyal to Russia and believes in its Empire. Though willing to see the beauty and cultural advantages offered by the Caucasus, he is not willing to let go of Russia’s claim to this space. Bitov’s sense of the

Caucasus as an inalienable part of the Russian and Soviet Empires is an attitude shared by Liudmila Ulitskaia; one with which Bulat Okudzhava seems to reconcile himself, if reluctantly; and which Otar Chiladze adamantly denounces. Although *A Captive of the Caucasus* contains only a few specific Classical references, they are pointed, and reflect the state of spiritual emptiness Bitov finds in the ruins of the Soviet Union; over all, his use of the Classics reveals a Soviet-era arrogance towards the ancient cultures. His dismissal of them as a source for spiritual sustenance in turn denies the Caucasus', and in particular Georgia's, belief in the importance of their Classical heritage, and the work as a whole helps to illuminate the cultural dimension of the tensions between Georgia and Russia.

### **Who Art Thou, Penelope and Odysseus: Confronting the Classics**

In "Penelope," Bitov uses Classical figures to help navigate a time of personal and social growth, of change, if not yet crisis in the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet Union would not officially collapse until 1991, its foundations were shaking earlier, and Bitov's story is example of how non-ideologues, artists whose creative impulses were formed in the relative freedom of Krushchev's Thaw,<sup>13</sup> were pushing the bounds of Soviet Realist literature.<sup>14</sup> Bitov uses an array of Classical figures, mythical and historical, to explore his relationship to positive human values, to assess Soviet interpretations of Western cultural roots, and in turn to reflect on Soviet Russia's relationship with the West: who are the founding heroes of the West? How does Bitov's fictional character, Lobyshev, a Soviet Russian, measure up to those Classical Western heroes? Are they relevant models? In asking these questions, Bitov also seems to suggest other, underlying questions: how has the Soviet state deformed Lobyshev's sense of what makes an

ordinary human heroic? How has it deformed basic human values of respect, honor, and honesty?

Like Saltykov-Shchedrin who offers insight about the fate of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal Russia, Bitov, in portraying his male hero also reflects on the gender issue: after 70 years of social engineering, what has the Soviet Union done to improve relations between the sexes? By the early 1960's, have men and women achieved equality as Soviet citizens, or do they still identify with paradigms from ancient myths? As Saltykov-Shchedrin uses the beleaguered orphaned sisters, cast as players in vaudeville productions of the Classics, to highlight the plagues of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, Bitov uses a female outcast, a later-day Penelope, to shed light on the troubles of the Soviet body politic.

Other scholars have noted the Classical references in "Penelope," but have focused on the negative aspects of Lobyshev's character, on the lies he lives by in his Soviet existence, and on Bitov's search for positive heroes in his late-Soviet life. Stephen Hagen, for example, has suggested that Bitov's purpose "is a plea for literature to include the stories of everyday life and characters," as counterpoised to the overblown heroes of the *Odyssey* Lobyshev watches, who are "akin to the protagonists in Soviet Realist works."<sup>15</sup> Peter Barta, interpreting the story as an intertextual dialogue with Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" in the *Republic* and Homer's *Odyssey* that "turns the story into a literary monument of unfreedom,"<sup>16</sup> notes that while most scholars agree on the story's exploration of the devaluation of moral behavior, "...[it is] in Bitov's re-articulation of ancient Greek works that the gravity point [sic] of the story's impact is to be found,"<sup>17</sup> and suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the Classical references.

Barta's suggestion is compelling, and in this chapter I explore further than he has done the implications of the story's Classical references: they are the warp of the veil Bitov weaves to make his revelations about his Soviet life. But it is also necessary to add the woof: these Classical references are woven into an even richer allusive context which includes at least three Western films.<sup>18</sup> The Classical figures Bitov mentions include many from the *Odyssey*: Penelope, Odysseus, Circe, the Sirens, Nausicaa, and Polyphemus. He also includes figures from Greek culture, such as Heraclitus, Herodotus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Romans are included, in particular the rebel slave, Spartacus, as found in Raffaello Giovagnoli's late 19<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary novel, *Spartaco*. In addition, Bitov filters many of the Classical figures through the lens of a more contemporary portrayal, that found in Mario Camerini's 1956 film version of the *Odyssey*, *Ulysses*, starring Anthony Quinn, Kirk Douglas, and Sylvana Mangano, which is the film Bitov's hero, Lobyshev, just happens to watch in Leningrad.<sup>19</sup> Lobyshev, in turn, reflecting on both Soviet and the ancient Western heroes, offers his own suggestion for a more suitable heroic model: Charlie Chaplin, perhaps from *City Lights*. And I suggest that Bitov found in Gelsomina, from Federico Fellini's *La Strada*, a model for his version of a Soviet anti-Penelope, transformed from Homer's loyal, clever wife into a lonely, abandoned outcast; deformed, like the male heroes, by living in Soviet Russia.<sup>20</sup> Through his characters, Bitov suggests the impossibility of ever finding either a Soviet Odysseus or Penelope who would measure up to the Homeric models.

Short yet multivalent, "Penelope" encompasses a broad span of Western culture, from the ancient Greeks to the newly "independent" country of Italy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; to contemporary film culture of the 50's and 60's, both American and Italian. It

contrasts elements of Classical Western culture with Russian and Soviet realia, questioning the cultural life of the Soviet Union at a time when it was beginning to come undone, and exploring representations of Western culture, in the midst of the West's own turmoil of the 60's. All of this transpires through an allusive dialogue of the Classics, inviting comparisons between the Greeks and the Moderns, between the supposed heroes of Bitov's late-Soviet life, and the unsung, conflicted heroes who worried about human values in inhuman times.

### **The Plot**

For all its allusive complexities, "Penelope" follows a fairly basic story line. The hero, Lobyshev, works as a foreman of a crew outside Leningrad, and comes into town to collect money for his workers; when the money is late arriving, he finds he has three hours to kill. He contemplates going to a park, the Summer Garden; or to a movie. He decides on the movie, which happens to be *Ulysses*. In the ticket line, Lobyshev strikes up a conversation with a young woman who is out of work. Over lunch, she asks him to find her a job of any kind, and he promises to help. They watch the movie. After the movie she again asks for his help, and Lobyshev, lying, gives her a false work address and tells her to visit him. End of story: he realizes he has been a total cad for lying to the girl, but misleads her all the same; reflecting that he lies all of the time, he goes on his merry way.

## The Real Story

On one level, Bitov's story is a wistful, bittersweet portrayal of a would-be Odysseus and a want-to-be Penelope who never manage to consummate their fleeting relationship. However, though the title of the story hints at Classical themes, the opening pages reveal no overt, immediate signal about the Classical referents, presenting instead the first layers of the veil through which Bitov plays cat and mouse with his reader, laying the groundwork for the interplay of literary allusion and political illusions.

The story involves an apparently typical young Soviet hero, Lobyshev, who has come into Leningrad and decides to play hooky one fall afternoon when he has to wait for the money he needs to pay his workers. Although clearly Soviet in the opening paragraphs, Lobyshev also recalls other, more distant Russian heroes.<sup>21</sup> Like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov or Underground Man, lurking through the streets of St. Petersburg, Lobyshev skulks through the dark corridors of a Leningrad office building, keeping a close watch out for his boss. He skulks like earlier heroes, but in 1962, he does so to avoid having to answer for his portion of the Soviet Plan, to avoid having to explain why he is shirking his duties. He is highly self-conscious, even paranoid, imagining various conversations with his boss and fellow workers. Drawn in part from Gogol as well, Lobyshev decides to walk down Nevsky Prospect. As he does, he contemplates the beautiful girls, and how he has grown too old to enjoy them all. And yet, he notes ironically, from habit, he still looks. Here he recalls Gogol's story "Nevsky Prospect" in which one of the male protagonists meets a young woman on said street, and is utterly disillusioned when he discovers she is a prostitute. Gogol's story, among other things, is a meditation on the illusive beauty of Nevsky Prospect, and on the illusive



nature of St. Petersburg, which, built by slave labor over northern swamps, offered Russia an eye to the West in Peter the Great's efforts to Westernize rapidly in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Bitov's allusion to Gogol is a nod to the illusive façade of Soviet realities, as well as a prelude to the girl Lobyshev will meet, who will reveal to him further illusions about his own character and life.

Before looking closely at Bitov's more explicit Classical references, it is important to consider how Lobyshev invites reflections on Classical characters. Lobyshev is cast as a philosopher of sorts, and is preoccupied with the process of thinking; he constantly reflects on his own thought processes, and in the course of the story, changes from thinking about his life obliquely, to finally being able to think clearly.<sup>22</sup> A critical element of Lobyshev's psychological make-up, which casts him as both Russian and Soviet, blending echoes of Dostoevsky and Gogol with Bitov's own role as a member of the Soviet intelligentsia, is his compulsive need to think. Cast as a philosopher, Lobyshev is a character who, on his break from Soviet duties is headed for an encounter with the Classical world.<sup>23</sup> As others have noted, the park Lobyshev thinks about visiting is the Summer Garden founded by Peter the Great, and known for its paths lined with neo-classical sculptures imported from Europe, physical manifestations of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment that would have been familiar to Pushkin and later generations of Russians, and which will appear again in Okudzhava's novel, discussed below. Bitov sets Lobyshev up as a potential philosopher who contemplates going to think about greater things, surrounded by the closest equivalent he can find in Leningrad to the Classical setting of an agora or academia.

Lobyshev, however, both literally and symbolically, never makes it to the Summer Garden. Instead, he remains caught in his own Soviet thinking, which is curiously circular, mechanical, and irrational. How he thinks and the moral quality of his thoughts are intertwined: it is as if the unreflective acceptance of his Soviet way of being makes his thoughts become swinish. Indeed, a major leitmotif of the story comprises various forms of the verb “to think”: “he thought,” “he was thinking” (он думал); and a significant part of the plot is the development of Lobyshev’s ability, or lack thereof, to think clearly. In depictions of Lobyshev’s thinking, the verb is almost always accompanied by the word translated as “in passing,” or “obliquely” (вскользь). This is a word that brings up a major problem in Lobyshev’s life: in thinking about his Soviet life, he thinks mechanically, and it is about the very quality of his thoughts that he does not wish to think, or can do so only “in passing:”

Still, he thought it strange that these sensations already arose so mechanically, that you don't even think about them, that they pass as if part of a dream, unpleasant and rotten, and then it is as if they had never been. He thought about all this, but, as it were, in passing... (66)

Он еще подумал, что странно, что такой уже возникает мотор этих ощущений, что о них и не думаешь, что они как бы во сне проходят, неприятные и свинские, и потом будто бы их и не было. Он обо всем этом подумал, но как бы вскользь... (183)

When thinking about daily Soviet realities he must face, or the girls on Nevsky Prospect with whom he would like to sleep, Lobyshev is unable to think either clearly or at length. His thoughts arise “mechanically,” a trope which recalls many Soviet images of mechanized life, from the early films of Eisenstein, Vertov, and Room, of finely working motors and machines, to the photographs of Rodchenko, and to novels such as Valentin

Kataev's *Time Forward!* The mechanical nature of Lobyshev's thoughts makes them Sovietized thoughts, and their unpleasant nature is emphasized throughout the story.

While Lobyshev's actual thought process offers a critique of the effects of being Sovietized, what he thinks about is also revealing. Bitov contrasts how free and healthy Lobyshev feels, walking down Nevsky Prospect in the fresh air and fall sunshine, with how conflicted he becomes, unable to finish a thought or think about a topic in detail, when his thoughts turn to the trivial tasks that await him at work.

Although cast as a philosopher, Lobyshev is caught in the nightmare of mechanized, Sovietized thought, and the inability to think as a philosopher should is portrayed as evil. Deciding whether he should go to the Garden to think, "...perhaps, happy thoughts..." (68) (...хорошие, быть может, вещи...) (185), or to a movie, where he doesn't necessarily have to think, the thought of the futility of the very process of thinking is likened to a snake, slithering into his brain:

This seemed somehow to be pointless...however beautiful your thoughts may be, in itself, thinking things out is in the last analysis unsatisfying.

This painful idea slid through Lobyshev's mind like a snake... (68)

Бесцельно это как-то...размышлять какие бы они было прекрасные вещи, само собой, без удовлетворения в конце концов размышлять. Этот жутковатый опыт проскользнул в голове Лобышева, как змея... (185)

The upshot of Lobyshev's troubled thought process is that he decides to go to the movies. There, however, instead of not having to think, he confronts Classical western models, and seeing himself as Odysseus, meeting his Penelope, he will actually be able to reflect on, and think beyond the Soviet nightmare.

Although Lobyshev's decision to see a movie seems to happen by chance or on a whim, the cinema plays a critical role in providing insight into Lobyshev's character and his reflections on the Soviet empire. It is not just coincidence that the theatre he stumbles upon is called the "Coliseum," named after the site of gladiator contests and mock naval battles, of Christians being thrown to the lions and other spectacles in ancient Rome. Although "Coliseum" is an utterly common name for a theatre, a heightened sensitivity to Classical references signals that this particular Soviet theatre suggests the image of Soviet Russia as the Third Rome, comparing the grandeur of Rome to that of the Soviet Empire that has brought power and glory to its people. Reflecting on issues of empire, the association of the "Coliseum" with Rome is a double-edged sword. For Roman emperors, the Coliseum embodied the greatness and power of Rome. For the participants of the spectacles, and particularly the victims, the Coliseum was less friendly; and it is in this kind of cinematic coliseum that Bitov throws Lobyshev into a host of contemporary battles; hostage and slave to the Soviet system, Lobyshev meets his "Penelope," an outcast from that system, and both are caught in the onslaught of Soviet lions and wolves.

Although Lobyshev enters what is marked as a Roman space, the "Coliseum," when he actually goes into the cinema, it is as if he enters a Greek theatre; his thoughts turn to Greece and begin to take on a more positive tone. Unlike out in the streets of Leningrad, in the theatre, Lobyshev's thoughts are likened to owls, the symbolic animal of Athena, patron goddess of Athens, war, the hearth, weaving, and wisdom. Confronting the mythic dimension of the theatre itself, and the Classical characters in the film, Lobyshev's own thoughts take on unaccustomed wisdom, so that by the last line of the story, he is finally able to think clearly: "And it was like a long-forgotten feeling to

think, not offhandedly, not ‘as it were,’ not forgetting, not while half-asleep.” (79) (И как давно забытое ощущение было, что думал не вскользь, не как бы, не вроде, не забывая, не в полусне.) (197). Lobyshev comes alive in the mock battlefield of the cinematic coliseum, finds himself in the role of a reluctant contemporary combatant, and must meet his enemies and find heroic value in his life as he is able.

Lobyshev’s first reaction to seeing that the film playing in the “Coliseum” is *Ulysses* is one of ironic dismissal, and he exhibits a remarkably entrenched ambiguity towards the pagan, Western characters; a strong desire to reject and deride them, and yet an equally strong desire to identify with them. Ultimately, he recognizes their lasting psychic power, but refuses to accept them as moral models. Swoboda has translated the film’s title as *Ulysses*, the name of Camerini’s actual film. Bitov, however, uses the Greek name throughout his story: “...so it's the Colosseum, wide-screen cinema. They were showing the *Odyssey*, the wanderings, y' know, of this guy Odysseus.” (67)<sup>24</sup> (Колизей, что ли – широкоэкранный кино. А в нем “Одиссей,” странствия, что ли, этого Одиссея.) (184). It seems essential in discussing the story to keep Bitov’s original Russian use of the *Odyssey* and Odysseus, (which I do in my modifications of Swoboda’s translation). Bitov’s point is that what Lobyshev confronts is not a Roman copy that could be associated with the image of Russia or the Soviet Union as the Third Rome, but with an image that is somehow closer to the original Greek, more authentic than a Romanized version of Homer’s epic, and which could possibly provide alternative insight into his Soviet Russian existence.

When Lobyshev approaches the theatre, he wonders what kind of a film he will see: a thoroughly modern, Sovietized remake, with a working-class hero, or a Classical

rendition, togas and all? A skeptical Soviet citizen, Lobyshev assumes the film will be laughable: “Yes, he also thought about how this movie would inevitably be idiotic.” (68) (Да, еще он думал о том, что картина эта неизбежно дурацкая.) (185). He imagines it might be a black and white neo-realist, Soviet-inspired version of the story, but is confronted with a Technicolor production, one step closer to the original Greek reality:

At first he hoped that it was just a title, the business about Odysseus, but that it was about some Italian peasant, or American traveling salesman, or poor French kid, and he was the one, the peasant, the salesman, the kid, who did the wandering as though he were Odysseus, though actually it was in our time: cars and long limousines drove up to their cafes and then a solitary figure, rain, a turned-up collar, cigarettes, then these outdoor shots in black and white, a wasteland, petroleum storage tanks on the horizon, leaves on the asphalt and the black trees of empty parks ... it became clear; it was not a matter of “as though” he were Odysseus, but it actually was Odysseus... (68)

Сначала он надеялся, что это так себе, название такое про Одиссея, а на самом деле это вовсе какой-нибудь итальянский крестьянин, или американский коммивояжер или французский бедный мальчик, и это именно он, крестьянин, комми, мальчик, странствует и вроде как бы Одиссей, а на самом деле наше время, машины, длинные такие лимузины, подъезжают к своим кафе, и одинокая фигура, дождь, поднятый воротник, сигарета, просторные такие черно-белые кадры, пустырь, и газгольдеры на горизонте, листья на асфальте и черные деревья пустых парков, ... все стало ясно, что это не словно бы Одиссей, а на самом деле Одиссей ... (185)

As Lobyshev muses about the film, he voices a conflicted, double-edged Soviet-era longing, both to see beyond the Iron Curtain, connecting his Soviet reality with a founding mythic figure of Western civilization; and yet to have the film inspired by

Italian neo-realist films, themselves inspired by Marxist ideology, with a more proletarian and humble hero than Odysseus.<sup>25</sup>

Lobyshev experiences an even deeper ambiguity when he suggests he doesn't want to see an ancient version of the epic, but is still captivated by the myth. He feels a similar conflict about the filmic medium itself: he wants to enjoy the film, but is highly aware of film as a tool for manipulating his consciousness. His reflections on the Classical content of the film belie a deep suspicion about the extensive use of film as a mode of propaganda in the Soviet Union,<sup>26</sup> and he implicitly compares the two experiences. On the one hand, the deep mythic experience of the story will grab him, and despite the disgust he feels knowing that his emotions and consciousness are being manipulated, he will derive pleasure from it and not be able to separate himself from it. Similarly, Soviet propaganda, in the form of film media, with which he and so many others have been fed and manipulated, is so successful that he can not escape its lure; he knows it is bad, doesn't want to believe it, but he believes it in spite of himself: the siren call of cinema has compromised many a Soviet filmmaker and viewer.<sup>27</sup> Lobyshev blames that effect on the directors' ability to manipulate their audiences' baser instincts to respond to sentimentality, even of the vulgar kind:

But in the end, he would go into the theatre all the same. And all the same he would enjoy it, however much he might deride it later. Because the jerks who make these films have some way of getting hold of something inside you, so that only for appearance's sake, only to uphold your standards of taste, you will deride it, when actually you will enjoy it. Because there is a banal sort of sentimentality on which these jerks zero in. (68)

Но, в конце концов, все равно бы он пошел в кино. И все равно он получит удовольствие, как бы не плевался потом. Потому что эти гады умеют как-то что-то такое в тебе задеть так, что ты только с виду, чтобы поддержать свой вкус, будешь плеваться, а на самом деле получишь удовольствие. Потому что есть же и это пошленькое, на что они гады и бьют. (185)

Adding the suffix “-en’koe” (-енькое) to the adjective “poshlyi’, (пошлый) [vulgar, common; trivial; trite, banal], which makes the “banal sort of sentimentality” even more banal in the Russian, Lobyshev senses the double bind presented by the cinema.

Suspicious of the film medium, he resists admitting that he shares in a common ground of “sentimentality.” And yet it is this common ground of human emotions in which the mythic figures such as Odysseus and Penelope participate that will assist him in recognizing and battling his Soviet ills, and bring about what moral insight he achieves.

### **Inside the “Barrel:” Classics and the Soviet Empire**

In addition to feeling suspicious of the film medium itself, Lobyshev is also conflicted about the very nature of the Classics. Before he enters the cinema, the poster outside the theatre sparks reflections about the Classical world. Bitov telegraphically relates Lobyshev’s thoughts, which are complex, and contrast how, as a typical Soviet citizen, Lobyshev might be expected to interpret the Classics, with how, as a non-Soviet humanist, he might actually understand them. Glancing at the poster, Lobyshev realizes he is about to watch some remake of the *Odyssey*, and almost walks out; as noted above, his attitude seems callow and skeptically derisive:

....so it’s the Colosseum, wide-screen cinema. They were showing the *Odyssey*, the wanderings, y’ know, of this guy Odysseus. That’s Homer, the



*Iliad*. Never read it. Sophocles, Euripides. Heraclitus, Herotodus.

Demosthenes. The barrel. Giovagnoli's *Spartacus*. Romulus and Remus.

Men of genius. A name. People don't read them, but everyone knows the name. And what's more: what we do read, we don't even know the names.

No men of genius. Yet the geniuses we don't read. One can think about all that too – in a casual way. (67)

...Колизей, что ли – широкоэкранное кино. А в нем “Одиссей,” странствия, что ли, этого Одиссея. Гомер там, Илиада. Никогда не читал. Софокл, Эврипид. Гераклит, Геродот. Демосфен. Бочка. Спартак Джованьоли. Ромул и Рем. Гениальные люди. Имя. Вот ведь не читали, а имя всякий знает. А то еще: читали, а имени можем и не знать. Негениальные люди. А гениальных мы не читаем. Об этом обо всем тоже можно подумать – вскользь. (184)

Not unlike the young Eugene Onegin's flippant remarks claiming that Latin is out of fashion in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, yet which belie a much deeper understanding of Classical allusions, Lobyshev's thoughts, although brief and seemingly dismissive, reveal a rather complex relationship of this Soviet man to the Western Classics.

Bitov has Lobyshev think in his characteristic manner, in abbreviated, contradictory sound-bites, with the tell-tale “in a casual way” “in passing” (вскользь) indicating that his knowledge of the Classics, and his ability to judge what is good writing and what is not, is a subject Lobyshev finds difficult to think about clearly. Thus, although Lobyshev claims not to have read some of these authors, his language is contradictory and confusing: “haven't read...have read” (...не читали...читали...); “geniuses...not geniuses...” (гениальные...негениальные). It is as if the dictates of Soviet culture do not allow him to think openly, seriously, or in depth about the Classical authors, and yet despite his Soviet training, he knows they are important. Although

Lobyshev drops many names, it is not immediately clear whom he has read, or what he really thinks about them: we have all heard of Homer, but who's read him; the geniuses (whoever they may be is not clear), we don't read. Yet, the list includes canonical names from at least one Soviet era textbook of ancient history, so any Soviet child could be expected to have at least passing knowledge of the names.

Lobyshev's reflections *are* convoluted, and it *is* difficult to tell who the geniuses are, and who are not: but this may be a deliberate tact to obfuscate or veil Bitov's, and his character's, knowledge of the Classical material that contradicts standard Soviet-textbook interpretations. As Gogol, Pushkin, and Saltykov-Shchedrin had found in the Classical materials more liberal attitudes towards human passions, political and aesthetic freedom than they were able to express openly, so the Soviets who read the Classical texts undoubtedly saw much more in them than a Marxist critique would allow: pagan acceptance of sexuality, luxurious material possessions, not to mention Democratic thought, and reflections on ideals and the absolute values of truth and beauty. Were Bitov to praise the Classics openly, to admit having read and understood them in an alternative, subversive light, he would be guilty of knowing and even praising their content: it is no wonder that he tries to hide his deeper understanding in cryptic sound-bytes.

And indeed, for Bitov and his *homines sovietici*, many Classical authors were a potential source of conflict, as the catalogue in his "barrel" illustrates. An entire dissertation could be written on Soviet Marxist/Leninist readings of the Classics, but a few examples from one Soviet textbook, published in 1962, the year Bitov wrote "Penelope" will perhaps suffice for now. *The History of Ancient Greece (История*

древней греции)<sup>28</sup> illustrates the kind of Marxist readings the Classics received, which might indeed have provoked the conflicted attitude, indifference and disdain, and suppressed longing, that Bitov's Lobyshev expresses. Critiquing bourgeois interpretations of Greek culture, the *History of Ancient Greece* offers its own example of the multivalence of the Classics, and how rewriting the texts is an important step in attempting to own them, and make them part of your own heritage: if Soviet ideologues can interpret the Classics to suit their needs, then they, too, can lay claim to being heirs of these foundational texts. Yet the textbook is so ideologically slanted that it begs someone with liberal ideas to look for a more humanistic, Western reading of the texts it presents. It is in part this relativistic rewriting of the myth figures that Bitov explores, and his understanding of the Classical materials at times seems to counter that relativism, tending towards a more essentialist interpretation, seeking a more universal meaning.

Predictably, the *History of Ancient Greece* explains history from a progressive, Marxist point of view:

In bourgeois historiography, the Homeric period of Helladic history is usually called “the Greek Middle Ages.” This definition, introduced by the proponents of the theory of cyclical history, is in essence incorrect.<sup>29</sup>

В буржуазной историографии гомеровский период истории Эллады обычно называют “греческим средневековьем.” Это определение, введенное в обиход сторонниками теории циклизма, неправильно по существу. (126)<sup>30</sup>

Attempting to correct bourgeois interpretations, the *History* reveals a preoccupation with Homeric references to slavery, and a tendency to praise those who side with the workers, slaves, and women, and fight against the tyranny of the ancient aristocracy:

Both male and female slaves are often mentioned in the *Iliad* and especially in the *Odyssey*. The terms referring to slaves occur in the Homeric epic more than a 100 times in all. As noted above, about 50 slave women worked in a king's "oikos."

В "Илиаде" и особенно в "Одиссее" часто идет речь о рабах и рабынях. Термины, обозначающие рабов, встречаются в гомеровском эпосе, в общей сложности более сотни раз. Выше указывалось уже, что в ойкоцах басилеев работало по пятидесяти рабынь. (124)

The discussion about Socrates is starkly black and white, and not particularly sympathetic:

If the Sophists concluded it was impossible to give a positive answer to a question posed to them about the criterion for truth, then their contemporary, the ideologue of the Athenian oligarchic and aristocratic circles, the idealist philosopher Socrates (471-399 BC) considered this possible, and even suggested he had found the criterion for truth. In this way, he elevated the oligarchs' ethical views to an absolute, since in fact he considered they alone were noble people.

Если софисты пришли к заключению, что дать положительный ответ на поставленный ими вопрос о критерии истины невозможно, то их современник – идеолог афинских олигархий и аристократических кругов философ-идеалист Сократ (471-399 г. до н.э.) считал это возможным и даже полагал, что критерий истины он нашёл. Таким способом он возводил в абсолют-этические взгляды олигархов, так как фактически только их считал добродетельными людьми. (358)

Further comments about Socrates reveal even stronger anti-oligarchic sympathies in the textbook. And yet Bitov's allusions to Plato in "Penelope" and "Pushkin House" suggest that, as a young rebel during the Thaw, Bitov was not unsympathetic to or unfamiliar with the Platonic canon.<sup>31</sup> How did he manage not to be indoctrinated by Soviet interpretations of Classical writers, especially the playwrights, Socrates and Plato?

Not all Classical authors are equally reviled in the Soviet textbook, but they are given a Soviet Marxist twist. For example, Pindar, unabashedly aristocratic in Ancient Greece, is seen to devalue the individual and emphasize the common good, making him quite acceptable to Soviet ideology:

This anti-oligarchic process had a clearly expressed slant....

Usually Pindar praised the athlete-victors not as separate individuals, but as the best representatives of the polis, of which they were citizens.

Этот антиолигархический процесс имел ярко выраженную окраску.... Обычно Пиндар прославлял атлетов-победителей не как отдельных индивидуумов, а как лучших представителей полиса, гражданами которого они являлись. (358-359)

Sophocles is interpreted in a similar light: “Sophocles represented people as they ought to be: ideal people of the polis, for whom the personal was closely linked with the public.” (Софокл изображал людей такими, какими они должны быть: идеальных людей полиса, у которых личное тесно связано с общественным) (362). The emphasis placed on the heroes’ role in the collective social group contrasts sharply with standard Western interpretations of both authors. For example, Pindar is generally known for singing the praises of heroic individual athletes, in victory odes such as Pythia IV.<sup>32</sup> Sophocles’ Theban cycle, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Antigone*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*, in turn celebrate Oedipus’ individual questioning intellect, the responsibility he takes for his own actions, and the inescapability of his fate; pit Antigone’s individual consciousness against Kreon and his insistence on following the Law of the State; and explore the isolated pain of the blind and elderly Oedipus before his assumption into the heavens.<sup>33</sup>

Given the interpretations of the Classics found in the *History*, what Soviet youth with a tendency to liberal bourgeois thought and a longing for Western freedoms would be drawn to those ancient sources? Alternatively, who could dare admit openly that he or she saw them in a different, non-Marxist light? Armed with a few examples of standard Soviet interpretations of the Classics, it is interesting to see which authors Bitov includes in Lobyshev's "barrel," and consider why Lobyshev might mention these specific authors, and why he feels the need to express his understanding of the Classics in such veiled, cryptic, and ambiguous language.

Among the Greeks, the first is Homer, whose *Iliad*, which Lobyshev claims not to have read, provides the ultimate paradigm of the archaic, aristocratic way of life the ancient Greeks, singing the rage, passion, and strength of individual warriors, and was used in its own time both for entertainment and as a textbook for inculcating proper behavior. While Homer was invoked as providing an ideal model for Soviet citizens,<sup>34</sup> the best the *History* culls from it is the number of times oppressed slaves are mentioned; and yet, the *Iliad*'s ancient models of individual heroism still might have tempted a writer like Bitov, looking for replacements for his Soviet heroes. Sophocles and Euripides are next on the list, and while they themselves may have critiqued elements of Athenian male hegemony<sup>35</sup> and could thus more easily be interpreted in a Marxist light, their explorations of individual resistance to tyranny, as in *Antigone*, and the destructive forces of Dionysian passions (*Hippolytus*, *The Bacchae*), would also present appealingly alternate models of behavior for the mechanized Soviet citizen Lobyshev feels he has become. Fourth on the list is Heraclitus, who, most likely born in Ephesus, was an aristocratic, pre-Socratic philosopher known for his obscurity and haughty behavior, and

espoused ideas about the unity of all things, (“the path up and down is one and the same”); the necessity of strife as the source of change that dominates life; and that life is in constant flux (“you can would not step twice into the same river”).<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Plato, Aristotle, and Theophrastus, among others, Heraclitus is a philosopher whose teachings seem not to invite a Marxist interpretation, and yet he was considered a materialist, and thus not completely suspect.<sup>37</sup> He would be another ambiguous Classical figure, an attractive, yet forbidden object of intellectual curiosity for a Soviet “philosopher” such as Lobyshev: it is no wonder he can barely allow himself to think of his name.

Curiously, despite the implied liberal understanding of the above-mentioned Greek authors, Lobyshev reveals a characteristic Russian bias in mentioning Herodotus, but not Thucydides. Both are foundational Greek historians, but distinctly different. Thucydides, considered the father of history and a promoter of Athenian democracy, also found subtle ways in his account of the Peloponnesian War to illustrate that Athenians who urged gratuitous violence to control restless colonies were not always in the right, as found in his description of the revolt of Mytilene, and the ensuing Mytilenian Debate.<sup>38</sup> And, as we have seen in Chapter I, because of the ancient Greeks’ perceived emphasis on democracy, his texts were considered objectionable in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia; Thucydides’ interests and politics might have cut too close to the quick in Soviet Russia, that was far from democratic and had its own history of violence. Herodotus, on the other hand, born in Halicarnassus, Caria, or present day Bodrum, Turkey, wrote about the peripheries of the Greek empire, describing the life of various peoples, including both the Scythians of southern Russia in his *Histories*, (Chapter IV, 3-27), and the Colchians on

the Eastern shore of the Black Sea (I, 103; IV, 34). Although not all he writes about the peoples of the steppes north of the Black Sea is positive, he at least writes about them, with curiosity and some sympathy.<sup>39</sup> And this interest is dear to Russians who at various times, considering themselves Asiatics, have identified in particular with the Scythians, as articulated by Alexander Blok in his poem, “The Scythians” (“Скифы”), written in January, 1917.<sup>40</sup> As an historian who traveled around his Greek world, Herodotus is a more appropriate model than Thucydides for Bitov, who may feel a sense of pride about the Scythian heritage in Southern Russia which has helped Russians feel connected with Greece;<sup>41</sup> and who, in his capacity as a journalist traveling around the Soviet Empire, writing about the Caucasus, could feel himself a later day Herodotus.

The last Greek Lobyshev mentions is the Athenian orator, Demosthenes, whose name could be translated as “the peoples’ strength,” and who is known for urging the citizens of Athens to fight for their independence and democracy against the encroaching power of Philip and Alexander of Macedon. Unlike other orators such as Antiphon, Gorgias, or Isocrates, famous for composing with elaborate rhetorical flourishes of the “Eastern style,” and writing speeches about fictive subjects, such as the defense of a javelin, or suggesting that Helen of Troy had actually spent the years of the Trojan war safely in Greece, Demosthenes wrote about real cases, people, and politics, and eventually committed suicide rather than accept being ruled over by Alexander the Great.<sup>42</sup>

The Greek authors Lobyshev mentions include a mixture of those who explore a more individualistic view of humans, express curiosity about other peoples, and defend real people and cases, as well as democratic Athenian practices against tyrants from the



East. And yet, they are in some ways safe authors – not Aeschylus, not Pindar, and certainly not Plato. It is telling that Bitov presents his “barrel” in such a cryptic fashion, as if suggesting there is an alternative, more humanist, non-Marxist way to understand them, but unable to discuss in greater detail the role these Greek authors play in Soviet Russian culture.

While the multiple Greek references reflect a conflicted attitude toward more humanist interpretations of the Classics, Bitov has Lobyshev mention only two Roman references, both of which recall the familiar trope of Russia and the Soviet Union as the Third Rome. First, Lobyshev mentions Romulus and Remus, the twin brothers who suckled at the wolf’s teats, and whose internecine battle led to the founding and naming of Rome. Within the Soviet context, Lenin and Stalin were also twins of a sort, feeding on the tenets of Marx, and their internal struggles led to the founding of the Soviet Union, a Russian-Soviet-Roman Empire.

The second Roman reference is Lobyshev’s mention of Raffaello Giovagnoli’s *Spartaco*, a work that represents yet another instance of the Classics being recast to bolster causes in yet other eras. As early as 1750 in France Bernard Saurin wrote a play, *Aménophis*, which was “the first in a long line of artistic creations of the slave rebel as symbol of the age’s assertion of the freedoms of the individual citizen.”<sup>43</sup> In 1874, Raffaello Giovagnoli wrote an immensely popular novel, *Spartaco*, which, in retelling the story of the Roman slave, reflects the ideals of Italy’s liberator, Giuseppe Garibaldi, who showered praise on the novel. It was translated into French, German, Finnish, and Chinese, but not English. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, “...*Spartaco* had acquired sufficient notoriety to be enshrined at the center of socialist and then Marxist

discourse.”<sup>44</sup> Within Russia and the Soviet Union, however, the novel was first serialized in the Russian magazine *Delo* in 1880. Controversial in Tsarist Russia, according to Shaw, it was:

subject to heavy deletions by Tsarist censors, and was first published in full only after the October Revolution; between 1918 and 1952 it appeared in no less than thirty-four editions in all the eleven official languages of the Soviet Union, amounting to almost a million copies in print, and the figure of Spartacus was a leading icon of the Marxist communist ideologues, from Rosa Luxemburg, to Lenin and Stalin.<sup>45</sup>

But the novel also served a dual purpose. Though it was popularized in Jewish circles by Vladimir Jabotinsky, who translated it into Hebrew and published it in Odessa, in 1913, Jabotinsky came to favor the heroic figure less for his communist or socialist ideals than as “a romantic icon linked to the struggle for the formation of a national self-identity.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, the figure could also serve as an icon for the opposition.

The meaning of Giovagnoli’s *Spartaco* in Bitov’s text is thus ironically ambiguous. While first created as a populist text supporting the Italian people’s fight against French control of Italy, in pre-revolutionary Russia it was read as a revolutionary text against the Tsarist regime. During the high Stalinist Soviet period, it was, as Shaw notes, read widely as a staple of Marxist ideology. But by 1962, a young writer of the Thaw had begun to see through the “Classics” of the Soviet Union: the allusion to *Spartaco* in Bitov’s text has the potential to be fodder against the new authoritarian masters, the new tyrants – the Soviet apparatchik and the Soviet system – against the ideology of those who popularized it in the first place.<sup>47</sup>

The contents of the “barrel” and Lobyshev’s side-comments bespeak a complex and conflicted attitude towards the Classics, their interpretation, and value in Bitov’s Soviet Union. The list of authors, which is perhaps both a parody of and an homage to the “Catalogue of Ships” in the *Iliad*, or the “Catalogue of Women” in the *Odyssey*, betrays an attitude that sounds defensively dismissive and derisive, and yet is tinged with respect and regret: we know these are the great writers of all time, but given the current state of our politics and education, we are allowed to know them only by name, or by sound-bites found in textbooks such as the *History of Ancient Greece* that distort and trivialize their meaning: “No men of genius, those. Yet the geniuses we don’t read.” (Негениальные люди. А гениальных мы не читаем.) The “barrel” Lobyshev thinks of reflects a sanitized canon of Classical authors who could more easily than others be treated to a Marxist interpretation; and those who are sympathetic to a more populist point of view. Yet the list also articulates the conflict felt by a person who seems to know there is far more to the Classics than found in a typical Soviet explanation, and who understands the underlying voices of a free flowing exchange of philosophical ideas, scientific and historical inquiry. Caught in a double bind, Lobyshev thinks about what he is allowed to read, and what he does read, “in passing.” Soviet life, with its censors and the demands to conform to the canons of Socialist Realism, would not let him dwell on difficult issues for too long; and yet, perhaps his own Russianness would not let him dwell too long on the full riches of the Western tradition. Even in a seemingly simple list of Classical references, Bitov has Lobyshev simultaneously veil underlying criticism of Soviet culture, and unveil his longing for real connection with the original Greek sources.

### Outside the “Barrel:” Soviet Realia vs. the *Odyssey*

Once Lobyshev has telegraphically expressed his complex attitude to the contents of the Classical “barrel,” Bitov has him focus his reflections on various characters from Homer’s *Odyssey*, and meet the woman who would be his Penelope. As mentioned above, although Camerini’s *Ulysses* promises to represent the real thing, togas and all, Lobyshev overcomes his initial revulsion to the “farce he was going to see.” He understands that once he steps inside the theatre he will be manipulated by the filmic medium, yet he is willing to submit himself to this aspect of Soviet depravation, and confront yet others, namely, what he will see in his Penelope and what she will teach him about his own moral degradation. Standing in line, Lobyshev is drawn into conversation with a young girl who does not compare to the beauties he has been ogling on Nevsky Prospect. She is, it transpires, out of work, famished, and an outcast of the Soviet system. She is, however, his would-be Penelope, and once he enters into a conversation with her he is unable to break off their relationship: it is their encounter that drives him to recognize that he is a “swine-hero,” in so many ways unlike either the Odysseus of the film he is about to watch, or the more original Greek hero; and that his Soviet life is sustained by a web of lies and deception.

**Penelope:** “A guy can look nice – and be a brute.” (69) (“Бывает, и симпатичный – а скот.”) (187)

Other critics have failed to fully appreciate the significance of the girl’s role in Lobyshev’s emotional and social maturation. Barta, for instance, notes that the narrator is silent about the girl’s identity and background. He comments:

Barbara Heldt writes in *Terrible Perfection*: “The heroines of male fiction

serve a purpose that ultimately has little to do with women: these heroines are used lavishly in a discourse of male self-definition.”(3). Thus, the role of Bitov’s heroine is primarily to complement her male companion to facilitate a better psychological description of him.<sup>48</sup>

The story, however, is entitled “Penelope,” and I would like to suggest that the girl is no mere complement to Lobyshev, but functions as an active agent who helps bring about his growing consciousness and self-awareness. The importance of her role is signaled in their initial encounter: she may not be exactly like Homer’s Penelope, a Siren, or even Calypso, but she could definitely be a Circe, whose words and gaze first draw Lobyshev into conversation, and then rivet him in an unspoken, magical bond; that bond, and Lobyshev’s reaction to it, are what bring about his moral revelation.

In cinema scholarship there has been much discussion of the “male gaze” by which men objectify women, assessing their beauty, their sex appeal, freezing them into subject-less objects of male desire.<sup>49</sup> As if anticipating and engaging with such criticism, Bitov problematizes this interpretation of the “male gaze,” putting Lobyshev in the position of both gazing and being gazed upon, and giving the unnamed girl and other anonymous members of Soviet Leningrad the power of the gaze to compel, objectify, and embarrass him. For example, when Lobyshev thinks about going out on Nevsky Prospect to ogle the girls, he worries that dressed as he is like a provincial, no one (i.e. no woman) will look at him; he will be the only one looking:

... but it would pay to dress better... now no one would give him as much as a second look, he did all the looking... In any case, he didn’t

look like a provincial, and as far as being inconspicuous, lord! What a thing to worry about! (66-67)

... но одетым стоило бы быть получше... теперь на него и не смотрят – только он смотрит... во всяком случае, провинциалом он не выглядит, а что незаметен, то господи, ерунда какая! (184)

Lobyshev's obsession with his appearance signals a first critique of the Soviet system in which he lives: despite the supposed classlessness of the Soviet Union, he has a complex about his appearance that rivals the class-consciousness any healthy bourgeois might feel. He is, in fact, far more obsessed with appearances than the girl he meets in the cinema, whose looks mortify him. Though Soviet, or perhaps because of being Soviet, Lobyshev is not a typical male hero: he is not just a viewer, but also a viewee; and he is sensitive to other viewers' and viewees' sensibilities, which allows him to respond to the girl, at least initially, with sympathy and understanding. As their relationship develops, several key moments play off their mutual assessment of each other: his male gaze, looking at and judging her, rebounds to mortify him and lead to his final moral failure; and her female gaze, focusing the power she wields over him, direct, unveiled, and intelligent, reveals to him negative elements of his Soviet life he does not want to confront.

The importance of the girl's gaze and Lobyshev's susceptibility to it is signaled in their first encounter, which breaks the standard pattern of the "male gaze," and with it, the unshakableness of the Soviet system in which they live. Thus, rather than seeing her and being attracted to her physically, Lobyshev first notices her disembodied voice as she reacts to hooligans stealing 20 rubles from an old lady: "Brutes! Ugh, brutes!" (69) (Скоты! Ах, скоты!) (186). Her comment invites a repartee from him, resulting in her flirting comment that with eyes like his, he could not possibly look nice, but be a brute.

It is precisely her disembodied voice that catches Lobyshev's attention, provokes his sympathy, and draws him into the relationship by which he is made to confront his own brutishness and her helpless situation in the Soviet system.

But appearances matter in the Soviet Union, and although Lobyshev initially responds with sympathy when he hears the girl's voice in the darkness of the ticket line, he reacts with caution when they step into the day-lit courtyard: "But whatever it was that he had noticed in the light and hadn't yet figured out had already begun to put him on his guard." (70) (Но, то, что он увидел на свет и пока не понял, уже стало настораживать его.) (186). Sensing his hesitation, she notices his eyes, and looks at him with her powerful glance: "... 'Could it be?' – here she paused – 'With eyes like that?' -- and she gave him a glance which was both devoted and admiring, one might even say amorous, or inviting... who the devil knows how it was she glanced at him." (70) (Разве может быть, -- тут она сделала паузу, -- с такими-то глазами?...-- и заглянула на него и преданно и восхищенно, можно сказать любовно, или призывно...черт знает как она на него взглянула.) (187). Although they have just met, her gaze has the power to immediately sunder his world, drawing a line between his personal desires and society's condemnation of those desires:

At this point Lobyshev began to feel torn in half: one half which, as it were, no one saw, already, as it were, slept with this girl, and no one, as is proper, saw them, but the other half dug in its heels and dropped behind, people stared at this other half, many people, going into the theatre they looked and condemned, this second half of him was ashamed and uncomfortable, it wanted to efface itself, to disappear. (70)

Тут же Лобышева стало раздирать на две половины: одна половина, которую как бы никто не видел, уже как бы спала с этой девушкой, причем их обоим никто, как и положено, не видел, а другая уже упиралась и отставала, на эту другую смотрели во все глаза люди, много людей, они идут в кинотеатр, смотрели и осуждали, этой второй половине было стыдно и неловко, она хотела стушеваться, исчезнуть. (187)

Before seeing the girl in full daylight, he feels an immediate sexual attraction to her, but which he will not be able to act on because of his feeling of shame – not of his desire, but of her appearance and who she is. When he looks at her in full light, he is shocked and embarrassed to be seen next to her. He feels as though everything is happening in a dream where he finds himself in public without his clothes: his gaze objectifies her to some extent, but its real effect is to undress *him* in public, and this humiliation is compelling – “...there is even something delightful about that dream” (70) (...есть же что-то и сладостное в этом сне.) (188)

Although Lobyshev is embarrassed to be seen with the girl, understanding in a glance who she is and what she represents, (he has “seen everything now,” (разглядел теперь все -- ) (188)), he doesn't leave her. She has already, like a Circe, bewitched him, and is determined to get him to watch the film, even walking backwards into the theatre to draw him in with her eyes. Her gaze, here direct and unveiled, continues to rivet him, and she will help reveal negative elements of about his Soviet life: the lack of personal and artistic freedom, the presence of the gulags and prisons, and the plight of those less fortunate, or who choose to live outside the pale of Soviet respectability. In the early moments of their relationship, he reflects on his own lack of autonomy: he realizes he does not have any real control over his life, but has merely been following along in a pre-set pattern.<sup>50</sup>



And he is controlled not only by his society, but also by the moral power exerted by the girl: her gaze is strong enough to make him fear embarrassing her by abandoning her; so he continues to stand beside her, although increasingly embarrassed by what her appearance reveals to him about the truth of her condition and Soviet society:

What he had seen was that her hair was styled short -- and it was not as though it were really a hairdo, rather it was like hair that had recently grown out; moreover, it was so bleached as to be almost brittle; that -- there was a blazer, close-fitting, as though it were a man's sport jacket with turned-down, old fashioned lapels which resembled dogs' ears, and beneath the jacket—a cowboy shirt, again, like a man's, which had not been laundered for a long time... well then, there was a sort of skirt, of course,-- a skirt; but on her feet, these impossible things: with heels worn down, shapeless -- and no stockings. (71)

А разглядел он, что короткая ее прическа -- и не прическа вроде, а недавно отросшие волосы, к тому же перекрашенные до ломкости, что – задрипанный, в обтяжку, вроде бы мужской пиджак с загибающимися, как собачьи уши, старомодными лацканами, а под пиджаком – ковбойка, тоже вроде бы мужская и давно не стиральная, ну юбка-то конечно, -- юбка, но на ногах что-то невозможное: стоптанное, бесформенное, и чулок нет... (188)

It dawns on Lobyshev, and on Bitov's readers, that this girl has recently been released from prison: her shorn hair is just beginning to grow back, and her clothes are those of a homeless person. The topic of the gulags and prisons, and of what happened to people who survived them, though not discussed openly in the Soviet 60's, was certainly on everyone's mind, and a source of much pain and anguish.<sup>51</sup> Although uncomfortable, Lobyshev, desperate for both human contact and truth about his Soviet society, is drawn

to her, curious to learn what she will reveal. For Bitov, as a young rebel of the 60's, the girl represents that subaltern, suppressed voice of unspeakable thoughts that helps him articulate his own frustrations and desires to escape from his Soviet confines.

Bitov further depicts Lobyshev's discomfort in terms of the filmic medium. Once Lobyshev has scrutinized the girl, he feels a desperate need to hide, but she drags him into the cafeteria, where he becomes the object of others' gaze, experiencing scorn for himself both as a spectator, and as an embarrassed object manipulated by others' condemning eyes:

... Various people were already sitting there drinking soft drinks or beer.

The audience. This was definitely not the place where Lobyshev wanted to show himself just now. "Audience," he thought venomously... (71)

Там уже сидели и пили свой лимонад и пиво разные люди.  
Зрители. И это было не то место, где бы сейчас хотел оказаться  
Лобышев. "Зрители..." подумал он ядовито. (189)

As if participating in the nightmare of a Soviet film he has no desire to watch, he nonetheless must respond to the girl's real needs. Although he wants to flee, her elemental need for food trumps his desire: ("I really want something to eat.") (71) ("Жутко хочу что-нибудь съесть,") (189); unwilling to stay, but equally unable to leave, he is drawn further inside the theatre, first to the cafeteria, where he begins to confront his conscience and feel wisdom dawning:

During this brief time, ponderous thoughts rose in his brain, thoughts big and rustling. Like owls. These thoughts, these owls, were connected with the same subject as before; yet earlier he had been but dimly aware of them. Now, however, they stood out more sharply in his mind; at

the very least, it would no longer do to doubt their existence: Did they exist, or didn't they? They did. These thoughts concerned the girl: why was he ashamed of her, ashamed even to walk beside her? How shameful it was, that he was more ashamed of someone in front of others than he was ashamed of himself in front of his own conscience. (72)

И в это недолго время, что он шел, тяжеловатые мысли вспархивали в его мозгу, большие и шуршащие, как совы. Эти мысли, эти совы, были о том, что и раньше бывало вскользь, но теперь они были порезче, так, что, по крайней мере, не приходилось уже сомневаться в их существовании: были они или не были. Были. Были они о том, почему же он стыдится этой девушки, раз уж с ней идет, и как это позорно стыдиться кого-то перед кем-то и гораздо сильнее, чем себя перед собой. (189)

These thoughts, like the owls of Athena, come to him as an individual human being confronting his own conscience, in direct contact with another human, penetrating to a level of his consciousness that is free, for a moment, from Soviet ideology.

Yet part of the shame and revulsion he feels is precisely about the uncomfortable truths her position in Soviet society implies. Over lunch, during which Lobyshev reflects that a single ruble may be her full day's salary, she asks what he does for a living; hearing that he directs a crew of workers, she immediately begs him to get her some kind of a job. She is desperate, and placing her hand on his knee, assures him that she can do anything:

“Oh,” she said, “I can do plenty of things, I can operate a lathe, I’m a house painter, a cook, and -- (all this time she had not withdrawn her hand from Lobyshev’s knee) – a woman...” She broke out laughing. (73)

-- У, -- сказала она, -- специальностей у меня хватит! Я могу быть токарем, маляром, поварихой и, -- она все не снимала руку с лобышевского колена, -- женщиной... -- она засмеялась. (191)

Listing jobs that one might consider masculine, but that in Soviet times have fallen to women, she lets Lobyshev know she will do anything, even prostitute herself to him or any other male to earn some money.<sup>52</sup> Lobyshev laughs with her, as if at a joke, but feels the moral depravity of his situation and responds by hedging a promise:

In the meantime, some little demon inside Lobyshev just went limp. It was as though he couldn't see anything anymore. He just said,

“I'll have to check it all out,” and he laughed in a nasty tone, and nasty in a way that he no longer noticed it, because to notice it would be too difficult for him...<sup>53</sup>

“I'll have to check it all out,” he said...

“So you'll take me? asked the girl.

“It's possible,” he said, and wanted to ask something, or add something. (73)

А какой-то чертик все раскисал в Лобышеве. Он вроде бы ничего и не видел. А только приговаривал:

-- Это сначала надо проверить... -- и смеялся гаденько, так гаденько, что уже не мог бы заметить этого, потому что заметить это – было бы слишком для него тяжело.....

-- Это сначала надо проверить, -- говорил он.

-- Так возьмешь? сказала девушка.

-- Это можно, -- сказал он и хотел что-то спросить, или добавить, или подумать... (191)

The girl is an uncomfortable mirror. In offering to prostitute herself to Lobyshev, she reminds him that he has prostituted his moral and spiritual integrity to being a functioning member of the Soviet state; his moral depravation has become so normal that he is desensitized to it, and cannot let himself feel its weight. He feels acutely embarrassed to be seen with the girl, since she reflects unspeakable evils of the Soviet system: prisoners,

gulags, and prostitution; about which Lobyshev is just beginning to think, and about which young authors such as Bitov were just beginning to write.

The girl's power over Lobyshev does not end at lunch. Rather, she escorts him into the theatre, where together they confront the mythic models, Odysseus, Penelope, and others; are reminded of non-Soviet ideas about ancient standards of beauty and truth; and reflect on their contemporary Soviet realia, especially the suppression of aesthetic freedom of the human spirit. During a short about Chinese vases, Lobyshev is drawn to confront his inner bourgeois tendencies, and like an illuminated being in the darkness of the theatre, she is allowed to utter words that draw out his desire for the beauty of the vessels:

And he liked the vases.

“Really beautiful,” she said.

“Really.”

“I bet you'd like to have one like that in your house,” she said. (74)

И вазы ему нравились.

-- Правда, красивая, -- сказала она.

-- Правда.

-- Ты бы хотел иметь такую дома, -- сказала она. (191)

After she articulates his desire to actually own such a vase, he reflexively thinks the unthinkable in his Soviet world – that he could never hope to earn enough money to buy one in his entire lifetime of working. Bitov's point is accentuated in the Russian, where the word Swoboda translates as “really” is “pravda” (правда), which also means “the truth,” but which here has nothing to do with the Communist daily newspaper, “Pravda” (Правда), which would, on December 2, 1962, publish an article recounting Krushchev's hostility to the abstract and formalist art he had seen the day before at the Manezh

Gallery in Moscow.<sup>54</sup> This article ushered in an era of Stalin-like censorship of the arts, and reestablishment of the canons of Socialist Realism that insisted that art should portray positive events and heroes, enthusiasm for labor, and not repressed desires for unobtainable foreign vessels.

This simple discussion about the true beauty of a Chinese vase and the impossibility of owning anything like it in one's own home is uncomfortable enough for Lobyshev, but the girl challenges his Soviet sensibilities one step further, asking him what he thinks of abstract art, another taboo of Soviet life.<sup>55</sup> Her question strikes him dumb, and disrupts any directness of his "male gaze:"

For a few moments he was stunned. He gaped at her.

"It's okay," he said. My god, he thought, so it's come to this.

What kind of terrible experiences has she had that she starts talking to me about abstract painting? (74)

Он несколько обалдел. Посмотрел искоса.  
-- Ничего отношусь, -- сказал он. Боже, подумал он, ведь до чего дошли... Что же это жуткий обит такой она приобрела, что со мной про абстрактную живопись заговаривает? (192)

Alluding to the fate of abstract artists in the Soviet Union, to those who did not subscribe to the canons of Socialist Realism,<sup>56</sup> Lobyshev is particularly aghast when the girl expects some kind of sympathy from him, "I had a friend once..." she said, pressing his hand." (74) (У меня был один знакомый...сказала она и пожала ему рукой.) (192). He reacts to her touch with horror, and again, wants desperately to flee, proving himself to be a thoroughly conservative Soviet citizen as he cringes from any hint of contact with the freedoms that were reemerging from Russia's past and seeping in from the West.<sup>57</sup>

The girl, however, has sensed her power, and as an agent who will bring him face to face with the truth of his Soviet being, is determined to make him see the film and its mythic characters. Although their tickets are for opposite sides of the theatre, she insists they sit together, and physically draws him to her seat, where he feels the utmost revulsion; the two are about to sit in one seat when another man, more decent than Lobyshev, offers up his ticket so they can sit side by side. During the movie, she attempts to continue the physical relationship with Lobyshev, placing his hand on her knee, but as the movie progresses, they individually become engrossed in the film: she with Odysseus, he with Penelope and the other characters, all of whom become touchstones for reflections on the nature of a contemporary Soviet hero and heroine.

### **The Movie: Penelope, Circe, Nausicaa, Odysseus, Antinoos**

A few comments about the film, *Ulysses*, are in order to fully appreciate its role in Bitov's story. Although Bitov embroiders a few details, he describes other elements of the film clearly enough that you can recognize scenes from Mario Camerini's 1955 film, which while not a masterpiece of cinematography, attempts to capture events of Homer's epic and replicate the costumes and architecture of Ancient Greece. For example, when Odysseus remembers his home and identity, highlights from Homer's *Odyssey* are included: Odysseus intoxicates and blinds Polyphemus; is tied to the mast so he can listen to the Sirens; lives with Circe; and visits the underworld to meet his dead companions and his mother. Shot on location in Greece, with sumptuous costumes, scantily clad men, and diaphanous gowns on Nausicaa and her friends, the film undoubtedly offered Soviet eyes a welcome change from Soviet Realist fare.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to the film's elaborate costumes and settings, one can also see in this retelling of Homer's epic some of the turbulence that was simmering in the 50's in the West, in particular a greater openness about erotic energies, both male and female. For a Soviet viewer, this B film may have presented a glimpse of Western decadence, both in its portrayal of a permissive attitude towards fidelity and infidelity, and a stronger hint of feminist stirrings for woman's agency than was openly acknowledged and condoned.<sup>59</sup> Odysseus' philandering on his way home to Penelope is emphasized. For example, while his men, dressed in rags, suffer and pine for their own families and wives, Camerini's Ulysses lives in sybaritic, self-indulgent happiness with Circe, and in one undeniably corny line, comments that the six months he has spent with her seem but a warm summer's eve: indulging his senses, he has ignored his men and any sense of duty to progress; he is certainly in no hurry to help build Socialism.

Although Camerini's film retells episodes of the ancient epic, it, too, is updated for its time, strengthening the women in a relatively open portrayal of their desires and agency, seen not only in Circe, as expected from a sorceress, but also in Nausicaa and Penelope. Nausicaa is not just an innocent young princess; rather, her active desire to secure Ulysses as a husband is fore-grounded far more than in Homer, where her desire is balanced by her sense of modesty when she first spies him naked on the beach; and where she only wishes to herself she might have such a man for her husband.<sup>60</sup> In the film, she and Odysseus are clearly attracted to each other, actually kiss, and become engaged. She openly manipulates her father, Alcinoos, into arranging her marriage to the mysterious stranger; on her wedding day taunts him, asking what good it is to have a king for a father if he can not break tradition and let her see her groom before the wedding. She is indeed



dressed sumptuously for her wedding on the very day Odysseus remembers his love for Penelope. Her desires are explicit, but despite this twist in the Homeric plot, when Odysseus remembers his home and hearth, her father does make the traditional call to give Odysseus a ship to get home, and the previous, long standing marriage trumps current desire. Odysseus deals with Nausicaa's tears in noble fashion, saying he will take them home with him as a sign of all the love he has encountered on his journey.

While feminist critics may see this episode as an instance of male domination and the double standard, back in Ithaca, Penelope is also shown to be both stronger and more inclined to act on her passions than in her Homeric iteration. She actually wavers in her loyalty to Odysseus, and visibly tempted by one of the suitors, Antinoos (played by a young Anthony Quinn), meets him alone and partially returns his embrace. She averts her head so their lips don't touch, but appears willing to marry him the next day, as it seems to be her fate. Expressing her own erotic energy, Camerini's Penelope expresses desires beyond that of Homer's paragon of a loyal wife. She differs from Homer's Penelope in other ways as well: with more maternal strength, she convinces Telemachus not to leave Ithaca to seek of news of his father, but to stay and protect her; she herself addresses her suitors, instead of asking her maid to deliver messages. Further, once Odysseus returns home, she lets him know of her bitterness at his absence, but then proves her resolve to be as unwavering as he is when he strings the bow and takes revenge on the suitors: she knows her husband is hiding beneath the beggar's cloak, and plays her part without faltering. Unlike Homer's Penelope, she is also shown at the end of the film praying to Athena, lamenting all the blood that has been shed in her house. The end of the film also differs significantly from the "original" *Odyssey*, in that this

Odysseus swears that he will stay home with Penelope to make up for her years of loneliness, rather than follow the gods' dictates to carry his oar until he meets people who mistake it for a winnow.

With this film running in the background of his creative mind, it seems that Bitov is also thinking about the gender issue, and, in spite of himself, is rather forward thinking. Among his various asides about the film, Lobyshev notes that the same actress plays both Circe and Penelope. Indeed, Sylvana Mangano plays both roles in the film, suggesting that both a seductive witch who turns men into swine, and a faithful, chaste wife can reside in one person, and gives the film's Penelope the depth of a complex, real character. After watching the film, Lobyshev reflects that one of Penelope's more obvious virtues is that she does not cuckold her husband. While spoken from a seemingly traditional patriarchal point of view, given the wholeness of her character, his reaction is perhaps less callow and more complex than his comment suggests: Bitov has understood a Western 1955 version of the *Odyssey* that has kept some of the essential traits of the traditional male character, yet updates those of the female into his Soviet story. Bitov's nameless girl is a complex figure: she transfixes Lobyshev like a Siren, offers herself to him like Nausicaa, turns him into a swine like Circe, and yet senses that he would like to find his own Penelope. She herself would like to be that Penelope, wrapping all of these characters into one whole, very real, human being with the power to touch and positively effect another human being, while helping to reveal the evils of the Soviet state.

### **The Girl and Gelsomina: A Soviet Penelope?**

A further influence on the portrayal of this Soviet “Penelope” can be found in Fellini’s film, *La Strada*, from which elements of Gelsomina’s character are woven into the girl’s more Classically inspired traits. Bitov began writing fiction after seeing *La Strada* and feeling inspired by a sense of freedom embodied in the film.<sup>61</sup> Fellini’s film has itself been seen as an *Odyssey*-type tale: “The quest motif, from Homer’s *Odyssey* on, usually embodies a journey of self-discovery, and Fellini’s *La Strada* follows this venerable literary tradition.”<sup>62</sup> While insight about the journey of self-discovery is not shockingly new, it is important that Fellini himself was a rebel when he made his film, breaking away from the neo-realist film theorists of post-War Italy who argued for a Marxist ideological content in films.<sup>63</sup> Bitov, a quiet rebel of the Soviet era, in exploring the psychological realities of his Soviet hero and heroine, draws inspiration from a fellow iconoclast, Fellini. Yet he is ever caught as a Soviet citizen, and continues to express ambiguity about the Classical models: although the girl possesses insight and intelligence that bring Lobyshev to self-awareness, and could potentially be a positive Penelope figure, Bitov, by casting her as a Soviet Gelsomina, seems to suggest that Lobyshev is not worthy of a true, Homeric Penelope, or that such a Penelope could not survive in Soviet Russia.

It seems that Bitov, consciously or not, modeled the girl in “Penelope” on Giulietta Masina’s portrayal of Gelsomina in *La Strada*. One striking similarity between the two is their appearance, ironically so, given Lobyshev’s obsession with “looking good.” If I were to draw a picture of “the girl,” she would resemble Gelsomina, but bleaker: both have short, blond, unkempt hair, wear ill-fitting clothes, and something

“totally unthinkable” on their feet. Their short, blond hair is particularly evocative. As noted above, the girl’s hair has most likely been shorn in prison, and is just growing out.<sup>64</sup> Their life circumstances are also similar, that of women willing and able to do anything to survive. Commenting on playing Gelsomina, Masina remarks:

... with Gelsomina I had the responsibility of portraying a typical Italian woman from the lower classes who has to adapt herself to any kind of job in order to survive, and who suffers from hunger, solitude, and a sense of uselessness.<sup>65</sup>

The passage recalls Bitov’s girl’s plea to Lobyshev: she is beneath working class, famished, and desperate for human companionship; she, too, is a woman who is ready and willing to do anything to take care of herself.

But Bitov’s language tells us more about “the girl:” she is not simply blond, but illuminated, almost iconic, and does not easily release Lobyshev from her gaze: “She was very easy to pick out, all lit up.... She didn’t move -- she just watched.” (78) (Она-то была очень хорошо видна, освещенная.... Она не двигалась – смотрела) (196). A figure reflected from one film to another, she is a source of light and truth, a spiritual quality she shares with Gelsomina.

Both women are agents of change, and share traits that allow them to play an active role in their male counterparts’ self-discovery; as the girl’s gaze wields a positive power over Lobyshev, so, too, Gelsomina, with her large, trusting eyes, has an impact on Zampano. Although Gelsomina may appear less than intelligent in Fellini’s film, Masina describes the positive qualities she embodies:

... Gelsomina was and is an “active” character. A character, in other words, who never gives up, who is attached to life, I would say, with both hands and

feet, and who is engaged in difficult relationships that she does not succeed in resolving.”<sup>66</sup>

This passage echoes the psychological relationship between the girl and Lobyshev, as if Bitov understood Gelsomina’s relationship with Zampano and translated it into his story. Masina further explains Gelsomina’s role in the difficult relationship:

... she feels the need to speak with everything and with everyone... Yet all of this is more a lump in the throat than anything else, merely the dream of a harmonious life.... In my relationship to Zampano, I always tried ... to express the difficulty of communication with others, which often becomes transformed into an artificial vivacity or into the feeling of not being in the proper place, but rather, being trapped inside a deep sense of embarrassment. (192-193)

The girl’s actions in the theatre mirror Masina’s articulation of this aspect of Gelsomina’s character: she stubbornly pursues some kind of communication, insisting that she and Lobyshev sit together, despite the embarrassment it causes. In twists on Masina’s character, Bitov lets Lobyshev, and not the girl, feel trapped in embarrassment; and the failed communication results in a lump in the throat for both Lobyshev and the girl.

In the end, however, although the girl is active in bringing about Lobyshev’s self-discovery, a Soviet Gelsomina can no more survive than an Italian one, and in her Soviet environment loses her potential for being a Penelope. Like Gelsomina, who dies in the course of her encounter with Zampano, Bitov’s girl finds no hope for actually transforming Lobyshev, and disappears like a speck of fading light. The final lies Lobyshev tells the girl bring about her tragedy: we are left with the sense that she will continue to live on the margins of Soviet society, thinking about abstract art and beauty,

understanding what it means to be a real Penelope, but knowing she cannot survive as such in Soviet Russia. She is someone who cannot live within the bounds of Soviet society, and may indeed end up a prostitute, for not prostituting herself to the Soviet system. A would-be Penelope, she is reduced to playing an unfortunate Gelsomina, and reveals a Soviet world so darkened that her illuminating effects seem ephemeral. Yet like Gelsomina, whose memory plagues Zampano when it dawns on him how terribly he treated her, the girl has the potential to live on, provoking pangs of conscience in her male counterpart, a lingering threat to those like Lobyshev who live in Soviet mode.

### **The Male Heroes: Odysseus, Polyphemus, Charlie Chaplin**

If Bitov modernizes the girl, giving her a degree of agency that turns her into an understated heroine, he deals with Lobyshev by reflecting on both positive and negative traits he sees in Western mythic heroes, searching for a model his characters can live by. Exploring the terms “human being” (человек) and “humanity” (человечность), the story is very much a quest to understand what makes a decent, but not necessarily everyday, or ordinary, human being. Watching the film, Lobyshev is finally free to think about his life, drawing a comparison between Homeric times and his own, and initially at least, he finds fault with Camerini’s Odysseus:

But there was no getting away from the grotesqueness of this whole effort from a purely human point of view, though there was something strangely similar to the original in it. Not without reason is it said that we live in an epic period. Only it is not the pomposity which is the measure of epic stature. Take a look at wily Odysseus – what a low-down, treacherous

fellow they make him. The perfect modern playboy. The epitome of selflessness -- to tie yourself to the mast so as to listen to the Sirens. That kind of selflessness is nothing more than a taste for thrills; he enjoys doing it. (75)

Хотя никак не отделаться от безобразности всего этого с точки зрения чисто человеческой. И до странности кое-что схоже. Недаром же мы живем в эпическое время. Только не помпезность мера эпичности. А вот это хамство и предательство хитроумного Одиссея. Совершенно ведь игровой современный парень. Максимум самоотверженности – привязать себя к мачте, чтобы послушать сирен. Самоотверженность эта – не больше жажды острых ощущений: наслаждение то есть. (193)

Despite his condemnation of Camerini's version of the epic, and Odysseus's selfish motivation for his adventures, Bitov has Lobyshev recognize Homer's greatness:

However ineptly this box-office smash was put together, despite all its school-boy over-doneness, still, Homer was clearly not famous for nothing. If nothing else, just the basic plot has so much in it... (76)

Как ни бездарно, по-школьному старательно, делали этот боевик, все-таки Гомер, наверно, недаром прославился... Взять хотя бы сюжет: за ним вставало многое... (193)

As if he cannot openly express appreciation for the Ancient Greek epic as it is adapted and embellished by the Western cinematic imagination, Bitov has Lobyshev praise at least Homer's plot: that much can be allowed in his Soviet framework.

However, although Bitov's Lobyshev sounds as though he would like to appreciate Homer more and be able to accept the values the ancient heroes represent, he betrays a characteristic ambiguity Russians tend to feel towards the Greek heroes and mythic sources. Rather than seeing the Homeric Greek characters as true heroes, he critiques their value, offering his own alternative. For example, critiquing Odysseus' canonic cleverness, he expresses sympathy for the Cyclops rather than Odysseus.

Camerini's film portrays Odysseus and his crew stamping grapes and intoxicating the giant, and though the actual scene is not as gruesome as Homer's original, Odysseus does taunt Polyphemus as they sail off. Lobyshev reflects:

Wine for that one-eyed devil Polyphemus -- they managed to wade through that bit well enough. Only it was too bad that the poor creature got his eye burned out, and that he didn't crush the heroes. (76)

Вино для этого одноглазого черта Полифема тоже месят неплохо. Только жалко его, беднягу, что глаз ему выжгли и он не передавил героев. (193)

One wonders if there is a hint of perceiving himself, as a Russian, as being like that lawless Cyclops, outdone by crafty, yet civilized folk: a cultural imagining which might make a loyal, if liberal, Russian defensive.

Working through his ambiguous feelings about the ancient heroes, Lobyshev finds more to criticize in what is traditionally the culminating scene of the *Odyssey*.

Thus, he thinks the episode when Odysseus, dressed as a beggar, wreaks havoc on the suitors who have been despoiling his home, is particularly non-heroic. (76) (194).

Reflecting that the Greeks had it all wrong, he offers an alternative choice of a real hero for the modern era, Charlie Chaplin:

In our day, in the present epoch, true humanity is finally able to surface.

Chaplin, for example. While back then -- as though that was what they needed, as if that was the best part of a person -- their strength; they bragged about their muscles. While in the essential things they were extraordinary weaklings. (76)

У нас хоть, от нашего-то эпоса, какая-то человечность очевидной стать может. Чаплин, к примеру. А тут -- словно так и надо, будто это-то и



есть что-то лучшее же в людях – их сила. Слабаки, в сущности, они  
чресвычайные. (193-194)

For Bitov, via Lobyshev, to offer Charlie Chaplin, the proverbial Tramp, as a modern-day hero is striking, though not unprecedented.<sup>67</sup> In a film such as *City Lights*, Chaplin, though comically foolish, is indeed a hero. With sympathy and sensitivity, he first saves a wealthy New Yorker from throwing himself into the Hudson, and then, by working as a dung-collector and appealing to his wealthy friend, he saves a poor flower girl, securing funds both to pay her back-rent and for an operation to cure her blindness. After being falsely accused of stealing the money from his “friend” and spending time in prison, the Tramp stumbles across the girl, now sighted and prospering in her own shop, who at first treats him like the tramp he is, but then recognizes him through his voice and the warm touch of his hand. The final scene, capturing the rewards of treating a fellow human with love, sympathy, and respect, could well be a definition of deep and true humanity; Chaplin is indeed a worthy hero for Lobyshev’s Soviet world.

Chaplin, however, is Lobyshev’s opposite, and it is ironic that Lobyshev, exploring the differences between modern and ancient heroes, invokes Chaplin as a hero, but then himself destroys a young woman’s hopes. He is unlike Chaplin, unlike the canonical view of the ancient Homeric heroes, and more akin to the suitors of Homer’s epic, who are portrayed as appropriately swinish in Camerini’s B-rated movie. Lobyshev admits as much, and bows again to Homer’s authority:

Even though he was a swine himself – and remained a swine. Only  
Odysseus – the swine-hero, the king of the hill -- is justified, the blind  
genius Homer has sympathy for him. That’s how it is. (76)

А сам был хамом -- хамом и остался. Только Одиссей – хам-герой,

он -- наверху, оправдан, ему симпатизирует гениальный слепой Гомер.  
Вот как. (194)

Lobyshev's choice of Chaplin as the perfect modern hero points out Lobyshev's confusion about his own moral worth, and continues to highlight his ambiguous, tortured relationship to the Classical models.

Despite his initial criticism and disdain for the characters in Homer's epic, once the movie begins, Lobyshev recognizes the magical, sympathetic attraction they exert on his consciousness, the identification he feels with them, as well as the discrepancy between the film and his "everyday epic actuality:"

You watch. And you feel like Odysseus -- just as strong, brave, and handsome. He doesn't go under, and he doesn't get killed. Women love him.

They love you in the image of Odysseus. And everything ends happily for you. And you embrace faithful Penelope, who by chance did not make a cuckold of you. And the lights come on. And you have to go out of the theater. Into your everyday epic actuality. (76)

Смотришь. И чувствуешь себя Одиссеем. Таким же сильным, и храбрым, и красивым. Он не тонет и не гибнет. Его любят бабы. Они любят тебя в образе Одиссея. И все у тебя здорово кончается. И ты обнимаешь верную Пенелопу, которая обкрай не наставила тебе рогов. И зажигается свет. И надо выходить из кинотеатра. В твою обыденно-эпическую действительность. (194)

Lobyshev's Soviet epic reality, however, brings out his true, non-heroic character: although he had originally felt sympathy and sexual attraction for his Penelope, he, unlike Chaplin or Odysseus, cannot deal with desperate truths she reveals about him, herself, and the society in which they live; and he will prove himself the cad he has become.

At the film's end, after all of Lobyshev's reflections, it is as if both he and the girl have internalized the basic elements of the epic, recognizing themselves in the film, but the power of the girl's gaze, the salvation she offers by drawing him into the theatre to confront the mythic paradigms, has been broken, and their Soviet reality intrudes. Like Penelope and Odysseus, who after twenty years of separation share a sympathetic intuitive understanding, Lobyshev and the girl, mediated by the mythic cinematic representation, seem caught together in a similar mutual understanding, but theirs is transitory. Bitov communicates the tentativeness of girl's feelings: "It was as though she understood that Lobyshev shunned her; but she still hoped." (76) (Она словно поняла, что Лобышев отдаляется совсем, но еще надеялась.) (194). Understanding his loneliness and her own needs, she also understands the impossibility of attaining the kind of relationship portrayed in the film; yet like Gelsomina pursuing her dreams, she presses him about his reaction to the film, asking, "Would you like to have a woman like Penelope?" (77) (А ты бы хотел иметь такую женщину, как Пенелопа?) (194). Bitov notes his response: "Lobyshev was overwhelmed with misery and compassion. He hesitantly touched her hand. But this gesture was not understood; it was slurred, incomplete." (77) (Лобышеву стало плохо и жалостливо, он даже неуверенно тронул ее за руку. Но движение так и осталось непонятым, смазанным, несовершенным.) (194-195). A connection exists between this late-Soviet, would-be Odysseus and Penelope, they share in the human sentiment expressed in the film, but their relationship is flawed and incomplete: Lobyshev, overwhelmed by the weight of her sorrows, cannot act as he knows a hero should.

The failed consummation of their relationship is signaled by the shift in the girl's gaze, which itself seems broken by her confronting the mythic reality in which she will never fully participate. Her newly oblique gaze is mentioned three times as the couple emerges from the theatre and before her hopes are finally shattered:

The girl walked at his side and glanced at him out of the corner of her eye.... (76)

“Well, how did you like the movie?” she said, casting a quick glance at him....

The girl glanced at him out of the corner of her eye, waiting for something. (77)

Девушка шла сбоку и заглядывала сбоку.... (194)

“Ну как тебе понравилась картина?” сказала она, заглянув сбоку.... (194)

Девушка заглядывала сбоку, чего-то ждущая... (195)

Emerging into the sunlight from the theatre, which Barta likens to humans emerging from Plato's cave (“But the blazing sunlight struck their eyes.” (77) (Но солнечный свет ударил в глаза) (195),<sup>68</sup> the two come face to face with the true harshness of their Soviet realia. For the first time in the story, the girl feels embarrassed at herself:

She looked around, as though she didn't understand where she was. There was something childlike about her expression now, it was perplexed and piercing at the same time. She was, it seemed, ashamed of herself, she felt guilty -- that was what her face expressed. All these people, the passers-by and he, Lobyshev, were in the right, while she – was not... The world had cast her out -- that was what her face expressed. (77)

Она озиралась, словно бы не понимая, куда попала. Что-то детское было сейчас в ее лице, постерянное и пронзительное. Казалось, она стыдилась себя и чувствовала виноватой – такое было лицо. Все эти люди, прохожие, и он, Лобышев, были правы, а она -- нет. И мир выталкивал ее из себя – такое было лицо. (195)

If Lobyshev had been embarrassed by the girl's appearance before the film, after watching it and confronting the sumptuous images of Odysseus, Penelope, and Circe, he becomes even more critical of the girl, whom Bitov portrays ever more abjectly:

Just then he caught sight of something in her hand he hadn't seen before. Some green material. Where would she have gotten hold of that... he wondered. The green thing was a little knitted cap. The cap was full of hair-curlers. The girl took the hair-curlers out of the cap and stuffed them into her various pockets. Her jacket was close-fitting, and the pockets bulged in an unsightly way. When the cap had been emptied, the girl pulled it onto her head and assiduously hid her short hair beneath it.

It was hard to imagine where she'd dug up this treasure. It was awful to look at -- Lobyshev didn't know where to escape to. (77)

Он увидел тогда в ее руке что-то, чего раньше не видел. Зеленую тряпицу. Откуда бы она ее достала... подумал он. Тряпица была вязаной шапочкой. В шапке были бигуди. Девушка доставала бигуди из шапки и рассовывала их по карманам. Пиджак был в обтяжку, и карманы уродливо оттопыривались. Когда шапочка опустела, девушка натянула ее себе на голову и старательно спрятала под нее короткие свои волосы. Трудно было представить, где она это сокровище откопала. Страшно было смотреть. Лобышев не знал, куда деться. (195)

Perhaps sensing the comparison between herself and the Western actresses, the girl tries to make herself presentable; but looking even more bedraggled than Gelsomina, she can not hide her female self that has been so disfigured by her Soviet experience. Lobyshev, blindsided by the filmic images and the reality of the girl's trauma, yet again, wants only to escape. Despite the influence of her gaze, her desire and willingness to work, even "put out" for him, she, as a single individual, is not strong enough to change his Soviet consciousness. And he, like the swine-heroes he derides in both Homer's epic and

Camerini's film, is not brave enough to help another human being: he, too, has been disfigured by the Soviet system.

Rather than enjoying a homecoming at the end of his "odyssey," after the movie, Lobyshev experiences the impossibility of such a homecoming. Rather than finding his "Penelope," it is as if he has encountered a twisted, Soviet version of a Nausicaa. In Homer, Odysseus' encounter with Nausicaa takes place in the domain of Alcinoos (Sharp-minded) and Arete (Excellence), and prepares Odysseus for his final return home. Meeting Odysseus on the shore, Nausicaa thinks to herself how she would like a husband like him, as mentioned above. He understands her desire and is moved by her beauty to think of the benefits of matrimony: "And for thyself, may the gods grant thee all that thy heart desires; a husband and a home may they grant thee...For nothing is greater or better than this, when man and wife dwell in a home in one accord, a great grief to their foes and a joy to their friends..."<sup>69</sup> Inspired by Nausicaa's beauty, Odysseus feels the call of home, and begins the final steps in his journey back to Ithaca: listening to the bard, Demodocus, sing tales of the Trojan War, he breaks down in tears that make him reveal his identity, and lead Alcinoos to provide him with a ship for the voyage home. In Bitov's story, Lobyshev, as a modern day Odysseus, is tempted by momentary sympathy and desire for the girl, but refuses the girl for much less noble reasons than Odysseus. Rather than feeling loyalty to his "Penelope," Lobyshev, in Leningrad in the 1960's, feels acute embarrassment at the girl and what she represents, and an extreme lack of the moral fortitude that would allow him to find a true home. Further, it is implied, he has nowhere to return, and no leaders like Alcinoos and Arete to provide him with the means of return.

And yet, the encounter with the girl provides a fleeting awareness of Lobyshev's potential for bravery:

The world had cast her out -- that was what her face expressed. And were it not for him, Lobyshev -- her expression would have been quite different. Lobyshev understood all this now in one single sensation. (77)

И мир выталкивал ее из себя – такое было лицо. И если бы не он, Лобышев, -- такого бы не было у нее лица. Все это, только в едином ощущении, увидел сейчас Лобышев. (195)

Finally aware of the impossibility of her plight and the hope she is pinning on him, he reaches a moment where he could act heroically, but slips back into his pathetic Soviet mode of being:

But this insight was too weighty for the Lobyshevian consciousness to handle – it burst in upon him and immediately toppled over. Anyway, the central fact remained, that he was ashamed to stand next to her on Nevsky Prospect. And when these two things were taken together, Lobyshev felt terrible. (77)

Но это было слишком грандиозно для лобышевского сознания – вырвалось и опрокидывало. И главным все-таки оставалось то, что ему стыдно стоять с ней сейчас на Невском. И когда и то и это смешалось вместе, Лобышеву стало страшно. (195)

Her situation is too much for him to handle, and he has the gall to imitate the negative aspects he had noticed in Odysseus; he lies his way out, as a modern swine-Odysseus, master of crafty lies, might do: “I’ll try,” he said. “Since you don’t have a passport, it will be pretty hard, of course, but I’ll try.” What a swine I’ve become! He thought hopelessly.” (78) (Я попытаюсь, -- сказал он. – Без паспорта это, конечно, очень трудно, но я попытаюсь. Какой же я стал свиньей! – безнадежно подумал он.) (196)

His treachery is heartbreaking, and reveals the most cowardly element of his character, his inability to deal with the truth of Soviet citizens who live outside of the system, who have had the courage to believe in abstract art, in decency, in Western-inspired ideals.

Although he feels hopeless deceiving the girl, Lobyshev still struggles to be a decent human, and the awareness of his failure torments him. Even though he lacks the courage to tell her outright he cannot help her, he hopes that she will understand his lie, but is not reassured even by his own sense of hope:

Where was it, that station at Kilometer 53, where he had never even been?... Had she understood, or not? He recalled her parting expression and decided that she'd understood. This thought did not relieve him...

I do this kind of thing every day! (79)

Где она, эта платформа 53-го километра, на которой он и не был ни разу?...Поняла она или не поняла? Он вспомнил ее последнее лицо и подумал, что поняла. Это его не успокаивало...Ведь это же я делаю каждый день! (196)

The essence of Lobyshev's epic reality is that he tells lies every day, deceiving both himself and others; and his life is full of painful contradictions. He perceives the distance between the Classical figures and himself, as their contemporary late-Soviet Russian counterpart. Although he had initially wished to see a modern-day Odysseus, such as a down-trodden youth or an American salesman, he walks out of the theatre to play one character he had not imagined: a Soviet cad of the early 1960's, conflicted about the proletarian Soviet heroes he was supposed to admire; and about himself. Through his brief, seemingly chance encounter with a woman who offers to be his Penelope, but who is also his Circe, Nausicaa, and Gelsomina wrapped into one complex figure, Lobyshev



experiences conflicting feelings of sympathy and shame, as well as consciousness about how constantly he lies and deceives.

As a modern Soviet Russian Odysseus, Lobyshev, makes an heroic effort to reach the state of awareness he does, and to battle his helplessness in face of the system he cannot change. Exposing Lobyshev's everyday epic battles, and his encounter with his would-be Penelope, Bitov is able to reveal, though obliquely, certain truths about the degradation of Soviet existence: the gulags and prisons, the inequality of the sexes, the suppression of aesthetic and intellectual freedom, and above all the prevalence of falsehoods and the lies that wrap the Soviet people in an impenetrable web. These revelations are brought about by the presence of the girl, who embodies and brings to light so many of society's ills, but who also hints of non-Soviet ideas of truth and beauty, of older ways of life, based on the foundations of Western culture that are so at odds with his characters' Soviet realia.

By the end of the story, Lobyshev, despite his failures, has absorbed some of the illumination the girl sheds on his life:

He walked on, and it seemed to him that everyone saw him, all lit up by the sun, and that everything that had happened was written all over his face... And it was like a long-forgotten feeling to think, not offhandedly, not "as it were," not forgetting, not while half-asleep. (79)

Он шел, и ему казалось, что все его видят, столь освещенного солнцем, что все это у него на лбу написано... И как давно забытое ощущение было, что думал не вскользь, не как бы, не вроде, не забывая, не в полусне. (196)

Tellingly, the word Swoboda translates as Lobyshev's "face" is in Russian the word for "forehead" – "lob" (лоб), the root of Lobyshev's name, suggesting that not only is

Lobyshev guilty, but so is the entire Soviet intelligentsia, for not to having done more in facing up to the truths of their collective, Soviet life. Lobyshev, and others like him who read Bitov's story, can finally think clearly and directly, but their thoughts are only an insight about life, and do not translate into the active ability to change or modify that life. Lobyshev, like other members of the Soviet intelligentsia, is stuck in his corrupt, Russian Soviet being.

### **Reflections on Empire and Nature, or Paradise Regained, Soviet Style**

The sense of corruption and decay in the Soviet way of being pervades several of Bitov's works. As we have seen, "Penelope" in particular articulates this dissatisfaction, using Classical figures to reflect on the manipulative nature of the filmic medium and the kind of heroes or non-heroes who exist in the Soviet Union, and confronting various problems of the Soviet Union: the pervasiveness of lying, the presence of the gulags and alienated citizens, as well as the lack of moral probity and spiritual wholeness. Bitov, sensing these problems growing in the 60's and 70's, was willing to expose them in his stories. But rather than facing his spiritual crisis within the boundaries of Russia proper, he went to the Caucasus: in *A Captive of the Caucasus* (*Книга путешествений по Империю*),<sup>70</sup> with its own share of literary and cinematic allusions, Bitov turns to both the art and nature he encounters in the Caucasus to find a sense of a wholeness that encompasses spirituality, individualism, and authenticity that he found so lacking in the Soviet Union.

As a young journalist and intellectual, Bitov had several opportunities to travel to the Caucasus, and his essays about his travels continue to articulate Russia's fascination

with Georgia, the small country just beyond Russia's southern border that has been an alluring alternative space for Russia since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bitov has been called a master of an "ecological prose" which draws inspiration from and mimics organic shapes found in nature.<sup>71</sup> While his works do seem organized in an organic, flowing form, it is also important to read them within the socio-political context of the late-Soviet Union, exploring Bitov's attitude, as a Soviet Russian, towards the Caucasus, and especially Georgia: why was Georgia important then, and why is it still so important in post-Soviet times that Russia has taken action to essentially retain it in its sphere of influence.<sup>72</sup>

The relationship between Georgia and Russia is of intense interest to at least three late- and post-Soviet authors discussed in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation: Liudmila Ulitskaia, a Russian Jew, converted to Orthodoxy; Bulat Okudzhava, the Soviets' beloved bard of Armenian and Georgian descent; and the Georgian nationalist, Otar Chiladze. All four authors are drawn into a literary dialogue exploring Russia and Georgia's relationship, which I have chosen to examine in part through the lens of the Classics. Although Bitov's allusions to the Classics in *A Captive of the Caucasus* are few, they are significant, revealing nuances of Bitov's attitude towards the Caucasus, and Georgia in particular.

In "Choosing a Location: Georgian Album" ("Выбор натуры: Грузинский альбом"), Bitov unquestioningly describes Georgia as part of the Soviet Union, and also as an inalienable part of the Russian Empire.<sup>73</sup> Life is different there, but still, it belongs unequivocally to the larger, northern country. Acknowledging differences between Russia and Georgia, but asserting that Russia is the dominant, parent figure, Bitov

articulates his ambiguous, liminal place as a travel writer, caught between the two countries:

The traveler's empire is another planet. A different sun illumines the parent state [metropolis] and the province. The dual sun blinded me in both directions; I cast two shadows... (155)

Империя путешественника -- другая планета. Разное солнце освещает метрополию и провинцию. Двойное солнце слепило меня и оттуда и отсюда; я отбрасывал две тени. (528)

Although Bitov does not refer to any specific mythology, simply mentioning the sun as a standard of comparison carries its own cultural weight. Given that Aeëtes, king of ancient Colchis, was the son of Helios, the sun god in the Greek pantheon, and that Georgia's history includes elements of Zoroastrianism and pagan sun worship, Georgians have a strong sense of their country's intimate ties to the power of the sun.<sup>74</sup> Bitov, suggesting that Russia's sun, that of the metropolis (which Brownsberger translates as "parent state"), is stronger, and that Georgia's, merely provincial, is weaker, expresses a sense of cultural superiority fueled, perhaps, by a real sense of inferiority that in Russia, the sun, literally and figuratively, does not shine as brightly as it does in the Caucasus. In "Penelope," the sun that illuminates the girl and sheds light on truths about Lobyshev and Soviet life, is momentary at best. In the Caucasus, this light seems to shine always.

But before Bitov can stare directly into that sun, the symbolic source of Georgia's spiritual superiority, he expresses what it means to him to live in Russia, and be Russian. Even though Bitov claims that a "traveler's empire" is a different planet, he still feels that he is Russian, and questions neither his right to import cultural goods from Georgia, nor that Georgia belongs within the Russian empire:

Spy and invader! I wanted to carry home with me something they still had: the sense of belonging to oneself. No such luck! Only from there could I see my home, only from there could I feel that I was in it. At home I began to pine because I had lost this feeling. In truth, only in Russia can one feel homesick without leaving one's country. A great advantage! (155)

Лазутчик и захватчик! Я хотел импортировать домой то, что у них оставалось: принадлежность себе... Только оттуда мог я увидеть свой дом, только оттуда – в нем себя ощутить. Дома я начинал тосковать по утрате этого чувства. Воистину только в России можно ощутить ностальгию, не покидая ее. Великое преимущество! (528)

Accepting Russian and Soviet conquest of the region, he believes that having a right to its expansive territory is one of the benefits of living in Russia.

Bitov affirms his deep-seated sense of being Russian, claiming Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy as his specific Russian literary predecessors, yet notes a weakness inherent in Russia:

Having invaded, I kept finding myself trapped. This traditional Russian capacity to be penetrated by an alien way of life (Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy...) proved Russian, came full circle... We can write something down, no matter what our topic... but strength of spirit cannot be borrowed from a neighbor: the spirit fills with strength only on its own soil, poor though that soil may be. (155)

Захватив, я оказывался пойман. Эта традиционно -- русская способность проникаться чужим существованием (Пушкин, Лермонтов, Толстой...) оказывалась российской, оборачивалась... Написать -- можно. О чем бы мы ни писали... Но силу духа не займешь у соседа: дух наливается силой лишь на своей, пусть сколь угодно бедной почве. (528-529)

In claiming his literary ancestors, Bitov betrays Russia's perennial anxiety about its borders (that it will be invaded from outside), which over the centuries has caused it to insist on keeping the countries of the Caucasus and other border states within its sphere of influence for protection, yet has resulted in a constant state of tension with many of these satellite states.

Bitov is quite aware of the complex relationship between Georgia and Russia, which he describes in military and erotic language. Like Lobyshev in "Penelope" who was both subject and object, gazer and gazed, Bitov plays with trope of being both captor and captive of the Caucasus, seeing himself and his country as both the invader and the invaded. This dual perception of self as Self and Other, invader and captive, calls particular attention to Russia's perception of the vulnerability of its Caucasian border.<sup>75</sup> Bitov frames this vulnerability as a Russian capability of absorbing other cultures, yet does not see that perhaps Russia had taken the first the aggressive steps, invading its neighbors, calling upon itself some of its troubles; that if it had a stronger sense of its own core and center, it would not need to invade its neighbors, or depend on them as protective boundary states.

Bitov interweaves this military language of the paradox and pain of the Russian--Georgian relationship with erotic terms. He knows full well that he, a Russian, is invading Georgian space, and yet that is just what he wants and claims as his right: he wants to embrace the entirety of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, assuming that the Georgians will yield to him, precisely because of the love he professes for Georgia. Describing his first visit to Georgia, he seems to understand the moral dilemma of his position:

I didn't want to understand. I wanted to seize. Anything added to someone's fame (even by me), any recognition (however well deserved!) from an outsider, is a portent of the end. An invasion and appropriation. For some reason, love is acknowledged to have an incontestable right. But, in fact, the person we love should be asked whether he needs this, whether he is flattered by our unrequited right to him... The rights of the loved one are neglected. He is a victim of our passion. (155)

Я не хотел постигнуть. Я хотел -- отторгнуть. Любое добавление к славе (в том числе и мое), любое (сколь угодно заслуженное!) признание со стороны -- есть предвестие конца, есть захват и присвоение. Почему-то за любовью признано неоспоримое право. Между тем следует спросить того, кого любишь: нужно ли ему это, безответное, льстит ли... Права любимого не учтены. Он -- жертва нашей страсти. (529)

Bitov sees himself as a Russian writer who loves Georgia, and realizes that in singing praises of Georgia he will colonize the country further, imposing his Russian will upon the country, appropriating it, and preventing it from speaking its own needs and identity.<sup>76</sup> In using the rhetoric of love, however, he seems to be rationalizing Russia's domination of Georgia as an event that springs from natural desires, for which he need not take responsibility: "For some reason, love is acknowledged to have an incontestable right." (Почему-то за любовью признано неоспоримое право.) The Georgians, when allowed to speak, as we will see in both Okudzhava's and Chiladze's novels, have very different opinions.

Trying to exonerate himself as a colonizer or destructive lover, as one who has sacrificed another country, Bitov turns to aesthetic cover, attempting to strip away the

political meaning in works of Pushkin and Tolstoy that deal critically with the Russia's role in the Caucasus:<sup>77</sup>

...with what military sub-unit can *A Captive of the Caucasus* or *Hadji Murad* be equated? The essential thing is impeccability of artistic form – to carry on the standard. (155)

Какому воинскому подразделению можно приравнять “Кавказского пленника” или “Хаджи-Мурата”? Существенна безупречность художественной формы -- не выбиться из-под образца... (528)

Maneuvering his interpretation of Pushkin's poem “A Captive of the Caucasus” and Tolstoy's story “Hadji Murad” to avoid confronting or acknowledging the harsher realities of Russia's military and political takeover of the Caucasus, Bitov attempts to embrace political innocence, substituting aesthetic standards where earlier military ones had prevailed.

Part of the aesthetic standards he employs are references to the Classics, but these, perhaps predictably, are fraught with conflict and ambiguity. As Pushkin and others before him, Bitov is drawn to describe the Caucasus in terms of pagan imagery and its connection with ancient Greece,<sup>78</sup> yet as in “Penelope,” he feels ambivalence towards the Classical heritage that plays into the feelings and desires he projects onto the Caucasus. Even as a visiting Russian, his aesthetic standards are defined in Western Classical terms: after experiencing the awe-inspiring, Apollonian heights of the monastery at Haghartsin, (which I discuss below), Bitov experiences drunken revelry at Garni, where he reflects on the Dionysian aspects of the Caucasus:

Garni is the Soviet Union's only pagan temple. The ruins of it. Garni is splendid... But here you can eat, drink, dance, sing. It's a pagan temple.



We sat on cyclopean rubble, drank chacha obtained from the temple  
 watchman...winked, chortled, guffawed, whooped, hooted... (101-102)

Гарни -- это единственный в Союзе языческий храм.  
 Развалины его. Гарни -- это прекрасно... Но тут можно есть, пить,  
 плясать, петь. Это языческий храм. Мы сидели на циклопических  
 обломках, пили чачу, которую достали у смотрителя храма...  
 подмигивали, подхохатывали, ржали, улюлкали, гикали... (478)

Presenting Garni as a pagan temple, the site of Dionysian drunkenness sanctioned by the temple guardian, Bitov projects a Soviet Russian desire for freedom, which seems to translate into not much more than the license to drink excessively even in sacred places. But Bitov, as a Russian, must maintain his sense of superiority over his southern neighbors. Noting specifically that Garni is in ruins, and that he sat on “cyclopean rubble,” Bitov suggests that the Caucasus is far from the civilized centers, implying that Leningrad and Moscow should perhaps be identified as Ithaca and Athens. The association of the Caucasus with intoxication and ecstasy will surface again in Ulitskaia’s and Okudzhava’s novels in their portray Russian perceptions of the Caucasus; and will be downplayed in Chiladze’s novel, which will offer a picture of more deeply conservative, though still pagan, elements in Georgia.

Knowing that the Caucasus, both Armenia and Georgia, is the closest he will come to direct contact with an ancient civilization that could offer him the sense of authenticity and balance he desires, Bitov expresses ambivalence about the shaky Western foundations of his Soviet Empire. Reacting to the moral and social decay of his world, he suggests that the current state of the Soviet Union belongs to a time when two major icons of the Classical world, this time both Roman and Greek, had never existed in their full glory:

Here's an image for you: a beautiful capital lying around without a column -- as if the Coliseum and the Parthenon were being created directly as ruins, bypassing their intended purpose. The seductive economy of abbreviating the technological process -- and right away the product: nothing. Worse and worse: the macaroni factory accidentally turns out matches, the caramel factory cigarettes. (156)

Вот вам образ: валяется какая-то прекрасная капитель без колонны -- словно уже создаются развалины Колизея и Парфенона, непосредственно, минуя назначение. Заманчивая экономия на сокращении технологического процесса, -- и сразу результат: ни-че-го. Дальше -- больше: макаронная фабрика выпустит случайно спички, карамельная -- папироски... (530)

In this image of a world born in ruins, in which the foundational structures of both the Greek and Roman Empires had never existed, Bitov seems to be lamenting Russia's lack of "normal" European ties to the ancient past: it has inherited only the capitals, the ruins, and has no claim to the entire structures, or even the supporting columns. In an associative leap, he then connects that lack to the rapid industrialization in the Soviet Union under Stalin, which had deteriorated from a political system that promised to help its citizens by feeding them pasta and candy, to one that produces nothing but matches and cigarettes. This critique would be devastating for any society,<sup>79</sup> but is far more so for the Soviet Union of the 1960's and 1970's, when the benefits of Sovietization were quickly beginning to diminish.

After juxtaposing these references to iconic Classical structures with the godless ruins and devastation of his contemporary Soviet Union, Bitov articulates his desire for a sense of balance and wholeness, specifically on the border between Georgian and Armenia, where he finds a living spirituality, Biblical abundance, and his individual self,

all in an idyllic world of unspoiled nature. “Georgian Album,” written in stages between 1970-1973 and 1980-1983, is very much philosophy masquerading as travel writing, in which Bitov’s “ecological prose” is not just inspired by natural forms, but also reflects the importance of nature in shaping national identity and even spirituality. In the landscape of Georgia, and in the humans, their dwellings, and churches he encounters in that landscape, Bitov experiences an epiphany both of God and of himself as an individual, which, coming from a late-Soviet writer, working in a time when religion and the individual were supposedly banned, is stunning.

Although the rhetoric of the Classical world is present in Bitov, his relationship with the Western Classics is vexed, and there is a sense in which he looks to the Caucasus for an experience of reality that would be different from, or deeper than that provided by the models of the pagan West. He looks for this reality by trying to find the perfect definition of the word “norm,” or “normal.” In Georgia, scouting for a film location, he reflects on the vicissitudes of the word “norm” within his lifetime: from his childhood, when it indicated superlative praise, to his young adult years, when it means “nothing special.” Bitov longs for a sense of “norm” that is neither of these, but is something that is whole, natural, and combines the human and divine:

... it was complete... everything was *normal*... This was the *divine norm*.

The same norm as in nature -- the Norm of *Creation*... the higher, palpitating norm, the delicate balance, the pause in flight... you go on living in this unstable and dynamic equilibrium. The form of feeling in which you almost lose your senses. Happiness.” (157)

... она была *вся*... все было *нормально*... Это была *божественная*

*норма. Та же самая, что и в природе, -- норма творения... о высшей, трепетной норме, тонком балансе, остановке в полете... продолжаешь ... жить в этом неустойчивом и подвижном равновесии, -- о той форме чувствования, при которой разве что не сходишь с ума, -- о счастье. (531)*

He finds the “norms” he seeks in divine creations found in nature: contact with them results in an indescribable flight of his earthly being which, equated with happiness, hints at the mystical epiphany he experiences in the natural landscape of Georgia.

We are first made aware that nature plays a pivotal role in the work through the full title of the section on Georgia: “Choosing a Location: Georgian Album” (“Выбор природы: Грузинский альбом”). Brownsberger translates “Vybor natury” (“Выбор природы”) as a cinematic term for “choosing a location” for a film, which it is, but it could also be translated more literally as “The Choice of Nature” or “Nature’s Choice,”<sup>80</sup> an apt title for both the subject matter and the “ecological” character of Bitov’s prose, rambling through the landscape it describes without gelling into the form of a more traditional novel, or even an organized travelogue. Indeed, the work’s seemingly haphazard structure is like an unkempt park in which philosophical reflections on the origin of ideals are interspersed with descriptions of nature; accidental meetings with authors are interlaced with comments on cinema and art, which sit side by side with descriptions of the large open-air market in Tbilisi. Despite the work’s rambling, natural form, I will turn to one episode: “Reminiscence about Haghartsin (in Anticipation of Zedazeni)” (“Воспоминание об Агарцине: в ожидании Зедазени”) to highlight Bitov’s sense of how the natural landscape intertwines with, and is a platform for, a feeling of religiosity and individuality.

Although “Recollection of Haghartsin (in Anticipation of Zedazeni)” is the second entry in “Georgian Album,” the monastery complex it describes, Haghartsin, is

actually located in Armenia, on the Georgian border. What seems to be a minor geographical inconsistency recalls various times when the borders and ethnic make-up of the Caucasus were different than in the late 20<sup>th</sup> or early 21<sup>st</sup> century: when Georgia was not a unified state; when Armenians were the leading citizens of Tbilisi; and most pointedly, when the Caucasus was just coming under Russian domination, after the Georgian kings had asked for Russian protection from the Ottomans in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup>

Calling attention to the shifting borders in the Caucasus encourages a reader to think back to other Russian authors, in particular Pushkin and Lermontov, who, once in the Caucasus, were able to reflect on Russia. Bitov clearly signals his identification with Russia's Romantic writers in the preface quote from Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of our Time*: "I traveled by post-chaise from Tiflis. My entire baggage consisted of one small suitcase, which was half stuffed with travel notes on Georgia." (151) (Я ехал на перекладных из Тифлиса. Вся поклажа моей тележки состояла из одного небольшого чемодана, который до половины был набит путевыми записками о Грузии.) (526). Lermontov, traveling in the Caucasus with the Russian military expeditions sent to conquer the unfriendly Chechens and mountain highlanders, articulates the ennui of a member of the aristocracy, Pechorin, who seeks a more emotionally honest life in Russia's southern climes. Bitov's passage about Haghartsin also alludes to Pushkin's last visit to the Caucasus, "Beyond Pushkin Pass, where the biblical landscape of Armenia begins to give way to the warm, moist breath of Georgia..." (158) (За Пушкинским перевалом, где библейский пейзаж Армении начинает уступать теплomu и влажному дыханию Грузии...) (531), referring to

Pushkin's "Journey to Arzrum," reflections from the poet's unauthorized 1829 trip to Erzurum in the retinue of General Paskevich, and witnessing Russia's battle against the Ottomans.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the fact that Lermontov and Pushkin were both exiled to the Caucasus, and spent most of their time in the company of military troops, or perhaps because of this circumstance, the Caucasus became the location par excellence in the Russian Romantic imagination. Like the Alps for the English Romantics Byron and the Shelleys, the Caucasus was a place to commune with the awesomeness of nature, and where nature and reflections about culture were inextricably intertwined.<sup>83</sup> Bitov participates in this Romantic tradition, collapsing time and underscoring his identification with Russia's literary past when he observes mid-way through the sketch that in visiting Haghartsin, he feels an entire century younger:

... it was easy to breath, and I felt like someone in an engraving, in a cloak and a broad-brimmed hat, with a tall alpine walking stick, as though I were a whole century younger than my real self. (159)

... легко дышалось, и чувствовал я себя словно на гравюре -- в плаще и широкополой шляпе с высокой альпийской тростью, будто был я моложе самого себя на целый век. (533)

Finding similarities with Pushkin, Bitov notes that it is easier to breath in a different time and place, but he also carefully notes differences between his own and Pushkin's interpretations of the local landscapes: "Like negative and positive." (158) (Как негатив и позитив.) (532). Hinting at self-criticism, he suggests that Pushkin was the positive pole, and he, a lesser, Soviet being, the negative. But by evoking the writers of the previous century Bitov defies his Soviet times; and by re-connecting with 19<sup>th</sup> century

Romantic history, he himself grows younger and more robust, inviting his readers to do the same.

Reveling in the natural setting of Georgia and enjoying the spiritual company of Pushkin and Lermontov, Bitov explores experiences that fall outside the Soviet canon: religious ecstasy, the epiphany of God, and of himself as an individual. Although traveling through the Soviet Union, a supposed bastion of socialist atheism, he takes pains to visit a monastery, and re-constructs his visit carefully. One of his first observations is that the monastery has not been working for a long time, and you assume the church has long since been abandoned. However, it soon becomes clear that the grounds have a guard and are being taken care of: although the monastery "... had not functioned for a long time, of course..." (160) (... конечно, давно не действовал...) (533), "... the family of watchmen, made gracious by peace and health, has established themselves here with a cow, a calf, sheep, bees, a grandmother, and children." (160) (... благостная от здоровья и покоя семья сторожей развела здесь корову, теленка, овец, пчел, бабушку и детей.) (533). Not only are the guard and his extended family thriving, but they are living in a kind of pastoral paradise: "These people and their bashful smiles were redolent of something warm and milky, fresh from the cow." (160) (Чем-то теплым, молочным -- парным -- пахло от этих людей и их смущенных улыбок.) (533). A subsequent observation about the monastery's refectory, which the guard points to with "greater liking and special good humor" (160) (с большей симпатией и особым благодушием) (533), causes Bitov to note: "So that's how they ate here..." (Вот так они здесь кушали...) (533), hinting at Georgia's legendary cuisine and wine, as well as at its hallowed tradition of treating guests with utmost

respect and care, as if divine visitors. Although the monastery does not appear to have been working as a religious center, it is in fact quite healthy; and its people dwell in pastoral bliss, upholding key elements of Georgian national traditions.

Bitov further explores the spiritual side of the monastery in its natural setting, and his comments reflect both the deep animism and the Orthodoxy that are part of Georgian religious life. When Bitov first sees the complex, he describes it as very much alive; as he and his host arrive at the monastery, the buildings take on both human and animal qualities:

This was a monastery. It rose up on the path to meet me, like a man coming around a bend... It had a lived-in look. And if it blocked my path with the suddenness of a live creature, as though the curiosity were its and not ours, the creature was benevolent. (159)

Это был монастырь. Он встал передо мной на дороге так навстречу, как человек из-за поворота... Он казался жилым. И если он перегородил мне дорогу с внезапностью живого существа, будто это было его, а не наше любопытство, то существо это было доброжелательно. (533)

Plants, too, come to life, and interact with human desires: “The tree blocked our view – we wanted to look and see what was there, beyond the yard...” (160) (Дерево заслоняло взор -- хотелось заглянуть, что там, за площадочкой...) (534). And religious practices and feelings are very much intact: the humans light their thin wax candles, an essential ritual of Orthodoxy, as they hover in the dusty twilight that has gathered around the monastery buildings. The entire setting is so natural that the building, and the people are positively calming: “Everything here was so very scrupulous, plain, and so tranquil – there was nothing to excite us, and we felt sleepy.” (160) (Все было здесь



очень добросовестно, просто и так умиротворенно -- волноваться было ничем и хотелось спать.) (533).

As Bitov focuses on the natural beauty of the location, he moves more explicitly towards an experience of finding a heaven on earth that is not supernatural: “No, there was nothing supernatural.” (160) (Но нет, ничего сверхъестественного.) (534). In turn, he re-discovers a much earlier identity, one that is linked closely with existing simply and in harmony with nature:

We found ourselves in the place where we had lived our whole lives, where we and no one else in our stead, had lived. We found ourselves in the world we lived in. But this whole world, all of it, was placed within our view, as if we had just arrived in it, as if we had fallen from the sky. We had flown, we were exiles... As if we had just been led here by the hand and told: “Be fruitful and multiply.” (160)

Мы оказались там же, где уже прожили всю жизнь, где именно мы и никто за нас не жил. Мы оказались в том мире, где мы живем. Но он весь, весь был помещен к нам во взгляд, словно мы только что в этот мир прибыли, как с неба упали. Прилетели, были изгнаны... Будто это только что нас за руку привели, сказали: “Плодитесь и размножайтесь.” (534)

The biblical reference is clear, and provides one of many examples of Georgia being described as paradise; and it is here that Bitov finds his sense of his individual self.

After contemplating the monastery’s setting, Bitov describes a ravine that opens out before him like a “horn of plenty” (161) (рог изобилия) (534), and how he himself is integrated mystically in nature:

In its shape, in its flare and curve, the whole valley spreading out below me seemed to resemble that horn. As though the horn had been

dropped on the ground, and its upper arc had become transparent, like the sky. I had been put into the very bottom of the horn, and spilling out from under me were all the riches that filled my view. (161)

Как бы вся расширившаяся передо мною внизу долина по форме, по расширению и гнотости напоминала этот рог. Будто этот рог обронули на землю, и верхний свод его стал прозрачным, как небо. Я был засыпан на самое доньшко рога, из-под меня просыпалось все то, чем изобиловал мой взгляд. (534)

The natural landscape of Georgia is part and parcel of this abundance: the earth is soft, fruitful, and peaceful; blue fir-trees stand out above the alpine meadows.<sup>84</sup> Bitov can't see himself in this landscape, but he fixates on his hand, which he suggests is the hand of someone living in paradise, of an infant that does not yet know work. Yet even this infant's hand is animated with desire: the fingers of the hand gape at the world that awaits their touch. Bitov reaches further mystical heights when he looks at the palm of his hand:

As if I had been brought here, let here by the hand... I looked, exclaimed -- but when I remembered and glanced back He was already gone. Only my empty hand still preserved the touch of Him who had led us here, and the palm was empty. (161)

Словно это за руку меня сюда привели, подвели... Я глянул, охнул; а когда вспомнил и оглянулся -- Его уже не было. И только моя пустая ладонь хранила еще прикосновение того, кто привел нас. Ладонь была пуста. (535)

This meditation leads straight to a perception of God as immanent in the body of the church, and to an epiphany of both God and the human individual. Bitov frames God as an architect who created this particularly inspiring church:

But never had I encountered a church so subordinated to the idea of

dissolving in Creation. A church so *absent*. As calmly, as inconspicuously as possible... in a whisper... the builder led his lines away from our eye, led our eye away, so that we would not see the church – no, this is a trivial human affair, a building. So that where the church stood, were we lived, we would see the reflection of God's face in His own creation. (162)

Но ни разу еще не встречал я храма, настолько подчиненного идее растворения в творении. Такого отсутствия я еще не встречал. Как можно незаметнее, спокойнее, шепотом... уводил строитель свои линии от нашего взгляда и уводил наш взгляд, чтобы не храм мы увидели, нет -- это пустое, человеческое дело, постройка, -- а чтобы мы узрели, где он стоит, где мы живем, отражение лица Бога в его собственном творении. (536)

Immersed in nature, Bitov sees divinity.<sup>85</sup>

What Bitov takes from this encounter with God is an imperative to relearn how to speak, to find a language that can articulate this new sense of where he lives, who he is:

Here we had to learn language anew, generate it, barely unstick our lips -- with the same effort, full of courage, with which I had dared to open my eyes – and pronounce a first word, one word, to name what we saw: *world*. (163)

Здесь надо было заново учиться языку, зародить его, разлепить с трудом губы, тем же исполненным бесстрашия усилием, каким осмелился распахнуть глаза, и произнести первое слово, одно, чтобы назвать то, что мы видим: мир. (536)

That would be, the natural world in its divine beauty and plenitude. But to perceive the natural world as God created it, Bitov must take care of himself, and in closing this passage he articulates an idea that was at antipodes to the supposed Soviet communist ideal: the individual.<sup>86</sup> Bitov breaks the world as if into new phrases, and in finding new

relationships in the world, between words, he finds, or re-finds, the building blocks of his own identity:

The world opened before me. I stopped on the threshold. Stood still in the doorway. The gateway to the world. Gates of the world. I stand on the threshold. It is I who stand. It is I. (163)

Передо мной отворился мир. Я застыл на пороге. Замер в дверях. Ворота в мир. Врата мира. Я стою на пороге. Это я стою. Это -- я. (537)

In the natural setting of the monastery of Haghartsin, on the remote border between Armenia and Georgia, Bitov is able to reclaim elements of his identity, namely his sense of God and individuality that the Soviet system had tried so hard to suppress.

Traveling to the Caucasus, the Romantic destination of past great Russian writers, Bitov finds that it is not just the wine and food of Georgia and the Caucasus, but also the spiritual qualities accompanying these manifestations of nature that provide him with a renewed spirituality: contact with God, and sense of himself as an individual in God's world. The importance of nature in sustaining the intimacy between the divine and human, in redefining a *homo sovieticus* into a *homo sapiens et sentiens* cannot be underestimated. Nature, as found in Georgia, provides a Russian writer such as Bitov with a warm heart, the missing pulse of his northern, Slavic soul. Recalling the rhetoric of his literary ancestors, Lermontov and Pushkin, who saw Georgia and the Caucasus as a land of freedom and aesthetic inspiration, using biblical rhetoric to describe Georgia as an earthly paradise, Bitov feels empowered to create language anew, correct the many wrongs wrought by his Soviet life, and step forth a transformed man.

However, in the process of undergoing his spiritual transformation, Bitov seems to have forgotten the premise of his journey -- that he is a visitor in this amazing land.

He still thinks like a colonial conqueror, assuming that because he has fallen in love with Georgia and the Caucasus, and with the spiritual nourishment they offer him, he has the right to claim them as his own. As he himself comments in his opening reflections, any fame he might bestow on the region, as an outsider, is “a portent of the end,” and would lead to “invasion and appropriation.” Rather than casting the Caucasus as a predominantly Muslim land as his 19<sup>th</sup> century literary ancestors had done,<sup>87</sup> Bitov extends his appropriation of Georgia to include some of its more sacred spaces, the churches and monasteries nestled on hills, hidden from view of the general public. This invasion and appropriation of Georgian culture, spirituality, and lands, is indeed part of the tension and competition that has been so intertwined in the political relationship between Georgia and Russia, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

While Bitov felt troubled by much of his Soviet existence, with its corruption and lack of viable heroic models, as seen in “Penelope,” when he travels to the Caucasus, he feels he finds answers to some of the problems spawned by the Soviet system. Dispensing with the models provided both by Homer’s and Camerini’s versions of the *Odyssey*, he imagines a place where the cultural monuments of the Parthenon and Coliseum are nothing but ruins: bypassing the foundational structures of specifically Western culture, he imagines himself immersed in a landscape and culture where God is immanent in the architecture of the churches, in Nature itself. In this re-claimed space, Bitov re-enacts the Romantic poetic traditions of Pushkin and Lermontov: thinking himself anew, he nonetheless recreates his past, including an imperial Russian attitude towards former colonial spaces; he is conscious of his violation of that space, but does

not seriously question what seems to him to be a God-given right to take the Georgian land on his own terms.

In articulating the cultural relationship between Russia and Georgia, Bitov's ambiguous attitude towards the Classics tends to diminish the real cultural heritage of Georgia. As a Russian, his connection with the Classical materials is ambiguous and tenuous, and by imagining a space without Rome or Greece, by desecrating the ancient temple site, Garni, with Soviet-style drunkenness, he projects that tenuousness on to Georgia, Armenia, and the Caucasus, stripping it of a rich culture that is in fact historically intertwined with the Classical heritage. As I will discuss in the following chapter, Liudmila Ulitskaia promulgates this colonial attitude in her novel, *Medea and her Children*, appropriating and co-opting yet another aspect of Georgian culture, the ancient Colchian figure, Medea, transforming her into a Crimean Medea who attempts to re-unite the disparate ethnic groups and nationalities that have emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Nosov, A. A. "Towards a History of Classical Education in Russia (1860-the beginning of the 1900's)" ("К истории классического образования в России (1860 -- начало 1900-х годов)," in Knabe, *Classical Heritage in Russian Culture*. (Античное наследие в культуре России), (203-229).

<sup>2</sup> Kelly, Catriona, *Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky and the Classical Ideal*. See, also Vyacheslav Ivanov's *A Study in Dostoevsky: Freedom and the Tragic Life*; and Kalb, Judith, *Russia's Rome*, especially "Rome Envy" (3-33), on the persistence of the myth of Russia as the Third Rome in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other chapters include: "Relinquishing Empire? Valerii Briusov's Roman Novels" (76-105), and "The Third Rome in Exile: Refitting the Pieces in Viacheslav Ivanov's 'Roman Sonnets'" (129-161).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Marina Tsvetaeva's tragedies, *Phaedra* and *Ariadne* (Федра, Ариадна). Tsvetaeva's father, I.V. Tsvetaev, was a Classical scholar and linguist, active in promoting public interest in Classical studies in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (I.S.Sventsitskiia, "The Study of Ancient Heritage in Russian Universities of the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" ("Изучение античного наследия в университетах России во второй половине XIX века") in Knabe, op. cit., (236-239). A solid knowledge of Classical materials was assumed in the elite Russian readership of the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, so allusions could be thoroughly appreciated. Joseph Brodsky continued this tradition into the 60's and beyond, for example, in his poems, "A Letter from Odysseus to Telemachus," a heart-wrenching farewell to his son whom he left

behind in Leningrad; and “Dido and Aeneas,” about his feelings of abandoning what he most loved in Russia. See Zara Torlone’s “Brodsky and the Classics” (95-114) for further discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Kalb, Judith, *Russia’s Rome*, “Conclusion: Bulgakov and Beyond” (185-202). For a further discussion of Russia as the Third Rome, see Rabinowitz and Griffiths, *The Third Rome: Classical Epos and Russian Novel*, which, in a dialogue with Bakhtin’s theories, addresses the creation of a Russian “national epos in the likeness of *The Iliad* or *The Aeneid*.” (<http://www.limbakh.ru/index.php?id=1430>, accessed July 20, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> It is unfortunate that Iakubovich happened to die in 1937. Though outside the immediate scope of this dissertation, it would be fascinating to research the state of Classical education in the 30’s and 40’s; how Iakubovich managed to survive as a rigorous Classicist as long as he did; and whether or not he was caught in the purges for his scholarship, deconstructing imperial mythologies, reading subversive meanings in Classical texts. For examples of Western deconstructionist interpretations which explore alternative, subversive readings of Classical materials, see Hinds, Stephen, *Allusion and Intertext, Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*; Blondell, Ruby, *Women on the Edge, Four Plays by Euripides*.

<sup>6</sup> Chances, Ellen, *Andrei Bitov* (1-17), covers details of Bitov’s biography, and introduces what she calls his “ecological prose.” For a critique of Chances’ ideas, see Gelbak, Igor, “On Secret Freedom and ‘Ecological Inspiration.’” (О тайной свободе и ‘экологии вдохновения’) (157-67), who argues that neither “postmodernism” (постмодернизм) nor “ecological prose” (экологическая проза) have much meaning for understanding Bitov’s oeuvre, but rather that the sense of “secret freedom” (тайная свобода) in the Soviet period is far more important.

<sup>7</sup> Chances, op. cit., (2-3), notes that Bitov’s novel, *Pushkin House* (*Пушкинский дом*) (1964-71), was rejected by Soviet publishers, but published by Ardis Publishers in the United States in 1978; and that Bitov was able to travel to the United States (Wesleyan University, Princeton University), and Europe (Berlin, Paris, Finland, and England) during glasnost’. See Chances (258-259) for details about when his stories were published, and where.

<sup>8</sup> Spieker, Sven, *Figures of Memory and Forgetting in Andrej Bitov’s Prose*, (11-17) sees Bitov as a post-modernist who has done much to preserve and revive the legacy of Russian literature, from Pushkin through Brodsky.

<sup>9</sup> Spieker, op. cit., (123-130), discusses various Classical references in Bitov’s *Pushkin House*, especially those to Cicero and Quintilian on Simonides Melicus, as mnemonic representations of the dead; and to the subtext of Plato’s *Theatetus* and *Phaedrus*, and the theme of Platonic memory (131-136). He mentions but does not examine in detail the Classical references in “Penelope” (60-69).

<sup>10</sup> All English quotes are taken from Philip Swoboda’s translation, “Penelope: Nevsky Prospect,” with exceptions mentioned in the endnotes or discussed in the text. NB: Swoboda calls Bitov’s hero “Monamakh” in his translation, which does not appear in the Russian original. I refer to him as “Lobyshev” throughout my discussion, for reasons I discuss below. All Russian quotes are from Bitov, Andrei, “Penelope” (“Пенелопа”), *Tales and Stories*. (*Повести и рассказы*).

<sup>11</sup> *A Book of Travels Around the Empire* (*Книга путешествий по Империи*) has been translated into English as *A Captive of the Caucasus*, which title I have kept, but it is a partial translation of a text that has been transformed through different editions. According to the translator, Susan Brownsberger, *Choosing a Location: Georgian Album*, was first published in 1973 in Russian as an essay on contemporary Georgian filmmakers, and has grown into “... an ‘album’ in which Bitov’s impressions of Georgia alternate with thoughts of home;” she notes in her 1992 edition that at Bitov’s request she restored parts that were censored in Soviet times (Brownsberger, *A Captive of the Caucasus* (321)). The current edition, however, is still not a complete version of the original Russian text: she has included a section on the filmmaker, Otar Ioselliani, but omitted references to Erlom Akhvediani, (the screenwriter for many of Ioselliani’s films, including *Pirosmani*, and an author in his own right), found in *A Book of Travels Around the Empire* (*Книга путешествий по Империи*) (648), depriving the English language version of passage that praises highly an example of literature written in Georgian.

<sup>12</sup> Annensky, Lev, in his concluding essay, “A Strange Traveler” (My translation) (“Странный странник”), to *A Book of Travels Around the Empire* (*Книга путешествий по Империи*) (699-712), foregrounds the section “Lessons from Armenia” (“Уроки Армении”), elaborating the sense of wholeness and healthiness Bitov finds in Armenia. Annensky’s discussion of Georgia is brief, contradictory, and puzzling. He first notes that Bitov’s experience in Georgia offers “spiritual therapy” (душевная терапия), but then contradicts himself, saying that the trips to Georgia take Bitov back to a deeper, earlier memory of spiritual

wholeness, but that “the sparks of this memory do not heal a wound, they are far from therapy; rather, these are the strikes of a surgical knife, letting blood. Together with the Georgian landscapes, this lightening of an earlier being gives a strange, torturing, yet clarifying effect.” (My translation) (Вспышки этой памяти не врачуют боли, они далеки от терапии, скорее, это удары хирургического ножа, отворяющие кровь. В соединении с грузинскими пейзажами эти сполохи предбытия дают эффект странный, мучительный и -- просветляющий.) (711). After his comments about the “Georgian Album,” discussing Bitov’s need to travel outside of Russia to find spiritual well-being, Annensky suggests that Bitov may be guilty of running away from his problems: “Albert Schweitzer answered this as follows: on this earth, there is not another’s life, another’s pain, another’s guilt.” (Альберт Швейцер ответил на это так: на земле нет чужой жизни, как нет чужой боли и чужой вины.) (712), implying that one must accept one’s own guilt before blaming others.

<sup>13</sup> Bitov, Andrei, interview in Lauridsen, *The Beat Generation and Russian New Wave Writers* (81-85).

<sup>14</sup> Chances, op. cit., (2-5). Chances, op. cit., (257) cites various critics who have made similar conclusions, including Stephen Cohen, “The Friends and Foes of Change: Soviet Reformism and Conservatism,” in *Rethinking the Soviet Experience. Politics and History Since 1917* (128-57).

<sup>15</sup> Hagen, Stephen, “The Stories of Andrei Bitov, 1958-1966. A Search for Individual Perception” (1-3).

<sup>16</sup> Barta, Peter, “Bitov’s Perilous Passage: ‘Penelopa,’ Odysseus and Plato on the Nevskii” (633).

<sup>17</sup> Barta, op. cit., (638).

<sup>18</sup> Barta, op. cit., (633), understands the “intertextual matrix” of the story, but limits himself to elucidating the references to Homer’s *Odyssey*, and Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” from the *Republic*, Book VII, 514-520.

<sup>19</sup> Barta, op. cit., (635-636), identifies *Ulysses* as the film Lobyshev watches, but does not discuss it at length.

<sup>20</sup> Chances, op. cit., (18), mentions that Bitov had seen *La Strada*, probably in 1956, and suggests the film as a model for “One Country,” an early journey-story depicting the clash between evil (as found in Zampano) and good (as found in Gelsomina) (31-32). Many critics mention that the spiritual odyssey is a familiar topos for Bitov: see Bakich, Olga, “A New Type of Character in the Soviet Literature of the 1960’s: The Early Works of Andrei Bitov” (125-126); Chances (31-32); and Barta (635).

<sup>21</sup> See Chances, op. cit., (102) and Barta, op. cit., (639) who also see traits of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literary figures in Lobyshev’s character.

<sup>22</sup> Bakich, op. cit., (127).

<sup>23</sup> Lobyshev’s name is based on the root, “lob,” or forehead, emphasizing that he belongs to the intelligentsia, and thus it seems essential to use his original Russian name, rather than “Monamakh” which Swoboda uses in his translation.

<sup>24</sup> I have altered Swoboda’s translation, changing “it was” to “y’ know,” to try to approximate more closely the almost untranslatable Russian phrase, “что ли” (chto li).

<sup>25</sup> A check-list of traits for a neo-realist film usually includes: black and white footage; shot on, or partially on location; and that it somehow portrays something that is phenomenologically real. See Bazin, Andre, *What is Cinema?: Vol. II*, for seminal essays on Italian neo-realism; Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 1* for the philosophy of neo-realist cinema.

<sup>26</sup> Consider Soviet manipulation of film to further the goals of the Revolution, beginning with Lenin’s statement that cinema is the art form of the masses; and Stalin’s manipulative use of film for propaganda, and his role in film censorship. Barta touches briefly on the potential misuse of cinema as a tool for propaganda, pointing out that cinema, “... with its always monologic voice, promotes one viewpoint and does not admit opposing voices. By its very nature, it is deceptive.” (639).

<sup>27</sup> For example, Mikhail Kalatozov’s (born Kalatozishvili) *Salt for Svanetia* (*Соль Сванетии*) (1930), and *The Cranes are Flying* (*Летят журавли*) (1958); and the very popular, Grigorii Aleksandrov’s *Circus* (*Цирк*) (1936), to name but three films that were well-crafted and propagandistic. Bitov clearly understands how difficult it is to remain independent of the psychic influence of visual moving media. See Chances, op. cit., (8), for Bitov’s interest in film, including his two years studying at the Moscow’s Graduate Courses for Screenwriters and Directors. This interest is also evident in Bitov’s “The Choice of Location: Georgian Album,” discussed below.

<sup>28</sup> *History of Ancient Greece* (*История древней Греции*). The text had a triage of 25,000. It is outside the immediate scope of this dissertation, but it would be interesting to trace how many of these kinds of texts were in circulation.



<sup>29</sup> *History of Ancient Greece. (История древней Греции)*. My translations.

<sup>30</sup> All Russian quotes are from *History of Ancient Greece. (История древней Греции)*.

<sup>31</sup> See Spieker, op. cit., (123-136), for extensive references to Plato in *Pushkin House*. Barta, interestingly, brings up the irony that Plato, although anathema in the Soviet period, wrote the *Republic*, outlining a utopian state in many ways similar to what the Soviet Union was supposedly in the process of becoming; he notes in particular Plato's suggestion that in the ideal state, Homer would not be allowed because of the negative effects his works.

<sup>32</sup> Pindar, *The Odes of Pindar*, trans., Richmond Lattimore, (vii-xiv).

<sup>33</sup> Blundell, Mary Whitlock, *Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus*, (1-17). Blundell, *Sophocles' Antigone*, (1-18).

<sup>34</sup> See Tertz, Abram. *On Socialist Realism* (214), where he describes Mayakovkii's writing: "Mayakovski [sic] knew this and, hating psychological analysis and details, wrote in proportions that were larger than life. He wrote coarsely, poster-style, Homerically."

<sup>35</sup> See Blondell, *Women on the Edge* (162-166), for a discussion about the ways Euripides problematizes traditional ideology and gender roles in *Medea*, distorting Jason into a "barbarous feminized Greek, and [Medea into a] masculine Hellenic barbarian." (162-166).

<sup>36</sup> Kirk, G.S. & J. E Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, (182-184, 196-199).

<sup>37</sup> For a further example about the taboo against the non-materialist Greek philosophers, see Iurii Trifonov's story, "The House on the Embankment" ("Дом на набережной"), where, in a trial for anti-Soviet activities, condemning evidence against Professor Ganchuk included that he had busts of Plato and Aristotle in his study, but not those of ancient materialist philosophers, such as Democritus and Heraclitus.

<sup>38</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, (212-223).

<sup>39</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, (Chapter IV, 1-27), describes various Scythian tribes and their customs: in some, the men are effeminate, and the women ride horseback and hunt; he is fascinated by the tales of the Amazons. See Herodotus, (I, 103), for a brief discussion of the East Coast of the Black Sea, including Colchis.

<sup>40</sup> Blok, Alexander. *Стихотворения и поэмы*. "The Scythians" ("Скифы") (166). (My translation). The first stanza articulates the Russian sense of being Asiatic:

You – are millions. We – are hordes and hordes, and hordes.  
Just try, battle with us!  
Yes, we are Scythians! Yes, we are Asians,  
With slanting, greedy eyes!

Мильоны -- вас. Нас -- тьмы, и тьмы, и тьмы.  
Попробуйте, сразитесь с нами!  
Да, Скифы -- мы! Да, азиаты -- мы,  
С раскосыми и жадными очами!

<sup>41</sup> See Minns, *Scythians and Greeks*, (Fig. 10), for an image of a Greek in barbarian in dress from the Kerch, in the Crimea.

<sup>42</sup> Demosthenes, *Against Meidias*, (2-5).

<sup>43</sup> Shaw, Brent, "Spartacus before Marx," Princeton/Stanford Working papers in Classics, version 2.2 November, 2005, Princeton University (11).

<sup>44</sup> Shaw, op. cit., (14-15).

<sup>45</sup> Shaw, op. cit., (4-5).

<sup>46</sup> Shaw, op. cit., (17-18).

<sup>47</sup> It is an irony of history, of course, that because of the Marxist and socialist popularity of the text, Howard Fast's novel *Spartacus* was withheld from print in the 1950's in the USA (Shaw, 2, 33).

<sup>48</sup> Barta, op. cit., (634).

<sup>49</sup> See Mulvey, Laura, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (14-26) for a seminal discussion of the "male gaze" in film.

<sup>50</sup> Barta, op. cit., (638): "Plato's intertextual presence turns the story into a literary monument of 'unfreedom'."

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Anatolii Rybakov's anti-Stalinist novel *Children of the Arbat* (*Дети Арбата*), first circulated in samizdat in the 1960's, but published officially only in 1987; and Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen*, (469-470), for the explosion of interest in the archives once they opened.

<sup>52</sup> This passage seems a clear reference to prostitution in the Soviet Union, and the plight of women who were driven to prostitution. See Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life*, (3-23), for discussion of women's lives depicted by women writing during the Thaw.

<sup>53</sup> I have amended Tait's translation, because he has omitted the lines: "-- Это сначала надо проверить... - и смеялся гаденько, так гаденько, что уже не мог бы заметить этого, потому что заметить это -- было бы слишком для него тяжело..." Because they add a significant moral coloring to Lobyshev's reactions, I have included them here.

<sup>54</sup> Brown, Matthew, in *Realismi socialisti* (100-101).

<sup>55</sup> Bagnoni, Elisa, *Realismi socialisti*, (276). As early as 1959, in addition to the first clandestine "samizdat" publications of literature, non-official artists had begun showing their art in private apartments, a practice which lasted until the late 1970's.

<sup>56</sup> Bagnoni, op. cit., (276). It is as if Bitov anticipates events of December 1, 1962, when Krushchev visited the Manezh Gallery in Moscow, only to express hostility to the art on display, and begin an official crackdown on the new wave of formalism and abstract art.

<sup>57</sup> Bagnoni, op. cit., (276) mentions two significant shows of Western art in Moscow during the Thaw: in 1959, in Sokol'nik Park, "The American Nation Exhibition" for the first time in the USSR showed paintings by Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Alexander Calder, Arshile Gorky, Georgia O'Keefe, Willem de Kooning, Yves Tanguy, and Edward Hopper. In 1961, there was a show, "French National Art," with work by Bernard Buffet, Pierre Soulage, Chaim Soutine, and Hans Hartung. Matthew Brown, *Realismi socialisti* (99) also mentions that an exhibit of the British "Kitchen Sink" painters had been shown in Moscow in 1960.

<sup>58</sup> Kotkin, Stephen, *Armageddon Averted*, (39-43), discusses the "creeping invasion of the West" beginning in the 1960's, noting British TV shows (*The Forsythe Saga*, *David Copperfield*) that were making their way into the Soviet Union in the mid-1970's, and the 1968 viewing of *Easy Rider* by members of the Komsomol, supposedly to help combat "worrisome trends in youth culture." (43).

<sup>59</sup> Goscillo, *Dehexing Sex*, and others.

<sup>60</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, (VI, 244-245), "Would that a man such as he might be called my husband, / dwelling here..." (αἰ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τοῖσδε ποῖσις κекλημένος εἴη / ἐνθαδὲ ναίεταων...).

<sup>61</sup> Chances, op. cit., (31-32).

<sup>62</sup> Bondanella and Gieri, eds., in *La Strada*, (15).

<sup>63</sup> See Bazin, *What is Cinema?: Vol. II*, for essays on Italian neo-realism. See Bondanella and Gieri, *La Strada*, (3-6) for a discussion on the ideological debates among the "neo-realist" filmmakers and authors.

<sup>64</sup> Barta, op. cit., (637).

<sup>65</sup> Bondanella and Gieri, op. cit., (192-193), "An 'Active' Character: Gelsomina Senses the Life of the Trees."

<sup>66</sup> Bondanella and Gieri, op. cit., (193).

<sup>67</sup> For an account of the early reception of Charlie Chaplin in USSR, see Shklovskii, V., *Chaplin*; anecdotal evidence indicates loving admiration for the Tramp. The Tbilisi Puppet Theatre has presented *The Winter of My Spring*, (*ზამთარი ჩემი გაზაფხულის*), a satire of Soviet times in which the figure of Charlie Chaplin appears as a very sympathetic character.

<sup>68</sup> Barta, op. cit., (638).

<sup>69</sup> Homer, op. cit., (VI 181-184).

<sup>70</sup> All quotes in Russian are from, Bitov, Andrei. *A Book of Travels Around the Empire*. (*Книга путешественный по Империи*).

<sup>71</sup> Chances, op. cit., (9-13).

<sup>72</sup> Three years after the 2008 August War, Russia had still not withdrawn its troops from the disputed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in fact has moved in heavier equipment, M-300 missiles, into Abkhazia. Despite ongoing negotiations being held in Geneva, and Georgia's recent deal to allow Russia into the WTO, Georgia is currently in essence captive to Russia's military power. (Personal communication, Archil Gegeshidze, Senior Analyst at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, Tbilisi, September 27, 2011.)

<sup>73</sup> See Chances, op. cit., (147), where she notes that “[Bitov] states that the Russian’s image of Georgia, culled from literary images created by Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy, is accurate, for these authors, in their images of Georgian life, had captured the Georgian soul in a way that even a prolonged stay, on the part of a Russian reader, would not have been able to produce.” I hope my discussion calls into question this sense of confidence about some Russians’ depiction of Georgia.

<sup>74</sup> Lordkipanidze, Otar, *The Heritage of Ancient Georgia (Наследие древней Грузии)* (224): “The sun was one of the most honored divinities in the pagan pantheon of the Georgian tribes...” (My translation.). (Солнце было одним из наиболее почитаемых божеств в языческом пантеоне грузинских племен...). For discussion of Zoroastrianism in the Caucasus, see David Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity*; James Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*; William Malandra, *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion*.

<sup>75</sup> See Greenleaf, “Pushkin’s “Journey to Arzrum”: The Poet at the Border,” (940-953), for a discussion of Pushkin’s perception of himself as captive of and captivated by the Caucasus, and his shifting appreciation of his travels in the Caucasus from 1823-35 to 1829, to 1835, when he wrote his final version of “Journey to Arzrum.”

<sup>76</sup> See Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire*, especially (175-192), “Feminizing the Caucasus” and (192-211), “Georgia as an oriental woman” for extensive discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian authors’ articulation of this gender based erotic/militaristic attitude in the process of colonizing the Caucasus.

<sup>77</sup> See Hokanson, Katya, *Writing at the Borders* (132-133); Monica Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, “The Foreign Fountain: Self as Other in the Oriental Poem” (108-155), for a discussion of how the “Oriental formulas” Pushkin borrowed from Byron shaped his response to Russia’s conquest of the Caucasus. (117); and especially Layton op. cit., (289), for her summary, that “both Bestuzhev-Marlinsky and Lermontov adumbrated ... Tolstoy’s declaration that the ‘glorious triumph over barbarism’ [in the Caucasus] was in fact genocidal despoilment, morally and spiritually injurious to its Russian perpetrators.”

<sup>78</sup> See Layton, op. cit., (230) for discussion of the paradox of the Caucasus as both a site of “genocidal warfare” and as the “route to terrestrial paradise;” of its significance for Pushkin as a kind of “Parnassian refuge along quasi-religious lines” (48-49), home of the muses; and for Lermontov, as a refuge from “the whole repressive realm of ‘unwashed Russia’ with its omnipresent police and slavish masses.” (230).

<sup>79</sup> This is one place where Bitov seems to display a nascent environmental awareness, which Chances suggests exists in his “ecological prose,” of interest to explore further.

<sup>80</sup> Chances, op. cit., (146-152), discusses the title, and highlights of what she, too, calls “Choice of Location.”

<sup>81</sup> See Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, for a general history of Georgia.

<sup>82</sup> Pushkin, A. S., *A Journey to Arzrum (Путешествие в Арзрум во время похода 1892 года)* (11-12; 67-76).

<sup>83</sup> Layton, op. cit., (52-56, 69, 290).

<sup>84</sup> See Layton, op. cit., (177-179), on the representation of Georgia as a pastoral haven. Also, (192-193), of the “Alazani valley as a nubile bride-to-be,” ready to be raped by Russian forces.

<sup>85</sup> Layton, op. cit., (180), notes that Bestuzhev-Marlinsky also experienced an epiphany in Georgia: “Steeped in the imaginative Caucasian geography of the 1820’s, he views mountains as the ‘originals’ of literary ‘copies’ he ‘read’ back home... The stars participate too in his series of tropes: gazing at the heavens on a clear night, the author reads the celestial bodies as letters spelling the big, glorious ‘word – GOD!’” I draw my readers’ attention the similarity between this and Bitov’s 20<sup>th</sup> century epiphany in the Caucasus.

<sup>86</sup> See Bitov, interview in Lauridsen, *The Beat Generation and the Russian New Wave* (81), for his statement that the most important element of the so-called New Wave was not trends or politics, but the individuality of various authors.

<sup>87</sup> Layton, op. cit., (163-166, 193-194).

## Chapter III

**Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Medea and her Children*: A Modern Russian Medea, Stalin, Georgia, and the Limits of Tolerance.**

[Harlampy's] blood proved strong, however, not yielding to other lines, and those of his posterity who were not winnowed by the bloodthirsty times inherited robustness of spirit and talent from him, while his renowned avarice manifested itself in his male issue in great energy and a passion for building. In the women, as in Medea, it turned into thrift, a heightened attention to material things, and a practical resourcefulness. (*Medea and her Children*, 6)<sup>1</sup>

Но кровь [Харлампега] оказалась сильной, не растворялась в других потоках, и те из его потомков, которых не перемолотило кровожадное время, унаследовали от него и крепость натуры, и талант, а всем известная его жадность в мужской линии проявлялась большой энергией и страстью к строительству, а у женщин, как у Медеи, оборачивалась бережливостью, повышенным вниманием к вещи и изворотливой практичностью. (*Медея и ее дети*, 8)

In post-Soviet Russia the pattern of using Classical myths to address issues of national identity and contemporary social concerns has in no way diminished.<sup>2</sup> Liudmila Ulitskaia, exploring the history and contemporary lives of characters living in late- and post-Soviet Russia, manipulates the trusted vehicle of Classical figures to both veil and unveil pressing issues of her age. Rather than using in-depth quotations, pointed re-translations, or extensive satirical allusions, as do Gogol, Pushkin and Saltykov-Shchedrin, or a complex of suggestive allusions and counter-allusions as does Bitov, Ulitskaia uses much broader strokes to rewrite ancient mythic figures such as Medea, Odysseus and Penelope, creating a new mythology in a resurgent Russia, a mythology that provides a framework for dealing with the post-Soviet legacy of Stalin, the emergence of multiple nationalisms, Russia's relationship with the West, as well as for offering insight into Russia's ongoing relationship with Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

In many ways, Ulitskaia shares similar concerns with other cultural figures from the late- and post-Soviet eras who continue to use the Classics to articulate their thoughts about Russia and about its relationship with Georgia and the Caucasus: Andrei Bitov, who, as we have seen in the previous chapter, found solace in the Caucasus as an alternative Greece, a site of Eastern spirituality; Bulat Okudzhava, the Soviet bard, poet and novelist who, ethnically Armenian and Georgian, was beloved in the Soviet Russia but scorned by many in Georgia; and Otar Chiladze, an ardent Georgian nationalist who refused to speak Russian on his death bed, but whose novel, *A Man Walked Down the Road*, (*gzaze erti katsi midioda*), was translated into Russian and read widely.<sup>4</sup> As if in response to Bitov, who held the ancients up as both positive and negative models for his Soviet hero, Ulitskaia, too, uses Penelope and Odysseus as models against which to contrast her late- and post-Soviet Russian characters. She plays with the trope of Russia as the Third Rome, drawing out contrasts between Rome and Greece. She mentions Okudzhava in his role as a bard who united the different ethnic groups of the Soviet Union with his songs; he, however, wrote an historical novel, *The Dilettantes' Journey*, presenting the last decade of Nicholas I's reign as a fallen Roman state and Georgia as a Grecian haven controlled by Russia, and used these tropes as an extended allegory for the political conditions in Soviet Russia. Further, Ulitskaia's image of Medea both evokes and competes with Otar Chiladze's Medea as described in his novel, *A Man Walked Down the Road*: although she claims her Medea is an emanation of Eastern Wisdom, her text in many ways contradicts this claim, revealing instead an image of Medea who is an icon of nostalgia and longing for the better days of both pre-revolutionary, and even Soviet Russia, a supposedly politically neutral figure who, while claiming to be tolerant,

nonetheless betrays a sense of Russia's superiority over its imperial subjects and holdings.<sup>5</sup>

Liudmila Ulitskaia trained as a geneticist, and worked as a researcher at a biological institute in Moscow. After losing her position, she turned first to theatre and children's literature, finding work in 1979 at the Jewish Chamber Musical Theatre, where she began writing, and after three years began publishing. Since then she has enjoyed great acclaim as one of Russia's leading authors.<sup>6</sup> Although she claims to be apolitical and interested in people's personal lives, she is also noted for promoting tolerance and understanding of women's rights, sexual diversity, and Russia's multi-ethnic diversity in her literary creations and through her involvement with the Institute of Tolerance, an NGO funded in part by the Open Society Foundation.<sup>7</sup> Many of Ulitskaia's characters reflect elements of her biography, and the line between her self as author and her fictional characters is sometimes blurred.<sup>8</sup> She is Jewish by upbringing and ethnicity, but has converted to Russian Orthodoxy; her Medea is Orthodox, married to a Jew, who is also a card-carrying Communist. Both she and many of her characters exhibit a passion for essentializing their genealogical makeup, and her characters' lives and personalities often seem genetically determined by their national or ethnic backgrounds, making them sound at times like stereotypes that verge on parody, rather than fully developed characters.<sup>9</sup>

As Russia moved into the post-perestroika years and the tumult of the Yeltsin era, Ulitskaia published her first full length novel, *Medea and her Children* (*Медea и ee дети*), in 1996, in which she clearly adapts the ancient Greek figure of Medea to late- and post-Soviet times, continuing the dialogue about the importance of the Western Classics in Russia, displaying as well the urgent need to alter those very Classical models

to fit their Russian environment. Structured as a family chronicle that unfolds from the spring of 1976, the novel's narrative is not strictly chronological, but interweaves history and contemporary life, explaining events and characters with a logic of its own that reveals much of Ulitskaia's intent.

Her name notwithstanding, Ulitskaia's Medea is the polar opposite of Euripides' crazed barbarian from Colchis who kills her children in a jealous rage. She is a much kinder version of Ovid's Medea, who does not stop at concocting herbal potions for Jason and his clan, but yields to Jason's wish to restore youth to his aged father, and urged on by Bacchus, sets off on a killing-spree, tricking Pelias' daughters into hacking him to bits, and committing more heinous deeds which are stopped only when Aegeus strikes poison from his son's lips: "Mischievous is hard, it seems, to put an end to."<sup>10</sup> Unlike her ancient predecessors, Ulitskaia's Medea is childless, kills no one, but instead acts as the caretaker for her extended family that vacations in her home in the Crimea; as a guardian who watches over the ebb and flow of both time and history, and the passions and erotic energies that surge through her various family members.<sup>11</sup> Selfless, nearly sexless, yet tolerant and accepting, she holds together a vast family through the ancient Greek bloodlines she embodies, and from which flow the "...many tribes [of the former Soviet Union], from Lithuania, Georgia, Siberia, and Central Asia." (49) (...разноплеменное множество – из Литвы, из Грузии, из Сибири и Средней Азии.) (42).

Further, Ulitskaia echoes Bitov's use of the Classical figures, especially Odysseus and Penelope, to engage with the traditional Western models, contrasting them with new and improved Russian versions, both in *Medea and her Children*, and in a collection of connected stories, first published as *Skvoznaia liniia* (*Сквозная линия*) in

2002.<sup>12</sup> Sharing Bitov's concern for the moral degradation and lying in Soviet society that he explores in "Penelope," Ulitskaia focuses on the nature of women's lies. She experiments with Western European and American developments in feminism, for example, deriding Penelope for her lack of imagination in waiting so long for Odysseus to return; and contributes to the development of Russian feminism in her daring portraits of women's lives, affirming the importance of women's literature in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>13</sup> Ulitskaia, like Bitov, is concerned as well about artistic and personal freedom within the Soviet context, and the nature of women's lies provides a metaphor for exploring the sources and limits of creative freedom in her own era.

Curiously, in a 2004 edition of *Skvoznaia liniia* (*Сквозная линия*), included in a larger collection entitled *Iskusstvo zhit'* (*Искусство жить*), the Classical figures that framed the 2002 edition are excised, a move that highlights a retrenchment from the earlier edition that openly challenges the ancient models, betraying, perhaps, the influence of growing nationalism in the Putin era in the late 1990's and early to mid 2000's. Ulitskaia has her characters experience what may be seen as the destructive influence of capitalism and other Western ideas, for example, an adolescent who indulges in sexual fantasies with an older man (a wishful, would-be Lolita),<sup>14</sup> and a mature female journalist who travels to Geneva to investigate a ring of Russian and Ukrainian prostitutes. As if to counter the exposure to these negative elements, however, Ulitskaia has the stories' main character, the journalist, Zhenia, eventually return to a more traditional life in Moscow, settling down with her former husband, embracing her Orthodoxy and Jewish roots, and magnanimously hiring a Chechen refugee as a household helper. The Classical references are not completely lost, however, and Zhenia,



in passing, is likened to a solid Odysseus rather than a flamboyant and profligate Penelope: she is still a strong feminist figure, but the Classical references reflect an image that is subdued, reflecting a conservatism that is also seen in the earlier work, *Medea and her Children*.

Considering these examples, it seems that the Classical figures Ulitskaia uses are vehicles to reflect on a number of pressing issues Russia currently faces.<sup>15</sup> Through the figures, primarily of Medea, and secondarily of Odysseus and Penelope, Ulitskaia's novel reflects on issues of ethnic resettlements during the Soviet era and ethnic conflict after the collapse of the Soviet Union; on the relationship with Russia of the breakaway regions and nations, especially Latvia, Uzbekistan, and Georgia and the Caucasus. Through the figures of Odysseus and Penelope, she reflects on more personal issues: political, sexual, and artistic freedom in Soviet Russia, and by association and contrast, in post-Soviet, Putin/Medvedev times.

But Ulitskaia's Medea is a complex figure who raises many questions: does she represent nostalgia for the good times of the Soviet Union and pre-Revolutionary Russia?<sup>16</sup> Is she a supra-national figure, innocent of politics, who just happens to peacefully unite the newly formed countries of the former Soviet Union, who just happens to include all corners of Russia's "sphere of influence" in her genetic pool? Is she truly tolerant of all ethnic groups, or is she a more ambiguous figure, playing on ethnic stereotypes, re-writing aspects of Crimean history to foster feelings of national pride and identity for a new Russia that help restore Russia to its former imperial glory?

Previously, scholars have interpreted Ulitskaia's Medea in nothing but a positive light:

Her Medea Mendez could almost be called an anti-Medea. Childless, she becomes a surrogate mother for many of her relatives, and especially for the sensitive poet Masha. An archaic matriarch without children of her own, rooted in the Caucasus region far from modern Moscow, Medea Mendez is drawn as a humane, compassionate role-model. Allusions to myth are enforced [sic: I'm quoting Grothe] through the novel's setting in present-day Georgia, the modern equivalent of Colchis...<sup>17</sup>

I suggest, however, that Ulitskaia's Medea is not rooted in the Caucasus, but rather has been up-rooted to the Crimea, in many ways appropriated and then cut off from her Georgian roots and mythic ancestry. I argue that rather than being a matriarch who takes care of her extended family, she is essentially a passive figure, a guardian in a tower watching and recording, but not interfering or actively helping; she is an icon who seems calm and accepting, but who, perhaps wearily indifferent, actually chooses her favorite to ensure the continuation of her particular Greek heritage, while her offspring that would continue Russian lines, in particular Masha, a scion of Russian literary heritage, actually dies out.<sup>18</sup> Further, overall, the novel presents a picture of Russia and the Soviet Union as a multi-cultural country in which all remaining ethnic groups seem to get along relatively well. Ulitskaia chooses not to dwell on the harsh times, on the difficult ethnic issues involved in the geo-politics of the Crimea and the Caucasus, or other countries of the former Soviet Union. She creates a picture of love and tolerance, but the tolerance her characters enact is one that erases ethnic differences and the deep nationalist pride in the newly independent states that have emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Reading the clues in her characters linked to Classical figures helps uncover a less

utopian vision, revealing a sense of Russia's lingering imperial interest in influencing and even controlling its peripheral countries and ethnic groups, including Tatars in the Crimea, Uzbeks in Tashkent, Lithuanians, and in particular, Georgians in the Caucasus.

Medea, as a character created in 1996, in the turbulent years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, thus serves as a new mythological figure for new times, as an icon to help Ulitskaia's readers, as post-Soviet citizens, navigate the terrors and collapse of the Soviet Union; deal with the loss of territory once integral to the Soviet Union, such as the new, yet still fragile and vulnerable independent Baltic States and Georgia, which having capitalized on the sense of national identity encouraged and celebrated during the years of Soviet rule, have now emerged to claim and further cultivate those identities.<sup>19</sup>

Ulitskaia's image of Medea and her extended family, while seeming to portray an island of tolerance and acceptance, contains within it a host of contradictions and tensions that reflect troubles in the current Russian body politic, including a lingering resentment of and hostility towards Georgia and all Georgians, an underlying immorality masked by the glorification of a pseudo-pagan veneer, and an entrenched competition for cultural ascendancy.

The excision of the Classical figures in *Skvoznaia liniia* is a slight change, but signals a conundrum, a tension in Ulitskaia's work that manifests itself in her earlier work, especially *Medea and her Children*. Although she is known for being a positive force in post-Soviet literature, a radical exponent of women's sexual liberation, and for celebrating the moral probity of her characters and the tolerance they display, there is a slippage in that tolerance, an ambiguity that makes one wonder if the tolerance she exhibits could also be a sign of turbulence underlying her characters and Russian society,

one that is not as well controlled as she would like to portray, no matter what she hopes for Russia as it continues to evolve, or revolve to older ways of thought and behavior. It is a turbulence fueled by a basic tension inherent in the post-Soviet period.

Indeed, although the novel chronicles Medea's extended, supposedly happy family, not all family members are treated equally, and it is curious to see a distinct prejudice emerge against the Georgian branch of the family, several of whom are portrayed as ignorant, unfortunate, or crazy. This prejudice seems to stem from guilt by association with the legacy of Stalin and his cohort of Caucasian henchmen (such as Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Lavrentia Beria, to name but two), who ruled the Soviet Union in the early days.<sup>20</sup> It is a prejudice that deserves deeper investigation, especially in post-Soviet Russia, which Donald Rayfield suggests has not yet come to terms with the trauma of the Stalinist legacy: "The Soviet Union and its successor states have never achieved what psychiatrists call closure."<sup>21</sup> And where, in fact, many say they would vote for a man like Stalin, were he to enter politics today.<sup>22</sup>

However, while denouncing Stalin and the Soviet period, Ulitskaia is susceptible to expressing a sense of nostalgia towards a time that was at least physically and economically more secure. As others have noticed, her novel reads like a utopian dream of a Soviet Union that never existed.<sup>23</sup> But it is a utopian dream that has been reconfigured for a post-Soviet, resurgent Russia in search of its own boundaries and national identity. The tension, turbulence, and hostility to Georgia in particular can be seen in Ulitskaia's re-inscription of Medea and her entire family, which emphasizes her Greek heritage, appropriating and yet dismissing her Georgian roots; whose traditions are carried on by a male figure in whom Armenian, Greek, and Russian lines dominate, to the

detriment of the Georgian bloodlines.<sup>24</sup> It is a hostility that runs counter to the impulse elsewhere in her writings towards freedom, democracy, tolerance, and inclusiveness.<sup>25</sup>

On first reading, the hostility towards Georgia and Georgian characters seems to be non-existent. Ulitskaia's Medea lives in a Soviet Union that includes Georgia within its boundaries, that does not even consider that Georgia could be an entity independent from Russia or the Soviet Union. Medea's ancestors are Pontic Greek, but also from Georgia, and several characters find refuge from their northern Soviet life in the warmer and freer southern climes of Tbilisi. In Ulitskaia's fictive world, Georgia has been fully integrated into the Soviet empire, yet the picture of Georgia and Georgians does little to go beyond stereotypes of the country and its people, and in fact does much to belittle the independent traditions Georgians would like to claim as their own. Descriptions of a Caucasian restaurant in Theodosia and of a character's involvement with Georgian actors in Tbilisi and Moscow, while inclusive, do little to dispel the image of Georgians as creative and passionate bohemians, and of the Caucasus as nothing but a source of wine, good food, and an alternative space for Soviet citizens from the north. Formed in part by Russians writing about the area, and in part by the relative freedom that Georgians did enjoy during the Soviet period, these images are ones that Okudzhava will explore, and Chiladze soundly contradict.

## Confronting Soviet History and Politics

In an interview in November, 1996, discussing how her novella, *Sonechka*, was an attempt to understand the people of her parents' generation, and how they lived through and are slowly coming to terms with the horrific years of Stalinist times, Ulitskaia affirms her belief that it is possible in some way for people to separate politics from their personal, interior lives:

The 50's and 60's, preserved in my memory, left a heavy imprint on that generation of Soviet people. I know, I remember, the extent to which my parents' generation was painfully touched. Only now, in recent years, peoples' souls have slowly begun to straighten out: in the midst of all of the difficulty, complexity of contemporary life in Russia they have begun to take on a genuinely human character... *Sonechka* and the heroine of *Medea and her Children* are very important for me precisely because, living in a difficult time, in an uneasy social environment, they deal with it, as if... to the weather, to an atmospheric event. Their purpose in life, moral positions were deeper than that layer where the interactions of man and society usually take place.<sup>26</sup>

Сохранившиеся в моей памяти 50е, 60е годы наложили тяжелый отпечаток на тогдашнее поколение советских людей. Знаю, помню, до какой степени оказалось болезненно затронуто и поколение моих родителей. Лишь сейчас, в последние годы, начали потихоньку расправляться души людей: при всей тяжести, сложности нынешней жизни в России они стали приобретать подлинно человеческий характер... Сонечка же, как и героиня... книги «Медя и ее дети», очень важны для меня именно тем, что, живя в тяжелое время, в нелегкой социальной среде, относились к ним, как к... погоде, к атмосферным явлениям. Их жизненные установки, моральные позиции были глубже того слоя, где обычно происходят взаимодействия человека и общества.<sup>27</sup>

She specifically notes that the separation between the personal and political layers applies to her novel, *Medea and her Children*. However, although Ulitskaia claims to be interested primarily in the personal, internal lives of her characters, in reading her work, it is clear she cannot avoid the political and larger social questions of her age. Although she would prefer the political context behind her characters' lives to be like an "atmospheric event," the weather, like geography is physical fact, and cannot be divorced from the larger phenomenology of characters' or their authors' lives. Rather, these stories are in many ways morality tales for very difficult times: how did people manage to survive the upheavals of Soviet history: the Revolution and ensuing Civil War, the years of forced migrations of peoples, collectivization, the forced friendship of nations, the breakup of traditional family structures, the loss of old fashioned, humanistic, bourgeois values of love and meaning, all supposedly lost in the process of creating the ideal Soviet state and citizen?

Rather than being immune to the turbulence of politics and history around them, however, each of her characters deals with the terrors in his or her own way. As Ulitskaia notes in the first paragraph, Medea was saved from being deported as a Pontic Greek thanks to her husband's Spanish surname. Medea's own husband, the jolly philanderer Samuel, a Jew who was a party member from the Revolution until his death in 1952, decides to marry Medea because she offers emotional protection from hysterical fits he first suffered when he was unable to order his soldiers to kill peasants hiding food from the Soviet Red Army. The family as a whole makes its political statement by not being involved in politics. The mythic aura Ulitskaia gives her characters tends to mask the contradiction that she cannot avoid political issues, despite her declared intention to focus

on the personal, and has the effect of veiling the political realities of their lives, and perhaps veiling as well Ulitskaia's deeper concerns and beliefs.

### **Genetics and the Nation: Whose Medea? Georgian? Greek, or Crimean?**

One of the most striking elements of Ulitskaia's novel is its insistence on the importance of the ancient Greek blood that flows through all of Medea's "tribes" scattered through the Russian and the Soviet Empire. The novel begins and ends with praise of the Greek blood that flows through Medea and her ancestors to their descendents in Lithuania, Latvia, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Siberia. Indeed, written after the Soviet Union had dissolved as a political entity, the novel creates, or re-creates the picture of the Soviet Union as an ideal family of nations, united through the ties to ancient Greece as they are expressed in the character of Medea, who is first introduced as one of the few remaining speakers of the ancient language:

Medea Mendez had the maiden name of Sinoply and was, if we disqualify her younger sister Alexandra who moved to Moscow in the late 1920's, the last remaining pure-blooded Greek of a family settled since time immemorial on the Tauride coast, a land still mindful of its ties with Ancient Greece. She was also the last member of the family who could speak passably the medieval Pontic Greek which survived only in the Tauride colonies and lagged one thousand years behind modern Greek, the same length of time it was separated from the language of antiquity. (3)

Медя Мендес, урожденная Синопли, если не считать ее младшей сестры Александры, перебравшейся в Москву в конце двадцатых годов, осталась последней чистопородной гречанкой в семье, поселившейся в незапамятные времена на родственных Элладе таврических берегах. Была она также в



семье последней, сохранившей приблизительно греческий язык, отстоявший от новогреческого на то же тысячелетнее расстояние, что и древнегреческий отстоял от этого средневекового понтийского, только в таврических колониях сохранившегося наречия. (5)

Described as a “pure-blooded Greek,” even though her mother is Georgian, not only does Medea have linguistic ties to Ancient Greece, but she looks the part as well, sitting in a “... little garden with her classical Greek profile silhouetted against the whitewashed wall...” (64) (“... в... садике со своим древнегреческим профилем на фоне белой стены...” (54). Her sister, Alexandra, shares this ennobling heritage:

... from the Pontic seafarers she had probably inherited a drop of royal blood and honorary kinship with those queens who always had their profile toward the spectator as they spun wool, wove tunics, and made cheese for their husbands, the kings of Ithaca and Mycenae. (143-44)

... а через понтийских мореходов она получила, вероятно, каплю царской крови, почетное родство с теми царицами, всегда обращенными к зрителю в профиль, которые пряли шерсть, ткали хитоны и выделывали сыр для своих мужей, царей Итаки и Микен. (118)

Emphasizing the sisters’ ancient Greek heritage, Ulitskaia lends an exaggerated glamour and legitimacy to the Sinoply family, otherwise simple, seafaring Pontic Greeks.<sup>28</sup>

It is essential to Ulitskaia’s story, told to mend Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union, to emphasize her heroine’s Greek identity, and to weave that identity into a greater Russian identity. Even though Medea’s father was a Pontic Greek, and her mother a Georgian, it is paramount for Ulitskaia to have her Medea maintain her roots in the Crimea, close to her Greek heritage, diminishing her ties with Georgia, the site of ancient Colchis. Indeed, several years after Medea’s parents die within ten days of each other, (her father on a boat, *The Empress Maria*, sunk in 1916 by sabotage; and her

mother during the birth of her 14<sup>th</sup> child), it transpires that one of Medea's sisters, Anelya, is living in Tbilisi, happily married to a successful musician. Although Anelya urges Medea to visit her, hoping to introduce her to a suitable widower, Medea delays her trip; history and fate take over, ensuring the continuation of Medea's line in the Crimea:

If Anelya's plans had come to fruition, this house, possibly the last Greek house in the Crimea, would not have survived, and the next generation of the Sinoply family, Greeks in Tashkent, Tbilisi, and Vilnius, would have forgotten its seafaring heritage. But things turned out differently.(60)

И если бы Анелины планы осуществились, не сохранилось бы в Крыму этого греческого, может быть, последнего, дома и следующее поколение Синопли выродилось бы в сухопутных греков, ташкентских, тбилисских, виленских. Но все произошло иначе. (51)

Instead of moving to Georgia, Medea meets her husband, Samuel Yakovlevich Mendez, the revolutionary, card-carrying member of the Communist party, and Red Army officer who been re-trained as a dentist after collapsing in a fit of nervous hysteria while requisitioning wheat. Medea remains safe in the Crimea, concealed and protected by her husband's name and party credentials; along with her, her house and the happy multi-ethnic family continue to survive in her ancestral home. Again, it is the Greek side of her heritage, the Sinoply name, rather than the Georgian (her mother was from Batumi), that is emphasized, and that seems essential to Ulitskaia's portrayal of her Medea's ability to survive Soviet times, and to emerge as a post-Soviet icon who embraces so many distant corners of the Russian and Soviet Empires.

In Ulitskaia's insistence on her Medea's Greek heritage, we can see a continuation of the battle between Georgia and Russia about which country has deeper claims to ancient Greece, and significantly, which nation has a legitimate claim to the

lands and nautical heritage of the Black Sea. Recall here the importance Russia has placed on its ties to ancient Greece via the Crimea, a pattern strengthened in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Kelly and others have noted, since Russian archeologists were not allowed to travel freely to Greece to carry out research, many of them turned to the rich archeological sites of the Crimea, both to further professional activities in the field of Classical and Archeological Studies, and to boost a sense of connection between Russia and the Classical world, which also brought Russian scholars into the fold of European intellectual inquiry and achievements.<sup>29</sup>

Ulitskaia acknowledges this role of the Crimea, and a further significant element of her Medea's Greek heritage, which draws a negative contrast with her Georgian heritage, is the Greeks' renown as sailors. Sea-faring skills are a noted trait of the Sinoplies living in the Crimea, which just happens to have been Russia's link to the greater Mediterranean, not to mention home both for Russia's Navy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and currently for its Black Sea Flotilla.<sup>30</sup> While Greeks have plied the Black Sea since time immemorial, the Georgians, in contrast, have never enjoyed a reputation as sailors. Traditionally, they do not look on the sea as a beckoning expanse: the Georgian word for the sea, "zghva" (ზღვა), shares its root with the word for border, limit, bound: "zghvari" (ზღვარი). Although the Georgians have enjoyed living on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, they have not traditionally used the sea to cross to other lands. Rather, others have come from afar to invade their shores and coastal cities, from Dioscuri (present day Sukhumi), to Bathys (now Batumi), places built up by invading imperial forces, whether Greek, Roman, or Ottoman, but which do not figure as a core part of the Georgian national identity.<sup>31</sup> Though this may seem an overly dogmatic interpretation of

this particular trait of Ulitskaia's Medea, Chiladze, in *A Man Walked Down the Road*, exploits the trope of the dangers brought by the sea, of the shore as the site where waves of invading armies enter ancient Colchis, destroying its Eden-like countryside. Ulitskaia is not the first to sense the importance of keeping Russia's ties to Greece centered in the Crimea, to hold on to the sense of entitlement and ownership of those lands and the sea which surrounds them.

Although Medea is introduced as a scion of the ancient Greeks, she is not without her own ethnic mix, and how this mixture is described raises questions about what Ulitskaia ultimately believes is the best blood to be maintained in Russia's genetic pool. As noted above, Medea is from a family of Pontic Greeks on her paternal side, and this is what Ulitskaia most emphasizes and praises. However, on her maternal side, Medea is very Georgian: she inherited her coppery red hair from her mother Matilda, from Batumi, and received her name, Medea, from her mother's sister, details of whose life she chooses to hide from the rest of the family and of which we learn only later in the novel as the family's "scrupulously kept secrets" (183) ("неразгласимые тайны") (150) are slowly revealed. Batumi, of course, is currently Georgia's main port, and the capital of present day Adjara, home to the resorts of Kobuleti and Kvariati near the current Turkish border. Batumi is also located just south of the Rioni River, in ancient times called the Phasis, the river up which Jason and the Argonauts sailed to capture the Golden Fleece, somewhere in the vicinity of Vani, a town that was most likely a religious and political center of the eastern Black Sea area, the homeland of ancient Colchis.<sup>32</sup>

Despite this geographical connection with her character's mythological namesake, Ulitskaia diminishes the status of both of Medea's maternal forebears. Her mother, when

first introduced, provides a vitality to the Greek line that was about to die out, but it is a vitality tinged with a hint of transgressive sexuality which could have resulted either from female licentiousness or rape, or a combination of both: “Or perhaps his [Harlampy’s] son’s fecundity came from the scrawny redheaded bride, Matilda, whom he had brought from Batumi and who entered the house already scandalously with child...” (6) (“А может, многоплодие его [Харлампия] сына шло от рыжей, тощей невестки Матильды, привезенной им из Батума, вошедшей в их дом скандально непорочной...”) (8). Matilda is also the source of the coppery red hair that highlights the uncontrolled sensuality inherited by some of her offspring, playing off stereotypes of Georgians as unbridled and passionate, ignoring the reality of more conservative Orthodox Georgians. Further, Medea’s Georgian mother is described as kind, but unworldly and close-minded, especially when compared with her daughter who marries a Jew and befriends Tatars in the Crimea:

Redheaded Matilda, a good Christian in every respect, was zealously Orthodox, had no time for Muslims, feared the Jews, and had an aversion for Catholics. Her views on sundry Buddhists, Taoists, and the like are not known, if indeed she had ever heard of them. (18)

Рыжая Матильда, добрая во всех отношениях христианка, истовая православная, недолгоблывала мусульман, боялась евреев и шарахалась от католиков. Неизвестно также, что она думала о прочих буддистах и даосах, если о таковых слыхала. (17-18)

This description links the clearly Georgian Matilda with a more nationalistic, narrow-minded strain of Orthodoxy, which contrasts negatively with Medea’s more tolerant Crimean strain.<sup>33</sup>

Further denigrating Medea's Georgian lineage, her mother's sister, Medea, is described as a semi-literate barbarian, whose letter describing her husband's drowning, is "written in extremely bad Russian, and signed with the Georgian name Medea," (183) ("написано... на очень плохом русском языке и подписано грузинским именем Медея") (150), and quoted, "... with its spelling and grammar corrected..." (183) ("... с выправленной орфографией...") (150), emphasizing both her illiteracy in Russian, and her role as the wife of failed sailors, unworthy to be acknowledged in a family of Greeks. Ulitskaia further notes: "It was in her honor that Medea had received her own name, which was unusual among Greeks." (183) ("Именно в ее честь и получила Медея свое, столь необычное для греков, имя...") (150). While these negative traits are narrated in a cursory fashion, scattered in the novel like breezy tidbits of history, they build upon each other, and rather than creating a sense of positive tolerance for ethnic differences that existed in pre-Soviet and Soviet Russia, seem to denigrate them. Rather than celebrating ethnic differences or erasing old stereotypes, Ulitskaia, with her fictive genealogy, ends up reinforcing an image of the Georgians as undereducated barbarians who muddy the Greek bloodlines, and are unworthy to participate further in the genetic lineage. This is an image that has come down in Western culture from Euripides' original play, written at a time when Athens was trying to secure its own ascendancy over the Asian forces on the eastern edge of the Greek empire: Ulitskaia in re-writing her Medea betrays a similar vulnerability that insists, perhaps too much, on the enemy's negative otherness.<sup>34</sup>

Insisting on Medea's distance from her Georgian forebears, Ulitskaia clearly wants to separate her Medea from the mythic Greek character as well, referring to the

mythic Medea only once, and even then only to dismiss her significance. Describing a trip Medea takes to the sea with her family, Ulitskaia makes a point of telling us that her Medea is a current, Crimean iteration, known only to the local population:

...these coves and the rocks in the sea had had their names changed on many occasions, but in recent decades it had become increasingly common to refer to them as “Medea’s.” At first they had been given the name by Medea’s young relatives. From them the new name was adopted by the postwar settlers, and subsequently also by other people they didn’t know, who, if they had heard of a Medea, knew only the other, mythical one. (79)

И бухточки, и морские камни пережили множество имен, но в последние десятилетия их все чаще называли Медеинными. Сначала их так окрестила Медеина молодая родня, от них переняли это новое имя послевоенные переселенцы, а следом и другие незнакомые люди, если и слышавшие о существовании Медеи, то о другой, мифической. (66)

Ulitskaia pointedly lets us know that she is creating a localized, Crimean Medea, far from her Euripidean incarnation. In addition to barbarically killing her children, Euripides’ Medea was also a gifted herbalist, and it is this trait that Ulitskaia definitely appropriates for her own figure, creating an image of a very local Medea, a fit steward of her Crimean lands, far removed from her mythic home:

For local people Medea Mendez had long been a part of the landscape.

When she was not sitting on her stool in the white frame of the registration window, her dark figure was to be seen out on the eastern hills or on the rocky slopes to the west of the Village. She was not strolling idly but gathering sage, thyme, mountain mint, barberry, mushrooms, and rose hips, and she did not neglect the carnelian, the layered and structured

rock crystal, or the dark antique coins with which the dull soil of this minor arena of world history was brimming.

She knew the region near and far like the inside of her own buffet, and not only remembered when and where a useful plant could be picked, but also noted to herself how the green mantle was gradually changing over the decades....

She could feel the goodness of this land through the soles of her feet. (4-5)

Для местных жителей Медея Мендес давно уже была частью пейзажа. Если не сидела она на своем табурете в белой раме регистратурного окна, то непременно маячила ее темная фигура либо в восточных холмах, либо на каменистых склонах к западу от Поселка.

Ходила она не праздно, была собирательницей шалфея, чабреца, горной мяты, барбариса, грибов, шиповника, но не упускала также и сердоликов, и слоистых стройных кристаллов горного хрусталя, и старинных темных монет, которыми полна была тусклая почва этой скромной сценической площадки всемирной истории.

Вся округа, ближняя и дальняя, была известна ей, как содержимое собственного буфета. Она не только помнила, где и когда можно взять нужное растение, но и отмечала про себя, как с десятилетиями медленно меняется зеленая одежда....

Своими подошвами она чувствовала благосклонность здешних мест. (6-7)

Although this picture of Medea as a gifted herbalist and naturalist may be positive and alluring, it is not one that belongs only to the Crimea. Rather, the Georgians have a long tradition of seeing Medea as a healer. In Greek mythology, she is the niece of Hecate, also from Colchis, and an herbal healer par excellence; and contemporary Georgians take great pride in this heritage.<sup>35</sup> Many of Medea's positive traits are found in Chiladze's novel, written in 1973, and which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter V.<sup>36</sup> Ulitskaia's Crimean Medea also appropriates another noted Georgian national trait, viticulture: not only is she familiar with the location and use of all of the local herbs, she also keeps her



private vineyard well tended, in marked contrast to the vineyards around her that have been destroyed by the Soviets (13,19).

While Ulitskaia appropriates for her Medea key traits Chiladze attributes to his Georgian Medea, Ulitskaia's portrayal of Medea tries to separate those traits from their Georgian roots. Whether or not Ulitskaia has read Chiladze's novel, it seems an act of injustice and slightly less than tolerant to create an image of Medea that circumscribes her domain to the Crimea, remaking her into an iconic Russian Greek, limiting her Eastern roots to the hills east of her native village; to appropriate only the positive traits, erasing and hiding the Georgian precedents and connections, finding in Medea's immediate female forebears an ancestry shameful for its ignorance and scandal, rather than the glory of her mythic dimensions, or the positive traits the Georgians themselves are wont to see.

### **Politics, History, and the Nation: Religion, Soviet Power, Re-writing History**

In many ways, Ulitskaia has created a thoroughly Russian, Soviet Medea, one who professes not to be interested in politics, but has maintained a strong yet flexible Orthodox faith in the midst of the Soviet strictures against religion, a faith which has helped her survive the vicissitudes of the Soviet years. A seeming model of selfless perfection, she is even called a "holy fool"<sup>37</sup> by her brother, the only person who speaks to her in Pontic Greek. Her ties to the Greek mother-lode, her ancient lineage, seem to excuse her from becoming involved in the politics times in which she lives, yet if you listen to her asides, she is anything but disinterested in politics; seemingly neutral, she reveals her own prejudices in quiet one-liners that can, on cursory reading, be easily

dismissed. This combination of seeming indifference to the politics which rage around her yet leave her alive, if not unscathed, is captured in the first paragraph of the novel:

The other Tauride Greeks of Medea's generation had either died or been deported, but she had lived on in the Crimea by the grace of God, as she supposed, but partly no doubt also because of the Spanish surname bequeathed by her late husband, a jolly Jewish dentist... (3)

Таврические греки – ровесники Медеи либо вымерли, либо были выселены, а сама она осталась в Крыму, как сама считала, по Божьей милости, но отчасти благодаря своей вдовьей испанской фамилии, которую оставил ей покойный муж, веселый еврей-дантист... (5)

Medea is protected by her Orthodox faith, which however much it gives her strength and shields her from the harsh realities of ethnic deportations and other Soviet injustices, also causes her to turn away from active involvement in politics, and to re-write certain elements of Russian and Soviet history.

Indeed, in the middle of a family argument about politics, Medea gets up abruptly to go to bed. Her favorite nephew, Georgii, criticizing Masha for her progressive politics, defends Medea: "For you, everything evil in the world comes from Soviet power... What does power mean to her? She's a believer, a different authority stands over her. And never say again that she's afraid of anything." ("У вас все мировое зло – советская власть... Что для нее власть? Она верующий человек, другая над ней власть. И не говори никогда, что она чего-то боится...") (43).<sup>38</sup> This allegiance to a "different authority," which could be interpreted as God, but also perhaps as pre-Soviet, Orthodox Russia, combined with her selfless devotion to her family and to her work as a nurse, allows Medea to help others where she can without endangering herself, as if shielding herself from complicity in the events unfolding around her.

Protected by her religion, she is free to comment silently to herself and to her bosom friend, Elena, about the destruction and death that surround her, and to assert her “different” authority, and yet her seemingly courageous acts and thoughts are tinged with a sense of self-protection. For example, at one point she stands up to the police who have come to arrest a young man, Ravil Usupov, who has knocked at her door, a descendent of one of the local deported Tatar families and an activist eager to help the Tatars return to the Crimea. She spends an evening with Ravil, at his request recording their conversation about what life was like in the Crimea before the Tatars had been deported. Recounting this incident in a letter to Elena, she criticizes Soviet rule, yet casts the local politicians as Soviet, but with human sympathies: a local Party boss was “crying buckets” (10) (“плакала в три ручья”) (11) while helping the Tatars pack their bags before being taken away, and suffered a stroke the following day. She also recalls the destruction brought by the Soviets, especially the razing of an old hazelnut grove planted by the Tatars: “... we sat and cried, watching that barbaric bonfire.” (11) (“... мы сидели и плакали, глядя на этот варварский костер.”) (11-12) When the Soviet authorities, two young men, arrive at her gate ostensibly to check for illegal guests, incensed at their impudence, Medea asserts her older, local authority: “... how dare you burst into my house at night... I have a guest, and let them go wherever they like, just don’t disturb me till morning.” (11) (“...как ты смеешь в дом ко мне ночью вламываться? ... у меня гость, и пусть они отправляются куда им будет угодно и до утра меня не беспокоят.”) (12). Ravil quickly throws the tape with their conversation into the fire, to protect Medea from trouble; and she remembers when, as the sole medical practitioner during harsher times, she had lanced furuncles in the young officers’ ears. Ravil and Medea do what they can

in the face of the very real Soviet authority, and sit up all night, she reminiscing, and he listening intently to her stories. The police are polite enough, or awed enough by Medea's alternative authority to leave them in peace for a few hours: parking their car at a respectful distance, they wait till dawn to take Ravil away.

This scene shows a moment of defiance, but also softens and diminishes so much of the horror of the Soviet purges. Medea's sense of a "different authority," which here also includes an Eastern sense of protecting a guest in her house, alters the officers' behavior for a few hours, but does not erase the full horror of what they are about to do. Ulitskaia's emphasis on Medea's humanity is curious, showing the moral ambiguity of those who were not taken: Medea knows full well what is going to happen in the morning, and even offers Ravil some supplies for the road, which he refuses, knowing the authorities "will take them away" (12) ("отберут") (13). Her attitude towards him is kindly and tolerant, but also patronizing, as he does not blame her for the politics of the times, but instead praises her, diminishes the reality of what awaits him in the morning, reassuring her about the transience of political systems and the permanence of his belonging to his native lands:

But my young Tatar boy, Ravil, smiled peacefully: "Thank you, Medea Georgievna, you are an unusually courageous human, and rarely do you meet such people. It's a pity that you won't be able to show me either the valleys, or the eastern hills tomorrow. But I will come here again, the times will change, I'm sure." (12)

А мальчик мой татарский, Равиль, улыбается спокойно: "Спасибо, Медя Георгиевна, вы необыкновенно мужественный человек, редко такие встречаются. Жаль, что вы мне не покажете завтра ни долины,

ни восточные холмы. Но я сюда приеду еще, времена переменятся, я уверен.” (13)

She walks Ravil to the gates of her property, where the authorities are waiting with their car doors open. Reflecting on the event, she does not express any anger or desire to have helped him more, but is willing to trust to the greater forces of history and God. Her sense of justice at this point is limited to thinking that she might at some time give Ravil back the hat he has forgotten: “Perhaps... the Tatars will come back, and I’ll be able to return his hat. It would be no more than simple justice. Well, God’s will be done.” (12) (“Может,... вернутся татары и отдам я ему шапку-то? Право, это было бы по справедливости. Ну, как Бог рассудт.”) (13). Despite her kindness at letting Ravil in and sharing her memories, is Medea really such a courageous, marvellous person? Knowing what awaits Ravil in the morning, why doesn’t she suggest that he flee in the night over the hills? Would she have taken the heat, lost her job, perhaps herself have been taken away? Ulitskaia’s portrayal of her Medea as tolerant, here in particular, begs the question about the complicity of citizens who claim to be disinterested in politics.

Part of Medea’s seeming holiness and innocence also comes from the naïveté and romantic coloring of her perception of Crimean history. Further in her letter to Elena about Ravil’s visit she notes that Ravil has asked her for a “secret favor: to buy him a house in the Crimea, but in my name, because apparently houses can’t be sold to Tatars. There is a special government decree on the matter which dates back to Stalin’s time.” (11) (“И тут он мне высказал свою тайную просьбу – купить ему дом в Крыму, но на мое имя, потому что татарам, оказывается, домов не продают, есть на этот счет специальный указ от сталинских еще времен.”) (12). She seems ignorant (“because apparently”) (оказывается) of what would have been obvious laws, and villainizes

specifically Stalin-era treatment of the Crimea. While Medea is thus cast as a liberal, tolerant, caring individual who remembers history (“Thank God my memory is still good.”) (11) (“Память у меня, слава Богу, еще хорошая...”) (12), she nonetheless seems to have forgotten earlier episodes in the history of the Russian Empire, such as the mass deportations of the Circassians in the Caucasus, and other episodes in the colonialization of Southern Russia.<sup>39</sup> She rhapsodizes on the beauty of the Crimea, idealizing the Tatars:

Do you remember, Elena, what the Eastern Crimea used to be like when the Tatars were here? And Central Crimea? What orchards there were in Bakhchisarai? And now as you travel the road to Bakhchisarai, there’s not a tree to be seen: they’ve flattened them all, destroyed the lot. (11)

Помнишь, ли, Еленочка, каков был Восточный Крым при татарах? А Внутренний? Какие в Бахчисарае были сады! А сейчас по дороге в Бахчисарай ни дерева: все свели, все учичтожили... (12)

In mentioning the name Bakhchisarai, Ulitskaia invokes Pushkin’s poem, “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai,” written in the time of Russia’s active conquest the Crimea, which was anything but peaceful; when Russian armies carried out a scorched earth policy in the Caucasus under General Ermolov, cutting down entire forests.<sup>40</sup> The tone of her letter, however, is one of utter praise, allowing no hint that there might be complex attitudes towards Russia’s 19<sup>th</sup> century campaigns, or anything objectionable to Pushkin’s right to have been in Bakhchisarai writing his poem in the first place. She sees no similarity between Soviet and Russian imperial actions in the Crimea and the Caucasus, but villanizing the former, romantizes the second.

She further evokes the romantic conquest of Russia's southern lands, alluding to the story "Tamara" in Lermontov's *A Hero of our Times*: "Once upon a time, a hundred years ago, there had been a road here which the local smugglers had used to ferry their precious goods out through the coves..." (77) ("Когда-то, сто лет тому назад, тут была дорога, по которой здешние контрабандисты переправляли через эти бухты свои драгоценные товары...") (65). Although Medea comments on the existence of corrupt officials in both tsarist and Soviet times, "... their descendants had either been deported or become bureaucrats, first in the old tsarist council, then in the district soviet, exchanging one form of criminality for another." (77) ("... а потомки их либо были выселены, либо сделались чиновниками, сначала в управе, а потом в райсовете, то есть стали заниматься другими видами бандитизма.") (65), the crime here is one of petty smuggling, not the wholesale deportation of people and the destruction of the natural world. In evoking these two great authors of Russia's 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pushkin and Lermontov, Ulitskaia seems to be drawing a line: it is tolerable to criticize corruption as a universal human weakness, and to fault Stalin's deportations of the 40's, but not to attack Russia's long, difficult, and continuing conquest of the Caucasus. Medea may remember history, but it is selective, and betrays a privileging of imperial Russia.

Ulitskaia does not limit Medea's re-envisioning of history to the Crimea and the Caucasus, but has her exhibit a similar bias in Uzbekistan as well, furthering yet another myth of the extent and inclusiveness of Russian Soviet power. That same bosom friend, Elena, an aristocratic Armenian, had married Medea's brother, Fyodor, for protection during the revolution. The couple subsequently moves to Tashkent where they raise their own harmonious, ethnically mixed family. (Their daughter marries a Korean man).

When Medea visits them after Samuel's death, (after discovering his affair with her sister, Alexandra), she notes that all traces of Uzbek culture had completely disappeared, and that Tashkent had become thoroughly Russianized. This portrayal of Tashkent is limited, at best. Medea, for all of the cosmopolitanism and mixed ethnicities in her family, and although she mentions that she had not taken the time to go to the old section of Tashkent, fails to recognize that the very dwelling in which Elena and Fyodor live, with its several smaller houses surrounding a garden, the raised platform in the center for drinking tea, and an outdoor stove, is a traditional Uzbek structure. Houses of this sort were still in use in the early 1990's, and certainly would have been in use in the 1950's when Medea visited the city.

Further, Medea attends the Russian Orthodox Church in Tashkent, but fails to look beyond her Russianized environs. Wrapped in a bubble of her own Orthodoxy, she observes that the only people in the church are old women, not unlike herself and Elena. But if she had looked around her at all, beneath the surface of that Soviet Tashkent, she could easily have seen more signs of the Islamic land in which her family members were living. Again, as late as 1990, there were many signs of traditional Uzbek and Islamic culture to be found in Tashkent: intact mosques and madrassas, well maintained and staffed museums of ethnic arts and crafts; an entire neighborhood filled with traditional homes, in which books of Uzbek authors stood next to the collected works of Marx and Engels.<sup>41</sup> Ulitskaia, creating her late-20<sup>th</sup> century Medea, gives her blinders that erase the evidence of ethnic diversity beneath the smooth Soviet surface and the happy family of nations. Her Russian Crimean Medea, though seemingly tolerant and accepting, is still only able to see what her Russianizing eyes allow her to recognize. Portrayed as an icon



of unity, she fails to register ethnic differences that were actually encouraged during the Soviet period, only to emerge as nationalism in the years since the break up of the Soviet Union.

It is only at her death that Medea acts to help restore some of the wrongs done in her lifetime. Yet even then, Ulitskaia, in seeking to have her iconic figure right at least some of the wrongs of the Soviet empire, again asserts her characters' sense of Russia's superiority over its subject ethnic nationalities. In her will, Medea leaves her house to Ravil, the young Tatar whisked away at dawn, whose family had been deported even before Stalin's time. Again, Medea's sense of history is cited as a cause for her magnanimity, in contrast to her fellow Crimeans who are of a generation that has forgotten the longer history of the Crimea, when it did not belong to Russia. Her generosity and sense of justice are contrasted starkly with her relatives and neighbors' disbelief at her actions, and only Georgii, who has long desired to leave Moscow and move to the Crimea, understands, and eventually goes out of his way to help Ravil claim the house. In yielding up Medea's ramshackle house, however, Georgii does not relinquish his Russian superiority over the Tatars, but reasserts his Russian Greek superiority, in an episode which I discuss in further detail at the end of this chapter.

### **Further Repudiations: Stalin, the Caucasus, and Medea's Georgian Family**

As Ulitskaia has her Medea rewrite the histories of the Crimea and Uzbekistan, allowing Georgii to inherit Medea's Crimean lands, another major legacy to deal with in post-Soviet Russia is its specifically Stalinist heritage, a vexed question, to say the least. Donald Rayfield has commented on the lingering tensions and trauma:

In the USSR, neither the shooting of a dozen of Beria's men, nor Nikita Khrushchiov's twentieth Communist Party congress speech of 1956 brought the Soviet population face to face with the realities of the past...Despite all the revelations in ten years of perestroika, Stalinism remains a deep-seated infection in Russia's body politic, liable to flare up at any crisis.<sup>42</sup>

While Ulitskaia is fairly consistent in having Medea express anti-Soviet sentiments in multiple asides, she is less sanguine about condemning Stalin outright, and instead expresses her characters' anti-Stalin sentiments cautiously, presenting both pro and con, couched in a characteristic Soviet sense of black humour. She does, however, or at least her characters do, seem to project any negative judgment of Stalin, as a man from the Caucasus, directly or indirectly onto other Georgians.

Not only does Ulitskaia co-opt and deracinate Medea from her Georgian roots, but she also has her characters denigrate other Georgians in the novel, all seemingly guilty or tainted by association with "the Great Leader." Stalin's connection to Georgia, despite his efforts to equalize the various republics in the Soviet Union, was, and is not easy to erase.<sup>43</sup> Stalin, born to a Georgian mother and Ossetian father, was born Iosef Jugae, and added -shvili ("son of") to his name to make himself sound more Georgian.<sup>44</sup> But to the general public he was seen as ethnically Georgian, and as leader of the Soviet period helped usher in the spread of supposed Georgian, or generalized Caucasian, culture to Moscow, enjoying evening supras, the lengthy feasts overseen by a *tamada*, or toastmaster, and cultivating the taste for Georgian cuisine. He also brought with him a Georgian clan-like network that came to dominate the political and cultural life of the

Soviet Union, including Sergo Ordzhonikidze, and Lavrenti Beria, who rose to head of the NKVD, and is currently held largely responsible for the terrors of the Stalin Purges. And, while building the Soviet Union, Stalin did not treat all republics equally: favoring his dacha outside of Sukhumi, currently in Abkhazia, then part of Georgia, Georgia came to enjoy the position of favored Republic, its culture and influence flourishing as it became one of the Soviet Union's wealthiest republics. That Stalin, relying in the early days of the Soviet Union on the Abkhaz leader, Nestor Lakota, declared Abkhazia an autonomous region, angering Georgians, (and helping to fuel some of the conflicts seen in the region today), did not deter others from thinking of him as Georgian, through and through.<sup>45</sup>

But, while elements of Georgian or Caucasian culture may have become widespread and even enjoyed in the Soviet Union, the wider population felt a troubled and ambiguous response to the Great Leader: from guarded adoration, to fear, and abhorrence. Ulitskaia, of course, is not alone as a late-Soviet Russian expressing distaste for the Sovietized Russia cultivated by Stalin.<sup>46</sup> Georgians, too, as will be seen in Chiladze's novel, are not fond of tyrants, but have been more reluctant to denounce Stalin. As a favored son of Georgia, his statue was removed from the main square in Gori only on June 25, 2010, under cover of night, and not destroyed but moved to the grounds of the Stalin Museum, one of the most well tended museums in contemporary Georgia that charges by far the highest entrance fees, and has a ready supply of English speaking guides.<sup>47</sup>

Ulitskaia's condemnation of Stalin takes on a passive-aggressive tenor: she presents a balanced response to Stalin's death, but has little patience with or sympathy for

other Georgian characters. Indeed, she articulates a certain amount of tolerance towards some of the Soviet Union's other minorities in the Caucasus and Russia's greater sphere of influence, for example, when her heroine in *The Transparent Line* hires a Chechen domestic helper, and in *Medea and her Children* Butonov, a healer, cures victims of Russia's Afghan War. However, while reminding her readers indirectly of the atrocities perpetrated in those two lands at the hands of the Russian army, she is less liberal and understanding in her treatment of Georgia. As if blinded by hatred of Stalin and his process of Sovietizing Russia, she does not see Russia's aggression against that country; nor does she, although writing in 1996, even hint that Georgia could possibly be independent of Russia. She acknowledges the presence of Caucasian culture in Soviet life, but dismisses its importance for her characters' personal lives: she speaks disparagingly of other Georgian members of Medea's family; and show's Medea drawing a clear line between Stalin and her family, juxtaposing the larger social trauma brought about by his death with a moment of her personal self-discovery that enfolds her within the Russian Orthodox faith, contrasting the Soviet power structure with her own, alternative, Russian Orthodox authority.

Although Medea has mixed Greek and Georgian heritage, when Samuel Mendez decides he must marry Medea, he courts her by appealing to her Georgian side, and their courtship demonstrates an ambiguous attitude to elements of Georgian and Caucasian culture brought in during the early years of Stalin's power. Dressing to take Medea to dinner where he will make his marriage proposal, Samuel puts on a "Caucasian belt" to hold up the trousers that envelop his skinny Jewish body. For the dinner itself, he invites her to his favorite place, called simply the "Caucasian restaurant" (61) ("ресторан

'Кавказ") (54), where, consuming lavash and *chakhokhbili* (a spicy chicken and tomato stew) with thick kvanchkara wine, he finally proposes. Curiously, it is here that Samuel thinks about Medea with her "classical Greek profile" ("древнегреческим профилем") (54), and reflects on the difference between the orthodox simplicity of her upbringing and his revolutionary youth. Medea has imbibed the good manners from her Greek heritage; he, the Bolshevik revolutionary, has none, implying that the Caucasian restaurant, the highest form of culture he has experienced as a Soviet citizen, can only be inferior to Medea's more noble culture: indeed, the *chakhokhbili* turns sour in his mouth when he notices how crudely he eats (54).

Samuel's proposal consists of revealing why he needs to marry Medea. He feels no passion for her and actually prefers plump, Russian women, but her presence calms the hysteria he suffers from having been traumatized as a Red Army officer during the grain requisitions. Although Medea finds the evening delightful, the Caucasian accoutrements are foreign to her, and she is touched by Samuel's quirkiness rather than impressed by his display of supposed high Soviet culture. She is not convinced that her ability to calm his Soviet-induced trauma is sufficient reason to marry him, and tells him he must wait for her answer, which comes only after he proves his affection on her own terms, nursing her through a mysterious flu she contracts immediately after the proposal. The sequence of events suggests that the very contact with the clear symbols of Georgianized Soviet culture causes Medea to fall ill, and only after Samuel has proved himself to be a fit part of her culture, nursing her for an entire month, using her teas and herbal remedies, does she agree to marry him. The Caucasian elements prominent in their courtship, the restaurant, the food, and the belt were intended to impress Medea, not

to become part of their daily life, and do, in fact, disappear from their shared life in Medea's Crimean home.

As for the Leader himself, Medea draws a clear line between Stalin and her family, emphasizing Stalin's power of coercion, penchant for illegal activities, and apparent indifference to the consequences of his actions:

As for the Great Leader, the family had long had a bone to pick with him. Well before the Revolution, in Batumi, he had turned the head of her aunt's husband Iraklii, and landed him in a thoroughly unsavory episode involving a bank robbery from which he had to be extricated by his family putting together a very large sum of money. (210)

Что же касается великого вождя, то за ним числился давний семейный счет. Задолго до революции, в Батуме, он сбил с толку тетушкиного мужа Ираклия, и тот попал в неприятнейшую историю, связанную с ограблением банка, из которой вытянула его родня, собравши большие деньги. (173)

Again, Medea's sense of history, while hinting at real events, is not as accurate as it could be. Ulitskaia's Medea paints Stalin's criminal activities as having nothing to do with the Revolution, while in fact, Stalin committed at least one robbery to support the Democratic Socialists in the early stages of the Revolution.<sup>48</sup> Skewing history in this way, Medea is able to distance herself and her family from Stalin's activities. Yet, while to Medea this family history seems like "... the distant echo of someone else's life..." (211) ("... отдаленным гулом чуждой жизни...") (173), it is nonetheless very personal, begs the question of who Medea will admit belongs to her family, and defines her relationship to the political power structure of the Soviet Union; while she can separate her family from Stalin, hoping to keep him clearly outside the bounds of her extended

clan, it is best to criticize him through the distance of time. Portraying this caution, Ulitskaia paints an ambiguous picture of Medea's complicity in trying to deny historical realities of her times: is Stalin, or is he not part of the Georgian family? Does distancing herself and her family from Stalin lessen her complicity?

Ulitskaia's treatment of Stalin's death, filled with a posturing of indifference to political power that belies deeper concern, is further striking for how she relates Stalin both to Medea's family and to the Russian people as a whole. Stalin dies while Medea is en route to visit her friend in Tashkent, and Ulitskaia's narrator comments on the mourners, reflecting on Medea's tolerance of all points of view, and on Stalin's role as *pater sovieticus*:

Her present traveling companions, individuals who collectively constituted the Russian people, were now loud in their anxiety, fearful of their future as orphans, weeping; others, unspeaking, were quietly rejoicing at the tyrant's death; but all of them had now to resolve things in a new way, and to learn to live in a world which had changed overnight. (211)

Теперешние дорожные попутчики, эти отдельные люди, образующие народ, теперь громко тревожились, боялись своего сиротского будущего, плакали, другие, молчаливые, тихо радовались смерти тирана, но и те и другие должны были теперь что-то решать заново, научиться жить в изменившемся за одну ночь мире. (173)

Able to acknowledge that not everyone appreciated Stalin equally, she suggests that Medea's "traveling companions" ("попутчики»), all those who had survived the purges and other terrors, still have to deal with Stalin's death, a decisive event that will shift politics and invariably impact their lives.

Medea, herself, is far from immune to Stalin's death, and experiences a sense of change similar to that of her "fellow travelers," but which in her case aligns her even more closely with her Orthodox faith. Visiting Tashkent to deal with a supposedly personal problem, her response to Stalin's death is to plunge into Orthodoxy, taking on the role of Ulitskaia's particular version of the "holy fool." Intending to seek comfort from her sister-in-law Elena for her recent discovery of her husband's infidelity, she instead finds her own brother has fathered an illegitimate son, of whom he is extremely proud. When they discuss his new progeny in the Pontic Greek that only the two of them can understand, he comments on her fate as well: "Everyone knew, but she is a 'holy fool,' like you and sees nothing,' he said in an unexpected mean and harsh tone." (225) ("Все узнали, а она, святая дура, как ты, ничего не видит, -- сказал он неожиданно зло и горько.") (185).<sup>49</sup> Embracing what is presented as a deeply Orthodox sense of tolerance and forgiveness, she resolves to keep her suffering to herself; neither she nor Elena openly acknowledge to each other their spouses' illegitimate children.

Medea's reaction to Stalin and the sovietization of Russia is further captured by her husband, Samuel, who on his deathbed, while Stalin is still alive, refers to Stalin with wry humor, contrasting Stalin's formulation for the multiplicity of nationalities in the Soviet Union with the alternate reality that Medea has managed to maintain in her interior life. Having come to understand the deeper aspects of his own Jewish faith, encouraged by Medea's example of giving herself over to and living by the laws of the Orthodox Church, he notes:

"National in form," Samuel smiled, paraphrasing Stalin, "and divine in content."

Even now he couldn't stop joking. (189)



“Национальное по форме, -- улыбался Самуил, -- божественное по содержанию...” Шутил по привычке. (155)<sup>50</sup>

Paraphrasing Stalin's motto, “National in form, Socialist in content,” Samuel contributes to the picture of Medea as a sainted figure, strongly suggesting that the laws of religion and Orthodoxy are immune to the vagaries of politics, and that indeed, Medea's Orthodox faith allowed her to live through Stalinist terror and repression, contravening the dictum by which Stalin had tried to reform and restructure pre-revolutionary, pre-Soviet Russia.

As we have seen, Ulitskaia begrudges Medea her mythic background and Georgian namesake, removes signs of Georgian culture from Medea's Crimean home, and rather than criticizing Stalin openly, fills in the gap left by his death with traditions of the Orthodox Church. But Ulitskaia's portrayal of conflicted emotions about Georgians does not stop with Medea, but is found in other characters as well.

Indeed, other members of Medea's family may revel in the relaxed cultural climate of Soviet Georgia, but they do not in the end respect Georgia's older culture, its Orthodox customs, or the Georgian language. One incident in particular displays the havoc wreaked by a Soviet Russian, Medea's niece Nika, visiting Georgia, as well as Medea's seemingly ineffective means of influencing the immorality of her family. Even though Nika shares her aunt's bloodlines, her visit to Tbilisi reminds readers that the cultural circumstances have changed from the days when Elena's generation of aristocratic Armenians ruled that city. Nika, to reiterate, is Medea's niece by her sister Alexandra, and her, Medea's, husband, Sam, the knowledge of which Medea was blissfully and blessedly ignorant until a year after her husband's death. Nika is a niece, but like a daughter as well, and in this family situation Ulitskaia, incidentally, has created a situation that could be from a Greek tragedy, complete with adultery that seems like

incest, which Medea discovers because of her own curiosity, but to which she must then blind herself, as Oidipous in the Theban plays blinds himself so as not to look on the sins of his house.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly part of her aunt's family, Nika has inherited her mother's free spirit, and her personal life is turbulent, to say the least. At one point she takes up with a Georgian actor, and visiting him in Tbilisi has one of her many scandalous affairs. In this particular case we hear about the betrayed wife's reaction, and witness a scene that exploits many stereotypes of Georgians: passionate, partying, creative males; traditional, hard-working females, dressed in obligatory black; and generally explosive, crazy behavior:

She again recalled Nina's account of how Nika had turned the life of a famous actor's family upside down. She had embarked on a wild romance in full view of the citizens of Tbilisi, sparkling, dazzling, chortling, and the actor's poor wife, dressed in black and consumed by jealousy, had rushed around to her husband's friends at night, trying to force her way through closed doors in the hope of catching her faithless spouse in flagrante delicto. Which, in the end, she did. There was smashing of crockery, and people leaping out of windows; there was screaming and passion and a total breakdown of all propriety. (270)

И опять она вспоминала Ниночкин рассказ о том, как Ника переполошила семью знаменитого тбилисского актера, завела шумный роман на виду у всего города, сверкала, блистала, хохотала, а бедная актеров жена, вся в черном, сжигаемая ревностью, носилась ночами по друзьям своего мужа, ломилась в закрытые двери в надежде застать неверного на месте преступления – и застала в конце концов. И была битая посуда, и прыжки из окна, и вопли, и страсти, и полное неприличие. (220)

Interestingly, it is Nina, Medea's niece visiting from Tbilisi, who lets Medea know after the fact about Nika's behavior, and her opinions open a partial window on a Georgian perspective of Nika, a Russian visitor from Moscow: she is indifferent to and destructive of the local social bonds and structures, seeing Georgia as nothing more than a land of unlimited license and sunnier weather. Yet, as a member of Medea's family, living in Tbilisi, even Nina portrays the Georgians stereotypically, as passionate and uncontrolled. Medea, though she notes the difference between the two points of view, is characteristically calm: as the supposed guardian of her extended family, she is safely removed from Nika's outrageous behavior, a saintly contrast to the younger generation. However, there is a tinge of discomfort in Medea's calm and Ulitskaia's use of Tbilisi as a setting for exposing Nika's "evil" behavior. Recalling this episode, Medea comments that she had earlier prayed for Nika: "... protect Nika from all manner of evil. The girl is following a dangerous path, such a good girl, so bright, show her the way, Lord." (270) ("... Ника сохрани от всякого зла, опасно ходит девочка, такая добрая, такая яркая, вразуми ее, Господи...") (220). However saintly Medea may appear, her prayers have not proven particularly effective. And it is problematic why Ulitskaia feels she must use Georgia as a backdrop to highlight Nika's evil behavior, as if scandals like she caused could only happen in Tbilisi, as if similar "evil" did not occur in her home in the Crimea, or in Moscow.

Medea reconnects directly with her Georgian side only near the end of her life, in an episode that plays even further to negative depictions of Georgians, their language and culture. Shortly after Medea retires from her post as a nurse, her Tbilisi niece Nina comes to visit the Crimea; the very day after her arrival, as if Nina had brought with her

an evil Caucasian wind, Medea falls ill with the same illness she had suffered immediately after Samuel's Caucasian-inspired courtship. Nina, however, is a proficient herbal healer, and nurses her aunt for eight days before returning to Tbilisi. For the first time in the novel, we hear of Georgian actually being spoken, but rather than it being included as part of the family, Medea perceives it as a foreign language she doesn't actually need to understand:

Nina helped her up from the pillow, gave her the fragrant drink, and said something, but the meaning didn't quite get through to Medea, as if she were speaking a foreign language: "Yes, yes, Georgian," Medea remembered.

But the intonation was so rich and clear that she could understand everything just from the expressions on Nina's face, the movements of her hand, and also from the taste of the drink. (268)

Ниночка приподнимала ее от подушки, поила душистым питьем, говорила что-то, но смысл сказанного не совсем доходил до Медеи, словно язык был иностранным. "Да, да, грузинский," – вспоминала Медея.

Но интонация была такая богатая, такая ясная, что все понималось из одних движений лица, руки, и из вкуса питья тоже. (218)

In praising the vocal beauty of the Georgian language which can be understood as if magically by the expressiveness of Nina's face, Ulitskaia feeds the assumption that Russian was and should be the universal language of the Soviet Union: others, particularly Georgian, are too difficult, merely a memory of a distant, different past. Ulitskaia's Medea's attitude is a direct slap in the face to those Georgian patriots who believe strongly that the Georgian language is the cornerstone of Georgian culture, and must be maintained if Georgia is going to survive, an attitude which we will see articulated in great detail in Chiladze's novel.

As if these episodes were not enough to convey a negative attitude about Georgians, Ulitskaia adds insult to injury in her portrayal of Medea's relatives who live in Tbilisi, the offspring of her sisters who moved away from the Crimea after their parents' death. As the narrator notes, "... the Tbilisi relatives were a grafted branch of the family." (268) ("... вся тбилисская родня была привитой веточкой.") (218). But the grafting, it seems, has not been successful. The branch has not thrived on the host tree, and produces deformed fruit: it is a branch of the family that couples mental disability and illness with Georgia's own conflicted loyalty to Stalin. One sister, Anastasia, "... had left a son, Robert, who was unmarried and seemed to be slightly touched in the head. Medea had no contact with him." (268) ("... остался сын Роберт, неженатый, кажется, слегка тронутый. Медея с ним никогда не общалась.") (218). While Medea will help her Lithuanian relatives who have a disabled child, holding that child lovingly on her lap, stroking his head and neck when they visit her in the Crimea (241), she has no such sympathy for her Georgian nephew, who is never shown to visit her.

Her second sister, Anelya, is married to a Georgian whose family is portrayed even less positively. Like Medea, Anelya has no children of her own, but with her husband adopted his niece and nephew, Nina and Timur, after their parents were arrested in 1937 during the height of Stalin's purges. Despite a blood relationship, Ulitskaia's description demonstrates little sympathy or family feeling for the imprisoned parents:

Lado's brother Grigol and his wife Susanna were an absurd and unhappy couple: he was a fervent champion of a fair trade deal for traditional craftsmen; she was the city's madwoman, with a penchant for Communist

Party work. (268)

Брат Ладос Григол и его жена Сюзанна были нелепой и несчастной парочкой: он – пламенный борец за кустарную справедливость, она – городская сумасшедшая с партийным уклоном. (218-219)

Indeed, Lado had been a functioning member of Soviet society, who, “... a musician and professor at the Tbilisi Conservatory... had nothing in common with his brother, whom he had hardly seen since the mid-1920’s...” (268) (“... музыкант, профессор Тбилисской консерватории... не имел с братом ничего общего и не общался с ним с середины двадцатых годов.”) (219), and was presumably equally distant from the politics that had caused his brother and his sister-in-law to be imprisoned. Within the family structure, however, they are obliged to adopt the two young children, although raising these “neglected children” (268) (“запущенные дети”) (219) hastens their deaths. Nina’s biological mother, Suzanna, returns from exile in 1957, four years after Stalin’s death, a date which is presumably understood, but not brought to the readers’ attention. Suzanna, it turns out, was further deformed by her years in prison: “... [she was] completely demented. Nina was a young woman by then, and had a much loved stepmother replaced by her natural mother, a one-eyed harpy full of spite and paranoid devotion to the Leader.” (269) (“... [она была] совершенно безумной. Нина, уже молодая женщина, получила взамен любимой мачехи родную мать, одноглазую гарпию, полную злобы и параноидальной преданности вождю.”) (219). Ulitskaia’s attitude here is full of contradictions. Unlike Medea’s previous criticism of the Soviet system and her sympathy for victims of Soviet purges in the Crimea, when talking about the Georgian relatives, she praises those who live quietly within the bounds of Soviet society but displays no sympathy for the victims of Stalin’s purges. She evinces little or

no sympathy for the fact that Stalin's purges affected Georgians as well as Russians. And curiously, she exhibits little understanding or tolerance for the fact that despite the horrors, Georgians might indeed feel deeply conflicted about Stalin and his legacy: he is, after all, a native son, and while he committed great evils, he was also the supreme ruler of Russia, leading the Soviet Union to victory over the Germans in World War II. National pride runs deep, as Ulitskaia herself seems to understand when it benefits her Russian Greek lines. While Ulitskaia's sympathies seem clear in the Crimea, she seems far more conflicted when describing Medea's Georgian relatives.

When we meet Nina in the Crimea nursing Medea, she has been looking after her own mother for twenty years, and the structure of the family has come to resemble that of the larger Soviet family, and the Russian Empire. Nina has learned some positive skills from her Georgian ancestors, such as her knowledge of herbal medicine. But the goodness she attempts to bring with her is tainted by the seemingly inescapable inheritance of her country's intimate relationship with Stalin, one that has driven its natural inhabitants mad and diminished her own role as a healer, who in turn infects the "better" parts of the Union: after Nina returns to Tbilisi, Medea is not completely cured, but still has to apply her own, Crimean remedies.

The role the Caucasus and Georgia play in the novel speaks directly to Russia's attitude towards Georgia: it had become such an important part of the Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its integration was taken for granted in the 20<sup>th</sup>. That Stalin hailed from Georgia and ruled the Soviet Union as supreme leader for close to three decades bolstered the sense of the Caucasus as an integral part of Russian territory. This novel, written in 1996, however, for all of the inclusiveness depicting the Soviet Union as a large, happy

family, ignores the issue of Georgia's long struggle for independence from Russia, treating the Georgian family as second class, a grafted branch. Though Ulitskaia will hint of dismay at the wars in Chechnya and Afghanistan, and suggest that the Lithuanians never really cared about being part of the political structure of the Soviet Union, ("Lithuanians have always taken their smoked sausage, eels, and beer more seriously than meetings of the Communist Party, that's for sure." (50) ("Для литовцев все же колбаска копченая, угорь, пиво всегда поважнее партсобрания, это уж точно.") (43), this novel avoids depicting any hint of Georgia's desire to be independent and sovereign. In terms of family politics, it is as if Georgia and Russia, in the course of the past two centuries, have become a dysfunctional family, with Russia and or Russians unable to see Georgia as a separate country, and its people with their own identity; it is perhaps, then, the pain of separation, of redefinition, that is a large part of what we see played out in the current politics and literature, and what informs much of Ulitskaia's portrayal of her Medea and the Georgians in her extended "happy" family.

At the end of the day, the novel also begs the question of Ulitskaia's idea of tolerance: does she express a Russian tolerance that includes Georgia in the greater Soviet family, while hating it for having given birth to Stalin, who helped bring Russia into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, creating a new Soviet culture, while destroying old Russia?<sup>52</sup> Or Georgians' tolerance for Russian occupation of their lands, and destruction of their culture?<sup>53</sup> I am not sure that Ulitskaia or her ardent supporters would welcome such question about her claims to promoting liberalness and tolerance, and yet it seems that a close reading of the novel reveals just how difficult it is to eradicate deep-seated prejudices, especially racial ones involving the politics of the Stalinist legacy. Rewriting



the myth of Medea for her post-Soviet audience, however, Ulitskaia not only deals with the lingering Stalinist legacy, gently probing psychic wounds, but also turns her attention to the more clearly Russian members of her extended family, both those who emigrate, and those who remain in the Crimea and Moscow, closely connected with traditions of Russian culture, especially literature and theatre.

### **Who Inherits the Land: Russians, Tatars, and the Illusion of Pagan Pleasures**

Shortly after describing Medea's Tbilisi relatives, Ulitskaia turns to Medea's more immediate family and to the dramatic love triangle that results in the suicide of the young poetess, Masha, the inheritor of the Russian intellectual heritage, and possibly Ulitskaia's most closely autobiographical figure in the novel.<sup>54</sup> Setting the stage for Masha's suicide, describing those who stay in post-Soviet Russia, and others who emigrate, Ulitskaia articulates concerns about the borders of the new Russian empire, and how Russians relate to the West, and to different ethnic groups; once again, Classical references are interwoven in her depictions of empire.

While Medea is the figure in Ulitskaia's novel whose ancient Greek ancestry is most easily identified, (deprived though she is of the mythical Colchian aspect of her character), other major characters are also connected with the pagan world, and populating Medea's world as quasi-pagans, they help give it its moral and ethical shadings. A sprinkling of Classical references that at times seem essential and at times gratuitous reflect political, emotional and metaphysical issues Ulitskaia's late-Soviet characters face as they confront corruption in the Soviet body politic; and the choice of emigrating to the West, or staying in Russia, loyal to Russian traditions. It is thus worthwhile to look in

greater depth at Georgii, who inherits Medea's home; and others, in particular Nika, Masha, and Butonov, to understand more fully who it is Ulitskaia portrays as inheriting the Crimea and post-Soviet Russia. These late-Soviets are still ethnically mixed, but in addition to Medea's specifically Greek blood, Armenian, Tatar, and Slavic traits are clearly privileged. Georgians and Georgia continue to be denigrated: although the Georgians are listed as one of the many "tribes" in the epilogue, they have been marked as evil, and as seen above, are essentially deprived of direct bloodlines to the family tree.

As the personal lives of Ulitskaia's characters unfold against the backdrop of 20<sup>th</sup> century history, their moral and political lives are intertwined with their sexual, and the "sexual politics" encompass not simply the battle of the sexes, but a complex expression of competing religious and political systems, as Ulitskaia explores the limits of political and sexual promiscuity within Russian Soviet lands, broaching old questions about Russia's identity, and its relationship with Western Europe.

The exuberant sexuality of Medea's family is attributed in part to post-World War II Soviet culture, as Medea comments that she doesn't understand the younger generation's behavior, in which she notes a lack of seriousness: she describes young mothers visiting her house with their children, lovers arriving in the absence of spouses; and the divorces, remarriages, and sharing of children and step-children that ensue (53) (45). However, as high Soviet times fade into the late- and post-Soviet era, the rampant promiscuity also calms down, and those who survive in the Crimea and post-Soviet Russia find a way of regulating their sexual and emotional turmoil: they settle down to traditional lives, embracing traditions of Russian culture that date back to the time of the Mongols. Those who do not, emigrate or die. Masha, touched by a quasi-pagan desire to embrace

the co-existence of both rational and irrational, commits suicide on the eve of her departure to America; her husband and son emigrate without her. Her sensual aunt Alexandra, once over fifty, marries a stolid woodworker who, raised an Old Believer, insists that she, like Medea, has lived the life of a saint. Georgii, a pagan who embraces Russia's Tatar heritage in the Crimea, settles into his new home with a woman of distinctly Slavic blood.

Although Ulitskaia has been praised for her celebration of female sexuality, the rampant promiscuity that affects many characters in *Medea and her Children*, is, in the end, portrayed as a destructive force of the Soviet system; although it seems like a desired and natural human freedom, when unregulated, it spells the destruction of the very system that gave it birth and the people who engage in it. While open expression of sexuality in the Soviet era was taboo, eros, as ever, was still a force to be reckoned with, and continues to be one of the issues Ulitskaia grapples with in post-Soviet times.<sup>55</sup> In exploring the forces of human desire and irrational passion, Ulitskaia engages with lessons learned from the Classical world, both from Homer's *Odyssey*, and Euripides' plays. One of the lessons of Euripides' plays, especially *The Bacchae* and *Hippolytus*, is that if you suppress erotic energies, specifically female, or treat them with disrespect, they have the potential to destroy: Hippolytus is dragged to his death beneath a chariot after he refuses the advances of his step-mother; Pentheus is torn limb from limb by the Bacchantes after he has forbidden their practices in the city, and yet spurred by curiosity, spies on their secret rites they still hold. And Euripides' *Medea*, par excellence explores the destructive force of passion: Medea, the Colchian princess, in her love for Jason kills her brother and betrays her homeland; when Jason's desire for political alliance turns his passion towards

Chrysiyas, the young Corinthian princess, Medea murders her two young children, Jason's sons, as well as the princess. For avenging her husband's betrayal, however, Medea is not punished by Euripides, but is transported like a goddess, *ex-machina* to Athens, where she is accepted by the polis. Called upon to help cure Athens' king of infertility, her skills as an herbalist remain intact, and her sense of moral outrage at Jason's behavior seems to be forgiven. But this part of Euripides' play is not what is best remembered; rather, Medea's passion, and her acts of betrayal and vengeance are the staple elements of her fame.

Invoking Medea and other Classical figures, Ulitskaia engages with larger questions of human behavior. Importing pagan mores into the framework of Russian, Orthodox culture, she seems to be searching for workable models for post-Soviet Russia; referencing Classical figures, both specific and generally identified, she also seems to use the Classics awkwardly, to add luster, a veneer of grandiosity to her characters.

Thus, the celebration of female sexuality for which Ulitskaia initially gained a certain notoriety is actually quite complex, and in the final analysis paves the way to confirming aspects of Russia's patriarchal spiritual and religious traditions, including a trend towards mystic striving to overcome the mind/body binary, and the tradition of *dvoeverie*, a form of religious practice that reflects both Orthodox Christian and pre-Christian pagan beliefs. Ulitskaia strategically exploits Medea's Greek heritage, blurring the lines between Classical, Pontic, and Orthodox: if the "alternative authority" to which Medea answers is a reincarnation of imperial, Orthodox Russia, her Greek heritage helps legitimize older Russian traditions which might seem basically immoral in another Christian culture. Interestingly, the women who are most flagrant in their pursuit of sexual pleasure are more inclined to the West, and wreak havoc on their Slavic sisters;

despite the daring expression of female sexuality in this family chronicle, male erotic power is in the end privileged over female. For all of the veneer of Medea overseeing a happy extended family, the battles of the sexes, culture, and religion are far from over in post-Soviet Russia.

Despite, or perhaps because of Medea's Orthodox faith, her selfless devotion to her extended family and unquestioning loyalty to her husband, she is nonetheless a witness to erotic energies that surge through her extended family. Although Medea tries to accept the rampant promiscuity of her Soviet times with an Orthodox understanding of the vagaries of human nature, she herself is a victim of it, and contributes to the ongoing licentiousness in her family that is masked as freedom and the triumph of her Greek lineage. Indeed, her treatment of the immoral behavior of her Soviet world seems in part legitimized by her ancient Greek heritage, reinforced by multiple references to quasi-Classical elements, tragedy and epic. Ulitskaia, however, unlike Saltykov-Shchedrin who used figures from Greek tragedy to denounce the transgressions of his age, Ulitskaia is more circumspect in her criticism, seemingly unwilling to admit the "barbarity" of her Soviet Russian characters.

Indeed, Medea's acceptance of illicit human passion and of her own humiliation leads her to be called a "holy fool," and reflects an immoral core of her extended family that appears to be justified by her Greek heritage. As mentioned above, Medea learns after his death that her husband, Samuel, the object of her unwavering loyalty had an affair with her younger sister Alexandra and was the mysterious father of her favorite niece, Nika, whose name recalls that of the Greek goddess of victory, Nike. Medea is crushed by

her discovery, and the next day takes off to visit her friend and her brother, Elena and Fyodor, in Tashkent, imagining herself to be even greater than the epic hero, Odysseus:

Standing at the bus stop with the rucksack on her shoulders, Medea felt herself a second Odysseus. Probably, indeed, even more heroic, since Odysseus standing on the shores of Troy, while not guessing that it would take him many years to return home, did at least have a fairly good idea of the distance separating him from home. (201)

Стоя на остановке автобуса с рюкзаком за плечами, Медея ощущала себя не менее чем Одиссеем. Вероятно, даже более, поскольку Одиссей у берегов Трои, не догадываясь о многолетнем времени, которое понадобится ему для возвращения, достаточно точно представлял себе расстояние, отделявшее его от дома. (164-165)

This characterization of Medea as Odysseus is startling, and seems trite or gratuitous, verging, perhaps, on an awkward parody. Ulitskaia, however, proceeds to use the comparison to rewrite Homer's epic, belittling Odysseus and his famous return to Ithaca: he was only an adventurer who "... did not pass up any opportunity to delay his return, mostly just pretending that his ultimate destination was the crude habitation in Ithaca called a king's palace and the embraces of his aged and domesticated wife." (201) ("... вовсе не упускал возможности отсрочить свое возвращение, больше делая вид, что цель его -- грубое жилище в Итаке, называемое царским дворцом, да объятия престарелой и хозяйственной жены.") (165) Diminishing the Homeric sense of Ithaca's grandeur and Penelope's noble spirit, she in turn elevates the significance of Medea's Crimea, even describing it with the Greek term, "oikomenos:" "Arriving... in Kerch, she found herself on the frontiers of her oikomene, which had the ancient Pantikaepia at its easternmost point." (202) ("Приехав... в Керчь, она оказалась на границе своей

ойкумены, древняя Пантикапея была ее самой восточной точкой.”) (165)<sup>56</sup>

Transforming a seemingly off-hand reference into a loaded comparison, she suggests that Medea’s journey, her longest time away from her home in the Crimea, is a nonetheless a personal odyssey that allows Medea to become a model of a Russian Odysseus, who gains an understanding both of her self, and of her country’s history: the trip comes just days after Stalin’s death, and as Medea rides first a freighter and then a train to Tashkent, she relives, albeit with the distance of time, the travels of many peoples who were subjected to forced migrations around the Soviet Union, but which she herself had been spared.

In Tashkent, specific allusions to Medea as a heroic Greek warrior disappear, but she gains the bitter glory of a being “holy fool,” and confirms even more deeply her faith in the Orthodox Church. As mentioned above, rather than finding sympathy from Elena, she discovers that she is not alone in having been made a fool. Elena and Fyodor have living with them an “adopted” son, who is in fact Fyodor’s son by a Russian woman working at his research station. Medea, amateur geneticist that she is, recognizes family traits in the young Shurik: his curly hair, and the foreshortened little finger on his left hand. When Fyodor asks Medea how she likes the latest addition to the family tree, he speaks in the language only the two of them understand, Pontic Greek, with its roots in ancient pagan Greece (223) (183). With the cruelty of both Greek tragedy and an eastern Pasha, he lets her know that the entire family has known about Samuel’s affair, and that life goes on despite these small personal traumas. She assumes Elena knows the truth about Shurik, but she and Elena never discuss the fact of their illegitimate children: ignorance is a large part of their holiness and their bliss. Faced with this reality of

illegitimate children she must continue to love, Medea notes that life within the Church is the only way for her to lead her life (224) (184).

Medea, reconciled to this small tragedy, returns home to live the rest of her life in perfect loyalty to Sam, actually feeling as if she grows closer to him spiritually over time. She assigns no guilt to her husband, but instead blames her sister Alexandra for the act of betrayal, and cuts ties with her for 25 years. Nor does she see the proverbial sins of the fathers in the children. Instead, she feels a palpable, almost incestuous closeness to her husband through Nika, as if it were not so bad being a member of a quasi-harem. She seems reconciled to human folly, and caressing the copper-haired Nika who has just returned after a late night tryst, reflects: “She liked Nika’s head: her hair is just as springy and slightly crackly as Samuel’s.” (134) (“Она любила Никину голову: волосы ее были такими же пружинистыми и чуть трескучими, как у Самуила.”) (111). Medea’s reaction suggests a contrast between her Eastern Orthodoxy and the westernized, Euripedean version of her Colchian mythical forebear: it seems to be part of her Orthodox Greek heritage that men will have the freedom to scatter their seed wherever they like, living in knowing, silent triumph, while the women suffer in silent acceptance of their situation. Her reaction is totally unlike that of Euripides’ Colchian Medea, the westernized model of confrontation of betrayal. Ulitskaia’s Medea’s does not attempt to take revenge on Nika, but accepts her, rejoices in her presence and tolerates her profligacy, and even sees something divine in the expression of male sexual energy, even though it contributes to Masha’s destruction.

As one Russian critic has noted, Medea, Alexandra, and Samuel’s relationship is repeated in a parallel love triangle that emerges in the younger generation between Nika,



Masha, her cousin who is raised as a sister, and their shared lover, Butonov.<sup>57</sup> Although the characters of this second generation do not share Medea's specific mythic dimension, they are associated with their own Classical references and reflect many troubles plaguing the Soviet system and Soviet mentality, including Ulitsakaia's vacillation between one loyalty to Russian Orthodoxy, and another to Western models of behavior and systems of belief. The Classical references used are often inconsistent and confusing, and this slippage suggests that Ulitskaia herself feels conflicted about those models. Like Bitov, she is drawn to the clarity they are supposed to represent, but finds them incompatible with her system of belief, unsuited to express the realities of her late- and post-Soviet Russian life.

As noted above, Nika's name recalls that of the Greek goddess of victory, and she indeed is triumphant in her triangle, which ends in Masha's suicide just a few months after she discovers that Nika and Butonov have had a parallel affair that started just 24 hours before her own affair with Butonov. Yet this younger threesome does not simply form a love triangle, but triangulates as well the intertwining forces of personal, intellectual, and artistic expression within the Soviet political system. The two women, though equally part of Medea's family, are almost polar opposites. Nika's Greekness, although genetically linked to Medea's, is quite different: she is a pagan incarnate, flamboyant and purely physical, accepting of her self and her physical desires; possibly the unspeakable pagan underbelly of Russian Orthodoxy that is projected onto transgressions allowed by the Roman Catholic West: when she matures, she moves to Italy, settles down with a rich, fat Italian, and takes delight "... when relatives from Russia come to visit her in her luxurious house in Ravenna." (310) ("... когда в ее богатый дом в Равенне приезжают

родственники из России.”) (252). In contrast, Masha, a sensitive Soviet intellectual and poet whose maternal grandfather is a well-connected general, is married to a gifted Jewish scientist who after her suicide will emigrate to the US to gain his moment of academic glory at MIT. Masha, however, seeks spiritual and emotional fulfillment with the athlete turned healer, Butonov, who with near divine stamina when it comes to pleasing women, and whom Masha calls a centaur in one of her poems, spurns the idea of leaving Russia, and finally settles down with his phlegmatic Russian wife and their three children.

Although scholars have commented on Ulitskaia’s daring writing about female sexuality, in this novel male erotic energy surges as well, and verges on being a quasi-divine force in the figure of Butonov. The combination of Classical references Ulitskaia uses to describe him, however, confounds any logical sense, and thus seems to reflect her own confusion about how the Classical models fit into her Russian Soviet context.

Butonov is cast as a pagan god, as a kind of Zeus, but one who in his dual role as lover extraordinaire and god of healing, is also a centaur who trained Apollo. He is someone who should perhaps be sensitive to the art of poetry, but who, blinded by the force of physical pleasure, actually helps to destroy Masha, failing to appreciate the poetry she writes to him about the mystic union of the spiritual and material she experiences in her relationship with him. He is also the one character who, as a gifted healer, comes closest to being compromised by the Soviet system. A masseur to elite Soviet athletes and ballerinas, he gains all the wealth and independence he could desire: he earns good money, travels to Prague, and he enjoys many of the privileges of the Community Party elite such as access to theatre tickets and special restaurants. Despite these benefits, his proudest achievement is helping a circus colleague regain his ability to walk after being

caught physically and metaphorically in the nets of circus politics. Skillful and intuitive with his hands, he is so dense, or indifferent, that he does not recognize that his mentor, Pseudo-Ivanov,<sup>58</sup> on the surface a gifted teacher “imbued with teachings of Eastern wisdom that were then coming into fashion...” (117) (“Он знал толк в восточных единоборствах, которые тогда входили в моду...” (96), is a government informer who wore the “invisible epaulettes” (“погоны невидимые”) (97) of the secret police.

Butonov, intellectually, spiritually, and politically dense, but intuitive and physically gifted, is cast as a kind of pagan god, or a parody of one. A talented knife-thrower in his youth, he becomes a gymnast who enjoys all of the perks of the Soviet system, then an acrobat, before eventually becoming a healer. After discovering women, he likens his physical and amorous gifts to flashes of the divine, taking on the aura of Zeus hurling a lightning bolt:

From then on, Butonov never refused a woman. He knew that miracles don't happen, but if you kept on the edge of the possible, at the limit of your concentration, then here too, in the physical depths themselves, lightning strikes and everything is lit up, and that same feeling flares within you of a knife hurled at a target, which shudders and dies right there in its heart. (128)

С тех пор Бутонов женщинам не отказывал. Знал, что чудес не бывает, но если пребывать на грани возможного, на пределе концентрации, то и здесь, в самом телесном низу, пробивает молния, и все озаряется, и вспыхивает то самое чувство – нож, направленный в цель, вздрогнув, замирает в самой ее сердцевине... (106)

Although Butonov's “discovery of women” reads like soft pornography (125-126) (104-105), the presence of which can perhaps be explained as artistic freedom of expression in the early 1990's,<sup>59</sup> Butonov is also given the qualified dignity of a Classical athlete:

A physical giftedness, so much admired in the classical world, and just as rare as musical or poetic talent, or a talent for chess, became apparent in Butonov. He didn't know that the modern world rated his talent lower than intellectual gifts... (103)

В Бутонове открылась античная телесная одаренность, столь же редкая, как музыкальная, поэтическая или шахматная. Но тогда он не знал, что его талант ценится ниже, чем дарования интеллектуальные... (85)

Although isolated within the bubble of his Classical gift, he does understand its value in his Soviet society, and his near divine status provides Ulitskaia with an opportunity to critique the Soviet system of corruption and favoritism. She uses a clichéd Classical reference, but does equate Olympian heights with a divine realm of freedom, so lacking in the Soviet Union:

... he was profoundly aware that at the very peak of artistry in the Soviet Union, in the zone where you are totally master of your profession, there is a tiny platform of independence. Up there, on the summit of Mount Olympus, were the stars of the circus, who freely crossed frontiers into other countries, and wore unimaginably beautiful clothes, and were rich and independent. (107)

...[он] глубоко понимал, что на вершине мастерства, в пространстве абсолютного владения профессией располагается крошечная зона независимости. Там, на вершине Олимпа, находились звезды цирка, свободно пересекающие границы стран, одетые в невообразимо прекрасную одежду, богатые, независимые. (88)

Following that trite image, however, Ulitskaia also corrects Butonov's innocent perceptions, revealing the double edge to those Olympian heights: along with the

potential freedom, the Party hierarchy was rigid, and ironically, Stalin and other party leaders considered themselves to be divine controllers of the Soviet Union:

The boy had intuited something crucial, although in many respects the circus was exactly the same as other Soviet institutions—the warehouse, the bathhouse, or academe. It had its Party committee, its local committee, its official subordination to superior institutions—and its unofficial subordination to any telephone call from the mystical heights. (107)

В чем-то существенном мальчик был прав, хотя во многих отношениях цирк был совершенно таким же, как прочие советские учреждения – склад, баня или академия. Существовал партком, местком, официальное подчинение вышестоящим организациям и неофициальное – любому звонку с мистического верха. (88)

Striving for the freedom of the gods, Butonov, innocently at first, enjoys the benefits of the Soviet system such as special training, food and clothing, not to mention the promise of that tiny moment of freedom to travel outside the Soviet Union. When he does learn how serious the intrigue can be, witnessing a fellow acrobat plunge to near death in a plotted accident, he decides to become a healer. If he cannot be Zeus, he can perhaps play the role of Apollo; if he cannot change the Soviet system and the Soviet pantheon, he can at least attempt to heal some of its victims; and as a healer, he reflects the wounds of the nation.

When Butonov enters the circle of Medea's family, dressed in tight white pants, a bright pink tee-shirt and a pony tale, he is at his quixotic best, transformed into a Crimean centaur who fits well into Medea's Greek world. He meets Medea's family, literally, leaping down a slope like a mountain goat, possessed of such a divine, radiant energy that when he briefly touches Masha's forearm, she feels the spot burn for hours afterwards and

falls ill that evening. Nika has already marked him as her own, calling him a “Some hunk!” (76) (“Хорош зверюга”) (63), and warning Masha away; but Masha has been touched by his quasi-divine fire, and their triangle begins to unfold in near comedic, yet epic proportions.

The contrast between Nika and Masha, between physicality and spirituality, takes on the dimension of a differentiation between West and East, between European sensibilities and Russian. Nika’s physical sensuality asserts itself as she makes her conquest the first night after she meets Butonov; when Masha confesses her own infatuation with Butonov, irritated at the rivalry, she suggests that Masha “Give him one and calm down.” (171) (“Дай ему и успокойся.”) (140). Masha does not know exactly what her cousin means, but manages to find herself alone with Butonov in town. As they stroll along the street, Masha articulates the distance she senses between her emotional and her physical being in terms of seeing herself in a film, with guarantees of freedom that seem prescribed by a set of cinematic clichés, and because of that, unreal:

Everything took on the expansiveness of cinema and at the same time the flatness of a movie... Oh yes, a movie allowed you to act, allowed easy ways, passion, the bursting of champagne bubbles, he and she, a man and a woman, the sea at night... (173)

Все приобретало кинематографический охват и одновременно кинематографическую приплюснутость....Да, да, кино разрешает игру, разрешает легкость...страсть...брызги шампанского..он и она... мужчина и женщина...ночное море... (142)

Seeing herself with a filmic eye, she draws a contrast between herself and her cousin, emphasizing the differences between a Soviet intellectual with Slavophile leanings, and her idea of a liberal, westernized woman:

Nika you are a genius, you are so gifted, no heaviness of being, no forced striving toward self-cognition, toward self-improvement....Clever Masha, educated Masha, Masha the first in their entire company to begin reading Berdyaev and Florensky, who loved the commentaries to the Bible, Dante, and Shakespeare more than the originals... (173-174)

Ника, ты гениальная, ты талантливая...никакой тяжести бытия... никаких натуженных движений к самопознанию, к само-совершенствованию....Умная Маша, образованная Маша, первая из всей компании начавшая читать Бердяева и Флоренского, любившая комментарии к Библи, Данте, и Шексперу больше, чем первоисточники... (142-143)

This exquisitely educated, intellectual Soviet poetess comes face to face with the elemental force of nature, which happens with a canned cinematic touch and the sordid overtones of a harlequin romance. Her initial tryst with Butonov takes place on a naked hillock, and when it is over, it is as if they are caught in the limelight:

...the air was lit up with a bluish light and every blade of grass was visible. There was no searchlight: high in the sky a round moon was riding, enormous, completely flat and silver-blue....Sorry, the show's over." He slapped her on the hip. (177)

...воздух светился голубоватым светом и видна была каждая травинка. Никакого прожектора не было – посреди неба катилась круглая луна, огромная, совершенно плоская и серебряно-голубая... "Извини, но представление окончено." Он шлепнул ее по бедру. (146)

Butonov returns home to find Nika in his bed, waiting for what duly comes her way.

If a reader is tempted to wonder what has become of Butonov's supposedly divine qualities, Medea's reaction to this promiscuity provides some answer, and gives a nod to the presence of *dvoeverie* in this quasi-Orthodox passion play. When Nika returns at

dawn, Medea is already drinking her morning coffee, and Nika accepts without a qualm that Medea might have seen her return: “Actually there was really no need to try to hide anything from Medea: the young people were always sure she knew everything about everyone...” (179) (“Впрочем, скрывать что бы то ни было от Медеи нужды не было: молодежь всегда была уверена, что Медея знает все про всех...” (147). Medea does not know as much as her young relatives assume, and her confusion is telling. Finding herself awake at two in the morning, peering out her kitchen window, she had seen a naked couple and heard Masha return to the house:

Now, seeing Nika return, Medea was puzzled for a moment: there was, after all, only one young man to go around the entire neighborhood, the athlete Valerii with his iron body and the long, priestly hair pulled back in a pony tail. (179-180)

Теперь, видя вернувшуюся Нику, Медея на минуту задумалась: молодой человек, собственно говоря, был один на всю округу – спортсмен Валера с железным телом и поповской прической хвостиком. (148)

It is as if Medea has witnessed a divine act, but one which draws a curious line between Eastern and Western religions, between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. On the one hand, Medea likens Butonov’s ponytail to that of a priest: in her Orthodox worldview, he is indeed near divine, and there is no shame in the sexual act. Masha, however, boasting to Nika the following morning, emphasizes the cinematic touch of her drama that is inspired by Western influences: “At the Hub! It all happened right at the Hub. Like in an Italian movie. Now we can put a cross there in memory of my unshakable fidelity to my husband.” (181) (“На Пупке! Прямо на Пупке все произошло. Как в итальянском кино. Теперь на этом месте можно поставить крест в память о моей негибавшей



верности мужу.”) (149). She, the Russian Soviet intellectual who has suffered from Soviet repressions, separated from yet striving for the West, needs an image of Western decadence to liberate her from her state of Orthodox purity. The effect of this dual striving, to experience a Western sense of liberation, and yet be Russian in essence, will destroy her. Nika, though chagrined at Masha’s involvement with Butonov, has relatively few moral qualms about her own behavior, and leaves for Moscow the next morning as planned, predicting that Masha will now have fodder for her poetic endeavors. Indeed, Masha’s poetry dominates the last third of the novel, drawing a further contrast between a mystic, spiritual Russia, and a rational, scientific West.

The fallout of this younger triangle, however, happens in real time, with real consequences, and the original divinity of the sexual act is complicated by its fallout – the negative effects on the humans involved – a Classical theme, tragic indeed for Masha. When Masha she discovers Nika’s affair with Butonov, she falls into a rage, while Nika, in contrast, views her own relationship with Butonov with scientific rationality, as something simply “... to be measured in centimeters, minutes, hours, the level of hormones in the blood.” (280) (“... это измеряется сантиметрами, минутами, часами, количеством гормонов в крови.”) (228). Masha reacts with an outpouring of poetry, and in one poem to Butonov includes images from Western culture, but also veers towards a mysticism that bridges the body/mind divide.<sup>60</sup>

Play on, centaur, play on, chimera of two breeds,  
 Burn, fire, along the boundary dividing  
 The human soul and its immortal needs,  
 The stallion, his lusts unbridled riding.

Your destiny it is to mediate, to ferry,  
 To ply shores which forget how close they used to be,  
 And heedlessly you plunge into those waters merry  
 Which care no more than you if you remember me.

Masha Miller. (281)

Играй, кентавр, играй,  
 химера двух пород,  
 гори, огонь, по линии раздела  
 бессмертной человеческой души  
 и конского невзнузданного тела.  
 Наследственный удел – искусство перевоза,  
 два берега лежат, забывши о родстве,  
 а ты опять в поток, в беспамятные воды,  
 в которых я никто – ни миру, ни тебе.

Маша Миллер (229)

With Butonov, Masha experiences a physical, embodied love which defies her esoteric learning: “The heavens were again rent for [her], and the gate into them proved to be not at all in the place where she had diligently and consciously sought it, leafing through Pascal, Berdyaev, and the cinnamon-scented wisdom of the East.” (236) (“... небеса опять разъялись, и ворота в них оказались совсем не в том месте, где она трудолюбиво и сознательно их искала, листая то Паскаля, то Бердяева, то пропахшую корицей восточную мудрость.”) (193). Despite his impressive physique, Butonov comes to Masha at night like a god, squeezing in through the window, and “... filled all of Masha’s body and soul with his being, and departed at dawn, leaving her each time immersed in a tingling sensation of the newness of her whole being and of renewal of her life.” (243) (“... заполнял собой... все Машино тело вместе с душой и уходил на рассвете, оставляя ее каждый раз в остром ощущении новизны всего существа и обновления жизни...” (199). When he leaves the Crimea to return to Moscow, she

comments after one last visit that he left, “The way gods depart. As if he had never existed.” (245) (“Как уходят боги... Как будто его никогда и не было...”) (200).

The purpleness of Ulitskaia’s prose and the glib use of Classical references may make it difficult to take these characters and their experiences seriously, but their clichéd erotic experiences are intertwined with serious issues about emigration, the suppression of late-Soviet writers, and a Russian writer’s need to stay in Russia to maintain his or her spiritual heritage. Masha is clearly well versed in the traditions of Russian and Soviet literature, and as an adolescent in the 1960’s reads Andrei Siniavsky in samizdat copies, and both listens to Joseph Brodsky and reads her own poetry at unofficial gatherings (253, 257) (207, 210). She cites include Rozanov and Daniel Kharms as other influences on her poetry (257) (210). She eventually becomes reconciled to her love triangle, claiming that Butonov “has united them [her and Nika] now in some mysterious way” (286) (...он соединил их теперь каким-то таинственным образом) (233); and finds comfort that their situation has a precedent in Cherneshevsky’s 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian work, *What Is to Be Done? (Что делать?)*: “And she smiled thinking about utopian Chernyshevsky and the grand brothel in one or other of the dreams of his heroine in *What Is to Be Done?* “ (286) (“И сама же улыбнулась: великий бордель Чернышевского, какой-то там сон Веры Павловны.”) (233). In Ulitskaia’s presentation, Masha, in her mind and in her work, participates fully in Russian culture.

As she prepares to leave for America with her brilliant husband, Alik, Masha begins to suffer what her husband’s friend, a psychiatrist, after her suicide will call “an acute manic-depressive psychosis” (304) (“... маниакально-депрессивный психоз в острой форме”) (247). This psychotic breakdown intensifies with the approach of her

departure from Soviet Russia, manifesting itself in mystical visions and an outpouring of lyric poetry. While her husband is frightened of her poetry, Masha believes it is precisely her poetry that bridges the divide between rational and irrational: “In her case, however, the realm of poetry lay between medicine and mysticism, and there she was the ruler.”

(295) (“Но в ее случае между мистикой и медициной пролегло поле поэзии, на котором она была хозяйкой.”) (240). One Russian scholar, studying Masha’s verse into the context of Russian poetry, finds allusions to Bruisov and other symbolists.<sup>61</sup> Her suicide is also clearly symbolic: unlike her husband, the rational scientist, who is eager to leave for America, she, the poet, cannot leave Russia and survive.

And indeed, Masha’s poetry and suicide play a crucial role in giving the novel its pro-Russian slant and confirming various characters’ loyalty to Russia. At Masha’s funeral, Medea and her estranged sister Alexandra are reconciled: despite personal betrayal, Medea finally remembers that her sister, who has settled in Moscow with her stolid Russian husband Ivan Isaevich, is the dearest person to her on earth, and she can not understand what has kept her away from her sister for twenty five years. Even Butonov, who perhaps should feel partially responsible for Masha’s suicide, is exonerated, and his role is that of a priest who attends a necessary sacrifice. Faced with Masha’s imminent departure, he voices understated support for Russia: “Forever? Well, of course, you’re right, Masha, quite right. Life here is crap compared to the West, I’ve seen that. But forever...” (291) (“Навсегда? Вообще-то правильно, Маш, правильно. Жизнь у нас хреновая по сравнению с западной, я повидал. Но навсегда...”) (237). Although never fond of her poetry, when faced with losing her “forever,” he forsakes his other lovers to spend time with her, hastening her madness, which descends like an angel

visiting her to teach her about other realms; the freedom she had found in an Italian movie was a mere prelude to a more real, spiritual sense of freedom:

Masha experienced a superhuman freedom and an unearthly joy...

which came from regions and spaces the angel had revealed to her...

she intuited that the extremes of pleasure she experienced when she was

closest to Butonov derived from the same root and were of the same nature. (294)

Нечеловеческую свободу и неземное счастье Маша испытывала от этого нового опыта, от областей и пространств, которые открывал ей ангел...она догадывалась, что запредельное счастье, переживаемое ею в близости с Бутоновым, происходит из того же корня, той же породы. (240)

In the angel's absence, she talks to the "almost non-existent Butonov" (294) ("почти не существующему Бутонову") (240) in "miserable monologues" (294) ("тоскливыми монологами") (240) that are highly symbolic of the mystical eternity she is poised to enter: "So dazzling, the light of Tabor daunts us, but far harder to gaze upon the disk whose empty blackness taunts us through all the following days." (294) ("Фаворский свет нам вынести едва ли, но во сто крат трудней – пустого диска темное сиянье всех следующих дней...") (240).

Shortly before Masha's suicide, as Butonov's passion for her mysteriously increases, one of Masha's most intense mystic experiences occurs simultaneously with the linked promiscuity of sex and politics. Nika, advising Butonov to stay out of Soviet politics, quotes Samuel, her own father and Medea's husband:

...I had a close relative, a Jewish dentist, who put it splendidly: 'In my heart I love Soviet power so much, but my body just won't react to her.'

If you take this job, you will have to spend all your time cuddling that body. (299)

У меня был один близкий родственник, еврей-дантист, у него была

чудесная шутка: 'Душой я так люблю советскую власть, а вот тело мое ее не принимает.' А ты на этой работе все время будешь ее за тело тискать... (243)

Nika's advice for Butonov to distance himself from Soviet politics coincides with Masha's deepest experience of spiritual intimacy with Butonov and Nika. After Nika gives Butonov the astute political advice they head off to Rastorguevo, Butonov's dacha, and Masha, suffering intense insomnia, experiences a moment of clairvoyance, having a vision one moment of her dead parents, the next of sliding, in spirit, to join Nika and Butonov, seeing Nika's smile and running an unnoticed finger down Butonov's chest. Her sense of clairvoyance is strong enough to penetrate Nika's consciousness, and Nika asks Butonov to return her home, finally breaking off their relationship. Moments later, invited by the angel and compelled by a demon, Masha jumps to her death.

Although Ulitskaia insists that she writes about personal experience on a level removed from politics, moments like this seem to suggest otherwise: her characters, including extended members of Medea's family, are never far removed from the context and conditions of their country's politics and culture. The political problems and cultural conditions of the country cause moral and emotional suffering that is visited on the people.

In Masha and her fate, symbolically linked with the fate of Russia and its culture, Ulitskaia addresses a seemingly eternal question: how to define the difference between Russia and the West. Beginning with a western-inspired experimentation with sexual freedom she admires in Nika, Masha crosses over to a different realm of sexual energy enjoyed by Medea's brother, her husband, and Butonov, and which is tinged with the divine. She comes face to face not only with an erotic energy she cannot handle, but also with an equally destructive clash of two cultures. It is as if the sexual and spiritual

freedom she wants to experience as a kind of melding of body and soul, inspired in part by Western culture (“it was just like an Italian film”), confuses and destroys her. She would have done well to have heeded the words of Anna Akhmatova:

With closest friends there is a secret line...

Passion and love can't cross it or deny it....

Those who strive for it are mad...And those who

Gain it are stricken by anguish and yearning.

Есть в близости людей заветная черта,  
ее не перейти влюбленности и страсти....  
Стремящиеся к ней безумны, а ее  
Достигшие – поражены тоскою..<sup>62</sup>

Masha, however, disregards the boundaries between self and other, body and soul, West and East, and pays the price.

It is as if Masha, caught between two systems of thought, her own, tortured Russian intellectual soul and Nika's, Butonov's, and her husband's easy acceptance of Western mores, is crushed as a sacrificial victim whose death makes others' decisions easier, and reflects on the course of post-Soviet Russia. Her husband Alik and their young son emigrate to America; Butonov returns to his Russian wife, dedicating his medical gifts to healing victims of the Afghan and Chechen wars; and Nika eventually takes her westernized spirit abroad, settling in Italy with an Italian husband. Although the Soviet Russian Orthodox church refuses to give Masha a proper funeral, Medea finds a Greek Orthodox priest who will administer the rites. Masha's funeral becomes a celebration reuniting the family, as Medea forgives her sister Alexandra, wondering how she could have allowed the rift between them over a simple, single act of sexual transgression, and she finally hears news of her long lost brother who, also harking back to earlier roots, had

avoided the Soviet era altogether, becoming a hermit on Mt. Athos (305) (248). The significance of Masha's suicide is complex. As the death of Ulitskaia's most autobiographical figure in the novel, her death becomes a catalyst for all the various ways in which Russians come to terms with their complex post-Soviet reality.

It is interesting to think of Tarkovsky's most autobiographical film, *The Mirror*, completed in 1975, a year before the events of *Medea and her Children* unfold, and his quotation from Pushkin's 1836 letter to Chaadayev about Russia's history, its isolation from Western Europe, and his decision never to leave Russia.<sup>63</sup> Ulitskaia seems to echo this sentiment: her Russia, its religion and culture are different from Western Europe's. Although her characters may have the names of Classical characters, such as Medea and Nika, or are likened to Odysseus, a Mycenaean princess, a centaur, or even Zeus, these suggested resemblances seem strained and confused. Her characters, like Bitov's, may think they are acting out events perceived in Western films, but these characters and their actions do not make full and coherent sense in their Soviet Russian context; they are still at their core Orthodox and Russian as they continue to populate the post-Soviet Russian Empire. Thus, despite her supposed tolerance and liberality, writing the novel in 1996, Ulitskaia seems to have caught the wave of anti-Western feelings that were flowing back into Russian culture in the late 1990's, following the first intoxication with Western culture after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>64</sup> The question remains, who rides in on this wave to further populate Medea's supposed utopian Crimean realm?



### **After Masha's Suicide: St. George and Beyond**

Of Medea's immediate family members and those who intermingle by sexual involvement, her favorite is Georgii, the nephew who will move permanently to the Crimea, leaving Moscow, his mediocre career as a geologist, as well as his first wife, an engineer who is a solid part of the Soviet structure. It is almost too obvious to mention, and heavy-handed on Ulitskaia's part, but he shares his Orthodox name with St. George, patron saint of both Russia and Georgia; and he clearly chooses the Russian side. As the relative Medea has chosen to be her successor, Georgii has many desirable traits: he is a pagan, feels at home in the Crimea with its Tatar heritage, has the right genetic mix, with Greek and Armenian blood predominating, and chooses as his second wife the mild-mannered Nora from St. Petersburg who thrives with an infusion of southern sunshine and carefreeness. And, his suitably anti-Soviet sentiments combine with a desire to reclaim the land for its rightful historical heirs, i.e., himself and his family:

He loved looking at this land, with its weathered mountains and its rounded foothills. It had been Scythian, Greek, Tatar, and although now it was part of the Soviet farming system and had long been languishing, unloved and slowly dying from the ineptitude of its masters, history had not forsaken it but was hovering in this blissful springtime, every stone, every tree reminding him of its presence. (16)

Он любовался этой землей, ее выветренными горами и сглаженными предгорьями, она была скифская, греческая, татарская и хотя теперь стала совхозной и давно тосковала без человеческой любви и медленно вымирала от бездарности хозяев, история все-таки от нее не уходила, витала в весеннем блаженстве и напоминала о себе каждым камнем, каждым деревом... (16)

Understanding Crimean history with its admixture of Scythian, Greek, and Tatar influences, Georgii also loves his ancestral lands, “as one loves a mother’s face, or a wife’s body... forever.” (19) (“Как можно любить лицо матери или тело жены... навсегда.”) (18). Combining these various traits, he presents a picture of an ideal post-Soviet Russian citizen who in his supposed tolerance and acceptance of the native Tatar inhabitants, as mentioned above, will eventually assert his Russian, patriarchal dominance, taking on the time honored role of *pater familias*; or in his Greek guise, the Odysseus of his oikomenos.

Georgii, raised in Tashkent with Greek and Armenian parents, (Medea’s brother Fyodor and her best friend Elena), is a more subtle figure than Medea, but is nonetheless marked as pagan, and the right kind of pagan, a Greek. Ulitskaia takes care to emphasize that Medea calls him “Georgiou... in the Greek way.”(14) (“... Георгию... на греческий лад.”) (14). Nora, who will become his new wife in the Crimea, re-articulates, if rather naively, the old debate about which ancient culture it is better to be aligned with, Roman or Greek. On first seeing Georgii stride along the hilly paths near Medea’s home, Nora comments to her young daughter that he looks like a Roman legionary (21) (20). After encountering him a few more times and feeling a guilty yet domestic erotic confusion when he asks if he can pick up something for her at the market, she changes her mind: “Neither potatoes nor dill had that handsome man brought her who looked, she now realized, not in the least like a Roman legionary, but like Odysseus.” (47) (“Ни картошки, ни укропа не принес ей этот красивый человек, похожий – теперь она наконец додумалась – вовсе не на римского legionера, а на Одиссея.”) (40). The motivation for the change in her description is not explained, but she does reject the image of Georgii

that would cast him as a foreign invader in the Crimea and link him with the metaphorical army of the Soviet Union as the Third Rome. Shortly after this scene, Nika, with her hunter's instinct for sexual attractions, notes that they are a perfect pair: the elemental attraction between them allows her to sense they are meant to live together on Georgii's homestead, as Penelope and Odysseus in their Crimean Ithaca.

Georgii is further marked as a pagan in the way he imparts his knowledge of nature. On a day trip to swim in the Black Sea, a day marked by the erotic energy, "... the languor of love... the subtle stirring of hearts and bodies" (87) ("... любовное томление... тонк[ое] движен[ие] душ и тел")(73), that result in Masha's suicide, Ulitskaia notes:

Georgii, without the least pedagogical intention, year after year gave all the family's children incomparable lessons in the art of survival. He versed the boys and girls in a pagan's exact and subtle knowledge of how to treat water, fire, and wood. (74)

Георгий, вовсе не ставя перед собой никаких педагогических задач, из года в год давал всем детям своей родни ни с чем не сравнимые уроки жизни на земле. От него перенимали мальчики и девочки язычески точное и тонкое обращение с водой, с огнем, с деревом. (62)

Complementing Medea with her knowledge of herbs and plants, Georgii is a pagan who understands the natural world, and is a very suitable choice to carry on Medea's legacy.

In addition to the elemental pagan teachings he has imbibed, he respects Medea's unwritten laws, but is also willing to change them to accommodate his needs. Signaling his unspoken intent to carry on Medea's legacy, he and his son Artyom are the first to arrive for the season of 1976. He is the first and only adult visitor shown to make a pilgrimage the local cemetery, and he arrives with a spade to tidy up the spiritual home of

his ancestors. He also makes the greatest effort to maintain the physical house, thinking twice during the first two days that he should investigate digging an artesian well to replace the old system, enforced by Medea's "inexplicable law," of bringing buckets of water only during daylight from a cistern of imported water; and mentioning that he wants to run a wire from the main house to the summer kitchen so the family can stay up for their late chats by electricity, rather than by candle light. Medea welcomes his suggestions, sensing and sharing the spiritual bond Georgii feels to the Crimea.

Medea's house contains many elements of Tatar culture, and Ulitskaia presents it as only natural for Georgii to retain some of these, while not wholly imbibing the culture. For example, he buys bottles of sweet Crimean wine to supplement Medea's homemade apple vodka, whereas "The old Tatars...wouldn't touch wine." (11) ("Старые татары...вина не брали.") (12). The old water cistern that Georgii wants to replace was built by the Tatars in the late nineteenth century, but is now seen as outdated (37). Although wishing to make changes to the exterior amenities, inside the house he more readily accepts the Tatar influence. Indeed, the house itself is traditional: "The kitchen was constructed of natural stone after the manner of a clay saklya." (21). ("Кухня была сложена из дикого камня, на манер сакли.") (20). And though he was raised in Tashkent, his aesthetic seems almost preconditioned by his Crimean blood: "...with a keen and slightly ascetic eye..." (38) ("...обладающий глазом верным и несколько аскетическим...") (33), he prefers the simple, rustic Tatar copper pots to their Uzbek counterparts, "... with all their lavish craftwork and garrulous Asiatic ornamentation." (38) ("...многоработным, полным болтливое азиатского орнамента.") (33). Last but not least, despite his Greek and Armenian heritage, at home Georgii takes on the

aspect of a traditional Russian aristocrat. Settling into Medea's home, he revives the symbolism of the Tatar robe, a *khalat*, shared with his nineteenth century Russian literary ancestor, Oblomov.<sup>65</sup> On a cool May evening, "he dons a Tatar robe [*khalat*] which had been serving all Medea's family member for many years..." (21) ("... а [он] накинул татарский халат, который уже много лет служил всей Медеиной родне..." (20). The *khalat* Oblomov puts on at key moments in Goncharov's novel signals his return to a state of dreamy slothfulness connected with the Eastern, Asiatic aspects of Russian culture, and his turning away from the Western-looking life in St. Petersburg. For Georgii, the *khalat* signals turning away from his life in contemporary Moscow, and turning towards the traditional ways of life in the Crimea that are shown to be increasingly Orthodox and Russian.

Georgii, the paragon who will carry on Medea's lines, exhibits his own complex genetic makeup and sexual preferences, which curiously align his praiseworthy Armenian and Greek blood with pure Russian, slighting, again, like Medea, his Georgian ancestry. This results in a family arrangement that masks more serious social issues, a microcosm of what were and are more searing political realities. Georgii, interestingly, has more Caucasian blood than many of Medea's relatives, but it is his aristocratic Armenian lines that dominate. His mother, Elena, Medea's bosom friend since childhood, was born into an Armenian aristocratic family and spent her childhood traveling between Tbilisi, Theodosia, and Geneva, where she learned to appreciate finely-made baklava and to speak perfect French. In descriptions of her Armenian childhood, Tbilisi is called Tiflis, the city's older, Persian name, recalling the cosmopolitan, pre-Soviet times when Armenians held most of the city's political and economic power, and the majority of the Georgian

population lived in the countryside either as peasants, or as landed aristocracy ruling over their estates.<sup>66</sup> Her father had been a member of the White parliament in the Crimea and was certainly no Soviet revolutionary. Elena, however, married Medea's older brother, Fyodor, to keep her safe during and after the revolution, hiding her aristocratic lines behind Fyodor's outward compliance with the new Soviet powers. Ulitskaia showers further praise on Georgii's Armenian mother for her positive influence in Medea's family for maintaining her home in aristocratic fashion, even in far-flung Tashkent; and for continuing to correspond with Medea in the flawless French of their adolescent years in the Russian Empire.

Beginning to take an interest in Nora, Georgii reflects on the European Russian traits of her facial structure, and on the music being sung around him, drawing further lines between Russia and Georgia. Unlike others of his generation who adore Bulat Okudzhava, the Soviet bard of Armenian and Georgian heritage who in many of his poems celebrated the beauty of human friendship shared around the warmth of Georgian wine, Georgii distances himself from his influence:

At the time, everyone was singing Okudzhava, but Georgii, unlike the rest of them, did not like his songs. They irritated him with their cuffs and their velvet camisoles, their blues and their gilding, their smells of milk and honey, with all their romantic charm; but mainly, perhaps because they were captivating, and crept into your heart uninvited, and because you could still hear them long afterward and they left a residue in your memory. (130-131)

Тогда все пели Окуджаву, а Георгий, единственный из всех, не любил этих песен. Они раздражали его манжетами и бархатом камзолов, синевой и позолотой, запахами молока и меда, всей романтической прелестью, а главное, может быть, тем, что они были пленительны, против воли вползали

в душу, долго еще звучали и оставляли в памяти какой-то след. (107)

Georgii rejects the songs of the quintessentially Soviet bard Bulat Okudzhava, who, barely tolerated by the Soviet powers, seemed to embrace and pacify the potentially warring ethnicities of the Soviet Union in singing the human sorrows of the Soviet citizens, making their lives seem warmer and more endurable than they were. Although of Armenian and Georgian heritage, he never spoke Georgian fluently, but was nonetheless considered to be Georgian and celebrated aspects of Georgian culture in his songs and poems.<sup>67</sup> It is curious that of all the offspring of Harlampy and Medea, known for their ability to survive the harshest of political times, Georgii alone prefers both material and music with hard structures, such as fossilized seashells and Schubert's *Lieder*. It is as if, in order to be the inheritor of Medea's traditions, Georgii needs to resist the captivating charm, the romantic, Georgian part of himself that Okudzhava projects in his songs.

However, surrounded by the ambiance of the family singing, and, as Ulitskaia suggests, of the inevitable effects of Okudzhava's songs which link yet another Georgian to sexual licence, Georgii succumbs to the erotic stirrings that beset all of Medea's young people. He falls in love with Nora, who, infantilized, is cast as both Germanic and northern Slavic. She has a high, pale forehead, "found in babies and medieval German Madonnas, and this fault made her face seem even sweeter." (130) ("...как бывает у малых детей и у немецких средневековых мадонн, и этот недостаток делал ее лицо еще милей.") ( 107). Georgii notes her Slavic traits, to which he responds sexually:

"She's a real northern girl, and not very happy by all appearances," he mused. "A Petersburg girl. There is an anemic blonde type with transparent fingers, fine blue veins, slender ankles and wrists. Her nipples

are probably pale pink too...” He suddenly felt hot. (131)

“Такая северная девочка, не очень счастливая с виду,” -- размышлял он, -- “петербурженка. Есть такой тип анемичных блондинок, с прозрачными пальцами, с голубыми венками, с тонкими лодыжками и запястьями...И сосок у нее, наверное, бледно-розовый...” И его обдало вдруг жаром. (108)

She, too, feels his pagan heat, but unlike Masha at Butonov’s touch, blushes modestly.

Although Georgii is Medea’s favorite and subject to the erotic energy his aunt observes and seems to condone, Ulitskaia nonetheless subjects him to ethnic stereotyping that dictates his character and behaviour:

From an Armenian mixture of stubbornness and lethargy, but also because he adhered to the mythology of family life instilled in him by his mother, despite the universal acceptance of promiscuity and all the habits of his circle and the derision of his friends, he preserved a grim fidelity to fat Zoyka, but could never remember, no matter how hard he tried, what it was about her that had attracted him fifteen years ago. (131-132)

Из армянской смеси упрямства и лени, а также из-за приверженности семейной мифологии, внушенной матерью, наперекор общепринятой легкости, всем привычкам его круга, насмешливости друзей он хранил угрюмую верность толстой Зойке, но никогда не мог вспомнить, как ни старался, чем же она ему понравилась пятнадцать лет тому назад. (108)

Under the influence of the quasi-pagan Crimea, however, Georgii eventually leaves his Zoyka, a model Soviet citizen, and marries his Penelope, Nora.

It is revealing to see what Nora brings to Medea’s extended family: a touch of St. Petersburg, a shadow of Medea’s skills, and more than a bit of traditional, patriarchal order. A mediocre artist, mild mannered and timid, yet Slavic, Nora is initially drawn to Medea’s family by its seeming normality: “Lord, what incredibly normal human relationships. There’s nobody demanding anything from anyone else, not even the



children,' she sighed.” (86) (“Господи, какие же нормальные человеческие отношения, никто ничего друг от друга не требует, даже дети, -- вздохнула она.”) (70) She finds this normality in particular in Nika’s unconstrained and natural behavior: “She doesn’t think twice about screwing up her beautiful face, contorting it with her fingers...” (86-87) (“Как она бесстрашно мнет свое красивое лицо, растягивает его пальцами...”) (72). While Nora finds Nika’s behavior both “amazing and beyond comprehension” (“удивительно и непонятно”) she is drawn almost involuntarily into Medea’s “tolerant” family, responding, in fact, to Georgii’s role as patriarch and her own traditional role as mother and caretaker.

As she had responded with guilty confusion to Georgii’s earlier offer to shop for her in the village, when they are on the beach amidst the swirling erotic energies, she responds similarly to his taking charge about serving food: “Some more for Medea, please, Nora,’ Georgii said, proffering Medea’s empty bowl... Nora leaned over the pot in confusion.” (84-85) (“Нора, налейте, пожалуйста,' -- протянул Георгий пустую Медеиму миску Норе... Она растерянно склонилась над котелком.”) (71). Nika notices the exchange, and makes her prediction: “They are a couple... a real couple.” (85) (“А они пара... очень даже пара.”) (71). Unlike the freespirted, liberated Nika, however, Nora is a misogynist vision of a submissive Penelope to Georgii’s Odysseus: a pale shadow who first ventures out into the hot Crimean sun in long sleeves and skirt, with a leaf tucked under the bridge of her glasses to protect her nose from the scorching rays. In addition to “giving Georgii two daughters” (310) (“Она родила Георгию двух дочек”) (251), thereby bringing into the family more northern, Slavic blood, she also takes over Medea’s role as herbalist: “Nora has learned to gather the local herbs, and bunches of

drying herbs hang from the walls just as they used to.” (310) (“Нора научилась собирать местные травы, и так же, как в старые времена, со стен свисают пучки подсыхающих трав.”) (252). Taking on Medea’s role as herb-gatherer, she establishes a crucial link between pre-Soviet and Soviet times. In doing so, however, she has also appropriated the most positive role Medea’s Colchian mythic predecessor possessed, thereby cutting this new incarnation of Medea more deeply from her Caucasian roots, transferring her to a suitably Russian vessel.

Thus Georgii, as Medea’s heir, is like his aunt an ambiguous figure. Although his house is still a meeting ground for an ever-expanding multi-ethnic family, there is a clear hierarchy of nationalities, and the Greek and Armenian, with the new admixture of Russian blood, reign supreme. Combining elements of European Russia and its former territories to the East, Georgii is a multi-ethnic Russian who has appropriated and dominated his Eastern half. As noted earlier, he generously returns Ravil’s house to him, but manages to build a newer house on the hill above the old Tatar structure, of which his neighbors, fellow Russian Crimeans, approve: “... the villagers have changed their opinion and now say Georgii was fiendishly cunning: instead of getting Medea’s ramshackle old house, he has a new one twice as big.” (310) (“... поселковые переменили свое мнение и теперь говорят, что Георгий страшно хитрый: вместо ветхого дома Медеи получил новый, в два раза больший.”) (252). Not only does he build the house, but Ravil and his family, acquiescing to their place in the new order, help him build the new structure: “He was given a lot of help in building his own house by Ravil and his brother.” (310) (“При постройке дома ему много помогал Равиль с братом.”) (252). As mentioned earlier, Georgii further signals his domination of and

intent to stay in the Crimea by boring an artesian well, penetrating, as it were, into the core of the Tatar land, changing a fundamental structure of Tatar traditions that not even Medea had dared to change. He is, thus, indeed an ambiguous figure. His neighbors think he is crazy for going through two years of legal battles to return the house to Ravil, and compared to them he does seem to exhibit a liberal ethnic tolerance. However, Ulitskaia's description of the location and construction of the house seems to suggest otherwise, opening the possibility that beneath the veil of tolerance, he instead strengthens Russia's sense of its dominance, and plays a part in a system that may serve "to justify colonialism, to legitmate neo-colonialism, and to stir up racist attitudes."<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, the novel's epilogue suggests that nationalist, if not racist, attitudes are actually increasing as Medea's family spreads in numbers and influence across the globe, growing and mutating up to the time the novel was actually written. As always, Medea's legacy continues to be articulated through the Sinoply, Greek side. The unidentified narrator comments after she visits the village in 1995: "My husband is a Sinoply too, not from Harlampy's branch, but from that of his younger sister Polixena." (309) ("Мой муж тоже из семьи Синопли, но не от Харлампия, а от его младшей сестры Поликсены.") (251). She offers updates on other family members, noting not only how some Russians have integrated into the West, but also how others have reclaimed more nationalist roots. Although Nika has moved to Italy, only one of her daughters, Liza, has stayed with her. The other, Katya, has returned to Russia and reclaimed her Russian heritage: "As sometimes happens with children of dual nationality, she has become a raging Russophile." (310) ("Как это иногда случается с полукровками, она страшная русофилка.") (252). It is through this Russophile that Medea's coppery-red hair

manifests itself: “She came back to Moscow... and the red-headed little girl who was making such a scene in the courtyard was her daughter.” (310) (“Вернулась в Москву... и рыженькая девочка, которая скандалила в дворе, -- ее дочка.”) (252). Masha’s husband Alik, a member of the American Academy of Sciences, is developing a drug against old age; his son Alik, however, has become an Orthodox Jew, moved to Israel, and published a volume of his mother’s poems. Even Butonov, the miracle-working doctor/centaur who does not share Medea’s direct blood line, is doing work that calls to mind the ethnic tensions that have emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union: “... and he works with spinal patients, of whom he has had a regular supply first from the war in Afghanistan and then from the war in Chechnya.” (311) (“... и работает со спинальными больными, которых бесперебойно поставляет ему то Афганстан, то Чечня.”) (253). Medea herself is beatified, in her Orthodox incarnation: “Ivan Isaevich considers both sisters [Alexandra and Medea] to be saints, but Alexandra smiles...and corrects her husband: ‘Only one of us was a saint.’” (311) (“Иван Исаевич считает обеих сестер праведницами, но Сандрочка улыбается... и поправляет мужа: ‘Праведница у нас была одна...’”) (253).

The narrator of the epilogue expresses her love for being part of Medea’s large family in a description that repeats, yet again, the image of the happy Soviet family of nations, but one that has expanded to include black Americans:

I am so glad that through my husband I became a member of this family, and that my children have a little Greek blood, Medea’s blood, in them. To this day her children come to the Village: Russian, Lithuanian, Georgian, and

Korean. My husband hopes that next year, if the money can be found, we will bring our little granddaughter here, the child of our older daughter-in-law, a black American born in Haiti. (311)

Я очень рада, что через мужа оказалась приобщена к этой семье и что мои дети несут в себе немного греческой крови, Медеиной крови. До сих пор в Поселок приезжают Медеины потомки – русские, литовские, грузинские, корейские. Мой муж мечтает, что в будущем году, если будут деньги, мы привезем сюда нашу маленькую внучку, родившуюся от нашей старшей невестки, черной американки родом с Гаити. (253)

Is it intentional or simply ironic that this image calls to mind one of Stalin's favorite films, "Circus" (Цирк), in which a white American woman, a circus entertainer, unable to marry her black lover in the US, moves to the Soviet Union where interracial marriages are tolerated and approved, and the final shots include a vision of the triumph of a utopian dream, of the mother and her biracial child marching in a propagandistic, Soviet parade?

What kind of impact does this grand finale, with its image of a sainted Medea and her blessed, extended family, have on a contemporary Russian reader? What does this novel suggest to Russia trying to re-structure itself after the collapse of the Soviet Union, trying to define, yet again, its relationship with Western Europe? On the one hand, it offers a positive image of Russia, immune to the ethnic tensions and prejudices that have emerged since the collapse of the Soviet Union and continue to fester, and it encourages a sense of tolerance about including all comers in one's extended family.

On the other hand, if one reads more carefully, connecting various dots, it also sends the not so subtle message that Russian blood, mixed with a cleansing, bracing dose of Greek, will prevail. In the end, it is not so subtle nationalistic propaganda, not unlike that created by Stalin: the man about whom many post-Soviet citizens feel ambiguous, the

scapegoat for and perpetrator of much that was wrong in the Soviet times; and yet, a strong leader whom, as recently as 2005, many young and adult Russians regard as a “wise leader,” and say they would vote for should he run for office.<sup>69</sup> As Rayfield has commented, Stalin’s legacy is still an open wound: “The Soviet Union and its successor states have never achieved what psychiatrists call closure,”<sup>70</sup> explaining how various efforts at “destalinization” have failed, noting that those in the Krushchev era who would have brought accusations were themselves “up to their neck in [the] blood” of complicity with Stalin’s programs; and that after perestroika, the KGB, and the subsequent FSB, put a halt on revelations being made by historians and scholars who tried to publish archival secrets.<sup>71</sup>

In the context of post-Soviet Russia, *Medea and her Children*, if read closely, is a novel that can open a dialogue about difficult questions in the history of Soviet Russia. It can and has been read and interpreted as a seductively utopian family chronicle that appears to bring Russia, with its ties re-established to the cultural heritage of Greece, into the cultural fold of Western Europe. It is, however, a romance that holds within it, nearly invisible beneath the veil of Classically-inspired figures such as Medea, Odysseus, Penelope, and vaguely defined gods and centaurs, the more complex reality of the horrors of the Soviet Union: the complicity of supposedly innocent citizens; the still-open wounds of the Stalinist legacy; a lingering sense of Russia’s superiority over its former territories and colonies, in particular, Georgia; and Russia’s cultural isolation from and competition with Western Europe. Ulitskaia’s re-inscription of Medea as a Crimean, Pontic Greek who denies her mythic, Georgian past, contributes to the anti-Caucasian feelings prevalent in contemporary Russia, and does nothing to acknowledge Georgia’s rich, complex history

or its status as an independent state freed from its Russian occupiers.<sup>72</sup> Georgii, masquerading as an Odysseus who has migrated to the Crimea, while adopting some of its customs, in the end reasserts Russian superiority. Masha's death, representing the death of a true Russian intellectual, is the result of clashing values and civilizations, disrespected boundaries, and as such, is a national tragedy, encouraged, if indirectly, by Medea's calm Orthodox acceptance of the moral chaos that surrounds her.

Rather than promoting a sense of tolerance for different nationalities, the novel seems to reinforce stereotypes, challenging the limits of Ulitskaia's very notion of tolerance. It suggests a sense of wounded chauvinism: all are welcome as long as we, Russians, are more than tolerated, are in fact, recognized as the natural leaders of the world. The picture of Medea and her family does indeed seem to express nostalgia for the utopian dream of the Soviet Union, perhaps echoing agreement with the sentiment that the greatest tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the collapse of that dream. If we can begin to see through the veil of illusions Ulitskaia creates in her use of Classical references, we might yet be able to see the complex questions that post-Soviet Russia must face in order to move forward, or at least come to terms with its past.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Ulitskaia, Liudmila, *Medea and her Children*, trans. Arch Tait. New York: Schocken Books, 2002. All English quotes are from Tait's translation, with exceptions marked in the endnotes. All Russian quotes are from Улицкая, Людмила. *Медя и ее дети*, Москва, ЭКСМО, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> This study could include many other authors and works, for example: Liudmila Petrushevskaja's short stories "Medea" ("Медя") and "Like Penelope" ("Как Пенелопа"); Victor Pelevin's *The Life of Insects*, (*Жизнь насекомых*) with chapters entitled "The Third Rome" and "In Memory of Marcus Aurelius;" and *The Helmet of Horror: The Myth of Thesus and the Minotaur* (*Шлем ужаса : кретициф о Тесе и Минотавр*). I have chosen to focus on Ulitskaia's novel because of the connections between her work, Bulat Okudzhava's, and Otar Chiladze's, especially their shared use Classical materials to explore the relationship between Georgia and Russia.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of post-Soviet Russia's relationship with Europe, and a summary of the debates between the Westernizers and their opponents from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present, see Rosalind Marsh, "'The Nature of Russia's Identity: The Theme of 'Russia and the West' in Post-Soviet Culture.'" (555-578). Marsh also discusses anti-Caucasian sentiments that are often found together with anti-Western, anti-capitalist attitudes: "Prokhanov's text [*Gospodin Geksogen* [Mr Hexogen, 2002](565)] ... is permeated by revulsion against contemporary Russian capitalism, presented as typical of egoistic "Western" values and embodied by rich Russian Jews and the corrupt traders "of Caucasian nationality" who have inundated Moscow." (566); she focuses, however, on the scorn towards the oligarchs, and not towards Caucasian nationalities.

<sup>4</sup> Personal interview. September 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Grothe, Anja, *Medusa, Cassandra, Medea: Re-inscribing Myth in Contemporary German and Russian Women's Writing*, (225). Grothe writes: "Liudmila Ulitskaia had, according to her own account, a mythic image of Medea as a skillful, maybe not 'sophisticated' but certainly 'sophist' woman from the East in mind, when she cast her Medea Mendez, protagonist of her first and critically acclaimed full-length novel, *Medeia i ee deti* [Medea and her Children], 1996."

<sup>6</sup> Ulitskaia, "Literature Arises From Life," ("Литература происходит из жизни...") (16). Interview. See [http://www.perevod.it/elkost/ludmila\\_ulitskaya/biography/biography.html](http://www.perevod.it/elkost/ludmila_ulitskaya/biography/biography.html) for information about Ulitskaia's works and current honors.

<sup>7</sup> Sutcliffe, Ben, "Liudmila Ulitskaia's Literature of Tolerance," (495-509). Sutcliffe analyses the idea of tolerance in Ulitskaia's oeuvre, including *Kukotsky's Case* (*Касуз Кукоцкого*), *The Funeral Party* (*Веселые похороны*), *Medea and her Children* (*Медея и ее дети*) and various short stories. For an example of material produced by the Institute of Tolerance, see Vera Timenchik, *Our Family and Others' Families* (*Семья у нас и у других*), that promotes open-mindedness about alternative family structures, such as divorced parents (16-21); women's work in different cultures (raising children, working at home) (18-19); dowries and child brides in Muslim countries (34, 44-46); the existence of homosexual marriages (49).

<sup>8</sup> Sutcliffe, op. cit. (496). Sutcliffe notes Ulitskaia's tendency to conflate author and fiction, and refers to Judith Kornblatt, *Doubly Chosen: Jewish Identity, the Soviet Intelligentsia, and the Russian Orthodox Church* (Madison, 2004) (15); and to Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), (253) for further discussion about this issue. See also Grothe, op. cit., (267), for the suggestion that the character Masha "might be read as the author's alter ego; she is extremely literary and sensitive." See Ulitskaia "I Take Everything That's Given" (*Принимаю всё, что даётся*) (221), on autobiographical elements in her cycle of stories *The Girls* (*Девочки*).

<sup>9</sup> Ulitskaia, *Medea and her Children* (*Медея и ее дети*). Take for example, a conversation between two Lithuanians about how to deal with their disabled child: "It's the only way we can get through this. It's only possible by being Lithuanian," he confirmed, and she, a Lithuanian born and bred and with a strain of Teutonic blood, was suddenly seared by an unusual feeling: "If only I were a Georgian, or an Armenian, or even a Jewess." (238) ("Иначе нам не выжить. Только по-литовски и возможно, -- подтвердил он, и она, коренная литовка с прожилкой тевтонской крови, вдруг ожглась необычным чувством: 'Быть бы мне грузинкой, или армянкой, или хоть еврейкой!'" (195). Ulitskaia, in her attempt to promote tolerance, seems to believe that genetic makeup determines character; while this helps one to understand others' characters and possibly to point out the roots of intolerance, it also reinforces stereotypes that breed intolerance. Further examples will be discussed throughout this chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Bk. VII, (153-167, 296).

<sup>11</sup> Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, (80, 105-110). Goscilo appraises Ulitskaia's openness in foregrounding descriptions of female sexuality: "In general Ulitskaia credits women with a rich range of sexual appetites, her stories teeming with the kinds of sexual encounters that under the Soviet regime would have been unimaginable for a woman." Few scholars discuss the negative consequences of her female characters' promiscuity.

<sup>12</sup> Two stories from *The Transparent Line* (*Сквозная линия*) have been translated into English as "Women's Lies" in *Nine of Russia's Foremost Women Writers*, (237-281). These excerpts include "Diana" (240-270) and "End of Story" (270-281), as well as a short introduction with a bold invocation of Odysseus and Penelope as models, or anti-models, for the characters in the subsequent stories: "Behold the regal couple, Odysseus and Penelope. Not much of a kingdom, perhaps." (238) ("Вот царственная пара, Одиссей и Пенелопа. Царство, правда, не велико."), *The Transparent Line* (7).



<sup>13</sup> See Goscilo, op. cit., (80, 89), and Sutcliffe, *The Prose of Life* (19), on Ulitskaia's contribution to Russian feminism. For a discussion of feminism in Russia, see Goscilo, op. cit., (5-27), "Perestroika or Domostroika? The Construction of Womanhood under Glasnost."

<sup>14</sup> Ulitskaia, "I Take Everything That's Given," (Принимаю всё, что даётся) (215-237). Ulitskaia notes that Nabokov is one of her favorite authors.

<sup>15</sup> Grothe, op. cit., (230) discusses Ulitskaia's contemporary, Liudmila Petrushevskaja, for whom the "use of ancient mythology is not a comprehensive reworking of mythic stories. She used them as 'templates' to enhance the allusive capacity of the conflict she is about to describe." Grothe also quotes Goscilo on Petrushevskaja's use of antiquity: "'Such a reading, however, fails to account adequately for Petrushevskaja's extensive reliance on antiquity as cultural referent [...] far from merely serving as a vehicle for social commentary, family in Petrushevskaja, as in Greek tragedy, metonymizes the human condition. The exalted tone of tragic doom in Euripides and Sophocles that Aristotle deemed requisite for catharsis, however, undergoes radical debasement in Petrushevskaja's modern world in extremes. What Greek tragedy casts as elevated cosmic drama, she decrowns as shabby everyday prosaics. Substituting low-key horror for noble grandeur, she capitalizes on associations with classical antecedents to convey the full magnitude of experiences that her style, by contrast, ironizes and degrades.' Goscilo, *Mother* 103f." Ulitskaia so thoroughly alters her Medea from the Euripedean or Ovidian originals and shows so little interest in 'cosmic drama,' that one is encouraged to read the use of ancient myth in her works as a "vehicle for social commentary."

<sup>16</sup> Ulitskaia, "I Take Everything that's Given," (216), describes her sense of nostalgia for her own childhood in the 50's: "My childhood was wonderful." ("Детство мое было прекрасным").

<sup>17</sup> Grothe, op. cit., (225). Grothe also comments (280-281): "Looking back in time, Ulitskaia finds in the figure of Medea a symbolic character suitable to represent cultural grounding and roots. Among all other re-inscriptions, hers is the most removed from ancient models, but also the least displaced. It is no u-topia, as Medea has found her place. Her otherness becomes a utopian enclave, wherein those close to her can escape estrangement. It is not Medea who travels, rather others travel to her to discover their own fears and desires. Medea is presented as an epiphany of cultural origin, embedded in a context of humanist compassion." NB: The novel takes place in the Crimea, though some passages refer to characters who live or visit Georgia.

<sup>18</sup> Grothe, op. cit., (267) suggests further biographical links between Ulitskaia and her character Masha, a poet schooled in the classics of Russian literature. See also Ulitskaia, "I Take Everything that's Given," (217), where she notes that two of the three poems she has published (of many she has written) are those attributed to her fictional character, Masha, confirming an autobiographical connection between herself and Masha.

<sup>19</sup> See Slezkine, Yuri, "The USSR as a Communist Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," (414-452) for a seminal study in how ethnic nationalities were actually encouraged to develop in the Soviet Union. For the struggle for independence in the Caucasus, see Goldenberg, Susan, *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*; de Waal, Thomas, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*, with their suggestions for further reading.

<sup>20</sup> See Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen: The Tryant and Those Who Killed for Him*, and Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, for relatively recent assessments of the number of fellow Caucasians in Stalin's entourage.

<sup>21</sup> Rayfield, *Stalin and his Hangmen* (469).

<sup>22</sup> Vujacic, Veljko, "Stalinism and Russian Nationalism, a Reconceptualization," (49, 69).

<sup>23</sup> Sutcliffe, "Family, Doom, Hope: Everyday Life and the Ties that Bind in Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Medea and Her Children*." Though Sutcliffe broaches the possibility of less than utopian elements of the novel, such as Masha's suicide, which he aligns with tragedy, he concludes that Medea remains a mediating, tolerant force (3, 15). Goscilo & Lanoux, *Gender and National Identity*, (3-27) discuss Ulitskaia in terms of Russia's post-Soviet search for national identity.

<sup>24</sup> Sutcliffe, "Liudmila Ulitskaia's Literature of Tolerance" (497), interestingly enough does not include Georgians in his list of ethnic groups to whom Medea extends her hospitality: "A Russian-speaking Greek living in what will later become independent Ukraine, Medea's hybrid ethnicity is mirrored by the Jews, Russians, Armenians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Tatars among her friends and relations – childless herself, she becomes a mother figure because of the everyday tolerance of her home." As if blinded by the idea of tolerance, sympathetic critics can miss an important gap in Ulitskaia's tolerance.

<sup>25</sup> Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex* (160-163), on "The Porn of Politics: Airbrushing a Myth."

It is interesting to see the deep hostility to Stalin, especially in Goscilo's discussion about the surge of pornography in post-Soviet Russia, and the pornographic element in Soviet posters and other images of Stalin: "If Western pornography is the political product of the capitalist economic system, in Soviet Russia politics has been the pornographic product of a utopian imagination unrestrained by ethics... If the pinup (or her "tamed" relative, the model) represents the "ideal" of the Western billboard, her Russian analogue is, unquestionably, Stalin."

<sup>26</sup> Ulitskaia, "Literature Arises from Life," (Литература происходит из жизни...) (16). My translation.

<sup>27</sup> Ulitskaia, "Literature Arises from Life," (16). My translation.

<sup>28</sup> Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex* (17), comments that some women writers tend to produce texts "littered with pretentious references to pseudolegitimating sources from Heraclitus to Kant." I think Ulitskaia uses her Classical references in a variety of ways within this novel: some do seem "pseudolegitimating," even unmotivated and superficial, (see below, on the character Butonov); others have more depth; and yet others are in between, as here with Alexandra.

<sup>29</sup> Kelly, Catriona, "Innokenty Fedorovich Annensky and the Classical Ideal: Poetry, Translations, Drama and Literary Essays," (9-79). Kelly analyzes the system of Classical education in Russia from 1870-1910, describing Russian classicists' attempts to popularize their subject.

<sup>30</sup> For the current importance of the Crimea as a home for Russia's Black Sea Fleet, see [www.acus.org/natosource/russia-plans-major-build-black-sea-fleet](http://www.acus.org/natosource/russia-plans-major-build-black-sea-fleet), (Accessed June 7, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Goltz, *Georgia Diary*, (19-43) presents an informed journalist's review of Georgia's coastline as a site of invasion, and the changing names of the coastal cities.

<sup>32</sup> Braund, David. *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia 550 BC-AD 562*, offers the best study in English on this topic. See also Martin L. West, who has suggested an alternative provenance: "the topography of the Argonautic poem related to a northerly sector of the Black Sea from the Crimea to the Straits of Kerch and the Sea of Azov," in "The Argonaut Legend in Early Greek Poetry," *Phasis*, 10 (I), 2007 (200). He published these ideas first in "Odyssey and the Argonautica," *Classical Quarterly* 55, 2005, (39-64), so it is unlikely Ulitskaia was influenced by his scholarship.

<sup>33</sup> Sutcliffe and Elizabeth Scamp, at the 2010 ASEES Conference, October 2010, on a panel on Ulitskaia, raised the question of what kind of Orthodoxy Ulitskaia presents in *Medea and her Children*. Sutcliffe suggested she is actually trying to create something he is tentatively calling "orthopraxis," which is different from traditional Russian Orthodoxy. Sutcliffe and Scamp's comments invite interesting future discussions.

<sup>34</sup> Blondell, Ruby, *Women on the Edge*, expounds this post-modern explanation of Euripides's *Medea*.

<sup>35</sup> Khelaia, Nani, Ramaz Shengelia, Revaz Gagnidze, and Nino Chikhladze, "New Information about the Plants from Medea's Garden and Their Use for Medical Purposes in Traditional and Modern Medicine," *Phasis* 10, I (201-208), present a contemporary Georgian assessment of Medea's knowledge of herbal medicine, and her role in modern medicine.

<sup>36</sup> I do not know if Ulitskaia has read Chiladze's novel, which was translated into Russian in 1978, published in Tbilisi, and reissued by EKSMO Press, Moscow, in 2000, with a new forward, but given the descriptions of Medea as a gifted herbalist, it seems she was at least aware of some earlier, Georgian version of Medea.

<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that Ulitskaia seems to be creating her own definition of a "holy fool," which in her Russian text is "sviataia dura" (святая дура). This phrase could also be translated as "holy silly woman," or even "sainted silly goose," and has little to do with the traditional Orthodox "Holy Fool," or "Fool in Christ." The Russian Orthodox term for "Holy Fool," "iurodivyi" (юродивый) or "radi Khrista urod" (ради Христа урод) refers to a person who practices an extreme form of religious asceticism and self-denial in dedication to the Church. Ulitskaia, perhaps in experimenting with feminist ideas, has created a female version of a "holy fool" in which suffering the humiliation of others' immoral acts is a trait. She reinforces the idea of Medea being some kind of "holy fool" or "blessed idiot" in having Medea comment about her blindness to her husband's infidelity: "There, in the Beatitudes, they forgot to say: blessed are the idiots." (247) (Там, в Заповедях Блаженств, забыли все-таки сказать: блаженны идиоты.) (202). Elsewhere in the novel Medea is described as ascetic because of the straw mattress she sleeps on, but otherwise does not fit the role: she is definitely not homeless, nor does she live in voluntary poverty. I have therefore altered Tait's translation slightly, using "holy fool," but without capital letters.

<sup>38</sup> I have altered Tait's translation in this passage. Tait's translation: "For you, everything evil in the world comes from Soviet power... What does it matter to her who's in power? She's a Christian, her allegiance is to a higher authority. And never say again that she's afraid of anything." (51). Tait seems to over-interpret

Ulitskaia's words, "veruiushchii" (верующий) and "drugaia" (другая) which I read as slightly more neutral, though in the context they imply "Christian" and "higher."

<sup>39</sup> King, Charles, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (92-98) offers an account of the Circassian deportations and massacres in the 1860's.

<sup>40</sup> Kelly, Laurence, *Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran*, discusses Russia's 19<sup>th</sup> century campaign in the Caucasus, including both Russia's military exploits and Alexander Griboedov's courtship of Nina Chavchavadze, and his murder in Tehran.

<sup>41</sup> Personal observations, March 1990, when I visited Uzbekistan, and was invited into a variety of dwellings, both traditional and Soviet-era apartments in Tashkent. As a woman, I was chased out of several madrasas, but also shown Islamic rites performed by women in the privacy of their homes. The ethnographic museums were well kept and extensive, the mosques in Bukhara and Samarkand undergoing significant restoration.

<sup>42</sup> Rayfield, op. cit., (xii).

<sup>43</sup> Goltz, Thomas, op. cit., (33) discusses Stalin's distaste for and lack of special treatment of his native land; compare with Montefiore's account of Stalin's love of his dachas in Abkhazia, in *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication from John Colorusso, Professor of Anthropology, McMaster University.

Rayfield, op. cit., (5), however, dismisses the importance of Stalin's "possible" Ossetian heritage.

<sup>45</sup> This is a case of "the periphery penetrating the center," which has been the topic of growing research. See Sebag-Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* for a study of Stalin's family life and the number of Georgians and Armenians in Stalin's inner circle.

<sup>46</sup> Andrei Tarkovsky's film *The Mirror* (Зеркало) offers a scene in which an image of Stalin hangs on the walls of a printing press, and where the hushed fear of a single mis-print in reference to the "Great Leader" moves the characters to hysteria and tears. See Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (120-121), for a discussion of this scene depicting the effects of Stalinism in Soviet life.

<sup>47</sup> See [www.eurasianet.org/node/61409](http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61409), (accessed June 7, 2011) concerning the secrecy and politics involved in removing Stalin's statue from the town square in Gori. Personal visits to Gori and the Stalin Museum in 2009 and 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Rayfield, op. cit., (26-33), discusses Stalin's early revolutionary activities in Batumi, Baku and Tbilisi, including a 1907 robbery in Tbilisi, as well as early involvement in terrorist acts.

<sup>49</sup> To reiterate, I have altered Tait's translation of "Holy Fool" to "holy fool," as explained above in endnote 38.

<sup>50</sup> Tait's translation, which I keep here, identifies the source of the allusion which Russian readers, it is assumed, would automatically understand, but which a general audience may not.

<sup>51</sup> See Blondell, Ruby, *Oidipous the King*, for justification of the Hellenized spelling of Oedipus' name.

<sup>52</sup> Kotkin, Stephen, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (14), discusses the idea that the Soviet period and the Stalin Revolution resulted in "a new civilization called socialism."

<sup>53</sup> Lest my readers think I am completely alone in questioning Ulitskaia's idea of tolerance, let me clarify: at a panel on Ulitskaia and maternity at the 2008 AAASS Annual Conference, which included papers delivered by Elizabeth Scomp and John Sutcliffe, an unidentified member of the audience raised the question of whose idea of tolerance Ulitskaia portrays. The question lingered in my mind and has helped spur my closer reading of the text -- my thanks to that anonymous comment.

<sup>54</sup> Grothe, op. cit., (265-267), reiterates that Masha is Ulitskaia's most autobiographical figure in the novel, and suggests that Medea and Masha are "two sides of the same coin" who experience many of the same emotions because of their parallel love triangles, but Masha expresses them in her poetry, while Medea keeps them to herself. This paring suggests that Medea, too, is a spiritual double of the author, and that Ulitskaia may indeed share some of her attitudes.

<sup>55</sup> See Goscolo, *Dehexing Sex* (135-170), "New Members and Organs: The Politics of Porn," concerning the explosion of pornography in Russia in the 1990's.

<sup>56</sup> For a foundational study of the ancient Greek settlements around the Black Sea, consult Minns, Ellis, *Scythians and Greeks: A Survey of Ancient History and Archaeology on the North Coast of the Euxine from the Danube to the Caucasus*.

<sup>57</sup> Bologova, M. A., “The Birth of Lyric from the Spirit of Parody: L. Ulitskaia. *The Funeral Party vs Medea and her Children, Sonechka and Kukotsky’s Case*,” (Рождение лирики из духа пародии: Л. Улицкая. “Веселые похороны” vs “Медея и ее дети”, “Сонечка” & “Казус Кукоцкого”).

<sup>58</sup> I have altered Tait’s translation of Butonov’s mentor’s name from “Deutero-Ivanov” to “Pseudo-Ivanov,” which seems to reflect more accurately Ulitskaia’s name for him: “Psevdo-Ivanov” (Псевдо-Иванов).

<sup>59</sup> Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, (135-170), again, on the explosion of pornography that swept the Soviet Union in the 1990’s.

<sup>60</sup> Goscilo, op. cit. (109-110), discusses Ulitskaia’s character, Lialia, as an earlier example of a woman’s sexuality being used to bridge the mind/body gap. Goscilo argues that Ulitskaia makes no judgement about Lialia’s fulfillment of her sexual drive; Masha, however, seems to present a different case, as her affair, and the striving to overcome the duality results in her psychotic breakdown and suicide.

<sup>61</sup> Bologova, M.A., “The Birth of Lyric from the Spirit of Parody,” (139), explores allusions in *Medea and her Children* to the topos of “three women” in the works of Mikhael Bulgakov and Pasternak, and particular in Briusov’s 1912 poem “Stoiat v moei zhizni...,” (Стоят в моей жизни...) about “three women – white, black, crimson” (Три женщины -- белая, черная, алая...).

<sup>62</sup> Akhmatova, Anna, “With closest friends there is a secret line...” (Есть в близости людей заветная черта) (1915), included in *Modern Russian Poetry*, ed. Vladimir Markov and Merrill Sparks (270-271). Ulitskaia commented in “I Take Everything that’s Given” (219) that in her youth she saw Pasternak, Anna Akhmatova and Joseph Brodsky in person, and was particularly awestruck in Akhmatova’s presence.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson and Petrie, op. cit., (110-136), discuss this scene: “The extract is from [Pushkin’s] famous letter to Chaadayev in 1836, which was a key text in the Slavophile-Westernizer controversy raging in the second quarter of the nineteenth century: should Russia adopt the West as its cultural and political model or look to its own indigenous religious and historical traditions? Recognizing Russia’s significance, Pushkin states that he would not, for any reason, change his country or choose a different history. It is not surprising that some Soviet critics have praised *Mirror*, like *Andrei Roublev* before it, for being a thoroughly nationalist, Russian film.”

<sup>64</sup> Rosalind Marsh, “The Nature of Russia’s Identity: The Theme of ‘Russian and the West’ in Post-Soviet Culture,” (568-72), discusses others authors who helped foster the nationalistic, anti-Western sentiments that began recurring in Russia after a brief period of openness to the West, both America and Europe, in the early 1990’s. Marsh mentions Ulitskaia’s *The Funeral Party* (*Веселые похороны*), published in 1997, for its depiction of the “wholesale transplantation of Russian values and relationships to a Western setting” (565); and *Kukotsky’s Case*, (*Kazus Kukotskogo*) (2002) for the anti-Western and anti-commercialism of two of her nationalistically minded characters (569). Marsh does not discuss *Medea and her Children*.

<sup>65</sup> Goncharov, *Oblomov*.

<sup>66</sup> Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, (115-119).

<sup>67</sup> For an autobiographical account of Okudzhava’s life, see his *The Abolished Theatre: A Family Chronicle* (*Упраздненный театр: семейная хроника*). For comments about the Georgian elements in his poetry, see Lominadze, Sergo, “...And from My Own Fate I Pulled Out a Thread – a Georgian Thread.” (“...И из собственной судьбы я выдергивал по нитке -- грузинская нить”) (130-139); and Abuashvili, Aida, “Two Sources: Notes about the Lyric Poetry and Prose of Bulat Okudzhava.” (“Два истока (заметки о лирике и прозе Булата Окуджаву)”) (57-58). Personal information from Aida Abuashvili Lominadze about Bulat Okudzhava’s lack of fluency in Georgian.

<sup>68</sup> Shnirelman, Victor, “New racism, “clash of civilization,” and Russia.” *Russian Nationalism and The National Reassertion of Russia*, (125-144) (133).

<sup>69</sup> Vujacic, Velijko, “Stalinism and Russian Nationalism, a Reconceptualization.” *Russian Nationalism and The National Reassertion of Russia*, (49-74) (49).

<sup>70</sup> Rayfield, op. cit., (469).

<sup>71</sup> Rayfield, op. cit., (469-471). Rayfield further notes that the police of today’s FSB “take pride in their Cheka ancestry,” fostering “the cult of themselves as Dzierzynski’s samurai, this time protecting the Russian nation, rather than the working class, against its enemies.” (470); and that in a nation, led by a man whose career began with the KGB, “...any genuinely democratic politician or journalist...has not much more life expectancy today than under the Bolsheviks.” (471)

<sup>72</sup> Marsh, Rosalind, op. cit., (565), notes that prejudice against the Jewish oligarchs and people of Caucasian blood is quite common in popular literature. She also discusses the current messianic mission of Russia’s more nationalist writers (566-568), but does not directly suggest that Ulitskaia is among these.

## Chapter IV

**Bulat Okudzhava's *Dilettantes' Journey*: Lovers Flee to Freedom in Georgia**

In the following chapters I discuss two novels, Bulat Okudzhava's *Dilettantes' Journey* (*Путешествие дилетантов*) and Otar Chiladze's *A Man Walked Down the Road* (*გზაზე უბრალო კაცი მიდგომდა*), continuing to explore the Classical references which help frame and critique Russian society and imperial power in late- and post-Soviet Russia, and explore the fate of Georgia and the Georgian people in the face of that power. Both works, written in the late-Soviet period, are allegorical, historical novels, the first set during the reign of Nicholas I and after his death; the second set in ancient Colchis, in the time of the mythological Aeëtes and Medea. While both novels describe the vulnerability of Georgia as an abundant, heavenly paradise that welcomes lovers and friends, in contrast to the repressive, destructive force of Russia, they also reflect how the authors themselves negotiated the complexities of living in the Soviet Union, and of the relationship between Russia and Georgia. Okudzhava, whose father was Georgian and mother Armenian, wrote his poems, songs, and novels in Russian, sharing a warm sense of humanity with a wide Soviet audience. Chiladze, a Georgian who never lived in Russia proper, wrote primarily in Georgian and passionately defended the imperative of maintaining a clearly defined Georgian identity.<sup>1</sup> Read together, these two novels offer literary strategies for negotiating a turbulent time in late-Soviet life, and a troubled border in the Caucasus.

These novels are particularly fruitful when read side by side because their authors take different approaches to dealing with Russian imperial interests in the Caucasus, and do not always see eye to eye as Georgians. Written in the 1970's, both novels were

available, in Russian, to the general Soviet public by 1979; and both were controversial and popular when they first appeared.<sup>2</sup> *Dilettantes' Journey* had been serialized between 1976 and 1978 in the Soviet journal, *Druzhiba narodov*, and published as an entire novel by 1979.<sup>3</sup> *A Man Walked Down the Road* was published in Georgian, in Tbilisi, in 1973, and translated into Russian and published in Moscow in 1978.<sup>4</sup> Chiladze was a staunch defender of Georgian culture, and championed the role of the Georgian language to uphold that culture: he wrote *A Man Walked Down the Road* in a decade in which the Soviet government, dominated by ethnic Russians since Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1957, tried to restrict the use of Georgian.<sup>5</sup> Although his novel was widely read in Russian, the Georgian text, at crucial moments, tells a very different story than the Russian translation. Chiladze actually cut off personal relations with Okudzhava, believing that the latter, in particular, had betrayed the Georgian language, the country, and its people.<sup>6</sup> Other Georgians from Tbilisi have more recently expressed their disdain for Okudzhava and his role as a popular bard in Soviet culture.<sup>7</sup>

As a preeminent Soviet bard from the late 1950's through the 1970's, the heyday of guitar poetry, Okudzhava was beloved by Soviet citizens across Russia, and for many was "a mighty resource in their daily struggles with Soviet life."<sup>8</sup> He sang of life in Moscow, his experiences in World War II, and love, and even his early songs from 1956 to 1957 were felt to be a protest against Soviet canons, and contained political allusions.<sup>9</sup> He celebrated Georgia in several of his poems, focusing on its wine and reverence for friendship and family, but having grown up in Moscow on the Arbat, home to many of Moscow's elite, he wrote in Russian and was well schooled in Russian literature.<sup>10</sup> Although it is acknowledged that his command of Georgian was not strong,<sup>11</sup> some

scholars have argued that he nonetheless maintained his love for and connection to Georgia, and trace Georgian threads of his songs and poems, finding oblique references to his family tragedies of the Stalin era.<sup>12</sup>

While Okudzhava sang for the entire Soviet Empire, in Russian, praising human values in inhuman times, he also confronts complex political issues, including his ambiguous, conflicted position within Soviet Russia.<sup>13</sup> As a child he felt the unfortunate, yet all too typical torment of Soviet youth. When his father, who had grown up in the epicenter of Kutaisi's revolutionary fervor and worked in various capacities in the Communist Party in Tbilisi from 1931 to 1932, was arrested and shot in 1937,<sup>14</sup> and his mother was sent to Siberia, where she stayed in the Gulags from 1937 to 1955, "... he of course felt sad, because he loved his parents; but at the time, a 12 year old boy, he loved and respected Stalin more than his own parents." (... ему, конечно, было грустно, потому что он любил своих родителей; но тогда он, двенадцатилетний мальчик, любил и уважал Сталина больше, чем своих родителей).<sup>15</sup> He joined the Communist Party in 1955, and though he would become involved in opposition activities, be expelled from the Party in 1962 and reinstated shortly thereafter, he was relatively well tolerated within the Soviet system.<sup>16</sup> His novel, *Dilettantes' Journey*, however, in the guise of historical fiction, ventures into a critical assessment of the Soviet system, reflecting the struggles of a free-spirited soul in a drab, repressive Soviet life, and the tensions between Georgia and Russia. Although he suggests that the myth of Georgia as a paradise is just that, a myth with little reality behind it, he nonetheless draws a sharp line between Russia and Georgia, delineating an equally sharp contrast between the fate of Russians living in the Empire, and of Georgians, living, as it were, under the Empire.

Despite the differences in their overt loyalty to Georgia, it is my sense that Chiladze and Okudzhava share an underlying love of and grief for their motherland, as well as a deep sense of the humanity it has to offer. Together, they celebrate human freedom, mourn the loss of Georgia's original state as a paradise, as well as its historical lack of independence. Both celebrate characters who seek personal freedom and rebel against the Russian machine, whether represented as ancient Greece, 19<sup>th</sup> Imperial Russia, or the Soviet Union. Both also express their characters' impotence to alter their own and their countries' history. Okudzhava's Russian hero, Count Sergei Miatlev, retires to internal exile on his rural Russian estate; his female heroine, Lavinia, leaves Russia forever near the end of her life; and his Georgian interlocutor, Amiran Amilakhvari, emigrates to America. Chiladze's Georgian hero, Pharnaozi, named after Georgia's first king, Parnavaz, accepts being sacrificed so that his dream of personal freedom and Georgia's glorious past and future can live on.

It is no coincidence that both authors wrote non-traditional historical novels that do not attempt to show historical truth, but rather use history as a basis for fiction that can be read as allegorical commentary.<sup>17</sup> Given the trans-temporal nature of this kind of historical fiction, the allegory extends beyond the time of its creation to include comments on current issues, including continuing restrictions on civil rights in both countries, continued Russian influence in the Caucasus, and the contested nature of the border between Russia and Georgia. The allegory is aided by the Classical references, which are used as an Aesopian language, and help both to veil criticism and to reveal truths otherwise difficult to discuss.



The Classical dialogue is prominent in both of these works, which, however, use the Classical allusions paradoxically. Okudzhava adopts tropes from 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, including the intellectual construct of Russia as an iteration of the Roman Empire, and Georgia as a Grecian haven. Chiladze's novel takes this imaginary identification in a different direction, presenting Crete as a symbol of a perfidious Russia, and creating a vision of ancient Georgia and Georgian culture as a phenomenon independent of the imperial, aggressive aspects of Cretan Greece, but allied with its poetic, creative culture embodied in the figures of Daedalus and Icarus.

Previous scholars have noted the historical facts that inspired Okudzhava's novel, as well as references to Lermontov, and allusive dialogues with Pushkin and even Leo Tolstoy. Krechkova and others discuss how Okudzhava uses the story of Lermontov's friend (and second in his fatal duel), Count Sergei Trubetskoi, as an inspiration, in particular his abduction of a married woman, Lavinia Zhadimirovskaia, and his flight with her to the Caucasus.<sup>18</sup> Further, Gordin explores Okudzhava's debt to Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* in terms of the structure of the novel, especially the use of found diaries and an older interlocutor like Maxim Maximovich.<sup>19</sup> Krechkova, in turn, notes how Okudzhava amplifies that structure, including diary entries by multiple characters; and emphasizes Okudzhava's identification with the Georgian interlocutor, Amiran Amilakhvari, and the latter's, and therefore Okudzhava's, identification with Miatlev himself.<sup>20</sup> Gordin notes Okudzhava's shared interest with Tolstoy, in *Dilettantes' Journey*, in the "Society of Independents" ("Общество независимых"), who were " – not revolutionaries, and not even Frondeurs, but people who wanted to have nothing to do

with imperial power” (“-- не революционеры, и даже не фронтеры, а люди, не желающие иметь ничего общего с имперской властью.”)<sup>21</sup>

Fewer scholars have discussed the significance of the Classical references in the portrayal of the era as a whole, or in the novel’s allegorical depiction of Soviet times, or in articulating the relationship between Russia and Georgia. Krechkova notes suggestively how negative descriptions of Georgia and the Caucasus are offered by the tsar’s agent von Miuffling, and the positive by Amiran Amilakhvari and another Georgian, Gogi Kikvadze, but draws no further conclusions.<sup>22</sup> She refers to the Classical allusions in passing, quoting the epithet from Marcus Tullius Cicero to explain the characters’ striving for freedom; and observing that Miatlev adopts his belief in Fate from his favorite Greek philosophers;<sup>23</sup> but she does not explore in greater detail how these and other Classical references, albeit passing, contribute to the text. She does, however, discuss the topos of flight within the novel, suggesting that almost all of the characters, including Nicholas I, are in flight towards freedom of one kind or another. Although Krechkova’s observation about the basic topos of flight towards freedom is sound, my goal is to explore how the subtext of the Classics amplifies the meaning of the novel, revealing implied criticism of Russia, and a sympathetic interest in Georgia’s fate, that Okudzhava, despite his professed disinterest in politics,<sup>24</sup> and having described himself as “a Georgian bottled in Moscow,”<sup>25</sup> offers to sympathetic, receptive readers.

***Dilettantes' Journey: Russia's Rome in the 1960's - 1980's***

Okudzhava's novel, while not set in the ancient world, nonetheless engages Russian authors' use of the Classics to address political and social issues, and to express oblique criticism. Okudzhava's particular issues include a government's restrictions on the personal freedom of its people;<sup>26</sup> Russian military expansion, whether into Poland, Moldavia, or the Crimea; and Russia's relationship with Georgia. Set in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the novel captures Russia's fascination Classical culture, including the equation of Nicholas I with Caesar Augustus, the Russian state with the Roman Empire, and the identification of Russia's capital at the time, St. Petersburg, as the Third Rome.<sup>27</sup> It articulates the conflict between Russia and Georgia in terms of Rome and Greece, and describes the Caucasus as both hell and heaven: a place of exile for criminals and political miscreants; and yet a Grecian Parnassus for a poet such as Pushkin, who identified with Ovid, even in exile in the Caucasus;<sup>28</sup> and a realm of relative freedom for a poet such as Lermontov, who is referred to throughout the novel. For other misfits in their northern environs, Georgia is presented as a haven for personal freedom, a place of hope and inspiration that comes, however, with severe restrictions.

Engaging with literary practices familiar from 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, Okudzhava imbues his novel with a historically appropriate sprinkling of passing, yet significant references to the Classics. His male hero, Count Miatlev, is cast as a latter-day Ovidian figure; and his female heroine is graced with noble Roman name, Lavinia. Describing Tsar Nicholas I in a masquerade as Caesar Augustus, Okudzhava shows the Russian leader as a failed imitator of ancient imperial power, one who relishes that power, but also senses its limitations. And yet, Okudzhava's characters reveal as well an

impotence to resist imperial power. Although his Ovidian, freedom-loving characters flee the hell of Russia's police state to Georgia, Russian influence extends well across its porous southern border, and the Georgians themselves in their Grecian haven are ultimately unable to secure for their guests the promised freedom, and question the nature of their haven.

It is not surprising that Okudzhava chose the era of Nicholas I, with its notorious Third Section, as an allegory for his Soviet times. Krechkova notes: "It seems that Okudzhava's choice of precisely this period of Russian history was not made by chance." (Думается, что выбор Окуджавой именно этого периода в русской истории сделан не случайно.),<sup>29</sup> and cites at least one parallel between the reigns of Nicholas I and of Stalin: in both periods, literature flourished, and yet the writers who wrote so well "... were killed, exiled, and poisoned." (... убивали, ссылали, травили).<sup>30</sup> In discussing Okudzhava's works, Soviet-era scholars (themselves subject to censors and self-censoring), even working in post-Soviet times, are cautious about discussing Okudzhava's implied criticism of the Soviet system under which he wrote;<sup>31</sup> and have suggested that although another of his historical novels, *A Meeting with Bonaparte* (*Свидание с Бонапартом*), lacks overt criticism, Okudzhava himself was considered with suspicion.<sup>32</sup> Once again, understanding the significance of the Classical allusions, I hope, will help give us a clearer appreciation for what Okudzhava really felt about his Soviet Caesars and his role in their empire.

As Judith Kalb has discussed, imagining the Roman Empire as an allegory for the Soviet Union was thriving up to 1940, and continues to survive.<sup>33</sup> It was definitely alive in the 1970's and 1980's, as seen in Okudzhava's poem, "The Roman Empire at the Time

of its Decline” (“Римская империя времени упадка”).<sup>34</sup> The opening lines suggest a parallel between the Roman authorities who did not see the decay around them, and contemporary Soviet leaders:

The Roman Empire, at the time of its decline  
 Preserved the appearance of strict order:  
 The Chief was in his place, his comrades by his side,  
 Life was wonderful, judging by the reports.  
 But critics will say, that the word “comrade” – is not a Roman  
 detail,  
 That this mistake deprives the entire song of sense...<sup>35</sup>

Римская империя времени упадка  
 Сохраняла видимость твердого порядка:  
 Главный был на месте, соратники рядом,  
 Жизнь была прекрасна, судя по докладам.  
 А критики скажут, что слово “соратник” -- не римская деталь,  
 что эта ошибка всю песенку смысла лишает... (1-6)<sup>36</sup>

Expanding the allegory, Okudzhava compares the myth of Imperial Roman extravagance with a picture of the alcoholism that was a reality during the late-Soviet Union:

The Romans, at the time of the Empire’s decline,  
 Ate what they could get, got stinking drunk,  
 And everyone, hung-over, craved pickled cucumbers,  
 Apparently, they didn’t know they were in decline.

Римляне империи времени упадка  
 ели, что достанут, напивались гадко,  
 а с похмелья каждый на рассол был падок,-  
 видимо, не знали, что у них упадок. (9-12)

He further mentions the allure of military service,<sup>37</sup> and continuing efforts to protect and expand the Soviet empire:

The youth, at the time of the Empire's decline  
 Constantly dreamed, now of their rolled greatcoats, now of skirmishes,  
 Sometimes attacking, sometimes in the trenches,  
 Sometimes in Afghanistan, and sometimes even in Europe.

Юношам империи времени упадка  
 снились постоянно то скатка, то схватка,  
 то они в атаке, то они в окопе,  
 то в Афганистане, а то и в Европе. (17-20)

While the poet comments that his critics complain that “comrade” (соратник), “pickled cucumbers” (рассолы), and “rolled greatcoats” (скатки) are not Roman details, “Afghanistan,” too, stands out as extremely non-Roman, and turns the work into a poem protesting the Soviet war in Afghanistan, begun in the late 1970’s at a time when many Soviet citizens were suffering deprivations, while members of the elite enjoyed Party perks and imports from the West, and the body politic was in decay.<sup>38</sup> Okudzhava’s reaction to the critics echoes Pushkin’s voice in “exegi monumentum:”<sup>39</sup> he does not care what the critics or authorities will say, because he will gain his poetic glory from the poem:

It may be, perhaps, it may be, that it’s not Roman – too bad.

This doesn’t bother me at all, and even uplifts me.

Может быть, может быть, может и не римская – не жаль.  
 Мне это совсем не мешает, а даже меня возвышает. (7-8, 15-16, 23-24)

Okudzhava is joined in using similar Classical references by Anatoly Rybakov, who, in his novel *Children of the Arbat*, (written between 1966 and 1988, but set in

1934), explores the pain involved in building the Soviet Union. Rybakov depicts Stalin contemplating his increased power and the Russian people's need for authoritarian rule, and drawing an implicit comparison between himself and Caesar: "Only Caesar, possessing individual power, could defeat the barbarians... The supreme power had to be majestic in a tsar-like way... Only such authority was capable of inspiring fear and trembling in the people."<sup>40</sup> Stalin also implies an equation between the Soviet Union and Rome: "All... nations had submitted to Rome and preserved themselves as nations." (347). Clearly, allegorical use of the Roman Empire was alive and well in the Soviet Union from the 1960's to the 1980's, and Okudzhava extends the trope, interweaving it with other Classical references in *Dilettantes' Journey*.

### **Count Sergei Miatlev: An Ovidian Rebel in the Hell of Imperial Russia**

Set in the mid-1800's, Okudzhava's the novel encompasses the years from the beginning of Nicholas I's reign, which coincided with the Decembrist uprising on December 26, 1825; to the tsar's death, on March 2, 1855; and into the early years of the reign of Alexander II. The putative action of *Dilettantes' Journey*, then, is roughly contemporary with the era of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol. The period was, as discussed in Chapter I, a time of ambivalence about how the Classics of Western culture fit into Russia, and Russia into Europe. Classical studies and instruction in Greek and Latin had been adopted as a means for bringing Russians to the level of their educated European peers, and neo-classical elements had found their way into many areas of art and culture. The reign of Nicholas I, however, saw a retreat from embracing Classical studies in Russian education as encouraged by Count Uvarov, that dutiful Minister of

Education and amateur Classicist who understood the need for Russia to gain European enlightenment via the Classics. Nicholas I and other conservative figures, in contrast, saw the potential threat of democratic ideas and pagan morals that education in general, and intimate knowledge of the Classics, Greek in particular, could impart to subjects they preferred would remain loyal to the Tsar's Credo of "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nationality." Nicholas I was so afraid that the 1849 revolutions in Europe, which he blamed in large part on an educated public, would spread to Russia that he ordered the numbers of university students to be reduced from 4,467 to 1,800.<sup>41</sup> While this order, which would have eliminated many non-elite students, was not fully implemented, it ushered in a period in which university attendance dropped by about 25 percent.<sup>42</sup> And yet, as seen in Chapter I, Classical texts had been adopted into their Russian context and were thriving, used as an Aesopian language to critique the regime, and widely deployed to frame discussions of difficult problems in the Russian body politic.

Okudzhava researched the historical period of his novel well, and although the Classical allusions in *Dilettantes' Journey* are neither as specific nor as numerous as those found in Gogol, Pushkin, and other 19<sup>th</sup> century authors, they capture the spirit of the era, in particular engaging the trope of a hedonistic, Ovidian rebel in a repressive society. Rather than referencing exact quotes from Ovid, they create the picture of a generalized Ovidian character, Count Miatlev, who would live by the precepts of books such as Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Amores*. Okudzhava's Ovidian character, however, encompasses a larger scope of allusions, and by invoking the Roman neoteric elegists Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius, and their indebtedness to earlier Hellenistic poets, Okudzhava, projecting aspects of himself, weaves together an image of an educated,



Hellenistic pastoral, neoteric character, singing his “trifling” lyrics in his own epic times, in Soviet Russia.<sup>43</sup>

While we understand by the end of the novel that Okudzhava may have imagined his work as a latter-day *Metamorphoses*, other Classical allusions help to align Miatlev with the voice not only of the Roman elegists, but also of those who flourished in the Library at Alexandria, during the Hellenistic period under the Ptolomies, in particular Callimachus and Theocritus. Known for their knowledge of arcane Classical materials and for shunning what they saw as the bombastic epic poetry of Homer, these poets followed a “slender muse,” writing highly polished, allusive poetry that celebrated the everyday events of traditional heroes, but that also contained political overtones.<sup>44</sup> The Hellenistic age was also a period when “philosophy was at its richest in terms of diversity, interschool debate, and educational influence,”<sup>45</sup> and it is only fitting that in representing a period in Russian history when philosophy was taboo, Okudzhava portrays Miatlev as a character who turns to ancient philosophy for guidance.

These varied Classical associations create an image of Miatlev as an outsider, a rebel, sympathetic to Greek culture, who is trying to live in an alien, Roman-like Russian world. Indeed, the novel’s two antagonists are framed in terms of the Classics: Count Miatlev, an Ovidian figure, a man of radical, Western leanings, revels in pagan freedom, Classical statues, and the comfort of relatively obscure Classical philosophers; his nemesis, Nicholas I, dressing as Caesar, relishes his role as the “Most August Monarch” and indulges in a re-enactment of the image of Russia as the Third Rome, desperate to preside over a well-oiled, repressive police state.

Okudzhava signals the prominent role the Classics will play in the novel, beginning with a triple epithet that invokes Roman philosophy:

But nature, having made all other living beings bend down to earth to obtain their food, raised up man alone, and encouraged him to look at the heavens. Marcus Tullius Cicero<sup>46</sup>

...Ибо природа, заставив все другие живые существа наклоняться к земле, чтобы приминать пищу, одного только человека подняла и побудила его смотреть на небо... Марк Тулий Цицерон

When you move, try not to push anybody. Laws of Good Behavior.

Когда двигаетесь, старайтесь никого не толкнуть. Правил хорошего тона.

Sometimes you want to scream, but good upbringing does not allow it.  
Lavinia Ladimirovskaia

Иногда хочется кричать, да хорошее воспитание не позволяет.  
Лавиния Ладимировская.

Without knowing the exact source of the quote from Cicero, a reader, confronting the divergent voices of the epithet, may sense a tension inherent in the construct of Russia as the Third Rome: Rome itself was not a monolithic empire; so, too, cracks may appear in the Russian empire, and people may be driven to scream in protest against its strictures.

Quoting an ancient philosopher is subversive enough in a novel set in a time when “the usefulness of philosophy has not been proven, but the possibility of its being harmful is a fact.”<sup>47</sup> But Okudzhava’s choice of quoting Cicero, seemingly a solid Roman citizen, is also significant. Although the lines may be from Cicero’s *Laws*,<sup>48</sup> they could be taken as well from the *Tusculan Disputations*, which Cicero wrote from the quasi-exile of his Tuscan villa after the fall of the Republic, the rise of the Empire, and Caesar’s consolidation of power. *Tusculan Disputations* is a work in which Cicero introduces Greek philosophy to Rome, drawing on Plato and the Academic tradition to argue for the

immortality of the soul: humans should indeed raise their eyes to heaven, listen to the harmony of the spheres, and find themselves free beings.<sup>49</sup> Turning to Greece for inspiration, Cicero used philosophy for comfort in facing both the death of his favorite daughter and his own old age, and also for seeking happiness when political means were no longer options for him.<sup>50</sup> Within *Dilettante's Journey*, the quote from Cicero acts as an attempt to infuse a Greek sensibility into a Roman context, which is also a significant part of Miatlev's journey to Georgia: after kidnapping Lavinia and fleeing with her to Georgia, he becomes increasingly associated with Hellenistic tropes as he approaches that supposed outpost of Hellenism. The high spirits expressed in Lavinia's epithet also suggest that although the Classics may offer wisdom about how to deal with philosophical questions and the powers that be, should that ancient wisdom fail, a suitable alternative is to do as she does when she faces off with the Russian guards at the Georgian border: scream in protest, despite your good upbringing; and when that fails, learn to live disguised within the system. The combined attitudes expressed the triple epithet, indeed, hint at Okudzhava's approach to dealing with the Soviet authorities, his own Caesars.

As the epithet anticipates, Okudzhava's novel is openly sympathetic to the difficulties freedom-loving citizens suffer in a police state that through surveillance and coercion attempts to control the comings and goings, not to mention the moral fiber, of its citizens. Count Miatlev, the novel's hero, is a debauched misfit in St. Petersburg, and his eternal love, the young Lavinia Ladimirovskaia, née Bravura, is equally free-spirited and misplaced. Before his involvement with Lavinia, however, Miatlev has been involved in a number of scandals. He is peripherally involved in the Decembrist movement, and as a

result his house is frequented by various “friends” from the Third Section, including his servant Afanasy, and his “trusted” acquaintance Hektor von Miufling. He has been romantically involved with a number of young women, gaining a reputation that accentuates his Ovidian persona: first, with Fraulein Annette Frederiks, who, already married, will aid and abet his affair with the young Lavinia; second, with the 16 year old Alexandrina Zhil’tsova, whose father was mistakenly exiled to Siberia because of his supposed association with the Decembrists; and who disappears mysteriously, having, it transpires, eloped to the Caucasus with the doctor who had treated her in Miatlev’s home; and finally, with Natalia Rumiantseva, whom he marries at the behest of the tsar, but whose attempts to integrate him into Russian society fail.

Miatlev’s behavior certainly troubles Nicholas I, who, praising the well-oiled machine of his empire, seems to scorn its supposed little people. Full of ambitions, the tsar boasts of his expansive empire secured by military exploits, but also expresses doubt lurking in his mind:

Wherever the interests of the government demanded it, the troops were victorious: in Transylvania, in the mountains of Dagestan, and in Moldavia. Everything was working like a glorious machine, if you didn’t count the small group of diseased and slacking madcaps, mired in their personal caprices, renegades, freaks, who consider themselves exceptional, but are in fact insignificant egotists, useless... those, like Miatlev.

Везде, где того требовали интересы государства, войска совершали подвиги: и в Трансильвании, и в горах Дагестана, и в Молдавии. Все работало, как славная машина, если не считать малой кучки больных и вялых сумасбродов, погрязших в личных капризах, отщепенцев,

уродов, мнящих себя исключительными, а на самом деле ничтожных эгоистов, бесполезных... таких, как Мятлев... (256)

In his doubt, he brings himself to ask what seems like a rhetorical question: “The Miatlevs? But really, can they mean anything in s u c h an enormous state?” (Мятлевы? Но разве они могут что-нибудь значить в т а к о м громадном государстве?) (256). Okudzhava, depicting Nicholas I, could just as well be talking about the Soviet leaders, worried about him, and others like him, who wrote poems, songs, and novels in protest against the Soviet machine.<sup>51</sup>

The Miatlevs, and Count Miatlev in particular, however, do mean quite a bit in Nicholas’ empire. In considering the construct of Russia as Rome and in comparing Nicholas I with Caesar Augustus, one must remember that while Augustus, in the process of restoring peace after years of civil war and leading the Roman Empire to glory, also attempted to consolidate his power by tyrannizing his aristocracy, trying to control their morality, or at least curb their immorality. To do so, he implemented laws that upheld the sanctity of the marriage: the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, punishing adultery, and the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*, encouraging the raising of families. Ovid, in both *Ars Amatoria* and *Amores*, advocated the opposite. The opening poem of *Amores*, I announces his intention to turn away from the iambic hexameter of epic that celebrates “arms and war and violence,” to the elegiac couplet, created when Cupid stole a metric foot from epic’s second line. Subsequent poems celebrate his battles in love, and his affair with Corinna, encouraging her to deceive her husband, even in the quasi-public space of a dinner party.<sup>52</sup> The *Ars Amatoria* includes light-hearted lessons for men about how to seduce women at the Games; and for women, how to find the best mascara and attract the most desirable men. And Ovid, to reiterate, for reasons that are still uncertain

today, but most likely because of the *Ars Amatoria*, or because he witnessed something he should not have, or a combination of the two, having upset Augustus, was sent into exile in Dacia, to Tomis, currently Constanta, Romania.<sup>53</sup> There, he finished writing his extensive works, *Metamorphoses*, with its compendium of myths, and the *Fasti*, celebrating Roman religious practices; and wrote the *Epistolae ex Ponti* and *Tristia* to Augustus, pleading for clemency and the right to return to Rome.<sup>54</sup> Miatlev, as an Ovidian figure like Pushkin, is a significant enough part of the construct of St. Petersburg as Rome to trouble the tsar; unlike Ovid, however, although he is eventually exiled, for the first part of the novel he lives in close proximity with his tormenters.

The narrator indicates that Miatlev thinks of St. Petersburg as his Rome, using the Roman term *penates* in its variety of meanings. The term is first used to refer to his ancestral home, when Miatlev returns to St. Petersburg after seeking refuge at his country estate, and after the disappearance of his second love, Alexandrina:

And so, Miatlev had only to return to Petersburg by the first light  
snow to his own *penates*, he had only to escape the terrible memories,  
to board up the superfluous doors, to take in his hands a book that  
had grown cold, with its description of others' tragedies and passions.

Да так вот, стоило лишь Мятлеву воротиться в Петербург по первому  
снежку к своим пенатам, стоило лишь избавиться от страшных  
воспоминаний, заколотить лишние двери, взять в руки остывшую  
было книгу с описанием чужих трагедий и чужих страстей... (109)

Returning to his own *penates*, his ancestral household gods in St. Petersburg, Miatlev hopes to free himself from the memories of his love for the young Alexandrina, the daughter of the mistakenly exiled Decembrist sympathizer, whom he has rescued, cared for, and eventually lost.

But *penates* are also associated with the union of households, i.e., the government, as seen when Aeneas, fleeing Troy, takes his *penates* with him to found Rome.<sup>55</sup> Reflecting this meaning, *penates* are referred to again when Miatlev, having fled the madness of St. Petersburg to his estate, is ordered to return to the city after being implicated in the scandal with Natalia Rumiantseva. The order has come from no less than Count Orlov, Tsar Nicholas' right-hand man:

And Miatlev did not tarry, for the preparations were light, and the invitation of the all-powerful aide to the tsar was not to be crossed.

And they returned to their *penates*.

Мятлев и не медлил, ибо сборы были легки, а приглашение всеильного помощника государя непрекословно. И они воротились к пенатам. (137)

Although the use of the term *penates* is a slight touch, it adds depth to Okudzhava's depiction of Russia as an incarnation of the Roman Empire, and helps to identify Miatlev as a lyric, elegiac figure in St. Petersburg imagined as Rome, an identification which contributes to the negative portrayal of the Nicholas I as Caesar Augustus; and by analogy, offers a negative assessment of Okudzhava's Soviet tsars.

### **Nicholas I as Caesar: Charades and the Illusions of Empire**

In contrast to Miatlev, the elegiac, Ovidian character, is Tsar Nicholas I, whose connection with the Classical world is highlighted by charades of him as August Caesar, but which also indicate the illusory nature of his Empire. In the overall structure of the novel, Okudzhava has included inserted chapters,<sup>56</sup> which, as he explains in the post-script, he added to give historical context to the events described, and in particular, to give a more complete picture of Nicholas I:

I considered it interesting for the reader to include several episodes of the life of Nicholas I, and so I've called them inserted chapters, which should, in my opinion, add to the characterization of the man whom Miatlev for a long time considered guilty of his personal misfortunes.

Я посчитал интересным для читателя вставить несколько эпизодов из жизни Николая I, так и назвав их вставными главами, которые должны были, на мой взгляд, несколько дополнить характеристику человека, которого Мятлев долгое время считал виновным в своих несчастьях. (493)

The various chapters describe Nicholas in private, family settings: drinking tea, showing affection for the tsarina; reflecting on Russia's failed military efforts in the Crimea; and his death. All of these, as Krechkova comments, render the tsar more human than one might expect.<sup>57</sup> But if the tsar is somehow more human, he is also more vulnerable to criticism, which is revealed in the masquerade of him as Caesar, which points to the illusory nature of Russia as an Imperial power.

A large portion of the third inserted episode, Chapter 67 (308-317), is dedicated to Nicholas' preparations for a summer masquerade, and is heavily laden with references to Imperial Rome, drawing a contrast between the charade of Russia as Rome, and the reality of Russia; exposing the hypocrisy and doubt that plague the tsar; and revealing discontent among his people. The chapter begins by contrasting the winter and summer masquerades, the first capturing the beauty of Russian aristocratic balls, with their glittering lights and music, and the sense of privileged isolation from the cold and misery outside the palace: "The ability to see into the distance does not always bring happiness." (Умение видеть далеко не всегда приносит счастье) (308). The summer masquerade, however, is a "festival of a different kind" (празднество иного рода) (308). Lit by the



lamps of the Summer Palace, it has the magical air of a pagan, neo-classical celebration that brings the tsar and his ministers closer to the people:

... throughout the entire enormous park, along the shores of the ponds,  
in the follies and grottos, and the hollows of the ancient elms, and in the still  
hands of marble Venuses and Apollos, and the quivering hands  
of the exultant guests... Somewhere on this unbelievable field, in the pale  
light of green lamps, -- suddenly a coachman appears, not of this world,  
in a hat with feathers, with the habits of Count Orlov, surrounded by a  
crowd of *ruslaks*, nymphs, and chimeras, and you feel like rushing towards  
him to help, to divert him, so he doesn't perish...

... по всему громадному парку, по берегам прудов, в беседках,  
и гротах, и в дуплах вековых вязов, и в неподвижных руках мраморных  
венер и аполлонов, и в дрожащих руках ликующих гостей .... Где-то  
на невероятной поляне в бледном свете зеленых фонарей -- вдруг кучер  
не от мира сего, в шляпе с перьями, с повадками графа Орлова,  
окруженный толпой русалок, нимф и химер, и хочется кинуться к нему  
на помощь, отвлечь его, не дать ему погибнуть... (308)

The park seems overrun with neo-classical decorations that are part of the trappings of Empire, albeit with mixture of Russian folklore in the form of a *rusalka*.<sup>58</sup> A key word that follows this description, however, is “illusion” (иллюзия), recalling other descriptions, from Dostoevsky to Bitov, of St. Petersburg and its environs as an illusion behind which lurk Russian realities:

Nature, that is the earth and the sky, muffle, extinguish, calm everything...  
the darkness, the semi-darkness, the twilight, the mystery, the illusion...  
Behind every tree trunk – was an enigma, and if suddenly, a wood-goblin  
and a witch tumbled out from the gloom, from the bushes, breathing

heavily, snorting, mumbling curses, enticing, well then, please understand: whether disguised, in masquerade, or natural, they're drawn in by the solemn festivities of a monster.

Природа, то есть земля и небо, все приглушают, гасят, утихомиривают... Темень, полумрак, полусвет, тайна, иллюзия... За каждым древесным стволом -- загадка, и если из мрака, из кустов, сопя, отфыркиваясь, бормоча проклятия, соблазняя, взявшись за руки, вдруг вываливаются леший с веймой, то сразу, пожалуй, и не возьмешь в толк: ряженые ли это, маскарачные ли, или натуральные, привлеченные празднеством чудовища. (308-309)

Okudzhava teases his readers with the contrast between the neo-classical illusion and the Russian reality, in the forms of the wood-goblin and witch, and the word "enigma" (загадка), often used to characterize the depths of the Russian soul.

Okudzhava is quick to clarify the nature of the "monster," as the narrator explains how the magic of this masquerade, combining pagan, neo-classical, Western, Imperial Roman, and Russian elements, works upon the minds of its participants, creating a sense of the vastness of the Russian empire:

And it begins to seem, to be believed, that now, no matter how long you walk – a day, a month, a year, -- all the same, the trumpets, the flutes, and the violins will sound, the drum will beat, and the lamps twinkle, and no matter how far you walk – whether to Voronezh, Irkutsk, or the ocean – the semi-dark park, painted, adorned, over-saturated with cosiness, love, promises, with the fragrance of nocturnal violets, French perfume, the mud of the warm puddles, the Finnish pines and delight...

И начинает казаться, вериться, что теперь уж сколько ни идти -- и день, и месяц, и год, -- все так же будут звучать и трубы, и флейты, и скрипки, и постукивать барабан, мерцать фонарики, да, сколько бы ни идти -- хоть до Воронежа, до Иркутска, до океана -- полутемный

парк, раскрашенный, расцвеченный, перенасыщенный уютом, любовью, обещаниями, ароматом ночных фиалок, французских духов, тины в теплых прудах, финских сосен и наслаждения... (309)

However, it is only an illusion that these festivities celebrate a truly great empire stretching from St. Petersburg, to the Pacific Ocean, encompassing the scents of French perfume and Finnish pines.

The passage recalls Pushkin's description of the Russian empire in his version of Horace's "exegi monumentum," discussed in Chapter I, where, while critiquing Alexander I, Pushkin still supports the idea of the empire. Differing from Pushkin, however, Okudzhava, by the end of the inserted chapter questions the tsar's strength, and confirms the illusory expanse of his empire. As the tsar looks into a mirror, sensing both his age and the burdens of running the empire, he reflects that he could have taken part in such revelry only in his youth:

"Perhaps," said Nicholas Pavlovich, looking in the mirror, "although it's already difficult for me to remember how I presented this when I was young. You can only act like this when you are young, when almost nothing burdens you."

-- Может быть, -- сказал Николай Павлович, глядя в зеркало, -- хотя мне уже трудно вспомнить, как я представлял это в молодые годы. Так можно представлять только в молодые годы, когда ты почти ничем не обременен.

Okudzhava underscores the illusion of the tsar's power by using two different meanings of the verb "to present" (представить), both "to offer, present," and "to act," as in a theatre.

It is also telling that the genius behind the masquerade is not the tsar himself, but his make-up artist, Ivan Shumskii, and that it is Okudzhava, the Soviet Georgian-

Armenian bard, who as the putative author of this inserted chapter, acknowledges the artifice and pageantry of staging the tsar to his people. His third-person knowledge of Shumskii suggests, perhaps, an appreciation for what Shumskii might have had in common with Soviet artists who helped the machine; and perhaps offers an apology for his own artistry, which helped create an image of the possibility of finding human comfort in the Soviet Union: popular and tolerated, Okudzhava sang to the masses to make them feel more comfortable in their Soviet skins, was unable to do more to alleviate his own or their pain, but that was, perhaps, enough.

Shumskii's role sheds light on the role of the artist in the Soviet Union. The narrator comments that among the tsar's underlings, the make-up artist has come to occupy a privileged place. Ivan Shumskii, whose name contains the word "noise" (шум), and gives him the moniker "Ivan the Noisy" or "Ivan the Sensational," dresses in the latest fashion, and is presented as confident enough of his talent to be able to address the tsar with a touch of humor and insolence. Though he is "lazy and apathetic" (ленив и апатичен) (309), his eyes reflect "... concentration and even inspiration, and not the servility and fear of an insignificant servant." (... сосредоточенность и даже вдохновенье, а не подобострастие и ужас ничтожного слуги.) (309), which the tsar appreciates: "It was as if Nicholai Pavlovich even liked this: he did not try out the incinerating strength of his glance on Shumskii." (Николаю Павловичу это даже как будто нравилось: на Шумском он не испытывал испепеляющей силы своего взгляда.) (309). In this way, perhaps, similar to Shumskii, Okudzhava understood the power of his own songs, and his position in the Soviet Union: while suspect, he was

tolerated, and maybe even welcomed as a positive foil to the underlying evils of the Soviet regime.

Shumskii's expertise in staging the masquerade is unparalleled, and described with Classical references which, while drawing a contrast between Roman dignity and Greek inspiration, reflect on the fallacy of equating Russia with an incarnation of Rome. Although his competitors' creations are noteworthy and affect their spectators, the latter's reactions are expressed in terms of ecstatic rituals: "They... fell into an ecstasy, which looked like agony..." (Они... впадали в экстаз, напоминающий агонию...) (309), using vocabulary with ancient Greek roots which are presented as if they had no real thought behind them, but that "... like an ephemeral butterfly, flew in for only a short moment." (... подобно бабочке-однодневке, взлетала лишь на короткое мгновение.) (309). Shumskii's works, on the other hand, are presented as having intellectual weight, articulated in neo-classical terms: "...and in his enlightened mind was formed a geometrical figure with a square foundation, penetrating to the heavens with its sharp peak, at the top of which the triumphant silhouette of the Emperor was clearly visible." (... и в его просветленном мозгу выстраивалась геометрическая фигура с квадратным основанием, пронзающая небеса своей острой вершиной, на которой отчетливо просматривался торжественный силуэт императора.) (310).<sup>59</sup>

The apogee of Shumskii's efforts to portray the tsar as Caesar Augustus is described with a tension that paradoxically, both asserts and questions the absolute authority of the tsar. Emphasizing the foreignness of the event, the masquerade unfolds on "soft, evening English grass..." (на мягкой вечерней английской траве...) (310):

When the ancient Roman chariots, sparkling with gilt, slowly drawn

by heavy horses, drowning beneath horse-clothes, heavy like  
rugs, sailed out through the park from the arsenal to the esplanade  
of the Aleksander Palace in the illumination of blinding fireworks...  
widely opened eyes caught every movement of Caesar and those  
surrounding him. The light-blue tunic of Caesar, rising up in the first  
chariot, was like a continuation of the sky; a wreath of noble laurel  
framed his high forehead...

Когда древнеримские колесницы, сверкающие позолотой, медленно  
влекомые тяжелыми конями, утопающие под ковровыми попонами,  
поплыли через парк от арсенала до эспланады Александровского  
дворца в озарении ослепительного фейерверка... широко распахнутые  
глаза ловили каждое движение Цезаря и его окружающих. Голубая  
туника Цезаря, возвышающегося в первой колеснице, казалась  
продолжением небес; венки из благородного лавра обрамляли его  
высокое чело... (311)

Complete with chariots, laurel wreath, and tunic, the masquerade is a staging of imperial  
glory inspired by the Roman Empire, and the glory and its seeming reality linger in  
Nicholas' memory: "Nicholai Pavlovich remembered that evening well. The feeling of  
the authenticity of what had happened had not left him the entire way." (Николай  
Павлович хорошо помнил этот вечер. Ощущение подлинности происходящего не  
покидал его на протяжении всего пути.) (311). And yet, the masquerade gives only  
the feeling of reality, and doubt battles with belief as Nicholas anticipates one person's  
smirking disdain:

Most likely, he thought, some solitary, despicable person, worn out  
with sarcasm, some Miatlev, despising the general exultation, is  
hiding in the depths of the glade, curling his lips and pretending  
to be indifferent...

Наверное, думал он, какой-нибудь одинокий, плюгавый, измученный сарказмом человек, какой-нибудь презирающий всеобщее ликование Мятлев укрывается на глухой полянке, кривит рот и притворяется равнодушным... (311)

Even though the masquerade in question happened four years earlier, the praise that drowned out the fleeting doubt still resounds in the tsar's ears, and his sense of being Caesar is still very much alive: "... and he himself – is Caesar, called upon to make happy, purify, and uplift his bitter, rebellious, servile and great people..." (...и он сам -- Цезарь, призванный осчастливить, очистить, возвысить свой горький, мятежный, подбострастный и великий народ...) (312). Sensing the criticism lurking in the likes of Miatlev, Nicholas clings to the image of himself not just as tsar, but Caesar; and is indeed an apt image of Stalin, Krushchev, or Brezhnev, clinging to the helm of the Soviet state.

Four years after the Roman masquerade, Ivan Shumskii is again required to help uphold Nicholas' reign, but the empire's decline is already apparent. In those four years, "Vanni Shumskii has grown a bit pudgy..." (изрядно растолстевший Ванька Шумский... ) (312), and the masquerade he creates for Nicholas to appear as a medieval Russian knight fails. Indeed, the identification of Nicolas with Caesar is starting to fade. Rather than call Nicholas "Caesar," the latter's name is used only as an adjective: he was called upon "to uphold the stability of the Caesar-like institutions" (утвердить незыблемость Цесаревых установлений) (312). Nicholas, dressed in the heavy costume of the knight, still wanting to think of himself as Caesar yet sensing his waning powers, is drawn to reflect on his 25 years as ruler of the Russian Empire. Contrasting the servile many with the rebellious few, he articulates his feeling of responsibility towards a new generation of servants who surround him, and who, "businesslike, upright,

fulfill his will without any doubt...” (деловых, четких, несомневающих исполнителей его воли...) (312). He contrasts them with the ill-wishers:

... that for the pitiful handful of immoral, embittered failures, wishing his empire all kinds of trouble with their hostile villainy and spirit of defiance, well, there was nothing for them to do but lay down their arms.

... что же до жалкой горстки безнравственных, озлобленных неудачников, желающих его империи всяческих тягот из врожденного злодейства и духа противоречия, то и им, в конце концов, не останется ничего другого, как сложить оружие... (312)

Nicholas' fears of potential rebellion and dissent mirror an autocrat's worst nightmare; he sees his relationship with his subjects in military terms.

The new masquerade also provokes Nicholas to evaluate his reign less positively, including thoughts about the negative effects of non-Russian influences on his sons, and the cracks in his iron grip. The description is accompanied, again, by Classical allusions, in which Miatlev emerges as a prime embodiment of rebellion and dissidence. Sensing his age, Nicholas I notes that the metal helmet he wears feels heavy, whereas his sons wear theirs lightly, like the sham they are: “It seemed that their helmets were made of paper.” (Казалось, что их доспехи сооружены из бумаги.) (312). He associates the weight of his helmet with his upbringing, which he contrasts with his children's, and his reflections speak to a tension between Russia and external influences, both Western and Eastern, which are associated with his children's tutor, Vasily Zhukovsky, the poet who, as discussed in Chapter I, helped bring Western education and enlightenment to Russia through the Classics, translating Homer's *Odyssey* in his later years. In Okudzhava's text, Nicholas was raised by General Lamsdorf, whose “... chief task was to beat out of the small Grand Duke the spirit of rebelliousness.” ([Его] главной задачей было выбить



из маленького великого князя дух непокорности.); and, “The whip was his main instrument.” (Розга была его главным инструментом.) (313). Pitting power versus poetry, Nicholas reflects on this education, its result, and the nature of governmental power: “The fate of government, in the end, is determined not by poetic passages from Vasily Zhukovsky, but by the might of the army, which he, an autocrat beaten with rods in childhood, had created to frighten his enemies.” (Судьба государства, в конце концов, определялась не поэтическими пассажами Василия Жуковского, а мощью армии, которую он, самодержец, битый розгами в детстве, создавал на страх врагам.) (313).

His children’s education, particularly that of his designated heir Alexander, leaves Nicholas conflicted. Zhukovsky, known for his translations of Homer and his sympathy for Western culture, was also of Russian and Turkish descent, and it is an education from such a man that Nicholas laments, yet praises: “Alexander was a bit soft; a poet with Eastern blood in his veins and bliss in his eyes had brought him up... Among other essential qualities, he had cultivated magnanimity in his heir...” (Александр мягковат, его воспитывал поэт с восточной кровью в жилах и негой во взоре... Среди прочих необходимых качеств он воспитывал в наследнике великодушие... ) (313). Worried about Zhukovsky’s lasting influence, he tries to assure himself that Alexander has had sufficient military training: “Aleksander was a very worthy officer, and in spite of Zhukovsky’s soft and brief influence on him, he had taken in the military arts with the necessary love and zeal...” (Александр -- весьма достойный офицер и, несмотря на мягкое и кроткое влияние на него Жуковского, воспринял военное искусство с должной любовью и тщанием.) (313); with one qualification: he has allowed himself

to criticize his father's tactics, and with an inexplicable stubbornness, suggested that the army should rely less on pageantry, and more on updating its weaponry. (313). The potential of Zhukovsky's negative influence is reflected most strongly in the tsar's recollection of the young Alexander, who at seven years of age broke down in tears when he learned that he was heir to the throne. Despite these weaknesses, however, the tsar still does not wish his own teacher's strictures upon his child: "Remembering with disgust the furious face of his former teacher..." (С отвращением вспоминая разъяренную физиономию своего бывшего воспитателя...) (313), he seems to accept that a certain amount of Enlightenment could perhaps be mixed into his military blood; he seems to understand, if grudgingly, the necessity of the Europeanized education his son was given.

And yet, Nicholas still feels uneasy about how best to teach his son to be a proper tsar. His thoughts turn to Miatlev, and he is led to confront a basic hypocrisy of his rule. Waiting for the pageantry to begin, thinking of what will happen after his death, Nicholas watches his sons through the window, wanting them to notice the "understanding smile" (понимающая усмешка) (314) on his face as he imagines, and even hopes they are talking about women. While experiencing a moment of human weakness, wanting to connect with his sons, he reflects on his recent actions, and remembers that Alexander had not approved of his sending Miatlev into internal exile for having run away with Lavinia to Tbilisi. He recalls the lecture he had prepared, but decided not to deliver aloud:

Do you really not know that every person, man or woman, who has thrown down a challenge to society, having tried to cross the moral

boundaries established by the nature of this society, by the centuries,  
 by god, can not remain unpunished, and my dispensation in this case  
 -- is not a caprice, but an expression of this higher will, and if at some time  
 you are tempted in a similar situation to rule by the flights of your soul,  
 you will then resemble that sad ruler, who tried to forbid the  
 flocks to eat the flowers in the field because they are beautiful.

Разве тебе неизвестно, что всякий человек, мужчина или женщина, бросивший вызов обществу, попытавшийся преступить нравственные границы, установленные природой этого общества, веками, богом, не может остаться безнаказанным, и мое распоряжение в данном случае -- не каприз, а выражение этой высшей воли, и если ты когда-нибудь вознамеришься в подобном случае руководствоваться порывами своей души, ты тотчас уподобишься тому печальному властителю, который пытался запретить скоту пожирать цветы в поле, потому что они красивы... (314-315)

Continuing to identify with Caesar and Rome, Nicholas never delivers this speech, realizing that it was merely a “justification” (оправдание) that his son would see through: “... he could present his speech before the senate, despising in advance its silent agreement, but his son would say politely: ‘It’s the real truth.’ And this would be more terrible than an objection.” (... эту речь можно произнести перед сенатом, наперед презирая его молчаливое согласие, а сын вежливо скажет: ‘Это истинная правда.’ И это будет ужасней, чем возражение.) (315). By using the Roman word “senate” (сенат), the place where, in the days of the Republic issues were debated in democratic fashion, but which lost its importance after Caesar consolidated power, Nicholas concedes the autocratic, arbitrary nature of his rule, as well as his vulnerability to well placed criticism.

Nicholas’ thoughts, following the moment when he had been hoping his sons were talking about women, reflect an underlying hypocrisy in his own behavior and in

the treatment of his subjects: as autocratic ruler, he would allow himself and his sons the right to sexual pleasure, but deny that right to his subjects, in particular Miatlev and Lavinia, who as Ovidian, neoteric figures born for love, are perfect foils for his role as Caesar Augustus.

Soon after these reflections, weighted down by his helmet, as if signaling the discomfort he feels about the hypocrisy of his rule, the tsar snaps at Shumskii: “And what if I fall, hey, Shumskii?” (А ежели я упаду, а, Шумский?) (315). Shumskii is silent, as if anticipating the crowd’s apathy and disbelief, as if suggesting that he knows the Russian masquerade cannot live up to the authority of Augustus’ Classical model. The narrator, instead of calling Nicholas “Caesar” (Цезарь), ironically uses the term “most august riders” (августейшие всадники) (316) to describe the people who surround the tsar as the sycophants they are in their Russian context: “... all this smiling, bowing, venerating, agreeable army, with respect took a step aside, and froze, as is fitting, waiting for this historical procession to begin.” (... вся эта улыбающаяся, кланяющаяся, благоговеющая, согласная армия с почтением отступила на шаг и застыла, как и подобает, ожидая, когда нанчется сей исторический выезд.) (316). And historic it is, the first failed masquerade of Nicholas’ reign. As anticipated by Shumskii’s silence, it is perceived as complete artifice:

Meanwhile, the masquerade, contrary to expectation, failed completely.

From the start, the knightly procession was taken as a crowd of actors, but then the excusable frenzy sounded so improbable that there was nothing to do but take the most desperate events as deception and stupidity... Apparently, something had happened...

Кстати, маскарад, против ожидания, совсем не удался. Рыцарский выезд был поначалу принят за толпу актеров, а уж потом извинительное неистовство прозвучало столь неправдоподобно, что впору было высечь самых отчаянных за фальшь и глупость...Видимо, что-то произошло...  
(316-317)

This image of Nicholas in the trappings of an historical Russian leader suggests Okudzhava's low estimation of what the tsar had become, and he likens the scene to an "... ill-conceived picture in an expensive frame" (...злополучное полотно в богатой раме) (317) that is tucked away in Gatchina Palace, originally a sumptuous neo-classical structure built by Catherine the Great's favorite, Count Orlov, but which had had been disfigured by her son, Paul.<sup>60</sup> Although the masquerade of the tsar as Caesar, evoking Russia as Rome, is a temporary illusion, it commands more belief than a charade of Russian power.

### **Miatlev: Metamorphoses and the Importance of Love**

In contrast to Nicholas I as Russia's autocratic ruler, Count Miatlev is a man who, at odds not only with the tsar, but the government and Russian society as well, has embraced the effects and mores of liberal, enlightened Europe. He reflects these tastes, surrounding himself with neo-classical accoutrements; as an Ovidian figure with the soul of a neoteric, elegiac poet, he is a man who endures metamorphoses, both his own and those of people around him; and caught within the strictures of an authoritarian state, tries to live in accordance with his desires.

Although Miatlev is an Ovidian inspired figure, Okudzhava, unlike his 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors Pushkin and Gogol, does not specifically name Ovid in his work, but only hints at Miatlev's spiritual predecessors, using three instances of the word

“metamorphosis” to describe mysterious shifts in emotions, or transformations of character. Though fleeting, these references suggest that the author has been writing his own Ovidian text, both light-hearted and serious, combining elements of the *Metamorphoses*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Amores*, and creating a composite character – an Ovidian figure combined with elements of a neoteric poet such as Catullus, and an elegiac poet such as Tibullus. As a tongue-in-cheek hint, the narrator, Amiran, describes Miatlev’s last police guard as a sympathetic young man who, while initially afraid of Miatlev’s reputed immoral behavior and dangerous political activities, feels comfortable sharing his own affairs: “... and he starts to confess his own amours.” (... тут же начнет исповедоваться в амурных делах.) (484).

One of the basic themes of this Ovidian text is that love is mysterious and can inexplicably alter the lives of humans: all three instances of “metamorphosis” refer to the transformations the characters suffer, emphasizing the waywardness of human emotions and the importance of loving whom you will. The word first appears at a brunch in Tbilisi, where, having run into his companions from St. Petersburg, Koko and Berg, Miatlev is not bothered by having to face his former cohort:

... but time, evidently, is truly able to heal, and human passions are  
so inclined to metamorphoses, that these figures... called forth  
neither anger nor distress.

... но время, очевидно, и впрямь способно врачевать, а человеческие  
пристрастия столь склонны к метаморфозам, что ни гнева, ни огорчения  
не вызывали эти фигуры... (366)

Referring to the fluctuations in his own passions, he is so transformed by his love for Lavinia that he no longer feels anger at the two reprobates for the part they played in his

ill-fated relationship with Natalia Rumiantseva, discussed below. The second mention of a “metamorphosis” occurs when Amiran Amilakhvari is reflecting on Lavinia’s transformation after she has been captured in Tbilisi, namely, her decision to travel with her legal husband to Italy, seeming to forsake Miatlev:

The blow was so sudden, that for a long time I could not collect my thoughts, to somehow imagine this wild metamorphosis. I applied non-human efforts to this, and Margo called on all of her feminine acuity, and our memory was astir...

Удар был так внезапен, что я долго не мог собраться с мыслями, чтобы хоть как-то вообразить себе эту дикую метаморфозу. Я прилагал к тому нечеловеческие усилия, и Марго призывала в помощники всю женскую изошренность, и память наша была возбуждена... (461)

Amiran feels Lavinia’s decision had been so unexpected that it warrants using the term “metamorphosis.” He could have used other phrases, such as “change of heart” or “inexplicable decision,” but chooses to use “metamorphosis,” emphasizing a dramatic shift in Lavinia’s behavior which is beyond his human ken, suggesting that a magical or divine force has caused the shift, in keeping with many transformations that occur in Ovid’s tales.

The third instance suggests Okudzhava’s intention to have been writing *some* kind of *Metamorphoses*. After the epilogue, Okudzhava inserts himself as the character in the novel who had “found” Amilakhvari’s original bound volume, and who had discovered, tucked between the last page and the leather binding, two letters Amilakhvari had not included in the original text, but which he, Okudzhava, deems significant: “After I read them, I let out a cry of wonder: in them was concealed an explanation of the most mysterious of the metamorphoses which the heroes of the notes had endured.”

(Прочитав их, я ахнул: в них таилась разгадка самой таинственной из метаморфоз, которые претерпели герои записок.) (493). Okudzhava's novel, indeed, is a study of the mysterious transformations his characters undergo in their service of love and the pursuit of freedom.

The first found letter is from Elizabeta Miatleva, Miatlev's sister, who, with a touch of wicked irony is also known as Cassandra, and who, accusing Lavinia of having caused her brother's demise, implores her to spare him her egotistical caprices by acting responsibly, as a married woman should. The letter explains Lavinia's sudden departure to Italy with her husband, Ladimirovsky: believing this "Cassandra's" false words that she is saving Miatlev from further persecution by the tsar, Lavinia disappears from Miatlev's life for 20 years. The second is from Lavinia's mother, who, in a surprising shift from the woman who married off her high-spirited daughter to Ladimirovsky in the first place, finally praises Lavinia for being a "true Bravura:"

Only I alone can know how we, the Bravuras, are able to serve love selflessly; and we value nothing so highly or so triumphantly as this ability... I cannot atone for my guilt towards you! Prohibitions kill the likes of you, and you felt this when you were still just a child... I bow down before you, and your love, and your choice, and if I dare once more to wish you peace in the repellent embraces of your lawful spouse – curse me!

Только я одна могу знать, как мы, Бравуры, умеем самозабвенно служить любви, и ничего мы не ценим столь высоко и торжественно, как это умение ... Моего греха перед тобою не замолить! Запреты убивают таких, как ты, и ты это чувствовала еще совсем ребенком...



Я преклоняюсь перед тобой, и перед твоей любовью, и перед твоим выбором, и если я еще раз осмелюсь пожелать тебе покоя в постылых объятиях твоего законного супруга -- прокляни меня! (495)

The spirit of Madame Bravura supports her daughter's pursuit of love, and at the end of the novel Okudzhava confirms what we suspected all along: Miatlev and Lavinia are indeed Ovidian rebels in an Augustan Russia, suffering metamorphoses at times brought about by their own passions, and at times imposed on them by the powers that try to control them.

Miatlev, in his dual role as an Ovidian character and Hellenistic-inspired neoteric, engages *topoi* from the ancient poetry, most notably the drive to live in accordance with his own desires, and yet suffer the poet-lover's helplessness in the face of those desires.<sup>61</sup>

In his Russian context, Miatlev blames part of his helplessness on political causes.

Lamenting the impossibility of reversing time and fate, he complains about not being allowed to have tea with Lavinia, and faults his country's intrusive domestic spying:

"It's impossible, impossible... the spy appeared in my home again, as if it were nothing, and the first thing he did was to sit himself down to drink tea in the family circle."

(Нельзя, нельзя... Шпион появился в моем доме вновь, как ни в чем не бывало, и первым же делом уселся пить чай в семейном кругу.) (173). The spy in question,

Hektor von Miufing, is not insensitive to the conflict between government service and poetry, and comments on Miatlev's fate:

Of course, he will perish... in our time they call service to society not the passion to share your inspiration, but the ability to s e e m irreplaceable, along with, naturally, a familiar obedience... Moreover, I sometimes think that perhaps his destiny is precisely to burn in the fire of love and suffering,

and warm our icy hearts... But, this is comes from the realm of fantasy and poetry, where I, a bureaucrat, have never stuck my snout.

Конечно, он гибнет... в наше время служением обществу называют не страсть отдавать свое вдохновение, а способность к а з а т ь с я незаменимым, при, натурально, известном послушании... Мало того, я думаю иногда, что, может быть, его предназначение именно в том и состоит, чтобы сгореть в огне любви и сострадания и отогреть наши ледяные сердца... Впрочем, это уже из области фантазии и поэзии, а я покуда чиновник и рылом, как известно, не вышел... (341)

Recalling imagery found in Gogol and Pushkin's Ovidian allusions to Russia as a frozen wasteland, von Miufling's comments emphasize how foreign Miatlev is in his native Russia; and reflect on difficulties Miatlev shares with poetic souls like Okudzhava, living in a world of Soviet bureaucrats and other insidious "apparatchiki."

### **Miatlev: Ovidian Misfit in St. Petersburg, Russia**

Miatlev, misfit that he is in the Russia of Nicholas I, is of aristocratic lineage, and his house is furnished with signs of his attachment to Western culture: an extensive library with Classical texts, pictures on the walls, and copies of ancient sculptures.<sup>62</sup> His connection with European culture, expressed through the Classical references, is not without the wit and irony of a neoteric. His home, referred to as a dying, three-story fortress, comprises a park and house decorated with neo-classical statues, predominantly Greek copies, the description of which serves a dual purpose – through gentle parody, to emphasize the ambiguity of Russia's adoption of neo-classical effects, and more seriously, to explore the moral decadence and political subversion associated with the Western figures. For example, when Miatlev and his libertine friends, Koko and Berg, enter the vestibule, they confront a "hilarious picture" (уморительную картину), a description that pokes fun at Russians who surround themselves with copies of original

works of art, and who, in the absence of real works of art, have been known to resort to painting their servants white to resemble marble statuary:

In the vestibule they met a hilarious picture: the servants, bursting with laughter and voices, as in a picture, had become rooted among the marble torsos, which had long been unused to the gaze of unruly crowds within the walls of the dying house. Red-haired Aglaia, like Diana of Ephesus, stood with her hands apart, leaning against the Lateran Marsyas. Afanasii looked out from behind the shoulder of Apollo Kithara, like a Wounded Gaul, trying in vain to protect himself with his hand; and others, whether footmen or toppled Lapiths, whether alive, or sculpted, were scattered here and there...

“What a delight!” Thought Miatlev, making an agonizing attempt to stop. And he was dragging Natalia up the stairs, hoping her amazing nephews would disappear ... Koko Tetenborn was already hanging over red-haired Aglaia, pretending he took her for a marble figure, and his brother, in the meantime, had taken off who knows where.

В вестибюле застали они уморительную картину: челядь, высыпавшая на грохот и голоса, картинно оцепенела среди мраморных туловищ, давно отвыкнув от лицемерия разнузданных орд в стенах умирающего дома. Рыжеволосая Аглая, подобно Диане Эфесской, с разведенными руками стояла, прислонившись спиной к Латеранскому Марсию; Афанасий выглядывал из-за плеча Аполлона Кифареда, словно раненый галл, пытающийся напрасно прикрыться ладошкой; и остальные -- то ли лакеи, то ли поверженные лапифы, то ли живые, то ли изваяния -- там и сям...

“Какая прелесть!” Подумал Мятлев, мучительно пытаясь остановиться. И потащил Наталью по лестнице, надеясь, что удивительные племянники затеряются и исчезнут...Коко Тетенборн уже повис на рыжеволосой Аглае, делая вид, что принимает ее за мраморную фигуру, а его братец тем временем провалился неизвестно куда. (131-132)

In addition to creating a charming, if chaotic picture, the eclectic but specifically named statues set the stage for the pagan tenor of events that transpire at Miatlev's home, a bastion of scandalous behavior and supposedly rebellious activities.

Although the servants seem oblivious to the meaning of the statues surrounding them, more educated readers might appreciate the associations they evoke. For example, *Diana of Ephesus* refers to a statue of the goddess imported to Rome from Asia Minor, with lunar attributes, who is recognized by the *ependyte* that swathe her body, giving her the appearance of having multiple rows of breasts or testicles.<sup>63</sup> She looks strange in Rome, would have seemed outlandish in enlightened Russia, and positively out of place in Orthodox Russia. The *Lateran Marsyas* is a sculpture of the satyr who, as described by Ovid,<sup>64</sup> was flayed alive by Apollo for challenging the god in the art of playing the flute; and who, in Rome in the Republican era became a symbol of freedom of speech, and during the Empire, a supporter of the common people, or *populares*, and symbol of opposition to Augustus. Together, these two statues suggest the non-Orthodox, foreign, rebellions forces that attract renegade visitors to Miatlev's home.

The *Apollo Kithara* could be any of a number of statues representing the god of poetry with his kithara, and represents both patron saint and, perhaps, a tongue-in-cheek equivalent of Okudzhava himself, a contemporary bard with a guitar. The *Wounded Gaul* (a Hellenistic sculpture also known as the *Dying Gaul*), is one of the more bathetic statues of native subjects facing imperial violence, and provides an incongruous, humorous foil to Apollo. Positioned as they are, they evoke two sides of Okudzhava's existence in the Soviet union: both bard par excellence, and yet at the same time, an outsider in Soviet Russia, having to protect himself from imperial authorities who might

wish that he produce more canonical forms of art. The *Lapiths* present another touch of irony. They are known, again from Ovid, for their fight with the Centaurs at the wedding of Hippodamia and Pirithous, where the Centaurs, intoxicated, attempt to rape Hippodamia and the other women.<sup>65</sup> Their struggle came to represent a battle between civilized peoples and barbarians. Here, with the Lapiths toppled to the ground, mingled with the Russian footmen, and Koko poised over Aglaia, it seems that the barbarian centaurs of Russian society are winning the battle. And, mention of this battle anticipates questions about the charge of rape and kidnapping Miatlev will face regarding Lavinia: who is the centaur -- he who truly loves her? Who are the Lapiths -- her lawful husband, from whom she cringes, and the tsar who upholds a legal, but loveless marriage?

In addition to representing foreign deities, oppositional figures who defend freedom, and being reminders of the conflict between the civilized and the barbarians, the statues seem to influence the moral fiber of those around them. Natalia, who had earlier been riding alone in the carriage with the three men, emerges from this episode pregnant. Miatlev, as master of the house, is held responsible, and it is after this evening and his subsequent departure to his estate that Miatlev is recalled to St. Petersburg to face his *penates*. As Count Orlov explains, although “It is not among our duties to watch over the private predilections of the inhabitants of the empire...” (В наши обязанности не входит наблюдать за частными пристрастиями жителей империи...) (138), the tsar has nonetheless heard of Miatlev’s activities, and wants him reprimanded. The carousing at Miatlev’s ancient, aristocratic house reflects the ambivalent influence of and response to Western Classical culture in Imperial Russia: the freedom and lax morals the Classical myths inspire, and the politics the statues imply, are not in harmony with the

myths and morals expounded by Orthodoxy, especially as embodied in the authority of the tsar.

**The Elegiac Battle:   hic ego dux milesque bonus: vos, signa tubaeque  
                                  ite procul, cupidis vulnera ferte veris  
                                  ferite et opes: ego composito securus acervo  
                                  despiciam dites despiciamque famem.**

**Tibullus, 1.2 (75-78)**

The behavior the tsar would like to see curbed continues to be framed in the vocabulary of Rome's elegiac, neoteric poets, but with ironic twists, as the narrator understands both the glory of imagining Russia as Rome, and its limitations. If Ovid had felt like a "barbarian" in exile in Tomis, and Pushkin had felt a similar estrangement from life in St. Petersburg,<sup>66</sup> Miatlev, as a neoteric elegist in St. Petersburg during the militarized reign of Nicholas I, becomes a soldier for love, freedom, and the simple life of a pastoral philosopher. As Miatlev gives in to Natalia's expressions of love, which stem as much from her desire to save her reputation as any real feeling for him, their relationship is conveyed in terms that echo the vocabulary of the elegiac poets who describe love as a battle.<sup>67</sup> In Russia, that battle has the potential to be fatal, and Cupid is neither refined nor gentle. Playing to Miatlev's neo-classical tastes, Natalia gives him "... a delightful, small picture by Natoire, in which a sly, spoiled Cupid brandished a crude arrow, fully suited for real murder..." (...прелестное небольшое полотно работы Натуара, на котором лукавый изнеженный Амур натачивал грубую стрелу, вполне пригодную для подлинного убийства...) (144). Further, Natalia is such a "marvelous conquistador-ess" (прекрасная конкистадорша) (145), that with every kiss she moves further into Miatlev's territory, and will try, in marrying him, to move him from his realm

of sybaritic freedom into one where he serves the tsar. These allusions, though brief, recall a significant trope of Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid, whose many poems about love as a battle, often subversive and laced with learned allusions, reflect the politics surrounding them, and were often protest against them.<sup>68</sup>

But Miatlev's identification with ancient Western culture and the Roman elegiac poets is fragile in his Russian context, and his endless battles with Russia and its authorities find their way into the sanctity of his home. At first flattering Miatlev's cultural tastes, Natalia quickly shows her inner loyalty to Russia. As if responding to the negative influence of neo-classical figures to which she succumbed, she anticipates becoming the mistress of Miatlev's house, and insists that the Classical statues must go, to make "... the entrance wider and more elegant." (... чтобы вестибюль был шире и элегантней.) (145). As Mr. Sverbeev, whose name recalls the verb "to itch, irritate" (свербеть), Miatlev's acquaintance and tailor who doubles as an agent of the tsar, leads her out amidst the marble figures, he explains their worth, yet laughs and assures her that the servants will fulfill her desire. When Miatlev tries "to stand up for the mute little marble nation" (вступить за бессловесный мраморный народец) (145), Natalia cuts him short, deriding his neo-classical haven, and Sverbeev agrees with her:

"No, no, mon chère, all of this will be moved there, what's needed here is distance."

"Distance," concurred Mr. Sverbeev.

"You've become so accustomed to it that you don't see how ugly it is," she continued...

"They feel sorry for you," the noble spy backed her up.

Нетушки, mon chère, это все разместится там, а здесь должно быть пространство.

-- Пространство, -- поддакивал господин Свербеев.

-- Вы к этому так уже привыкли что не видите, как это дурно, продолжила она...

-- Они вас жалеют, -- поддерживал благородный шпион. (145)

Significantly, Natalia says the house needs “distance” (пространство), the perfect word to describe the great expanses of her native Russia, and used elsewhere to emphasize the distance Lavinia must travel through Russia to return to Miatlev.

In the context of Miatlev’s house, a contrast between Miatlev’s moral integrity and Russian hypocrisy arises when he learns the real reason Natalia has been courting him. Because of carousing with Toto, Berg, and Miatlev, her good name has been compromised, and she claims Miatlev alone can save her. Only after she thinks she has snared him does she let him know she’s pregnant, and that “...we will have a charming baby” (...у нас будет очаровательный baby) (146), using the English word for child, as if this illegitimacy is a fashion imported from the West. Miatlev’s reaction to her news reflects his moral integrity. He recoils as if he’d been struck, and realizing that either Berg or Koko, or anyone else could be the “guilty party of this happiness” (виновником этой радости) (146), tells her that he is not meant to be a father, or a stable member of society: “Natalie, you’re joking, I’m not fit for the role you’ve set for me,” and he gulped down some vodka.” (“Natalie, вы шутите, я не гожусь для роли, которую вы мне предназначили,” -- и отхлебнул водки.) (147). Miatlev, anathema in the tsar’s court, is also a voice of its conscience: he will not participate in the masquerades demanded by society to cover up the basic corruption of its leading citizens, including himself. Natalia’s domestic skirmishes with Miatlev, while presented in a lightly



humorous tone, are part of a battle that reflects the real battles Miatlev experiences living in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia.

Emphasizing his learned, neoteric nature, Miatlev makes historical and philosophical allusions, and the authors he mentions seem to have been chosen purposefully. Battling to survive within the strictures of his St. Petersburg life, as Krechkova has noted, Miatlev turns to ancient philosophy for solace.<sup>69</sup> While still in St. Petersburg, for example, besieged by Natalia and his sister, Elizabeta (or Cassandra), to marry the former, Miatlev recalls an episode from the Roman historian, Appian, which helps him in his immediate situation, but also anticipates his later flight to Georgia with Lavinia. The story is one of flight and capture, in which the victim, released by one set of captors, is mistakenly caught by a second, and dying, wishes the first set had finished him off earlier. (164). Casting himself in a pastoral setting, he applies the story to himself, seeing a fatalistic prediction about his own life:

I can't refuse myself the pleasure of copying out this episode from Appian, which so prophetically anticipated our fate, although we are living eighteen centuries later. I read it with a shudder, but can't imagine how to act otherwise. While I am running towards the woods through the dewy grass, behind my back, voices and the barking of the hounds are drawing nigh.

Не могу отказать себе в удовольствии выписать этот эпизод из Апиана, так пророчески предугадавшего нашу судьбу, хотя мы проживаем спустя восемнадцать столетий. Я читаю это с содроганием, но не представляю, как можно поступить иначе. Покуда я бегу к лесу по траве, окропленной росой, за моей спиной все время слышны приближающиеся голоса и лай псов. (164)

He clearly appreciates the past, recognizing there are lessons to be learned from history, if only humans could assimilate them:

If only people had not just one life, then experience of the first would be enough to not goof up in the second. However, every new generation learns anew, and perishes from its own ignorance.

Если бы у людей была не одна жизнь, то опыта первой хватало бы на то, чтобы в следующей не попадать впросак. Однако каждое новое поколение учится заново и гибнет от собственного невежества. (164)

Although he is speaking about his sister harassing him to marry Natalia and become a respectable servant of the tsar, the passage introduces the idea of fleeing to Georgia, and anticipates a scene where he and Lavina are hounded by the tsar's agents. Miatlev in fact associates this passage from Appian with Georgia, as at this particular moment of crisis he imagines that he would do well escape the looming wedding and recover from his wounds in Georgia:

For now, I'm too lazy to move, but in the critical minute I'll flit out the window like a moth, and fly away, if only to that heavenly country, which Amiran Amilakhvari has been buzzing about in my ear.

Пока лень двигаться, но в критическую минуту я выпорхну в окно, подобно мотыльку, и улечу, ну хотя бы в райскую страну, о которой мне прожужжал все уши Амиран Амилахвари. (164)

It seems only logical that in the given context Miatlev thinks of a story of flight and capture, and then of Georgia as a refuge.

However, Appian is an interesting choice for Miatlev to quote. Appian is not a well-known Roman historian. He was, in fact, not Roman, but a Greek from Alexandria, Egypt, who died around 160 AD, and wrote a history of Rome, focusing on the expansion of the Roman Empire. Only one chapter of this work has survived intact, but significantly, that chapter is the *Wars of the Romans in Iberia, or Iberike*.<sup>70</sup> Writing from

an outsider's perspective, in Greek rather than Latin, Appian does not always praise the Empire, but is willing to criticize the Romans, as he does biting of Galba, contrasting the Roman's behavior with that of supposed barbarians:

[Galba] hurried on and killed the second and third groups in the same way while they were still in ignorance of what had happened to the other. Thus he paid back treachery with treachery, imitating barbarians in a way that was unworthy of the Romans. (61(253))

J.S. Richardson, in his introduction to the *Iberike*, notes that Appian's criticism resembles that leveled by Tacitus about the Romans' push into Germany. If we recall from the introduction of this dissertation, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian military historian Potto alluded to Tacitus for the opposite reason, to justify the Russian attempt to conquer the Caucasus, rather than to question its validity. Okudzhava, having Miatlev quote Appian, suggests a reading of history that would corroborate the first reading of Tacitus, suggesting the Russians were just as barbarous as the Romans in their conquests of their imperial provinces, especially Georgia, the eastern half of which in ancient times was also called Iberia.

It is further curious that several of Appian's comments about the Iberians could apply to Georgia, and especially to the Caucasian highlanders:

Such was the love of liberty and of bravery in a city that was both barbarian and tiny. Although they were only about eight thousand strong in time of peace, they inflicted so many and such great defeats on the Romans... (97(419))

Indeed, the mountain people of Georgia, small in number but fiercely independent, inflicted similar losses on the Russians; as mentioned above, one of Potto's complaints about the war in the Caucasus was that the Russians had already lost too much blood to give up the battle and not bring the benefits of Russian "civilization." In having Miatlev quote Appian, Okudzhava not only alludes to the barbarity of the "Roman" conquests of Iberia, (i.e., the Russian conquest of Georgia), but also underscores the seeming inevitability of that conquest: "I read this with a shudder, but can't imagine how to act otherwise." (Я читаю это с содроганием, но не представляю, как можно поступить иначе). Miatlev, in recalling Appian's words as he imagines his escape from Natalia and flight to Georgia, seems locked into the idea that his and Lavinia's fates are already inscribed in history. One of the lessons of Appian's history seems to be: if you think of Russia as Rome, there is little escaping a similar fate in a similar province. Veiled in Miatlev's Roman meditations are some of Okudzhava's concerns about his own native land.

In another brief Classical allusion with larger implications, Okudzhava reminds us yet again that Miatlev is a quintessential neoteric who spurns public service to pursue his own desires. As part of her strategy to reclaim their family's reputation, Elizaveta convinces her brother to apply for government service so he can "clean himself up in the eyes of society," (очиститься в глазах общества) (165). In an appointment with one Count Nessel'rod, Miatlev is described in terms of pastoral poetry that could be inspired by one of Theocritus's *Idylls* about a rustic shepherd living far from the demands of court life. Nessel'rod conducts the interview with diplomatic charm, but makes little impression on Miatlev, who was:

... unused to government service and looked over the refined gestures  
of the official with the spontaneity of an ancient shepherd.

... не привыкшего к государственной службе и разглядывающего  
утонченные телодвижения должностного лица с непосредственностью  
античного пастуха. (165)

Like an ancient shepherd with neoteric leanings, Miatlev is not destined to work in any Ministry, but given that he lives in Russia, he falls immediately into a more politically compromising situation, the allegory of which extends into Soviet times.

Leaving his interview with Nessel'rod, Miatlev notices the sign for the tailor, Sverbeev, his "friend" who works as both tailor and spy; and he stops in to order his new government suit. When Miatlev's name is mentioned, another customer emerges, half dressed and barefoot: Adrian Simeonovich Kolesnikov, a collegiate secretary who has heard all kinds of fantastic tales about Miatlev. While Kolesnikov talks in conspiratorial tones about the recent 1849 revolutions in Europe, advocating for similar action in Russia, Sverbeev, fiddling with their clothing, listens in on their conversation. Espousing revolutionary ideas, Kolesnikov is incensed about rumors that the Government is going to abolish reading and restrict education: "They think that the events in Europe are the result of reading books and being interested in the sciences, and therefore, so that we avoid all kinds of cataclysms here, they have to abolish reading and science as much as possible." (Принято считать, что события в Европе -- результат чтения книг и увлечения науками, а посему, чтобы у нас избежать всяких катаклизмов, следует науку и чтение по возможности упразднить!) (169).<sup>71</sup> He whispers that Europe had "raised its head" (подняла голову) (169) against arbitrary rule, and hints that Russia might do the same. He reveals his liberal belief that Russia's ability to stand up against

arbitrary rule depends on its education: “When we suffocate in ignorance, we groan beneath the canes, we lose our human dignity...” (Когда мы задыхаемся в невежестве, стонем под палками, теряем человеческое достоинство...) (171). Lest Okudzhava’s readers forget that they are reading an allegory of their own times, embedded in Kolesnikov’s utterance is the word “suffocate” (задохнуться/задохаться), which Smith has noted was a code word for enduring the difficulties of living under Soviet conditions.<sup>72</sup>

Reflecting real historical restrictions on the study of the Classics and philosophy,<sup>73</sup> Kolesnikov flaunts his own subversive erudition, tossing off a quote: “It’s better to fight along with a few good people against a multitude of bad, than with a multitude of bad against a few who are good!” (Лучше сражаться среди немногих хороших людей против множества дурных, чем среди множества дурных против немногих хороших!) (170). Miatlev, true to his enlightened character, immediately identifies that the quote is from Antisthenes (445-365 BC), a devoted student of Socrates: “‘That’s Antisthenes!’ laughed Miatlev. ‘Do you know him?’” (Это Антисфен! засмеялся Мятлев. Вы его знаете?) (170). Kolesnikov does, and hints that having such knowledge, and from a Greek whose name suggests opposition (anti-“sthenos” or “power, strength”), implies he has even more radical knowledge: “I do, and even something more...” (Я знаю и кое-что еще... ) (171). Miatlev declines to join in Kolesnikov's revolutionary fervor, but reveals his true leanings by his familiarity with the Greek philosopher.

In a touch of cruel irony, Sverbeev drapes the green fabric for Miatlev's government uniform over him, like a toga: “Sir Sverbeev brought out a bolt of the dark-

green fabric... unwound it, and threw the free end over the Count's shoulder, as if dressing him in a toga..." (Господин Свербеев притащил штуку темно-зеленого сукна... разматывая, и свободный конец бросил князю через плечо, словно наряжал его в тогу... ) (170). With this simple gesture he reminds them all of the reality of their situation: he is paying close attention to their every word; Miatlev, though he may have knowledge of Greek philosophy, may soon be assuming a role in the Empire; Kolesnikov should perhaps watch his tongue, and pick his friends and allies more carefully.

Kolesnikov hastily retreats, turning the conversation to a safer topic, though one still tinged with rebellious overtones: the possibility of Miatlev writing memoirs of his friendship with Lermontov. The incident leaves Miatlev musing about the emptiness of the word "liberalism," as well as about the fragile state of his corrupt country:

Everyone is saying almost out loud that our country is on the verge of disaster, that thieving and bribery have reached such a height, and if we should hear tomorrow that the tsar has fallen, then someone would steal him, to exchange him for a medal, or for something else.

Все почти вслух говорят, что наша страна на грани катастрофы, что воровство и взяточничество достигли апогея, и если завтра выяснится, что царь пропал, стало быть, его украли, чтобы обменять на орден или еще на что-нибудь. (173).

These words must have resounded loudly in the ears of Okudzhava's Soviet contemporaries, where "liberalism" was a vexed idea, stealing from the state coffers had reached amazing levels, and bribery was endemic.<sup>74</sup>

Like his younger contemporary Bitov, who, as we saw in Chapter II, turns from Soviet Russia to the Caucasus for spiritual renewal, imagining himself as a 19th century Pushkin or Lermontov, Okudzhava reiterates this move: Miatlev, faced with troubles in

19th century St. Petersburg, turns to the Caucasus, singing praises of his Georgian friend, Amiran Amilakhvari, and his inborn sense of humanity and freedom:

The free spirit, absorbed by him since childhood in his heavenly Georgia, does not allow him to judge others. It must be, there, in his country, there is really something impossible to learn, but which you can acquire only through your mother's milk.

Вольный дух, впитанный им с детства в своей райской Грузии, не позволяет и ему быть над другими судьей. Должно быть, там, в его стране, и в самом деле есть нечто, чему нельзя выучиться, а можно приобрести лишь с молоком матери. (174)

Miatlev, an Ovidian misfit, choosing his battles with all the care he is allowed within his Russian world, is poised to enter the service of imperial Russia, yet dreams of the freedom Amilakhvari promises in the Caucasus. In order to make his escape, however, he must have a partner-in-crime, and this will be his poetic muse, the love of his life, Lavinia Bravura Ladimirovskaia, and her alter ego, Sir van Shonkhoven.

### **Lavinia: Love and Inspiration**

Although Natalia wins her immediate battles with Miatlev, she dies in childbirth, and her death serves as a narrative convenience that frees Miatlev to pursue the true love of his life, the gentle Lavinia, a curiously classicized figure, subversive in her own right, who, as Miatlev's soul-mate, craves freedom and love as much or more than he does, and is also connected with Western culture, in particular Italy and ancient Rome. As a child she travels to Italy, the desired destination for many of Russia's elite, and like those lucky enough to travel abroad, is exposed to the southern Mediterranean mores and air.<sup>75</sup>

When Miatlev meets Lavinia, she is in her guise of a young boy, Sir van Shonkhoven,



who, dressed in a “peasant coat of heavy cloth” (армячек), black felt boots, a raspberry colored hat, and armed with a cardboard sword, plays freely in the St. Petersburg snow. Despite the difference in their ages, she is drawn to Miatlev. She relates how, after a separation of a summer spent in Rome and Genoa, and a fall in the Russian countryside, she convinces her mother to return to St. Petersburg, so she can play in the park and visit Miatlev: “...maman scolded me the entire way, but I had one thing in mind: we are arriving, and I’m running through the park to you... Are you happy?” (...маман ругала меня всю дорогу, а у меня в голове было одно: приезжаем, и я бегу через парк к вам... Вы рады?) (116). Their relationship, from the beginning, is tinged with a subversive affection, that of a younger boy for an elder man. which in ancient Greece would have been tolerated, but in Orthodox Russia, is strictly taboo.

When Miatlev first begins to realize that van Shonkhoven is a girl, he comments on her non-Russian qualities, marking her identity with a Classical allusion that aligns her with the poets of Russia’s Golden Age:

Yes, but whom did he resemble, with his delicate hands, straightening  
his disobedient, dark-red hair, which hung down over his narrow  
shoulders, opening wide his grey, deep set eyes, lavishing a soft light?

No, he’s not one of us, he’s from a different country, a son of Aeolus...

Да, но кого он напоминал при этом, тонкими ручками оправляя  
непослушные темно-русые волосы, ниспадающие на узкие плечи,  
широко распахивая серые глубокие глаза, расточающие мягкий свет?  
Нет, он не наш, он из другой страны, Эолов сын... (119)

Miatlev identifies van Shonkhoven as stranger to Russia, a son of Aeolus, the god of the winds who plays on the harps of the poets, including Pushkin’s and Zhukovsky’s. She is just thirteen, the age when she is beginning to define her sexuality. Here, she is

scandalously transgendered and fully aware of the transgression of her guise: when Miatlev asks her if she isn't interested in any of the girls at the children's ball, she bursts out in laughter, and soon reveals her real identity, asking Miatlev's forgiveness for her own personal masquerade. Her transgressions, however, are part of her nature, and as their love transgresses the laws of the court of Nicholas I, she will continue to appear to Miatlev as the young van Shonkhoven, bringing inspiration and hope in moments of crisis and despair.

Having heard her name, Miatlev, well versed in both the literature of Augustan Rome and the politics of imperial Russia, immediately recognizes the source of her names, both first and last:

Everything, everything gave her away, and only when the dark red locks were concealed beneath the raspberry colored woolen hat, the faint image of Sir van Shonkhoven arose for a moment, but immediately faded away. Lavinia – Aeneas' wife! Lavinia Bravura, the daughter of the émigré from Poland.

Все, все выдавало ее, и лишь когда под шапочкой малинового сукна укрылись темно-русые пряди, смутный образ господина ван Шонховена возник на мгновение, но тут же растаял. Лавиния -- жена Энея! Лавиния Бравура -- дочь выходца из Польши... (120)

Lavinia's mother, a Bravura by marriage, as a young widow re-married a Russian named Tuchkov, and after his death tries to reclaim her original married name, to no avail. Her efforts remind the reader of the tensions between Poland and Russia, both in 1981,<sup>76</sup> and in the mid-19th century, when Nicholas I, after the Poles had deposed him as King of Poland in response to his limiting the liberties of Poland's constitutional monarchy, had sent troops into Poland in 1831, leading to his repression the country's Catholics, and by

the 1840's, the reduction of the Polish nobles to commoner status.<sup>77</sup> This hidden history suggests that Madame Bravura might have had other motives than love for wanting to reclaim her Polish name:

The young widow tried to fight for the right to reclaim her earlier last name, but this was impossible, and even fraught with unpleasantness; therefore, remaining Tuchkova, she would say “We – are Bravuras,” paying tribute in this way to her first love.

Молодая вдова пыталась исклопотать себе право вернуть первую фамилию, но это было невозможно, да и чревато неприятностями, поэтому, оставаясь Тучковой, говорила “Мы – Бравуры,” воздавая тем самым должное своей первой любви. (120)

It seems that Okudzhava has kept Lavinia’s name, taken from the historical case of Trubetskoi, for a purpose. The original Roman Lavinia became Aeneus’ wife only after significant struggle, and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Book 12, narrates the battle about who will rule Italy and take Lavinia as wife: the eastern, foreign usurper, Aeneus, who had fled the fall of Troy, bringing his father and son with him to found Rome, transforming a rural city into an imperial capital; or Turnus, a native son of Latium. Okudzhava, in giving Lavinia her name, playfully suggests that Russia participates in a similar struggle in the battle over Lavinia fought between Ladimirovsky and Miatlev. Ladimirovsky, her legal husband, a solid citizen of Russia and servant of the tsar, will take her, re-captured and miserable, to Italy, the inspiration for Russia’s incarnation as the Third Rome. Miatlev, who knows Lavinia as the free-spirited van Shonkhoven and desires only to rescue her from her tyrannical husband, flees to Georgia. Miatlev, in winning Lavinia’s love, reverses Virgil’s tale: he is not Aeneus who will found or help maintain his Rome, but her more true spiritual spouse.

Okudzhava plays with yet another convention of the neoteric poets in giving Lavinia a double identity. Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid gave their lovers (whether fictive or real), the poetic names, respectively, of Lesbia, Cynthia, Delia, Corinna, to hide their true identities from their Roman audiences.<sup>78</sup> Okudzhava, playing with the trope, has Lavinia escape her Russian identity when she adopts the persona of van Shonkhoven. For the neoterics, the assumed names allowed the real women (or multiple women) to play the role of muse. Lavinia, in her incarnation as van Shonkhoven, is like a muse, providing Miatlev with the inspiration he needs to live his life in imperial Russia.<sup>79</sup> Lavinia is further connected with the West by her assumed name. As a child she had adopted the identity of van Shonkhoven from a Dutch painting that hung in her room. She had wanted to be like the Dutch woman in the picture, beautiful, in a white pinafore and a high bonnet, with a peaceful visage, as if she had reached mysterious heights, which she did not yet understand. She achieves this state as van Shonkhoven. Amilakhvari, his wife, Margo, and Miatlev will all come to think of van Shonkhoven as Lavinia's true spirit, an angel with transparent wings (456), not meant for such a wet, cold climate as Russia (463); and of her living in Russia as if living in Hell (483). She is, indeed, a foreign-born, rebellious mystery, caught in the Roman masquerade of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, the perfect companion for Miatlev, the keeper of his poetic soul.

### **Flight to the Caucasus**

Miatlev's identification as a rebellious, neoteric pastoral figure with a penchant for quoting ancient philosophy recurs throughout the novel, continuing to highlight the

contrast between Russia associated with the Roman Empire and Georgia as a Hellenistic, Grecian haven, but also hints how that haven will not prove permanent. A pastoral element appears when Miatlev and Lavinia first escape from St. Petersburg, in a brief idyll near Tver'. Passing beyond the schlagbaum that marks St. Petersburg's border, the couple stops frequently, "so that they can walk along steep shores of unnamed streams, and hide in the woods..." (чтобы они могли бродить по крутым берегам безымянных речек, забираться в лес...) (281). Here, Lavinia expresses her gratitude for her escape: "... Lavinia, bending down on her knees, could proclaim triumphantly, in a singsong voice: 'Lord, you have deigned to listen to my tears, you have saved me'." (... Лавиния могла, опустившись на колени, провозглашать торжественно, нараспев: 'Господи, ты снизошел к моим слезам, ты спас меня.' ) (281). She praises Miatlev for his heroic behavior, and notices how he has taken on a youthful, pagan aspect: "His thinning curls, as before, were beautiful, like a golden fleece, his childish lips were ready to quiver into a smile..." (Его поредевшие кудри по-прежнему хороши, как золотое руно, его детские губы готовы дрогнуть в улыбке...) (281), referring to the mythic Golden Fleece in anticipation of their arrival in Georgia. In their happiness, they sleep in barns on last year's hay, "in the company of young grasshoppers and very old bats." (...в сообществе с юными кузнечиками и престарелыми летучими мышами.) (280). Curiously, Amiran, in his final recollections about Miatlev, refers to a grasshopper appearing before Miatlev as a reminder of a better world:

The familiar face of a grasshopper arose suddenly in the grass...

Miatlev had met this grasshopper once in spring, on a riverbank, when he lay on the fresh green rug, sinking into the stalks, petals,

and ringing sound. This ancient messenger from an unknown,  
happy world rose up before him unexpectedly and without a sound...

Кузнечика знакомое лицо вдруг выросло среди травы... Мятлев встретил этого кузнечика однажды весной на берегу реки, когда лежал на зеленом свежем ковре, утопая в стеблях, лепестках, звоне. Этот старинный посланиц из счастливого неведомого мире возник перед ним неожиданно и бесшумно... (466)

There is no better image than of a man lying on a grassy riverbank, listening to the whirring of a grasshopper, to recall the image of a Hellenistic shepherd seeking the inspiration of poetic ecstasy and promise of philosophical insight.<sup>80</sup>

Further, the narrative following the inserted chapter about Nicholas' failed masquerade transitions immediately to Miatlev and Lavinia, who, having escaped St. Petersburg, are drawing close to Georgia. The very landscape of the Caucasus promises freedom: "But already the threshold of earthly Paradise was felt in the breath of the southern wind." (Но уже в дыхании южного ветра ощущалось преддверие эдема.) (317), and Okudzhava regales us with signs of the southern lands: the smells of walnut trees and pressed dung, the whistling sound of waterfalls, laden ox-carts, hunting horns, "or even of a delighted human voice." (или даже восхищенного человеческого голоса.) (317). But the narrator anticipates that Miatlev, although a count, will not live easily in this heaven: "... his boundless rights and privileges – this is all nothing but a Christmas illusion, because it is not they that determine freedom and happiness, but the possibility of managing without them." (... его бескрайние права и привилегии -- всего лишь рождественская иллюзия, потому что определяют свободу и счастье не они, а возможность без них обходиться.) (317). Despite this warning, or in the face of it, Lavinia, sensing their closeness to Georgia, gives voice to her favorite refrain: "And all

the same, long live freedom!’ said Lavinia stubbornly.” (И все же да здравствует свобода! – сказала Лавиния упрямо.) (317).<sup>81</sup>

Classical allusions continue to dot the narrative, not without humor and poignancy, suggesting Lavinia’s likeness to Venus, and the inadequacy of Roman philosophy to offer comfort in a Russian context. Miatlev and Lavinia, having endured dusty roads and discomfort in their haste to reach the promised land of Georgia, see the Caucasus Mountains in the distance, and Lavinia is described as a marble statue, one assumes a Classical goddess, perhaps Venus: her dark red hair gives her “... the likeness of the lady, to whom fathers and sons alike prayed, sculpted out of marble, and brought to life by the efforts of genius.”) (... сходство с той самой изваянной из мрамора и оживленной стараниями гения дамой, на которую молились одновременно и отцы и дети.) (318). Lavinia, however, unlike a goddess, begins to suffer from heatstroke, and Miatlev stops for water, at which point their driver and carriage vanish.

Although Lavinia and Miatlev are enjoying a near blissful idyll, the reader is aware of reality pursuing them from St. Petersburg in the form of von Miufing, the tsar’s agent who has been tracking them down. At this moment, Okudzhava mentions his first name: “Beyond him, ready for victory, emerged his devoted friend, Hector) (“За ним, готовый на подвиг, выступал преданный Гектор.”) (320), which curiously recalls Homer’s Trojan hero in this allegorical battle between Rome and Greece, Russia and Georgia. The mention of his Greek name recalls scenes from Homer’s *Iliad* which evoke the pathos of war, both in Hector’s farewell to Andromache and Astyanax in Troy, and in Priam’s pleading with Achilles for humane treatment of his son’s corpse. Coincidentally, Hector von Miufing, as noted above, is one of the more sympathetic of the tsar’s agents.

Acting on orders from the tsar, he pretends to rescue Lavinia and Miatlev, taking them to a Russian fort on the Caucasian line, but does not arrest them there. Rather, he will track them to Tbilisi and be responsible for returning them to Russia, but not before he allows both himself and the ill-fated couple a modicum of freedom, a taste of heaven in the Hellenistic land Miatlev has imagined. One wonders, if, given the associations of his name, he shouldn't have acted with even more sympathy to his victims' very human plight.

At the fort, Miatlev again turns to ancient philosophy, which, however, fails to provide solace; and curiously, it is the Roman, Marcus Aurelius, who fails to provide wisdom:

Then he lit a candle, drew out of his traveling bag a small, worn volume of Marcus Aurelius, but on this occasion, the Roman's *recherché*, calm wisdom seemed sarcastic and empty. He wanted healing combinations of words, but there weren't any.

Тогда он зажег свечу, извлек из саквояжа затрепанную книжицу Марка Аврелия, однако изысканное спокойное мудрствование римлянина показалось ему на сей раз насмешливым и пустым. Хотелось целебных сочетаний слов, но их не было.

Although his copy of Marcus Aurelius is well-used, Miatlev finds no comfort in the words of an ancient Roman at this moment in his Russian environment; following the inserted chapter describing Nicholas I's masquerade as Caesar Augustus, this episode suggests that although the image of Russia as Rome is an illusion, the reality of its power is not, and no amount of Roman philosophy will help free one from Russia's deep reach in the Caucasus.



### **Georgia as the Capital of Hellenism: Myth, Ecstasy, and Tragedy**

As Okudzhava moves the narrative out of Russia, he continues to emphasize Miatlev's Hellenistic, neoteric persona both as he approaches Georgia and once he is in Tbilisi, as if he were indeed in the Hellenistic capital of the Russian Empire, joining Pushkin and others, in spirit, in the Caucasian Parnassus. Okudzhava, however, contrasts the image of an earthly paradise with many realia; and deconstructing the myth of Georgia as a Grecian haven is one of the central tasks of the novel, revealing Russians' prejudices about and their attraction to the Caucasus; as well as Georgians' feelings towards their homeland, how and why they have fostered certain myths about their country, and how they negotiate Russia's overpowering presence in the area.

Okudzhava has hinted at doubt about the construction of the Caucasus as a haven earlier in the novel. When Miatlev is trying to help cure his first love, Alexandrina, he thinks of Amilakhvari's advice to take her somewhere far away from St. Petersburg, perhaps to the Caucasus, and even then expresses disbelief in the myth:

And where is further? Maybe, I can hide myself from your pashas  
beyond the Caucasus range? And that's the trouble, that "maybe,"  
after all, may not be.

Да и куда подальше? Быть может, за хребтом Кавказа укроюсь  
от твоих пашей?.. В том-то и дело, что "быть может," а ведь  
может и не быть. (72)

It is the "may not be," the impossibility of finding the desired refuge in the Caucasus, that Miatlev and Lavinia face when they finally reach Georgia.

Okudzhava's ambiguous feelings about the myth of Georgia as refuge and haven are also seen in early comments by Count Amiran Amilakhvari, who, singing Georgia's

praises to Miatlev, focuses on stereotypical elements of traditional Georgia – its natural beauty, its connection with Greek legends, its cuisine and wine. He understands, however, that in reminiscing about Georgia, he articulates both the dream and a recognition of its unreality: “... speaking about Georgia, I imagined the devil knows what, but not my true native land.” (... говоря о Грузии, воображал себе черт знает что, а не истинную свою родину.) (231). Despite this sense of unreality, Amiran can't help but romanticize Georgia, comparing the detrimental effects of the bustle in St. Petersburg to the benefits Georgia's natural beauty bestows on humans:

But in Georgia, realizing that you are immortal, you gain the lightness of a bird, the confidence of a snow leopard, the wisdom of a snake, and the stability of snow on the mountain peaks... and everything human multiplies ten-fold...

А в Грузии, осознав себя бессмертным, ты приобретаешь легкость птицы, уверенность барса, мудрость змеи и неколебимость снега на вершинах... и все человеческое удесятерится... (231)

His dream, fed in part by his nostalgia for his homeland, mixes realistic touches with mythology:

In the mornings, the transparent wafts of cool mountain air surround you, innumerable in their multitude: the aroma of smoke from the hearth, of thick yellow bread and *kindzi*<sup>82</sup>; the guttural voices of the birds, the people, and the rivers; the rivers of wine, breaking forth from the earth; the earth, trembling with a light wind... and, finally, the sea, approaching this land, covered with white crests, overflowing with life, recalling Jason, and changing color like the fish-like scales of the Golden Fleece...

По утрам прозрачные глыбы прохладного горного воздуха окружают тебя, их множество, они бессчетны: аромат очажного дыма, густого желтого хлеба и киндзы; гортанные голоса птиц, людей и рек; реки вина, бьющие из-под земли; земля, колеблемая легким ветром...и, наконец, море, подступающее к этой земле, покрытое белыми гребнями, переполненной жизнью, помнящее Язона и переливающееся чешуйками золотого руна... (231)

Describing his homeland as a haven, replete with the alluring glitter of the Golden Fleece, he fills in details of the picture with further references to Georgia's antiquity, and its fame as a natural paradise:

... the milky muslim... revealing the furnishings of the rooms and the inhabitants, frozen in ancient poses, as if they were portrayed on canvas. The music, and the proud sound of the mountain deer, and squeal of the wild boar, the burbling of water, and the monotonous rustling of the *chonguri*...<sup>83</sup>

... молочная кисея... обнажая убранство комнат и неподвижных, застывших в античных позах их обитателей, словно изображенных на холсте... Музыка, и рогдый глас горного оленя, и вепря визр, и клокотание воды, и однообразный шелест чонгури... (232)

Although he realizes he is mythologizing Georgia, Amilakhvari defends himself for exaggerating the country's allure to Miatlev, acknowledging the influence of love, and the touch of madness and make-believe in his descriptions:

I swear, only love, only it moved me to that ancient and seductive wild behavior, and Miatlev seized hold of that motley, aromatic and proud hope with the frenzy of one doomed... and the pinkish trout became dark-violet and like a fairy tale...

Клянусь, только любовь, лишь она подвинула меня на то давнее и обольстительное сумасбродство, и Мятлев вцепился в эту пеструю, ароматную и гордую надежду с неистовством обреченного ... и розовая форель становится густо-лиловой и сказочной... (231)

He reflects on the role Georgia has played for Russians who have found solace there, and not incidentally, what he thinks ails the Russians:

What else could God think up to console the northern sufferer, straighten him up, breath into him the feeling of immortality and love, and with harmony cure him of a ruinous passion, of the blind necessity to save himself from others by flight, spite, or a fit of insanity?

Что же еще мог придумать бог, чтобы утешить северного страдальца, распрямить его, вдохнуть в него ощущение бессмертия и любовью и гармонией исцелить от пагубного пристрастия, от слепой потребности спастись от других бегством, злобой или умопомрачением? (232)

While it is Amilakhvari's dreams that inspire Miatlev to flee Russia with Lavinia, Okudzhava does not shy away from describing the country's realities once they are there. Lavinia first expresses her dismay and disbelief on the Georgian Military Highway:

“And t h i s is heaven? You were telling me about t h i s heaven?”

The border between West and East, North and South, Asia and Europe, the mixture of Orthodoxy and Islam, the heart-rending cries of mullas and the Greek songs of the Christians, the blood, vengeance, robbery, kidnaping, repression, slavery, and the mocking whisper of Sir van Shonkhoven:

“T h i s is what you promised me, you madman, when you tore me away from the cool Finnish crags and saved me from the granite captivity... ”

“Э т о и есть рай? Вы об э т о м рае говорили, да?...” Граница Запада с Востоком, Север с Югом, Азии с Европой, смешение православия с магометанством, истошные крики мулл и греческие песнопения христиан, кровь, месть, разбой, захват, подавление, рабство, и насмешливый шепот господина ван Шонховена: “Э т о вы мне обещали, безумец, когда отрывали от финских хладных скал и спасали из гранитного заточения?... ” (346)

The road from Mtskheta to Tbilisi is equally picturesque,<sup>84</sup> if less than idyllic, filled with dryness and dust, stray dogs, and women dressed in black, selling fruits and vegetables.

Confronting the geo-socio-ethnic realities of Georgia, the couple faces the political realities of the area as well. Arriving in Tbilisi, Miatlev and Lavinia are met by Amilakhvari's distant relative, Giorgii Petrovich Kikvadze, known to his Georgian friends as Gogi.<sup>85</sup> On their drive through the city he regales them with an overview of Georgia's tragic history, citing the major invading empires: Persian, Ottoman, Mongol. He does not mention the Russians by name, but Okudzhava has him repeat the words Lavinia's husband uses to defend his legal right over her, the words of a condescending imperial conqueror:<sup>86</sup> “After all, each one of them probably said: ‘Am I really concerned about myself? I am struggling because of you, or don't you know what's truth, and what's a lie, and I do have to make sure you understand.’” (А ведь каждый из них, наверное, говорил: ‘Да разве я о себе пекусь? Я ради вас стараюсь, ибо вы не знаете, что есть истина, а что -- ложь, и я должен вас вразумить и наставить.’) (352). Lavinia understands the meaning of his words only too well, and answers with her favorite refrain: “Long live freedom!” (Да здравствует свобода!) (352), to which Gogi agrees with immense irony: “‘Precisely,’ laughed Gogi Kikvadze, ‘and it shines on the people, like the face of a radiant sun.’” (Вот именно, -- засмелялся Гоги Киквадзе. -- Да светит народам она, как лик лучезарного солнца.) (352): the Soviet machine was often referred to as the Sun shining on its people.

Although the Russians see themselves as liberating protectors, to a Georgian they are no different than any of the other conquerors who have invaded Georgia over the centuries. And Okudzhava subtly shows his support as a native born Georgian: “... the

memory of it [the past] was alive only in the blood, and could be transmitted only by blood, and, invisible to an outsider's glance, raged in the depths of souls..." (... память о нем [прошлом] была жива лишь в крови и передаваться могла только с кровью и, невидимая посторонним глазом, бушевала где-то в глубинах душ... ) (351).

Although he says nothing outright, it seems that he, too, feels a genetically conditioned love for his homeland.

In confronting the question of the Russians' role as liberators of Georgia, and the Georgians' sense that they are yet one more imperial force, Okudzhava intensifies the presence of Classical references. In the portrayal of Georgia as a Grecian haven, we find an implied competition between St. Petersburg and Georgia as the true repository of Hellenism which articulates again the battle about which culture is more worthy of being considered European. In the course of the novel, St. Petersburg is referred to twice as the Northern Palmyra, referring to Palmyra, Egypt, which when first discovered was touted as a perfect example of the wisdom and beauty of Ancient Greece. While this may be a common moniker for St. Petersburg, reiterating Peter the Great's desire to create a Russian city that would rival European capitals, these repeated comparisons draw attention to the fact that St. Petersburg is neither Venice, nor Palmyra, and certainly not Athens, but an artificial construct in far northern climes.

But, although Okudzhava feels a deep connection with Georgia, he also seems to be asking whether Georgia is any closer than St. Petersburg to actually being a second Athens. And he gives us competing, conflicting answers. Describing a traditional Georgian dinner, or *supra*, in celebration of Miatlev and Lavinia's arrival in Tbilisi, Okudzhava, he suggests that this is indeed an ancient custom, worthy to be called a

Hellenistic feast. First, he uses the ancient Greek word for table, “trapeza” (трапеза”, (which perhaps not incidentally, Ulitskaia boasts that her Medea uses, from her medieval Pontic Greek): “The evening dining-table recalled a dream...” (Вечерняя трапеза напоминала сон... ). Further, the wine flows from a vessel made “of pure gold” (из чистого червонного золота), and “...the phrases around the oval table sound like poetry.” (...фразы за овальным столом звучали как стихи.) (354). And, it is not simply any poetry, but rather, verses that praise both Miatlev's defiance of St. Petersburg: “How brave you are, my children, that you did not bow down before St. Petersburg...” (Как мужественны вы, дитя мое, что перед Петербургом не склонились... ); and Lavinia's beauty: “Isn't it true, Maria, she's so much more lovely than Amiran portrayed?” (Не правда ли, Мария, сколь прекрасней она, чем Амиран живописал?) (354). Miatlev is so moved by the feast that he is inspired to join in the toasting. His creative efforts result in a dithyramb, the ancient Greek meter associated with ecstasy and inspiration, in which he celebrates his new found freedom: “Variko, Variko, St. Petersburg is far away.” (Варико, Варико, Петербург далеко.) (354).

Beneath the façade of this fantastic Hellenistic feast, however, lurks danger, of which the Georgians are already aware. In the midst of the festivities Maria reminds the couple that life in Georgia is not heaven: “There remains still for you to know sadness: after all, our life, is not heaven, painted by a childish hand...” (Еще вам предстоит познать печаль: ведь наша жизнь -- не рай, что нарисован рукою детской... ) (354). While she assures Lavinia that she will be forgiven all of her trespasses – for abandoning her husband, casting aside her mother, loving Miatlev, a stranger comes to the door, bearing news that troubles both Maria and Gogi, and about which the reader is already

aware: Russian agents are in Tbilisi, intending to arrest the couple. Although Maria and her brother try to act calmly, their guests suspect something is amiss. Gogi makes an appropriate threat, in Russian, about dealing with the trouble-maker tomorrow, and then speaks in Georgian, which Miatlev can not understand, but which bodes ill: “Then he started to speak in Georgian, and this sounded like tragic verse.” (Затем он заговорил по-грузински, и это свучало как трагические стихи.) (356). Although moments before Miatlev had felt himself almost able to understand the Georgian spoken around him, this time he catches the tenor, but would have done well to better understand the details.

While Miatlev basks in the illusion of freedom inspired by Georgia’s connections to ancient Greece, his shadow, von Miufling, who had rescued him in the North Caucasus, counters the myth of Georgia as a Hellenistic haven in a letter to his brother in St. Petersburg:

Don’t believe anyone who, with rapture, describes the local beauties,  
the churches and monuments of the past, the graceful Georgians and  
the feasts in ancient Hellenistic style.

Не верь никому, кто будет тебе восторгом описывать местные  
красоты, храмы и памятники прошлого, грациозных грузинок и  
пиршества по древнеэллиническому образцу. (358)

Critiquing Georgia, he finds Tbilisi “dirty, dusty, fetid...” (грязный, пыльный, зловонный... ) (358), and attacks many things of which Georgians are particularly proud: their Orthodox churches, the multi-ethnic richness of their physiognomy, the traditions of the *supra*, and Georgia's polyphonic singing:



The churches are absurd, shabby buildings; it's impossible to tell the Georgians from the Armenians or the Tatars; they all have black eyebrows, black eyes, aquiline noses, a peevish character and child-like curiosity; the feasts are set with suspicious looking food, tedious toasts, and deafening music.

Храмы -- нелепые по виду облезлые постройкы; отличить грузинок от армянок или татарок невозможно; у всех черные брови, черные глаза, орлиные носы, сварливый характер, и детское любопытство; пиршества -- застолья с подозрительной пищей, утомительными здравицами и оглушительной музыкой. (358-359)

And he expresses a strong sense of Russian chauvanism:

We, Russians, ought to thank God for our closeness to Europe. Or rather, the Georgians ought to thank God that we saved them from the Turks, though I'm not in a position to differentiate them from the Turks.

Мы, русские, должны благодарить бога за свою приобщенность к Европе. Впрочем, грузины должны также благодарить бога, что мы спасли их от турок, хотя я и от турок их отличить не в состоянии. (359)

After insulting Georgian national cuisine yet again, von Miuffling finishes his letter by saying that were he Miatlev, he would have fled with Lavinia through Finland to Europe, calling the Count an “absolute fool” (суший дурак) (359) for choosing Georgia.

Curiously, Okudzhava complicates this portrayal of Russian chauvanism, as if suggesting that those who express it may not be completely responsible, or guilty towards the Georgians. Despite belittling Georgia for not living up to its reputation as a repository of Hellenistic culture, von Miuffling has a soft side to his character, and finds himself drawn in by what he encounters in Tbilisi. As mentioned above, although he had caught up with Miatlev and Lavinia en route, he felt sympathy, and let them continue to

Tbilisi. Gogi, realizing why he is in Tbilisi, pleads with him not to arrest the couple, reminding him of the Georgian tradition of treating guests as sacred.<sup>87</sup> von Miuffling is influenced less by the reality of that tradition than by his perception of Gogi's helplessness, but promises not to arrest Miatlev and Lavinia. In return, he is treated to his own *supra*, where in spite of his prejudices, he is taken in by the mythic dimension of Georgian hospitality, and he, too, sees himself in terms of a pagan Greek as he drinks Georgia's wine: "I drank ambrosia from a golden goat horn!" (Я пил из позолоченного турьего рога амброзию!) (362). Having fallen temporarily under the spell of the deeply rooted mythology of Georgia's Hellenism, he keeps his promise for about a month from mid-June, to mid-July, when reality intrudes.

### **The Reality: Meeting the Guards, Dealing with Power and Fate**

The reality confronting Miatlev, Lavinia, all of the Georgians, and many of the Russians, soon becomes all too apparent: Miatlev's ecstatic dithyramb, "Variko, Variko, Petersburg is far away," proves absolutely false. Even von Miuffling feels a sense of insecurity that undermines his trust in the Georgians and the local codes of honor. Although he believes he has kept his mission secret, a taxi driver, taking him to Mtatsminda to pay his respects to Griboedov's ashes,<sup>88</sup> telling him who lives where along the road, he also tells him in broken Russian about his mission, the news of which has spread throughout Tbilisi: "A Russian prince is livin' here. She runned away from Petersburg. Now they wants to arrest to him." (здесь живет адна русски князь. Она убегаль из Петербург. Тэперь ему хочит арэставать...) (360). He, indeed, does not speak proper Russian, confusing genders, which don't exist grammatically in Georgian,

and using the dative for the accusative, also a trait of Georgian. Asked who knows about this, the driver answers: “And who don’t know?” (... А кто нэ знает?) (360). The Russians, Miatlev, Lavinia, and von Miufing, seem alone in their ignorance about how life in Tbilisi really works.

The claws of St. Petersburg, thus, reach into this Georgian haven, and despite the tradition of treating guests as sacred and the feasts to secure promises, Russia’s imperial power seems inescapable, asserting itself in the insidious forms of betrayal by the closest of friends and brute force. Koko and Captain Berg have also arrived in Tbilisi, and have been asked to breakfast at the Amilakhvaris’ apartment. Their rude conversation causes Gogi and Maria to argue under their breath in Georgian, and sets off an alarm in Maria, who hastily tells Miatlev and Lavinia they must depart for the country before dawn the next day, reassuring them that they must move to escape the heat of the sun, and go under cover of darkness so as not to alarm the neighbors. Clearly, in imperial provinces, distance from St. Petersburg means little in the way of security or protection.

Miatlev and Lavinia, mystified by their departure, have a premonition of evil, but seem to have no other alternative: they are guests in Georgia, and thus blessed with the double-edged gift of being both sacred, and already captive. Captivated first by the tradition that treats them as sacred, they are further captive to the mythology of Georgians as fairytale heroes. As they leave Tbilisi, their retinue assumes a magical air: “There was something mystical in what was happening... It began to seem that the squeaky phaeton was an enormous golden landau, surrounded by an escort of many thousands of sullen riders on winged horses.” (Было что-то мистическое в происходящем... Начинало казаться, что скрипучий фэтон -- громадное золотое

ландо, окруженное многотысячным эскортом угрюмых всадников на крылатых конях... ) (377). In fact, they are accompanied by Maria, Gogi, and the legendary bandit Barnab Kipiani,<sup>89</sup> stories of whose heroic deeds they have heard during their stay in Tbilisi. As if anticipating trouble, Kipiani and his small, armed cohort have been called to Tbilisi to help them escape, and Kikvadze's face is "unsmiling and intense" (неулыбчиво и сосредоточенно) (377).

What seems inevitable happens, and Appian's history seems to come true. At a mere six *versts*<sup>90</sup> outside Tbilisi, their journey is interrupted. The Russians, informed about their departure, have set up a post, with a soldier and the lieutenant Katakazi to do von Miuffling's dirty work. Our travelers are met by the soldier, who does not allow them to pass, but invites them, none too kindly, into the guardhouse. The shadow of a line, cast by the Russian and his rifle in an open square, leads to their arrest, and none, especially the Georgians who had been boasting just the day before of their prowess as warriors, can do anything. Rather, one wonders what kind of collusion is happening: who is the informer, and why do none of them resist?

The characters' personal reactions to the shadow cast by the soldier's rifle differ, and speak to how they deal with their punishment, and to the fate of Russians compared to Georgians living within the bounds of the Empire. Lavinia is the most spirited as she bursts into a rage, breaking out in a torrent of her native Polish curses,<sup>91</sup> taunting the soldiers for the stupidity of the accusations leveled against her -- of having fallen in love with Miatlev as a child, with an eternal love. Pounding her fists in frustration and rage, she goes kicking and screaming, but will never accept her place in tsarist regime. She will eventually be returned to her husband, miserable, but will escape yet again to return

to Miatlev, and disguised as a nurse, care for him until he dies. Miatlev, after his heroic efforts to reach Tbilisi, slumps over in exhaustion. He looks much older, having done all he thought possible to save Lavinia by fleeing to the Caucasus. He tries to calm Lavinia, but realizes his personal inability to alter their history. He will face internal exile, first at a military outpost in the Caucasus near Vladikavkaz; and then, eventually pardoned by Nicholas' son, Alexander II, will retire to his country estate.

Returning to the border, however, the most the Georgians can, or seem willing to do is to feel pity, protest, and plead. Maria, the least willing to express her horror openly, advises the Georgians not to resist: “Gogi... don't you see who's standing in front of you?” (Гоги... ты разве не видишь, кто стоит перед тобой?) (382). She mutters two Georgian words under her breath, “shame” (сирцхвили) and “pity” (сацхали) (381), and answers Kikvadze's Russian exclamation “Murder!” (Убийство!) with the Georgian, “ravkna” (равкна) (381), discussed below in greater detail. Kikvadze puts up the strongest opposition, protesting at first that von Miufing had promised not to arrest the couple, but when that tact is brushed aside, comes the closest of any to telling the Russians off, in anger that is mixed with beseeching impotence:

“I implore you... take your amazing war and go down to the city... it's a misunderstanding... as if nothing had happened... as if you had met no one... I implore you!”

“Я вас умоляю...заберите вашего замечательного воина и спускайтесь в город...это недоразумение... как будто ничего не случилось... как будто вы никого не встретили... Умоляю!” (382)

But all of the Georgians, at some level, know they are helpless before the will of the tsar, and perhaps beholden to their desire not to shed their own blood in their sacred hills, their stronghold, and especially not for two Russians.

When the shadow of the soldier's rifle stops them on the square, the lieutenant is helpless, too, in his own way, defending himself with his most powerful weapon, invoking the tsar by wagging a piece of paper. When Katakazi calls to the soldier to fetch the carriage, the Georgian warriors close in on him: "The riders spurred their horses, and started to draw near. Their hands lay on their *kinjali*. Their eyes were focused on the lieutenant..." (Всадники тронули коней и начали приближаться. Их руки лежали на кинжалах. Глаза были устремлены на поручика...) (383). At this moment the representatives of the two cultures come head to head, stripped of their respective mythologies. The potential for bloodshed is palpable, and it is curious to see how the conflict is resolved: Katakazi pulls a piece of paper out of his cuff, and wielding its symbolic authority, cries out for mercy: "Sirs, I'm not to blame! It's an imperial order, sirs! An imperial order!" (Господа, я тут ни при чем! Высочайшее повеление, господа! Высочайшее повеление!) (383). His order from the tsar is like a white flag of surrender, a signal for both sides to back down, and it is a surrender to which the Georgians are the first to respond. Invoking the tsar's will returns the square to its previous stasis: "At once the earlier balance was established on the square." (На площадке тотчас установилось прежнее равновесие.) (383); and yet the Georgians are the first to yield, and admit defeat, or wise restraint: "The horsemen stepped aside. Sir Kikvadze covered his face with the palms of his hands." (Всадники отступили. Господин Киквадзе закрыл лицо ладонями.) (383).

Before Lavinia bursts into a final round of protest, Kikvadze makes one last attempt to foster a feeling of sympathy between the two hostile parties, trying to resurrect the image of a Hellenistic Georgia, tempting Katakazi with an invitation to an idyll, where they can drink away their hostilities, and forget the tsar and his empire:

“...we’ll head for Manglisi, or, as you understand, Manglis; and there, somewhere on the shady banks of the Algeti, or, as you say, Algetki, beneath a pine-tree, like brothers, we’ll taste some wine. Here, Barnab Kipiani will carry a whole wineskin of excellent ‘Napareuli’...”

“... мы отправимся в Манглиси, или, как у вас принято, Манглис; и там где-нибудь на тенистом берегу Алгети, или, как ваши говорят, Алгетки, под какой-нибудь сосной по-братски попробуем вино, вот Барнаб Кипиани везет целый бурдюк отличного ‘напареули’...” (383)

Replete with linguistic barbs, however, with the language of us vs. them, of Georgian vs. Russian pronunciation of the place names, this appeal reveals the depths of hostility on the part of at least one Georgian, and is the last straw before Katakazi orders his soldier to call the carriage. The legendary Barnab Kipiani, known for fighting off entire bands of raiding Lezgin in Kakheti, remains seated on his horse, “a silent giant” (...молчаливый гигант) (383). Having appeared at the last minute to increase the strength of Miatlev and Lavinia's escort, he does nothing to help them, as if the sacredness of guests applies when they are literally in a Georgian home, but not on the road, where they are vulnerable to the laws of the Russian empire. In this episode, Okudzhava acknowledges the indisputable power of the Russian empire, and also expresses pity for his countrymen and his country, and an understanding of the Georgians' desire to preserve themselves, in so far as they are able.

When appeal to the mythology of Georgia's Hellenism fails, there is little else the Georgians can do, little strength they actually have. The Georgians are allowed to maintain control over their own domain, but that is restricted to the domestic realm. Maria Amilakhvari, indeed, may be queen of her home, but the men of Georgia have been emasculated – her brother, Amiran Amilakhvari, as he explains early, was torn from his homeland and nourishes his ties to it through romanticized memories that even he knows have little connection with reality. Barnab Kipiani can fight the Lezgin, but can not lift a finger against the tsar's men; and Gogi can only howl at the wind in protest. One of Georgia's most cherished customs, treating guests as sacred, is a limited promise, at best.

Significantly however, the Georgians are not arrested, as if the Russians know all too well the power they wield, and the impotence of their imperial subjects. The mighty Kikvadze runs to the top of a hill, where he sobs, not unlike a character in Chiladze's novel, Bedia's wife, who will howl to the wind on the shores of ancient Colchis. He is portrayed as the king of nature, who can not control the events in his own house:

He looked from the dizzying heights on the winding road, saw two clouds of dust moving towards Tiflis, and started to cry, shedding tears, cursing his helplessness and impotence... helplessness and impotence... impotence... impotence and helplessness...

Он глянул с головокружительной высоты на извивающуюся дорогу, увидел два облачка пыли,двигающиеся к Тифлису, и закричал, обливаясь слезами, проклиная беспомощность и бессилие... беспомощность и бессилие... бессилие... бессилие и беспомощность...<sup>92</sup> (384)

Okudzhava clearly identifies Kikvadze's pain and humiliation as one of the worst experiences a man can suffer:



You just listen to these words, to the whistling and hushing mixture of whistling and hushing sounds, especially intended by nature to express all of the horror, despair, and fury of a man to whom it has befallen to experience the bitterest of all experiences...

Вы только вслушайтесь в эти слова, в это свистящее и шипящее месиво свистящих и шипящих звуков, специально предназначенных природой, чтобы выразить весь ужас, отчаяние и неистовство человека, которому выпало быть испытанным самым горьким из всех испытаний... (384)

It is a specifically Georgian sorrow, recalling the natural beauty and wealth of Georgia:

And he cried, and yelled out his guttural, eagle-like, seething curses and shook his fists, shedding tears, which poured forth like mountain streams -- Helplessness and Impotence...

И он плакал и выкрикивал свои гортанные, орлиные, клопочущие проклятия и потрясал кулаками, проливая слезы, которые вливались в горные потоки -- Беспомощность и Бессилие... (384)

At yet, despite the pain, Okudzhava sounds resigned to Georgia's place in the Russian empire:

You just meditate on the meaning of this hushing sound and whistling, reminding you, how you, the tsar of nature, are insignificant beneath another's sky, before your own fate, in the midst of tragedies, pretending to be vaudeville.

Вы только вдумайтесь в значение этого шипения и свиста, напоминающего вам, как вы, царь природы, ничтожны под этим чужим небом, перед лицом своей судьбы, посреди трагедий, притворяющихся водевилями. (384)

Okudzhava's attitude towards his fellow Georgians may, indeed, be ambiguous: we are unsure as to whether Kikvadze's fate has been written by the geo-political condition of his country, or by his own character, his own unwillingness, or inability to live up to the

legendary bravery, chivalry, and hospitality that is deeply imbedded in the mythology of Georgia as a Grecian, Hellenistic haven. What is clear, however, is that he is a lord in a country that may be a near paradise, but in which he is held an essential captive, both to the more powerful Russian forces, and to the beauty and traditions of the country that is his home, a theme Chiladze visits in his novel as well.

### **Miatlev's Lessons from Georgia**

Despite Okudzhava's sympathy for, and yet potential ambiguity about the causes of Georgia's fate, Miatlev's third recourse to ancient philosophy further explores his condition as a rebel in Russian society, and highlights positive lessons he learns from travels in Georgia, and in particular from his Georgian hostess, about how to survive in autocratic Russia. Reflecting on his fate, Miatlev expresses his admiration for the regal character of his hostess, Maria Amilakhvari, who lives in Tbilisi, loyal to the memory of her beloved husband. Miatlev attributes her stoicism to the meaning he ascribes to the Georgian expression, "ravkna" (равкна), which is translated into Russian as "what can you do" (что поделаешь?) (373). This expression, coming from Maria, fills him with hope:

...and her rare "*ravkna, genatsvale*" fills me with light. On other lips this could have sounded like a weakness, but on hers, it was always like an agreement with nature.

...и ее редкое "*равкна, генацвале*" наполняет меня светом. В иных устах это могло бы прозвучать как слабость, но в ее -- всегда как согласие с природой. (373)

This reflection, written on a page of Miatlev's diary before he and Lavinia are arrested, is presented following Maria Amilakhvari's revelation that Miatlev and Lavinia must depart quickly from Tbilisi. Reflecting how best to deal with the worst, Miatlev quotes Bion: "The inability to endure misfortune-- is the greatest misfortune of all, said Bion." (Неумение переносить несчастье -- самое великое из несчастий, сказал Бион.) (373).

It is curious: given the emphasis on Georgia's Hellenism, one might expect Miatlev to have made an allusion to Bion of Smyrna, the Hellenistic poet known for his portrayal of the death of Adonis. Here, however, Miatlev quotes Bion the Borysthene (c. 325-250 BC), born in the ancient Greek colony of Olbia, near the shores of the Borysthene River (now the Dnieper), who is a perfect foil for those who live in Russia's southern borderlands; his words, like Appian's, spoken by an outsider to the empire, provide more appropriate consolation than those of the Roman Marcus Aurelius. And Miatlev appreciates Bion's philosophy: "We study this ability hastily and awkwardly all our lives, only with age do we reach some kind of perfection." (Мы учимся этому умению торопливо и неуклюже всю свою жизнь, только с возрастом достигая лишь некоторого совершенства.) (373).

Miatlev contrasts himself with Maria, who at 27 already seems to have reached that state of wisdom. Returning to the phrase, "ravkna, genatsvale" (равкна, генацвале), he remembers a moment when he had called her a fatalist:

Yes, you are a fatalist! I said to her once, -- here it is, the worth of your *ravkna*: we are not able to live by our desires, and eternally someone's painful palm reaches for our throat, and dangers always fall to our fate.

Да вы фаталистка! Сказал я ей однажды. -- Вот она, цена вашему равкна: мы не смеем жить по своим прихотям, и вечно чья-то

тягостная длань тянется к нашему горлу, и всегда опасности выпадают на нашу долю. (374)

Maria, however, corrects his understanding of “ravkna,” explaining that it is not a phrase of helplessness before fate or the powers that be, but rather a phrase that means to be proactive and protect yourself: “No, my dear, you need to defend, save, and respect yourself... This ‘ravkna’ is not about what has fallen on you, but what you are obliged to do. ‘Ravkna,’ my happiness...” (“Нет, генацвале, надо себя защищать, и спасать, и уважать... Это ‘равкна’ не о том, что на тебя свалилось, а о том, что ты вынужден совершить. Равкна, моя радость.”) (374). Miatlev takes Maria’s words to heart: “...from the first day of my acquaintance with her she inspired me with confidence in the justice of my actions.” (...с первого же дня знакомства с нею внушила мне уверенность в справедливости моих действий.) (373), as he gathers strength to endure his and Lavinia’s misfortune, suffering the will of the tsar, whose agents pursue and retrieve them from Georgia. The lessons of loving whom and what one will, whether Lavinia, Poland, or Georgia, and standing up for that love in the face of all odds, is a lesson Okudzhava, in turn, conveys to his readers.

At the end of his life, Miatlev does what he can to protect himself, and his love for Lavinia, ever noticing when her spirit, as Sir von Shonkhoven, soars through the leaden skies of Russia. Classical elements that have been part of his life throughout the novel reappear: after he is pardoned by Alexander II, he sequesters himself on his estate in rural Russia, where surrounding himself with his books and favorite neo-classical statues, symbols of a freer, enlightened European world, he waits for Lavinia:

Miatlev sank so sweetly into the comfort of Mikhailovskoe, licking his wounds, that at first time he didn’t suffer from the ban on leaving

his *uezd*.<sup>93</sup> His books, brought from St. Petersburg long ago, were standing on their shelves. The statues – witnesses of his past – were arranged among the trees. In the evenings, he would cry, not understanding such a long absence of Sir van Shonkhoven...

Мятлев так сладко погрузился в михайловский уют, зализывая раны, что первое время даже не страдал от запрет покидать уезд. Книги, вывезенные из Петербурга еще в давние времена, становились по шкафам. Статуи -- свидетели его былого -- удобно расположились среди деревьев. Он плакал вечерами, не понимая столь долгого отсутствия господина ван Шонховена... (484)

The symbols of Miatlev's former life, and his Ovidian, elegiac nature return to him, as he is finally free to long for Lavinia in old age.

Okudzhava, reminding his audience again of the autobiographical nature of this novel, has Miatlev suggest that his guard listen to the romances he sings to his guitar (485), and manages to charm and disarm the guard with those songs. His guard, that young man interested in “amours” (амуры), mentioned above, has been informed by the Third Section about Miatlev's former activities, but expresses disbelief that he has to keep this “lame, old, balding, but dangerous” (хромой, пожилой, лысеющий, но опасный) (486) man from causing further damage. He is sympathetic to Miatlev's activities, even if he does not fully comprehend their significance:

Whom did I see in front of me? An old man, wounded in the Caucasus, with a simple walking stick in his hand, in a light grey, very old-fashioned frock-coat... I found him in a strange activity. He had ordered his people to carry out of a shed all of these marble figures, representing ancient gods and heroes, and to arrange them in the park amidst the bushes. Of course, it looked beautiful: white on green, but what an undertaking!

Кого же увидел перед собой? Пожилого мужчины, охромевшего на Кавказе, с простою палкою в руке, в светло-сером сюртуке по давно минувшей моде... Я его застал за странным занятием. Он поручил людям вынести из сарая всякие мраморные фигуры, изображающие древнегреческих богов и героев, и расставить их в парке среди кустов. Конечно, выглядело это красиво: белое на зеленом, но что за затея?  
(485-486)

Surrounded again by his Classical gods and goddesses, Miatlev is in his element when Lavinia returns to him disguised as a housekeeper. As far as the guard is from understanding the significance of the statues, as a young, male, he is also far from recognizing the housekeeper's identity, and the nature of the love Miatlev and Lavinia share:

...the woman had been old for a long while, barely medium height, noticeably thin, dressed in a dark dress of grey stout Neapolitan silk, not even a dress, but a rag, and a light-grey shawl lay on her shoulders, something unfinished, as if clipped... Maybe, at sometime, someone had even adored her...

...это было женщина уже давно немолодая, чуть повыше среднего роста, заметной худобы, одетая в глухое платье из серого гроденапля, даже, пожалуй, не платье, а платьишко, и на плечах лежал тено-серый платок, неоконченный какой-то, будто обрезанным... Может быть, и ее, конечно, когда-нибудь кто-нибудь обожал... (489)

As a final confirmation of Miatlev's rebellious, Hellenistic, pastoral way of being, the grasshopper, that chirping being from another world, also reappears:

The familiar face of the grasshopper suddenly arose in the grass... that ancient divinity – witness of Miatlevian childhood and adolescence...  
a chirping, merry fellow...

Кузнечика знакомое лицо вдруг выросло среди травы...то древнее божество -- свидетель мятлевского детства и отрочества... хохотун, стрекотун...(490)

He is a being who, laughing and chirping, might defend himself as Miatlev had defended himself to his tsar, his August Caesar: “I am guilty of everything, and the only thing of which I do not repent, is my immeasurable love...” (Я виноват во всем, и единственное, в чем не раскаиваюсь, -- в своей безмерной любви...) (403).

Miatlev, as an enlightened, Ovidian, elegiac soul and a soldier in the battle of love, speaks for Okudzhava and the battles he and his contemporaries fought in the Soviet Union, speaking for the freedom to love and live in accordance with his desires, aesthetic and otherwise. Okudzhava, through Miatlev’s adventures and metamorphoses, reveals the persistence of the human spirit to pursue freedom in the face of authoritarian, repressive regimes. Exploring and exploding the mythologies of both Russia as an incarnation of Imperial Rome, and Georgia as a Grecian haven, Okudzhava, aided by his multiple Classical allusions, also unveils a deep love for his native land, and a complex understanding of the difficulties of being a Georgian in the Soviet Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Personal interview, October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Bykov, Dmitrii, *Bulat Okudzhava*, (*Булат Окуджав*) (667-672); Bestavashvili, A., “The World Will Be Like This” (“Таким будет мир”), (269-272).

<sup>3</sup> Krechkova, Liubov, “Okudzhava’s *Dilettantes’ Journey*,” (14). Although its title is in English, Krechkova’s monograph is in Russian. All translations of her monograph are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Chiladze, Otar. *A Man Walked Down the Road*. (*Шел по дороге человек*), Moskva: Sov. Pisatel’: 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Crego, Paul. “Language Policy and the Local Constitutions of 1978: Georgian and Abkhazian Cases,” Central East Asian Studies Society Annual Conference, October 8-11, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Personal interview, October 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Personal interviews, Central Eurasian Studies Society Conference, September 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, Gerald, *Songs to Seven Strings: Russian Guitar Poetry and Soviet “Mass Song,”* (1-6). Two other popular bards of the period were Aleksandr Galich (1919-1977) and Vladimir Vysotsky (1938-1980).

<sup>9</sup> Bogomolov, N., “Bulat Okudzhava and Popular Culture” (“Булат Окуджав и массовая культура”), (7-8).

<sup>10</sup> Scholars such as Kling, Oleg, “ ‘...The Distant Road is Given to You by Fate...’”: the Mythic element of the Road in the Lyric Poetry of Bulat Okudzhava” (“ ‘...Дальняя дорога дана тебе судьбой...’”: Мифологема пути в лирике Булата Окуджавы”), (45-57), emphasize Okudzhava’s familiarity with Russian literature, tracing his use of the theme of “the road” back to early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russians, including Gumiliev, Briusov, Tsvetaeva, and Blok. See Krechkova, *op.cit.*, (57) on Okudzhava’s allusions to Nekrasov.

<sup>11</sup> Personal interview, 2008, Aida Abuashvili Lominadze. Iamanouti, Sigemi, “I sang a ‘Georgian Song’” (“Я пела ‘Грузинскую песню’”), (30).

<sup>12</sup> Lominadze, Sergo, “...And from My Own Fate I Pulled Out a Thread – a Georgian Thread” (“...И из собственной судьбы я выдергивал по нитке” -- грузинская нить”) (131, 136).

<sup>13</sup> See Bulat Okudzhava’s autobiography, *The Abolished Theatre: A Family Chronicle (Упраздненный театр: семейная хроника)*.

<sup>14</sup> See Kikvadze, Vasilii, “Shalva Okudzhava,” (“Шалва Окуджавя”) and “‘They Killed my Father...’: from Materials of an Execution” (“Убили моего отца...’: из материалов расстрельного Дела), *Голос Надежды, выпуск 4*, (2007) for a selection of archival materials from Sverdlovsk Oblast’ concerning Shalva Okudzhava’s sentencing on August, 4, 1937.

<sup>15</sup> Iamanouti, Sigemi, *op. cit.*, (30). My translation.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *op.cit.*, (111-119). See Bykov, Dimitrii, *op.cit.*, (672), for the story Okudzhava told, that Andropov, during his fatal illness, asked that *Dilettantes’ Journey* be read to him aloud.

<sup>17</sup> Krechkova, Liubov, “Okudzhava’s *Dilettantes’ Journey*,” (58-59).

<sup>18</sup> Krechkova, Liubov, *op. cit.*, (13-17). Bykov, *op.cit.*, (650).

<sup>19</sup> Gordin, Ia., “Miatlev’s Love and Drama” (my translation), (“Любовь и драма Мятлева,” (5).

<sup>20</sup> Krechkova, *op. cit.*, (22-23).

<sup>21</sup> Gordin, Iakob, *op. cit.*, (41). Another of Okudzhava’s historical novels, *Merci, or The Adventures of Shipov (Мерси, или похождения Шипова)* (1971), is about a Tsarist agent who is assigned to spy on Leo Tolstoy.

<sup>22</sup> Krechkova, *op. cit.*, (26-28).

<sup>23</sup> Krechkova, *op. cit.*, (33).

<sup>24</sup> Iamanouti, Sigemi, *op. cit.*, (30). When asked what nationality he considered himself, given that his passport lists him as Georgian, but that he did not have command of Georgian, Okudzhava answered: “I am a Russian language poet. I want to live in the kind of country where an honest, ordinary man can live and work normally – outside of politics.” (Я поэт русского языка. Я хочу жить в такой стране, где честный обыкновенный человек мог бы нормально жить и работать -- вне политики.)

<sup>25</sup> Smith, Gerald, *op. cit.*, (111).

<sup>26</sup> Krechkova, Liubov, *op. cit.*, (4): “The author’s quest for new artistic forms, the research of one of the least known periods of Russian history, the end of Nikolai I’s reign, and also Okudzhava’s attempt to solve the problem, using historical material, of such contemporary problems as: the individual and the government machine, personal freedom, man and society – all this makes the research of the given work quite real, both as a literary event, and as a historical work.” (“Поиски автором новых художественных форм, исследование одного из самых малоизученных периодов в русской истории, конца царствования Николая I, а также попытки Окуджавы решить на историческом материале такие современные проблемы, как: индивидуум и государственная машина, свобода личности, человек и общество – все это делает актуальным исследование данного произведения и как явления литературы, и как произведения исторического”).

<sup>27</sup> Moscow was historically to be the seat of The Third Rome, but in this novel, St. Petersburg takes on the role.

<sup>28</sup> See Hokanson, Katya, “‘Barbarus hic ego sum’:” Pushkin and Ovid, “on the Pontic Shore,” (61-75) for a brief, but thorough discussion of Pushkin’s identification with Ovid.

<sup>29</sup> Krechkova, *op. cit.*, (18).

<sup>30</sup> Krechkova, *op. cit.*, (18).

<sup>31</sup> Lominadze, Sergo, *op. cit.*, (131, 136).

<sup>32</sup> Gordin, Ia. “Notes about the Historical Prose of Bulat Okudzhava” (“Заметки об исторической прозе Булата Окуджавы”), (41-42).

<sup>33</sup> See Kalb, Judith, *Russia’s Rome*, (196-201), for the outpouring post-Soviet references to Russia as The Third Rome, both positive and negative.



<sup>34</sup> Smith, op. cit., (137-138) cites this poem, published in 1983, as an example of Aesopian language. For a version of the poem (posted on youtube January 26, 2009), sung by Okudzhava, that juxtaposes pictures of Okudzhava and friends to a host of Soviet leaders, search for “Okudzhava, Rimskaia imperia;” accessed January 26, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> My translation.

<sup>36</sup> Okudzhava, Bulat, *Drinking Tea on the Arbat (Чаепитие на Арбате)*, (290-291).

<sup>37</sup> See Kotkin, Stephen, *Armageddon Averted*, (61), on the size and condition of the late-Soviet military machine, financed by the oil boom of the 1970’s.

<sup>38</sup> Kotkin, Stephen, *op., cit.*, (19-28).

<sup>39</sup> Smith, Gerald, op. cit., (138), observes that these lines recall Pushkin’s artistic credo: “More dear to me than the multitude of poor truths/Is deceit, which uplifts us.” (Тьму нищих истин мне дороже/нас возвышающий обман.)

<sup>40</sup> Rybakov, Anatoly, *Children of the Arbat*. (280).

<sup>41</sup> Whittaker, Cynthia, *The Origins of Modern Russian Education*, (235).

<sup>42</sup> Whittaker, Cynthia, op. cit., (236-238). Uvarov eventually resigned as Minister of Education because of the conservative opposition to his commitment to liberal education.

<sup>43</sup> See Putnam, Michael, *Tibullus: A Commentary* (3-13), on Roman elegists. See also, C. A. Trypanis, ed., *Callimachus: Aetia, Iambi, Lyric Poems, Hecale* (vii-xviii), for discussion of Hellenistic period. See Martin, *Catullus*, (20-25), on the neoteric poetics.

<sup>44</sup> Trypanis, C. A., op. cit., (vii-xii); for example, see also Theocritus, *Idyll XIV*, which uses key Platonic terms such as “eugnomos,” “mousikos,” and “eratikos,” to praise Ptolemy for having the soul of a philosopher.

<sup>45</sup> Long, Anthony, *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World*, (299).

<sup>46</sup> All translations of *Dilettantes’ Journey* are my own. There is an English translation available, *Nocturne: From the Notes of Lt. Amiran Amilakhvari, Retired*, of which I became aware in the late stages of writing this chapter, after I had already completed my translations. All Russian quotes are from Okudzhava, *Dilettantes’ Journey (Путешествие дилетантов)*, 1990.

<sup>47</sup> See Whittaker, Cynthia, op. cit., (238), quoting Shirinskii-Shikmatov, Uvarov’s replacement as Minister of Education.

<sup>48</sup> Bykov, op.cit., (653).

<sup>49</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I (35-39).

<sup>50</sup> Cicero, op. cit., (xxvi-xxvii).

<sup>51</sup> Smith, Gerald, op.cit., (4) notes: “The lone individual with an acoustic seven-stringed guitar in hand is inescapably an antiestablishment figure, a kind of gypsy.” He also discusses (114-117) the negative reaction to Okudzhava’s earlier prose, as well as Okudzhava’s other acts of protest and opposition.

<sup>52</sup> Ovid, *The Love Poems*, trans., A. D. Melville.

<sup>53</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, trans., Barsby, (6). See also Barsby (7): “Ovid alludes to *duo crimina, carmen et error* [(Tristis ii. 549-52)]. The *carmen* was obviously the *Ars Amatoria*...about the *error* we can only speculate.”

<sup>54</sup> Ovid, *Amores*, (7); Barsby notes that Ovid’s “sentence was one of *relegatio*, rather than *exsilium*, and did not involve confiscation of his property,” which suggests an interesting parallel with Miatlev – he, too, was banished to the Caucasus, but retained his home and estate. Miatlev, however, returned to his estate, while Ovid did not, though his family continued to live in Rome, and he corresponded with his wife until his death.

<sup>55</sup> See Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Book 1, 68; Book 2, 293, 320.

<sup>56</sup> The supplemental chapters are: 23 (85-100); 58 (253-257); 67 (308 317); 89 (468-480).

<sup>57</sup> Krechkova, op. cit., (45-48).

<sup>58</sup> A *rusalka* is a kind of mermaid in Russian folklore.

<sup>59</sup> This vision also suggestively links the tsar with Masonic imagery, itself inspired by neoclassical architecture.

<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, George H., *The Art and Architecture of Russia*, (294-295).

<sup>61</sup> Recall Catullus, poem 85: “odi et amo, quare id faciam, fortasse requiris / nescio, sed fieri sentio, et excrucior.” (I love and I hate; why do I do this, you might ask / I don’t know, but I am made to feel, and am tortured.) (My translation).

<sup>62</sup> See Whittaker, Cynthia, op. cit., (239-243). The description of his home is not unlike that of Count Uvarov's "beloved summer estate," Porech'e, which its frequent guests called the "Russian Athens," and which housed one of the most extensive Classical libraries in Russia, and boasted a sarcophagus decorated with figures of Dionysius, Ariadne, Pan, and Hercules, which Uvarov had found at an abandoned Jesuit church. Most fascinating, perhaps, is Whittaker's footnote (298): "Apparently, the Soviet government is restoring Porech'e and making it a national museum. An archival worker gave me this information, later denied by officials; the area around Mozhaisk [near Porech'e] is closed to foreigners because of its military importance."

<sup>63</sup> Turcan, Robert, *The Cults of the Roman Empire*, (254-258).

<sup>64</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book vi 383-400, and *Fasti*, vi, 649-710.

<sup>65</sup> See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xii 209-532, for a vivid, extended description of the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs.

<sup>66</sup> Hokanson, Katya, op. cit., (74-75).

<sup>67</sup> The metaphor of love as a battle is already a cliché in many of the Roman poets; see Ovid, *Amores* i.1, Tibullus, 1.2, 1.3.

<sup>68</sup> Martin, Charles, *Catullus*, (28-29).

<sup>69</sup> Krechkova, op. cit., (33).

<sup>70</sup> Richardson, John S., *Wars of the Romans in Iberia: Iberike*, (1-3).

<sup>71</sup> See Whittaker, op. cit., (228- 238), on the attack on education during the late 1840's and early 1850's.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, Gerald, op. cit., (137), notes: "...when Soviet writers speak about their situation, they most often use the metaphor of breathing to express their sense of the difficulties that surround them: 'There's no air... 'We're choking....'."

<sup>73</sup> See Whittaker, op. cit., (229-230; 238) for specific references to the study of Latin and Greek, ancient history, and philosophy.

<sup>74</sup> Kotkin, Stephen, op., cit., (25-29).

<sup>75</sup> Recall discussion from Chapter I, that Gogol traveled to Italy in the 1830's, and wrote *Dead Souls* while there; a sizeable colony of Russians resided in and near Rome, including artists such as Alexandr Andreevich Ivanov, and Zinaida Volkonskaia, who hosted salon in her home near the Trevi Fountain, and whose descendents are buried in the church across the square, Santi Vincenzo ed Anastasio, which is currently used by the Bulgarian Orthodox community in Rome.

<sup>76</sup> See Bykov, op.cit., (666), for Poland as a symbol of proud and doomed independence.

<sup>77</sup> Pipes, Richard, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (181).

<sup>78</sup> Martin, Charles, op.cit., (38-39;41-45).

<sup>79</sup> Bykov, op. cit., (666), has suggested that van Shonkhoven shares many traits with Okudzhava's wife, Ol'ga Okudzhava, of Polish ancestry, to whom he dedicated the novel, and whom he represented as a boy in a 1964 poem, "You are my young boy, my white light") (Ты -- мальчик мой, мой белый свет).

<sup>80</sup> See Theocritus, *Idyll VII*, replete with philosophical overtones from Plato's *Phaedrus*, about the poetic investiture of Simichidas, in which the pastoral *locus amoenus*, by the bank of a cooling stream, with plants and the sound of cicadas is a *locus crucialis*. See also T.E.V. Pearce, "The Function of the *Locus Amoenus* in Theocritus' Seventh Poem" (277-297).

<sup>81</sup> Ironically, Lavinia's phraseology mimics and mocks that of Soviet propaganda, in which "Long live ... " was followed by any number of Soviet slogans: "... the workers of the world," "... the proletariat," and even "freedom," though with a very different meaning.

<sup>82</sup> *Kinzi* is a commonly used spice in Georgian cuisine, similar to coriander, or cilantro.

<sup>83</sup> A Georgian folk instrument, resembling a guitar, but smaller and with three strings.

<sup>84</sup> Mtskheta, the capital of eastern Georgia, Iberia, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, lies about twenty kilometers north of Tbilisi.

<sup>85</sup> Reminding his audience of the contemporary ramifications of his novel, and that these are real Georgians about whom he is writing, Okudzhava seems to have given Gogi a family name: Vasilii Kikvadze was Okudzhava's father's cousin, and as noted above, Kikvadze, Vasilii, op. cit., (129-132.), has written about Shalva Okudzhava's childhood in Kutaisi.

<sup>86</sup> Krechkova, op. cit., (34) notes the repeated use of this imperial justification throughout the novel, from "the lips of Nicholas I, Sir Ladimirovsky, Lavinia's mother, the widow Tuchkova," though I would add that latter utters this phrase before her metamorphosis leads her to praise her daughter as a Bravura.

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<sup>87</sup> See Callimachus, *Hecale*, for one of the earliest and most widespread Hellenistic poems celebrating the tradition of hospitality to guests.

<sup>88</sup> See Kelly, Lawrence, *Diplomacy and Murder in Tehran*, (187-195), on Alexander Griboedov's death and the return of his corpse to Tbilisi.

<sup>89</sup> Kikvadze, Vasilii, op. cit., (130-131). Again, we see names taken from Shalva Okudzhava's childhood, which give a historical depth to the fictional character: Samson Kipiani was one of his teachers at the Kutaisi Gymnasium; Barnab Adamadze, whom Kikvadze describes as "warm, understanding, kind" (теплый, душевный, милый), was a member of Kutaisi's youth Communist organization, "Spartak."

<sup>90</sup> A *verst* is a Russian measure of distance, approximately 3,500 English feet.

<sup>91</sup> Krechkova, op. cit., (51) notes Lavinia's stream of Polish words but cites them as an example of Okudzhava's use "colorful language." She refers to the Polish, as well as the Georgian words in the text, as "barbarisms" (варваризмы). Bykov, op.cit., (653) calls her outburst the emotional culmination of the entire novel.

<sup>92</sup> Krechkova, op. cit., (50) cites this passage for its aesthetic use of sibilants and hushers, noting that they draw attention to the scene, but does not explicitly explore the political ramifications of the passage.

<sup>93</sup> Russian for the lowest administrative region, now called a region (район).

## Chapter V

**Otar Chiladze's *A Man Walked Down the Road: Medea Made Georgian, Captivity as Freedom***

In the cultural dialogue between the Russian empire and its citizens and neighbors, Chiladze, like Pushkin, Gogol, Bitov, Ulitskaia, and Okudzhava, has chosen to use the Classics as a common allusive language for discussion. In the cultural skirmishes between Russia and Georgia, Chiladze uses Classical allusions to wage his battles, revealing his deeply felt agenda to defend Georgia's cultural integrity and political autonomy. In his efforts to help defend Georgia, Chiladze, in *გზაზე ერთი კაცი მივიდა* (*A Man Walked Down the Road*),<sup>1</sup> attempts to define what it means to be Georgian, and in the process challenges a number of the stereotypes about Georgia and Georgians that we have seen in the works of Bitov and Ulitskaia, as well as in Okudzhava's novel. He begins this process by creating an image of Medea and a host of other characters, all imbued with traits, positive and negative, that he feels embody the essence of Georgian identity and at the same time help connect the Georgians with a sense of humanism founded on the principles of personal honesty and freedom.

Unlike Okudzhava, who was born in Moscow in 1924, lived in Tbilisi, Moscow, the Urals, and Kaluga between 1930 and 1955, and settled in Moscow after 1956,<sup>2</sup> and was a cosmopolitan Soviet citizen, Chiladze spent his life deeply rooted in Georgia. He was born in 1933 in the town of Signaghi, a cultural center of the Kakheti region in eastern Georgia located close to Bodbe Monastery where St. Nino, who brought Christianity to Georgia in the 320's, is buried. He attended school and university in Tbilisi, and lived there until his death in 2009. Steeped in Georgian culture, with its

secular literary tradition dating back to Iakov Tsurtaveli's *The Passion of Saint Shushanik*, written between 476 and 483 AD,<sup>3</sup> Chiladze was an ardent Georgian and has been honored as such. After his death in late September 2009, he was buried in the Georgian Pantheon on Mtatsminda ("Holy Mountain") in Tbilisi, along other great figures of Georgian culture and history, including Alexander Griboedov and Nino Chavchavadze, Ilia Chavchavadze, Vazha-Pshavela, and Zviad Gamsakhurdia.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Classical Conundrum: Russians as Greeks, Georgians as Themselves**

As discussed in Chapter IV, Bulat Okudzhava, relying on literary tropes inherited from 19th century Russia, frames his dissent and criticism of his Soviet times in Classical allusions, presenting himself and his heroes as rebellious Ovidian, neoteric, and neo-Hellenistic figures trying to survive in a Russia imagined in terms of the Roman Empire under Augustus. Otar Chiladze, in contrast, in *A Man Walked Down the Road*, bypasses the concept of Russia as Rome and frames his tale of nation and empire in terms entirely Greek, as if refusing to engage with Russia's imagining itself as either Augustan Rome, or a Christian Third Rome. Indeed, Chiladze shares his compatriots' interest in Georgia's ties to ancient Greece, primarily through the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, and other, archeological evidence of Colchis' ancient culture and its existence as a political entity.<sup>5</sup> He differentiates, however, between the Greeks on Crete,<sup>6</sup> whom he identifies as alien and hostile, equivalent of present-day Russians, and the Colchians, the ancient inhabitants of Georgia, who enjoy a culture that predates and in ways is superior to the Greek culture found on Crete. Drawing on elements of Apollonius of Rhodes' Hellenistic epic *The Argonautica* and other Classical literary and mythical tropes, Chiladze focuses on

Georgia's ties with the Classical Greek world, yet significantly re-constructs some of the basic Greek mythological characters from a Georgian perspective, defining for himself and his country a cultural space separate from Crete's, i.e. Russia's identity. With that bold move, ignoring Russia's identification with Rome and undercutting Russia's claim to ties with the cultural heritage that comes from ancient Greece, he denies Russia two of its sources for legitimizing its power via close association with the Classical world.

Georgia is no stranger to various ties to ancient Greek culture, especially to the myth of Jason and the Argonauts. As discussed in the introduction, European, American, Russian, and Georgian scholars alike have explored the tendrils of Greek culture that have spread and grown in Georgian soil. In the mid-to-late 1880's, after subduing the Caucasus and establishing Tbilisi (then Tiflis) as their Empire's capital in the Caucasus, the Russians were portrayed as bearing civilization to the Caucasus. When the British diplomat Oliver Wardrop visited the Caucasus Museum in Tiflis in 1887, he witnessed such an example: "Above the staircase, he saw a painting, 'the 'Arrival of the Argonauts in Colchis,' the figures in which are all portraits, the Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich [Romanov] being represented as Jason,'" bringing civilization to the ancient inhabitants of Colchis.<sup>7</sup> Also as noted, in 1856 the American writer J. Milton Mackie used the Classical figures who found their home in Georgia to suggest that Imam Shamil, the Islamic leader who carried out campaigns against the Russians in Chechnya and Dagestan from the mid-1820's to his capture in 1859, was in fact fighting for democratic freedom in a harsh and autocratic Russian environment.<sup>8</sup> The Soviet period was not without its allusions to *The Argonautica*, as seen in Konstantin Lordkipanidze's Socialist Realist novel, *The Dawn of Colchis*, which borrows the ancient name for a story about the heroic

efforts taken to found a kolkhoz named “Colchis” in western Georgia, though Lordkipanidze refers to the Golden Fleece only once in the entire novel.<sup>9</sup> And in the early 21st century, Georgian scholars and government officials alike have eagerly emphasized Georgia’s ties to both contemporary and ancient Greece, hoping to bolster their country’s connections with Western Europe in their efforts to establish independence from Russia’s influence.

Chiladze, too, is no stranger to manipulating the Greek myths, especially that of the Argonauts. An epic length novel, *A Man Walked Down the Road* begins as a nominal retelling of the *Argonautica*, Jason’s pursuit of the Golden Fleece, and the history of ancient Colchis, the legendary land of Medea and her father, Aeëtes. Beginning from the moment the first Greek sets foot on the territory of Vani, the supposed capital of ancient Colchis, and humbly asks for asylum, the story follows the fate of Colchis after the inhabitants of Vani accept the asylum-seeker, Phrixus,<sup>10</sup> and casts Jason as leading the second of four waves of invaders who, rather than bringing civilization to an “ancient yet somewhat backward kingdom,”<sup>11</sup> wreak havoc on a civilization that has been thriving for millennia. As with Okudzhava’s *Dilettantes’ Journey*, this historical novel can be read as political allegory, and Chiladze, on his deathbed, insisted that the Greeks from Crete who invade Colchis are to be identified as Russians, and that the novel is indeed, specifically about Russian aggression against Georgia.<sup>12</sup> When asked about the 2000 Russian language edition of the novel printed in St. Petersburg, he commented that he thought it was in part an admission of Russia’s guilt before Georgia, and that thinking, reading Russians would understand the allegory, and the nature of Russia’s continued aggression.<sup>13</sup>

Although published in 1973, the novel offers prophetic insight into the current relationship between Georgia and Russia, and problems of political and cultural identity Georgia faces today. Its characters experience the loss of territory they feel is integral to their country, as many Georgians feel about what has happened in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Waves of invading armies appear on their shores, and we are reminded that after the August 2008 War, Russia has installed a sizeable military infrastructure in both of the contested areas.<sup>14</sup> In the once rich and vibrant culture destroyed by geo-political forces, we see a reminder that Georgia in the post-Soviet world faces many challenges of restructuring and rebuilding its cultural institutions -- educational, artistic, medical, political, and military alike. In the picture of Vani, ruled by a native son working in collusion with an external enemy, and where the people are terrified to speak out in protest, we also see signs of some of Georgia's contemporary domestic tensions.<sup>15</sup>

The novel is far more complex than a simple political tract, however, and in its full scope celebrates moments of Georgian culture, reveling in arcane Georgian vocabulary,<sup>16</sup> allusions to folksongs, and imbedded images of Georgian country life. The result of these complexities is the expression of an underlying humanity that points to a space of shared human understanding, creating not a black and white picture of hostilities, but a multi-hued tapestry in which the final hero of the novel, Pharnaozi, embodies a sense of the ideals and freedom that Chiladze believes his country must embrace in order for it simultaneously to hold on to its history, deal with its near neighbors, especially Russia to the north, and move forward, continuing to assert its place in geo-political time and space.



Chiladze's use of the Classical referents helps to create a complex picture of the ancient Greek world, and by extension, the allegorized present. Although Chiladze adamantly identifies the invaders from Crete as Greeks (i.e. as Russians) and thus different from his native Colchian heroes, this distinction is complicated as his native characters intermarry and intermingle with the Greeks, and share characteristics with their Greek literary predecessors, especially those filtered through the Hellenistic literary tradition. For example, the chief villain, Kusa, is a native of Colchis who works in collusion with the Greeks as their local executioner. And Chiladze's hero, Pharnaozi, named after Georgia's legendary first king Parnavas, is thoroughly Georgian, but like Okudzhava's Miatlev, as a Hellenistic figure, or a pastoral misfit, also embodies aspects of ancient Greek myth, saving Daedalus' son Icarus in the final paragraphs of the novel.

In contrast to Okudzhava, however, who portrays Georgia as a haven that proves to be primarily a nostalgic mythical construct that veils the harsh realities of Georgia's position in the Russian empire, Chiladze, ardent nationalist that he was, affirms the myth of Georgia as a paradise in a more positive fashion. He is not afraid to criticize or question aspects of Georgian culture or of its mythology, but he does so as an insider, in Georgian, as a member of the family he does not abandon or forsake. His characters embody aspects of Georgia's identity and history, shaped by its geo-political location at the crossroads of so many empires, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Mongol, Ottoman, Persian, Russian, and some would argue, now American; and through all this complex history, Georgian culture has survived remarkably intact, in large part thanks to the Georgian language, which Chiladze insists on using to the fullest.<sup>17</sup> Through re-imagining the ancient Greek myths, and creating characters who weave together

Georgian traits with strands of Hellenism and older Greek culture, Chiladze's novel is a celebration of the Georgian language, an assertion of the independence and durability of Georgia, and of what Chiladze feels is best in Georgian culture.

Chiladze's novel, thus, is not nationalistic in the sense that it represents stereotypical elements of Georgian culture, examples of which we have seen in Bitov's, Ulitskaia's, and even Okudzhava's works discussed above. It is not a novel that celebrates excessive drinking, or the *supra*, the lengthy, extravagant feasts enjoyed by Stalin and his entourage, and discussed today as a defining element of Georgian life.<sup>18</sup> Nor does it cultivate unquestioningly the myth of sacred hospitality towards guests, the myth of Motherhood, or that of the invincible Georgian warrior; or find any tolerance for harsh, tyrannical leaders. Instead, there are only a few *supras*, none described in detail; and rather more underground gatherings of hushed and frightened voices. Pharnaozi's true love is a knock-kneed, pig-tailed prostitute; his wife and the mother of his child is a conniving, if well-intending neighbor girl. The novel's heroes, Aeëtes, Ukheiros, and Pharnaozi are ineffective, emasculated, or dreamers, or a combination of all three. The invading Greeks are deceitful or disabled by nostalgia, and the men who posture as lords and kings bring nothing but fear and loathing to their subjects' hearts. It is a novel that demythologizes one set of national myths, creating instead a vision of Georgian life lived within its historically integral borders, recognizing elements that are not perfect, and yet portraying a life firmly dedicated to human honesty, to personal and political freedom. In many ways, the novel explores the "what" of Maria Amilakhvari's interpretation of the expression "ravkna, genetsvale" ("What can you do, dear?"), that is, what Georgians

need to do to maintain their language and their culture, their humanity, and their self-respect.

### **Interwoven Threads: Unveiling Georgian Hellenism**

In expressing the novel's sense of humanism, national dignity, and the pursuit of freedom, Chiladze interweaves two major threads. First, that of the text above all as a Georgian novel, written in Georgian at a time when other authors from the Caucasus, such as Fazil Iskander from Abkhazia, and Bulat Okudzhava, had elected to write in Russian.<sup>19</sup> Chiladze, however, chose to write in Georgian, and although his work was translated into Russian in 1978, moments of contrast between the two versions offer additional depth to reading his novel, helping to identify and preserve a sense of Georgian national character that Chiladze simultaneously helps to create in his work. Second, rather than being Classical in the Homeric sense, or in the tradition of Athenian tragedy, the text resembles far more an extended Hellenistic poem, playing freely with inversions, additions and diversions from the original texts; and replete with philosophical and political overtones so characteristic of Hellenistic literature. When asked about why he used Hellenistic myths in his work, Chiladze just smiled, and said he had always been drawn to them, as if they were a natural part of his cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup>

Adding to the discussion about Hellenism in Chapter IV, it is important to recall that the Hellenistic period of Greek literature flourished after the center of the Greek world had shifted from Athens to Alexandria, Egypt, under the reign of the Ptolomies. It was an active and creative period. The authors, whose works have been preserved, such as Theocritus, Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Moschus and Bion, were highly self-

conscious, mixing genres, creatively altering canonical mythologies, making allusions, and focusing on the aesthetics of the text. It was also a period of humanizing the archaic, Homeric superheroes.<sup>21</sup> In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, for example, Heracles is left behind in Greece at the beginning of the epic, and Jason emerges as a new hero, but he is weak compared to Heracles, treacherous, dependent on Medea for his ultimate success in obtaining the Golden Fleece, and a traitor to Medea once back in Greece.

Although Chiladze's novel is based loosely on the story of the *Argonautica*, as a fractured fairy tale, the roles and character of the canonical Greek mythological figures are often inverted and redrawn, relatively minor characters are brought to the fore, and shown in domestic, everyday situations.<sup>22</sup> For example, in the *Argonautica*, Jason loses a sandal in the mud, and when he appears before Pelius with a single sandal the king remembers an ancient prophecy that his ruin will follow upon the arrival of a man with one sandal, and so sets Jason the difficult task of retrieving the Golden Fleece. Chiladze has altered the story, foregrounding Phrixus, the son of Athamas, king of Boetia, as the stranger who arrives in Vani with one sandal: “He was dressed in a short tunic with gold trim. He had a sandal on one foot, with lacings crisscrossing his calf; the other sandal must have been lost.” (“მოკლე ტუნიკი ეცვა, ოქროს სირმებით გაწყობილი. ცალი სანდალი დაჰკარგოდა, მეორე სანდლის თასმები კი წვივზე ჯვარედინად შემოეხვია.”) (13). A large part of the novel's first section, “Aeëtes,” is dedicated to Phrixus' inter-ethnic marriage to Medea's sister, Karisa, who is mentioned in passing in the *Argonautica*, where her name is Chalciope. There has been no specific prophecy, but being the first Greek to visit Vani, Phrixus eventually brings ruin to ancient Colchis, and not to the Greeks on Crete. Further, unlike Jason who travels from Greece to Colchis in

search of the Golden Fleece which will help him regain his rightful kingdom, Pharnaozi travels from Colchis to Crete and back again, returning with nothing but a clay identification tablet hanging around his neck, an intense love for his native land, and a stubborn hope that he has not lived his life in vain.

Other Hellenistic traits are reminiscent of Theocritus' cycle of bucolic poems, where mighty heroes are further diminished or humanized, the everyday is celebrated, and there is a subtle sprinkling of philosophy with political overtones. For example, Idyll I, in which the shepherd Thyrsis sings the praises of a rustic cup, "raises a popular song tradition to the level of high art."<sup>23</sup> Further, as mentioned above, Idyll VII, with Plato's *Phaedrus* as a literary precedent, presents a rustic shepherd, Simichidas, who waxes philosophical on the banks of a babbling stream, dispensing political advice about the traits an ideal king should embody. In Idyll XIII, Heracles' heroic stature is diminished when he deserts his men to search for his lost lover, Hylas. In Idyll XI, Polyphemus, in Homer the picture of a lawless, man-eating Cyclops, appears as a bathetic, lovelorn shepherd who finds his medicine and solace in singing poetry that is highly stylized and heavily laced with philosophy. Other "lesser" Idylls, such as II, XIV and XV, include witches' charms, lovers' laments, snippets of drinking songs, as well as domestic and street scenes.<sup>24</sup> Theocritus' poems are written in an extremely learned style, replete with arcane allusions and archaic language. The political implications of this kind of poetry are subtle, but present: in the welter of allusions to Classical Greek texts and the imbedded philosophical buzz-words, as court poetry it offers subdued, yet lively political commentary when more open criticism was not encouraged.<sup>25</sup> It provides a vehicle for allegorical reading of characters who at the same time are very real and down to earth.

Chiladze seems quite conscious of this Hellenistic tradition, borrows from it, and plays with it on many levels.

### **The Novel, its Reception, and the Importance of the Georgian Language**

Written in the decade that saw the 1977 protests in Tbilisi against Russian Soviet attempts to suppress the use of the Georgian language in schools and government institutions,<sup>26</sup> Chiladze's novel is above all a testament to the endurance of the Georgian language as a means to ensure the survival of the Georgian people and their culture. The novel was first published in Georgian in 1973, translated into Russian by 1978, and the prefaces of the two versions promise very different stories.<sup>27</sup> The novel was widely read, yet controversial. One of the novel's earliest reviewers, the Georgian A. Bestavashvili, noted that while it is based on the *Argonautica*, it is also full of Georgian folk elements, and predicted that it would become an object of controversy, which it did.<sup>28</sup> Subsequent Soviet critics became embroiled in questions such as: does it represent reality, is it mythology, or is it an attempt to create an anti-mythology, deconstructing the old myths, recreating new ones to replace them, an exercise in "mythmaking" (мифотворчество)?<sup>29</sup> One critic focuses on the first part of the novel as being more colorful and having most to do with re-writing the ancient myths – after all, Jason and Medea disappear at the end of Part I, at page 194 of a 613-page novel.<sup>30</sup> Another attributes Pharnaozi's cowardly, dreamy character to his political leanings, and suggests that he represents a contemporary problem: "The moral deficiency of the hero turns out to be linked also with his social-political inferiority: a fully contemporary collision!" ("Нравственная недостаточность героя оказывается связанной и с его неполноценностью социально-политической: коллизия вполне современная!").<sup>31</sup> Post-Soviet criticism has tended to avoid the political implications of the text. In his introductory essay to the 2000 Russian language edition, Lev Anninskii emphasizes the lyric, emotional aspects of the novel, and suggests

that it is “mythological,” or “magical” realism,<sup>32</sup> a definition which Chiladze did not endorse.<sup>33</sup> And even Georgia’s primary Chiladze scholar interprets the novel in structural terms influenced by theories of semiotics, eschewing any political ramifications of the novel.<sup>34</sup>

Above all, the Soviet critics accuse Chiladze of not creating a hero suitable for a Socialist Realist novel, which Pharnaozi, a dreamer and social misfit, clearly is not. Interestingly though, the Soviet Russian edition’s preface tries to mask this fault, and written in a tone that hails the good and hearty, emphasizing the striving towards progress, highlights Chiladze’s use of Classical mythology and the hyperbolic range of its characters’ emotions, its “...full-blooded heroes, full of deep feelings, powerful emotions, lofty thoughts, base intentions.” (“...полнокровные герои, исполненные глубоких чувств, могучих страстей, высоких мыслей или низменных помыслов.”) (3).<sup>35</sup>

The Georgian preface, in contrast, has none of the Russian version’s hyperbole, and reveals instead a preoccupation with the word, “the people” (ხალხი) which appears three times in the first short sentence, and six times throughout the preface. This term is translated as “the people” in Russian, (народ), but rather than having the familiar ring from the vocabulary of international communism, as in “the friendship of peoples” (дружба народов), it here begs the question of what the term means, in its own context, in Georgia. And indeed, the entire novel explores what “the people” (ხალხი) means, in many of its manifestations. The Georgian preface mentions little “about the dream and the faith of the people in a bright future” (“о мечте и вере в светлое будущее народа”), but rather promises us the story of the “pain” (ტკივილი), the “happiness” (სიხარული), the “dream” (ოცნება) and “faith” (რწმენა), specifically, of the people of Colchis. The Georgian preface also offers a more realistic picture of the novel’s actual content. Its three parts center on three men, Aeëtes, Ukheiro, and Pharnaozi, who are in turn a king, a warrior, and a stonemason: three faces of one people. We are told

outright that the main hero, not just a character, but a “hero” (გმირი) is again, the people. Finally, the Georgian preface concludes with a long, convoluted sentence that does not exist in the Russian version, but which expresses the essence of the novel, “This is the novel’s main idea.” (“ეს არის რომანის დედააზრი”): “If you can keep your humanity on the long road of life that is full of trouble, then your existence will be united with an eternal phenomenon – the people.” (“თუკი ცხოვრების ხიფათებით სავსე გზაზე ადამიანობას ბოლომდე შეინარჩუნება, მაშინ შენი არსება შეუერთდება მარადიულ ფენომენს -- ხალხს.”) (4). Again, we see the word, “the people.”

Further, the Georgian preface has very little to do with ancient mythologies. Rather than emphasizing Greek stereotypes of Aeëtes as a threatening king or Medea as a barbarian princess, or even mentioning Jason, it promises that we will see the traditional canon “anew” (“ახლებურად”), and that before our eyes we will see the “source, foundation, root” (“წყაროს, საფუძველს, ფესვს”) (4) of the ancient, canonical myths. Thus, many of Chiladze’s characters, though familiar from Greek mythology, are modified to represent his vision of Georgian reality behind the myths. In addition to the major figures of Bakha and Medea, and elaborations on those lesser known, such as Phrixus and Karisa, Medea’s sister, there are other, real Georgians, both men and women, who could have been taken from the streets and courtyards of Tbilisi: Ukheiro and Pharnaozi themselves; black-eyed Malalo, the local Madame, and her seven identical daughters; Popina and Kaluka, Pharnaozi’s sisters; Ino and Tina, respectively Pharnaozi’s beloved and wife; and Kusa, the king's henchman and executioner. All are characters who capture many aspects of Georgian culture and life, including, in Hellenistic fashion, the lofty and dreadful, as well as the domestic and mundane. Chiladze is willing to be his country’s conscience, show its sorrow, and hint how the two are intertwined.

Before turning to the characters inspired by Classical figures, it may be interesting to address Chiladze’s stylistic habit of embedding folk elements in the text and wedding them to Greek literary structures, which begins with the novel’s title. The Georgian title,



*gzaze erti katsi midioda* (გზაზე ერთი კაცი მიდის), can be translated literally as “On the road, [or path, or way] one man was walking [or going].” A key word here is “erti” (ერთი), “one” or “a.” While the title in Russian, *Shel po doroge chelovek* (Шел по дороге человек), attempts to replicate the beginning of a fairy tale, as in “Once upon a time a man was walking down the road,” the Georgian has a specifically Georgian reference. It is part of a children’s counting game, which anyone growing up on the streets of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, or Poti, would recognize: “One man was walking down the street, how many? Two men were walking, how many? Three men....”<sup>36</sup> The extended meaning of the title comes full circle at the end of the novel, when Pharnaozi walks down the same road in Vani as he had at the beginning of his life, suffering intense shame, but managing to keep his humanity. This structure gives the entire work a very neat, Classical ring composition, a special trait of the ancient Lyric poets, and which Chiladze uses more than once in the novel.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the title itself is marked by multi-valence. It can be translated into a rather neutral title in Russian or English, but for a Georgian reader it smacks of hometown, of childhood, of identity as a Georgian; it gives the philosophical meaning to the text; and it wraps the entire novel into a neat aesthetic bundle. It also gives a first clue to the overall polyphony of the text. As one Soviet critic has noted, a trademark of Chiladze’s style is the use of montage: he will present a lyrical passage, next to a philosophical one, next to a humdrum domestic scene, with little connecting them, and yet they flow together almost seamlessly; and he will often weave many tones together in a single sentence.<sup>38</sup> These are also, however, literary traits found in the Hellenistic poets that Chiladze so admired.

Blending Georgia’s literary heritage with its ancient culture, Chiladze weaves in key emblems of Georgian national identity, including Colchis’ famed goldworkers, as found in the descriptions of Vani’s goldsmiths’ quarter; and its tradition of humanistic animism, as seen in Aeëtes’ youngest son, Aphrasoni, who shares traits with Vazha-Pshavela’s Mindia in his poem “The Snake Eater.” Led by Otar Lordkipanidze,

archeological excavations at the site of ancient Vani have revealed tombs holding golden treasures that rival Scythian gold found in tombs on the northern shores of the Black Sea, and Greek and Etruscan metalwork from the fifth century BC.<sup>39</sup> Chiladze’s description of the goldsmiths’ quarter pays tribute to the industry and fame of the Colchian goldsmiths:

It’s true, every neighborhood in Vani had its unique spirit, its own coloring, but the goldsmiths’ quarter stood out among them all...

From morning till evening the tapping of little hammers, the whine of grinding wheels and the scratching of chisels echoed through the goldsmiths’ quarter; from morning till evening gold was forged, stamped and engraved... the noble metal sparkled and laughed, turning to blood and flesh, like a girl transformed overnight into a woman.

მართალია, ვანის ყველა უბანს თავისებური, განსაკუთრებული ელფერი ჰქონდა, მაგრამ ოქრომჭედლების უბანი მაინც სხვა იყო... დილიდან საღამომდე ისმოდა ოქრომჭედლების უბნიდან პატარა ჩაქურების ტაკა-ტუკი, ჩარხების ლულუნი და საჭრეთლების წრიპინი; დილიდან საღამომდე იწნებოდა, იჭრებოდა და იტვიფრებოდა ოქროს ლასტები...კისკისებდა და ფერხორციტ ივსებოდა კეთილშობილი ლითონი, ერთ ღამეზე დაქალბულ გოგოსავით. (9)

Chiladze describes the allure of the gold dust that coats visitors until they feel like golden men, and that was so plentiful “that even if a herd of elephants were led in, it would turn gold from head to toe.” (“სპილოს ჯოგი რომ გაგეტარებინათ, თავფეხიანად მოოქროვდებოდა.”) (10). This description, in addition to enhancing the glory of Colchian craftsmen, also helps explain the source of the mythic Golden Fleece in everyday, Georgian terms.<sup>40</sup> Chiladze makes it very clear that the ram on which Phrixus arrives is bedraggled, snorting, and anything but golden. Jason, when he arrives, actually

refers to the fleece as mangy and worthless. But we, Chiladze's readers, are led to appreciate how and where the fleece gained its luster.

Chiladze, borrowing from Georgia's rich literary heritage, further weaves Georgia's animistic heritage into the mythology of its Hellenistic past, in the character of Aeëtes middle child, Aphrasioni, who like Mindia in Vazha-Pshavela's long poem *The Snake Eater*, is able to understand the language of nature:<sup>41</sup>

When they lit the *tone*<sup>42</sup>, tears always appeared as the buds on the  
brushwood crackled... He really did understand what the bird said,  
or the grass, or the cricket hidden in a crack, or the rain beating on the  
leaves...

თონეს რომ გაახურებდნენ, დაკვირტული ფეხის ტკაცატკუცზე  
ცრემლი მოადგებოდა ხოლმე... მას მართლა ესმოდა, რას ამბობდა  
ჩიტი, ან ბალახი, ბზარში ჩამალული ჭრიჭინა თუ ფოთლებზე  
ადგაფუნებული ცვიმა... (27)

### **Medea and Others Made Georgian**

Living along side native Georgian figures are those inspired from Greek sources, yet transformed into their Georgian versions. One of them, clearly inspired from Greek mythology, is Bakha, the wine merchant. He is obviously Bacchus, but differs from the Greek god, so often portrayed as a youthful, sensual figure, or associated from Euripides' play, *The Bacchae*, with wild maenads practicing their rituals on mountain tops.

Chiladze has transformed Bakha into the owner of a tavern, located forty steps down, who sells Georgia's legendary wine: "Anyone who hadn't had the chance to visit the wine-merchant Bakha's cellar, forty steps down, did not know the taste of true wine. A

single cup of wine drained here was equal to a whole collection of *kvevri*<sup>43</sup> ... ” (“ვინც ღვინის ვაჭარ ბახას ორმოცსაფეხურიან სარდაფში არ იყო ნამყოფი, მან ნამდვილი ღვინის გემო არ იცოდა. იქ დალეული ერთი ჯამი ღვინო ქვევრების გადასცონიდა...”), which people remember “like the love of a single night ...” (“ერთი ღამის საყვარელით...”) (6), and for which, when remembered, they drop all business at hand and head for Vani.

Refusing to mix water with his wine, Bakha prefers to observe his customers and listen to their conversations rather than make an enormous profit. He loves his cellar, where the voices, mixing under the vaulted roof, form a polyphonic choir that rises and falls like traditional Georgian songs.<sup>44</sup> Bakha takes particular pride in the daily mixing of dampness, darkness, and blinding light, and the sunlight shining down his stairs has a divine quality illuminating the minds and hearts of his customers. The sacred and the profane blend in his tavern in the philosophical and political discussions of the men, who are likened to timid rabbits huddled in warrens to escape from enemies, and who reminded one Georgian reader of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and his followers, huddling in bunkers in the early 1990’s, during Georgia’s first days of independence from the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

The wine that Bakha serves in his tavern at the beginning of the novel, before the Greeks (read Russians) invade, is thick, undiluted, literally the life-blood of his country, and one can see in it the deep rootedness of viticulture in Georgian life. Chiladze incorporates folk elements in the description of Bakha and his wine, using a string of terms for specifically Georgian vessels:

The wine merchant Bakha could not without anxiety watch how the

wine flowed from a *kasri* to a *koki*, from a *koki* to a *doki*, from a *doki* to a *jami*, and from a *jami* to a stomach, this rich wine that had escaped unscathed tumbling from one vessel to another, from a *kasri* to get a respite...

ღვინის ვაჭარ ბახას აუღელვებლად არ შეეძლო ეცქირა, როგორ გადადიოდა ღვინო კასრიდან კოკაში, კოკიდან დოქში დოქიდან ჯამში, ჯამიდან კი სტომაქში, ეს დიდებული, საზეიმოსვლა ერთი ჭურჭლიდან მეორეში, კასრიდან თავდაღწეულ ღვინოს სულის მოსათქმელად... (17)

The passage evokes the rhythm of a children’s folk song, the Georgian equivalent of “The House that Jack Built:” “Who ate the grapes? A goat. Who ate the goat? A wolf. Who ate the wolf? A gun. Who ate the gun? Rust,” and so on, included in Iakob Gogebashvili’s primer *Mother Tongue* (*დედა ენა*), published in 1912 to help promote Georgian literacy.<sup>46</sup> The Russian translation of this passage is particularly interesting in that it loses the crisp rhythm of the Georgian, substituting Russian terms and the adjectives “large” and “small” to denote the different sizes and shapes of the Georgian vessels:<sup>47</sup>

The wine merchant Bakhe could not without agitation watch how the wine flowed from a cask to a large pitcher, from a large pitcher to a small one, from a small one into a cup, and from a cup into a human throat.

Виноторговец Бахе и не мог без волнения видеть, как переливается вино из бочки в большой кувшин, из большого кувшина в малый, из малого в чашу, а из чаши в человеческое горло. (10)

Significantly, it also substitutes “human throat” (горло) for the Georgian “stomach” (სტომაქი), verbally mimicking the Russian gesture for getting drunk, a slight tap of the finger to the neck, emphasizing the slaking of thirst, rather than the more substantial, life-sustaining value of the wine that is conveyed in the Georgian text.

In a single mistranslation, the Russian version significantly diminishes the role wine plays in Georgian culture, where the cultivation and image of grapes is integral to Georgian Orthodoxy. Examples of the sacredness of wine in Georgia are plentiful, from the stories of St. Nino, the young woman who brought Christianity to Georgia in 303 AD, more than half a century before Russia adopted Christianity in 988, who, according to legend, made the first Georgian cross by tying two grape vines together with a locket of her hair; to icons of the infant Christ in his mother's arms, holding a bunch of grapes; and the traditional religious hymn, “You are the Vineyard” (“შენ ხარ ვენახი”), sung in praise of Christ.<sup>48</sup>

Chiladze knows wine is a sensitive topic for Georgia, that its wine has become a key source in its national pride, and he actually seems to question this facet of Georgian identity. He draws attention to the potential misuse of the importance of wine when he uses wine to distinguish the Cretan Greek and Colchian cultures and draw battle lines between them. For example, when Phrixus rejects the wine Bedia offers him in an attempt to revive him from near drowning, Bedia immediately identifies him as a foreigner:

Bedia put the boy's head on his lap and poured a sip of wine into his mouth from a *kheladi*.<sup>49</sup> The boy made a face and spat it out.

“You can tell right away he's not from our part of the world!”

joked Bedia.

ბედია მ ბიჭს თავზე მუხლი ამოსდო და ხელადიდან ღვინო მოასმევინა. ბიჭი დაიმანჭა და ღვინო უკანვე ამოასხა. “ჩვენებური არ ყოფილაო,” გაიხუმრა ბედია. (13)

Further, one of Karisa’s more uncomfortable moments in her marriage with Phrixus occurs during a discussion of the wine they are drinking, in which a reference to the Homeric epithet for the sea, “wine-colored,” points to the sharp competition the Greek father and the Georgian mother feel for their children’s loyalties, and the underlying domestic hostility:

One day, when the whole family was sitting down to dinner, Phrixus’ oldest son, Argosi, took a sip of wine from a bowl and said: our sea is the color of wine. The other three boys stared at their mother with questioning eyes. Karisa involuntarily tensed up...

ერთ დღეს, როცა მთელი ოჯახი სადილად იჯდა, ფრიქსეს უფროსმა ვაჟმა არგუსმა თასიდან ღვინო მოწრუპა და თქვა: ჩვენი ზღვა ღვინისფერიაო. დანარჩენი სამი ვაჟი დედას ისე დაჟინებით მიაშტერდა, ქარისა უნებურად დაიძაბა... (52).

Phrixus picks this moment to consolidate his sense of superiority, noting that the wine in Greece is different:

Then he himself tasted the wine, moved the bowl aside, and said to Argosi: but not of this wine – our wine is of a different color.

მერე თვითონაც მოსვა ღვინო, თასი გვერდზე გააჩოჩა და არგუსს უთხრა: ოღონდ ამ ღვინისა არა, ჩვენებურ ღვინოსაც სხვა ფერი დაჰკრავსო. (52)

Karisa understands she has lost the battle for her sons’ loyalty and affection: when she realizes they are talking about Greek wine, and the Greek sea, she grows momentarily weak and smiles “... bitterly... like a man who had been deceived.” (“მწარედ ... მოტყუებული კაცივით...”) (52). Although she then reacts in anger, pounding her fist on the table, she also realizes that her children have the right to understand their

father's culture, and that despite her native pride in Colchian wine, in Colchian culture, she needs to find other means to keep the peace besides exploding in anger. This is a curiously reflective moment in the novel: while Chiladze clearly acknowledges that wine is an important element in Georgian culture, it seems he is also suggesting that instead of using myths about the superiority of Georgian wine as a basis for Georgian cultural superiority, Georgians would be wise to develop other aspects of their culture to strengthen and secure its continued existence.

And Chiladze does express the fragile stability of his country, as seen when a further image of native, traditional Georgia is suppressed in the Russian translation of the description of Bakha sitting on his favorite three-legged stool. The Georgian passage reads: “He stood the round-headed cornelian walking stick between his knees, laid his hands, swollen and chapped by the sun and wind, on the head of the stick like tiles...” (“მუხლებს შორის შვინდის მრგვალთავიანი ჯოხი ჩაედგა, გასივებული, მზითა და ქართთ დამაშრული ხელები ჯოხის თავზე კრამიტეზივით შემოეწყო...”) (17), repeating the word used in the opening description of the roof tiles of Vani. With his arms and legs, Bakha forms the shape of a traditional Georgian home, built around a central post, a “mother pillar” (დედა ბოძი), originally a live tree, and later a column or pillar.<sup>50</sup> The Russian translation subtly, but significantly, alters the meaning of the Georgian: “... having squeezed the cornelian walking stick with its rounded end with his knees, and having layed on it his big hands, rough and brown from the sun, at an angle, like two tiles...” (“... зажав коленями кизилковую палку с круглым комлем, сложив на ней большие, шершавые, коричневые от солнца руки углом, как две черепицы...”) (11), and effectively squeezes out, or suppresses, the



image of the traditional Georgian home. The Georgian original conveys the sense of vulnerability Georgians feel, even in their domestic architecture. Bakha holds his hands over the rounded knob of his walking stick, “and places his chin on top, as if he were afraid that the tiles might come crashing down.” (“ზემოდან კი ნიკაპი დაეზღინა, თითქოს შიშობდა, კრამიტები არ ჩამოცვივდესო.”) (17). The Russian version softens this fear, substituting a rather bland “so that ... not” for the Georgian “fearing:” “... he leaned his chin on them, as if to keep the tiles from falling down.” (“... упершись в них сверху подбородком, как бы для того, чтобы черепицы не свалились.”) (11). Bakha is the keeper of the Georgian soul, life-blood, and hearth, keeper of the sacred wine that spreads happiness throughout the people. His hands may be swollen and chapped from the wind and the sun, but he sits like a pagan god at the door of his very Georgian temple.

Another key ancient Greek mythological figure Chiladze recreates is Medea, who, along with Prometheus, is arguably one the world’s most famous Georgian literary figures. Known best from Euripides’ play *Medea*, and Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, her story has been re-written in hundreds if not thousands of renditions since her early Greek inception,<sup>51</sup> including that by Ulitskaia. Within Georgia, however, there has been a long-standing prejudice against the character from Greek tragedy, who, demonized as a passionate barbarian, kills her two sons in revenge after Jason, the Greek, abandons her for the Corinthian princess. For the better part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Euripides’ *Medea* was not staged in Georgia. Directors refused to produce it and actresses refused to play the part of a mother who kills her children, or insisted on changing the plot of Euripides’ original play. The Georgians have emphasized instead a version of the story in

which the Corinthians, and not Medea, kill her children. All protest that such a character does not represent a real Georgian woman, whose primary role is that of a loving and devoted mother.<sup>52</sup>

When Chiladze takes up the figure of Medea he follows this national tendency, significantly altering and softening her character, and does not focus on her at all as a mother. In a 2003 essay, he defends his Medea against charges of betraying her family and country, and praises her instead as a young woman who stands up for her passions: she falls in love with Jason, agonizes about whether or not to help him, but then leaves with him once she decides to help him obtain the Golden Fleece.<sup>53</sup> Chiladze defends Medea's actions, and rather than trying to re-script Euripides' play, or condemning her for betraying her homeland, he accepts the Greek version of the heroine and sympathizes with her agony, noting how awful she would feel, standing on stage, holding forth her hands dripping with her children's blood.

Brushing aside the ancient Greek portrayal of Medea as a jealous and crazed sorceress, Chiladze portrays his Medea as a young woman who is a gifted herbalist and healer, protégé of her aunt, the Goddess Hecate, but who has never used her herbs for harm in her native environment, until she falls in love with Jason. Chiladze, rather, is interested in portraying her as a young woman on the cusp of discovering her sexuality, who falls innocently in love with Jason.<sup>54</sup> He paints a psychologically realistic picture of a young girl who has had a prophetic dream of meeting a stranger, and is immediately attracted to Jason, who seems much stronger and more handsome than the local boys in Aeëtes' court. With this picture Chiladze also emphasizes the perceived difference between the local Colchian, i.e. Georgian boys, and the Greek, i.e. Russian invaders who

appear in their bronze greaves and shining gold helmets. Seduced by the glitter of the Greeks' supposed higher culture, Medea is led astray, misuses her knowledge of potions and herbs, feels tormented before she makes her decision, and eventually betrays her country.

Chiladze, however, is not particularly interested in further details of her story. She is born, in fact, only after her older sister marries the Greek, Phrixus. After she leaves Colchis, she is mentioned only once, in passing, as being fated to become mythical because of the strength of her passion; and we hear nothing about her murdering her children.<sup>55</sup> Chiladze is far more interested in describing the fourth wave of Greeks from Crete who invade Colchis literally in the wake of Medea's departure. The real betrayal of her country has come from the attack planned by Oq'ajado, Aeëtes' estranged cousin, who has been driven out of Colchis to Crete and works in collusion with "the all-powerful king" Minos.

More important for Chiladze than Medea's character or fate, then, is what happens to the women and men who remain in Colchis, and who deal with the consequences of multiple foreign invasions of their homeland, inter-ethnic marriages, and issues of personal freedom and love. Thus, though called "Aeëtes," much of Part I is dedicated to Medea's older sister, Karisa, the first Colchian woman to have fallen in love and entered into an inter-ethnic marriage, with Phrixus, the first Greek foreigner to set foot in Colchis. We eventually learn that as a young man Phrixus had been sold by his impoverished parents to the "all powerful king" Minos, who sends him as the first spy to Colchis. He arrives and is taken in under the pretext of seeking asylum, as the "all powerful king" had been careful to plant an olive leaf in his palm.<sup>56</sup> Their marriage

eventually fails when Phrixus falls ill with a fatal case of homesickness; after his death, their four boys desert Karisa and their “mother land” and travel to Greece to rediscover their own “father-land.” The Colchians’ first experiment in inter-ethnic marriage has far-reaching, negative consequences.

Chiladze draws a picture of Karisa and Phrixus' domestic strife as that of an inter-ethnic, specifically Georgian-Russian marriage. We see Karisa as a young girl, a woman, and a noble wife who tries to hold her family together. As a young girl, she is renowned for an independent streak, outdoing her brothers in “knavery” (გელქი), and showing no interest in learning the traditional healing techniques, or being like her brother, Aphrasioni. Rather, her nanny thinks of her as the “wild Karisa... who needed to be tied with a rope” (“ისევ “დასაბმელი” ქარისა... წყნარსა და თვინიერს”) (28). She is known for her peals of laughter: “...Karisa laughed from her heart.” (“...ქარისა გულიანად კისკისებდა.”) (29), which ring through the palace; and she represents a typical, dedicated mother and loving Georgian woman.<sup>57</sup> After realizing that she cannot fight her husband’s nostalgia, she attempts to become reconciled with him, and takes on the role of a peaceful matron: “One evening Karisa was sitting in an easy chair and knitting. The cat was playing with a ball of yarn that rolled on the flagstone floor.” (“ერთ საღამოს ქარისა სავარძელში იჯდა და ქსოვდა. ფილაქანზე გაგორებოლ ძაფის გორგალს კატა ეთამაშებოდა.”) (54), who goes so far as to express an interest in visiting her husband’s native land: “Let me not die before I see my husband and children’s homeland.” (“ისე არ მომკლა, ჩემი ქმრისა და შვილების სამშობლო რომ არ ვნახო.”) (54). Phrixus responds to Karisa’s statement with incredulity and more

excitement than he has exhibited in months: “Are you telling the truth?” asked Phrixus, bending forward, and leaning with his palms on the edge of his throne.” (“მართლა ამბობ?” ჰკითხა, ხელისგულებით ტახტის კიდეზე დაყრდნობილმა და წინ გადმოხრილმა ფრიქსემ.”) (54); and their four sons respond with obvious pleasure to their mother’s interest in their father’s native land.

Karisa’s efforts to become reconciled with her husband, however, fail, and their experience gives Chiladze a chance to question the wisdom of inter-ethnic marriages, and to explore conflicts involved in multiple allegiances. Their sons, “Argosi, Kitisore, Melasi, and Phrontisi” (“არგუსი, კიტისორე, მელასი და ფრონტისი”) (31), who have all been given Greek names “in honor of their father” (“მამის ხათრიით”) (31),<sup>58</sup> listen with rapt attention to the stories of his homeland, which leave Karisa indifferent. Phrixus eventually dies of nostalgia and estrangement, and soon after his death the four boys steal a ship and sail off to Crete. After her husband dies and her boys abandon her, Karisa rebels against being a dutiful wife, and lamenting the falsity of her relationship with her foreign husband, and the time wasted raising their sons, thrusts an over-ripe muskmelon towards her father in her disappointment, and asserts her feminine agency and her freedom:

“I, too, am rotting like this melon on its stalk,” said Karisa...

“I no longer have a husband, and I no longer have children,” sang out Karisa.

“I am free like a maiden.”

“მეც ამ ნესვივით ყუნწზე ვლპები,” თქვა ქარისამ...

“აღარც ქმარი მყავს და აღარც შვილები.” წაიმღერა ქარისამ.

“ქალწულივით თავისუფალი ვარ.” (96)

She is a Georgian woman, yet is anything but the stereotype of a submissive, nurturing mother.

Aeëtes, in turn, loses his rage, one of his defining traits in Euripides' *Medea*. He protests weakly, and feels "He could no longer be angry, as if he had no right to anger, while he held this soft and fragrant fruit in his hand." ("ველარც ბრაზდებოდა, თითქოს გაბრაზების უფლებაც არ ჰქონდა, სანამ ეს რბილი და სურნელოვანი ნაყოფი ეჭირა ხელში.") (96). He pities his child beyond what he should as an omnipotent king: "Aeëtes' heart contracted, his own child's sadness and distress crawled toward him like an unprotected child, and he stiffened involuntarily, so as not to frighten that child with an unforeseen, awkward movement." ("აიეტს გული ჩაწყდა, შვილის სევდა-წუხილი უპატრონო ბავშვივით შეაცოცდა ფეხებზე და ისიც უნებურად გაშემდა, გაუთვალისწინებელი, ტლანქი მოძრაობით რამე რომ არ ეტკინა მისთვის.") (97). With Karisa's earthy, prosaic act of thrusting the melon in his face, he finally understands that his daughter is running away from a dangerous fire, and we realize that he, too, feels the tensions of living under the pressure of Greek/Russian invasions. He is portrayed as a typical Georgian father who loves his children and grandchildren unconditionally, and to a certain extent unwisely, as in his kindness and lovingness he inadvertently betrays his land and kingdom.<sup>59</sup>

### **The Double Bind of Tradition**

Karisa's failed marriage further allows Chiladze to question two of the deepest traditions of Georgian national identity, that of treating guests as sacred, and of living by

a hero's or king's code of honor. While Okudzhava questions the Georgians' ability to fulfill the promise of unconditional hospitality towards guests and to maintain their word because of their place in the Russian empire, Chiladze seems to question the very wisdom of the Georgians' glorification of the tradition of hospitality in the first place, and points to difficulties of living by a hero's code. Both of these come into play when Jason arrives in Colchis. Phrixus and Karisa's sons eventually return after their father's death, but bring with them Jason and his sailors, who pretend to have rescued the boys. Aeëtes, known from Euripides and Apollonius as a wrathful figure, rejoices in seeing his grandsons, yet knows he should not trust Jason and the Greek sailors who have brought them home. Doubt and a feeling of obligation battle within him, as he questions the Greeks' real motives, and whether they are bandits who have forced his grandsons to tell them about the Golden Fleece, in which case he is free to burn them along with their ships; or if they have truly rescued them, in which case he must treat them well and uphold his kingly code of honor, even if he does not trust them. Interestingly, he blames the Greeks and their aggression:

The 12-oared Greek ship stood in the giant reeds of the river, high with water. From his grandsons' roundabout conversation he already knew that the ship had saved them from ruin; otherwise fish would long ago have feasted on their flesh. Thus, Aeëtes was already obliged to this ship, which had stormed into his country without permission.

But the debt needed to be paid. "Its amazing," thought Aeëtes, "what these sons of bitches knew, what advice they've given to my grandsons."

წყალუხვი მდინარის ლერწმოვანებში უკვე იდგა ბერძნული თორმეტნიზიანი ხომალდი. შვილიშვილების მიკიბულ-

მოკიბული ნაამბობიდან მან უკვე იცოდა, რომ ამ ხომალდს გადაერჩინა ისინი დალუპვისაგან, თორემ მათი ხორცი თევზები უკვე კარგა ხნის დამძღრები იქნებოდნენ. ასე რომ აიეტი უკვე დავალებული იყო იმ ხომალდესაგან, უნებართვით რომ შემოჭრილიყო მის ქვეყანაში. ვალს კი გადახდა უნდოდა. “საოცარია,” ფიქრობდა აიეტი, “რა იცოდნენ იმ მამამაღლებმა, რომ მაინც და მაინც ჩემს შვილიშვილებს გადაარჩენდნენო.” (103)

Chiladze shows Aeëtes yielding to what some may call his Georgian way of life,<sup>60</sup> which brings ruin. Overcome by his grandsons’ playfulness as he watches them jump over the castle’s low stone walls, he suppresses his doubt, forgets his mythical anger, and transforming into a simple peasant who wipes his dirty hands on his smock, welcomes the strangers according to the local laws of hospitality. The boys, however, have been contaminated by their exposure to foreign ways and foreign warriors: “but they had already tasted this fruit, and their father’s illness had infected them.” (“...მაგრამ ის ნაყოფი მათაც ეგემნათ უკვე და მათაც გადასდებოდათ მამის სენი.”) (99-100). They follow Jason and his crew, and after Jason and Medea’s departure, the fourth wave of invaders, sent by Minos under the leadership of Oq’ajado and justified as avenging the supposed insult to Jason by making him kidnap Medea as a wife, is followed by hordes who settle in Colchis, bringing poverty and the ruin of the Colchians’ prosperous and peaceful paradise. To emphasize the complexity of collusion between the Russians and native Georgians who sell out to them, Chiladze embeds a Georgian proverb: “It is said, a small mosquito can overcome a horse, if a large wolf helps it. And so it happened.” (“ნათქვამია, ცხენს პატარა კოლოს მოერევა, თუ დიდი მგელი მიეშველებაო. ასედაც მოხდა.”) (192).



The fact that Phrixus had been rescued by the elder fisherman, Bedia, welcomed into Aeëtes and Karisa's family and treated as royalty according to the ancient customs of hospitality, yields Chiladze a further opportunity to question the limits of the myth and the wisdom of fully implementing that custom. It reflects, in part, the double bind that Chiladze sees in the best of Georgians' traditions: that which is their strength and source of pride also brings them ruin. Thus, while Chiladze illustrates the traditions of treating guests as sacred and upholding ancient codes of honor, he also suggests that his country perhaps needs to be more careful about whom it welcomes into its fold if it hopes, again, to preserve its traditions and customs.

Karisa's marriage to Phrixus also speaks to a thorny strain of Georgian nationalism that would claim Georgia for Georgians, and not allow for any successful migrations of peoples. Chiladze addresses this briefly in reflections on the problem of refugees, and how they will never feel at home in another country:

Such is the nature of a refugee. He, of course, is thankful that you've shared your bread with him, given him refuge beneath your roof, that you've found him a place next to the fire, but at the same time his heart fills with envy, because he has neither his own bread, his own ceiling, nor his own fire.

ბიზანის ბუნებაც ხომ ასეთია. ის, რა თქმა უნდა, მაღლობელია, პური რომ გაუყავი, ჭერქვეშ რომ შეიფარე, ცეცხლთან ადგილი რომ გამოუნახე, მაგრამ, ამავე დროს გული შურით ევსება, რადგან მას არც საკუთარი პური, არც საკუთარი ჭერი და არც საკუთარი ცეცხლი გააჩნია. (175)

If we remember that Bitov, in describing his journey to the Caucasus, had said that one sun shines on the capital, i.e. Moscow, and another in the provinces, i.e. the Caucasus, it

is interesting to see Chiladze use the same image of the sun to frame the sense of place to which a person swears allegiance, and to suggest the impossibility of living in another country, as if excluding Russians, or any foreigners, from living in Georgia:

In the first place, because a foreigner, whoever he is, brought into a family, will never swear allegiance to your sun, in so far as he prefers a pumpkin seed from his own sun to yours, and although he has come to you, he has his own sun, and now that sun, which still exists somewhere, becomes 100 times more beloved and desired because of distance and inaccessibility. Your sun can never replace that sun.

ჯერ ერთი იმიტომ, რომ ოჯახში შემოშვებული უცხო კაცი, ვინც არ უნდა იყოს იგი, შენს მზეს მაინც არასოდეს დაიფიცავს, რადგან შენს მზეს თავისი გოგრის თესლი ურჩევნია და ვიდრე შენთან მოვიდოდა, თავისი მზე ჰქონდა და ახლა ის მზე, რომელიც სადღაც ისევ არსებობს, სიშორისა და მიუღწევლობის გამო, ასმაგად საყვარელი და სანატრელი გახდომია. შენი მზე იმ მზეს ვერასოდეს ვერ შეცვლის. (176-177)

While some would like to see racial purity among the Georgians,<sup>61</sup> the Caucasus has long existed at the crossroads of so many empires and peoples that mixed marriages are common and inevitable.<sup>62</sup> The myth of there being pure Georgians may be just that, a myth, to which Chiladze is drawn but which he also knows is not real. In 2006, he expressed concern over the fine line that the younger generation must tow: they need to live in and adapt to a multi-ethnic, post-Soviet world, but must also understand and appreciation elements of their national character, embodied in their language and literature.<sup>63</sup>

### Georgia's Fate: Bedia and the Sea

To draw a more detailed picture of Georgian life, Chiladze creates a cast of thoroughly Georgian characters who reflect the country's social and political realities. Although they are not Greek mythological figures such as Medea, Jason, and Aeëtes, all are connected with the ancient Greek world through Pharnaozi, who, playing the role of a Georgianized Hellenistic shepherd in the final days of his life, is closely associated with Chiladze's recreations of his hero's kindred spirits, Daedalus and Icarus.

One character who speaks closely to the novel's political allegory and Georgia's contemporary political situation is Bedia, Vani's elder fisherman. Bedia is responsible for having saved the young Phrixus and welcomed him to Colchis, and his name derives from the Georgian *bedi* (ბედი), or "fate, destiny, lot." The sea is his home, and is one of the most important factors in his and his country's fate. The cover of the 2006 Georgian edition of the novel features a fishing boat on the shore, signaling that the sea, the site of the influx of invaders, is both a character and a source of Georgia's sorrows. In the novel's first paragraph we learn that the minute the ancient Colchians welcome the first foreigner on their shore, the sea itself reacts as if to a sin committed by the inhabitants of Vani, and begins to recede:<sup>64</sup>

This is a story about those times when the city of Vani still stood on the shores of the Black Sea, when the first Greek set foot on the land of Colchis and meekly asked for asylum. That same day, after a long vacillation, the sea finally made up its mind and took a step away from the shore.

ეს იმდროინდელი ამბავია, როცა ვანი ზღვისპირა ქალაქი იყო; როცა კოლხეთის მიწაზე პირველმა ბერძენმა დაადგა

ფეხი და მორიდებულად ითხოვა თავშესაფარი. ზღვამაც  
სწორედ იმ დღეს გაბედა და ხანგრძლივი ყოყმანის შემდეგ  
პირველი ნაბიჯი გადადგა უკან. (1)

Foregrounding a Georgian sense of animism, Chiladze accentuates the sea's animate nature, comparing the sea's action to that of a husband who deserts his family.

Complicating the sense of human agency involved in history, of the Colchians responsibility for having welcomed Phrixus in the first place, he also suggests that the sea's decision, and thus the course of history, is also a natural phenomenon:

It was a first step, and the most difficult one. After that everything was supposed to keep rolling on its own. And who could hold back the sea anyway? Even if all the inhabitants of Vani, from the very young to the very old, had tied its waves to their garments, the sea still would have taken off and slipped away, for no force can resist what nature has in mind.

მთავარი პირველი ნაბიჯი იყო, მერე ყველაფერი თავისით მოხდებოდა, ან ვინ გაუბედავდა შეჩერებას. ყველა ვანელს, დიდიან-პატარიანად, კალთაზე რომ გამოეხა ზღვა, მაინც გაიპარებოდა, რადგან ვერავითარი ძალა ვეღარ აღუდგებოდა წინ ბუნების ჩანაფიქრს. (1)

The sea responds as if it were partially human and partially natural; and once Vani has committed the sin of accepting Phrixus, reacting in anger, turns into a brackish swamp and backwater.

The picture of Vani before the first Greek invasion is one that Georgians would love to see for their country today -- as a hub for thriving trade routes, where its people mingle freely with the sailors who come from all corners of the earth; and the visiting of which is an experience that breeds envy, and even confers a sense of immortality:

Anyone whom fate or desire brought to Vani could not wait to see with his own eyes all those things he had heard so much about and which made a long trip to the faraway lands truly worthwhile. Even before he got there, he knew that back in his homeland there would be a hundred girls seduced by jewelry from Vani and ready to marry him; that half the city would be cross-eyed with jealousy when he strolled down the street with a Vanian dagger hanging from his belt, or rocked his baby in a cradle made by a master from Vani. That was nothing! If a dying man were told that he would be resting in a Vanian sarcophagus, he would be so overjoyed that he would easily forget the fear of approaching death, as if a sarcophagus from Vani could protect him from that death.

ყველას, ვისაც კი ბედი თუ განზრახვა ვანისკენ აქნევინებდა პირს, ერთი სული ჰქონდა საკუთარი თვალით ენახა, რაც ამზად გაეგონა, რისი გულისთვისაც მართლა ღირდა, გაბმულიყო ამსიგრძე გზაზე. მან ჩამოსვლამდე იცოდა, ვანური სამკაულისათვის ათი ქალი რომ გამოყვებოდა ცოლად; ვანური ხანჯალი რომ შეეზა, ანდა ვანურ აკვანში ჩაეწვინა შვილი, შურისაგან ნახევარ ქალაქს დაებრიცებოდა სახე ის კი არა, მომაკვდავისათვის რომ ეთქვათ, ვანურ სარკოფაგში ჩაგაწვენთო, ისე გაუხარდებოდა, ისე იოლად გადაეყრებოდა მოახლოებული სიკვდილის შიში, თითქოს ვანური სარკოფაგი სიკვდილისაგანაც დაიფარავდა. (10)

Such hyperbole inflates the Georgians' pride in their mythic capital, and may indeed be tongue-in-cheek on Chiladze's part.

As succeeding invasions occur, the sea continues to recede, and the once vibrant capital of Vani becomes nothing but a pile of rubble. The bountiful Colchian sea

becomes a fetid swamp whose stench reaches the doors of the local inhabitants' dilapidated huts; the gold dust of Vani's famous goldsmiths is replaced by dust and spider webs in the palace of its foreign-backed king. Chiladze here presents a none too subtle estimation of what Russia has done to Georgia, starting from the 19th century campaigns to subdue the mountain people, transforming Tbilisi into an imperial outpost, disenfranchising the clergy of the Georgian Orthodoxy, sending members of the Georgian nobility to St. Petersburg to be educated, and in turn bring so-called civilization to Georgia.<sup>65</sup> The novel's 2006 edition also coincided with the Saakashvili government's efforts to encourage nationalism in the midst of Russia's efforts to cripple the country's economy, when it restricted the import of Georgian wine and mineral water to Russia, depriving Georgia of its traditional market for these goods; and after it closed its borders to Georgia in the wake of a spy scandal, seriously restricting those with economic ties between the two countries.<sup>66</sup>

At different points in the novel, images of Bedia mirror his country's progressive demise. Early, as the elder fisherman and master of his home, the sea, he is described like a god as he stands on the prow of his boat:

What a pleasure it was to watch Bedia in pursuit of a shoal of sturgeon, when, leaning from the prow of the boat he raised a trident above his head, his arm naked to the shoulder and bronzed by the sun! At that moment Bedia looked like a sea-god out on a hunt, in vain did the wind press against his chest, in vain did the wrathful waves rock the boat...

ერთ ნახვად ღირდა ვირთევზების ჯოგს დადევნებული ბედია, ნავის კიმზე შემდგარი, ოდნავ წინ რომ გადახრილიყო და ილლიამდე გაშიშვლებული, ბრინჯაოს ფერი მკლავით თავს ზევით სამთითა შეემართა. მაშინ ბედია სანადიროდ გამოსულ ღმერთს ემსგავსებოდა

და ამოდ აწვებოდა გულმკერდზე ქარი, ამოდ არყევდნენ ნავის  
ქროლვით გაცოფებული ტალღები... (12)

Significantly, Chiladze does not call Bedia “Poseidon,” and in fact refers to the Greek god only when Pharnaozi is leaving Crete (400), but presents Bedia, like Bakha, as a local, Colchian god.

As a god of the sea, Bedia articulates the Georgian tradition of being a master of his house who feels responsible for his actions; he is obligated both to save Phrixus in the first place, and to deal with the long-term consequences:

Had it not been for him, a tragedy would have happened. And  
wouldn't he have been responsible for the boy's death? Wasn't  
the host responsible for everything that happened in his home?

ის რომ არა, მართლაც დიდი ცოდვა დატრიალდებოდა.  
განა მისი ბრალი არ იქნებოდა, მიჭი რომ დაღუპულიყო,  
განა სახლის პატრონმა არ უნდა აგოს პასუხი ყველაფერზე,  
რაც მის სახლში ხდებოდა? (22)

Once he rescues Phrixus, Bedia feels as if someone has shifted one of the walls of his house, as well as an immediate, personal responsibility for the decline of his country. He uses a rope to measure how far the sea recedes each day, with each invasion, and coils that rope around his neck like a noose every time he takes the measurement. He is not alone in his grief, and his wife, standing at the edge of the sea, gives voice to their country's collective sorrow. She howls at the wind, but no matter how loudly she howls, she can neither erase nor turn back what history has done:

Bedia's wife took her husband's worry upon herself. As soon as evening  
fell, she threw a shawl on her shoulders and stood alone on the shore  
of the pounding sea, which had already moved a good distance away from

their small hut...

ქმრის მღელვარება ბედიას ცოლასაც გადასდებოდა.  
შესაღამოვდებოდა თუ არა, მოიგდებოდა მხრებზე შალს და  
იდგა მარტო აღრიალებულ ზღვის ნაპირას, უკვე კარგა მანძილზე  
რომ დაშორებოდა მათ პატარა ქობს... (252)

The shifting border of the seashore, which he measures and on which they stand, represents the loss of territory Georgia has suffered, which most Georgians, of all political stripe and hue, feel passionately. The conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia are a source of unsolved tension which erupted in August 2008, and which the government continues efforts to alleviate.<sup>67</sup> Chiladze felt this loss of territory passionately, and was involved in a long-standing feud with the British linguist, George Hewitt, after the latter married an Abkhaz woman and began to voice sympathy for the Abkhaz desire for independence.<sup>68</sup>

But it is a loss that seems written by the fate captured in Bedia's name. Perhaps surprisingly, the people of Vani pay little attention to Bedia's cautionary words; and it is here that Chiladze articulates further complexities of the Russian-Georgian relationship. As Bedia walks through the city with the rope around his neck, crying out warnings of the sea's retreat, proclaiming the loss of territory as the end of the earth, he is ignored as a lunatic and at his death becomes the laughing stock of the city:

Bedia was losing his peace of mind, as so much of the sea was slipping away in front of him, but in the city they considered him crazy, no one believed him. From respect they listened to him, they bowed their heads to him, and barely restrained themselves from laughing in the face of such an elder. In truth, Bedia came to resemble a madman.

ბედიას მოსვენება დაჰკარგვოდა, ამხელა ზღვა თვალსა და



ხელს შუა ეპარებოდა, ქალაქში კი გიჟად თვლიდნენ, არავის არ სჯეროდა მისი, ხათრით უსმენდნენ, თავებს აკანტურებდნენ და ძლივს-ძლივობით იკავებდნენ თავს, პირში რომ არ შეეცინათ ამხნის კაცისთვის. ბედია მართლა გიჟს დამგვანებოდა. (251)

After his death, even Bedia's wife, who spends a full day trying to get the sea to accept his body, is free to admit her fear of the sea; after finally burying Bedia by tying a stone to his chest, she desires nothing more than to return to solid ground and her simple hut on shore. Her initial sorrow, and then indifference to her husband's and Georgia's fate complicate the picture of who is guilty of welcoming the first Greek, who is guilty of giving in to the invading forces, and also asks a very real question that echoes the confrontation between the Georgians and the Russians in Okudzhava's novel: how much resilience and strength do the people really have to fight off the effects of Russian invasions once they have happened? What kind of hero does it take to survive and keep alive the hope of an independent Georgia, a distinctly Georgian culture?

### **Georgian Heroes: Aeëtes, Ukheiro, Pharnaozi**

Although Chiladze's novel shows the effects of multiple foreign invasions and the destruction of a peaceful and bountiful countryside, in the end it also articulates a humanistic point of view, and ultimately questions the myth of the warrior in Georgian culture. The novel's final hero, Pharnaozi, as mentioned earlier, named after Georgia's first king Parnavaz, who according to legend created the alphabet, is paired with his father, Ukheiro, and together they reflect on what it means to be a contemporary Georgian hero, offering both criticism of traditional images of superhuman warriors and possible alternatives. One of the great myths about the Caucasus is the strength of its men as warriors, and the historical reality of near-constant war is embedded in the

language: the word for “hello,” *gamarjobat* (გამარჯობათ), translates literally as “may the victory be yours,” and is answered with the traditional response *gagimarjos* (გაგომარჯობს), which confirms – “may *you* be victorious as well.” Indeed, to refer again to the 19th century historian Potto, Russian military leaders in the campaigns to subdue the Caucasus complained bitterly about the wildness and lawlessness of the mountain peoples. And we have seen how Okudzhava portrays his Georgian bandit, Kipiani, as superhuman hero who can fight off a band of marauding Lezgins singlehanded.

Both Okudzhava and Chiladze present their heroes’ masculinity as compromised by their basic impotence as subjects within the Russian Empire, but there is a difference between them. Okudzhava suggests that the Georgians, in dealing with the Russian military presence in the Caucasus, have learned to restrain themselves in acting out their roles as fighters; although they may suffer a crisis of faith in their traditional ways of settling disputes, and the pain of being deprived of ruling their own land, they are still physically healthy, and do what they can to maintain the appearance of their mythological stature. Chiladze, in contrast, seems far more strident, accusing Russia of truly deforming and emasculating Georgia’s heroes in the process of conquest, and of feminizing the Caucasus and its men.<sup>69</sup> It is tempting here to see the trope that Russia has raped the Caucasus, and while Chiladze may feel that this is what Russia has done historically, it casts the Caucasus, and Georgia in particular, in the role of victim, which Chiladze in the end rejects. Pharnaozi’s father, Ukheiro, may be crippled, but he is portrayed as master of his house and intentionally keeps his son from becoming a warrior. Pharnaozi, in turn, is crippled at the end of the novel, but the final vision of his

resurrection, as well as that of the Garden of Dariachangi, and the return of the sea to Vani, reasserts Pharnaozi's moral strength, and confirms his ideal of freedom and belief in goodness in the world, and the strength of the Georgian people to survive.

As others have noted, the majority of male characters in Chiladze's novel are crippled, emasculated, or otherwise ineffective in their lives.<sup>70</sup> While this may be true, I would like to suggest that Chiladze offers a picture of heroes who incorporate both masculine and feminine traits, who are not afraid of being tender as a mother or innocent as a young girl, but who are equally unafraid of being martyred for their ideals; it is the morally positive male characters who are particularly maimed, and their psychic strength balances out and conquers their physical deficiencies. As mentioned above, Aeëtes, the eponymous hero of the first part of the novel, is anything but the fierce hero of ancient myth, but is rather a tender father and an indulgent grandfather. As he pities his eldest daughter, Karisa, he is also sensitive to his youngest daughter's needs. When Medea sails away with Jason, his primary concern is what she will do without his help:

And what amazed everyone was that Aeëtes did not worry about his own defeat, his son, murdered slyly, or his court and home, completely destroyed, but he cried for his youngest daughter, who in all his unhappiness was the cause of his sorrow.

“What will happen to you, without me, my unhappy daughter,” cried Aeëtes, like a woman.

იმანაც გააკვირვა ყველანი, რომ აიეტი თავის დამარცხებას, ვერაგულად მოკლულ ვაჟიშვილს, გაპარტახებულ სახლ-კარს კი არ დასტიროდა, არამედ თავის უმცროს ქალიშვილს, რომელსაც ყველა მის უბედურებაში მიუძღვოდა წვლილი. “შენ რა გეშველება უჩემოდ, ჩემო უბედურო შვილოო,” დედაკაცივით ქვითინებდა აიეტი. (193)

At the end of Part I he is captured by Oq'ajado's forces, and comes to resemble a child:

Helpless like child, whimpering like a child, Aeëtes was separated  
forever from his native city. And whoever, in the end, heard his  
sobbing did not forget it until death; who could think that such  
an enormous and ferocious man was able to cry.

ბალღივით უმცერო, ბალღივით აღნავლებული აიეტი სამუდამოდ  
განარიდეს მშობლიურ ქალაქს. ვინც უკანასკნელად მისი ქვითინი  
გაიგონა, სიკვდილამდე აღარ დავიცუნია, ვინ იფიქრებდა, თუ იმ  
გოლიათ და მრისხანე კაცს ტირილი შეეძლო. (193)

Aeëtes, helpless and impotent like Okudzhava's Kikvadze, is left to cry at his fate, but he is not left alone, alienated, on a hilltop. Rather, he is joined in spirit by his offspring and other Georgians Chiladze presents as suitable heroes.

Ukheiro, Pharnaozi's father, is even more obviously crippled, ineffective, and feminized. His name in Georgian means "ne're do well," or "useless," and it may indeed be that as a soldier, especially for a foreign king, he is useless in fighting for Georgia. An outstanding soldier in his youth, he is an example of a Colchian warrior who proves himself in the service of the foreign "all-mighty king" Minos. After his final battle, returning to Vani, his legs are crushed by the wheels of a wagon, and he spends the rest of his life in bed like a woman, embroidering a coverlet "the size of a sail" that tells the story of his life and deeds:

Time passed. The children grew up. But Ukheiro embroidered.

He sat in the bed, leaning up against the wall, and on his legs lay a  
canvas the size of a sail, and on it he depicted the story of his  
turbulent life with the multi-colored threads.

დრო გადიოდა. ბავშვები იზრდებოდნენ. უხეირო კი ქარგავდა. საცოლზე წამომჯდარი, ზურგით კედელს მიჰყუდებოდა, ფეხებზე აპრისხელა ტილო გადეფარებინა და ზედ ფერადი ძაფებით თავისი მსფოთვარე ცხოვრების ამბავი გამოჰყავდა. (207)

He uses the embroidery as therapy, which provides time to reflect on his life, and learn lessons of the heart: “Embroidery lightened the sadness and bitterness gathered on his heart, humbled him; in turn, he learned to think, to turn his eye towards his heart...”

(“ქარგვამ გულზე დაგროვილი ბოღმა და ნალველი ცოტათი გადაჰყარა, გაუბიაბურა; სამაგიეროდ ფიქრს მიაჩვია, თვალი გულში ჩაუბრუნა...”) (207).

The embroidery helps him atone for all the blood he has shed, and signals a development of his conscience, recalling Vazha-Pshavela’s Aluda Ketelauri,<sup>71</sup> who undergoes a similar revelation about the inhumanity of shedding human blood:

And he began to embroider because his memory, full of corpses, disturbed him. Now, until death, he somehow needed to have the time to bring out the corpses, and take care of them. Since he could no longer kill, he needed to show respect to those who had died earlier, to bury them, to give them to the earth.

ქარგვაც ამიტომ დაიწყო, გვამებით გავსებულმა მახსოვრობამ შეაწუხა. ახლა სიკვდილამდე როგორმე უნდა მოესწრო ამ გვამების გამოზიდვა და მოვლა-პატრონობა. რაკი მოკვლა აღარ შეეძლო, ადრე მოკლულები უნდა გაეპატიოსნებინა, დაემარხა, დაეხიწავებინა. (208)

Ukheiro is further feminized, bringing out a positive aspect of Georgian hospitality:

And indeed, every event or story, however insignificant, brought so much memory with it that Ukheiro worried like a poor little housewife; he no longer knew where to put so many unexpected

guests. The helplessness even made Ukheiro wise.

მართლაც, ყველა შემთხვევა თუ ამბავი, თითქმის უმნიშვნელო, იმდენ მოგონებას მოიყოლებდა თან, უხერო ღარიბი დიასახლისივით აცრიალდებოდა ხოლმე, აღარ იცოდა, სად დაებინავებინა ამდენი მოულოდნელი სტუმარი. უძლურობამ უხერო დააბრძენა კიდევ. (208)

It is curious that although Ukheiro is not named after a particular Greek mythological figure, one he calls to mind is Philomela, who is left to weave the story of her rape into a tapestry after her sister's husband, Tereus, cuts out her tongue so she cannot speak openly of his violating her. The revenge Philomela and Procne then wreak on Tereus, feeding him his only son while pretending to celebrate the rites of Bacchus, is as violent as Medea's murder of her children.<sup>72</sup> Chiladze's portrayal of Ukheiro as being like a woman who can only describe her sorrow, in needlework at that, rather than act to defend himself, but in whom lies untold depths of sorrow, suggests a pacifist side of Chiladze's humanism: he is a nationalist, but will use words as weapons rather than fight on the streets. His picture of Ukheiro embroidering his story embodies what armed conflict in the region has done to Georgia and Georgian manhood: taken the best of its youth from their native land, exploited then crushed their strength, but also taught respect for human life and wisdom they need to share with subsequent generations.

Indeed, Ukheiro has come to understand the uselessness of bloodshed, and at home exerts only a show of force, shouting orders to his daughters and terrifying the household by shaking his javelin in impotent anger. His transformation is expressed in his love for his son. Although he ordered Pharnaozi to be killed after his wife dies in childbirth, he secretly rejoices when he realizes his family has defied his irrational orders:

He had long understood the domestic slyness, and deliberately

turned a deaf ear, because his first rage had passed, and now he even rejoiced that they had ignored his orders. Silence and feigned deafness were the only means by which he could save his son's life, and for that reason, he pretended to be deaf.

დიდიხანია მიხვედრილიყო შინაურების ეშმაკობას და განგებ იყრებდა ყურს, რადგან პირველ რისხვას **გადაეჯლო** და ახლა უხაროდა კიდევ, მისი ბრძანება რომ დაერღვიათ. დუმილი და ყურის მოყრუება ერთადერთი საშუალება იყო შვილის სიცოცხლეს რომ შეუნარჩუნებოდა, ამიტომაც დაყრუვდა. (205)

After he dies, his javelin, stuck in a wall in his room, is used to dry *churchkhela*<sup>73</sup> which Pharnaozi eats with delight after he returns from exile in Crete, and which later, also serves as a drying rack for his grandson, Little Ukheiro's diapers. Over all, Ukheiro recalls far less a Homeric warrior than a soldier suffering from post-traumatic stress, and he certainly does not encourage Pharnaozi to follow in his martial path.

Estranged from his father for most of his life, Pharnaozi becomes an artisan, a stonemason, and the real hero of the novel. Though kept apart from his father, he shares some very Hellenistic characteristics with him, as he becomes a dreamer, and a pastoral, idealizing, and bedraggled lover. Although a warrior in his youth, Ukheiro has a tender side. He courts his wife by inscribing an apple with the phrase "I love Ukheiro," and rolling it on the ground at a temple; when his beloved picks it up, she reads it aloud, declaring her love for him in public, for all to hear. While at war, he had insisted on sending her letters inscribed on heavy stones. Pharnaozi, as a stonemason, recycles these love letters, carving them into images of his beloved Ino and his dog, Tsuga. Also, after returning from Crete, Pharnaozi sees his father's finished coverlet and realizes finally that he and his father are very much alike, sharing a basic love for humanity: it is at this point

that Pharnaozi runs away from his family to live a quasi-pastoral life of a Georgian, Theocritan shepherd.

Embodying much of what Chiladze feels is best among his countrymen, Pharnaozi also reflects some of the real difficulties Georgian men face in their lives, which Chiladze explores through the institutions of prostitution, marriage, and the family. As an adolescent, Pharnaozi falls in love with Ino, the youngest daughter of black-eyed Malalo, originally from Babylon, who speaks to all her guests in their own tongues. In black-eyed Malalo, we see again how Chiladze blends Classical allusions and Georgian reality: black-eyed Malalo is always mentioned with her near-Homeric epithet, and yet “black-eyed” is also a common theme in Georgian folk music.<sup>74</sup> She and her daughters are also local sirens who lure men to destruction in their home that bursts with song when they entertain strangers. And Pharnaozi is warned about them; although the men frequent black-eyed Malalo’s house regularly, he hears a different story from the women:

Before Pharnaozi met Ino, he had heard that an evil woman lived  
in their city, not a woman, but a devil, who made men foolish,  
then made them sleep and drank their blood.

სანამ ფარნაოზი ინოს შეხვდებოდა, იქამდე ჰქონდა გაგებული,  
რომ მათ ქალაქში ერთი ბოროტი ქალი ცხოვრობდა, ქალი კი  
არა ალქაჯი, რომელიც კაცებს ასულელებდა, მერე აძინებდა  
და სისხლსა სწოვდა. (255)

Although black-eyed Malalo and her daughters are a known presence in Vani, their social class as prostitutes prohibits Pharnaozi from marrying Ino, and his forbidden love for her blesses and ruins his life. His emotional trauma reflects his country’s political trauma: Ino, the prostitute who has passed through the arms of the entire city, serves as a metaphor for Georgia, which has passed through the hands of several empires. As



Pharnaozi refuses to contaminate his feelings for Ino by buying her love with foreign, earned money, Chiladze will not compromise in his vision of the innocence and purity of Georgia, prostitute though she may at times be to Russia. An interesting parallel emerges: just as Pharnaozi will not be courageous enough to save Ino, Chiladze will not fight with arms, and is left to nurture his idealization of Vani and Colchis as a means of preserving the vision of an independent, flourishing Georgia.

As Chiladze suggests that the traditions of hospitality and a hero's code of honor, the best of Georgian life, can also bring destruction, he also suggests that the innocence and purity of Pharnaozi's love for Ino keep him from living within the bounds of traditional society. Again blending pagan allusions with Georgian realities, Chiladze describes Pharnaozi as a youth falling in love with Ino, who is skinny, knock-kneed, and pig-tailed; and their young love is a pagan, yet innocent celebration of human sexuality, of the best impulses of attraction and affinity.<sup>75</sup> In contrast to her mother and sisters, Ino is described as "Not a witch, but a lamb, a white lamb..." ("ალქაჯი კი არა, ბეკეკა, თეთრი ბეკეკა...") (255); and her relationship with Pharnaozi is compared to the purity of snow:

Involuntarily, little by little, she gathered in this other child's soul  
and consciousness unnoticed, like snow fallen in the night.<sup>76</sup> And  
one day Pharnaozi woke up and saw how the snow had made every-  
thing white, everything, as far as his eye could see.

უნებურად, ნელნელა, შეუმჩნევლად გროვდებოდა იგი მეორე  
ბავშვის სულსა და შეგნებაში, როგორც ღამით მოსული თოვლი.  
ერთ დღეს კი ფარნაოზი გაიღვიძებდა და დაინახავდა, როგორ  
გადაეთეთრებინა თოვლს ყველაფერი, ყველაფერი, თვალის  
საწიერამდე. (255)

The entire town knows that he and Ino play together, and theirs is a friendship of a boy and his best friends, Ino and his dog.<sup>77</sup>

After this, Pharnaozi remembered Ino more often, or rather, when he thought about Tsuga, somehow or another, he also remembered Ino. His anxious nature was looking for a companion, and as soon as he saw her, Pharnaozi recognized her. Ino was wearing a red dress, and red ribbons were woven into her small braids which stuck out from her head.

ფარნაოზს ამის შემდეგ უფრო ხშირად ახსენებოდა ინო, უფრო სწორედ, ცუგაზე რომ ფიქრობდა, რატომღაც ინოც გაახსენებოდა ხოლმე. მისი შემკრთალი ბუნება ამხანაგს ეძებდა და დაინახა თუ არა, მაშინვე იცნო ფარნაოზმა იგი. ინოს წითელი კაბა ეცვა და პატარა აპრეხილ კიკინებშიც წითელი ჭინჭები ჩაეწნა. (259)

He and Ino are friends for two years, meeting in the Garden of Dariachangi, Vani's Garden of Eden: "And the aroma of apples wafted from them, apple flowers were scattered in their hair, as if they had been born in this garden, at the same time, before each other's eyes." ("მათაც ვაშლის სურნელი ასდიოდათ, ვაშლის ყვავილი ეყარათ თმაზე, თითქოს ამ ბაღში გაჩენილიყვნენ, ერთდროულად, ერთმანეთისთვისაღწინ.") (259). They live in a perceived eternity that allows them childish laughter, and they indulge their curiosity about the physical world:

Everything was funny, and they, too, laughed; everything was interesting, and they tested everything with great attention; like kestrels they inspected a stick or a shell washed ashore,<sup>78</sup> multi-colored pebbles, or a dung beetle, rounded like a drop of tar, everything their feet and

eyes fell upon along the road home.

ყველაფერი სასაცილო იყო და ისინიც იცინოდნენ;  
 ყველაფერი საინტერესო ხდებოდა და ისინიც დიდი  
 გულისყურით სინჯავდნენ და უკირკიტებდნენ გამორიყულ  
 ჯოხსა და ნიჟარას, ჭრელ კენჭსა თუ კუპრის წვეთივით  
 დამრგვალებულ ხარაბუზას, ყველაგერს, რასაც მათი ფეხი  
 და თვალი წამოედებოდა შინისაკენ მიმავალ გზაზე. (262)

Participants in the wealth of Georgia’s natural world, they lie side by side on the warm sand, playing childish games with the waves and seaweed, as the sea breeze caresses their youthful bodies. As they approach puberty, Ino is described as a pagan goddess: “And Ino kept walking towards him, walking, walking, and wrapped in the rays of the morning sun, she glittered enchantingly, like a idol carried from a temple.” (“ინო კი მოდიოდა, მოდიოდა, მოდიოდა და დილის მზის სხივებში გახვეული, თვალის-მომჭრელად ბრჭყვიალებდა, როგორც ტაძრიდან გამოტანილი კერპი.”) (267).

Reality intrudes on their pagan paradise, however, and Pharnaozi and Ino learn some of the unpleasant aspects of Georgian life, which Chiladze is not afraid to portray: the confines of domestic tradition, and the legacy of political terror. They are “discovered” in the Garden of Dariachangi when Pharnaozi’s illegitimate nephew, Kusa, is born. Kusa is a counterpoint to Pharnaozi and his purity and idealism, and his name means “with squinty eyes,” from *kusavs* (კუსავს), “to look with squinty, popping eyes.” Kusa demeans both Pharnaozi and Ino, betrays his homeland, and he is an ambiguous, disturbing character, as if Chiladze wants us to realize how people, born with an evil streak, can become even more compromised by their life situations. Marked at birth as corrupt, Kusa is the illegitimate son of Popina, Pharnaozi’s sister, who is raped by Philomele.<sup>79</sup> As an adolescent, when he decides to marry one of Bakha’s daughters

simply from a desire to become rich, Bakha tells him to get a job first, and he apprentices as a butcher. At first fascinated by the blood that flows over the chopping block and splatters his apron, he grows fearful, and goes to work for Oq'ajada, the local tyrant, who in turn is servant of "the all-powerful" king, Minos who rules Colchis from Crete.

As an adult, Kusa's corruption becomes more manifest. He terrifies the town, walking around with a leather bag full of instruments slung over his shoulder that jangles, warning everyone of his approach. He frequents black-eyed Malalo's home, and assuming his uncle shares the same needs, repeatedly reminds Pharnaozi of Ino's easy accessibility. All that is needed is money, which Kusa gains in spades by serving Oq'ajado in a dubious position: although he reports daily to the castle, he feels he is a fraud -- sometimes his services are needed, sometimes they are not, and it is not quite clear what he does. His evil is further marked by his lack of progeny. Although relatively wealthy, an owner of one of the few two-storey houses in Vani, his successive wives bear him three stillborn children: he participates in and preserves no Georgian traditions worthing of passing on to future generations.

And yet because of his position at the palace, and the strength of his own evil, he holds a kind of psychological power over the inhabitants of Vani, and in particular, over Pharnaozi, who feels beholden to him by a bond of blood and basic humanity. Kusa is both part of Pharnaozi's immediate family, and part of a larger family of human beings, and this sympathy for the devil implicates all, so that when Ino later reflects that every living creature deserves at least a minute of happiness in its lifetime, we understand that this includes even someone as evil as Kusa. With a characteristic sense of humanity,

Chiladze seems to suggest that all humans participate in, or have the potential to participate in evil.

Against the backdrop of this understanding, however, Chiladze presses forward to identify a positive force to counter the evil, letting Pharnaozi emerge as a hero who works through despair, captivity, to eventual freedom. In despair over his unrequited love for Ino, Pharnaozi exiles himself to Crete. Leaving his impoverished homeland with all of its imperfections, he seeks to make some kind of existence in the land of the conquering Greeks, i.e., the Russians, and spends ten years helping to build Minos' marble palace. In Crete, echoes of conditions in both imperial Russian and the Stalin era blend together. For instance, Pharnaozi finds his individuality erased when he joins forces with others building the palace:

In the course of these ten years no one was interested in him as an individual. When he first got to Crete, they did not even ask his name; the supervisors were only interested in his profession, and when Pharnaozi said, "I am a stonecutter," 40,000 men called out in a single voice: come here, you are one of us. Nothing more than that, and after that day, Pharnaozi disappeared among the 40,000 stonecutters, turned into 40,000 Pharnaozis...

ამ ათი წლის განმავლობაში არავინ დაინტერესებულა მისი ვინაობით. პირველად რომ ჩამოვიდა კრეტაზე, არც მაშინ უკითხავთ სახელი, ზედამხედველებს მისი ხელობა აინტერესებდათ მხოლოდ და როცა ფარნაოზმა უთხრა, ქვისმთელი ვარო, ორმოციათასმა კაცმა ერთხმად შესძახა: აქათ მოდი, ჩვენი ყოფილხარო. ის იყო და ის, იმდღის მერე ფარნაოზი ორმოციათას ქვისმთელსი გაითქვიფა, ორმოციათას ფარნაოზად იქცა... (384)

One of 40,000 men, sweating to build Minos' palace, he represents all those in the Stalin era who helped build settlements across Soviet Russia. Putting his heart into his work so the rhythm of the physical labor takes away more troubling thoughts, he is also a brooding Tolstoyan figure, finding solace in manual labor, given to contemplating philosophical questions. The term used to describe him in this context is “superfluous” (ზედმეტი): “Everyone lay in this tar, but Pharnaozi was still alone, still a stranger and superfluous.” (“ყველანი იმ კუპრში იწვნენ, მაგრამ ფარნაოზი მაინც მარტო იყო, მაინც უცხო და ზედმეტი.”) (387). In the Russian translation, the term used is “lyshnyi” (лышний), the word used to describe an entire category of men such as Lermontov's Pechorin, living in imperial Russia with no clear or positive purpose. In this curious linguistic moment, it is as if Russians who read the novel may identify Pharnaozi with Russian heroes of the Caucasus. For Georgians, however, Pharnaozi is superfluous in Crete, i.e., in Russian society, and must return home to Georgia to be counted as an individual and a hero.

Indeed, life in exile does not satisfy Pharnaozi, and following the reverse path of Jason and the Argonauts, he returns from Greece to his homeland in Colchis, in a journey that reveals much about a Georgian attitude to living in Russia, or perhaps, anywhere outside of Georgia. Before he finds a ship home, Pharnaozi's life in Crete is not easy: in the workers' dorms, he is beaten up for being too dedicated to his work. Like his father who found solace in embroidering, Pharnaozi finds solace in working with the stones, which gives him time to dream of Ino and Tsuga. He thinks briefly about settling down in Crete, but imagines an idealized Georgian life -- building a house, a fence, and planting fruit trees -- and realizes he could never recreate his native way of life there.

Part of his discomfort comes from the fact that Crete is filled with deported people, and the description is reminiscent of both imperial Russian and Stalinist deportations:

Crete was full of deported people, like him, and each in his own way tried to adjust to it, to join with it, to blend into their new surroundings. They were brought by force, or they came by themselves... each one brought his own pain, and the eye that could see another's misfortune was already filled with the fog and dust of the country left somewhere beyond the sea: each one mourned for his dead, and his neighbors seemed to him to be only sleeping.

კრეტა სავსე იყო მასავით გადმოხვეწილი ხალხით და ყველა თავისებურად ცდებოდა შეჩვეოდა. შერწყმოდა, შეხამებოდა ახალ გარემოს. ძალით ჩამოეყვანათ, თუ თავისით ჩამოსულიყვნენ, საკუთარი სატკივარი, სანატრელი და საწამებელი ყველას ჩამოჰყოლოდა და სხვისი უბედურების დასანახი თვალი სადღაც. ზღვების იქით დარჩენილი ქვეყნის მტვრითა და ჯანლით ამოვსებოდათ ყველა თავის მკვდარს დასტიროდა, მეზობლისა კი მძინარი ეგონა. (387)

One does not have to read too deeply to see a portrayal of how difficult it has been for Georgians to live abroad, to adjust to a different culture. Pharnaozi understands he must return home when he recognizes Kusa's illegitimate father, Philomene, who falls to his death while working on Minos' palace. He feels only pity for his sister's rapist, Kusa's absent father, and realizes that despite all of the imperfections and pain that come with his extended Georgian family, he must return home to his life in the Caucasus.

Before Pharnaozi returns to Vani, however, Chiladze has him meet a Greek with whom he has much in common – Daedalus, a fellow exile and dreamer, and icon of artistic freedom. Suggesting that salvation is to be found in aesthetic endeavors, Chiladze

has Daedalus shelter Pharnaozi after he is beaten by his fellow stoneworkers. Daedalus, the Athenian painter, sculptor and inventor, whose most canonical version is found in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, viii 183-235, is presented by Chiladze as an artist whose studio and home are filled with sculptures, and who is busy painting frescoes in the palace ballroom for an adolescent Ariadne, before she helps Theseus conquer the Minotaur. As happened with Medea, Chiladze is not interested in the mythical figure Ariadne, though he mentions her briefly, but is far more interested in presenting Daedalus' "normal" domestic life, describing his wife cooking soup, and knitting. (408-409). The artist-in-exile expresses a desire for freedom, an interest in flying, but seems reconciled to his fate in Crete, and helping to secure Pharnaozi's passage to Colchis.

In a significant change from Ovid's version of the myth, Chiladze presents Daedalus' son, Icarus, as a paraplegic who will appear in the novel's grand finale as Pharnaozi's spiritual and moral companion. Rather than presenting Icarus as the one who flies to his death, Chiladze presents Daedalus as the one who wishes he could fly, but cannot escape Knossos, and who instead fashions wings for his son, who will fly to eternal life in a resurrected Vani. The sympathy and similarities between all of the novel's "incurable dreamers," between Pharnaozi's father Ukheiro, Pharnaozi himself, Daedalus, Icarus, and Pharnaozi's future son, Little Ukheiro, are telling: as the novel's moral heroes, they are all in some way crippled or disabled, and their disabilities, to reiterate, are a measure of their moral strength. Whether it is Ukheiro's amputated legs, Pharnaozi's inability to defend his love for Ino, Icarus' inability to walk, or Little Ukheiro's love for his father and his desire to imitate Icarus, all have their ability to move curtailed, and are kept from walking along the road of life. But, it is the force of art and



the aesthetic endeavors, and the desire for freedom embodied in the persons of Daedalus and Icarus, that bring succor, suggesting Chiladze's effort to portray Georgia as a haven of aesthetic and spiritual freedom.

### **Captivity as Freedom**

Pharnaozi's return to Colchis is no easier than his stay in Crete, yet reveals his deep love for his homeland, addressing how far Georgians will go to maintain their country's traditions, as well as the limitations those traditions impose on their practitioners. In Knossos, Pharnaozi must wait months before he finds a ship to carry him home: the infrequent sailings to Vani signal the vast change in the country since the Greeks, i.e. Russians, have taken over. As described in the opening pages of the novel, Vani had been a port that beckoned ships from all over the world, with the fragrance of the Garden of Dariachangi wafting miles out to sea. When Pharnaozi finally meets a fellow Colchian and boards a ship, overwhelmed with joy, his first act is to tear off the clay identification tag he has been forced to wear around his neck, telling everyone of his status as a foreign worker from the Caucasus.

Chiladze describes Pharnaozi's return with the elements he feels represent his country: its language, its bloody history, and its natural beauty. He calls attention to the particular moment when Pharnaozi, approaching Colchis, hears Georgian being spoken for the first time in ten years:

In all this time, no one had spoken Georgian on the ship, and Pharnaozi shuddered involuntarily. No, it didn't just seem, but in reality, the rower sitting next to him said in Georgian: "Look, Aphrasi's Islands."

ამხნის განმავლობაში ხომალდზე არავის დაულაპარაკია ქართულად და ფარნაოზი უნებურად შეკრთა. არა, არ მოჩვენებია, მის გვერდით მჯდომმა მენიჩემ ნამდვილად ქართულად თქვა: აგე, აფრასიონის კუნძულებიო. (410)

It is no accident that the first sighting of his homeland refers to Medea's bloody betrayal of her family, the islands named for her brother, whom she killed while fleeing with Jason. Shortly after passing the islands, Pharnaozi smells a familiar aroma, and spying an eagle soaring high above the clouds, catches sight of the Caucasus Mountains and cannot restrain his joy:

“The Caucasus! The Caucasus! The Caucasus,” cried out Pharnaozi, and he wiped his eyes, filled with tears either from excitement or from the wind, so that he could more clearly see the round dance of the black, jagged, proud, and magnificent mountains...<sup>80</sup>

კავკასიონი, კავკასიონი, კავკასიონი! ყვიროდა ფარნაოზი და მლელვარებისა თუ ქარისაგან აცრემლიბულ თვალებს წარამარა იხოცავდა, რათა უფრო გარკვევით დაენახა შავი, დაკბილული ზვიადი და დიდებული მთების ფერხული... (412)

He reflects that the mountains represent his homeland, and Chiladze emphasizes that like animate beings, the mountains share both Pharnaozi's sense of being grounded in the Caucasus, and sharing a fated captivity that is at the same time freedom:

And they, too, were attached by this invisible rope to the Caucasus, and consciousness of this is precisely what delighted them, the consciousness of the captivity, eternal, decreed by fate, which for them was also freedom, because here everything was like one's parents, familiar, natural, ordinary, understood, and easy to endure.

ისინიც ამ უჩინარი თოკით იყვნენ მიბმულნი კავკასიონზე და

ამის შეგრძნება ახარებდათ სწორეთ, მარადიული, ბედისაგან  
მისჯილი ტყვეობის შეგრძნება, რაც მათთვის იგივე თავისუფლება  
იყო, რადგან აქ ყველაფერი მშობელივით ახლობელი, ნაცნობი,  
ბუნებრივი, ჩვეულებრივი, გასაგები და ასატანი ეყო. (412).

Calling to mind once again his Georgian literary ancestor, Vazha-Pshavela, who also refers to the Caucasus Mountains as sentient beings,<sup>81</sup> it does not matter that the first sight to greet him are the islands, with their rocks died red from Aphrasioni's blood: he is home, in familiar territory, and will make his peace on his own terms, under his own sun.

It may be instructive to compare, if briefly, Chiladze's description of Pharnaozi's response to seeing the Caucasus with that of Russians who have approached the mountains from the north, in particular Lermontov, Potto, and also Okudzhava. Lermontov's Pechorin, in *A Hero of our Time*, from his window in Piatagorsk, sees the romanticized exoticism of the Caucasus, and the mountains' offer of adventure and escape from the social oppression of living in St. Petersburg, Russia. The novel's narrator, however, gives a less positive account of his journey into Tiflis, as he complains about the local Ossetians, the dust and the dirt, and notes that his "tea kettle" is his only comfort on his journey.<sup>82</sup> Potto, referred to in the introduction, begins his 19<sup>th</sup> century history with a cry, "The Caucasus!" (Кавказ!), only to cite the blood Russians have shed fighting to capture the Caucasus as one of the many reasons Russia should maintain its hold on the area, offering no sympathy for blood shed by the Caucasian peoples. And even Okudzhava, as discussed above, exudes a marked ambivalence about the Caucasus, as he has Lavinia express incredulity that what she sees along the Georgian Military Highway could possibly be called paradise, and when she and Miatlev are ultimately deported from their supposed haven. All of these figures are far removed from sharing

Pharnaozi's sense of a Georgian homecoming. Pharnaozi embodies an ardent nationalist who deeply loves his native land, despite its limitations or harsh realities; he has been abroad, but found that he is too rooted in the Caucasus to be able to live away from the land and its culture that he knows so well.

While the trope of "The Captive of the Caucasus" has also been well used among Russians writers, from Pushkin, to Tolstoy, Bitov, and Makanin,<sup>83</sup> Chiladze's captive Pharnaozi is distinctly different, as Chiladze is writing as a Georgian, and his hero's "captivity" is that of a person living within a traditional society. For Pharnaozi, part of his "captivity" involves returning home to fulfill his role as *pater familias* in a Georgian home, once again eating *churchkhela*, sleeping in the cot left vacant by his father, Ukheiro, who has died five years earlier, marrying the girl his sisters have chosen for him, and fathering a young Ukheiro.

Yet, though he loves his native land, Pharnaozi is compelled by his nature to search for personal truth and freedom within his native captivity, but outside the bounds of his traditional marriage. The girl who becomes his wife, Tina, a neighbor since childhood, is shown growing up in a typical, lively, tight-knit Tbilisi courtyard, or *ezo* (ეზო). She sits for hours in a fig tree planted by Pharnaozi's uncle, and hidden in its wide, rough leaves, sings at the top of her lungs, spying on her future husband until her mother, cursing, calls her home.<sup>84</sup> Having plotted to marry Pharnaozi from childhood, she befriends his sisters, happily shelling beans and grinding garlic with a wooden mortar and pestle at their side. In Pharnaozi's absence in Crete the sisters have begun to treat her like family, calling her "bride," and joking that she will marry their brother. Tina, although she longs for love, is happy to settle for the respectability of having her own

home, a husband and child; and experiences her relationship with Pharnaozi as a prolonged battle in which she wins a series of skirmishes, and prevails as far as she does by the sheer force of her patience and endurance. Presented as such, Tina and her sisters-in-law may indeed provide Chiladze's personal critique of the traditional structure of a Georgian marriage.<sup>85</sup>

Although Pharnaozi returns home and tries to settle into a traditional Georgian life, it is his fate to meet with his childhood sweetheart, Ino, the woman he cannot defend, yet the ideal he cannot betray, who embodies the essence of human worthiness: their meeting allows Chiladze to reflect on what he sees as the meaning of being human, the experience of an eternal, pure love. After Pharnaozi's return to Vani, his marriage, and the birth of his son, the two finally meet on a road, where Pharnaozi has stubbed his big toe. In Pharnaozi's absence Ino has become a beggar, dressed in rags, living in a hovel. When they meet, however, Ino becomes instantly radiant: "The woman was happy, and could not hide it. Everything was painted on her face, like the reflection of a flame on someone standing by a bonfire." ("ქალი ბედნიერი იყო და ვერც მალავდა, ყველაფერი სახეზე ეხატა, როგორც ალის ანარეკლი კოცონთან მდგარს.") (474).<sup>86</sup> After dressing Pharnaozi's wound with vinegar, she reveals her thoughts: "In her opinion, every being, no matter how frightful or insignificant it might be, had the right to one happy minute." ("მისი აზრით, ერთი ბედნიერი წუთის უფლება ყოველ არსებას ჰქონდა, როგორი საშინელიცა და უმნიშვნელოც არ უნდა ყოფილიყო იგი.") (474). She includes herself as one of those beings, and this belief has kept her alive during the many years of being a prostitute: "She felt with all her being that she had the right to this one minute, which, above all, would be the support and

confirmation of her humanity.” (“მთელი არსებით გრძნობდა, უფლება ჰქონდა ამ ერთი წუთისა, რომელიც, უპირველეს ყოვლისა, მისი ადამიანობის დასაყრდენი და დადასტურებაც იქნებოდა.”) (474-475). Sensing her moment of happiness, she remembers the love she and Pharnaozi experienced in the Garden of Dariachangi as a gift of eternal light:

She had a star, given to her by a small boy, silly and naïve like her.

Her heart, torn by the points of this star, burned continuously; and

what could she think, she trembled like a leaf, if this light the size of a

leaf, turned out to be so heavy, so inexhaustible, so unspent.

მას ვარსკვლავი ჰქონდა, პატარა ბიჭის, მასავით სულელი და გულუბრყვილო ბიჭის ნაჩუქარი. იმ ვარსკვლავის ქიმებით ჩახეული გული განუწყვეტლივ ეწვოდა; ან რას იფიქრებდა, ფოთოლივით მოცახცახე, ფოთლისხელა სინათლე, ასეთი მძიმე, ასეთი დაუღეველი და დაუხარჯველი თუ აღმოჩნდებოდა. (475)

If Pharnaozi has been unable to forget her, Ino, too, has harbored an image of the young Pharnaozi and recognizes in his eyes the boy “who drew dogs for her in the sand with a dry stick, who gathered apples for her in the Garden of Dariachangi, competed with her in swimming, who threw jellyfish, soft and slippery like boiled starch, on her naked body.” (“ზმელი ჩხირით სილაზე ძაღლებს რომ უხატავდა, დარიაჩანგის ბაღში ვაშლს რომ უკრეფდა, ცურვაში რომ ეჯიბრებოდა, ტიტველ ტანზე მედუზას რომ აგდებდა, მოდულეებული სახამებელივით თონთლოსა და სლიპინას.”) (475).

Chiladze calls the purity and innocence of their childhood love their one true refuge, removed from the unclean desires felt by most of the men who visit Ino; and it is also a refuge from the troubles that plague their country:

The world stood on the shoulders of these two children, a girl and a boy, on the shoulders of belief and love, and they, the woman and man, locked in the room fearing a witness, shared with these two children the last *goji*<sup>87</sup> of land, the last place where they could place their feet.

ქვეყანა ორი ბავშვის, გოგოსა და ბიჭის, რწმენისა და სიყვარულის მხრებზე იდგა, ისინი კი, მოწმის შიშით ოთახში გამომწყვდეული ქალი და კაცი, იმ ორ ბავშვს უკანასკნელი მიწის გოჯსაც, უკანასკნელ ფეხის მოსაკიდებელ ადგილსაც ართმევდნენ. (481)

As a refuge, their love, based in the ideal past, also provides a space for purification:

They shared this past with each other, the most hope-giving refuge, where, tired and crushed from life, they could take shelter, and not only take shelter, but also find renewal, purification, because from that past floated the aroma of an apple, and the wings of a quarrelsome seagull.

ისინი წარსულს ართმევდნენ ერთმანეთს, ყველაზე საიმედო თავშესაფარს, სადაც ცხოვრებისგან დაღლილებს და გათელილებს თავის შეფარება შეეძლოთ და არა მხოლოდ თავის შეფარება, არამედ განახლებაც, განწმენდაცა და აღდგენაც, რადგან იმ წარსულს ვაშლის სუნი ასდიოდა და მოჩხუბარი თოლიის ფრთები ჰქონდა. (481)

But theirs is a tenuous refuge, and as a sign of how low they and their country have fallen, and also as a reminder of Colchis', and Georgia's past glories, Bakha's walking

stick with its rounded knob reappears in Ino's room, left by none other than Kusa, in lieu of payment.

Repeating words from the opening pages of the novel as an ode to Vani's lost glory, Ino wishes Pharnaozi would reenact Bakha's favorite pose: to set the stick between his knees, cover its top with his hands like a roof, and lean his chin on his hands. At this moment, filled with inexplicable loathing, Pharnaozi feels he should break the stick over Ino's head as she describes the disgrace and disgust she feels when impotent old men undress her. Overcoming his anger, however, he realizes that Ino's fate is precisely what should concern him: she is everything to him, mother, sister, lover, and wife. He feels his own impotence and guilt, that he has been unable to be either son, brother, friend, or husband, and feels he should beg her forgiveness for making her the victim of his indifference, his lack of understanding, and above all, his cowardice. If he had had the courage, he would never have abandoned her, and by association, would never have abandoned his beautiful, beloved country. The two share a brief moment of contact, as he caresses her forehead. Their physical touch effects a kind of tactile memory that recalls the former beauty of their country, which in turn provokes a brief, but significant moment of courage as Ino locks her door to the next customer, Kusa, who feels it is his inalienable right to enter, reminding them of their, and Georgia's, vulnerability.

### **Of Tyrants, Toadies, and Freedom**

The politics of the day that intrude to destroy the lyric, nostalgic moments Ino and Pharnaozi share include both Kusa and the local king Oq'ajado, and in their portrayals Chiladze offers a critique of both toadies and tyrants, but one that is imbued with a sensitivity to the difficulties of separating the political from the personal, and particularly of having a villain and traitor in one's own family – an experience felt acutely by Georgians, who have had to bear the legacy of Stalin and his Caucasian henchmen being



of their own kin. As mentioned above, Kusa is the novel's villain, and he is generally self-assured, or pretends to be. Although Kusa is physically and morally repellent, Pharnaozi nonetheless feels cowed by him, as by someone who has gained prestige playing to the foreign powers that rule their city. He is the type of traitor for whom Chiladze would like to feel no pity. And yet, Pharnaozi and Kusa are related by blood and a kind of human sympathy – Kusa understands his uncle loves Ino, and has offered to help buy her from black-eyed Malalo. And Pharnaozi, too, seems to share Ino's generous thoughts that as a human, Kusa, no matter how frightful and repellent, deserves his moment of happiness. The sense of repulsion generated in the reader every time Kusa appears echoes the feelings of Vani's townspeople every time they hear the grating noise of his instruments of torture he carries with him. They hate and fear him, but he is one of their own, and reflects, perhaps, the complex reality of living with those who served Stalin and other, later Soviet overlords.

If Kusa is vile, Oq'ajado is cruel, not particularly bright, and not royal by birth. His father was a groom who is castrated and exiled early in the novel; his mother, on whom Oq'ajado depends, has been responsible for advancing his political career. Feeling acute shame about his birth, he also has a face that is described repeatedly as flat and pockmarked, a hint, perhaps, that he is meant to be a caricature of Stalin, or someone working closely with Stalin: Stalin himself was badly pockmarked and insisted that all photos of him hide this perceived defect.<sup>88</sup> There is, interestingly, a photograph in the Stalin Museum in Gori, Stalin's hometown, that shows his scarred neck, though as currently displayed, the photo is not well lit.<sup>89</sup> These two figures caricature tyrants and political toadies, and as the early Soviet scholars note, Chiladze is merciless in portraying their dehumanized and dehumanizing behavior.<sup>90</sup>

### **Pharaozi as a Georgian, Hellenistic Shepherd**

Pharaozi, unable to endure the doubly suffocating atmosphere of his city ruled by a tyrant, and his traditional, falsely constructed domestic life founded not on love, but duty, attempts to find personal freedom; as he does so, he also becomes a figure who rallies the other citizens' to protest against Oq'ajado's political machine. Seeking freedom, he first takes on characteristics of a kind of Hellenistic shepherd who finds peace and harmony in the natural world, while philosophizing about evil and good. Fleeing home, he is drawn involuntarily to the cave in which he and Ino were caught after being expelled from the Garden of Dariachangi: "He found the cave easily, and although he did not look for it, from the beginning he went towards it, because his heart drew him to it, his heart served as a guide..." ("მღვიმე ადვილად იპოვა, თუმცა არც უძებნია, თურმე თავიდანვე მისკენ მოდიოდა, რადგან გულს მოჰყავდა, გული უწევდა მეგზურობას...") (542).

There, he adopts the life of a shepherd, living out a broken idyll, sleeping in an indentation on the stone floor, and appears to be in a pagan paradise. Drinking milk straight from the udder of the goat that once belonged to black-eyed Malalo, then watching it cascade down the hill, Pharaozi is amazed at its "magical warmth and aroma" ("ჯადოსნული სითბო და სურნელი") (544). He sees divinity in the goat: "And he thought, perhaps she is one of the gods, because the goat, really, stood with divine peacefulness." ("ისიც კი გაიფიქრა, იქნებ ღმერთებისააო, რადგან თხა მართლაც ღვთაებრივი სიმშვიდით იდგა.") (544). And he attains a state of bliss:

Pharaozi had never been so delighted, as if the goat's milk had cured him immediately of everything. No, as if he had nothing to be cured

of, because he had been born here, in this cave, the goat had raised him, and now, for the first time, he was to go out into the sunlit world.<sup>91</sup>

ფარნაოზი არასოდეს არ ყოფილა ასეთი გახარებული, თითქოს არც არაფერი ჰქონდა განსაკუთრებული, რადგან, აქ, ამ მღვიმეში გაჩენილიყო, თხას გაეზარდა და ახლა პირველად უნდა გამოსულიყო სამზეოზე. (545)

He imagines life outside the cave as a heaven in found nature, where humans experience a proverbial Golden Age:

... outside only the sound of a bird's chirping was heard, and the bird had such a peaceful, high, pleasant voice that the universe where such a voice was born could not possibly be ugly, evil, and dangerous. This universe, after all was bathed with the goat's milk, and most likely, there, too, the intoxicating smell of milk circled, the fields shone radiant green, and the crimson-colored bees buzzed over the flowers, peeping out here and there with wide-open eyes; a man had plowed land in the field, the man's naked children followed after him, beautiful like flowers and bothersome like bees; only these children, with baskets clasped to their stomachs, were carrying the seeds of bread, goodness, love, peace, and wisdom.

გარედან მხოლოდ ჩიტის სტვენა აღწევდა, ხოლო ჩიტს ისეთი მშვიდი, წკრიალა და სასიამოვნო ხმა ჰქონდა, სამყარო, სადაც ამგვარი ხმა იზადებოდა, არ შეიძლებოდა თვითონ უშნო, ბოროტი და სახიფათო ყოფილიყო. ისიც ხომ თხის რძით იყო განბანილი და ალბათ, იქაც რძის დამატრობელი სუნი ტრიალებდა, მინდორი ხასხასებდა და აქა-იქ გამოჰყეტილ ყვავილებს ალისფერი ფუტკრები დაბზუოდნენ: მინდორზე კაცს ხნული გაჰქონდა, კაცს დედიშობილა ბავშვები ბოჰყვებოდნენ, ყვავილებივით ლამაზი და ფუტკრებივით აბეზარი; ხოლო იმ

ბავშვებს მუცელზე მიხუტებული კალათებით პურის, სიკეთის,  
სიყვარულის, სიმშვიდისა და სიბრძნის თესლი მოჰქონდათ. (545)

Pharaozi realizes he has seen this vision of the world before, on his father's embroidered coverlet "the size of a sail," and sensing a strong spiritual connection with Ukheiro, he longs for the solidarity of three to make the vision come true:

Already, two men would go out and share the same view and desire. And this already meant something, if nothing else, two are more than one, they could believe more, and later, it is possible, someone else would join them, if this other one really existed, and this other now heard the chirping of the birds. Three humans were already a people.

ასე, რომ უკვე ორნი გამოდიოდნენ ერთნაირი თვალისა და სურვილის მქონენი. ეს კი რაღაცას ნიშნავდა, სხვა თუ არაფერი, ორი ერთზე მეტი იყო, მეტი დაეჯერებოდა და ხვალ, შეიძლება კიდევ მიმატებოდათ ვინმე, თუკი ის ვინმე სინამდვილეში არსებობდა და ახლა ისიც ამ ჩეტეს სტვენას უსმენდა. სამი კაცი კი უკვე ხალხი იყო. (545)

Desperately desiring to return to the earlier, bucolic life of Vani, to the true love of his childhood, like a Hellenistic shepherd he is bathetic to the point of being almost ludicrous, and at the same time is completely true to previous ideals and emotions.<sup>92</sup>

He feels it is his fate to care for the goat to atone for his guilt: "The gods were both right, and good, Pharaozi needed to learn how to be a shepherd." ("ღმერთები მართლებიც იყვნენ და კეთილებიც, ფარნაოზს მწყემსობა უნდა ესწავლა.") (545). Nourishing a hope that Ino might one day wander out to care for her mother's abandoned goat, his isolated life is made tolerable by visits with his son, Little Ukheiro, the third party in sharing his vision. Given visitation rights, he takes him out walking,

imparting the secrets of his way of life. And his son imbibes the Hellenistic spirit from his father, as Pharnaozi had from his own; approaching the gate to their ancestral house, the two share a deep sympathy:

... they passed along this road together, anxious and excited like sworn conspirators. And they themselves felt that they had destroyed something, or were planning to destroy something, and the feeling of guilt, not completely clear, made them even closer.

... მაინც ერთად მიჰყვებოდნენ ქუჩას, შეთქმულებივით შემკრთალნი და აღზნელულნი. თვითონაც გრძნობდნენ, რაღაც რომ დაერღვიათ, ან რაღაცის დარღვევას რომ აპირებდნენ და ბოლომდე გაურკვეველი დანაშაულის შეგრძნება უარესად აახლოებდათ. (563)

Pharnaozi shares with his son a secret of preserving the Garden of Dariachangi, as if imparting sacred knowledge of their country's history:

... only no one could tear off even the smallest twig, otherwise Dariachangi would die and the garden would disappear, as indeed happened, because someone forgot the instructions of Dariachangi, which were passed on from generation to generation, like a secret medicine against death, and Dariachangi was so beautiful, it turned out the people ate bread in its light.

ოღონდ წკნელიც არ უნდა შეეტება არავის, თორემ დარიაჩანგი მოკვდებოდა და ბაღიც გაქრებოდა, როგორც მომხდარიყო კიდეც, რადგან ვიღაცს დაევიწყებინა დარიაჩანგის დანაბარები, შთამომავლობით რომ გადმოდიოდა თაობიდან თაობაში როგორც უკვდავების წამლის საიდუმლო, დარიაჩანგი კი ისეთი ლამაზი ყოფილა, ხალხი თურმე მის შუქზე პურსა ჭამდა. (565)

Pharaozi describes the wonders of his childhood so vividly that Little Ukheiro begins to feel they are real; but unlike Phrixus' sons, he does not have to travel to a foreign country to find them, nor is he estranged, for the moment, from his father:

The city of his father's childhood was more captivating and closer to him. And he never doubted that he himself ran in the streets of this city, that he himself had torn apples in the Garden of Daria-changi, and that he himself had gone to the noisy port to see the foreign ships, and together with Tsuga had rolled in the hot sand. And all of this happened when he and his father were one being, and shared everything, looked at the world with one eye, and listened to its sounds with one ear.

მამის ბავშვობის დროინდელი ქალაქი უფრო მომხიბვლელი და უფრო ახლობელიც იყო მისთვის. ეჭვიც არ ეპარებოდა, თვითონაც რომ ერბინა ამ ქალაქის ქუჩებში, თვითონაც მოეწყვიტა ვაშლი დარიაჩანგის ბაღში, თვითონაც გასულიყო ახმაურებულ ნავსადგურში უცხოური გემების სანახავად და ცუგასთან ერთად თვითონაც ეკოტრიალა გახურებულ სილაში. ეს ყველაფერი კი მაშინ მომხდარიყო, როცა ისა და მამამისი ერთი არსება იყვნენ და ყველაფერი საერთო ჰქონდათ, ერთი თვალით უცქეროდნენ ქვეყანას და ერთი ყურით ესმოდათ მისი ხმები. (565)

Enjoying the sense of solidarity with his father, Little Ukheiro pleads to stay with him longer, if not forever, as they slow their steps to the gate, where the women are waiting to welcome him back to the reality of their broken country. In this image of father and son, Chiladze creates a sense of a shared Georgian identity imbued with wholeness and integrity, one that can be passed down from generation to generation.

### Death, Icarus, and the Return of Eternity

As this long saga of Colchis draws to a close, the decline of Pharnaozi's personal life parallels the political; after he abandons his family the town is engulfed by Oq'ajado's forces. Chiladze's style also shifts, and his measured, relatively chronological, realistic narrative becomes fantastic and surreal. At the same time, Chiladze brings many threads of his novel together, closing circles, tying up ends into tidier knots of meaning. In Vani, not only are armed forces present, but twin brothers, "fear and horror," conspicuously dressed in Greek clothing, appear at night and creep from hut to hut, peering into windows, laughing at people's sorrow: "Both of them were bald, and their heads gleamed as if they were wearing gold bowls. Both were wearing short tunics, their sandals laces up to their thighs. They were brothers, one was called fear, the other, horror." ("ორივე მელოტი იყო და თავები ისე უპრიალებდათ, თითქოს ოქროს თასები ახურავთო. ორივეს მოკლე ტუნიკი ეზვა, სანდლის თასმები ბარძაყებამდე დაეხვიათ. ისინი ძმები იყვნენ, ერთს შიში ერქვა, მეორეს -- ელდა.") (569). The palace has the air of being under siege, its parapets wrapped in crepe, and the interior ghoulish. Oq'ajado himself is far from kingly:

Like a toad, he was born in a puddle, and even now he was slopping around in a puddle. He was unable to finish his thought, as the smell of the stagnant pond hit his nose.

ბაყაყივით წუმპეში გაჩენილიყო და წუმპეში დატყლაპუნობდა ახლაც. კარგად არც ჰქონდა ფიქრი დამთავრებული, თვითონაც რომ ეცა აშმორებული წუმპის სუნი.

And his palace shows signs of decay:

The walls were smashed, the dry, crumbling paint, turned to dust,

lay in clumps on the floor, the tiles were loose, water stood here and there in holes, and Oq'ajado involuntarily looked up. Bats hung upside down from the cracked ceiling, spiderwebs reached to the floor, waving like the braids of a *kaji*.<sup>93</sup>

კედლები ატკეცილიყო, გამხმარი, დაფშვნილი და მტვრად-ქცეული საღებავი ბლუჯა-ბლუჯა ეყარა იატაკზე, ფილაქანი, ამოცვენილიყო, ღრმულებში აქა-იქ წყალისც ჩამდარიყო, და ოყაჯადომ უნებურად მაღლა აიხედა. დაბზარულ ჭერზე თავდაყირა ეკიდნენ ღამურები. იატაკამდე ჩამოზრდილი აბლაბუდა ქაჯის ნაწნავით ირხეოდა. (576)

The cracked plaster obscures the frescoes of earlier, more glorious, times, and it is as if the current political climate has closed the palace doors. Oq'ajado has lost touch with the country he supposedly rules, and his mother despairs over her son's ability to rule, as they think in conventional terms about the nature of ruling and the ruled, and how interdependent they are:

Conspiracy, betrayal, revolt, poison and the *kinjal*<sup>94</sup> were the very oldest enemies of the throne, so old, that they could no longer be called enemies: they were so domesticated and well known to each other, that they could not even imagine themselves not being together.

შეთქმულება, ღალატი, ამბოხება, შხამი და ხანჯალი -- ტახტის ძველისძველი მტრები იყვნენ, იმდენად ძველი, მტრობა აღარც ეთქმოდათ: ისე გასცნობოდნენ და გამინაურებოდნენ ერთმანეთს, უერთმანეთობა ვეღარც კი წარმოედგინათ. (577)

The one enemy Oq'ajado and his mother do not anticipate is the one that actually strikes fear in them – Icarus, and the protest he inspires in Vani's children.

The fantastic events of the novel's finale begin when Daedalus' son Icarus, long forgotten in Crete, appears as an enemy who strikes fear even in the king. Unlike his



mythical forebear who perishes from flying too close to the sun, Chiladze's Icarus survives his attempt to fly, landing in Oq'ajado's courtyard like a bird, and at first is mistaken for a local chicken that's flown its coup. He arrives, however, as an emissary of freedom and rebellion who inspires the town's children, literally, to take wing. Perhaps not surprisingly, of all the children it is Pharnaozi's son, Little Ukheiro, who first hears the message of freedom, and in an attempt to imitate Icarus, fashions wings for himself, climbs to the top of the temple, and hurls himself to his death. The other children of Vani emulate his act of defiance, dressing up in a year's worth of old feathers they pillage from their parents' storerooms, and thronging the streets. Their rebellion, however, is crushed by Oq'ajado's men who beat them so badly their parents are finally moved to act, and throwing their bodies into the fray, promise to punish the children at home. The sound of the wails and whistling of the whips are so loud that they penetrate to the interior of the palace, where Oq'ajado trembles, feeling that something is amiss. The picture of the cruelty of tyrannical leaders' armed men recalls many a scene of massacre, including the Georgians' protests against Soviet rule in May, 1956;<sup>95</sup> and anticipates those of April 9, 1989, when Soviet paratroopers were ordered to fire on protesters gathered on Tbilisi's main street, Rustaveli Avenue.<sup>96</sup>

In the novel's final, fantastic scenes, Chiladze offers his readers two alternative endings to the life Pharnaozi has lived, giving a clear sense about which he believes carries more weight. The first ending occurs when Pharnaozi, after the death of Little Ukheiro, loses his sense of hope:

It couldn't happen, Daedalus, if flight were so easy, please tell me,  
who would remain on earth? A man exists for this, to chisel stone,

to build a house, and travel along his road. So it was, and so it will be.

I'd like to know, will it be like this forever? Forever?

ვერ მოგართვა, დედალუს, გაფრენა რომ ასე ადვილი იყოს,  
მიწაზე ველაცას გააჩერებდი, შენ გეკითხები? კაცი იმისთვისაა,  
ქვა რომ კოდოს, სახლი ააშენოს, გზა გაიყვანოს. ასე ყოფილა  
და ასე იქნება. ყოველთვის ასე იქნება ნეტავ? ყოველთვის? (599)

Feeling defeated by the current powers and crushed by the death of his beloved son, he thinks momentarily that it would have been better to give up his conscience and his freedom; to live his life in the confines of his traditional family and the given political system, following Kusa's advice:

“A man has to make himself fit into the hole pre-assigned to him  
if he wants to live peacefully. No one has the right to leave it and  
cry out, I'm living in a hole. Whose business is it, if he feels wonderful  
in this hole, and at night, before sleeping, he whispers to the gods,  
let it always be like this, let nothing change.”

“ადამიანი უნდა ჩაეტოს მისთვის განკუთვნილ ღრმულში,  
თუ უნდა, რომ მშვიდად იცხოვროს. არც არავის არა აქვს ნება,  
გამოდგეს და ეძახოს, ორმოში ცხოვრობსო. ვისი არ საქმეა,  
თუკი იგი თავს მშვენივრად გრძნობს ამ ორმოში და ღამით,  
ძილის წინ, ღმერთებს ეჩურჩულება, სულ ასე მამყოფეთ,  
არაფერი შეიცვალოსო.” (599-600)

Pharaozi continues to feel subjected to Kusa's will and the evil of accepting political exigencies; while waiting in his cave for a final reckoning with his nephew, he feels embarrassed that his legs are too long and project out the mouth of the cave. When Kusa arrives, he submits without protest to having his nephew cut off his legs: as the story comes full circle, we finally see Kusa's instruments of torture pulled out of his bag, like snakes.

Pharaozi's attitude is one of spiritual generosity, of wanting to live and let live; having thanked Kusa in his thoughts, in the throes of dying, he also forgives himself:

“You're a sly one, Pharaozi, a sly one, and you, too, it turns out, love a good life. And why not, why not,” Pharaozi thought aloud and deliberately repeated, and felt, from both pleasure and from shame, how he blushed, as if he were a maiden who had kissed a man for the first time, and without whom she could no longer live.

“ემმაკი ხარ, ფარნაოზ, ემმაკი შენც გყვარემია კარგი ცხოვრება. რატომაც არა, რატომაც არა,” განგებ ხმამაღლა და ხაზგასმულად იმეორებს ფარნაოზი და გრძნობს, როგორ ეფაკლება სახე სირცხვილისაგან და სიამოვნებისაგან ერთდროულად, თითქოს კალიშვილი იყოს და პირველად იკოცნოს მამკაცისათვის, ურომლისოდაც ცხოვრება აღარ შეუძლია. (675-676)

Juxtaposed to this understanding of his human frailty, Pharaozi is shown lying in a pool of his own blood, and as the level of his blood rises to his ears, and then his mouth, he feels a feather from Little Ukheiro's wings stuck to the top of his mouth. His mouth, his means of speaking in protest, is another cave with a bit of freedom trapped inside; but this is not the vision with which Chiladze chooses to leave his readers.

Rather, in an alternative ending, Chiladze describes Pharaozi's efforts to regain the vision of Georgia as a Colchian haven, and re-asserts a vision of independence, freedom and territorial integrity for Georgia, calling on the historic past as ballast for this vision.

In this second ending, Pharaozi is turned over to the authorities for being guilty, by association with his son Little Ukheiro, of teaching the children of Vani to fly. As Tsutsu advises Oq'ajado: “What sense is there in asking a child, you need to kill those

who bore him.” (“ბავშვს რა ჭკუა მოეკითხება, პატრონია მოსაკლავიო.”) (602). It is, of course, Kusa who denounces him, and implicates Daedelus as well: “He himself, somewhere, learned to fly from a clown, and he insisted, whether you want it or not, I need to teach my child. First I’ll teach my child, and then others, too.” (“თვითონ სადღაც, ჯამბაზებისგან ესწავლა ფრენა და აჩემებული ჰქონდა, გინდა თუ არა, ჩემს შვილსაც უნდა ვასწავლოო. ჯერ შვილს ვასწავლი და მერე სხვებსაცო.”) (607). Dragged around the city as an object of people’s scorn and horror, then hung on the castle wall, Pharnaozi reflects that the shame he feels is equal to what he felt when he was caught as an adolescent with Ino and marched through the streets of Vani. He feels the shame of being exposed for the innocent expression of his youthful love and for his attempt to bring freedom to the people of Vani represents equivalent, intertwined transgressions. But there is a significant difference in these two events. In the second depiction of Pharnaozi traveling down the road, he is no longer walking on his own power, but is dragged, bound hand and foot. And curiously, the people look at him not with scorn and horror, but with horror and sympathy:

But unexpectedly for the palace, the people, with their lips sealed by fear and sympathy, gazed after the martyr, whom Oq’ajado’s soldiers dragged through the streets like a bundle of twigs gathered for kindling. Pharnaozi did not hear the quiet laments of the women, did not see the faces of the men, pale as mistletoe...

მაგრამ სასახლისათვის მოულოდნელად, პირმოკუმული ხალხი შიშითა და თანაგრძნობით აყოლებდნენ თვალს ტანჯულ ადამიანს, რომელსაც ოყაჯადოს ჯარისკაცები ფიჩხის გუდურასავით მიათრევდნენ ქუჩაშე. ფარნაოზს არც ქალების ზუზუნი ესმოდა და არც კაცების გადაფითრებულ სახეებს ხედავდა... (608-609)

He does not feel their sympathy, but only the continuation of his shame:

... his weakened mind carried him to his childhood, it seemed to be that very day when “the bandits” of one week, frowning, walked between the laughing citizens and he tried only not to stumble, not to get angry, but to walk to the end of the street, so that everyone could take pleasure looking at him, looking at a defeated man. So, if one told the truth, this day did not especially differ from that one, simply, one was the beginning of the defeat, the other, the completion.

... დაუძღვრებულ გონებას ბავშვობაში გადაეყვანა იგი, ისევ ის დღე ეგონა, როცა ერთი კვირის “ნაავაზაკირი” მოღუშული მიაბიჯებდა ახარხარებულ თანამოქალაქეთა შორის და მხოლოდ იმას ცდილობდა, არ წაეზორძიკა, არ წაქცეულიყო, არ გაბრაზებულიყო და ბოლომდე ჩაეთავებინა ქუჩა, რათა ყველას შესძლებოდა, დამტკბარიყო მისი ცქერით, დამარცხებულის ცქერით. ისე, კაცმა რომ თქვას, დიდად არც განსხვავდებოდა ეს დღე იმ დღისგან, უბრალოდ ერთი დამარცხების დასაწყისი იყო, მეორე კი, -- დასასრული. (608-609)

Paradoxically, by living alone, apart from his fallen city, by clinging to his ideals in his pastoral cave, he proves to be an inspiration for the children to rebel. The people sense this dignity in him, and certainly understand the cruelty of the treatment he receives from Oq’ajado and his henchmen. Although he feels defeated, he has proved himself to the people, and keeping his sense of humanity, and become one with them, embodying the main goal and aim of the novel.

Chiladze offers further moral lessons about the nature of evil in the final scenes, when Pharnaozi is left hanging on the palace walls, not unlike Christ on the cross, and two men are left to guard him, one clearly called good, the other, evil. The good man sleeps through the night, but the evil man is bothered by hearing what he thinks is Pharnaozi’s voice asking for a sip of water, and decides to stone him to see if he is still

alive. The good man at first resists the temptation to stone his fellow citizen, but then gives in both to a sense of competition and to the desire to see if he is truly dead.

Chiladze seems to be posing the philosophical question: how do good men go bad and make bad decisions? In answer, he does not condemn either of the men outright, but offers more positive images, as if to suggest that this positive vision in itself is strong enough, or is at least the best he has, to counter the forces of evil.

The stoning actually revives Pharnaozi, and as the pain reawakens his consciousness the novel moves to its final epiphany, offering a resurrection of both Pharnaozi and the glories of ancient Colchis. As he comes out of what he feels is a deep sleep, Pharnaozi miraculously makes his way down off the wall, and finds himself in the yard of his father's house, seeing again two cypress trees that have been mentioned throughout the novel as spiritual guardians of his home:

The pain returned Pharnaozi's consciousness to him, "I've fallen asleep like a horse on his feet," he thought, and separated himself from the wall. He hadn't taken two steps when he saw the pair of cypress trees, then caught sight of the fig tree, which was like a woman waiting with her arms leaning over the fence, and his heart trembled, he had come to his father's home.

ტკივილმა ფარნაოზს გონება დაუბრუნა, ცხენივით ფეხზე დამძინებიაო, გაიფიქრა და კედელს მოშორდა. ორი ნაბიჯიც არ ჰქონდა გადადგმული, წყვილი კვიპაროსი რომ დაინახა, მერე მომლოდინე ქალივით ღობეზე მკლავებგადმოწყობილ ლეღვისაც შეასწრო თვალი და გული აუთრთოლდა, მამისეული სახლთან მოსულიყო. (611-612)

The young Icarus also appears in the yard, having flown from Oq'ajado's palace, and presents an image of Pharnaozi's son before he learned to walk. As Little Ukheiro had

done, Icarus, sitting on the stone step, picks up an apple and smashes it onto the stone; as a sign of his love, he leaves his teeth marks on another apple for Pharnaozi, who responds with an equal expression of love: “‘Shall we go for a walk?’ Pharnaozi asked, but it was so difficult for him to say this single word, as if he were saying to a woman for the first time, ‘I love you.’” (“გავიაროთო?” ჰკითხა ფარნაოზმა, მაგრამ ისე გაუჭირდა ამ ერთი სიტყვის თქმა, თითქოს პირველად ეუბნებოდა ქალს: ‘მიყვარხარო.’”)

(612). Pharnaozi picks up the young Icarus as he had his son, but has finally learned some lessons about love and maintaining human relations, and refuses to let him out of his arms, refuses to give in to Icarus’ desire to fly away. At that moment, the Garden of Dariachangi begins magically to reappear: the tops of the trees emerge from the earth, and soon all of the fruit trees are blooming, their blossoms and fragrance wafting into the air:

“Look, the Garden of Dariachangi,” Pharnaozi cried out, amazed, and stood frozen on the spot. The Garden of Dariachangi sparkled in the sun, pouring fourth its intoxicating aroma, here flowers were growing, here apples were ripening, and here fruit, already ripe, was falling. A swarm of bees hovered like gold dust over his head; in the distance, the wind carried its flowers as far as the eyes could see.

“აგე, დარიაჩანგის ბაღიო,” დაიყვირა ფარნაოზმა და გოცეებული ადგილზე გაშეშდა. დარიაჩანგის ბაღი მზეზე ხასხასებდა, დამატრობელ სურნელს აფრქვევდა, ალაგ ყვავდა, ალაგ მწიფდა და ალაგ უკვე ნაყოფი ჩამოსდიოდა. ფუტკრების ჯოგი ოქროს მტვერით ედგა თავზე, შორს, თვალის საწიერამდე, გაჰქონდა ნიავს მისი ყვავილი. (613)

Together, Pharnaozi and Icarus reach the gate of the yard, and opening it, discover that the foul smelling swamp has begun to recede, and the lost territory of Vani is being returned to them. In this final image, Pharnaozi and Icarus, a transformed father and son, reborn and reconstituted as a family without the sins of civil or domestic strife, are offered as an image of what it will take to return Georgia to its native glory. Rather than being a useless dreamer who suffers from moral deficiency, Pharnaozi is a dreamer with a purpose – to restore a vision of Colchis that is close to the essence of its people, or what Chiladze would like to present as the essence of its people; to restore a vision of ancient Vani as a peaceful haven that beckons and succors.

Overcoming civil strife and family violence seems key to that vision. When Pharnaozi picks up Icarus in the final scene, he is, like his father who embroidered, compared to a woman: the pride he feels for Icarus is as intense as what a young girl feels when she is kissed for the first time. Pharnaozi is feminized, but not as a victim of others' violence, but rather as the vehicle of an intense strength – his love for Icarus is the same caliber as that of his love for Ino – that will overcome the worst of political and civil violence, shut out the rape and pillage of Georgia embodied in Kusa, at least long enough to allow other visions to emerge.

Pharnaozi, decrepit and beaten, still embodies human ideals of freedom and love as he cradles the young Icarus in his arms. No matter what evil the Cretan Greeks and their henchman inflict, no matter that Kusa and doubtless many others have sold their souls to such devils, the vision of the return of his native land lives on in the eternity of Pharnaozi's mind and imagination: he is captive to the familiar, homey vision of his country that allows him all the freedom he could desire.

When I asked Otar Chiladze what role Pharnaozi plays in contemporary Georgia, he answered simply that he was a very autobiographical character.<sup>97</sup> I took his answer to mean that Georgia, even now, needs a character like Pharnaozi, a dreamer who can help preserve the best of Georgian culture and traditions. Certainly, Chiladze, writing his



novel in wonderfully complex Georgian, using archaic vocabulary to carve images of Georgian life with many of its complexities and difficulties, was such a hero. In recreating the ancient Greek myths and figures, and in presenting native Georgian characters along side the re-worked Greek figures, Chiladze lifts the veil, made of the cloth he himself has woven, and clearly expresses his intense pride in and love for his country.

In August 2009, Chiladze was Georgia's nominee for the Nobel Prize, and had been recently nominated for the Shota Rustaveli Prize in literature. In late September 2009, Otar Chiladze died in a Tbilisi hospital, waiting for a respirator and oxygen tanks that would help him breath, and which his sister commented, were coming from America.

In my final visit with Chiladze, one of his last wishes was to see his novel translated into English. In writing this chapter of my dissertation, I hope to fulfill part of my promise to bring Chiladze's work to a larger audience, and in so doing, to help counter some of the preconceptions about Georgia and its people that have become clichés promulgated by Russians and Georgians alike. Chiladze's vision of Georgia is one that is both deeply personal in its commitment to living by principles of freedom, and deeply patriotic in its clear-eyed exploration of positive and negative aspects of Georgian national identity; it is a vision that strives to include in that identity a sense of humanism that honors the worth of every individual human being, that will help unify his country, and connect it with other countries and people of the world that share his values and dreams. His use of the Classical allusions and mythology reveals a deep appreciation for those founding texts, as well as a level of intellectual and emotional familiarity with them that allows him play with them, altering and shifting their forms to present their Georgian aspects, without disrespecting their other, Greek forms.

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the Georgian are taken from from Chiladze, Otar, *gzaze erti katsi midioda*, Merani Press Tbilisi, 1973, except where noted. Georgian does not use capital letters, and I have kept this convention when quoting or transliterating from Georgian. All translations are my own, accomplished with the aid of a native Georgian speaker, Aida Abuashvili Lominadze. In the process of interpreting this novel, I have been translating it from Georgian into English, working closely with Ms. Abuashvili Lominadze, a childhood friend of Chiladze's in Tbilisi, wife of the late Sergo Lominadze, and daughter-in-law of Beso Lominadze. Her encouragement to pursue the translation project has been essential to my work, and I would like to express my debt to her for all her time and patience she has dedicated to the project, and the invaluable insights about Georgian culture she has shared with me along the way. I would also like to thank Ms. Abuashvili Lominadze for her belief that it is important for the world to be able to read Chiladze's work in English, to see descriptions of Georgian life from a Georgian point of view, and not one obscured or distorted by years of Russian and Soviet interpretations of what it means to be Georgian.

<sup>2</sup> Bykov, Dimitrii, *Bulat Okudzhava*, (758-767): Okudzhava lived in Tbilisi, and then Urals from 1930 to 1937, when his father was arrested and shot, and his mother imprisoned. He lived with relatives in Moscow from 1937-1939; in Tbilisi from 1940-41; fought in WWII between 1942-1944; returned to Tbilisi from 1948-1950; taught in Kaluga from 1953-1956; and settled in Moscow after 1956, until his death in 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Rayfield, Donald, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, (42-43).

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Griboedov (1795-1829), Russian playwright and diplomat, married Nino Chavchavadze, (1812-1857), daughter of Prince Chavchavadze; Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), poet and writer, considered the father of Georgian liberal thought; Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915), author, who blended nationalism with a cosmopolitan outlook, and encouraged an ethical attitude to nature; Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1939-1993), Soviet dissident and Georgia's first president in 1991 after the country declared independence from the Soviet Union.

<sup>5</sup> See Lordkipanidze, Otar, *The Heritage of Ancient Georgia (Наследие древней Грузии)*, (219-230), for archeological evidence for the unity of the Kingdom of Ancient Colchis from the VII-IVth centuries BC.

<sup>6</sup> For whatever reason, Chiladze differentiates between Greeks on Crete and Greeks in other parts of Greece, and identifies the Cretan Greeks, and in particular King Minos, as allegorical figures for contemporary Russians.

<sup>7</sup> de Waal, Thomas, *The Caucasus: an Introduction*, (45), quoted from Oliver Wardrop, *The Kingdom of Georgia: Notes of Travel in a Land of Wine, Women and Song*. (London: Sampson Low, Maston, Searle and Ribington, 1888, (15-16)).

<sup>8</sup> Mackie, J. Milton, *The Life of Schamyl; and Narrative of the Circassian War of Independence against Russia*, (5-6).

<sup>9</sup> Lordkipanidze, Konstantin, *The Dawn of Colchis*.

<sup>10</sup> Although Phrixus' name in Georgian would be transliterated as "Prikse," I have kept the standard spelling of his name from the Greek, as for example found in *The Voyage of the Argo*, trans. E.V. Rieu, Penguin Books, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> de Waal, op., cit., (46).

<sup>12</sup> Personal interview. September 24, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> If Bitov's vision of his journey to Georgia and Ulitskaia's version of Medea, discussed above, reflect even part of what the reading public thinks about Georgia and the Georgians, I am not sure I would agree with Chiladze, but I did not want to abuse him of his optimism and sense of hope in what was clearly our last interview, September 24, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interviews, October 2011, with Archil Gegeshidze, Senior Fellow, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies; and September 2010, with David Smith, Senior Fellow, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, and Director, Georgian Security Analysis Center.

<sup>15</sup> In December 2007, Saakashvili government security forces broke up an opposition rally in front of Parliament with rubber bullets and tear gas. They were far more restrained in a series of Opposition demonstrations in May 2008. Certain journalists claim that thousands of people with opposition views are currently imprisoned in the Tbilisi area. (Personal interview, with Ia Mamaladze, journalist and director of Georgia's Regional Media Organization, September 2011.)

<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation with Donald Rayfield, April 2010, about his use of Chiladze's novels for examples of archaic language in compiling his monumental Georgian-English Dictionary.

<sup>17</sup> Personal interview, October 6, 2006, in which Chiladze expressed his belief that the youth of today's Georgia have to maintain their language in order to maintain their culture. The Georgian language has been a rallying point for nationalists and dissidents since at least 1811, after Russia effectively dismantled the Georgian Orthodox church (de Waal, op. cit., (33-35)).

<sup>18</sup> Tuite, Kevin, "Extreme Banqueting: Positive and Negative Agonism at the Georgian Supra," offers an anthropologist's view on the agonistic nature of toasting at a supra. His observations are interesting, but do not correspond to what I have observed in more intimate family supras, where the toasting was a means of communicating affection, pride and respect, and had very little that was agonistic about them.

<sup>19</sup> Fazil Iskander, quite humorously, uses his own share of Classical references in works such as "The Thirteenth Labor of Hercules," and in *Sandro of Chegem*, in a scene involving the use of a contemporary Trojan horse as one faction invades across the Enguri River that now separates Abkhazia from Georgia.

<sup>20</sup> Personal interview. October 6, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Callimachus, ed., Trypanis, C. A., *Aetia, Iami, Hecale and other Fragments*, (176-179).

<sup>22</sup> Chiladze weaves in, with twists, other elements from Greek myth; e.g., that Minos' queen, rather than Phrixus' stepmother, Ino, had claimed that crop failure was a reason to sacrifice Phrixus and his sister Elene, when in fact she had planted sterile seeds as an excuse to send them away. He borrows the mythical name, Ino, for Pharnaozi's beloved.

<sup>23</sup> Theocritus, *Idylls*, ed., Hunter, (61).

<sup>24</sup> Theocritus, op. cit., ed. A.S.F. Gow, (17-29;103-121).

<sup>25</sup> Griffiths, F. T., *Theocritus at Court*, (1-8).

<sup>26</sup> Crego, Paul, "Georgian-Abkhazian Relations in the Context of Language Policy in the Twentieth Century" (21-22).

<sup>27</sup> This and the following few pages have been adapted from my previously published paper, "A Thoroughly Georgian Medea: Classical Motifs in Otar Chiladze's *A Man Walked Down the Road*," in *The Argonautica and World Culture*, *Phasis* 10, II (137-146).

<sup>28</sup> Bestavashvili, A., "The World Will Be Like This," ("Таким будет мир"), (269-70, 272).

<sup>29</sup> See Bestavashvili, A., op.cit., (269-70), for the suggestion that the novel presents "anti-myth"; see Nuikin, Andrei, "Vzlety i proshchety," (47-48), for the counter argument, that the novel should be considered, by genre, a myth.

<sup>30</sup> Nuikin, Andrei, "Flights and Errors." ("Взлеты и просчеты"). (40).

<sup>31</sup> Greenburg, I., "...And the Millstone has not yet Learned How to Grind," ("...И жернов еще не учился помолу"), (44).

<sup>32</sup> Anninskii, Lev, "The Road and the Precipice," ("Дорога и обрыв"). *A Man Walked Down the Road*, (5, 11-12).

<sup>33</sup> Personal interview, October 2006.

<sup>34</sup> K'vanch'ant'iradze, Manana, *Semiological Aspects of Otar Chiladze's Artistic System*. (ოთარ ჩილაძის მხატვრული სისტემის სემიოლოგიური ასპექტები), (9-13; 221-237)

<sup>35</sup> All Russian quotes are from the 1978 edition, *Shel po doroge chelovek*, with page numbers cited in parentheses.

<sup>36</sup> I offer my thanks to Aida Abuashvili Lominadze for pointing out this detail of traditional Georgian culture.

<sup>37</sup> Chiladze uses this ring structure repeatedly in his novel, bringing many things round; for example, Icarus sitting on the tile smashing an apple reiterates the picture of little Ukheiro as a child; Bacchus' walking stick reappears long after his death, resurfacing in Ino's hut to remind Pharnaozi of the days when Vani was in its full glory.

<sup>38</sup> See Nuikin, Andrei, op.cit., (46) on the critical discussion of polyphony of Chiladze's text among Soviet scholars. See also, Asiatiani, Guram, "The Spirit of Epic: Notes about the Latest Georgian Prose." ("Дыхание эпоса: заметки о новейшей грузинской прозе"), (1975) (237-239).

<sup>39</sup> Lordkipanidze, Otar, op. cit., (227-229). See also, Georgian National Museum, *Colchis – Land of Golden Fleece*, for color illustrations.

<sup>40</sup> According to various accounts, the myth of the Golden Fleece has some base in reality, as traditionally sheepskins were used to sift gold in mountain streams, and would have turned golden from the gold dust. I

saw such a sifter in Ushguli, one of the highest villages in Svaneti, in the Caucasus, September 2011, but could not tell if it was still being used, or there just for show.

<sup>41</sup> Vazha-Pshavela, “The Snake Eater,” trans. Urushadze, in *Georgian Poetry* (97-108). Mindia, after eating snake meat, is able to understand the voices of both the flora and fauna, a gift which alienates him from his society, as he is unable to cut trees or kill animals to care for his family.

<sup>42</sup> The Georgian term for an oven for baking bread, “tonis puri” (თონის პური), in which the formed bread dough is baked on the interior sides.

<sup>43</sup> A *kvevri* is a large clay pot for fermenting and storing wine that is buried up to its neck in the ground or in a *marani*, a winemaking shed.

<sup>44</sup> For examples of Georgian polyphony, visit John Graham's website, <http://www.georgianchant.org/>; for a recent scholarly study, see Jordania, Joseph, *Who Asked the First Question?: The Origins of Human Choral Singing, Intelligence, Language and Speech*, (74-104), who argues that “... Georgian polyphony represents one of the most complex polyphonic traditions known in ethnomusicology today...” (74).

<sup>45</sup> Aida Abuashvili Lominadze, personal conversation, July 2007. See also de Waal, op. cit. (157-164), for an account of the civil war in Georgia in the early 1990's, and how Gamsakhurdia hid in Abkhazia before the capture and fall of Sukhumi, and before he fled to Chechnya.

<sup>46</sup> Gogebashvili, Iakob, *Mother Tongue* (დედა ენა), (3-5). Gogebashvili, an ardent nationalist himself, founded the Society for the Spread of the Georgian Language in 1879, and held “secret discussion meetings for his students... where they also debated subversive political ideas.” de Waal, op. cit. (34).

<sup>47</sup> Gogebashvili, Iakob, op.cit. (9), also includes pictures of the various vessels.

<sup>48</sup> These are images that most people see on a first trip to Georgia: St. Nino's cross at the Jvari Monastery outside Mtskheta; bunches of grapes that are common motif carved on most Georgian churches; icons available in souvenir shops around the country.

<sup>49</sup> A *kheladi* is a pot-bellied, broad-lipped clay jar.

<sup>50</sup> Thanks to Aida Abuashvili Lominadze for explaining the image of a traditional Georgian house.

<sup>51</sup> See in particular, Grothe, Anja. *Medusa, Cassandra, Medea: Re-inscribing Myth in Contemporary German and Russian Women's Writing*; and Hall, Edith, ed., Fiona Macintosh, & Oliver Taplin, *Medea in Performance: 1500-2000* for contemporary studies of multiple iterations of the Medea myth in literature.

<sup>52</sup> See Nadareishili, Ketevan, “Medea in the Context of Modern Georgian Culture,” *Phasis* 10, II, (222-229), who discusses the reception of Medea in Georgian culture, as well as contemporary staging and sculptural representations of Medea, in both Georgia and Abkhazia.

<sup>53</sup> Chiladze, Otar, “Medea” (“მედეა”), *The Happy Martyr* (ბედნიერი ტანჯულო), (232-234).

<sup>54</sup> See Bestiashvili, op.cit., (270) for a Georgian critic's interpretation of Chiladze's portrayal of Medea, in contrast to Nuikin, op.cit., (51), for a less sympathetic interpretation of her character.

<sup>55</sup> Chiladze and other Georgians are not alone in exonerated the figure of Medea. Olga Taxidou, who produced a play about a modern Medea, has suggested that Medea kills her children as a sacrifice, rather than in revenge. Personal interview. Edinburgh, April 2010.

<sup>56</sup> See Anninskii, Lev, in his preface to the 2000 Russian language edition of *A Man Walked Down the Road*, for his refusal to see anything political in the text: “... it is impossible to draw imbedded “politics” from Chiladze's texts – neither then, nor now.” (... никакой прикладной “политики” из текстов Чиладзе извлечь невозможно -- ни тогда, ни сейчас.) (6). Further, explaining Phrixus as a scout, or spy for the “all-powerful king,” or “the tsar of tsars,” is the point at which Anninskii balks further at reading any geo-political allusions in Chiladze's text. He puts the need for scouts into a historical perspective, suggesting that kings will need their spies, and for anyone who knows recent history, as the German Empire needed spies in all parts of Europe, so the Russian Empire needed its spies in the same places; so, too, Albanians were sent half a century later into Kosovo, to give another “Minos” a reason to bomb the Serbs in Belgrade. But he claims that Chiladze does not have “the taste for such allusions” (вкус к таким аллюзиям) (10), and is unwilling, or unable, to read the text as an allegory about Russia planting spies in any part of Georgia as an excuse to carry out further aggression against Georgia.

<sup>57</sup> Personal interview, October 2006; confirmed by the twinkle in Chiladze's eyes when I asked him if Karisa represented a typical Georgian woman.

<sup>58</sup> Although these names are Greek, three of the four are given a Georgian form, with a final “i” at the end of the name.

<sup>59</sup> Nuikin, Andrei, op. cit. (50), considers this paternal care is one of three “mistakes” which Aeëtes makes as King of Colchis.

<sup>60</sup> Nuikin, Andrei, op. cit. (50), further suggests that Aeëtes’ leniency towards Phrixus, Jason, and his grandsons is a “fatal mistake” (როკოვია ოშიბკა); he criticizes Aeëtes for being weak, and not having moral character. I think Chiladze is making a more complex observation about the double bind in which Georgians find themselves vis-à-vis the Russians, and the complexity of relations between the two countries, found in the intermarriages and other mutual obligations that have developed over the last two centuries.

<sup>61</sup> Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia’s first president after the collapse of the Soviet Union, was notorious for promoting policies that encouraged “Georgia for the Georgians.” See de Waal, op. cit. (131-135) on Gamsakhurdia’s support for “Georgia’s ‘spiritual mission’ and ‘ethnogeny of Georgians,’” and (ibid., 147-164) for discussion of the ethnic dimension of the Abkhaz/Georgian war of the early 1990’s.

<sup>62</sup> See Tsarakhova, Bela, ed., *Multiethnic Georgia: 20th Century, Women’s Memory*. (Полиетническая грузия: XX век, память женщин), for interviews with women of various nationalities who are involved in inter-ethnic marriages in Georgia. Also, see Kikodze, Archil, *The Other Georgia*, for a photo-journalistic account of ethnic minorities that live in separate villages in Kakheti. Georgians are very aware of what part of Georgia people come from, which is relatively easy to determine as their last names reveal their provenance; a great deal of ethnic chauvinism does exist in the midst of a traditionally very multi-ethnic country.

<sup>63</sup> Personal interview. October 2006.

<sup>64</sup> Present day Vani, where major archeological excavations are under way, and where much of the Colchian gold artifacts have been found, is located inland, south of Kutaisi in Western Georgia.

<sup>65</sup> See Suny, Ronald, *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, especially his chapter, “Russian Rule and Georgian Society” (63-95), for the 19<sup>th</sup> century destruction of Georgian cultural institutions; see also, de Waal, op. cit. (31-36, 38-46).

<sup>66</sup> In May 2006, Russia cut imports of Georgian wine and mineral water, which has supplied Georgia with up to 60% of its yearly income, citing issues of quality control. In October 2006, after Georgia expelled four purported Russian spies, Russia retaliated by closing down flights and borders between Russia and Georgia. This effectively curtailed active economic cooperation between the two sides. The travel ban has since been lifted, and Georgia, as of February 2012, has just agreed to visa-free entrance for Russians.

<sup>67</sup> Gegeshidze, Archil, personal interview, September 26, 2011; Gegeshidze, Archil, *Transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict*, (19-36).

<sup>68</sup> For Chiladze's passionate response to the loss of Abkhazia, see his essay, “Open Letter to the English Scholar, Mr. George Hewitt” (“ღია წერილი ინგლისელ მეცნიერს ბატონ ჯორჯ ჰიუიტს”), in *The Happy Martyr* (ბედნიერი ტანჯული), (165-178). Hewitt has responded, in an essay, “Abkhazian separatism was born in labyrinths of KGB – Part III, 21/12/2009,” (shared with M. Childs, April 2010), defending himself against various misunderstandings about an article, “Foreigner’s observations on Abkhazian-Georgian tense relations – open letter to Georgians,” he wrote in 1989, including accusations of his involvement with Russian security forces.

<sup>69</sup> See Layton, Susan, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, (192-211), for her chapter “Georgia as an oriental woman,” which discusses this in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chiladze, as it were, confirms Layton’s approach, but moves the discussion into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, adding his Georgian point of view.

<sup>70</sup> Anninskii, Lev, op. cit., (12).

<sup>71</sup> Vazha-Pshavela, “Aluda Ketalaure,” in *Georgian Poetry*, trans. Venera Urushadze, (91-96), a narrative poem in which Aluda, a nominally Christian Georgian, recognizes the heroism and humanity of his defeated foe, a Muslim from the Kist peoples of Khevsureti, and refuses to cut off his right hand, as he should according to Khevsur tradition; he is exiled from the community for his refusal. See Tenghiz Abuladze’s 1967 film *The Plea* for an adaptation of Vazha-Pshavela’s poem.

<sup>72</sup> See Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vi, 430-171, for a canonical version of the story of Procne and Philomela.

<sup>73</sup> *churchkhela* is a Georgian food, (as well as Turkish), made of shelled walnut halves strung together and dipped like candles in reduced wine juice.

<sup>74</sup> My thanks to Jen Morris of the Seattle based Georgian choral group onefourfive, for pointing out that several Georgian folksongs feature “black-eyed girls” (შავთვალეზი გოგონები).

<sup>75</sup> My thanks to Professor Larry Bliquez for noting that Ino shares her name with the mythological Ino, also known as the White Goddess (Leucothea), who is a minor, but complex figure. Traditionally, as a divinity, Ino was Semele's sister, thus Dionysus' aunt, who nursed him after his mother's death; and is associated with insanity and violent Dionysian rites. She is also known in mortal form as the second wife of the Minyan king, Athamas, and step-mother of Phrixus and Helle, who was responsible for the oracle that Phrixus needed to be sacrificed, which did not happen as he was rescued by a flying golden ram, and whisked away to Colchis. Chiladze has altered her character, while tapping deeply into Greek mythology; he links Ino to Dionysian forces, but portraying her a lamb, tries to claim for them a kind of purity,

<sup>76</sup> It is difficult to do justice to Chiladze's Georgian in an English translation. The verb he uses for the snow accumulating, or gathering, (გროვდება), is also used for flocks of sheep gathering, and creates a multi-layered resonance: the whiteness is that of snow and lambs; and suggests a dynamic image, rather than one of snow sitting static on the ground.

<sup>77</sup> Chiladze has named Pharnaozi's dog "Tsuga," (ცუგა), which is the Georgian equivalent of "Rover" and is featured in Iakob Gogebashvili's *Mother Tongue*, (143-44), in "The Clever Dog" ("ჭკვიანი ძაღლი"), in a series of sketches about domestic animals.

<sup>78</sup> Chiladze seems to have created a verb for "watching intently" from the Georgian word for a kestrel (falco tinnunculus), (კორკობა).

<sup>79</sup> Chiladze gives Philomele a Greek-sounding name, similar to Philomela's from the myth of Procne and Philomela, though reverses the gender.

<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, the word Chiladze uses for "proud, haughty, arrogant" is "zviadi" (ზვიადი), creating a suggestive echo between the Caucasus Mountains as emblems of national identity and Zviad Gamsakhurdia.

<sup>81</sup> Vazha-Pshavela, "The Tall Mountains" ("მათანი მაღალნი"), *The Story Told by a Fawn* (შვლის ხუკროს ნაამბობი), (21-22).

<sup>82</sup> Lermontov, Mikhail, *A Hero of our Time*, (17-23, 56-58).

<sup>83</sup> There have been many iterations of "*A Captive of the Caucasus*," four of the more well known are Pushkin's poem, Tolstoy's and Makanin's short story, and Bitov's *Journey around the Empire*, translated as "*A Captive of the Caucasus*."

<sup>84</sup> Translating this passage brought Aida Abuashvili Lominadze close to tears as she remembered her own childhood in Tbilisi.

<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to ask Chiladze about this aspect of his novel.

<sup>86</sup> Chiladze, Otari, *A Man Walked Down the Road*. (გზაზე ერთი კაცი მიდგოდა) 2006, (474). Several pages were missing from the 1973 edition, and I quote here from the more complete text.

<sup>87</sup> A *goji* is approximately an inch, or 4.4 centimeters, or the length from the thumb joint to the nail.

<sup>88</sup> Rayfield, Donald, *Stalin and his Hangmen*, (48); and de Waal, op. cit., (75-78), for suggesting that Stalin "...became who he was to a large degree by rejecting Caucasian tradition." (75).

<sup>89</sup> Thanks Nika Tsiklauri for pointing out this detail in September 2009, during my first trip to the Stalin Museum.

<sup>90</sup> Greenberg, I., op. cit., (44-45); Asatiani, Guram, op. cit., (38-39).

<sup>91</sup> The phraseology here suggests a possible reference to the sunworship of Zoroastrianism: the word for "world" literally means "the place where the sun is," "samzeo," (სამზეო).

<sup>92</sup> See Theocritus' Idyll XI, Gow, op. cit. (87-91), for the image of Polyphemus in his cave, longing for Galatea, and as a poet, singing his songs as charms against his sorrows. Parnaozi, though not a poet, is an artisan who carves the objects of his sorrow out of stone.

<sup>93</sup> A *kaji* is a female devil in Georgian folklore

<sup>94</sup> A *kinjal* is a short Caucasian dagger.

<sup>95</sup> de Waal, op. cit., (88).

<sup>96</sup> de Waal, op. cit., (131-132); *Aprilia 9*, for a Russian language version of the protest, and especially (368) and following for images of the event. See *9 aprili*, a Georgian account of the events, for a more complete collection of both essays and images of the day's events.

<sup>97</sup> Personal interview. September 24, 2009.

## Conclusion

### **Georgia, Russia, and The Classical Dialogue**

In this study, I hope to have demonstrated the importance and continuity of the use of Classical allusions to articulate issues of personal and national identity in Russia, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the late- and post-Soviet period; and in Georgia, in the late- and post-Soviet period; and how the allusions are used in each country, to express both identity, and a sense of cultural competition between the two countries that is felt today.

For the Russians, particularly those from Moscow and St. Petersburg, the Classics and Classical culture serve as an intellectual construct, a metaphor for expressing their Empire. Living at the periphery of that culture, far from Athens, Rome, and the ancient Greek and Roman settlements around the Black Sea, they have never directly participated in those ancient Empires, but have had to adapt and appropriate the ancient cultural elements into their Russian context, for example, imagining Russia as Imperial Rome; exaggerating Russian claims to being Scythians who interacted with Greek culture found in the Crimea; and also diminishing the significance of the Classical heritage in the Caucasus. And they tend to experience an ambiguous, at times arrogant, dismissive posturing towards the Classics, especially in the Soviet era. In contrast, the Classical world for the Georgians was, and is, far more phenomenologically real, both in the mythological figures who hail from the Caucasus and in the traces of the ancient world found at archeological sites from the coast near Batumi to Uplistsikhe, to 30 kilometers north of Tbilisi.<sup>1</sup> The ancient Colchians were present at the periphery of the ancient empires, interacting directly with the Greeks and Romans who settled on their shores; continuous contact with the Classical world, including archeological excavations on their

lands, has led Georgians, or at least a author such as Chiladze, to an easy familiarity with the ancient culture.

To reiterate: After the influence of Uvarov's educational reforms that introduced significant exposure to Classical authors, in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Pushkin and Gogol are able to carry on an extensive allusive dialogue, primarily to Ovid and Horace, that allows them broach topics such as political censorship and repression within an authoritarian government, reflecting a picture of Russia as backwards and only partially Europeanized. Zhukovsky, in his "Lament: An Ode to Pindar," adds to the dialogue a reminder about the ambiguous role of the Classics in Russian culture as a whole. Saltykov-Shchedrin, writing in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has internalized many of the lessons of the Classics to create a substantial subtext of Greek tragedy in *The Golovlyov Family*, exploring the ills of the Russian body-politic, and the tragedy of Russia's failure to participate in the European enlightenment.

Moving to the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, there is a marked continuation into the Soviet period of using the Classics, although it is a period when the Classics undergo an intensive Marxist interpretation. Bitov, as an heir to Russian literature, was almost obliged to use the Classics, as did his literary forefathers, especially Pushkin, but reveals in his usage a marked Soviet Russian ambivalence towards the Classics.

In helping to articulate the relation between Russia and Georgia, the Classical allusions become a fulcrum in the cultural skirmishes between the two countries. Russia, while claiming the rights of being the Third Rome, and hoping to shore up its tenuous ties to Ancient Greece, tries to assert cultural authority over Georgia both by denying Georgia's legitimate ties to Greece, and by appropriating as its own, as Ulitskaia does, an



ancient figure, Medea, who rightly belongs in the Caucasus, in ancient Colchis. The relation between Georgia and Russia is further articulated when we turn to authors who are from the Caucasus. Okudzhava, with split loyalties, understands the contrast between Russia as a Third Rome, and Georgia as Greece, but ends by capitulating to Russian power over the Caucasus, and denying Georgia's Hellenism. Chiladze, an ardent Georgian, feels sure enough of Georgia's ties to Ancient Greece to manipulate the ancient mythological freely, creating a picture of a Georgia that embraces and participates in the cultural traditions of an Enlightened Europe that flourished after the re-discovery of the ancient world.

Despite the political and cultural differences they express, the various authors I present as examples, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century down to the 21<sup>st</sup>, have all found in the Classical allusions a language to help them reveal their thoughts about their respective empires, and their place within them. And perhaps this is indeed the beauty of the Classics -- to provide an intellectual space for a dialogue that can help us further understand a geo-politically turbulent corner of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See Amiran Kakhidze's *The Classical World in the Eastern Black Sea Area: The Fifth Century BC Greek Necropolis at Pichvnari*, and T. Sanikidze's *The City Carved in the Rock*, for current publications about archeological sites in Georgia.

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