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26th Anniversary of the John Fowles Center for Creative Writing

By Mark Axelrod

The John Fowles Center for Creative Writing promotes and advances the discipline of creative writing in all aspects: fiction, poetry, drama, creative non-fiction and screen/playwriting. The Center offers students and non-students alike, an opportunity to gain a greater appreciation for the written word and those who write it. Each year, a distinguished group of national and international writers are invited to Chapman University, making access to these writers available, even beyond the Chapman community, in both the Orange County and Southern California community as well.

Celebrating its 26th Anniversary, the John Fowles Center has hosted international writers such as: Nobel Laureates Mario Vargas Llosa and Wole Soyinka; Salman Rushdie; Maxine Hong Kingston; Edward Albee; Lawrence Ferlinghetti; Alain Robbe-Grillet; Gioconda Belli; Steve Katz; Pablo Neruda Prize winner, Raúl Zurita; Elias Khoury; Il Bienal de Novela winner, Carlos Franz; Pulitzer Prize winner, John Ashbery; David Antin; Willis Barnstone, Nobel Nominees, Claudio Margris and Luisa Valenzuela; Giorgio Pressburger; Dacia Maraini; Giuseppe Conte and Isabel Allende among many others.

As with many things, Covid disrupted the 26th Anniversary of the Fowles Center. Fortunately, we were able to salvage the tribute to Lawrence Ferlinghetti with appearances by his New Directions editor, Barbara Epler; Ferlinghetti scholar, Robert Barsky; and Ferlinghetti Art Dealer, George Krevsky. With the Ukrainian War still going on, we are pleased to include excerpts from Ukrainian and Russian writers, Andrei Kurkov, Mikhail Shishkin, and Yurii Andrukhovych. In addition, excerpts from British poet, Christopher Reid; Angolan novelist, Jose Eduardo Agualusa as well as excerpts from Romanian writers, Lucian Dan Teodorovici and Bogdan Suceava.

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Lexicon of Intimate Cities: Lviv, Always

By Yuri Andrukhovych

Translated by Mark Andryczyk

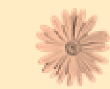
City Crossroads

This designation refers not just to the intersection of space but also of time. Thus, a crossroad is also a layering. A list of the ancient trade routes that brushed Lviv in one way or another would not fit on the pages of this book. Lviv was conceived not only in the middle of ages but also in the middle of lands. Trade from Europe came through it on its way to Asia and trade from Asia to Europe, although, in those times, Europe, and moreover Asia, were yet unknown concepts and all that was known was the Old World. Besides, the very existence of Lviv triggered the later division of the continent into Europe and Asia.

The city was so ideally positioned that neither caravans going from Britain to Persia, nor caravans going from Korea to Portugal, were able to avoid it. You had to go through Lviv to get from Moscow to Rome or from Amsterdam to Bombay. And not all travelers simply paused temporarily at this point of intersection. Some unexpectedly decided to remain there forever. Among them were not only merchants but also travelling musicians, sermonizers, deserters from various armies, spies, soothsayers, scholars, teachers, healers, escaped slaves and free escapees. I once tried to put together a list of them all but had to stop when I realized that it would have no end.

When the upper Austrian engineering apparatus was selecting a spot on which to build a central train station in the mid-19th century they were able to swiftly reach a consensus. The central train station was erected along the line of Europe's Central watershed, which was located at a height of 316 meters above the two closest seas. Although, in Ukrainian the word for "watershed"—vododil—the second root—dil—implies breaking apart or dividing, I would once again prefer to approach from the opposite side. A watershed is a geological part of the earth's surface which cannot only be seen as a stitch but also as a seam. That which seams together, connects, unites. That is why Lviv (I have already written about this) is a common endeavor of both the West and the East. Let me also add at this time that it is one of the North and the South as well.

This could best be passed along in a novel about strange metaphysical merchants who, having gathered in a local Lviv pub, take turns telling stories about the most distant worlds. They form a circle and each one of them picks up the story line from the previous storyteller, employing one of the former's motifs. What's key is that this chain of storytelling is never interrupted. If that were to happen, everything would disappear, blow away and scatter. Thus, the novel has neither an end nor a beginning—one can start reading it from any page. It is imperative to complete the cycle and to once again return to that page in order to realize that there is now a different story at that spot because, while the reader was moving along the circle, some of the storytellers left, taking their stories with them, and new ones had taken their place. Such a novel would be able contain everything in it—just like Lviv can. The name of the novel— "Rotations."

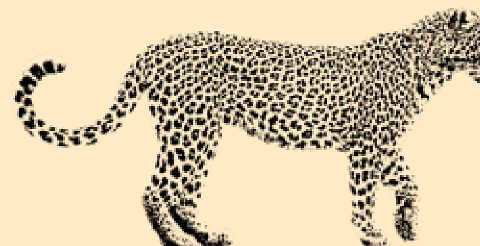


The City Circus

Any crossroad tends to attract eccentric spectacles (known as eccentracles) and eccentric people. The city of Lviv is not just one that attracts—it sucks in.

It began with the beggars and the cripples. They, as if on some kind of secret mission, slinked into Lviv during the first few centuries in such great numbers that the city leaders had to allot to them all of Cripple Mountain, where they were kept in cages by Lilliputians (in wintertime they were split between monasteries and hospitals). The city provided them with Sunday and holiday dinners, which, at all times, were accompanied by several barrels of Italian wine sweetened with spirits. The thankful beggars would, in return, provide the city dwellers with jester processions ("cripple manifestations") and with the entertaining dances of the legless on Ferdinand Square. No less entertaining for the residents of Lviv were the beggars' concerts ("hobo choirs") accompanied by a quartet of blind cellists enhanced by a small, portable, military organ, a trophy from the environs of Grunwald.

Lviv's golden years came concurrently with an era of great geographic discoveries, when people of the Old World came to realize, in awe, how exotic real life really was. It was then that pioneering showmen would occasionally appear by the city walls with their curiosities on display. Someone pulled up a wild Indian in a cage, someone a couple of lemurs, and someone else a wagon filled with minerals, shellfish and embryos. From the end of the 16th century a special decree existed allowing them to enter the city. As for zoos, they were allotted enough space in Pohulianka (which was not a park yet but a forest on the edge of the city). There the animals could drink from the wells of the Poltva, more accurately, from its inflow—the Pasika. Beginning with the second quarter of the 17th century Pohulianka, like a tropical jungle, was filled with the roars and howls of hundreds of fantastic creatures. Its green glades fully stomped over by hippopotami, elephants and rhinos. Panthers and cheetahs hop between the trees. Hour after hour, parrots and monkeys squabble hissingly, high in the air. Around



that time, closer to the middle of the vcircus "Vagabundo" made its first stop in Lviv—a wonderfully vibrant international throng of all kinds of curiosities, which, since then, had not left the boundaries of Central Europe for three hundred years, even if it would occasionally disappear for entire decades. Anything and everything that is known about the circus can be shared in a few sentences. It had a dynastic structure—as a result its actors had one and the same surname for centuries. Its directors were always appointed by an Investor —an individual who had never been seen by anyone because he controlled everything while remaining at all times in the Swiss canton of Valais, in the fatherland of the circus trade. The last of the directors, Ananda, launched an unprecedented coup and, removing the reigning Investor, personally took over the circus. But this happened just before the days of the final collapse, when all of its troupes were forced to save themselves from political repression by escaping overseas. A novel about their last days could simply have the title "The Vagabundo Circus."

It could begin like this: "Anomalies wandered all over the world and could not, in any manner, avoid Lviv. The anomalies were drawn to the greatest of anomalies, which had the name Lviv."

From Lem's "Highcastle" we know that, in his youth, he saw the final relics of the "Vagabundo." He remembers how "countless tricksters would wander through the courtyards in those days eating fire, as well as acrobats, singers and musicians, and also authentic organ grinders, some even with parrots picking fortune cards." It is true that in the period of time described by Lem, a certain number of actors were expelled from the circus.

The expelled imposters (and the novel is about them) take over the circus archive which contains the following: magic instructions for sorcerer and hypnotic séances, secret plans for underground connections between the prisons, monasteries, fortresses and banks of the 111 most important cities, several dozens of maps, handmade and printed, indicating the locations of the most famous buried treasures; thousands of pages consisting of incriminating evidence against active city officials and politicians of all eras; other esoteric things—for example: magic wands, vinyl records featuring the voices of spirits, witches' mirrors, on which one can see porno-films, mandragora roots, that were gathered by the gallows on Dogcatcher Hill.

The entire "Vagabundo" circus archive fits in one suitcase. It goes without saying that this is the world's most valuable suitcase. It is once again appropriate here to mention Lem's account, who writes about "travelling, clandestine,

family circuses, which, together with all of their props (fencing foils, dumbbells, swords made for swallowing), are capable of fitting in a single suitcase, one that is quite frayed and made of lederin." By the way. I saw suitcases like that in the late 1960s. But only the insane carried them. So then, back to the novel.

Obviously, a hunt for the suitcase containing the archive ensues. And there are at least four sides trying to get their hands on it. They are the state security organs, a private detective bureau, an Indian-brachman billionaire, and relatives of the first Investor. The imposters, who were able to sneak away and cover their tracks, finally become so tangled up in their own sneakiness that they lose the suitcase at some city dump near Zbyranka and Hrybovychi where it gets picked through by tramps.

In the novel, the city transforms into a permanent hypnotic séance or one big attraction, suspiciously cheap and democratically open to all, with a park orchestra, jazz, the first sound cinema and mechanical dolls. The city, in that novel, is head-spinning carousels, a ghost palace, a barrel of laughs, a string of fun house mirrors, endless kiosks and offices where naïve and enchanted souls of the suburban proletariat are bought and sold. In the final scene, it turns out that the city is actually a flea circus and that all of the novel's conflicts are just the hallucinations of a school boy sick with scarlet fever who, playing hooky in an amusement park, wandered into an entertainment pavilion and stared at a show of trained fleas.

Don't Blame Dostoyevsky

By Mikhail Shishkin

I understand why people hate all things Russian right now. But our literature did not put Putin in power or cause this war.

Culture, too, is a casualty of war. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some Ukrainian writers called for a boycott of Russian music, films, and books. Others have all but accused Russian literature of complicity in the atrocities committed by Russian soldiers. The entire culture, they say, is imperialist, and this military aggression reveals the moral bankruptcy of Russia's so-called civilization. The road to Bucha, they argue, runs through Russian literature.

Terrible crimes, I agree, are being committed in the name of my people, in the name of my country, in my name. I can see how this war has turned the language of Pushkin and Tolstoy into the language of war criminals and murderers. What does the world see of "Russian culture" today but bombs falling on maternity hospitals and mutilated corpses on the streets of Kyiv's suburbs?

It hurts to be Russian right now. What can I say when I hear that a Pushkin monument is being dismantled in Ukraine? I just keep quiet and feel penitent. And hope that perhaps a Ukrainian poet will speak up for Pushkin.

The Putin regime has dealt Russian culture a crushing blow, just as the Russian state has done to its artists, musicians, and writers so many times before. People in the arts are forced to sing patriotic songs or emigrate. The regime has in effect "canceled" culture in my country. Recently a young protester faced arrest for holding a placard that bore a quote from Tolstoy.

Russian culture has always had reason to fear the Russian state. In the saying commonly attributed to the great 19th-century thinker and writer Alexander Herzen, who was sent into internal exile for his anti-Czarist sentiments—and reading "forbidden books," as he put it—"The state in Russia has set itself up like an occupying army."

The Russian system of political power has remained unchanged and unchanging down the centuries—a pyramid of slaves worshipping the Supreme Khan. That's how it was during the Golden Horde, that's how it was in Stalin's time, that's how it is today under Vladimir Putin.

The world is surprised at the quiescence of the Russian people, the lack of opposition to the war. But this has been their survival strategy for generations—as the last line of Pushkin's Boris Godunov puts it, "The people are silent." Silence is safer. Whoever is in power is always right, and you have to obey whatever order comes. And whoever disagrees ends up in jail or worse. And as Russians know only too well from bitter historical experience, never say, This is the worst. As the popular adage has it: "One should not wish death on a bad Czar." For who knows what the next one will be like?

Only words can undo this silence. This is why poetry was always more than poetry in Russia. Former Soviet prisoners are said to have attested that Russian classics saved their lives in the labor camps when they retold the novels of Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevsky to other inmates. Russian literature could not prevent the Gulags, but it did help prisoners survive them.

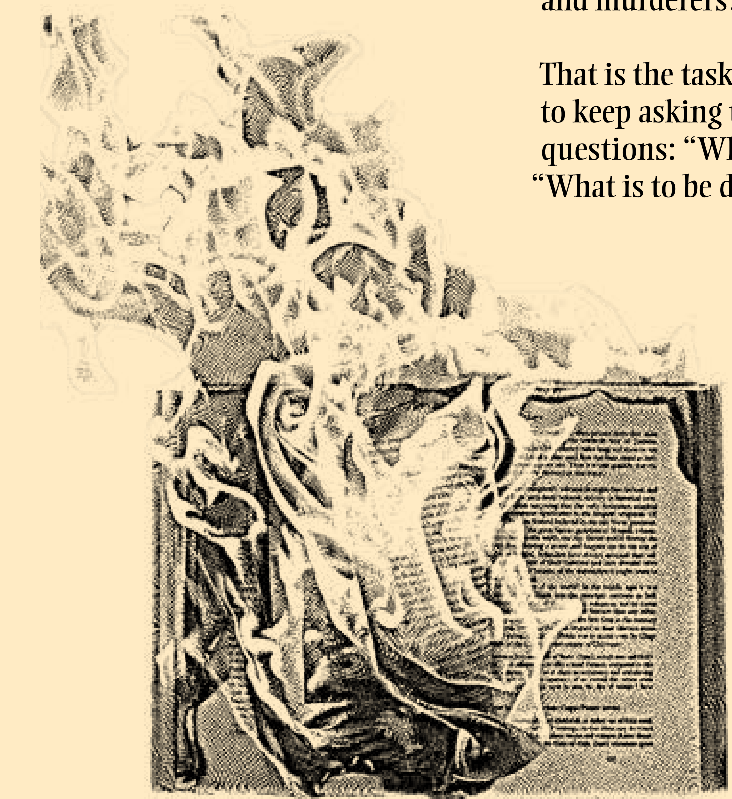
The Russian state has no use for Russian culture unless it can be made to serve the state. Soviet power wanted to give itself an air of humanity and righteousness, so it built monuments to Russian writers. "Pushkin, our be-all and end-all!" rang out from stages in 1937, during the Great Purge, when even the executioners trembled with fear. The regime needs culture as a human mask—or as combat camouflage. That's why Stalin needed Dmitri Shostakovich and Putin needs Valery Gergiev.

When the critics say Russian culture is imperialist, they are thinking of Russia's colonial wars, and they mean that its artists justified the state's expansionist aims. But what they do not account for is Russia's internal imperialism: Before anything else, it was a slave empire where the Russian people were forced to endure and suffer the most. The Russian empire exists not for Russia's people but for itself. The Russian state's only purpose is to stay in power, and the state has been hammering the Russkiy mir ("Russian world") view into people's brains for centuries: the holy fatherland as an island surrounded by an ocean of enemies, which only the Czar in the Kremlin can save by ruling its people and preserving order with an iron hand.

For Russia's small educated class, the eternal questions—the "cursed questions," as the 19th-century intelligentsiya knew them—were those framed by two great novels of the period: Herzen's Who Is to Blame? and Nikolai Chernyshevsky's What Is to Be Done? But for millions of illiterate peasants, the only question that mattered was, "Is the Czar a real one or an impostor?" If the Czar was true, then all was well with the world. But if the czar proved false, then Russia must Cave another, true one. In the minds of the people, only victories over Russia's enemies could resolve whether the Czar was real and true.

Nicholas II was defeated by Japan in 1905 and in the First World War. A false Czar, he lost all popularity. Stalin led his people to victory in the Great Patriotic War (World War II), so he was a real Czar—and is revered by many Russians to this day. Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader, lost the war in Afghanistan and the Cold War against the West, and he is still despised.

Through his triumph in 2014, easily annexing Crimea, Putin achieved the popular legitimacy of a true Czar. But he may lose all that if he cannot win this war against Ukraine. Then another will come forward—first to exorcise the false Putin and then to prove his legitimacy through victory over Russia's enemies.



Slaves give birth to a dictatorship and a dictatorship gives birth to slaves. There is only one way out of this vicious circle, and that is through culture. Literature is an antidote to the poison of the Russian imperialist way of thinking. The civilizational gap that still exists in Russia between the humanist tradition of the intelligentsiya and a Russian population stuck in a mentality from the Middle Ages can be bridged only by culture—and the regime today will do everything it can to prevent that.

The road to the Bucha massacre leads not through Russian literature, but through its suppression—the denunciations or book bans against Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Mikhail Bulgakov, Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Brodsky, Anna Akhmatova and Andrei Platonov; the executions of Nikolai Gumilev, Isaac Babel, and Perez Markish; the driving of Marina Tsvetaeva to suicide; the persecution of Osip Mandelstam and Daniil Kharms; the hounding of Boris Pasternak and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The history of Russian culture is one of desperate resistance, despite crushing defeats, against a criminal state power.

Russian literature owes the world another great novel. I sometimes imagine a young man who is now in a trench and has no idea that he is a writer, but who asks himself: "What am I doing here? Why has my government lied to me and betrayed me? Why should we kill and die here? Why are we, Russians, fascists and murderers?"

That is the task of Russian literature, to keep asking those eternal, cursed questions: "Who is to blame?" and "What is to be done?"

Grey Bees

By Andrei Kurkov

Translated by Boris Dralyuk

Sergey Sergeyich was roused by the chill air at about three in the morning. The potbelly stove he'd cobbled together in imitation of a picture in Cozy Cottage magazine, with its little glass door and two burners, had ceased to give off any warmth. The two tin buckets that stood by its side were empty. He lowered his hand into the one nearest him and his fingers hit coal dust.

"All right," he groaned sleepily, pulled on his pants, slid his feet into the slippers he'd fashioned out of an old pair of felt boots, threw on his sheepskin coat, grabbed the buckets, and went out into the yard.

He stopped behind the shed in front of a pile of coal and his eyes landed on the shovel – it was much brighter out here than it was inside the house. Lumps of coal poured down, thumping against the bottoms of the buckets. Soon the bottoms were covered with coal, the echoing thumps died away, and the rest of the lumps fell in silence.

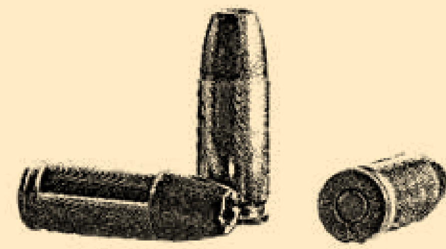
Somewhere far off a cannon sounded. Half a minute later there was another blast, which seemed to come from the opposite direction.

"Fools can't get to sleep… Probably just warming their hands," Sergeyich grunted.

Then he returned to the darkness of the house and lit a candle. Its warm, pleasant, honeyed scent hit his nose, and his ears were soothed by the familiar, quiet ticking of the alarm clock on the narrow wooden windowsill.

There was still a bit of heat inside the stove's belly, but not enough to get the frosty coal going without the help of woodchips and paper. Eventually, after the long bluish tongues of flame began to lick at the smoke-stained glass, the master of the house stepped out into the yard again. The sound of far-off bombardment, which was almost inaudible inside the house, now reached Sergeyich's ears from the east. But soon another, more proximate sound drew his attention. He listened close and heard a car driving along a nearby street. It drove some distance, then stopped. There were only two streets in the village – one named after Lenin, the other after Taras Shevchenko – and also Ivan Michurin Lane. Sergeyich himself lived on Lenin, in less than proud isolation. This meant that the car had been driving down Shevchenko. There, too, only one person was left – Pashka Khmelenko, who'd retired early, like Sergeyich. The two men were almost exactly the same age and had been enemies from their very first days at school. Pashka's garden looked out onto Horlivka, so he was one street closer to Donetsk than Sergeyich. Sergeyich's garden faced the other direction, towards Sloviansk. The garden rolled down to a field, which first dipped then rose up towards Zhdanivka. You couldn't actually see Zhdanivka from the garden – it lay hidden behind a hump. But you could sometimes hear the Ukrainian army, which had burrowed dugouts and trenches into that hump. And even when you couldn't hear the army, Sergeyich was always aware of its presence. It sat in its dugouts and trenches, to the left of the forest plantation and the dirt road along which tractors and lorries used to drive. The army had been there for three years now, while the local lads, together with the Russian military international, had been drinking tea and vodka in their dugouts beyond Pashka's street and its gardens, beyond the remnants of the old apricot grove that had been planted back in Soviet times, and beyond another field that the war had robbed of its workers, like the field that lay between Sergeyich's garden and Zhdanivka.

The village had been awful quiet lately. It had been quiet for two whole weeks. Not a shot fired. Had they tired themselves out? Were they saving their shells and bullets for later? Or maybe they didn't want to disturb the last two residents of Little Starhorodivka, who were clinging to their homesteads more tenaciously than a dog clings to its favorite bone. Everyone else in Little Starhorodivka wanted to leave when



the fighting had just begun. And so they left – because they feared for their lives more than they feared for their property, and the stronger fear had won out. But the war hadn't made Sergeyich fear for his life. It had only made him confused and suddenly indifferent to everything around him.

It was as if he had lost all feeling, all his senses, except for one: the sense of responsibility. And this sense, which could make him worry terribly at any hour of the day, was focused entirely on one object: his bees. But now the bees were wintering. The roofs and frames of the hives were lined with felt on the inside, and their thick walls were covered with sheets of metal. Although the hives were in the shed, a dumb stray shell could fly in from either side. Its shrapnel would first cut into the metal – but then maybe it wouldn't have the strength to punch through the wooden walls and be the death of the bees?

2.

Pashka showed up at Sergeyich's at noon. The master of the house had just emptied the second bucket of coal into the stove and put the kettle on. The plan was to have some tea alone, but it didn't pan out.

Before letting his uninvited guest into the house, Sergeyich placed a broom in front of the "safety" ax by the door. You never know – Pashka might have a pistol or a Kalashnikov for self-defense. He'd see the ax and break out that grin of his, as if to say that Sergeyich was a fool. But the ax was all Sergeyich had to protect himself. Nothing else. He put it under his bed every night, which is why he sometimes managed to sleep so calm and deep. Not always, of course.

Sergeyich opened the door for Pashka and let out a not very friendly grunt. This grunt was spurred by Sergeyich's thoughts – thoughts that had heaped a mountain of resentments on his neighbor from Shevchenko Street. It seemed the statute of limitations on these resentments would never run out. Sergeyich's thoughts reminded him of the mean tricks Pashka used to play, of how he used to fight dirty and tattle to their teachers, of how he never let Sergeyich crib from him during exams. You'd think that after forty years Sergeyich might forgive and forget. Forgive? Maybe. But how could he forget? There were seven girls in their class and only two boys – himself and Pashka – and that meant Sergeyich had never had a friend in school, only an enemy. "Enemy" was too harsh a word, of course. In Ukrainian one could say "vrazhenyatko" – what you might call a "frenemy." That was more like it. Pashka was a harmless little enemy, the kind no one fears.

"How goes it, Greybeard?" Pashka greeted Sergeyich, a little tensely, as he crossed the threshold. "You know they turned on the electricity last night," he said, casting a glance at the broom to see whether he might use it to brush the snow off his shoes.

He picked up the broom, saw the ax, and his lips twisted into that grin of his.

"Liar," Sergeyich responded calmly. "If they had, I would've woken up. I keep all my lights switched on, so I can't miss it."

"You probably slept right through it – hell, you could sleep through a bomb blast. And they only turned it on for half an hour. Look," he held out his mobile phone. "It's fully charged! You wanna call someone?"

"Got no one to call," Sergeyich said, not looking at the phone. "Want some tea?"

"Where'd you get tea from?"

"Where? From the Protestants."

"I'll be damned," Pashka said. "Mine's long gone."

They sat down at Sergeyich's little table. Pashka's back was to the stove and its tall metal pipe, which radiated warmth.

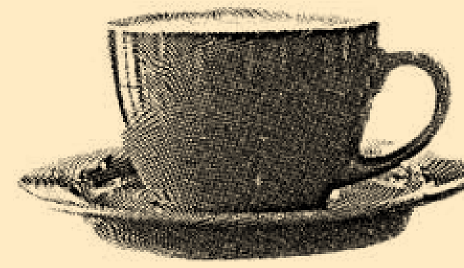
"Why's the tea so weak?" the guest grumbled, looking into his cup. And then, in a different, more affable voice, added: "Got anything to eat?"

Anger showed in Sergeyich's eyes.

"They don't bring me humanitarian aid at night…"

"Me neither."

"So what do they bring you, then?"



"Nothing!"

Sergeyich grunted and sipped his tea.

"So no one came to see you last night?"

"You saw…?"

"Yep. Went out to get coal."

"Ah. Well, what you saw were our boys," Pashka nodded.

"On reconnaissance."

"So what were they reconnoitering for?"

"For dirty Ukes…"

"That so?" Sergeyich stared directly into Pashka's shifty eyes.

Pashka gave up right away, as if his back were to the wall.

"I lied," he confessed. "Just some guys – said they were from Horlivka. Offered me an Audi for three hundred bucks. No papers."

"D'you buy it?" Sergeyich grinned.

"What, you take me for a moron?" Pashka shook his head. "Think I don't know how this stuff goes down? I turn around to get the money and they stick a knife in my back."

"So why didn't they come round to my place?"

"I told them I was the only one left. Besides, you can't drive from Lenin to Shevchenko anymore. There's that big crater by the Mitkov place, where the shell landed. Only a tank could make it over."

Sergeyitch didn't respond. He just stared at Pashka's devious countenance, which would have suited an aged pickpocket – one who'd grown fearful and jumpy after countless arrests and beatings. He stared at Pashka, who at forty-nine looked a full ten years older than Sergeyich. Was it his earthy complexion? His ragged cheeks? It's as if he'd been shaving with a dull razor all his life. Sergeyich stared at him and thought: if they hadn't wound up alone in the village, he would have never have talked to him again. They would have gone on living their parallel lives on their parallel streets, Sergeyich on Lenin, Pashka on Shevchenko. And they wouldn't have exchanged a single word – if it hadn't been for the war.

"Been a long time since I heard shooting," the guest sighed. "But around Hatne, you know, they used to fire the big guns only at night – but now they're firing in the daytime, too. Listen," Pashka tilted his head forward a bit, "if our boys ask you to do something – will you do it?"

"Who are 'our boys'?" Sergeyich asked, irritably.

"Stop playing the fool. Our boys – in Donetsk."

"My boys are in my shed. I don't have any others. You're not exactly 'mine,' either."

"Oh, cut it out. What's the matter, didn't get enough sleep?" Pashka twisted his lips to express his displeasure. "Or did your bees freeze their stingers off, so now you're taking it out on me?"

"I'll give you freeze…" Sergeyich's voice showed that his threat wasn't empty. "You shut your mouth about my bees…"

"Hey, don't get me wrong, I've got nothing but respect for your bees – I'm just worried!" Pashka backpedalled, hurrying to cut Sergeyich off. "I just can't understand how they survive the winter. Don't they get cold in the shed? I'd croak after one night."

"As long as the shed's in one piece, they're fine," Sergeyich said, softening his tone. "I keep an eye on them, check in every day."

"Tell me, how do they sleep in those hives?" asked Pashka. "Like people?"

"Just like people. Each bee in its little bed."

"But you're not heating the shed, are you?"

"They don't need it. Inside the hives, it's thirty-seven degrees. They keep themselves warm."

Once the conversation shifted in an apian direction, it grew more amiable. Pashka felt he should leave while the going was good. This way, they might even manage to bid each other farewell, unlike the last time, when Sergeyich sent him packing with a few choice words. But then Pashka thought of one more question.

"Say, have you thought about your pension?"

"What's there to think about?" Sergeyich shrugged. "When the war ends, the postwoman will bring me three years' worth of checks. That'll be the life!"

Pasha grinned. He wanted to needle his host, but managed to restrain himself.

Before Pashka went out the door, his eyes met Sergeyich's one more time.

"Listen, while it's charged…" He held out his mobile phone again. "Maybe you ought to give your Vitalina a call?"

"'My' Vitalina? She hasn't been 'mine' for six years. No."

"What about your daughter?"

"Just go. I told you, I've got no one to call."

Taras Bulba

By Nikolai Gogol

"Come, brothers, seat yourselves, each where he likes best, at the table; come, my sons. First of all, let's take some corn-brandy," said Bulba. "God bless you! Welcome, lads; you, Ostap, and you, Andrii. God grant that you may always be successful in war, that you may beat the Musselmans and the Turks and the Tatars; and that when the Poles undertake any expedition against our faith, you may beat the Poles. Come, clink your glasses. How now? Is the brandy good? What's corn-brandy in Latin? The Latins were stupid: they did not know there was such a thing in the world as corn-brandy. What was the name of the man who wrote Latin verses? I don't know much about reading and writing, so I don't quite know. Wasn't it Horace?"

"What a dad!" thought the elder son Ostap. "The old dog knows everything, but he always pretends the contrary."

"I don't believe the archimandrite allowed you so much as a smell of corn-brandy," continued Taras. "Confess, my boys, they thrashed you well with fresh birch-twigs on your backs and all over your Cossack bodies; and perhaps, when you grew too sharp, they beat you with whips. And not on Saturday only, I fancy, but on Wednesday and Thursday."

"What is past, father, need not be recalled; it is done with."

"Let them try it know," said Andrii. "Let anybody just touch me, let any Tatar risk it now, and he'll soon learn what a Cossack's sword is like!"

"Good, my son, by heavens, good! And when it comes to that, I'll go with you; by heavens, I'll go too! What should I wait here for? To become a buckwheat-reaper and housekeeper, to look after the sheep and swine, and loaf around with my wife? Away with such nonsense! I am a Cossack; I'll have none of it! What's left but war? I'll go with you to Zaporozhe to carouse; I'll go, by heavens!" And old Bulba, growing warm by degrees and finally quite angry, rose from the table, and, assuming a dignified attitude, stamped his foot. "We will go to-morrow! Wherefore delay? What enemy can we besiege here? What is this hut to us? What do we want with all these things? What are pots and pans to us?" So saying, he began to knock over the pots and flasks, and to throw them about.

The poor old woman, well used to such freaks on the part of her husband, looked sadly on from her seat on the wall-bench. She did not dare say a word; but when she heard the decision which was so terrible for her, she could not refrain from tears. As she looked at her children, from whom so speedy a separation was threatened, it is impossible to describe the full force of her speechless grief, which seemed to quiver in her eyes and on her lips convulsively pressed together.

Bulba was terribly headstrong. He was one of those characters which could only exist in that fierce fifteenth century, and in that half-nomadic corner of Europe, when the whole of Southern Russia, deserted by its princes, was laid waste and burned to the quick by pitiless troops of Mongolian robbers; when men deprived of house and home grew brave there; when, amid conflagrations, threatening neighbours, and eternal terrors, they settled down, and growing accustomed to looking these things straight in the face, trained themselves not to know that there was such a thing as fear in the world; when the old, peacable Slav spirit was fired with warlike flame, and the Cossack state was instituted—a free, wild outbreak of Russian nature—and when all the river-banks, fords, and like suitable places were peopled by Cossacks, whose number no man knew. Their bold comrades had a right to reply to the Sultan when he asked how many they were, "Who knows? We are scattered all over the steppes; wherever there is a hillock, there is a Cossack."

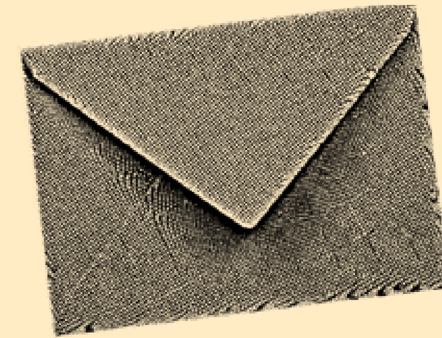
It was, in fact, a most remarkable exhibition of Russian strength, forced by dire necessity from the bosom of the people. In place of the original provinces with their petty towns, in place of the warring and bartering petty princes ruling in their cities, there arose great colonies, kurens (3), and districts, bound together by one common danger and hatred against the heathen robbers. The story is well known how their incessant warfare and restless existence saved Europe from the merciless hordes which threatened to overwhelm her. The Polish kings, who now found themselves sovereigns, in place of the provincial princes, over these extensive tracts of territory, fully understood, despite the weakness and remoteness of their own rule, the value of the Cossacks, and the advantages of the warlike, untrammelled life led by them. They encouraged them and flattered this disposition of mind. Under their distant rule, the hetmans or chiefs, chosen from among the Cossacks themselves, redistributed the territory into military districts. It was not a standing army, no one saw it; but in case of war and general uprising, it required a week, and no more, for every man to appear on horseback, fully armed, receiving only one ducat from the king; and in two weeks such a force had assembled as no recruiting officers would ever have been able to collect. When the expedition was ended, the army dispersed among the fields and meadows and the fords of the Dnieper; each man fished, wrought at his trade, brewed his beer, and was once more a free Cossack. Their foreign contemporaries rightly marvelled at their wonderful qualities. There was no handicraft which the Cossack was not expert at: he could distil brandy, build a waggon, make powder, and do blacksmith's and gunsmith's work, in addition to committing wild excesses, drinking and carousing as only a Russian can—all this he was equal to. Besides the registered Cossacks, who considered themselves bound to appear in arms in time of war, it was possible to collect at any time, in case of dire need, a whole army of volunteers. All that was required was for the Osaul or sub-chief to traverse the market-places and squares of the villages and hamlets, and shout at the top of his voice, as he stood in his waggon, "Hey, you distillers and beer-brewers! you have brewed enough beer, and lolled on your stoves, and stuffed your fat carcasses with flour, long enough! Rise, win glory and warlike honours! You ploughmen, you reapers of buckwheat, you tenders of sheep, you danglers after women, enough of following the plough, and soiling your yellow shoes in the earth, and courting women, and wasting your warlike strength! The hour has come to win glory for the Cossacks!" These words were like sparks falling on dry wood. The husbandman broke his plough; the brewers and distillers threw away their casks and destroyed their barrels; the mechanics and merchants sent their trade and their shop to the devil, broke pots and everything else in their homes, and mounted their horses. In short, the Russian character here received a profound development, and manifested a powerful outwards expression.

Ship Full of Voices

By Jose Edwardo Agualusa

Five thousand dollars in large-denomination bills. Félix Ventura tore open the envelope quickly, nervously, and the notes burst out like green butterflies - fluttered for a moment in the night air, then spread themselves all over the floor, the books, the chairs and sofas. The albino was getting anxious. He even went to open the door, meaning to chase after the foreigner, but out in the vast still night there was no sign of anyone.

"Have you seen this?!" He was talking to me. "So now what am I supposed to do?"



He gathered the notes up one by one, counted them and put them back in the envelope - it was only then that he noticed that inside the envelope there was also a note; he read aloud:

"*Dear Sir, I will be giving you another five thousand when I receive the material. I'm leaving you a few passport-style photos of myself for you to use on the documents. I'll come by again in three weeks.*"

Félix lay down and tried to read a book - it was Nicholas Shakespeare's biography of Bruce Chatwin, in the Portuguese Quetzal edition. After ten minutes he put it down on the bedside table and got up again. He wandered round and round the house, muttering incoherent phrases, until dawn broke. His little widow's hands, tender and tiny, fluttered randomly about, independently, as he spoke. The tightly curled hair, trimmed down now, glowed around him with a miraculous aura. If someone had seen him from out on the road, seen him through the window, they would have thought they were looking at a ghost.

"No, what rubbish! I won't do it…"
[…]
"The passport wouldn't be hard to get, it wouldn't even be that risky, and it would only take a few days—cheap, too. I could do that—why not? I'll have to do it one day—it's the inevitable extension of what I'm doing anyway…"

"Take care, my friend, take care with the paths you choose to follow. You're no forger. Be patient. Invent some sort of excuse, return the money, and tell him it's not going to happen."

"But you don't just turn down ten thousand dollars. I could spend two or three months in New York. I could visit the secondhand book dealers in Lisbon. I'll go to Rio, watch the samba dancers, go to the dance halls, to the secondhand bookshops, or I'll go to Paris to buy records and books. How long has it been since I last went to Paris?"

Félix Ventura's anxiety disturbed my cynegetic activity. I'm a creature that hunts by night. Once I've tracked down my prey I chase them, forcing them up toward the ceiling. Once they're up there mosquitoes never come back down. I run around them, in ever decreasing circles, corral them into a corner and devour them. The dawn was already beginning to break when the albino now sprawled on one of the living room sofas - began to tell me his life story.

"I used to think of this house as being a bit like a ship. An old steam- ship heaving itself through the heavy river mud. A vast forest, and night all around." Félix spoke quietly, and pointed vaguely at the outlines of his books. "It's full of voices, this ship of mine."

Out there I could hear the night slipping by. Something barking. Claws scratching at the glass. Looking through the window I could easily make out the river, the stars spinning across its back, skittish birds disappearing into the foliage. The mulatto Fausto Bendito Ventura, secondhand book collector, son and grandson of secondhand book collectors, awoke one Sunday morning to find a box outside his front door. Inside, stretched out on several copies of Eça de Queiroz's The Relic, was a little naked creature, skinny and shameless, with a glowing fuzz of hair, and a limpid smile of triumph. A widower with no children, the book collector brought the child into his home, raised him and schooled him, absolutely certain that there was some superior purpose that was plotting out this unlikely story. He kept the box, and the books that were in it too. The albino told me of it with pride.

"Eça," he said, "was my first crib."

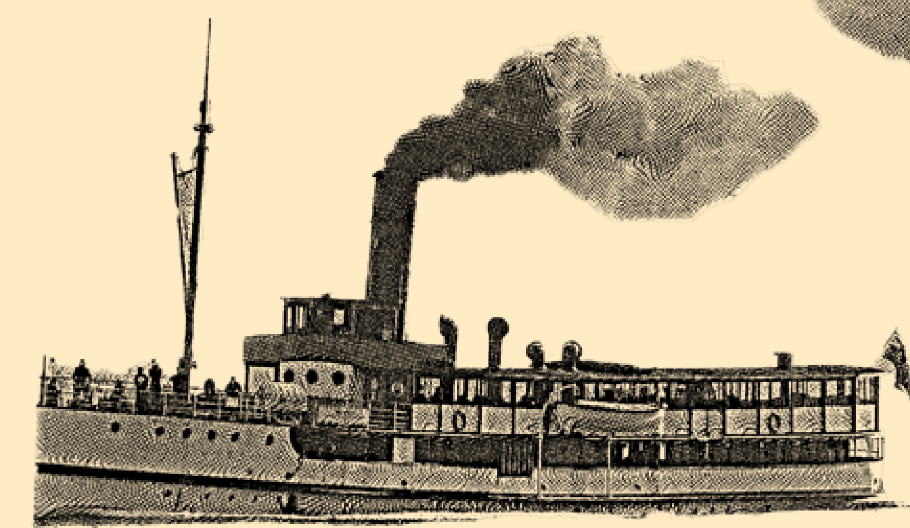
Fausto Benito Ventura became a secondhand book collector quite without meaning to. He took pride in never having worked in his life. He'd go out early in the morning to walk downtown, malembe-malembe - slowly-slowly - all elegant in his linen suit, straw hat, bow tie and cane, greeting friends and acquaintances with a light touch of his index finger on the brim of his hat. If by chance he came across a woman of his generation he'd dazzle her with a gallant smile. He'd whisper: Good day to you, poetry. He'd throw spicy compliments to the girls who worked in the bars. It's said (Félix told me) that one day some jealous man provoked him:

"So what exactly is it that you do on working days?"

Fausto Bendito's reply - all my days, my dear sir, are days of; I amble through them at my leisure - still provokes applause and laughter among the slim circle of old colonial functionaries who in the lifeless evenings of the wonderful Biker Beer-House still manage to cheat death, playing cards and exchanging stories. Fausto would lunch at home, have a siesta, and then sit on the veranda to enjoy the cool evening breeze. In those days, before independence, there wasn't yet the high wall separating the garden from the pavement, and the gate was always open. His clients needed only to climb a flight of stairs to have free access to his books, piles and piles of them, laid out at random on the strong living room floor.

Félix Ventura and I share a love (in my case a hopeless love) for old words. Félix Ventura was originally schooled in this by his father, Fausto Bendito, and then by an old teacher, for the first years of high school, a man subject to melancholic ways, and so slender that he seemed always to be walking in profile, like an old Egyptian engraving. Gaspar - that was the teacher's name - was moved by the helplessness of certain words. He saw them as down on their luck, abandoned in some desolate place in the language, and he sought to recover them. He used them ostentatiously, and persistently, which annoyed some people and unsettled others. I think he succeeded. His students started using these words too, to begin with merely in jest, but later like a private dialect, a tribal marking, which set them apart from their peers. Nowadays, Félix Ventura assured me, his students are still quite capable of recognizing one another, even if they've never met before, on hearing just a few words.

"I still shudder each time I hear someone say duvet? a repulsive gallicism, rather than eiderdown, which to me (and I'm sure you'll agree with me on this) seems to be a very lovely, rather noble word. But I've resigned myself to "brassiere. "Strophium" has a sort of historical dignity about it, but it still sounds a little odd - don't you think?"



WAR & PEACE CHAPTER II

By Leo Tolstoy

The forces of a dozen European nations burst into Russia. The Russian army and people avoided a collision till Smolénsk was reached, and again from Smolénsk to Borodinó. The French army pushed on to Moscow, its goal, its impetus ever increasing as it neared its aim, just as the velocity of a falling body increases as it approaches the earth. Behind it were seven hundred miles of hunger-stricken, hostile country; ahead were a few dozen miles separating it from its goal. Every soldier in Napoleon's army felt this and the invasion moved on by its own momentum.

The more the Russian army retreated the more fiercely a spirit of hatred of the enemy flared up, and while it retreated the army increased and consolidated. At Borodinó a collision took place. Neither army was broken up, but the Russian army retreated immediately after the collision as inevitably as a ball recoils after colliding with another having a greater momentum, and with equal inevitability the ball of invasion that had advanced with such momentum rolled on for some distance, though the collision had deprived it of all its force.

The Russians retreated eighty miles—to beyond Moscow—and the French reached Moscow and there came to a standstill. For five weeks after that there was not a single battle. The French did not move. As a bleeding, mortally wounded animal licks its wounds, they remained inert in Moscow for five weeks, and then suddenly, with no fresh reason, fled back: they made a dash for the Kalúga road, and (after a victory—for at Málo-Yaroslávets the field of conflict again remained theirs) without undertaking a single serious battle, they fled still more rapidly back to Smolénsk, beyond Smolénsk, beyond the Berëzina, beyond Vílna, and farther still.

On the evening of the twenty-sixth of August, Kutúzov and the whole Russian army were convinced that the battle of Borodinó was a victory. Kutúzov reported so to the Emperor. He gave orders to prepare for a fresh conflict to finish the enemy and did this not to deceive anyone, but because he knew that the enemy was beaten, as everyone who had taken part in the battle knew it.

But all that evening and next day reports came in one after another of unheard-of losses, of the loss of half the army, and a fresh battle proved physically impossible.

It was impossible to give battle before information had been collected, the wounded gathered in, the supplies of ammunition replenished, the slain reckoned up, new officers appointed to replace those who had been killed, and before the men had had food and sleep. And meanwhile, the very next morning after the battle, the French army advanced of itself upon the Russians, carried forward by the force of its own momentum now seemingly increased in inverse proportion to the square of the distance from its aim. Kutúzov's wish was to attack next day, and the whole army desired to do so. But to make an attack the wish to do so is not sufficient, there must also be a possibility of doing it, and that possibility did not exist. It was impossible not to retreat a day's march, and then in the same way it was impossible not to retreat another and a third day's march, and at last, on the first of September when the army drew near Moscow—despite the strength of the feeling that had arisen in all ranks—the force of circumstances compelled it to retire beyond Moscow. And the troops retired one more, last, day's march, and abandoned Moscow to the enemy.

For people accustomed to think that plans of campaign and battles are made by generals—as anyone of us sitting over a map in his study may imagine how he would have arranged things in this or that battle—the questions present themselves: Why did Kutúzov during the retreat not do this or that? Why did he not take up a position before reaching Filí? Why did he not retire at once by the Kalúga road, abandoning Moscow? and so on. People accustomed to think in that way forget, or do not know, the inevitable conditions which always limit the activities of any commander in chief. The activity of a commander in chief does not at all resemble the activity we imagine to ourselves when we sit at ease in our studies examining some campaign on the map, with a certain number of troops on this and that side in a certain known locality, and begin our plans from some given moment. A commander in chief is never dealing with the beginning of any event—the position from which we always contemplate it. The commander in chief is always in the midst of a series of shifting events and so he never can at any moment consider the whole import of an event that is occurring. Moment by moment the event is imperceptibly shaping itself, and at every moment of this continuous,uninterrupted shaping of events the commander in chief is in the midst of a most complex play of intrigues, worries, contingencies, authorities, projects, counsels, threats, and deceptions and is continually obliged to reply to innumerable questions addressed to him, which constantly conflict with one another.

Learned military authorities quite seriously tell us that Kutúzov should have moved his army to the Kalúga road long before reaching Filí, and that somebody actually submitted such a proposal to him. But a commander in chief, especially at a difficult moment, has always before him not one proposal but dozens simultaneously. And all these proposals, based on strategics and tactics, contradict each other.

A commander in chief's business, it would seem, is simply to choose one of these projects. But even that he cannot do. Events and time do not wait. For instance, on the twenty-eighth it is suggested to him to cross to the Kalúga road, but just then an adjutant gallops up from Milorádovich asking whether he is to engage the French or retire. An order must be given him at once, that instant. And the order to retreat carries us past the turn to the Kalúga road. And after the adjutant comes the commissary general asking where the stores are to be taken, and the chief of the hospitals asks where the wounded are to go, and a courier from Petersburg brings a letter from the sovereign which does not admit of the possibility of abandoning Moscow, and the commander in chief's rival, the man who is undermining him (and there are always not merely one but several such), presents a new project diametrically opposed to that of turning to the Kalúga road, and the commander in chief himself needs sleep and refreshment to maintain his energy and a respectable general who has been overlooked in the distribution of rewards comes to complain, and the inhabitants of the district pray to be defended, and an officer sent to inspect the locality comes in and gives a report quite contrary to what was said by the officer previously sent; and a spy, a prisoner, and a general who has been on reconnaissance, all describe the position of the enemy's army differently. People accustomed to misunderstand or to forget these inevitable conditions of a commander in chief's actions describe to us, for instance, the position of the army at Filí and assume that the commander in chief could, on the first of September, quite freely decide whether to abandon Moscow or defend it; whereas, with the Russian army less than four miles from Moscow, no such question existed. When had that question been settled? At Drissa and at Smolénsk and most palpably of all on the twenty-fourth of August at Shevárdino and on the twenty-sixth at Borodinó, and each day and hour and minute of the retreat from Borodinó to Filí.

A Window to Zeewijk

By Marino Magliani

So, as if following this star, Zeewijk Piet insists -was built, respecting the exact environment that created it and each characteristic that regulates it.

The sand on which the neighborhood sits is a mixture of original sand and that which was excavated after 1860, beached in the canal's creation. It's a monument that brings all sands together. Not taking into account the reality of each moment in the neighborhood's creation would have meant upsetting the sense of things.

"Zeewijk was my father's dream. Willem Leonard Van Bert. I] muiden's expansion- the expansion of Holland--that's what Zeewijk is …

We were at his house. He was standing in front of the window, his back to me as he looked out on his back garden, which consisted of a raised row of Calluna vulgaris invaded by Ribes giraldi—a plant I've to this day only seen in his garden despite how long I've lived in Zeewijk and a plant he'd cultivated to attract the only blue rock thrushes in all of Northern Europe, greedy for the currants that hung from them.

"I]muiden was supposed to expand towards the sea. To the west, like every migration. My father was a city councilor and he cared about those things."

I recreate our full conversation here, something I can do faithfully because back then I would-and have recently begun to do again-write down our discussions.

I asked Pier what he meant by "building and taking the sand into account."

I'll admit that I hadn't learned a single word of Dutch (I'd arrived in Holland a year earlier in the winter of 1989 and had worked as a dockworker in the port) and I would speak to Piet in English or French.

Piet didn't understand. "I meant what I meant," he said.

"Right. But was there a particular architectural design that considered the sand? I don't know. Were there long, low buildings that look like the mice and moles you'd find on the dunes, and they would create some kind of harmony with the land? Why don't we prefer houses with windmills next to them, like I've seen in other Northern coasts--like in Wijk aan Zee?"

Zeewilk was founded on sand. Before it was a neighborhood, it was Previous attachment wisted oaks and torn grasses.

But all of that changed after the canal. That was how Piet Van Bert explained it to me.

Sand is a kind of clastic rock, one that you get from the constant erosion of sandstone. This means 90% of Liguria sits on sandstone. But sand can also be formed from bone debris, shells and skeletons, from the sea, as is the case for Zeewijk.

From even my earliest glimpses of Zeewijk, and maybe even before I had met Piet, I had already realized that certain pathways the ones between the dunes and the hollows recently covered by vegetation-presented a sizeable stratum of shell dust. According to Piet, the contact between sedimentary sandstone and stone which formed by other means-from ionically charged rains, for example, or, in our case, from a concentration of skeletal dust creates a number of disturbing phenomena. One of these is a *filled time.*

It's as if time in Zeewijk depends on the cross-contamination of the particles in its sandy foundation.

In fact, the dune itself provides us with the perfect demonstration of Pier Van Bert's theory: no single part of a dune keeps its shape as is for long, but it still retains a primal essence. "For long" is meant not in archeological terms, but in purely human ones. A season, a cycle of seasons. We know that a dune begins to form as a grain of sand comes to rest on an object--a blade of grass, for example, collects one grain and so on until, in time, that same accumulation takes away its own height and form. The dune disappears, it moves. Until one day-and this is true, and even if it takes a long time, it does happen- it reforms itself, it remakes itself again as it was in the past.

Kindergarten

By Christopher Reid

Here's a piece of paper,
paints and a brush, a jar of water,
some little scissors, a pot of glue:
now, show us what you can do.

This room I've never been in before
is backs of other children's heads
and teacher moving from
desk to desk.
Teacher is nice, giving advice.

Put a round shape of yellow there.
Not too much. That's right.
Well done, you've made a sun,
lovely and bright.

She leaves. What do I do next?
Blue for sky. But the sun
isn't dry and the colours run,
blurring to green, which
doesn't belong.

Unless I can get a tree in there.
But that goes wrong when I add
red flowers
that puddle and brown
as soon as I dab them down.

The paint water is tainted,
tainting the painting.
The paper, loaded wetter and wetter,
tears when I try if scissors can
make things better.

That's how you find me now:
fumbling tatters of misbegotten art
with paint-stained, glue-
clogged fingers,
but not yet – while hope lingers –

ready for a fresh start.

Napoleon

By Alexander Pushkin

Wonderful lot accomplished:
Ugas great man.
In captivity grim rolled
Napoleon's formidable century.
Disappeared ruler convicted,
Mighty minion wins,
And dlyaizgnannika universe
Already the offspring comes.

Oh you, whose bloody memory
world long, a long time will be full,
Priosenen thy glory,
Pochy among desert waves ...
Gorgeous grave! above the urn,
where your ashes lie,
Peoples hatred rested,
And immortality beam lights.

Long Since your eagles fly
Above ground obesslavlennoy?
Long ago you broke empire
When thunder forces fatal;
Obedient to the will of the wayward,
Trouble noisy banners,
And imposes yoke sovereign
You're on earth tribes?

When illuminated by hope
I awakened the world from slavery,
And the hand of an angry gal
He will cast his old idol;
When the rebel area
In the dust of the royal corpse lying,
And the great day, inevitable -
Freedom to get up bright day -

Then, in a flurry of storms folk
Anticipating his
inheritance wonderful,
In its noble hopes
You despised humanity.
In its ruinous happiness
You must believe daring soul,
You captivated autocracy
Disappointed beauty.

And updating the people
You buynost young humbled,
newborn freedom, suddenly
speechless, lost power;
Among the slaves to rapture
You quench the thirst of power,
I rushed to the fights of their militia.
Their chain wrapped laurels.

And France, fame production,
Captive earnestly beholding,
Forgetting hope stately,
On his brilliant shame.
You were swords into abundant
feast; Everything fell noisily
in front of you:
Europe hybla - sleep mohylny
He hovered over her head.

And, in the majesty of shameful
I set foot on the chest of
her colossus.
Tilsit!.. (at the sound of this
and insulting
Now wax pale Ross) —
Tilyzit nadmennogo hero
Posledney glory venchal,
But boring world, but the
coldness of the rest
The lucky soul troubled.

Nadmenny! who you also came?
Who was overcome your
marvelous mind?
As Russian heart is not postignul
You're brave with a height of doom?
fire generous
No preduznav, Since you dreamed,
What we are waiting for the world
again, as a gift:
But late Russian guessed ...

Russia, Bran queen,
Vospomni ancient rights!
Pomerkni, sun Avsterlitsa!
dust, great Moscow!
The resulting time other,
disappear, brief our shame!
bless Moscow, Russia!
War on grave - our contract!

numb hands
Grabbing his iron crown,
He sees the sight of the abyss,
he dies, finally killed.
Bezhat Europe militia!
bloodied snow
They proclaimed their fall,
And melts them enemy trail.

And that's it, like a storm, zakipelo;
Europe has terminated its captive;
In the sled flew tyrant,
like thunder, curse tribes.
And the hand of the
people's nemesis
Podyatu sees giant:
And until recently all the insults
will repay thee, tyrant!

Redeemed its acquisition of
And evil warlike Wonderland
Stifling anguish of exile
Under the shadow of alien skies.
And sultry sharpened
Polnoschny sail visit,
And the word of
reconciliation traveler
On that stones naertit,

Where, fixing his eyes on the waves,
Exile remembered the sound
of swords
And icy horror midnight,
And his sky France;
where sometimes, in his desert
forgetting the war, progeny, throne,
One, One of the lovely son
Disheartened bitter he thought.

Let it be overshadowed by shame
the cowardly, Who in this day
Mad unsettle reproach
His shadow debunked!
thank you! he Russian people
High lots have,
And the world eternal freedom
Out of the darkness
links bequeathed.

The Wolves of Epsom

By Christopher Reid

There was an old flint wall
between the woods and us
in our house near the top of
the hill.

Wolves came out of the woods
at night,
leaping a breach in the wall.
They gave me a jarring fright.

I knew about wolves
from tales like 'Red Ridinghood',
but I'd never seen
wolves themselves.

Yet here they were prowling
around the back garden: real, wild,
lithe, strong, and hungrily
howling.

I woke choking on tears,
my mother hugging me, saying
there were no wolves,
failing to calm my fears.

Though for now they had fled,
some night the wolves would come
running again
out of the woods, over the flint
wall

and into my head.

Rumpelstiltskin

By Christopher Reid

Imp, homunculus, insidious
hobgoblin,

with your tricks and your traps –
weaving gold from straw

and then blackmailing the poor girl
into giving you her baby –

of all fairy tales yours was the most
frightening.

Where did its power lie? In
summoning to the mind's eye

a demoniacal personage no bigger
than I was,

who could command such feats of
magic and use them so cruelly?

(And not just the mind's eye, but
pulse and nerves as well.)

All that, yes, but there was
something extra

when, at the dénouement, your
secret name revealed,

you stirred yourself up into such a
temper tantrum

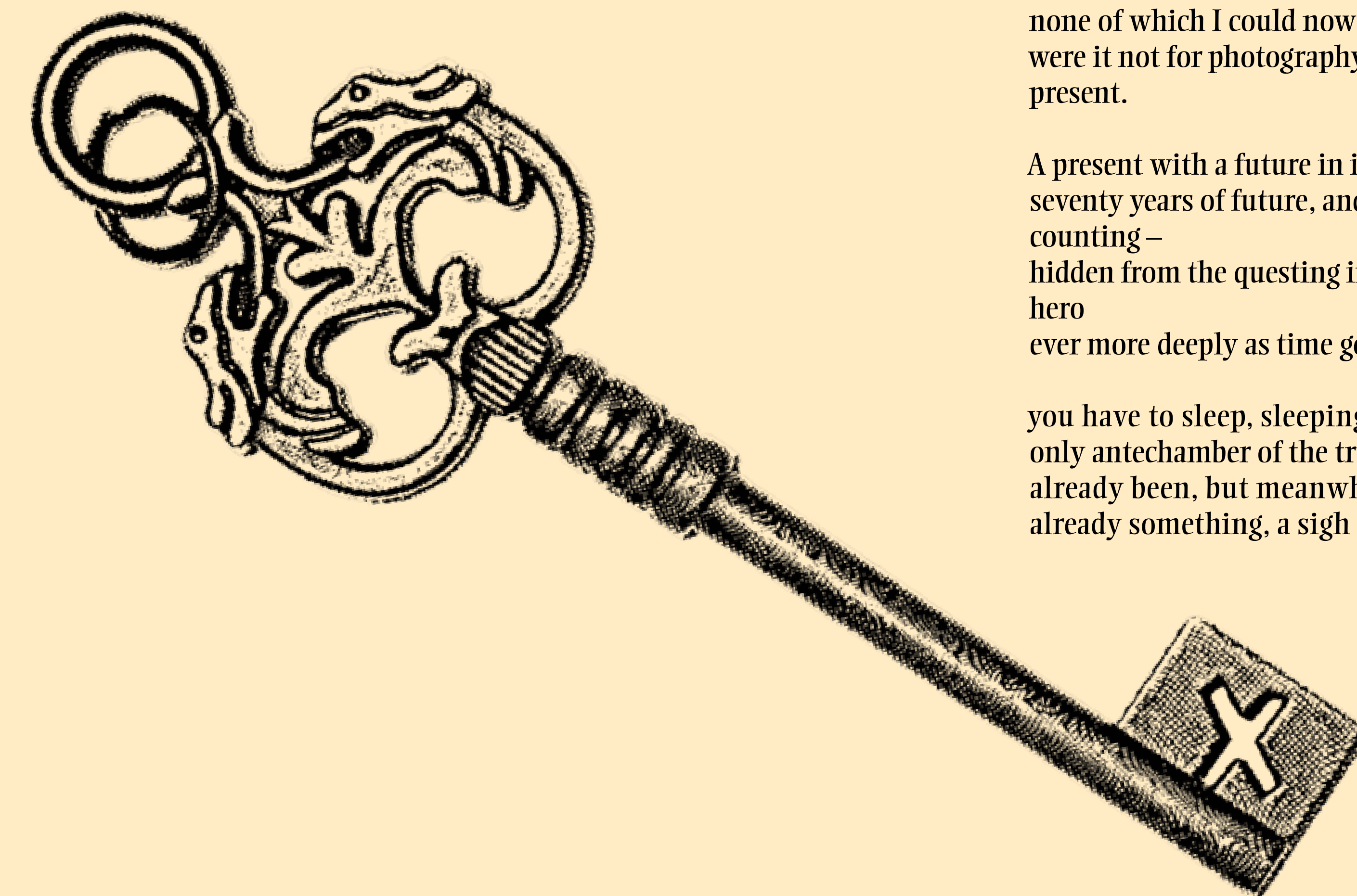
that you stamped your wee foot
and sank straight through the
floorboards,

taking me and my helpless
imagination with you.

The Edge of the Table

By Christopher Reid

Twist the key
till you feel the coiled
spring of the innards
tightened, tighten
and tighten no more;
then release the creature,
whatever it is –
duck, or dog, or person,
be it on wheels
or flat, paddling feet –
and watch it lurch
into a paroxysm
of animation,
shuddering, doddering
forward, swerving
on a path it appears
to have chosen for itself,
never mind
that the edge of the
table
lies in wait;
and while you're laughing –
delighted laughter
that was a
mechanism
no less simple
and is now beyond mending –
cup your hand
for the inevitable
topple,
catch the helpless thing,
return it to table level
and twist, twist
the key again.



The Hero

By Christopher Reid

Snapshots remember those far days
for me:
days when the camera doted on me
and could not keep its eye off the
little hero.

Behold the squirm of newness and
fragility
in my mother's arms, as she stands
on a lawn
I do not recognise, with a picket
fence
and the hills of Hong Kong in a faint
haze behind her.
Small, slender, spryly poised
in a pair of low-heeled, two-tone
shoes,
she returns the gaze of the
photographer,
while I, her first-born, her prize
exhibit,
appear to be keeping my thoughts to
myself
with a smile so cryptic you might
call it smug.

Big-headed centre of attention!

In later shots, as crown prince
of a realm from which I am destined
to be exiled,
I take my first steps, swagger in
nappies,
fondle the muzzle of Butch, our bull
terrier,
ride a four-wheeled wooden horse,
look scared of the sea, and throw a
quoit
on the deck of a boat going heaven
knows where –
none of which I could now recall
were it not for photography's eternal
present.

A present with a future in it –
seventy years of future, and
counting –
hidden from the questing infant
hero
ever more deeply as time goes by.

you have to sleep, sleeping is the
only antechamber of the true having
already been, but meanwhile it's
already something, a sigh of relief...

About the Writers

Christopher Reid

While living and studying in London, Christopher Reid, through the years, has taken the pen to the page in various mediums as a cartoonist, writer, and, most famously, a poet. His most recent honor was winning the Costa Book Award for writing A Scattering. Yet Reid's accomplishments do not end there, as he has also had work hit the big screen. His narrative poem The Song of Lunch was adapted into a movie by BBC and has become a popular short film. Finding endless inspiration and possibilities, Reid currently lives in London as a freelance writer, artist, and thinker.

Mikhail Shiskin

One of Russia's most praiseworthy contemporary writers, Mikhail Shiskin, is a well-accomplished writer and author to say the least. He has vast experience in dabbling in the writings of both fiction and nonfiction. His work as an author truly is unparalleled as Shiskin uses his platform as a best-sell novelist to traverse the landscape of what it means to be human. His novel Calligraphy Lesson, a collection of short fiction stories, masterfully showcases his skill and ability to connect and draw upon universal human sentiments such as love, life, loss, and death.

Jose Eduardo Agualus

Jose Eduardo Agualsa is an author, journalist, and activist on the Island of Mozambique. Primarily published in his native Portuguese language, his writings have also been translated repeatedly for others all around the world. His writing style is grounded in fiction, he can effortlessly bring characters and stories to life through his historical eye. He draws on history as his inspiration and means to breathe life back into a past that should not be forgotten. His most notable work includes A Theory of Oblivion, which follows the journey of a woman living through Portugal's steps to independence, and The Book of Chameleons,which examines memory and its connection to the past.

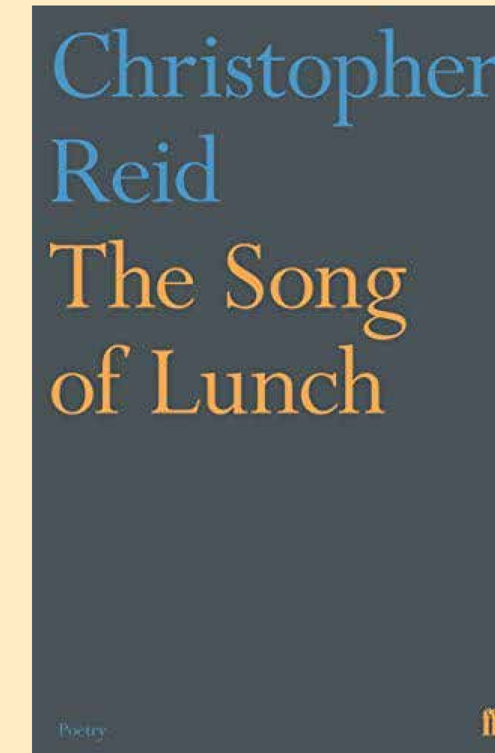
Andrei Kurkov

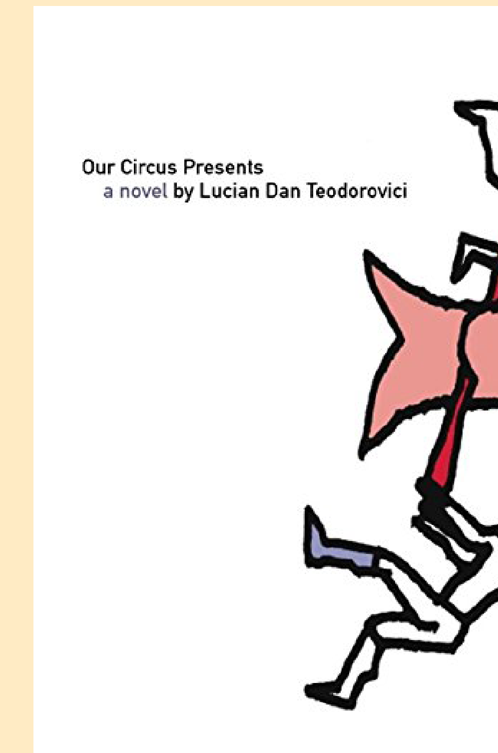
Ukrainian author, Andrei Kurkov, has written a wide range of fiction and nonfiction scripts for documentaries and on-screen dramas. He is also very well-known for his work as a writer of mysteries. Best known for his novel Death and the Penguin, Kurkov does not cease to keep the reader at the edge of his seat through the stories he creates in his novels.

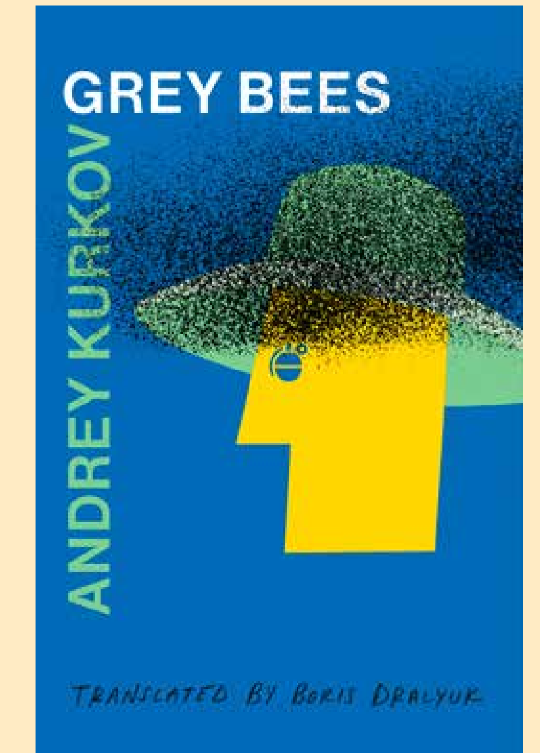
Yurii Andrukhovych

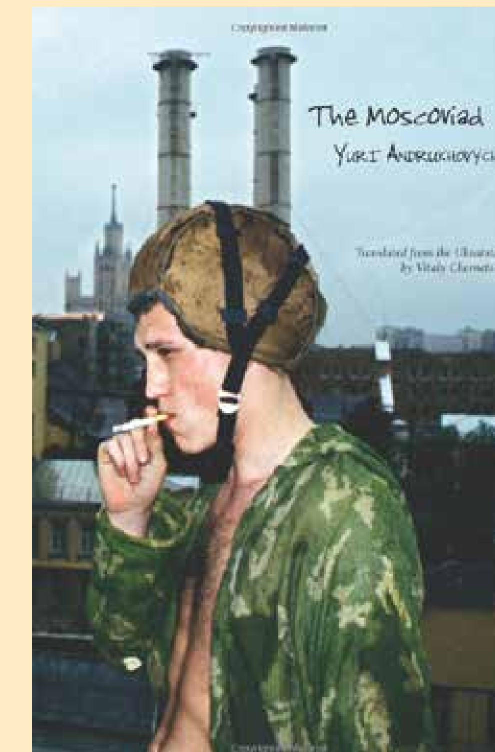
Yurii Andrukhovych is a critically acclaimed writer, essayist, poet, and translator within the Ukrainian community and beyond. His work as an author has been recognized and honored with numerousawards, such as the Hannah Arendt Prize and, most recently, the Goethe Medal. His prose writing captivates the reader through the fictional imaginings of his stories, the veracity of his arguments, and the beauty of the diversity with his use of language.

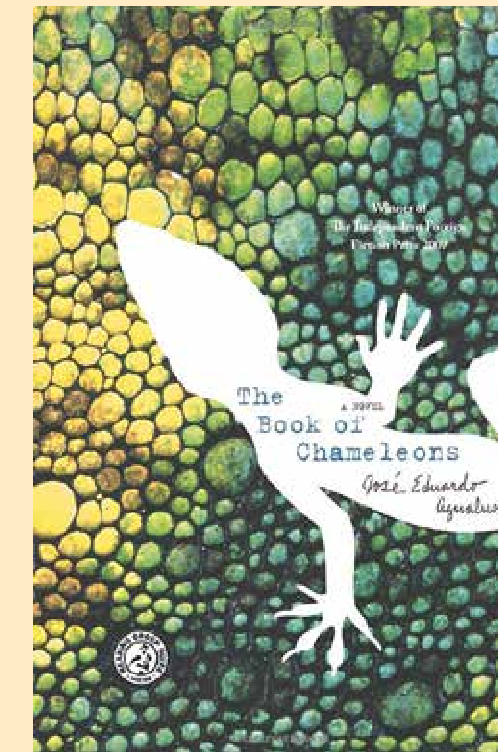
About the Writers

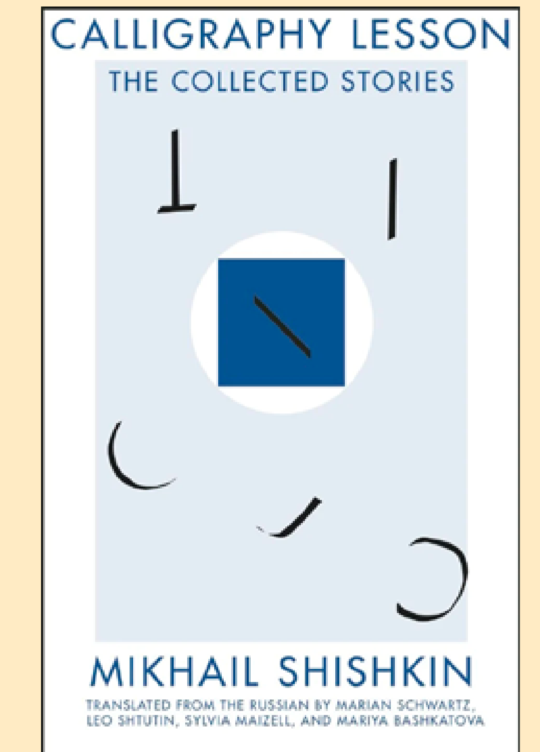












The next Issue is devoted to

Screenwriters and Screenwriting