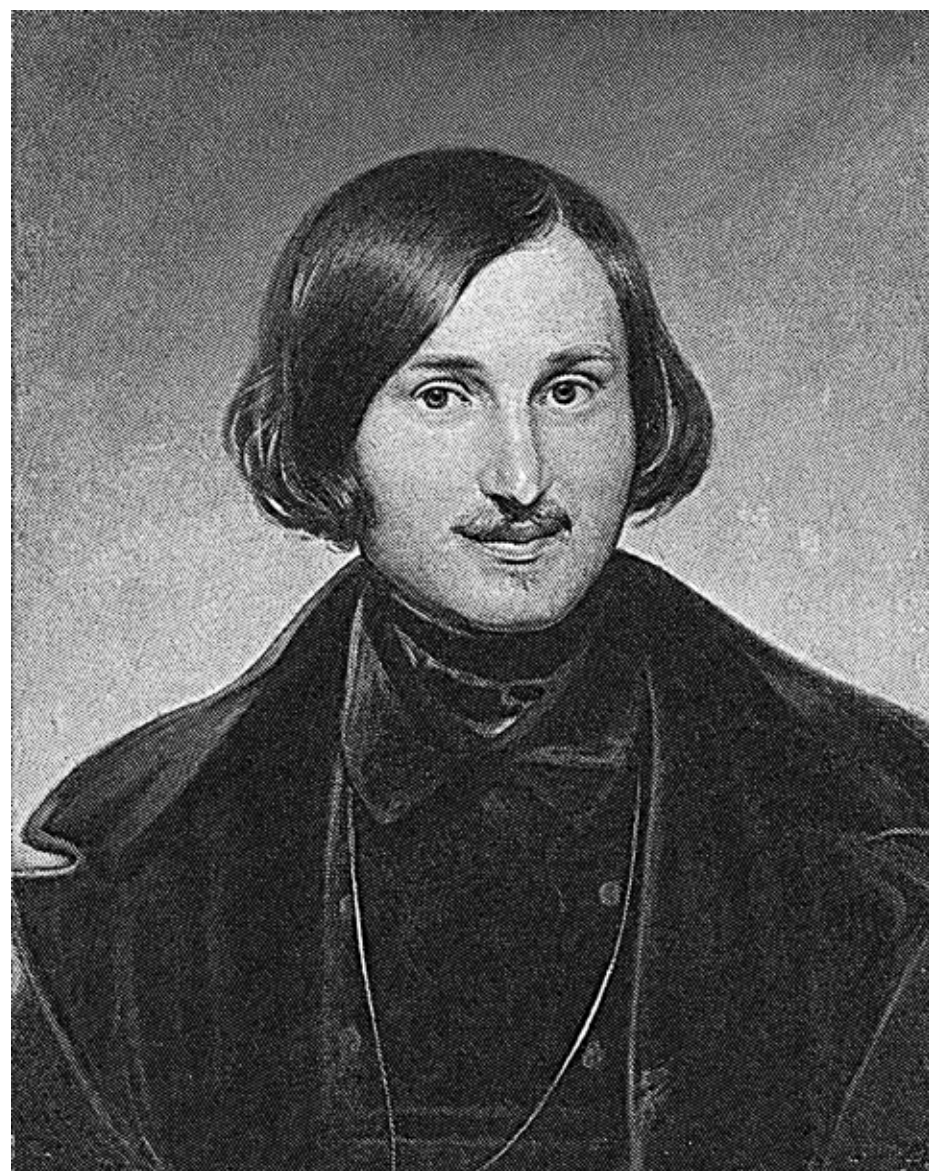




SPRING 2020

A PETITE LITERARY JOURNAL

VOLUME 5 ISSUE 1



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PUSHKIN & GOGOL

BY MARK AXELROD

Ever since I was an undergraduate at Indiana University, I have been enamored of Russian writers, especially the work of Chekhov, Pushkin, Nabokov, Turgenev and Gogol, the latter with whom I share a birthday as well as a Ukrainian heritage. My Master's Degree thesis

in Comparative Literature was based on the Russian novel, *A Hero of Our Time* by Mikhail Lermontov and a chapter from my novel, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Blase Kubash*, was totally influenced by Nabokov's *Pale Fire*.

That said, it is not surprising I would incorporate Pushkin and Gogol into a new novel/memoir I'm writing titled, *Ukrainian Odyssey*, based partly on the life of my mother who was born in Kiev, but also as a kind of homage to Pushkin and Gogol, whose rather fantastic fictions (e.g. "The Nose", "Viy", "The

Overcoat", "Nevsky Prospect") have often been the inspiration for my own fantastic fictions.

It is also not surprising that I would invite Russian and Ukrainian writers to participate in the 23rd Annual Fowles Literary series. Along with some excerpts of "classic" Russian fiction, the works of these contemporary writers are examples of some of the finest writing being written in Russia and Ukraine, which the excerpts from their work would attest. I hope you enjoy them as much as I and hope you can attend their readings.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

MARK AXELROD1
In The Footsteps Of Pushkin & Gogol

FICTION

OKSANA ZABUZHKO03	<i>Your Ad Could Go Here</i>
MIKHAIL SHISHKIN04	<i>More than Joyce</i>
ANDREY KURKOV10	<i>Grey Bees</i>
YURI ANDRUKHOVYCH12	<i>Lviv, Always</i>
ZSÓFIA BÁN14	<i>Gustave and Maxime in Egypt</i>
NIKOLAI GOGOL16	<i>Memoirs of a Madman</i>

BIOGRAPHIES

ABOUT THE WRITERS18

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those who have helped make the publication of MANTISSA possible: President Daniele Struppa, Dean Jennifer Keene, Dr. Joanna Levin, and Dr. Eric Chimenti.

This Issue was created by Chapman University's Ideation Lab. Special thanks to Alice Premeau.



Look for Volume 6, Issue 1
in the Spring of 2021



YOUR AD COULD GO HERE

BY OKSANA ZAPUZHKO

TRANSLATED BY HALYNA HRYN

They were the most splendid leather gloves I had seen in my life: finished to the gossamer weight of a rose petal, with a dazzling, luminous bay hue that instantly brought to mind the Imperial horses and their silky croups at the Hofreitschule, delicately laced with a finely cut design at the wrist (all of it handmade, my goodness!), they immediately wrapped my hand in the firm loving grasp of a second skin, and one was compelled henceforth to stroke the hand thusly gloved with the same reverence as an Imperial steed. One wanted to stroke and admire the hand, spreading one's fingers against the light, making a fist and letting it go—Ah!—and never take such beauty off. In a word, walking away from those gloves was beyond my power.

They existed—as befits any work of art—as a singular artifact.

Everything in that glove shop was singular, not one pair resembled another, each more fantastic than the next, but these—these caught my eye the second I walked through the door, like the glance of a dear fellow creature in a crowd. And they were exactly my size: I told the gentle old man in a knitted vest who sat behind the counter I wore a size six, but he just shook his head. No, he said in his slightly raspy Viennese English, you're not a six but a five-and-a-half, here, try these. But I always buy sixes! You'll be telling me, Miss, he laughed, I've been making these gloves for fifty years. Oh, you make these? And sell them? So you are the owner? Yes, he confirmed, with the quiet pride of a master craftsman who knows his worth. The tiny store on Mariahilferstrasse which I entered on a whim (with a purely touristy "I wonder what's here?"), transformed into a fairy-tale forest hut—the one to which the fleeing heroine stumbles at nightfall and where she meets the Master of the underground kingdom who chops his own wood, carries his own water, and makes his own supper. I dearly wished I spoke better German—and the old man, better English—we could hardly talk about anything important with our tourist-minimum vocabularies. I adore such dapper gentlemen in vests—in my own country they were exterminated as a species fifty years ago, shipped

out to Siberia in cattle cars, and their absence from the universe in which I grew up was still evident—as visible as silhouettes cut out of group pictures, with the names written underneath. It warms my heart every time I see what became of them in other, less chaotic lands. To spend fifty years sculpting such gloves, from tanning and cutting to the finishing stitches around the eyelet holes that would adorn imaginary hands—does this not mean becoming the Lord of Gloves, the one and only, not just in Vienna, but in the whole wide world?



I named them my sunshine gloves—they glowed. I could see their aura in the paper bag into which the Lord of Gloves packed them for me—with his name imprinted, and the address—Mariahilferstrasse, 35—and the telephone numbers (land lines—everything about him was so old-worldly, solid, with a distant nineteenth-century breeze of faith in an ordered world, a world in which things are made to last forever because the makers know that things outlast people and will one day serve for our descendants as the only tangible proof of our existence). Even through the paper bag, I could feel the silky softness of the rose-petal leather. I kept touching it and smiling. I had been entrusted with a treasure, in the fairy-tale forest hut—a talisman from a different age. Who today would labor over such gloves—every pair unique, every pair a single copy—to sell them for those same fifty euros they charge for the thick chunks of mitts in the mall across the street?

Later I got myself a special designer sweater to go with the gloves. A special jacket. A special pair of fine suede pants. I had the persistent feeling that my sunshine gloves stood out no matter what I wore, no matter how carefully I selected it, and they most certainly did: they demanded different lines—designed by someone in love with their model. With the gloves, I could tell the mood with which another item of clothing was conceived and made: they accepted

some, but rejected other garments without any apparent logic, but irrevocably and at once. In the fall of 2004 they suddenly fell in love with a flamboyant fiery scarf which I then wore throughout the entire Orange Revolution—never mind that the scarf did not come from a fashion designer and cost a third of what the gloves had. They were perfect together, and press photographers all to the man wanted my picture in that orange scarf and my sunshine gloves—no, no, don't take them off, just leave everything as is!

Here one rather expects a certain development of the plot: Julio Cortázar, for instance, or even Peter Haigh would have definitely written a story (and Taras Prokhasko would have told one in a pub, being too lazy to write it!) in which the gloves quietly move on from approving garments to approving—or disapproving—people and begin to rule the heroine's life, guiding her to the authentic and away from the fake, sweeping out from her life's wardrobe false friends, unnecessary obligations, and ultimately her own masques, stripping her down like a cabbage, to her bare core, and then we might discover that there is no core, that the heroine herself does not pass the test of the magical gloves, so in the end she has to perish in a dramatic fashion, to disappear, be disposed of, and the gloves, fine as a rose petal, will remain gloving in their silky-chestnut splendor on a desk, waiting for their new owner. Something along those lines.

What actually happened was different. What happens is always different from what we read about later. In May of 2005 I did what I had never, in my recollection, which begins more-or-less at the age of three, done: I lost a glove.

Maybe I lost it getting out of a cab. At least, it was not anywhere on the sidewalk—I retraced my steps along the entire length of my route, where I could have, theoretically, dropped it, looking hungrily into every single trash can. All in vain: the glove was gone. Evaporated. Vanished. Rose up to the sky and flew away. Took off and flew into the wide blue sky. Burned to a crisp like the Frog Princess's skin. My sunshine glove from my left hand. The hand was left naked.





And I don't think I wept like that since the age of three. I mean, of course, I'd cried countless times, and had abundant occasions and much weightier reasons to do so in my more-or-less coherently remembered forty years since I was three—but weeping like this, truly, never. I wept like the child who discovers for the first time the injustice of the world which she had begun to believe to be orderly and safe. Adults call it a life crisis—and instead of weeping, they usually climb into a noose or call a therapist. Or look for other ways to glue together the shattered self, because the older you get, the more you see that really life can be put back together somehow, made bearable, although it will never be the way it was before, but that's ok, it's going to be alright, really, things have a way of fixing themselves, as long as you're ok. That, specifically, is what everyone at home told me: Stop being a child, you have the other glove, you have the address, you have a book coming out in Austria, you're going to Vienna anyway—stop by the store and just ask them to make you a new one! You could even send them the right one by mail, my husband said, call them, make the order, and have the left one ready for pick up when you're there. There was no way I was doing that, though, no mailing—for me, that was somehow out of the question. To pass the surviving glove into unknown hands, to entrust its fate to a faceless tracking system felt like a betrayal to me, as if I would be confirming I deserved to have been abandoned by the lost glove, as the folk-song goes, “you knew not how to honor us...” No, I had to do it in person, I had to face the Lord of Gloves in his forest hut at Mariahilferstrasse.

One step into a side street off the busy shopping thoroughfare, push the right door—and I will be again in that cozy, draping silence, green-colored, as if tinged with the virgin forest outside the windows but in fact because of the green lining the display case, filled with the gorgeous, one-of-a-kind pairs of gloves in liver-bay, black, buckskin and roan. Perhaps the Lord of Gloves will offer me tea and we will have a chance to converse a bit, about important things—such as pursuing his craft for fifty years, despite the rising flood of Mariahilferstrasse outside his windows. I memorized several particularly difficult phrases in German, in case he couldn't understand my English.

The prospect truly made me nervous.



MORE THAN JOYCE

BY MIKHAIL SHISHKIN

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY MARIAN SCHWARTZ.

Saint-Gérard-le-Puy is buried in snow. No one can recall a winter like this in Auvergne. The radio reports that the Seine has frozen over in Paris. In the ports, ships are ice-bound. There have been heavy snowfalls throughout the country.

Every morning he goes to the village barber for a shave—with his own razor, out of fastidiousness. Then he wanders the snowy village and outskirts. He stops in at a church to get warm, but even there steam comes from his mouth. The clock in the tower strikes every quarter-hour, stealing the time left to him. For the first time in his life he is not writing anything. He's written it all.

He returns to the Hôtel de la Paix. The village restaurant on the ground floor. He drinks glass after glass of Pernod to forget himself as quickly as he can. He doesn't see the people at the neighboring tables, but he hears their voices. All conversations about the strange war. *Drôle de guerre*. All around are living with a sense of impending disaster. His disaster has already begun. Every day is a day of fear. Fear for his children, his book, his future. Fear that he has cancer; he suffers constant stomach pains.

Lucia is in a psychiatric clinic in Brittany's La Baule. Giorgio should be somewhere in Paris, but there's been no news from him.

Might the reason for what has happened to his daughter lie in their vagabond life? Lucia was constantly having to change schools, friends, and languages: Trieste, Zurich, Trieste again, Paris. Or did it all begin when the teenager became aware of her unattractive strabismus? She'd wanted to dance and studied for years with famous choreographers, working many hours a day, but she left the stage almost as soon as she stepped foot on it. She studied drawing but never became an artist. Or did it all begin when

Lucia fell in love with the young Irish writer to whom he had dictated *Finnegans Wake*, but Samuel Beckett had explained to her that his only interest in her was that she was the daughter of a genius. Then there was her engagement to Alex Ponizovski, an émigré who had given her father Russian lessons. He proposed and she agreed, but on condition that Beckett be their witness. When it came time to go to the celebratory dinner, Lucia took to her bed, where she lay in a stupor for several days. She never did marry.

Her deep depressions were punctuated by angry hysterics and bursts of feverish activity. Nora caught it more than anyone. The day he turned fifty, she threw a chair at her mother in a fit of rage. His celebration ended with Lucia being taken away to a psychiatric hospital. The cake with fifty candles was left untouched.

He arranged for his daughter to stay in the best clinics in France, England, and Switzerland. Doctors subjected her to every possible method of treatment. They sat her in cold baths, subjected her to electroshock, and injected her with sedatives and sea water. Various hospitals made the same diagnosis: schizophrenia. He didn't believe it. He thought that his daughter, like he himself, was a creative individual, and a creator cannot be like other people.

During periods of calm they took her home. He tried to save her and leave a loophole, explaining that she was a misunderstood artist—wholly like him. He got her assignments to do book designs, for which he himself paid. But the periods of calm did not last long. One time, Lucia begged him to take her to London. At the Gare du Nord she refused to board the train and became hysterical, so they had to unload the suitcases. When *Ulysses* finally came out in America and people called to congratulate him, she cut the telephone cord. In front of visitors Lucia would fling herself at her mother and hit her in the face. She would run away from home and go missing for days, until the police brought her home, dirty, thinner, insane. She was taken off in a straitjacket for the last time in March 1935. She spent the rest of her life in a clinic.

The periods of lucidity became increasingly brief. She sent dozens of telegrams from the hospital, including to people already dead. He would send her books, which she threw out the window. Lucia would attack and punch her sitters and set fire to rugs and furniture. Nora stopped visiting her, and he alone went to see his daughter. At the sight of her mother, she would become hysterical. He still didn't want to believe that his daughter was incurable. All he could do was assure her that she would get better soon and they would be together again. Then the war began.

Giorgio had wanted to be a singer, and everyone had admired his bass voice, but his career hadn't panned out. He married a woman ten years his senior who was divorced and had a son. Helen Kastor was a rich American. When they met, Giorgio was twenty; she was thirty-one. She was spoiled, extravagant, and capricious. She needed a lapdog husband and took him along even when she got her legs waxed. They had a son, Stephen, whom they christened in secret from his grandfather. Family relations with his bride were tense.

When it came to Giorgio, Helen was jealous of all women younger than she and was constantly making scenes. Giorgio started drinking. A marriage like that could not last long.

Helen showed evidence of a nervous tic, and it came to light that there was mental illness in her family and she, too, began treatment. While she was in a clinic, either her child stayed at boarding schools or else Giorgio passed Stephen on to his parents, who doted on him. Nora adored looking after her grandson, and his grandfather told him stories composed especially for him.

This unhappy marriage ended in ruin. Right before the war they parted and Helen hid their son from her husband. Giorgio took a taxi to see her in September 1939, tore seven-year-old Stephen from his wife's arms, and spirited him away. At that time, his parents were in La Baule with Lucia, so they had to leave immediately to join their son in Paris. They promised Lucia they'd be back soon, but they never saw each

other again.

In a fit of madness, Helen rushed about Paris with two blue Persian kittens, buying up the most expensive things in boutiques on credit, leaving debts of hundreds of thousands of francs, and throwing herself on strange men until the police arrested her and took her to an insane asylum. She told the policemen that the Joyces were German spies.

Giorgio left his child with his parents and disappeared with his new lover, Peggy Guggenheim.

In November, Stephen was sent to a boarding school in Saint-Gérand-le-Puy, not far from Vichy and a little farther from wartime Paris. The boy didn't understand what was happening, why his mama was in the hospital, or why his father had gone missing.

He and Nora promised their grandson they would visit him at Christmas. They took only clothing—and left home for just a few days. They would never return to Paris. Stephen asked them not to leave him alone. They decided to stay in the village so that they could bring the child home on Sundays.

The winter is passing and they are still living in the Auvergne village, not knowing what to do. At one time he had written in *Ulysses*: "We can't change the country. Let us change the subject." If a world full of wars, hatred, and fear cannot be changed, we can take a child's hand and go for a walk. He tells him about the adventures of Odysseus, the siege of Troy, the Sirens, the Cyclops.

Spring in Auvergne. Everything is blossoming, flowering, swelling with color. He sees nothing. Toward the end of his life, he himself had turned into a Cyclops. One eye, and that one eye nearly blind.

With every passing day of the world war, *Finnegans Wake*, his life's principal labor, becomes more and more irrelevant. Oh well, he's not the first writer to spend himself on writing irrelevant books, and he won't be the last. With each passing day his stomach pains grow more intense, he can't eat or sleep, and he's taking

painkillers and sleeping pills and drinking—and nothing is helping.

He's afraid of dogs. Once in his childhood a dog attacked him, frightening him for good. He wanders through fields with pockets filled with stones.

He hurls stones at the barking void.



In his book, as in life, everything happens simultaneously.

In life at this time in an adjoining room on another planet a prisoner's mother is saved by his book. Anna Akhmatova spends her days standing in endless prison lines in hopes of learning something about her son's fate, but in the evenings she reads. In October 1940 she will tell a friend: "Last winter I read *Ulysses*."

From the diary of Lydia Chukovskaya:

"Yesterday evening, Anna Andreyevna came to see me. Wearing a black silk dress and a white necklace, elegant. But sad and quite distracted." One of the guests admitted he didn't understand Joyce. "A stunning book. A great book," said Anna Andreyevna. "You don't understand it because you don't have time. But I had a lot of time. I read for five hours a day and read it through six times. At first I, too, had the feeling I didn't understand it, but later everything gradually came through. You know, like when a photograph is developed."

Few people in the Soviet Union could read Joyce in the original. Among those few was Sergei Eisenstein, who became fascinated by the writer back in the late 1920s. "*Ulysses* is captivating... In literature's linguistic kitchen, Joyce is doing exactly what I rave about regarding my laboratory investigations into film-language." For many years, *Ulysses* was the director's bedside reading. He dreamed of filming it, wrote a

lot about Joyce, and visited him in Paris. In one letter, Eisenstein wrote, "My interest in him and his *Ulysses* is anything but Platonic. What Joyce is doing in literature is very close to what we are doing, or rather, what we intend to do in the new cinematography! I'm in despair that I don't have enough time. I have a boxcar full of thoughts about Joyce and the cinema of the future." For Eisenstein, literature ended at Joyce: "After Joyce, the next leap is cinema." Instead of writing a film version of *Ulysses*, he started filming *Bezhin Meadow*—the story of the hero-Pioneer Pavlik Morozov who denounced his own kulak father—to mark the anniversary of the Great October Revolution.

The first Russian literary critic capable of truly appreciating Joyce was an émigré, Professor Dmitry Svyatopolk-Mirsky. In 1928, he wrote an article about Joyce in order to "draw the Russian reader's attention to the fact that there is right now in Europe a writer whose equal it has perhaps not given birth to since Shakespeare's day." In 1932, he returned to the Soviet Union and began writing about Joyce "as the most vivid literary representative of the parasitic bourgeoisie of the era of capitalism's decay."

In the autumn of 1934, in Moscow, the first (and last) Stalinist congress of Soviet writers was held. It approved the doctrine of "Socialist realism," which came down to the idea that only those prepared to extol their own barrack, barbed wire, and prison warden were permitted to write. Nearly every speaker talked about Joyce and called upon people to study him in order to "know their enemy." In "James Joyce or Socialist Realism," Karl Radek asserted: "The interest in Joyce unconsciously expresses the desire to get away from the great affairs of our country, to flee the stormy sea of revolution for the stagnant waters of the small lake and swamps where frogs live... A pile of manure in which worms wiggle filmed by a film camera through a microscope. That is Joyce." Soviet writers branded Joyce their number one enemy. He became a symbol of what slaves hate: freedom.

Karl Radek was arrested in 1936.

Translations of excerpts from *Ulysses* were published in two literary magazines, *Zvezda* in Leningrad and *Internatsional'naia literatura* in Moscow.

Dmitry Mirsky, who wrote an introduction to the publication, was arrested in 1937. He perished in a camp outside Magadan.

Translator Valentin Stenich was arrested in 1937 and executed in 1938.

Also arrested in 1937 was translator Igor Romanovich, along with his wife Elena. She later recalled: "He was arrested because of Joyce, you see. We'd gone cross-country skiing. That day Igor had received his fee, and knowing what a sweet tooth I have, he'd bought lots of oranges and a pile of delicious chocolate candies. Invigorated by the snow and by our joy at the evening we had to look forward to together, we were preparing for a luxurious tea when we heard a knock at the door. It was the janitor, who asked Igor to stop by the building office for a few minutes to sign something. I never saw him again."

For the epigraph to "Requiem," which Anna Akhmatova had hoped to print in *The Flight of Time*, her first collection after Stalin's death, she took a sentence from *Ulysses*: "You cannot leave your mother an orphan." How many times had she repeated those lines, talking in the night to her son, who was lost somewhere in the Gulag? They didn't let her include the Joyce epigraph.

In the novel, it is simply a paraphrase of a famous joke: "An Irishman receiving a challenge to fight a duel, declined. On being asked the reason, 'Och,' said Pat, 'would you have me leave his mother an orphan?'"

In Russia, a poet is more than a poet and Joyce is more than Joyce.

One autumn day in 1938, he placed the final period to *Finnegans Wake*, went outside, and sat on a bench for a few hours perfectly still. These were the last lines he wrote in his life.

"The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the riverrun, past Eve and Adam's..."

The end that is the beginning. Everything passes, but not before everything begins. An Ouroboros—a line, as long as the novel, that bites its own tail.

No, that's wrong. The Ouroboros doesn't bite its own tail, it disgorges itself, births itself through its mouth, as the mouth does the word, thereby changing the course of the universe. And all human culture gets turned around: *Finnegans Wake* gives birth to the Torah.

The book's very title, like an embryo, holds the essence of the universe. All meanings live in sounded words; writing forces us to choose one meaning. Like a dried insect, the written title "Finnegans Wake" leaves merely a

shell: a wake. In the spoken title, all the words' meanings start coming to life, fluttering, stirring. Dreaming is inseparable from waking, the end is by no means the end but merely a repetition of the end, and death lives on a par with resurrection.

To one guest who told him that his text was a mixture of music and prose, the writer replied, "It is pure music." He recorded several sections on a record he always played for visitors. Ideally, it would have been only a sound text, but it was technically impossible to record hundreds of records. Audio books didn't exist yet. The paper version was an inevitable compromise. It is a tone painting for which an appropriate system of annotation had not been invented. Samuel Beckett: "You complain that this wasn't written in English. It wasn't written at all. It's not meant to be read... It is for looking and listening."

For twenty years he lived in fear of going completely blind and not finishing his Work in Progress. But if not for his blindness, this book would not have been. Eisenstein recalled Joyce seeing him to the door: "In saying goodbye to me, this tall, slightly round-shouldered man nearly without a frontal image—so sharply distinct was his profile of ruddy skin and fiery hair with its streak of gray—for some reason is strangely waving his arms around and fumbling through the air. Surprised, I ask him what's wrong. 'But you must have a coat somewhere, don't you?' Joyce replies, and he fumbles along the walls." On the street, he nearly got hit by a car several times. Darkness took away his eyes: atrophy of the retina, iritis, cataract. He underwent twelve operations. Before each, Joyce told everyone he was seeing them for the last time because there was always the risk that he would go completely blind. To record a record, he had his text written out in giant letters on an enormous sheet of paper. He himself had great difficulty writing and dictated his lines. Books were constantly required for his work, and he ordered many editions—which were read to him out loud. He found the strength to joke: "My eyes have given me very little. I am creating hundreds of worlds and losing just one of them." The

more his vision betrayed him, the clearer the book's essence came through. His dying eyes gave his sounds sight. He had absolute pitch—both musical and for words. He saw words' living souls, not their dead bodies.

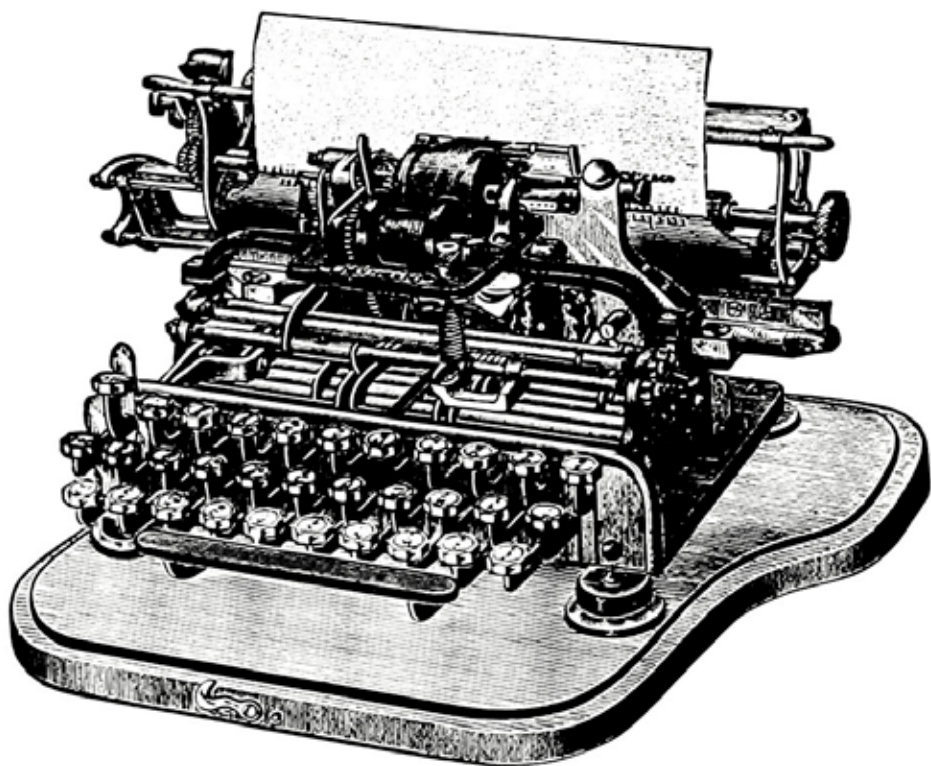
In this book, the words do not behave at all as they should. One bleeds through another, like on the pages of a book left open in the rain. The words flee grammar as if it were a prison. The words hold a wild orgy, get stuck together, copulate, latch onto one another, suck out the old meanings and inseminate new ones. The words multiply via gemmation and division, one sprouting in another. Each word conceals the germs of new meanings. Each word of *Finnegans Wake* is pregnant.

In a thousand pages there is not a single all-purpose sentence, such as jump from novel to novel as from bed to bed. Everything familiar, hackneyed, and decrepit is turned inside out and shredded. From the outside, the author seems to be killing language, mangling familiar phrases, dismembering words and tossing them in the meat grinder, out of which come rebuses and puns. Or spells, incantations. To the uninitiated, his shamanist incantations seem like gobbledygook, but intelligible to God.

Joyce isn't killing language. You can't kill what's already dead. He isn't destroying language but recreating it, purging it of all excess, trying to find ways to say the inexpressible, that which the usual words have not suited for a long time because they have rotted. The most important conversation about being cannot be conducted in rotten words. The pre-Babel dialect in which man spoke to God must be found.

In the beginning was the word. He is returning to the source.

His road lies through languages created for misunderstanding, to keep people from building a tower to heaven. In *Ulysses*, the Irishman took the language away from the English. In *Finnegans Wake*—from all humanity, in order to fuse the dialect back together. This text is a strong infusion of 150 living and dead languages.



At one time, seventy translators translated the crucial first book, where it all began, trying to preserve its distinctness and purity, so that not a single word could be replaced or moved. His work is the last book. He had to translate it from the mixture of dialects that scattered after the pandemonium of Babel into a shamanist language of absolute understanding. Return to the word its lost clarity and distinctness, purge it of everything irrelevant, unimportant, and distracting from the main conversation. This forgotten sacral language had to be rediscovered. Two books reach toward each other, having encompassed all world culture. Ouroboros had to swallow his own tail.

Joyce went beyond literature. *Finnegans Wake* is not prose, not a novel. A text like this can't be composed. A text like this is revealed whole. Not a single word can be replaced or moved. Joyce listened and reproduced what he had heard. He dictated to dictation. You can't compose a palindrome or an island. Those already exist and can only be discovered.

It is a book of wisdom. A book about accepting the world as it is—without end or beginning. The birth and death of a human being or a river is just as much a convention as the beginning and end of a book: it was all there before the first capital letter, and the final period is not the end of the world. Death is what has to be leafed through between the end and the beginning.

The song about the drunkard Finnegan who fell off a ladder and broke his neck and then came to life at his own wake has become a palimpsest book that sucks in everything ever written, said, or lived.

It is a hymn to the infinity of everything living. A hymn to the earthly cycle. You can't try to stop this stream, you have to step into it and surrender to the wave, a murmuring, gurgling, muttering wave singing in a language that doesn't exist.

To accept life is to accept everything it gives, including the disintegration of fabrics. Letting death in doesn't mean letting

yourself be vanquished, rather it means opening a door, not as to an enemy but to a guest who will come and go.

Here everything is as in life. Laundresses wag tongues and then turn to stone and wood. A father to a son, a mother a daughter, a river an ocean. People merge, decant, and spill, as words do. All parts of the universe, animate and inanimate, are connected to one another seamlessly, all is one. One night lasts as long as world history. The Limmat in Zurich and the Liffey in Dublin are one river. The story of one family is the story of humankind. Names play no role. You can call your wife Anna Livia Plurabelle. In the end, which means in the beginning, she'll become a river anyway. And before that an aging woman, and before that a child. She is all women and all rivers. The main hero can be called Harold or Humphrey Chimpden, or simply Earwicker. What difference what everything in the universe of the masculine gender is called, including mythological giants and the author himself, if we're talking about Judgment Day? The hero, that is, every man alive on Earth, has fought with some unknown person in Phoenix Park, Dublin's municipal park, and now he's going to be tried. Earwicker didn't know who he fought any more than Jacob knew who it was he fought in the desert. One of the heroes writes a letter of justification for the upcoming trial, or they all do, or the author does for them. This book is that letter.

If *Ulysses* is a book of one day, then *Finnegans Wake* is a book of the night. Everything of the day, superfluous and transient, vanishes with the night, and all that remains is what is important and invisible. At night, in insomnia, nothing distracts, and death's breathing is more audible. Joyce wrote that his book was intended for "the ideal reader suffering from ideal insomnia."

Finnegans Wake is an incantation for a resurrection from the dead, a magical conspiracy of flesh risen from the grave. All the heroes die and resurrect endlessly, they bleed through each other and through the history of humankind, having once fallen under the wheel of being for good.



The place and time of action of such a book is the creation of the world, which happens everywhere and also wherever this book is picked up, it happens always and also the moment it's read. The reader becomes author and creator. Or rather, this book cannot have a reader at all—either the person reading becomes a co-creator or he closes the book.

Once, before the beginning of beginnings, the letters went to God to ask Him to create everything that exists. Bet went to the Creator and said, "Creator of the world, I should co-create the world because They bless You by me. After all, Bet stands for Baruch—blessing." The Creator replied, "Of course I will create a world by you, and you shall be the beginning of the world!"

Now the letters went to him.

He wrote a new Torah, certainly not a novel to entertain the reading public. Only a few close to him understood what this was about. Beckett: "His writing isn't about something; it is that something itself."

He wrote the last book, through which passed the road to the beginning, to the primary book, which was not a book about the creation but the Creation itself.

He wrote the book of eternal life.

But who cares?

On May 10, the "strange" war ends and the ordinary one begins. France is defeated in a matter of weeks. On June 14, the Germans enter Paris without a fight. At his favorite Fouquet, they wait on

Wehrmacht officers. The Gestapo sets up shop on the rue Lauriston.

At the last minute, Giorgio manages to get out of Paris and join his parents and son in Auvergne. In May, Helen's relatives took her off to America. Lucia remains in a clinic in Brittany, in German-occupied La Baule.

The line of German occupation passes a few miles to the north of Saint-Gérard. In neighboring Vichy, Marshal Pétain's Free French government.

In *Ulysses*, Stephen is beaten by soldiers for his words: "You die for your country, suppose... but I say: Let my country die for me." Just a few months before, when the war had just begun, Joyce was with his daughter in La Baule. The dancehall at the restaurant was packed with soldiers, British and French. Someone started singing the Marseillaise. Joyce joined in. His strong, beautiful tenor stood out so clearly that the soldiers stood the writer on the table and he sang the hymn to the struggle for freedom all over again, from beginning to end. A witness remembered: "Never had I had occasion to see a spectacle of such complete conquest and enrapturement of an entire crowd by one single person. Joyce stood and sang the Marseillaise, and they sang it with him again, and had an entire regiment of Germans attacked them at that moment, he would never have broken off. Such was the feeling. Joyce and his voice hovered over everything." It all ended in disaster and disgraceful capitulation.

Life goes on. Shakespeare and Company is still operating in Paris. The shop will close only in December 1941, after a German officer tries to purchase the last copy of *Finnegans Wake* and Sylvia Beach refuses him. She is arrested. She will spend six months in a camp. *Wake's* author will never learn of this. Not only in Russia is Joyce more than Joyce.

Paul Léon, Joyce's secretary of many years, flees occupied Paris for Saint-Gérard with his wife. Pavel Leopoldovich Léon, a Russian émigré, a Jew from Petersburg, a lawyer by education, found himself in unpaid service to the writer's talent. Léon conducted

all of Joyce's correspondence, up to twenty letters a day, helped in legal matters, and handled his financial and legal affairs. The Léons' apartment on the rue Casimir-Périer was a fifteen-minute walk from the Joyces' apartment on the Square de Robiac, and the writer often went there to work, dictate, or be read to out loud.

Léon and Joyce were drawn to each other not only by an interest in Medieval jurisprudence and Irish home rule but also by their sense of humor. In 1932, the International Union of Revolutionary Writers in Moscow sent Joyce a questionnaire that asked, "What influence has the October Revolution had on you as a writer, and what is its significance for your literary work?" Paul Léon wrote in reply: "Kind sirs, Mr. Joyce asks me to thank you for the honor you have paid him, as a result of which he was interested to learn that in October 1917 there was a revolution in Russia."

It was Alex Ponizovski, the brother of Léon's wife, who taught Joyce Russian and was briefly Lucia's fiancé. Alex was a friend of Vladimir Nabokov; they had studied together in Cambridge. Léon introduced Joyce and Nabokov and brought Joyce to Nabokov's lecture on Pushkin. The Russian writer often went to the rue Casimir-Périer, and Léon's wife, a translator, helped him in the creation of his first English novel, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. They worked at the same table where Léon sat with Joyce.

On a copy of *Finnegans Wake*, the author wrote: "To / that Eurasian Knight / Paul Léon / with the thousand and / one

thanks of that most / distressful writer / James Joyce / Paris / 4 May 1939."

When the book came out, it was ignored because war had begun. Joyce joked sadly, "They should have left Poland in peace and taken up *Finnegans Wake*." Is man on earth to read or kill?

In Saint-Gérard, Joyce and Léon spend the summer days of 1940 looking for typos in *Finnegans Wake*, but in a world where a war is under way, the book itself seems like a typo.

In *Ulysses*, Stephen says what the author himself felt: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." In *Finnegans Wake*, he made short work of history, abolished it. Now history had made short work of his book, reducing it to naught. Around him was a world war, a nightmare from which he cannot awake.

Joyce is silent for days on end. One day he will suddenly say, "Land [Tolstoy's 'How Much Land Does a Man Need'] is the greatest story that the literature of the world knows."

His son is nearby, but the danger that the French will take him into the army or the Germans arrest him has not gone away. He has a hard time explaining to his grandson why they're staying in this village while his mama has left him to go to America. Nora's arthritis makes walking difficult. He himself has incessant stomach pains. He is felled by agonizing bouts and collapses into bed. As before, he treats himself with alcohol. He doesn't

know what's happened with the apartment he left in Paris, where he has all his things, books, and archive. Desperate, he and Nora argue and don't speak for days on end. They have no money. The transfers from England have stopped; all foreign contact has ceased due to the occupation.

For their twenty Paris years they lived on money from Harriet Weaver, a wealthy London patroness and an ecstatic admirer of the author of *Ulysses*. Her generous support allowed them to stay in luxurious hotels, dine at expensive restaurants, and travel first class. As excerpts from his *Work in Progress* were published, her ecstasy dissipated, to be replaced by bewilderment. She did not approve of *Finnegans Wake*, and that was the end of his luxurious life. By the late 1930s, she had begun financing the Communist Party of Great Britain and herself became a member. She continued to support the Joyce family merely out of a sense of obligation or out of pity.

In September, Léon leaves for occupied Paris. He is going to rescue his friend's archive. He will hide some of the documents, books, letters, and manuscripts in suitcases and books with friends and hand the rest over to the Irish consul. Ireland is a neutral country. With the outbreak of war, the Irish government surveyed the population: 78.2% were in favor of neutrality; 11.6% for war on the side of Britain; and 10.2% for war against Britain. The Irish Republican Army wages a terrorist war on English soil with the support of Nazi Germany.

In August 1941, the Gestapo arrest Léon in his Paris apartment. He will die in Auschwitz.

The Joyces are still in Auvergne. It is the autumn of 1940, his last autumn.

In the boarding school where Stephen is living, Maria Jolas closes her school and is able to leave for America. There is nothing more keeping them in Saint-Gérard. Joyce writes to people he knows in Zurich and they invite him to come. Moving to Switzerland seems like a reliable salvation from war.

A few months before this, he and his family had calmly traveled to Switzerland. Now the borders are closed. Will he get permission to enter? Giorgio is draft age and might be stopped at the border. It's unclear whether the Swiss authorities will let Lucia through.

A war of documents begins with various offices. He writes a request to the Swiss representative in Vichy for permission for his whole family to move and sends letters to everyone he knows in Switzerland asking for help. Acquaintances recommend a lawyer in Geneva who might be able to help with entrance visas. Lucia receives permission to leave from the German occupation authorities, but there is no money to pay the bill for her clinic stay.

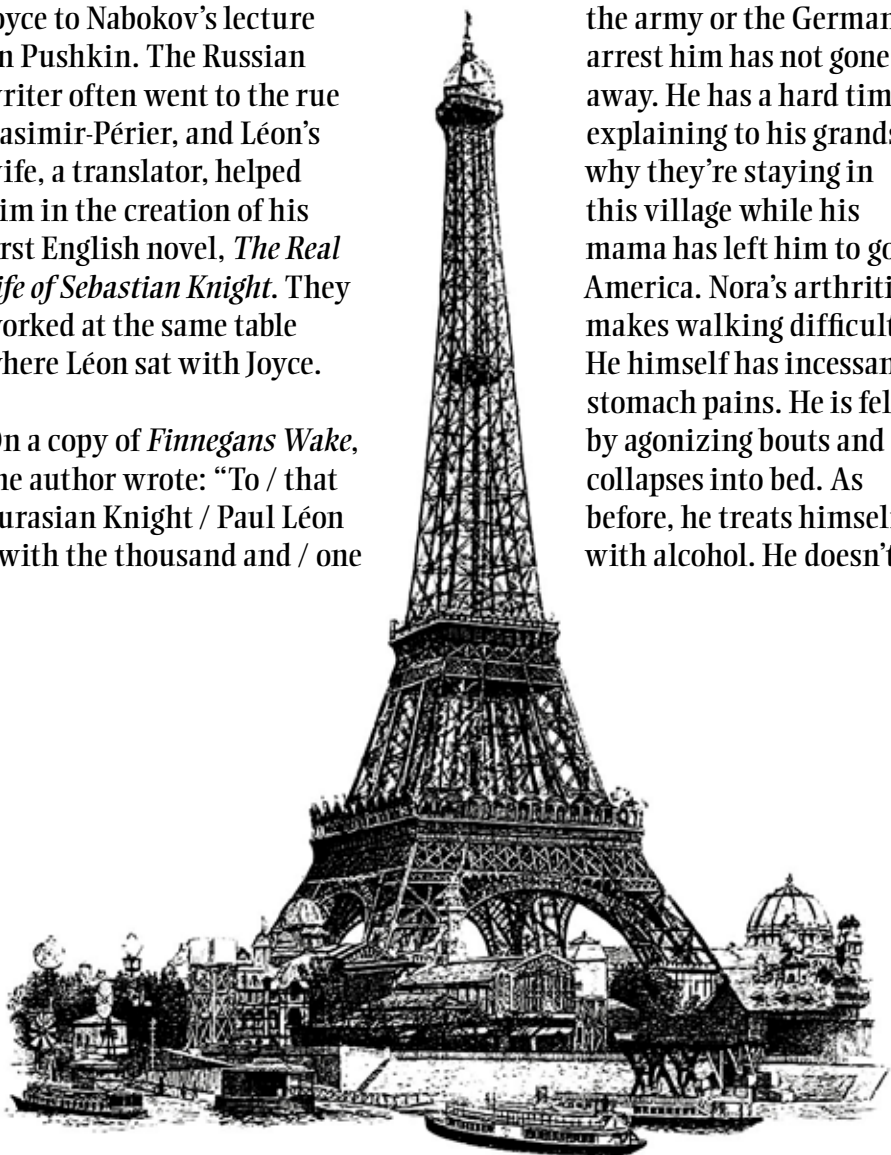
Joyce writes to the consulate in Lyons for entrance visas asking permission to remain in Switzerland as a refugee until the war's end. His case is sent on for consideration to the Federal Police for Foreigners in Bern. From there, papers go to the Zurich cantonal police. Finally, the refusal comes.

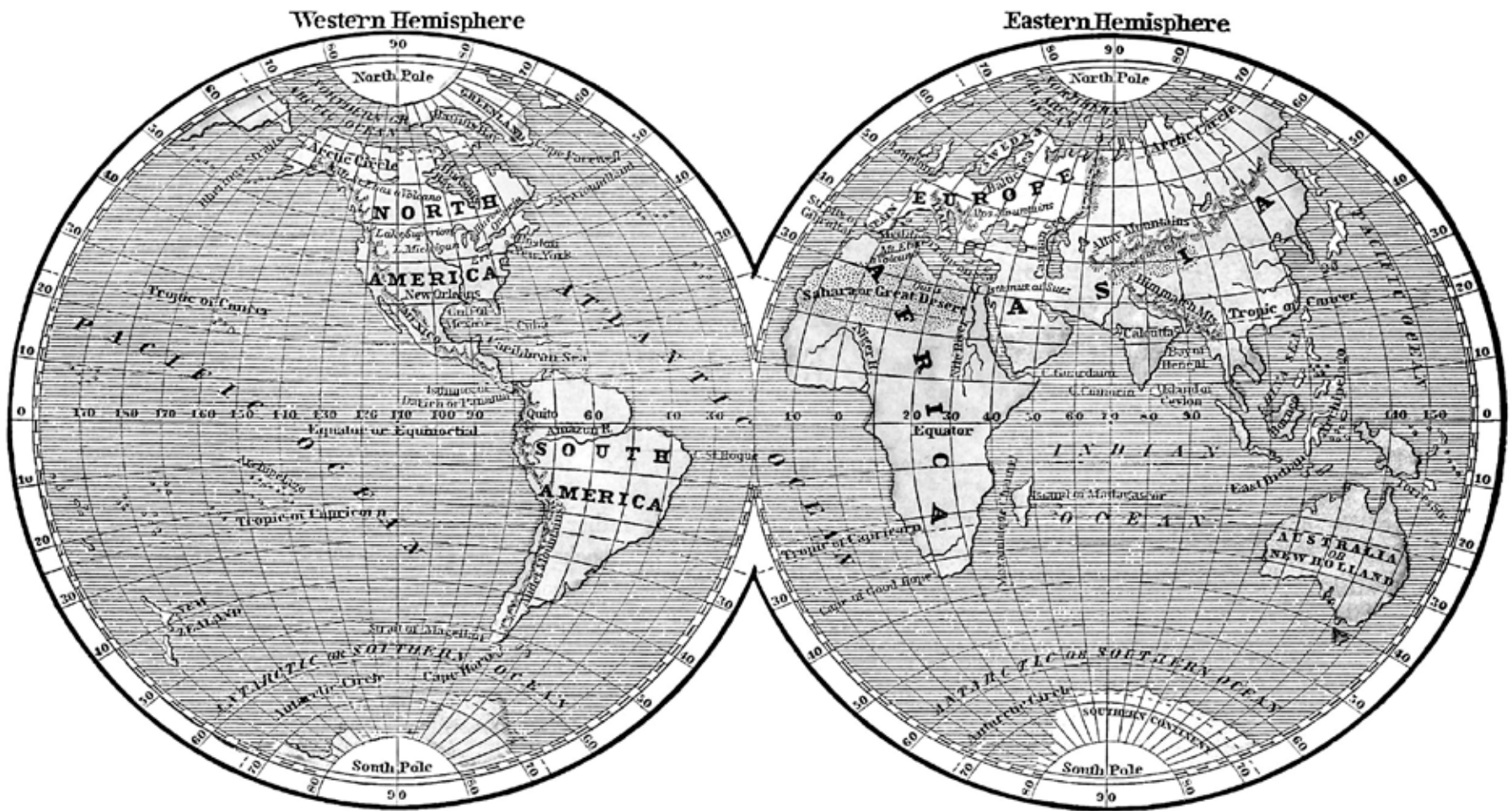
Only recently he was a famous writer. He worked with translators, read galleys, followed reviews. He had fame and success. His *Ulysses* was illustrated by Henri Matisse himself. His first biography was already being readied. During his secret, belated wedding in London, photographers from all the world publications chased after him and Nora. When he encountered Marlene Dietrich in a restaurant on the Champs-Élysées, he could simply go over to her and chat the entire evening away. His photograph was on the cover of *Time* magazine.

Now he is nobody, an ill man, a blind, irrelevant old man, a refugee who has been refused. Das Boot ist voll. The boat is full.

He understands this is not about Switzerland. He built an ark that will survive all floods, but there's no room in it for him. Das Boot ist voll. The boat is full. And the greatest book can't take its author along.

An acquaintance who goes to the police in Zurich to ascertain the reason for the refusal is told that





Joyce is a Jew.

At one time he made a Jew the hero of *Ulysses*. His hero was an outsider, an alien, Odysseus without a homeland. It was a metaphor for Joyce himself, the outcast, the pariah. The metaphor had been made real. Word become reality.

His Swiss friends begin a campaign in support of Joyce. They write letters to various offices, request a review of the refusal, assure them that Joyce is not a Jew but an Aryan from Ireland. Swiss writers submit their expert conclusion that Joyce is the best English-language writer. The mayor of Zurich and rector of the university weigh in. Finally, the cantonal authorities yield, but they demand a financial guarantee of 50,000 Swiss francs. Then they agree to 20,000, which is an entire fortune in any case. The Swiss are trading in a precious good: freedom and safety. Joyce doesn't have that kind of money; his Swiss friends pay the sum for him. Immediately after his death they will demand the money back from Nora and will take his death mask as a pledge, until the debt is repaid.

When permission to enter is received, it turns out that his passport and Nora's have expired. The country is at war with Great Britain. The Joyces turn to the

American representative in Vichy. He is perplexed: "How can I extend a British passport?" It is a matter of saving lives. The American extends the documents at his own risk.

They are living out of packed suitcases. Their entrance visas are about to run out. Now the Germans aren't giving permission for Lucia to leave. They're frightened for their daughter. What will happen to her if she gets put out on the street because of unpaid bills? What will the Germans do to her? After all, she has a passport from a country at war with Germany.

On December 15, the last day for their visas, they decide to leave without her.

On the train, Stephen chatters loudly in English and they can't make the excited child quiet down.

Giorgio had taken along his most precious possession, his bicycle. At the border, they have no way to pay the fee, so the Swiss customs officers confiscate the bicycle.

In Lausanne, when Nora unpacks their suitcases in the hotel, all their things are covered in green ink because Joyce hadn't closed the vials properly. The first thing he does is take his grandson out to buy him chocolate, which the

child hasn't seen for months.

Three days later, right before Christmas, they arrive in Zurich.

They settle in a modest boarding house. In the old days, he and Nora stayed in the best hotels—the Carlton Elite, the Saint Gotthard.

They've returned to a city they first arrived in thirty-seven years before, after fleeing Dublin, young and in love, his whole life and all his books ahead of them. They spent all these thirty-seven years together practically without parting. Living with him was impossible. Nora left several times. She would pack her suitcases and move to a hotel. Even in the presence of others she would shout, "I hope you drown!" And she would curse the day she met the man named James Joyce. Then she would come back because living without him was utterly impossible. Nor could he without her. Nora was the muse of all his books, the prototype for all his women. Earthly, ordinary, banal, uneducated, she gave him what a bookish man lacks—a lust for life, a lack of restraint, everything that education kills and suppresses. She devoted her life to her beloved, and the fact that he turned out to be a brilliant writer was a coincidence. This woman loved him and therefore his novels—which she did not read.

Now they are sitting in a cheap furnished room and barely go out. Her legs ache. He can't see anything. They are together.

Just before the New Year, Zurich is blanketed in snow. Joyce is taking a walk with his grandson through the city, which has become invisible. He tells the boy about the ancient Greeks.

He once finished his story "The Dead" with a snowfall like this: "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."

Behind the rippled white wall is the sound of water—the Limmat and Liffey merging and becoming one river.

He doesn't know he has just a few days left. This ignorance is the sole form of immortality.



GREY BEES

BY ANDREY KURKOV

TRANSLATED BY BORIS DRALYUK

1. 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.”

Sergeyich 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 backedpedaled, 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!”

Pashka 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?”

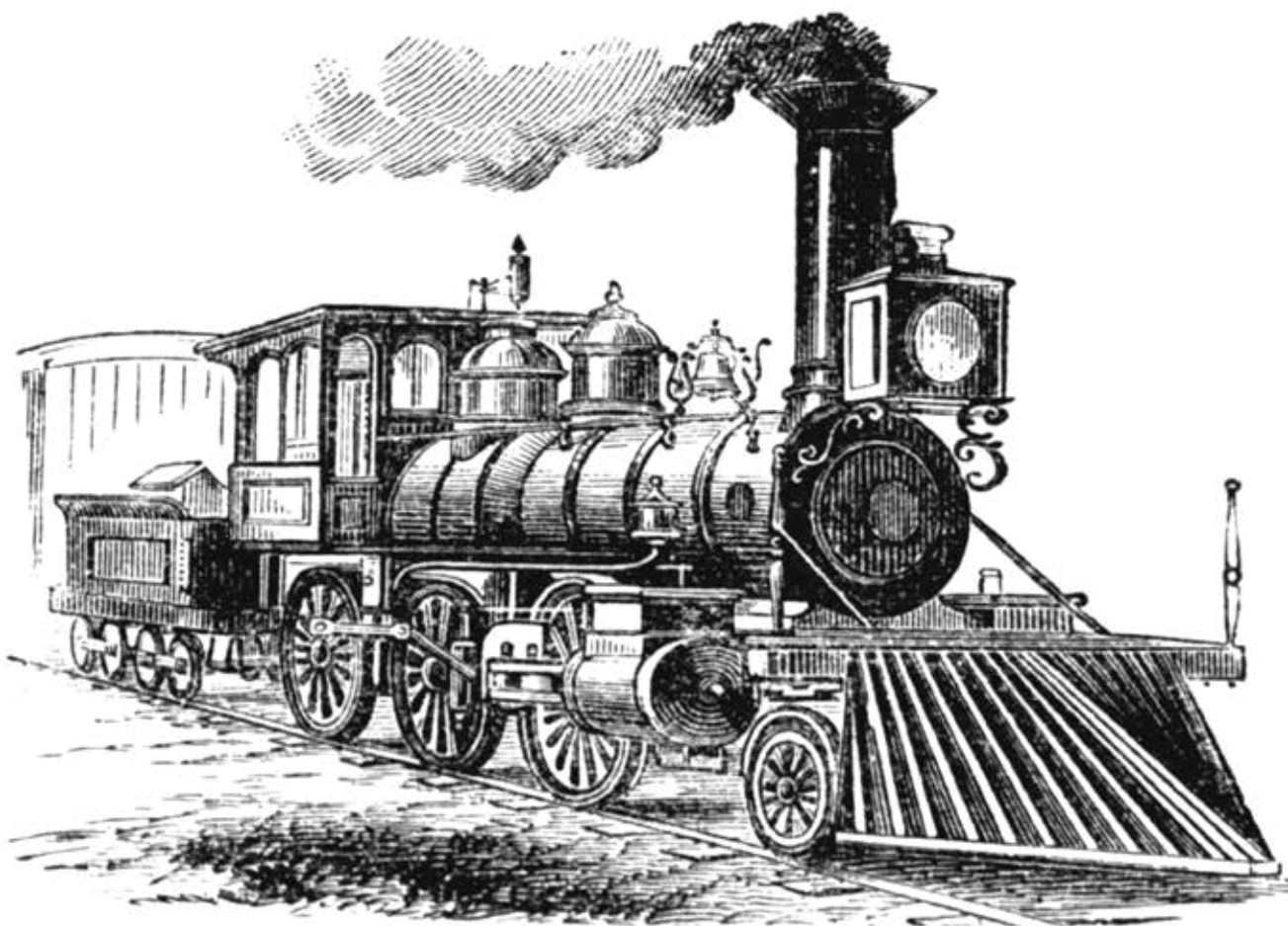
“My’ Vitalina? She hasn’t been ‘mine’ for six years. No.”

“What about your daughter?”

“Just go. I told you, I’ve got no one to call.”

A strange occurrence has taken place to-day. I got up fairly late, and when Mawra brought me my clean boots, I asked her how late it was. When I heard it had long struck ten, I dressed as quickly as possible.





LVIV, ALWAYS

BY YURI ANDRUKHOVYCH

“Only to Lviv!” I would repeat when I was fifteen years old, and when I was sixteen too, as if slightly altering the chorus of that sweet Polish tune¹ about whose existence I could not possibly have known back then. “Only to Lviv!” was my answer when I was asked where I would like to move to study.

Why there? I had only a rather vague notion of it back then. And mostly stemming from its train station, from which we traveled to Prague many years ago. And, honestly, that was it. It turns out that I had always wanted to go to Lviv because I imagined it to be a train station somewhere in the suburbs of Prague. I’m afraid that I may not have been mistaken about that.

Nevertheless, I still get excited about the fact that the English didn’t get it from Stalin, for the sake of the Poles, in 1944. If they had pulled that off, Lviv would then have ended up on the other side of the border and all my hopes would have vanished. The border between the USSR and Poland would then have been located

somewhere near Vynnyky² and the West, thus, would have begun just beyond it. And we would not have been allowed to go there.

Because history does not choose, what came to be were not only five of my densest and sharpest years but also everything that I have written to this day. And if I have my Dublin, then it is Lviv.³

When I write about it I can’t help repeating myself. That said, if it is indeed so inevitable then I will attempt, with each return, to unearth at least one revelation. Without revelations, first and foremost for an author, writing ceases to be writing and becomes rewriting. And if, when I do repeat, I use completely new words, then it won’t count as repeating.

From Lviv, paraphrasing Taras Prokhasko, one can still make a few novels.⁴ Moreover—I am convinced that many novels could continue to be made from it. Lviv is novel-like in the sense that its novels have yet to be written. Yes, I agree—a few novels have already been written about it and some pretty good ones among them.

² Vynnyky is a town located six kilometers east of Lviv. (Translator’s note)

³ Including Dubliany. (Authors’ note) Dubliany is a suburb of Lviv. (Translator’s note)

⁴ Taras Prokhasko (b. 1968) is a prominent Ukrainian writer. One of his publications has the title *Z tsioho mozna zrobyty kil’ka opovidan’* which translated as “One Could Make Several Stories from This”. (Translator’s note)

But how do you capture all of the possible meanings of this city with its fluctuating features?

I select them at random, understanding that more will always remain.

The City-Port

Once I referred to it as a city-ship, now let it be a harbor.

That is, let it be a shore, perhaps, an estuary of a large river, an aquatic territory, piers, docks, transporters of cargo and passengers, freight cranes, barges, and 24/7 brothels.

Stanisław Lem, in “Highcastle” mentions the bureau of a “Cunard Line” ship association with models of ocean liners (“The Lusitania”, “The Mauretania”) in each of its windows. It was located in the inter-war Lviv of Lem—I believe, on Słowacki Street. I wonder when it disappeared—in 1939?

Regardless, it was then that Lviv ceased being a discernible port and became a secret one. It simply cannot not be a port—that was

the will of its founders who, for several centuries, sought a place for it exactly between the Baltic and Black Seas.

That’s why so many dolphins are found on its buildings. They are the second most common attribute (after lions) one finds among the oldest building ornaments in the city. Maybe it is they that gave the city its particular chilly dampness. You could assemble an entire photo album filled just with them.

A whole novel could be written about the eels existing in the city sewer’s underground river: the path taken by an eel from the Sargasso Sea to the Shatsk Lakes and then to the Bug River basin, to the Poltva River, and then back to the Ocean—could be another “Odyssey” or another “Ulysses”. Or, at least, a poem such as this one:

*It seems completely possible to me—
the Lviv Opera was built*

*directly on top of a freshly encased
river,*

to a certain extent

it can be regarded as

a gigantic river gravestone

or maybe even a mausoleum.

But in that case

the most sensitive musicians,

when entering the orchestra pit,

cannot not hear

(hearing is what they do),

*how, in the stifling darkness within
the pipes,*

*filling them with quivering and
droning,*

almost moaning,

all those eels

again try to break through

in the only possible direction—

towards the Atlantic.

*It is known that eels can survive
even in sewer pipes,*



*thus providing city-dwellers
not only with hope,*

but also with an example to follow.

Sometimes it seems that Lviv is, first and foremost, an underground city. In other words, what is most essential in it continues to strainingly exist somewhere deep below us. And the orchestra pit, in this case, is somewhat of a transition space, a waiting room or a reception room, below which only the waters of the Styx are to be found.

If you chase after two seas you will not get to either one of them.

up with us and was left far behind.

A longing for it echoes to this day. For example, along Black Sea Street, smack in the center of the Older City. Not the Old City but the even Older one—the one where Old Rynok is to be found and towards which Fish Street runs.

Lviv's non-marium condition gave it a non-water condition. It became its drama and its karma. Existence became mundane, a dreary campaign involving toilets and dishwater, waiting and listening for when they'll turn it

The City-Crossroad

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 to contain everything in it—just like Lviv can. The name of the novel—"Rotations".



Lviv's intermarium condition transformed into a non-marium condition. In the middle of every July in the 1980s we, in a drunken ritual, meandered through nighttime courtyards down the former "Along the Pipes" Street⁵, striving to unearth—in the darkness, at least—the remains of water mills and an old pier. It smelled of water and slime and it seemed that we were on the verge of stumbling upon the Wallachian Bridge with its statue of St. John, that we would cross over to the right bank and lay down in its reeds. Small, merchant sailboats from Gdansk and Lübeck silently sailed past us along the established Poltva—Bug—Narew—Vistula—Baltic Sea water way. Salt was traded for amber and Carpathian juniper for Caribbean spices. Lviv's great nautical past couldn't keep

⁵ Today's vulytsia Kostia Levytskoho (Kost Levytskyi street). (Translator's Note)

on and when they'll turn it off and, finally—a drawn-out dripping of hours and years among mountains of dirty dishes and overfilled ashtrays, with a stubborn rock in your throat and sharp sand on your teeth. Life became dying in never-laundered, sticky bedsheets. A foul stench became an indispensable element of everyday life—it would crawl into dwellings as if into prison cells and would never leave.

It is in Lviv that I first understood the meaning of the saying "to capture the water". It really was a hunt, that endless filling up of the bathtub with rust stains on its walls, all those buckets and basins set up all over the place and all filled to the rim. This was hunting for water and keeping it in captivity. And then—letting go—downward, into the sewage pipes, down to the eels and rats, to the underground port in the estuary of the great river, homeward.

GUSTAVE AND MAXIME IN EGYPT

(Or: *The Metaphysics of Happening*)

BY ZSÓFIA BÁN

Gustave and Maxime are traveling. “*Et le petit chat,*” dit Hélène, “*partira-t-il aussi?*” Maxime is taking pictures and Gustave is reading. Maxime is running around and Gustave is sitting around. Maxime is enthusiastic and Gustave is bored. Maxime’s name is Maxime du Camp, and Gustave’s name is Gustave Flaubert. Gustave and Maxime. Fast friends. [Répétez! Articulez, et parlez à haute voix!]

Gustave is now twenty-eight years of age, as is Maxime. Maxime is two months younger than Gustave. Gustave will be fifty-nine when he dies, Maxime seventy-two. At this point (à ce temps-là) neither suspects this. Gustave and Maxime are traveling to Egypt, suspecting not a thing. Gustave is 183 cm tall, gray-green eyes, attractive, and cuts a fine figure indeed. He has a beard and mustache. He claims to be of Iroquois extraction, which makes him immediately sympatico in the eyes of many. Here is what Maxime relates about Gustave forty years later.

Traduisez!

“He was an exceptionally beautiful boy... the white skin of his cheeks danced with rose-pink, and with his shock of hair, his striking mien, broad shoulders, thick golden beard, large sea-green eyes shadowed by deep black lashes, his resonant trumpet of a voice, exuberant gestures, and swelling



laughter made of him the image of a young Gallic general in arms against the Roman legions.”

Maxime is an industrious and nimble boy. He takes more than 25,000 calotypes on this trip. This

is what Maxime looked like before their departure:



As for Gustave, we don’t know what he looked like before their departure.

Upon their return (1851), Maxime has 1 photo album and 1 trip diary published. Not 1 of the published images portrays Gustave. Not 1 of the entries in the trip diary mentions Gustave. [Qu’en pensez-vous?]

Upon their return (1851), Gustave publishes nothing. Upon their return, Gustave begins writing a novel. The title of the novel is *Madame Bovary*. Later, Gustave would make a fascinating declaration that he himself was *Madame Bovary*. [Expliquez!] Maxime is not mentioned in the novel even once.

Maxime wears a Renaissance ring with a cameo of a satyr. He had given this to Gustave five years before their voyage. In return, Gustave gives Maxime a signet ring on which he had Maxime’s initials engraved and a slogan whose text is unknown to us. It was a sort of intellectual proposal of marriage, Maxime would later write.

Gustave writes diligently, keeping to a schedule. Eight months before their voyage, on the night of February 13-14, he writes the following in his notebook:

“One can do so very much in a single evening. After dinner, I conversed with my mother, then dreamt of travels and possible lives. I wrote almost one whole chorus of *St. Anthony* (the dog-headed-monkeys part), read the entire first volume of *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*, then smoked three pipes, and now, take a pill. After that, a shit. And sleep is still far off!”

Gustave muses incessantly about the Grand Voyage. Alas, there is no chance his mother would



allow him on such a perilous undertaking to the ends of the earth. One example why: In September of 1846, Gustave’s mother stands white as a sheet on the platform of the train station where the 25-year-old Gustave returns, one day later than promised. Gustave then renounces all further nights that were to have been spent with his beloved, Louise Colet. My mother needs me, explains Gustave to Louise. “As we know,” explains crackerjack Flaubert scholar Jean-Pierre, “this unusual situation gave rise to one of the most sublime epistolary correspondences in French literature.” *Merci, Madame Flaubert, merci à vous!* Alternately: Thank you, dear Louise, for you have the patience of an angel.



Jean-Pierre delivers his lectures in a stunning sky-blue jacket over a wispy, pale-pink shirt. *Le jour de gloire*

est arrivé! I would softly add, in admiration, just for the sake of objectivity. Objectivity is the main thing in scholarship. Objectively speaking, there are two sorts of people: the ones who know they are prudes, and the ones who don’t know they are prudes. Jean-Pierre, for example, doesn’t know. But still, he is. This is what makes scholarship so wonderful. Jean-Pierre loves three things: 1) Himself, 2) Flaubert, and 3) Women. In that order. Jean-Pierre also likes men, but that is not on this list.

[Question: Is it on any list?]

On the last day of April 1849, the widow Mrs. Flaubert (residing at

7 Rue des Beauxjours, Croisset) collapses under the weight of the reasoning of Maxime de Camp, Achille Flaubert, and Dr. Cloquet. *Crack.* Well if there’s nothing else



for Gustave’s health, then fine, let him voyage to the East. If it must be, then let what must happen, happen. But did what

had to happen really happen? And perchance is what happens more important than all that does not happen? [Qu’en pensez-vous?]

Before the voyage, Maxime resolves that he will (*futur dans le passé!*), in revolutionary fashion (*technologie moderne*) and “with utmost fidelity” document it through photographs. But the unexpected revelatory force of the images proves on occasion to shake him to his very core. At such times, he rips them up. (Exposure time: min. 2 mins.; destruction time: max. 1 min.)

After the voyage, Gustave resolves he will (*f. dans le p.*), in revolutionary fashion (*style moderne*) write in suitable language and “with utmost fidelity.” Still, there are certain words (*le mot juste*) that, on occasion, shake him, too, to his very core. When this occurs, he erases. (Exposure time: max. 2 nanoseconds.) After all, let the *juste* have its limits (*subjonctif*) too!

The deletions are clearly discernable in the manuscripts, to which Jean-Pierre, chic scholar of deletion, has devoted his career. Ah, to fiddle with the deletions of others, and poke about in the discovery of unhappened happenings! *Que c’est bizarre, que c’est étrange!* This is said to be the very pinnacle of repressive effect inasmuch as, *chemin faisant*, there is no time for the examination of self-deletions. Between deletions, Jean-Pierre likes to screw; he says this relaxes him. *Je*, as a student of French, offer assistance in pursuit



of excellence. Jean-Pierre prefers it from behind (see also Huysmans's *À rebours*), which helps the Flaubert

go more smoothly the following day. I let him. After all, I love literature.

Gustave and Maxime set out in October of 1849. Maxime is jubilant. Gustave is swept on a tide of ecstasy (see also the widow Flaubert's last words: "Are you trying to kill me, Gus?!"). For me, writes Gustave, friendship is like a camel. Once it gets going, nothing can stop it. Gustave is mistaken. There are some things that can (pronounced *Cannes*).

Travel is the greatest enemy of a friendship. Or perhaps not. But if it is, then it goes whole hog. Gustave is bored. Gustave is not the least interested in fulfillment. Maxime is astonished by this, yet remains displeased. Gustave, chuffs

Maxime, is just like Honoré: he looks at nothing but remembers everything. But who



wants to climb up to the guano-caked attic of fulfillment, thinks Gustave. Gustave is no devoté of unnecessary exertion. Gustave is phenomenally corpulent. Gustave is cantilevered to the top of the Great Pyramid by twelve Arab servants. At the peak of the Great Pyramid, gasping for air, they have a look around. The Pharaoh can just suck all my dicks, thinks Gustave. *Le sport aide non seulement le développement physique, mais aussi la formation morale* (Baron Pierre de Coubertin, *Les jeux Olympiques*). [Mémorisez!]

"... dear God, what is this constant exhaustion that weighs me down wherever I go! It even accompanies me on my trip! It has become one with me! Deianeira's shirt did not cling to Hercules' shoulders any

more fiercely than this boredom to my life! The only difference is, it kills more slowly! It's Monday. The Khamsin is blustering, the clouds are red..." [Traduisez!]

The Khamsin is blustering. Gustave is blustering. Gustave finds a white chameleon. Maxime strikes it dead. Gustave spots a flying heron. Maxime shoots it. Gustave and Maxime's eyes meet. Their chests heave. Those sea-green eyes, those black lashes. [Deleted] Gustave and Maxime walk through the desert. Gustave and Maxime have been walking through the desert for three days without a drop of water.

Dialogue:

G: Remember the lemon ice we had at Tortini's?



M: (nods)

G: Lemon ice is just heavenly. Admit it, you'd love to toss back a

lemon ice right now.

M: Indeed I would.

(Five minutes later)

G: Oh, those lemon ices! The steam that envelops the cup like a white jelly.

M: Could we change the subject?

G: That would be nice, but lemon ice is clearly worthy of having its praises sung. Take a spoonful and there it towers like a little cathedral; gently spread it between tongue and palate. As it slowly melts, it exudes a fresh, magnificent savor, bathing the uvula, gently stroking the tonsils, sliding down the esophagus (to the latter's boundless delight), and then it reaches the stomach, which veritably cackles in glee. Just between us, a lemon ice is just what the Kusheir Desert needs!



M: (silence)

G: Lemon ice! Lemon ice!

M: (I'm going to kill him.)

Maxime kills Gustave. World literature mourns. At this point, Gustave hasn't even written *Madame Bovary*. All right then, sighs Maxime. I'll spare him. I can use this one later (which he did). He rewrites the end of the scene, like this:

G: My dear Max, thank you ever so much for not shooting me in the head. I'd have done it if I were you.

M: Gustave, this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

(FIN)

Gustave and Maxime go whoring. Gustave still has some of that fine sausage from home, as well as a case of morbus gallicus. *Non, je ne regrette rien!* Secretly, Maxime is fascinated by him, and jealous.

"I go off with that dissolute Safia-Zugera, a rakish little tigress. I sully the settee." Gustave has an obsessional neurosis. He cannot stand disorder.

"During my second round with Kücsük, when I kissed her on the shoulder and felt her round choker under my teeth, her pussy like a stained velvet pillow, I was a wild animal."

Here the student of French will respond:

"Jean-Pierre, *mon cher*, that phrase, 'stained velvet pillow'—would you call it adjectival or verbal?" [Qu'en pensez-vous?]



Louise Colet's reaction: "Gustave, you bastard, go get fucked!" (Which he did.)

Hassan el-Bilbezi: a dancer dressed as a woman. "His belly and hips gyrate hypnotically—the belly veritably undulates—and during the grand finale, his pantaloons inflate and open." [Deleted]

Gustave and Maxime look at each other with some surprise. As if Gustave were seeing Maxime for the very first time. "... What is his name, where could he be living, what about his life, or his past? He would have liked to explore the furnishings in Maxime's room, every last article of his clothing,



the people he sees. The desire for physical possession disappeared behind a deeper curiosity, an excruciating

curiosity that knew no bounds." [Gustave deletes this remark, and uses it elsewhere. Jean-Pierre mentions nothing of this.] Gustave has a thought: travel is a sentimental education. This pleases him and he writes it down.

Gustave and Maxime draw their voyage to a close. They smoke a water pipe in a Greek café. Later, Gustave writes about it all, surprisingly, elsewhere [Jean-Pierre is silent on this.]:

"He took a trip. He came to know, one after the other, the melancholy of great ships, the shiver of awakening in a desert tent, the sweet lulling intoxication of those landscapes and ruins, and the strange bitterness of shattered temptation."

And then: "A miserable attack of nerves about 3 in the afternoon." Jean-Pierre at last reports, in a footnote: "It is quite difficult to make out these words, overwritten in a light blue ink; the deletions only serve to render the text unreadable. This is not the result of the author's corrections but rather the bowdlerizations of Caroline Franklin-Grout." Caroline is Gustave's niece. She manages Gustave's papers. Caroline is an impossible prude. "The text, then, is unreadable," continues a triumphant Jean-Pierre, "but the word 'nerves' glows faintly through the ink. It appears that the word 'seizure'

MEMOIRS OF A MADMAN

BY NIKOLAI GOGOL

October 3rd.—A strange occurrence has taken place to-day. I got up fairly late, and when Mawra brought me my clean boots, I asked her how late it was. When I heard it had long struck ten, I dressed as quickly as possible.

To tell the truth, I would rather not have gone to the office at all to-day, for I know beforehand that our department-chief will look as sour as vinegar. For some time past he has been in the habit of saying to me, "Look here, my friend; there is something wrong with your head. You often rush about as though you were possessed. Then you make such confused abstracts of the documents that the devil himself cannot make them out; you write the title without any capital letters, and add neither the date nor the docket-number." The long-legged scoundrel! He is certainly envious of me, because I sit in the director's work-room, and mend His Excellency's pens. In a word, I should not have gone to the office if I had not hoped to meet the accountant, and perhaps squeeze a little advance out of this skinflint.

A terrible man, this accountant! As for his advancing one's salary once in a way—you might sooner expect the skies to fall. You may beg and beseech him, and be on the very verge of ruin—this gray devil won't budge an inch. At the same time, his own cook at home, as all the world knows, boxes his ears.

I really don't see what good one gets by serving in our department. There are no plums there. In the fiscal and judicial offices it is quite different. There some ungainly fellow sits in a corner and writes and writes; he has such a shabby coat and such an ugly mug that one would like to spit on both of them. But you should see what a splendid country-house he has rented. He would not condescend to accept a gilt porcelain cup as a present. "You can give that to your family doctor," he would say. Nothing less than a pair of chestnut horses, a fine carriage, or a beaver-fur coat worth three hundred roubles would be good enough for him.

And yet he seems so mild and quiet, and asks so amiably, "Please lend me your penknife; I wish to mend my pen." Nevertheless, he knows how to scarify a petitioner till he has hardly a whole stitch left on his body.

In our office it must be admitted everything is done in a proper and gentlemanly way; there is more cleanness and elegance than one will ever find in Government offices. The tables are mahogany, and everyone is addressed as "sir." And truly, were it not for this official propriety, I should long ago have sent in my resignation.

I put on my old cloak, and took my umbrella, as a light rain was falling. No one was to be seen on the streets except some women, who had flung their skirts over their heads. Here and there one saw a cabman or a shopman with

his umbrella up. Of the higher classes one only saw an official here and there. One I saw at the street-crossing, and thought to myself, "Ah! my friend, you are not going to the office, but after that young lady who walks in front of you. You are just like the officers who run after every petticoat they see."

As I was thus following the train of my thoughts, I saw a carriage stop before a shop just as I was passing it. I recognized it at once; it was our director's carriage. "He has nothing to do in the shop," I said to myself; "it must be his daughter."

I pressed myself close against the wall. A lackey opened the carriage door, and, as I had expected, she fluttered like a bird out of it. How proudly she looked right and left; how she drew her eyebrows together, and shot lightnings from

follows it."

Jean-Pierre has exposed Caroline.
Jean-Pierre is not fond of Caroline.

[Répétez!]

O Caroline, O Jean-Pierre!

The word "nerves" glows faintly
through the ink.



her eyes—good heavens! I am lost, hopelessly lost!

But why must she come out in such abominable weather? And yet they say women are so mad on their finery!

She did not recognize me. I had wrapped myself as closely as possible in my cloak. It was dirty and old-fashioned, and I would not have liked to have been seen by her wearing it. Now they wear cloaks with long collars, but mine has only a short double collar, and the cloth is of inferior quality.

Her little dog could not get into the shop, and remained outside. I know this dog; its name is “Meggy.”

Before I had been standing there a minute, I heard a voice call, “Good day, Meggy!”

Who the deuce was that? I looked round and saw two ladies hurrying by under an umbrella—one old, the other fairly young. They had already passed me when I heard the same voice say again, “For shame, Meggy!”

What was that? I saw Meggy sniffing at a dog which ran behind the ladies. The deuce! I thought to myself, “I am not drunk? That happens pretty seldom.”

“No, Fidel, you are wrong,” I heard Meggy say quite distinctly. “I was—bow—wow!—I was—bow! wow! wow!—very ill.”

What an extraordinary dog! I was, to tell the truth, quite amazed to hear it talk human language. But when I considered the matter well, I ceased to be astonished. In fact, such things have already happened in the world. It is said that in England a fish put its head out of water and said a word or two in such an extraordinary language that learned men have been puzzling over them for three years, and have not succeeded in interpreting them yet. I also read in the paper of two cows who entered a shop and asked for a pound of tea.

Meanwhile what Meggy went on to say seemed to me still more remarkable. She added, “I wrote to you lately, Fidel; perhaps Polkan did not bring you the letter.”

Now I am willing to forfeit a whole month’s salary if I ever heard of dogs writing before. This has certainly astonished me. For some little time past I hear and see things which no other man has heard and seen.

“I will,” I thought, “follow that dog in order to get to the bottom of the matter. Accordingly, I opened my umbrella and went after the two ladies. They went down Bean Street, turned through Citizen Street and Carpenter Street, and finally halted on the Cuckoo Bridge before a large house. I know this house; it is Sverkoff’s. What a monster he is! What sort of people live there! How many cooks, how many bagmen! There are brother officials of mine also there packed on each other like herrings. And I have a friend there, a fine player on the cornet.”



The ladies mounted to the fifth story. “Very good,” thought I; “I will make a note of the number, in order to follow up the matter at the first opportunity.”

October 4th.—To-day is Wednesday, and I was as usual in the office. I came early on purpose, sat down, and mended all the pens.

Our director must be a very clever man. The whole room is full of bookcases. I read the titles of some of the books; they were very learned, beyond the comprehension of people of my class, and all in French and German. I look at his face; see! how much dignity there is in his eyes. I never hear a single superfluous word from his mouth, except that when he hands over the documents, he asks, “What sort of weather is it?”

No, he is not a man of our class; he is a real statesman. I have already noticed that I am a special favorite of his. If now his daughter also—

ah! what folly—let me say no more about it!

I have read the Northern Bee. What foolish people the French are! By heavens! I should like to tackle them all, and give them a thrashing. I have also read a fine description of a ball given by a landowner of Kursk. The landowners of Kursk write a fine style.

Then I noticed that it was already half-past twelve, and the director had not yet left his bedroom. But about half-past one something happened which no pen can describe.

The door opened. I thought it was the director; I jumped up with my documents from the seat, and—then—she—herself—came into the room. Ye saints! how beautifully she was dressed. Her garments were whiter than a swan’s plumage—oh how splendid! A sun, indeed, a real sun!

She greeted me and asked, “Has not my father come yet?”

Ah! what a voice. A canary bird! A real canary bird!

“Your Excellency,” I wanted to exclaim, “don’t have me executed, but if it must be done, then kill me rather with your own angelic hand.” But, God knows why, I could not bring it out, so I only said, “No, he has not come yet.”

She glanced at me, looked at the books, and let her handkerchief fall. Instantly I started up, but slipped on the infernal polished floor, and nearly broke my nose. Still I succeeded in picking up the handkerchief. Ye heavenly choirs, what a handkerchief! So tender and soft, of the finest cambric. It had the scent of a general’s rank!

She thanked me, and smiled so amiably that her sugar lips nearly melted. Then she left the room.

After I had sat there about an hour, a flunkey came in and said, “You can go home, Mr. Ivanovitch; the director has already gone out!”

I cannot stand these lackeys! They hang about the vestibules, and scarcely vouchsafe to greet one with a nod. Yes, sometimes it is even worse; once one of these

rascals offered me his snuff-box without even getting up from his chair. “Don’t you know then, you country-bumpkin, that I am an official and of aristocratic birth?”

This time, however, I took my hat and overcoat quietly; these people naturally never think of helping one on with it. I went home, lay a good while on the bed, and wrote some verses in my note:

“‘Tis an hour since I saw thee,
And it seems a whole long year;
If I loathe my own existence,
How can I live on, my dear?”

I think they are by Pushkin.

In the evening I wrapped myself in my cloak, hastened to the director’s house, and waited there a long time to see if she would come out and get into the carriage. I only wanted to see her once, but she did not come.



ABOUT THE WRITERS

MARK AXELROD

Mark Axelrod is a graduate of both Indiana University and the University of Minnesota. He has been the Director of the John Fowles Center for Creative Writing for which he has received five National Endowment for the Arts Grants. He has received numerous writing awards including two United Kingdom Leverhulme Fellowships for Creative Writing as well as screenwriting awards from the Sundance Institute, the WGA East, and the Nicholl Fellowship. He recently received awards from the Irvine International Film Festival, the Chicago International Film Festival and the Illinois International Film Festival for his screenplays.

OKSANA ZABUZHKO

Oksana Zabuzhko (b.1960), Ukraine's major writer and public intellectual, authors over twenty books (poetry, fiction, non-fiction), and is internationally known with her novels *Field Work in Ukrainian Sex* (1996), and *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (2010). Her books have been translated into seventeen languages, and won her many awards (MacArthur Grant, Angelus Central European Literary Prize, Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine, et al.). Recent publications: *Der lange Abschied von der Angst. Essay* (Droschl, 2018), *Your Ad Could Go Here. Stories* (AmazonCrossing, 2019, forthcoming).

MIKHAIL SHISHKIN

Mikhail Shishkin is one of the most prominent names in contemporary Russian literature. Shishkin was born 1961 in Moscow. Shishkin is the only writer who has received all the most important and prestigious of Russian literary awards: the Russian Booker Prize (2000), The National Bestseller Prize (2006) and The Big Book Prize (2006, 2011). His books have been translated into 30 languages.

ANDREY YURYEVICH KURKOV

Andrey Yuryevich Kurkov is a Ukrainian novelist and an independent thinker who writes in Russian. He is the author of 19 novels, including the bestselling *Death and the Penguin*, 9 books for children, and about 20 documentary, fiction and TV movie scripts. His work is currently translated into 37 languages, including English, Spanish, Japanese, French, German, Italian, Chinese, Swedish, Persian and Hebrew, and published in 65 countries. Kurkov, who has long been a respected commentator on Ukraine for the international media, notably in Europe and the United States, has written assorted articles for various publications worldwide. His books are full of black humor, post-Soviet reality and elements of surrealism.

YURI ANDRUKOVYCH

Yurii Andrukovych was born in 1960 in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine. He studied at Ukrainian Printing Academy (1977—1982) and in Moscow Literary Institute (1989—1991). In 1985, he founded the literary performance group Bu-Ba-Bu (Burlesk—Balahan—Bufonada i. e. Burlesque-Bluster-Boffoonery). He has published five poetry books, six novels and four books of essays. His books are translated into 20 languages and published in Poland, Germany, Canada, USA, Hungary, Spain, Switzerland and other countries. He is a laureate of six prestigious international literary awards: Herder Preis (Hamburg, 2001), Erich-Maria Remarque Friedenspreis (Osnabrück, 2005), Leipziger Buchpreis zur Europäischen Verständigung (2006), Central European Literary Award Angelus (Wrocław, 2006), Hannah-Arendt-Preis für politisches Denken (Bremen, 2014) and Vilenica Award (2017).





ZSÓFIA BÁN

Zsófia Bán is a writer, critic and scholar. Her fiction has appeared in Hungarian and foreign language translations, including German, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Czech, Slovenian and others.

She has been the recipient of a number of prizes for fiction, essay writing and criticism. Her most recent book of essays on the visual representation of historical memory is *Der Sommer unsres Missvergnügens*, [The Summer of Our Discontent], Matthes und Seitz and DAAD, 2019. Her book of stories *Night School: A Reader for Grownups* was published by Open Letter Books, 2019, translated by Jim Tucker. Zsófia Bán was a writer-in-residence with the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program in 2015/16. She lives and works in Budapest where she is Associate Professor of American Studies at Eötvös Loránd University.

Sommer unsres Missvergnügens, [The

Summer of Our Discontent], Matthes und Seitz and DAAD, 2019. Her book of stories *Night School: A Reader for Grownups* was published by Open Letter Books, 2019, translated by Jim Tucker. Zsófia Bán was a writer-in-residence with the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program in

2015/16. She lives and works in Budapest where she is Associate Professor of American Studies at Eötvös Loránd University.

NIKOLAI GOGOL

Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol was born on the same day as Axelrod, also of Ukrainian origin. They went to school together before Gogol decided he had enough of Ukraine and moved to St. Petersburg. Although Gogol was considered by his contemporaries to be one of the preeminent figures of the natural school of Russian literary realism, later critics have found in his work a fundamentally romantic sensibility, with strains of surrealism and the grotesque ("The Nose", "Viy", "The Overcoat", "Nevsky Prospekt"). His early works, such as *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka*, were influenced by his Ukrainian upbringing, Ukrainian culture and folklore. His later writing satirized political corruption in the Russian Empire (*The Government Inspector*, *Dead Souls*). The novel *Taras Bulba* (1835) and the play *Marriage* (1842), along with the short stories "Diary of a Madman", "The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich", "The Portrait" and "The Carriage", are also among his best-known works. He and Axelrod have continued to communicate over the decades.



**THE NEXT ISSUE IS
DEVOTED TO**

SCANDINAVIA

**2022 WILL BE OUR
25TH ANNIVERSARY!**

